



# Elysian

Volume 2 Issue 1



*This issue is dedicated to those who create*



# Elysian

Volume 2

Issue 1

Fall 2019

## Notes from the Editors

### **Mariah Boehl**

Editor-in-Chief

Before coming to AU, I had a profound hatred for poetry. I disliked everything about it, from the annoying rhyme schemes to the metaphors. But after taking a class on analyzing poetry and later a creative writing class, I found that poetry was something I really loved. So I started submitting my poems to the Elysian and attending their meetings. Considering I loved the magazine and I'd always dreamed of being an editor, it just made sense to become the editor-in-chief. And I can honestly say that I'm glad I got the chance to be a part of such a wonderful team.

Sara Elliott and Scott Krave, thank you both so much for always steering us in the correct direction. You are our mentors and we couldn't have done anything without you. Jordan, I know we didn't make for great roommates, but I'm so happy you accepted the role of photography editor. I have zero idea of what a great photo looks like, so you are much appreciated! Myranda, you are amazing! I'm so sorry I'm such a procrastinator and sucked at gathering all the info you needed to design the magazine. The fact that you were able to design it in such a short amount of time truly shows how talented you are. Lastly, thank you so much staff members and readers!! Without you, the Elysian would never have existed. You are all amazing and I love you!!

### **Kourtney Lipps**

Assistant Editor

What I love most about being a part of Elysian is the community. Everyone who is a part of Elysian are people who care deeply about expressing who they are and how they feel by getting creative. Whether they do so through art, photography or writing, I hope that this magazine will always be a way to showcase that amazing side of Aurora University. With that said, I want to thank the incredible staff, submitters, and readers of Elysian. Thank you for striving to make this issue the best it can be.

## Notes from the Editors

### **Jordan Devera**

Photo Editor

As someone who rarely stops moving, there is a lot of irony in being the photography editor for the Elysian. It is a reminder that sometimes, slowing down is the best way to take in the beauty of the world; that yes, life moves at a speed that can't always be matched, but life must also be slowed down, or everything will be missed. So thank you, to everyone that submitted their works of art to the Elysian, for reminding us to take a couple seconds to stop and watch the world move.

### **Myranda Gould**

Graphic Designer

First I would like to say, Hello! And thank you for reading this issue of the Elysian! I am honored to be this semester's graphic designer! This is my first time putting the magazine together and there have been some ups and downs throughout this process. I have learned a lot and now understand how much work goes into making this magazine. With that being said, I am very happy to present the Elysian's Fall 2019 issue to you! I hope you all enjoy it!

This issue of the Elysian is dedicated to those who create. Without those who create, the world would be a very different place. Creating can be a very personal experience and scary to share with others, so thank you to all who create beautiful pieces of art and written work.

Lastly, thank you to those who submitted their work, and to the Elysian staff. Without all of us working together, there would be no magazine to read. Thank you for all of your hard work!

## *Acknowledgements*

The editors and staff of *Elysian* would like to thank the following groups and individuals for their support during the making of this publication:

Aurora University, English Department  
Sigma Tau Delta, English Honor Society  
Dr. Sara Elliott  
Scott Krave



## Submission Guidelines

*Elysian* welcomes quality online submissions of short stories, one-act plays, poetry, and art from all students, graduate students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Please state in the body of your email whether you are submitting short stories, one-acts, poetry, or artwork and include your name and email address. Free speech is welcomed and encouraged, but we will not publish hate speech, gratuitous violence, or pornography. No hard copy submissions, please. Specific guidelines are detailed below, and we are excited to hear from you!

**Poetry:** We will accept poetry submissions up to four pages with a total of five poetry submissions per person. Please avoid limericks and nursery rhymes. Please include contact information and a list of the poems you are submitting in the body of your email and attach your poems as a Word document.

**One-Act Plays:** One-act plays are limited to one submission per person with a maximum of 3,000 words. Excerpts from longer plays will not be accepted. Please include contact information and the title of the work you are submitting in the body of your email and attach your play as a Word document.

**Short Fiction and Non-Fiction:** Fiction submissions are limited to one submission per person with a maximum of 3,000 words. Accepted genres include literary fiction and the issue's featured genre. Please include contact information and the title of the work you are submitting in the body of your email and attach your story as a Word document.

**Art:** Art submissions can be sent as either a drawing or photograph in JPEG form. Drawings should be done in black ink with a black felt tip pen and contain no shading. Five art submissions are allowed per person. Please include contact information and the titles of the artwork you are submitting in the body of your email and attach your JPEG files. All images should be sent in black and white as well as color (if available), and be no smaller than 1 MB in size.

Please send submissions to  
elysian@aurora.edu with the title "Submissions for *Elysian*"

## *Elysian Staff*

Editor-In-Chief	Mariah Boehl
Assistant Editor	Kourtney Lipps
Photo Editor	Jordan Devera
Secretary	Kara Stiver
Treasurer	N/A
Design Editor	Myranda Gould
Readers	Sandy Barrientos Mariah Boehl Tiffany Brown Kourtney Lipps Scott Krave Alexis Rodriguez Tori Ruby Kara Stiver Kelly Theriautt
Faculty Advisors	Dr. Sara Elliott Scott Krave
Cover Photography	Cindy Cedeno's "Mirror Image"
Printing Center	Lighting Source

# Table of Contents

## *Poetry*

### **Breeze Lullaby**

Jennifer Davis ..... 12

### **Hayden**

Hannah Carter ..... 13

### **Too Much A Romantic. Too Much An Optimist.**

Emily Hughes ..... 15

### **Sound of Music**

99 ..... 17

### **Tryst in Mind**

Shae Hunt ..... 19

### **I Used to Write Him Poems**

Julia Kranenburg ..... 20

### **Unbreakable Bond**

Tiffany Brown ..... 22

### **He Comes, Seeking Veni Vidi Vici**

Glendy Aponte ..... 24

### **Love\***

Julia Kranenburg ..... 25

### **Leviathan**

Jenna Koerner ..... 31

# Table of Contents

## *Poetry*

<b>Snow Excuse</b>	
Jennifer Davis	..... 36
<b>I Mumble</b>	
Judith Mencia	..... 49
<b>Beloved</b>	
Emily Hughes	..... 52
<b>The Backyard</b>	
Jennifer Davis	..... 53
<b>Behind This Glass</b>	
Julia Kranenburg	..... 57
<b>Untitled Document</b>	
Kailee Seppelfrick	..... 59
<b>Manic</b>	
Taylor Krause	..... 61
<b>Enigmatic</b>	
Huri Cocilion	..... 63
<b>Message to Anxiety</b>	
Kourtney Lipps	..... 64
<b>The Funny Friend</b>	
Kara Stiver	..... 66

# Table of Contents

## *Poetry*

### **Preconceptions**

Hannah Carter ..... 67

### **Take a Breath**

Mariah Boehl ..... 69

### **Sensualidad**

Glendy Aponte ..... 70

### **Nosebleeds at Thirty**

Jennifer Davis ..... 72

### **Beauty in the Broken**

Hope King ..... 73

### **Dare to Be**

Hope King ..... 75

### **The Breath of Truth**

Mariah Boehl ..... 76

### **Resisting Refuge**

Hope King ..... 78

### **Civil War Letters**

Dana Drier ..... 79

# Table of Contents

## *Short Stories*

<b>Jealous</b>	
99	..... 27
<b>The Bee and Her Flower</b>	
Elizabeth Deluna	..... 33
<b>The Girl on the Roof</b>	
Tori Ruby	..... 37
<b>Fresa Con Crema</b>	
Judith Mencia	..... 55
<b>The Future of Cryonics</b>	
Sandra Schroeder	..... 82

## *Artwork*

Jollyana Martinez	..... 26
Leslie Gaeta	..... 62
Joshua Nelson	..... 65
Cindy Cedeño	..... 85

# Table of Contents

## *Photography*

Bryce Batts	.....	21
Brandon Belair	.....	48
Huri Cocilion	.....	18, 54
Alyson Deering	.....	14
Jordan Devera	.....	58
Kara McCleary	.....	81
Alejandro Muñoz	.....	77
Ruby Sacedo	.....	71
Lara Salazar	.....	68
Jakub Smolucha	.....	32, 35
Sierra Sotelo	.....	51, 74

## Breeze Lullaby



Jennifer Davis

As a child sleeping on the sun  
porch of a tattered second floor  
apartment, I longed for the  
cool summer breeze to fill the  
room and quench my heat.

To blow my sweat-soaked hair  
from my face and dry the  
beads from my forehead.

To fill the room with the  
delightful summer smells  
of flowers and fresh cut grass.

To blow through the window  
screen and sing me a lullaby  
to put me to sleep.



## Hayden



Hannah Carter

I have spent  
my entire life  
thinking I needed material possessions  
to make me happy,

when, in reality, no physical thing  
can make me as happy  
as the sound of your laughter  
echoing through my empty chest,

rattling my ribcage  
flowing through my veins,  
just as necessary as the blood it accompanies.



*Our Love*

Photo by Alyson Deering

## Too Much A Romantic. Too Much An Optimist.



Emily Hughes

I'm the fucking Michael Scott of romance.

I hope for things  
that'll probably never happen.

See?

There I go again,  
giving myself a sliver of a chance,  
a thread to hang on to  
by the skin of my teeth.

I trust too easily.

Fall in love too quick.

I see the good in all people,  
even when they twist my arm,  
try and steal my job,  
shit on the floor of my office.

When someone says something like  
Maybe,

I guess,

Hopefully,

I take that one percent of a chance  
and I run against the wind with it.

I buckle down,  
lock my heart in,  
and hold on until my knuckles turn white,  
red,

blue,

purple.

I have plans to text a boy  
to ask him on another date  
in a few weeks.

When I think he might be over his ex  
and ready to give me a chance.  
Because he gave me a penny  
out of a million dollars,  
said “maybe,”  
when I asked him about us  
in the future.  
We went on 4 dates.

Talk about Michael and Jan.  
“You complete me.”

But I guess it was weird,  
thrilling,  
like a high,  
to be treated with kindness I had  
never  
experienced before.

Like Holly after Jan.  
He could be that for me.  
maybe,  
I guess,  
hopefully.

I trust too easily,  
fall in love too quick.  
Oh well.  
“You miss 100% of the  
Shots you don’t  
take - Wayne Gretzky”  
- Michael Scott

## Sound of Music



99

Walking in, I saw a boy boiling with passion. Every phrase was spoken but then hushed with a magic comma meaning to breathe. Even though he was a precocious percussion, the music was written as if they were just trying to speak their mind but lost it, so they pause.

The boy that was playing the whimsical piece and numbed his thoughts with each chord he hit. The dark wood of the instrument would be struck with the blue yarn mallets resonating vibrations to the shiny metal tubes. The piece's tempo was a medium pace, fast enough to acquire your attention but slow enough to ease your nerves. The ringing of the marimba shivers down my spine.

I was currently facing the talented boy. The piece continued without stuttering even though his hands began to shake of his audience of one. The concluding chiming cord was grazed ever so slightly. He lowered the mallets into the black hanging bag and released a sigh he was holding for who knows how long.

He smiles at me and asks.

“How was that?”

I was speechless. The song was like a silk blanket created to keep me warm. An echoing sound that never faded as it rested in the back of my mind. I stare back at the now silent music maker. How could something so large have such a soft voice? I look into the eyes so full of music.

All I could whisper is, “Beautiful.”



*Orange Dreamsicle*

Photo by Huri Cocilion

## Tryst in Mind



Shae Hunt

My heart sings your come-home praises  
In sleep and wake, actively reminiscing,  
Missing, where was the cue?

You didn't need one.  
There you are, etched so majestically  
And delicately to the inner walls of my cerebrum.

I can see you now, but not visually  
Perhaps, metaphysically, but no,  
Accurately, you are caressed in my cognition.

But you didn't even ask!  
You exclusively didn't have to  
No doubts in my mind to your presence in it.

You reside other places too,  
Like the house of cards built around me  
You send cascading wind into my breath.

Send for me quickly, my dearest love  
Allow me to give you all encompassing proof  
Of the greatness of your absence.

## I Used to Write Him Poems



Julia Kranenburg

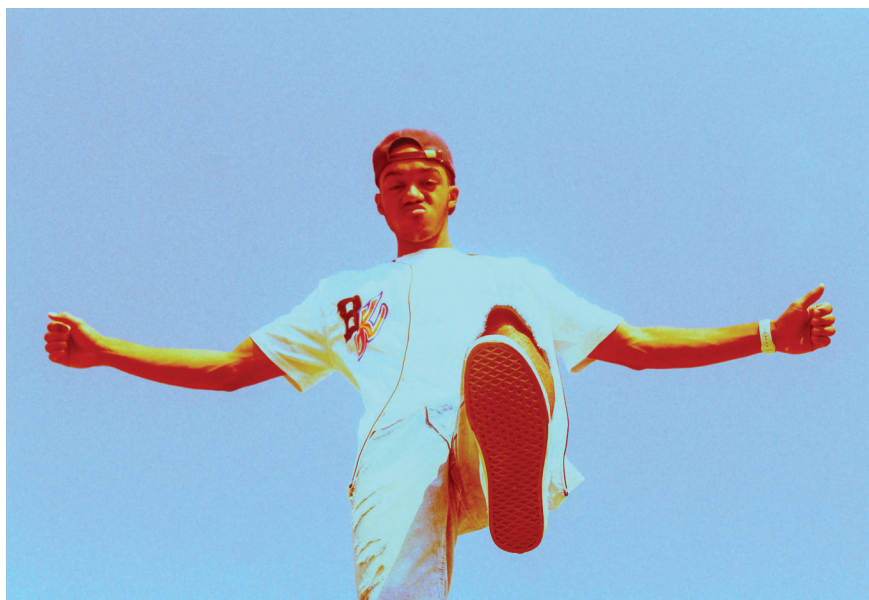
I used to write him poems  
Because it was easier to get through  
When I named it art and called it beautiful  
And hid the truth far from view.

What was hidden behind metaphors  
Was his anger and my terror  
And the inevitability of the two.

I crafted lines about the seasons  
As if winter didn't always mean his rage.  
And, when asked, I denied that it was true.

I dressed it all up as fiction,  
But deep down I always knew.  
I used to write him poems  
And the truth is I still do.





*Supremacy*

Photo by Bryce Batts

## Unbreakable Bond



Tiffany Brown

I remember my first kiss like it was yesterday

Hands united as one, the way you held me in your arms

I was yours

You were mine.

Time was our lifeline

The way you captured my soul felt almost like a child seeking to capture fireflies

The way you stared in my eyes and told me you loved me was magical

Like a shooting comet firing across the evening sky, those three words lit up my world.

My world was slowly crumbling and tumbling down like fallen rocks on a cliff; I was in a battle trying to survive.

Fighting every day to remain strong,

You were always there with open arms to catch me if I fell

I remember the way your smile made my stomach do somersaults

Your smile burned a hole in my heart that outshined the others.

I remember the days when the bell would ring, and we pushed the doors open to our freedom

Escaping reality for a while, trying to capture the brief moment.

Tell me, is it true that nothing good lasts forever?

The warmth of your breath against my neck sent shivers down my spine.

The memory of you has got me reminiscing on the past and dreading the future.

I've been fearing this day since the moment I met you  
You were mine until THEY took you away!  
You were my angel on Earth, my sculpture of perfection wrapped in  
a bowtie  
Now you are locked away, imprisoned within the system of evil.  
How could I know?  
My sweet, silly sculpture of perfection.  
They portray you as a criminal, but in my eyes, you are just a lost  
soul  
Caught up in the game of life.  
How could I have prepared?  
The despair was undeniable, but the bond is unbreakable.  
Your almond eyes stare back at me, empty and full of fear.  
NO!  
Please!  
NO!  
This nightmare is unbearable.  
I'm struggling to wake up.  
Too afraid that this reality is true.  
I'm trying to remain strong, but this hold is choking the life out of  
me  
No matter the distance, the time  
the pain,  
the numerous memories,  
Our bond is forever unbreakable.  
Until the chain falls off,  
I'm yours  
You're mine.

## He Comes, Seeking Veni Vidi Vici



Glendy Aponte

My body  
Is the landscape  
Over which  
You wish to roam  
Explore  
Discover  
New territory  
To claim for your own

I am no longer an easy surrender

Conquistador  
Adventurer  
Be tender  
In your approach  
And I may let you enjoy

For too many  
Would-be conquerors  
If they cannot possess  
Will seek instead  
To destroy

Love\*



Julia Kranenburg

Your love came with an asterisk.  
It came with limitations and conditions  
And now I hesitate before I say,  
    'I love you'  
Because those words are a promise  
And your love taught me  
    To read the fine print.



*Kali Uchis, Isolation*

Artwork by Jollyana Martinez

## Jealous



99

### I

You are only a touch away, but so poisonous to my skin. Yet I long to touch the skin that employed to heal me.

*I cry into his chest as if it's my own personal tissue. My powerless body held by his comforting embrace as the river of tears hurry down my face. The steady heartbeat is the only thing I hear other than his calming voice saying, "Breathe." My mind, focused on his words, that was only said just moments before. My arms gain the power to hold him not knowing if this would be the last. Bundling up the cloth in my hands made me think he will stay. Realizing what he has done in order to hurt me would make him see the mistake he had just made. Thoughts of him being gone makes the river return, makes the grip on him tighter. Words I craved to spill from his lips never did.*

### II

I see the smile that I employed to paint on you. Oh, but now I am only a faded memory that you have replaced for someone new. And now that I see it, I hurt.

*I reread the message he has left me. Nothing has cut me deeper than his words. "How do I get her to talk to me again?" The history of us was no longer on file. I felt as if I was never his world, but only a shiny new tool that he used for his own satisfaction. After everything we went through I was thrown away when I no longer kept my shine. "Why don't you just give her space or make small talk from time to time." My words sounded like a conserved friend, however, behind the screen, I call out crying for him to not forget what we were. I was now at the bottom of the bin counted at the seventh ex.*

### III

It hurts so much to know you are happy without me. I am not okay

with being a memory that will be gone in two years. I am not okay to be without you any longer. I am just no longer okay.

*I sit down on the lid of the toilet and cry out my sadness. It has been one month since I ceased to be his. The feeling of wanting him to be mine blossomed instead of died. Venting to friends no longer helped my sadness, but rather brought frustration at wanting to defend the one I still love. So why does he not care that I have shattered? "Because he no longer loves you." My conscious concludes, but I shake my head to the unwanted words. My heart was a mess of feelings pouring out of my eyes. My mind couldn't take the emotional pain anymore and took action. The sharp silver sheet danced along a portion of my paper-thin skin making it cry out more than my heart did.*

#### IV

I was healed, but seeing you everyday reopened that wound and is now bleeding out every time I see you, hear the voice that called me, or even think of what we had.

*Making music for the first time in the summer brought a smile to my face, but knowing he would be there crushed me. When I saw him, I could not kiss the locked up lips that I used to hold the key for, I could no longer hear the name he had given me, or feel the warmth of him next to me while The Flash was on. Those are now only distant memories that I can no longer gain access to. When he spoke of the smallest words to me, it makes me feel as if he still cared. That if we talk more words, he would realize that we can have a way out of this. That's what happened. We talked, laughed and had a great time. Feelings were spoken. Temptations were attempted, and lovers were found. Then he left for the third time. The wound that was me reopened and I thought he would fix it this time. I was wrong. I cry while stitching up the wound that still isn't patched.*

#### V

I remember that you played me a song and tried to show me where to place my hands on the keys just to feel my touch, but you no



longer have the urge or desire to remember. You no longer care. You no longer love, but I'm here burning without you.

*Slow music came from the talented fingers that belonged to him. I gravitate towards the curly haired boy. I closely monitor him and look at how his fingers move in time to make the beautiful song called Skyfall. He offers the seat next to him. I blush in response and take the seat. He takes his time and plays the song again as I requested. I smile as he finishes the final cord. I ask, "How do you learn so quickly?" He explains how exactly he learned it and teaches me the beginning. His upper body pushes me to my side, making me mess up just so I looked like I required assistance. He puts his hands on mine, showing me the next set of notes. All I remember is the way his hands felt on me and how we were going to make our own song. I was just so naive to think that our song would never end, but it did with two solid black lines.*

## VI

I have now lost you forever. I have lost the rhythm that kept me going. I have lost my tempo. I am lost without joy. I am silent knowing that I can't ever get what I had with you.

*I stand on the metal dock looking out into the water. It was so delightful not to capture. He comes up behind me, wrapping his arms around me and making me almost drop my phone. The warmth of his arms relaxes me as much as his words did. His friend comes over to request my lover. I ask him to take a picture of us on the dock. I turn to him and kiss his lips thinking of how lucky I am to have him. This is the picture that he gave me on our one year anniversary had the lyrics of our song we claimed. "Dear God, the only thing I ask of you is to hold her when I'm not around." Now God is holding all of my broken pieces, and even He can't find all of them, because knowing my love, he still holds them.*

## VII

In time I will find a different rhythm, tempo, and heartbeat, but for now, I will continue being a staff with no notes. I will find someone to write in modern music. Unlike the pencil you wrote in, I will find

someone to write in pen. Even after you erased what we had it still left marks, but the ink will stay and write a better song than you ever had.

*My love for him will never leave nor disappear but fade in time. I will continue being able to live even though he's not with me. He will continue to be a part of me and I must live with that. I know I have tried to save us even now, though he doesn't wish me to be involved. The plastic wall we have built together was now broken, leaving me alone to build a new wall that had a door. I would like to thank him for what he has given me and showed me to be happy with someone. Now I wait for the person that he has prepared me for.*

## Leviathan



Jenna Koerner

it crept up on me like a disgusting sea-beast, but it did not pull me to the bottom of the ocean murk.

it was when my taffy lips denied the salt water kiss, i knew i was already too far out legs treading water hopelessly.

the irony of it all was the fact that i had already taken the plunge, i allowed the waves to crash inside of me an abyss unexplored by soft tendrils of the deep.

i returned to the mirror's edge of the sea, warmth between my thighs begging for the cool atlantic embrace these urges to be ravaged like some type of ship wreck.

destruction in the shadowy depths, but i sang a siren's song calling the leviathan further into my inner mechanisms.

until my sea legs dissipated and then my land legs returned. slightly gritty from sand, sweet sticky drip trailing down my brackish thighs.

i still crave the leviathan's chokehold and kiss.



*Light in Motion*

Photo by Jakub Smolucha

## The Bee and Her Flower



Elizabeth Deluna

You have the warmest eyes I've ever seen. Pools of hot chocolate, so comforting and sweet. Making my own eyes of honey melt at your intensity. I lay slain at your feet as I remain the tender flower and you the eager bee. You're the sun setting amongst the sea. I'm the budding of flowers and you the passionate gardener's labor and hours. We wilt and flourish and drink each other in with each devastating kiss. My neck tilts and I swear I can almost hear your voice - hear you say -

"I missed this."

Between you and I there is so much that I miss. Our temporary bliss portrayed in various forms of art for when two lovers kiss. Apparent much so in the manner of which I ache when we eventually part, but we always find each other again. We find each other like those who seek trouble find the lion hiding within the den, like how your hands pick and pull me apart, and how I bare not only all I can give you but also my preciously guarded heart.

You let me blossom in your hands after having wilted all my life in different lands. You gently pressed your lips to my knuckles, my fingers, the side of my hands and let me remember the feeling forgetting that heartbreak lingers. You kept taking and taking and stealing and kissing my lips. Your hands caressed my hips, but you taste of insecurity. You taste of immaturity and well-practiced lies—of bitter goodbyes and sudden cries for my return. You taste of an anger that burns and stings, and despite all the wings that flutter

inside the pit of my stomach for you, you make me sick.

I'm not something convenient for you to pick. I was not raised and grown with my roots intertwined in soil for you to cut my stem and objectively want. How dare you daunt me and make me out to be the cause of all your inner turmoil? I was a child of the Earth and the moon, quiet and breathing in with the birds, thrumming with nature. Born in the spring, I was a gorgeous flower but gone far too soon. I gave too much to a measly bee who could never be content with just one flower. You tore each petal from me, day after day, hour after hour. The moon watched me and mourned. The flowers noticed the heartache I adorned—the way it lingered on my lips as do the ghosts of your fingertips. I had dandelions hold me back, beg me to stay. I had the birds singing there would be better days and tulips convincing me not to follow after you.

*-having to tell myself leaving you was the right thing to do*



*Moving World*

Photo by Jakub Smolucha

## Snow Excuse



Jennifer Davis

The whispers of each snowflake  
as they pass the cracked window  
before they fall to the ground  
startles her from her sleep.

A glance outside revealed  
the dribbled start of  
the dreaded storm  
she's been anticipating.

It provides a welcome reason  
to lie, curled up in bed, and even  
though she does this every day,  
the snow is the flawless excuse.



## The Girl on the Roof



Tori Ruby

Gemini wakes up, kisses her cat on her head, and stands to go to the bathroom before she remembers what day it is.

She remembers what goddamn day it is.

Maybe there's still some residual resentment, some anger at what she doesn't know, but it's been five freaking years, and she has work today. So, despite the gradually tightening knot in the pit of her stomach, she stumbles from her room. The sun streams merrily through the window and illuminates the dust particles in the air. She passes through the dingy living room, with its dark walls, old carpet, and ratty, second-hand furniture. She turns right before the dirty kitchen and the piles of unwashed dishes. She reaches the bathroom, body sore, and she pees, washes her hands, and looks in the mirror. She sees the icy blue eyes she got from her mother and dark skin from her father and takes a deep, deep breath, until her head spins and black spots swim in her vision, and only then does she breathe out.

*Officers Harmon and Bransen lounged, a fair distance apart, on the worn brown couch next to the window. Each man leaned against opposite arm rests, their legs at ninety-degree angles and their hands folded in their laps. The sun outlined their hair and threw their faces into shadow, and Gemini only remembered their sharp, unempathetic features because of all the times they had questioned her, and all the times they had walked in and out of Oliver's house.*

*Oliver's dads sat on matching armchairs, their backs rod-straight and their hands intertwined above an end table. They both wore khaki pants, loafers, and coordinating button-up shirts. Every time Gemini moved, their*

heads snapped to the side, as if they expected her to steal something. As if she would steal anything, especially on a day like this.

Gemini and her mother huddled together to the side, standing because this house didn't have enough chairs, and because they were thoroughly uncomfortable. She was only here because Harmon and Bransen had asked for her specifically, and her whole body was heavy from the stress and the emptiness and the constant crying. Her mom's hand was wrapped around her, grounding her. Her dad would be here, too, if Oliver's dads ever let black people into their house.

Bransen sighed deeply, a line forming between his eyebrows. "We have some bad news."

One of Oliver's dads, Pat, always wore his emotions on his face. He aged a few years after Bransen spoke, as if he knew what would come next. He gripped his husband, William's, hand.

"We found an arm and a leg," Harmon said, his voice filled with learned sympathy. "We found Oliver's backpack nearby. I'm sorry."

There was a soft sob from the other side of a doorway, and Pat and William both breathed deeply as silent tears streamed down their faces. Gemini's body went cold, but she felt an odd sense of peace and closure. Even though he was dead, at least she now knew.

The dog must have sensed something was wrong, because a blur of curly brown fur rushed into the room and slammed into the coffee table. Harmon and Bransen's folder slipped from the glass, and a collection of papers and photos spilled out. From their angle, Oliver's dads couldn't see it, but Gemini could.

A school photo of Oliver, smiling over a background of blue. Another photo, a wide shot where Gemini could just make out an arm and a leg, pale, bloody, waxy. She had held that hand countless times, felt that hand on her skin, in her hair. That leg had sat on her coffee table, on her couch, on her bed as Oliver lounged back and slept or watched TV.

*The last photo, though, was the one that gave her pause. It was of a purple JanSport backpack with black straps and zipper pulls replaced with safety pins. A red carabiner clung to the top loop. One of the zippers had been ripped open, and its contents of notebooks and loose pens and papers had spilled out onto a leaf-covered forest floor. Just barely visible under dark black stains was the phrase "I <3 MY OLIVER," a phrase which Gemini herself had Sharpied on during class while Oliver was in the bathroom.*

*Bransen fell to his knees, scrambling to collect the papers and photos as William grabbed a hold of the dog's collar and pulled it back. Harmon and Gemini made eye contact, and she could see that years of gruesome investigations haunted him.*

*Gemini's body moved toward the other room. She passed Pat, who sat frozen, and William, holding the dog back. She passed dozens of photos of Oliver's family that hung on the walls. She passed a pile of shoes, a few of which undoubtedly belonged to Oliver.*

*On the other side of the doorway, Oliver's little brother Sean knelt on the hardwood, tears streaming down his red face. Gemini nearly crashed down next to him and pulled him close, and he cried and cried.*

*Gemini didn't cry until she was laying in her bed. She didn't move for days.*

Five years ago, Oliver was declared dead. Gemini couldn't even go to the burial, because no one had known about their relationship, so no one considered her family. She hadn't gone to the gathering after the service, either.

She's out the door twenty minutes later, and she finds herself turning into the parking lot of an abandoned school building. It used to be Schuyler West, but Schuyler West had moved to the other side of town a number of years earlier. People of all ages go there to do basically whatever they want. The police never patrol the place

anymore, because as long as no one makes too much noise, they have better things to do.

She shoots a quick text to her boss. ‘Sick. Cant come in. sorry for late notice.’

She gets a quick reply. ‘Feel better :)’

Thank God she has a nice boss.

A well-positioned stack of wooden crates rests alongside an overturned dumpster. Above the dumpster, a rusty ladder climbs up to the roof. Gemini quickly scales the ladder. She sees a girl with long, blonde hair sitting on a ledge.

“Hey,” the girl says.

Gemini looks at the girl, who is staring at a dark gray cloud drifting across the sky. “Me, hey?”

“Come over here.”

Something about the girl’s throaty, catching voice draws Gemini. And as she crunches across the roof, she sees herself in the way the girl hunches her shoulders, in her unwashed hair, in her dirty, out-of-season clothes. She can’t see the girl’s face, because the girl turned her head more as Gemini got closer.

“Sorry, my face is a mess.” The girl’s last word devolves into a self-conscious chuckle.

Gemini slowly sits on the ledge next to the girl, who turns her knees away, and her body with it. Her hair falls over and blocks Gemini’s view of her face. “What’s wrong?”

The girl sniffles, and Gemini considers asking her name. “I, uh.” Another sniffle. “I just lost my boyfriend.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Can I ask what happened?”

“I guess life got too much for him.”

“Oh. When?”

“A few weeks ago.”

“I get it. A few years ago, my boyfriend disappeared. I was out of commission for months.”

“Does it get better? Does life go back to normal?”

“Do you want it to?”

“What do you mean?”

Gemini leans back, clears some space in the gravel for her hands. “Seems to me that if life went back to what normal was before, your boyfriend will have had no impact on you.”

“Will it get better, then?”

“It will get easier. You’ll never stop thinking about him, and sometimes it will be hard. But you’ll manage.” Gemini closes her eyes.

“How?”

“One day at a time. You seem to be doing as well as can be expected.”

The girl stays quiet for a moment. “What was he like?” she finally asks. “Your boyfriend.”

Gemini slowly sits up. “It doesn’t matter now, does it? He’s gone, and he’s not coming back.”

The girl’s shoulders droop, and as her chin falls to her chest, Gemini catches a glimpse of her red nose and splotchy, wet cheeks. She remembers being this girl. “It will get better.”

“Fuck off.”

Yeah, everyone said that.

But it truly did get better, after a while. But she has a steady job, and she’s dated since then. She now has a cat.

Today is just a bad day, is all.

“Please tell me what he was like?” the girl asks.

Gemini lets out a sigh.

Gemini heard the back door creak open, and Oliver called out, “Honey, I’m home,” in an old-timey voice.

“In the living room.”

Gemini was lounged on the couch, propped up on some pillows. Parks and Rec played ambiently on the TV in the corner. Oliver tossed his bag onto the chair and fell face-first directly on top of Gemini. She let out a guttural grunt. “Nice to see you, too,” she said into his hair.

“How was your day?” Oliver said, his voice muffled in the fluff of Gemini’s shirt.

“It was fine.” Gemini started to twirl her fingers through Oliver’s hair. She absent-mindedly tugged out a few knots. “The kids tried to eat my hair. One of them said it looks like spaghetti.”

Oliver laughed against her chest and turned his head so he could breathe. “Which one? Iliana?”

“Nah. Lincoln.”

“Ah, yes. From what I hear, that’s much more on-brand.”

Gemini smiled softly. She could see Oliver’s mile-long eyelashes against his cheeks. She could feel him breathing against her.

“How was your day?”

“My brother decided to yeet my phone into the toilet this morning.”

“Oh-ho, is that why you were late to school?”

“My phone may be waterproof, but I still put it in rice to be safe.”

“It’s kind of hard to wash a phone, too.”

Oliver nodded. “But,” he rolled off of Gemini and onto the floor, making her grunt again, “I got something for you.”

Gemini raised her eyebrows and pushed herself up. “Oh, did you?”

“As you may know, our third anniversary is coming up-”

“Fourth,” Gemini corrected.

“That was a test, and you passed.” Gemini rolled her eyes, but Oliver kept talking from where he was digging through his backpack while on his

knees. "See? I know our anniversary."

Oliver held out a purple card to her, and, sure enough, it read "Happy 4th Anniversary to My Gemini." Gemini smiled. "Thank you, Oliver."

"But that's not all," he said. He grabbed a small black box from one of the many overstuffed pockets of his bag and turned to her, still on his knees. "I got this for you."

Gemini took the box from him and opened it. A smile crept onto her face. Inside was a white gold ring. Its band was narrow at the bottom and thick at the top, where a deep brown, oval opal glistened up at her. An extra piece of metal stuck up from the stone like silver horns. A Taurus, which just happened to be Oliver's zodiac. She leaned over and kissed him gently on the corner of his mouth, slipped on the ring, and stood. "I'll be right back."

One quick trip to her room later, Gemini held out a box like the one from Oliver. "I got this for our anniversary, but someone," Gemini looked pointedly at Oliver, "thought giving me a gift two weeks early was better."

Oliver shrugged, his crooked little smile showing off his crooked front tooth. He took the navy-blue box and opened it, and a barking laugh escaped his lips. "Are you serious?" Out of the box, he pulled a double-banded silver ring with a rectangular icy blue topaz.

"We have matching rings now," Gemini said, holding out her right hand. The ring from Oliver shone from her finger.

Oliver slipped his ring on. "Did you know I was buying that?"

"I did not."

"So, we both decided, separately, to get each other rings with our zodiac signs and stones the color of our eyes."

"Sounds about right."

Oliver planted a kiss onto Gemini's mouth, and then pulled back, a smile on his face. "One more thing."

"More?" Gemini groaned as Oliver moved, yet again, to that purple backpack.

*She barely caught the DVD that Oliver haphazardly launched at her. Highlander 2: The Quickening. This movie had been on their list for a while. She threw the movie back at Oliver, who now stood next to the DVD player. He caught it easily.*

*“Last week on our quest to watch the worst movies ever made was Tommy Wiseau’s The Room,” Oliver said in his best announcer voice. “This week, I have chosen a film that will hopefully not lead to frantic muting every time a sex scene comes up.”*

*“Are there any sex scenes?” Gemini asked as she arranged some pillows.*

*“Yes, but your parents aren’t home.”*

*Oliver put the DVD in, grabbed the remote, and took his place on the couch. He put his arm around Gemini and pulled her close. She felt his sigh of contentment.*

She stares out over the overgrown baseball field, stomach heavy and throat tight.

The girl nudges her arm. “Hey.”

Gemini focuses on the girl again. “Hey.”

“Thanks for telling me. He sounds like a great guy.”

“He was.”

She hadn’t talked about Oliver in detail to anyone besides her therapist, and her therapist knew how to work with the constant overflow of emotions. Her therapist would take this time to help Gemini compartmentalize or some bullshit, to talk her down. Now all she has is a grieving high schooler and a roof.

“It’s not always bad,” Gemini says.

“Why would I want to live a life where I have no idea when I’ll break down? What kind of life is that?”

“The kind that we have.”

The girl has a point, though. Some days, without warning,



Gemini sees something that reminds her of Oliver. Last week, she was watching a movie in a theater and saw a man who vaguely resembled Tommy Wiseau. She spiraled, right there in the worn leather seat.

One of the kids at work had a purple JanSport backpack with a safety pin on it. Gemini had remembered the picture of Oliver's backpack, bloody and stained.

There's no telling when she would lose it.

Gemini looks up at the third story roof, which drops right down to the concrete next to the old practice soccer field. A few windows are blown out and there are holes where bricks used to be.

"What was your boyfriend like?"

"Nice. Sweet." The girl licks her lips. "We've been together seven years."

"You were nine?" Gemini asks doubtfully.

"Yep. Started out as one of those 'I dare you to ask her out' kind of deals."

"And you said yes?"

"He told me his friends would give him five bucks if he held my hand at recess. He gave me two."

"Seven years." She can't imagine losing someone she had been dating for seven years. She and Oliver only got to four.

"How have you made it this long without him? I don't know if I can."

How had she? Most of that time was lost in a blur of grief, confusion, and existential crises. Come to think of it, she can't remember much of the last five years. She doesn't remember her high school or college graduation. She's pretty sure her cousin got married, but she's not sure when, and she doesn't remember going to the wedding. She doesn't remember how she got her cat, or how

she got her apartment, or which of her grandparents had died the year before.

Instead of answering the girl's question, she looks up at the clouds drifting above the third story roof. It would be easy to jump from that. God knows why the city didn't shut this place down.

"You take it day by day," she says. "Losing someone is hard, and things will never go back to the way they were before, but you get used to this new normal, and you can even find happiness again. One day at a time."

"Isn't that what they teach in AA?"

"They have a point."

The girl stares off into the overgrown field. Pieces of glass glitter in the sun.

"Go home," Gemini says. "Make some soup. Take a nap. Take it one day at a time. Talk to someone."

The girl closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She lets it out, and her shoulders untense just a little. "I think I'll do that."

One day at a fucking time.

The day she got her first apartment, the day she managed to be approved, the day she first walked into the place where she would live for at least a year, she couldn't really enjoy it.

She and Oliver had talked about doing this together. "We'll go to school close to each other," they said. "Or we'll go to the same school."

"We'll get an apartment together and get a cat."

Everything was always "we."

So, when Gemini stepped into that apartment, a single person with no "we," she couldn't help but think about how different this would be if Oliver had been standing next to her.

How was she supposed to keep it clean? He was the

one who knew how to decorate. He actually liked cleaning and organizing. Gemini hadn't found the willpower to clean since Oliver disappeared.

Walking into that goddamn apartment was tainted by what couldn't happen.

When she got her cat, she realized that Oliver could have been with her, choosing a cat, helping feed it, helping take care of it.

Every fucking experience was tainted by a boy who died.

She climbs up to the third story roof.



*Party of One*

Photo by Brandon Belair

## I Mumble



Judith Mencia

I mumble a lot.

‘SPEAK UP’ he would yell in my ear  
even still, the more he yelled,  
the quieter my voice became.

I mumble a lot.

What was that? my friends asked.

I stare back blankly and quietly.

I am silent. I am mute.

I am

—invisible.

I mumble a lot.

‘SPEAK UP’

I still hear his voice in my ears.

The fear paralyzes me.

I want to—I want to—I want to—  
speak up.

but I’m so afraid of him.

Could you speak up? my professor asks.

no.

I cannot. I cannot. I cannot.

When I speak, when I voice, when I emit sound,  
the noise comes back. the yelling comes back.

the shame returns.

And so I mumble.

It's a beautiful balance for me.

I get to limit who hears me.

Only those nearest me have that privilege.

Only the attentive ones listen.

I mumble a lot.

in defiance of my father

in shame of my voice

in empowerment of myself

in controlling my surroundings

I mumble a lot.

so he won't hear me

so I don't bother

so my loved ones hear me

so I know who my loved ones are.

I'm a control freak.

I'm an anxiety-ridden friend.

I'm an invisible presence.

I'm an ashamed daughter.

I'm a mumbler.



*Lost Between the Lines*

Photo by Sierra Sotelo

## Beloved



Emily Hughes

The wringing of her hands,  
the swelling of her knuckles.  
The bills left unsigned  
The dishes left unwashed  
The pages of her Bible ever turning.  
God's most loving servant  
    ever praying.

Mama, why has He not granted you  
freedom from your pain?  
The incessant sting  
of nerves, writhing inside your body.  
Mama, why has He not answered  
the prayer prayed so many times  
for you, my mama?

It's not Him,  
    you tell me,  
It's him, the shining, shaking devil.  
He tortures you to keep you away  
from the early mornings of prayer,  
doing the things you do most.  
It does not work, he is not strong enough,  
Mama.

You are stronger  
but I pray that one day,  
you don't have to be strong  
to fight your worldly pain,  
but that you can live the rest of your days  
in peace,  
    tranquility,

Mama.



## The Backyard



Jennifer Davis

From dolls, to hopscotch, to playing house—  
my sister and I did it all those summers in that tiny  
backyard of the house on Bernice street.

I remember she convinced me to tromp through  
mother's vegetable garden and I found myself  
isolated to the house for the rest of the day.

But still, I trusted her and obeyed all of her  
wishes and commands. I remember when  
she spilled a can of Pepsi on my head

because I didn't want to play house and I enjoyed  
the backyard to myself that day. But, regardless  
of the fights and the spats, we were the best of friends.

Now, as I sit alone in my own large and colorful backyard,  
I want my friend back from those summers in that tiny  
backyard of the house on Bernice Street.



*The Touch of Mankind*

Photo by Huri Cocilion

## Fresa Con Crema



Judith Mencia

What kind of ice cream flavor would I be?

*Easy, fresas con crema, strawberries with cream: the story behind it, not so easy.*

My family and I were driving in Tijuana, Mexico with the windows down, hot air blowing on our faces. My palate craved something cold and sweet—opposite of the ambiance in the car. My dad was in a burning rage—again—while my mom became consumed in the flames too. This time it was something about being lost. I never knew the cause, but I became intimate with the effects. This day in particular, my innocent tongue simply wanted relief from the heat. In the middle of the fieriness, I craved refreshing. “I want *un helado de fresas con crema*—a strawberries with cream ice cream” I said aloud to anyone who would hear my parched tongue. Nobody responded. I repeated myself and still nothing. I spoke again in hopes that somebody would notice. When the last word came out of my mouth for the third time, I instantly regretted speaking at all. What came next was complete shame, regret, and hellfire. They both started yelling at me burning my hopes, dreams, desires, and self-worth.

“CAN’TYOU SEE WE’RE BUSY?!”

“SHUT UP!”

“I’LL NEVER BUY YOU ICE CREAM!”

“YOU ARE A WASTE OF TIME!”

“YOU ARE A COMPLETE ANNOYANCE!”

I was 7.

I could go on about how I shut down from that moment on. I could talk about my constant search of approval, perfectionism, or overwhelming self-hatred. But this is about ice cream, so let's keep it about that.

If I were an ice cream flavor, I would be *fresas con crema* because of what it represents. On that summer day, it meant being seen. It meant my needs being met. It meant being taken care of. To me, it was love. I did not get any ice cream that day, and it took me a while to find it. But I did. And I became what I thought I did not deserve. I became loved, I became *fresas con crema*.

## Behind This Glass



Julia Kranenburg

I wish I could tell you  
When I first realized I was a stranger  
Locked inside my own body.  
I felt foreign in my mind  
And fragile in my skin  
As if I was bound together by glass and string  
And each touch and every word  
Created cracks along my borders.  
I was aching to be free  
But the world named me  
A sum of my parts  
And I cannot exist outside these window panes.

I hid my heart behind dusty curtains  
And disguised my skin beneath some paint  
In an attempt to cover up my fears and flaws  
And pretend I could make a home here in this house.

But, in reality, I haven't changed.  
I'm still that child with her skin made out of glass-  
Trapped on the inside screaming out.

Can't you read the writing on my walls?

I don't belong here.



*Untitled*

Photo by Jordan Devera

## Untitled Document



Kailee Seppelfrick

Have you ever been around someone who makes you feel  
whole,

happy,

content

?

Until one day that feeling is ripped away from you,  
Leaving you lost- alone.

The pain that those months have caused leave nothing.

Emptiness floating into something to be cherished  
and forgotten at the same time.

The nothingness is what hurts more than anything.

To know that what we had is just easy enough to throw away,  
and to be discarded like an unwanted flyer  
handed out on a random sidewalk.

I don't even possess the words to say how I feel.

I am full of empty

thoughts

and full of regret.

Now looking back on everything we talked about,  
was it real?

was it ever going to

work?

Here I am just sitting, trying to write everything down,  
but it all comes out sporadically.

It's like when your mind's going a hundred miles a minute,  
and no one can really  
understan  
d  
you.

So an untitled document for untitled and confused  
feelings.

Seems fitting, huh?



## Manic



Taylor Krause

His body buzzed like a bustling city street  
heart pounding  
a drumline blasted inside him  
transforming his body into a high school football game  
gusts of wind raised goosebumps on his neck he noticed each groove  
scratch and ridge on his hand  
he felt like Spider-Man  
rapid speech and incomplete thoughts raged from  
his vocal chords winded and out of breath  
another consecutive sunrise greeted his soul  
as life flickered past like a Netflix binge



*look*

Artwork by Leslie Gaeta

## Enigmatic



Huri Cocilion

The deafening tones blare, ripping me back into consciousness, back into this life; awake

Awake, I shift and shuffle to arrive from place to place, working endlessly, yet accomplishing nothing; restlessly

Restlessly, I go about, breathing and blinking in the constant dilation of time, unsure of why; uncertainty

Uncertainty, it exists in every encounter, in every second of every day, it did not before but now it consumes daily life; hope

Hope, like in the world of Pandora, it pushes me past the demons stalking around, pushing me to continue seeking something; mystery

Mystery, that is what the light at the end of the tunnel is for me, I know not what or whom I seek, I simply hope to find connection, happiness, joy, purpose; fulfillment

Fulfillment, I find it in the little things, the mundanities of simple life, giving joy to others, because at the end of the day, what else do we have in the world but the ability to make life for others more bearable, even if ours is a motel of despair, window panes drenched in acid rain, corroding the exterior brick-by-brick

## Message to Anxiety



Kourtney Lipps

Anxiety,

You consume my mind

Like you haven't eaten in weeks.

It exhausts me during the day,

And keeps me up all night.

You lead me to believe that there's no one I can trust;

Especially myself.

You invade my thoughts

And pull my strings as if I'm your puppet.

All I long is to break free from your grasp,

But I'm too afraid to try.

# MYSTERY SKULLS



SURVIVAL OF  
THE DEFINED

*Mystery Skulls*

Artwork by Joshua Nelson

## The Funny Friend



Kara Stiver

Please don't misunderstand,  
I love to make people laugh.  
Making others happy makes me happy.  
I feel good making you feel good.  
It gives me a purpose.

But it can be burdensome.  
I don't mean that it's hard to be funny.  
Quite honestly, I'm funny without even trying.  
My insecurity stems from the fear that  
One day I won't be funny anymore.

What then? What purpose do I serve?  
I have nothing else to offer.

I fear that my friends will abandon me  
If I can't make them laugh.  
I fear that I'm only worth the amount of jokes I tell.

I fear that no one takes me seriously.  
I fear that I'm more of a novelty than I am a person.  
I fear that I may never create a real human connection.  
I fear that I go too far in an attempt to compensate for all my  
shortcomings.

I'm sorry if I annoy you.  
I'm sorry if you no longer find me funny.  
Please understand that I'm scared.  
I'm trying my best.  
Please continue to laugh.

# Preconceptions



Hannah Carter

## FEATHERS FROM A THOUSAND LI AWAY

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] she

[REDACTED] feels

[REDACTED] Too

[REDACTED] much

[REDACTED] to

[REDACTED] fir

[REDACTED] other people's

[REDACTED] expectations

[REDACTED]



There once was a time where this place gave someone happiness. Today, this same room places a pit in the stomach of those who visit. Here lies what used to be; but no longer is. A small light shines over a sea of burned photographs, cards, and the toys of simple plastics: the fad of the old youth, now a play thing for the dust. I can almost hear the loud, joyous voices of the barefoot children running across the loose boards, gripped by rusted nails. The moment stands still for me and in that moment, I lay in time's eternal graveyard of fading memories and dead dreams.

### *Dreams Left Behind*

Photo by Lara Salazar



## Take a Breath



Mariah Boehl

Breathe in inhale.

Let the words escape through the wind  
and over the ocean,  
running in fear of Death,  
like a cycle - repeating,  
no escape or beginning,  
only fear of the unknown.

So run, run little one  
Away from the scary monsters  
that track your every move.  
Run until your legs collapse beneath you,  
Your own body giving in to the inevitable.  
While fear of the unknown paralyzes you,  
Death will soon come and take your fear away.

So don't waste your life,  
Spend your precious moments in bliss:  
with laughter ringing in the air.  
For that's the way a life should end:  
Not in regret, but in satisfaction  
that your life was one worth living.

## SENSUALIDAD



Glendy Aponte

Tus ojos transmiten una electricidad  
Caliente y intensiva.

Camina todo mi cuerpo  
Como una culebrilla.

Que inmensa sensación  
Con tan intensa tentación.

Corre por mis lomas  
Pasea por el valle  
Gotea sin parar.

Gotas de agua que representan tus pupilas,  
Cada mirada es única y expresiva  
No se sabe lo que se espera,  
en cada gota que se desliza.



*Cold Glare*

Photo by Ruby Sacedo

## Nosebleeds at Thirty



Jennifer Davis

The warranty on me is up—  
turned thirty and started leaking—  
out my nose, believe it or not.

Sniff, splat. Sniff, sniff, splat, splat.  
That is how it all started—  
A little sniff, then splat of blood as  
it hit the floor—more sniffs, more  
splats and then the stream.

Talk about falling apart—  
who says it isn't all downhill  
after thirty?

Clip this, cut that, snip those,  
slice these, inject more,  
extract less, they are as dumbfounded  
as my mother who stands in the  
corner planning my funeral.

They even make a special plastic  
clamp for profuse, non-stop,  
horrendous nosebleeders like  
myself—if it were bronzed  
I'd put it on my shelf.

Twenty-seven days after it all started  
the leak was finally plugged (fingers  
crossed, knock on wood—and all  
those other clichés.)

## Beauty in the Broken



Hope King

It's a new day, but you're already done  
Everybody walks, but you want to run  
The work, the stress, the hurt, and the pain  
Does not make your depression go away  
Your face turns red as tears fill your eyes  
Your lips always quiver before you start to cry  
You are not okay, but there's nothing to do  
Except to sit in silence and be with you  
You are broken and you try hard to hide  
But I see your worth and beauty inside  
    You may not feel worth a dime  
But I guarantee you are worth my time  
Your eyes may hurt from all your tears  
    But now let me rest all your fears  
    I am not leaving or bidding adieu  
    For I have been broken just like you  
I can't fix you, but I'll show you who can  
    He's the living God, the great I Am  
    Piece by piece, He'll heal your heart  
    Putting together what's fallen apart  
A beautiful process, and sight to behold  
Your life to the Father, more precious than gold  
Listen and trust the words I have spoken  
There's so much beauty in your broken.



*Clarity*

Photo by Sierra Sotelo

## Dare to Be



Hope King

This mountain before me I cannot climb.  
It is too much work and too much time.  
But I take one step towards life and hope.  
Dealing with depression and trying to cope.  
But mountains come sometimes with pits.  
    And I stumble and fall into it.  
The progress I've made feels like nothing.  
    I want my life to count for something.  
    I call friends to meet me where I am.  
I partly feel shame, but don't give a damn.  
    After we sit in solidarity,  
    I hear someone say, "Dare to be.  
    Dare to stand and walk again.  
    Dare to fall and build what's been.  
Some days it will be hard and it will be tough  
    But trust me, daughter, I Am is enough."  
    So, I climbed the ladder out of the pit.  
    Determined to climb, bit by bit.

## The Breath of Truth



Mariah Boehl

Breathe in, inhale.

Let the lies twist your tongue  
As the truth sighs from within,  
Your voice ringing on the breeze,  
Telling all your deepest desires.

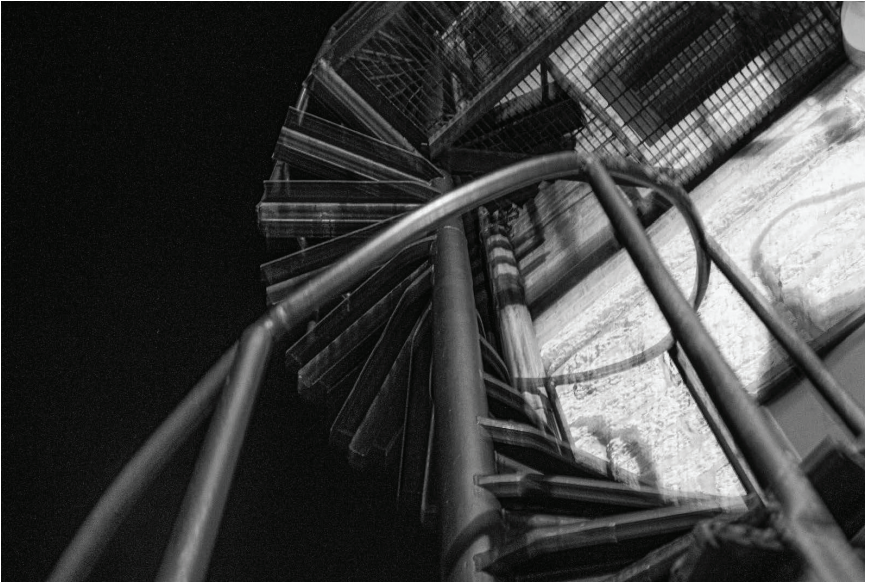
See the pulse of anger,  
The fog of the sky,  
Blasting through your mind  
And putting the gear into drive,  
Taking control of you.

Feel the muscles of your calves tensing  
As you run through the darkened streets,  
That lone streetlight casting  
An eerie glow, showcasing  
A glimpse inside your head:

Memories - fuzzy and white,  
That hide behind the red tint  
Of your eyelids,  
Showing the dark shadows  
The one thing that can break you.

So open your voice, let it flow  
Through your soul  
As the darkness embraces  
You, standing in defiance  
And fighting for your life.





*Adjust Your Focus When The Path is Blurry*

Photo by Alejandro Muñoz

## Resisting Refuge



Hope King

Killings, bombings, everything's destroyed  
The holes in their hearts have left a void  
They chase freedom; we close the door  
We have everything, but we want more  
So feet, keep wandering this lonesome earth  
You can't offer anything so you don't have worth  
My time is taken by the American mundane  
You think I'll give that up, you must think I'm insane  
Keep begging, keep dying, I can't hear your pleas  
At least I'll keep saying you're not talking to me  
Across the world; out of sight  
This is how I sleep at night  
Jesus may not think that's okay  
But I'll ask for forgiveness as I look away  
Now that I'm forgiven, I'll say a prayer  
Hoping you find refuge in someone who cares  
I don't want that responsibility or that shame  
So you keep on walking and I'll do the same.

## Civil War Letters



Dana Drier

“Civil War Letters from Aurora University’s 125th Anniversary Egg Hunt”

April the Seventeenth, 2019  
Aurora University, Alumni Hall

Dear Mother,

The indications are very strong that they will open the doors at noon. A hoard of students have lined up outside the building, each of us prepared for war. It is hard to gauge the exact number, but the line goes all the way to the library.

There is no question of everyone getting in, but rather, the number of us who will not make it out. We were told there will be five hundred eggs, and two thousand wristbands, so the vast majority of us will not make it home (with an egg, that is). Needless to say, when the doors do open, there will be a lot of pushing, and that is when the battle will unofficially begin, if it has not started yet.

I have no doubts that I am fighting for a worthy cause, and it was indeed worth skipping class for, so please do not fret for my participation grades.

Until we see each other next,

Your daughter,

Dana

April the Seventeenth, 2019

Aurora University, Thorton gymnasium

Dear Mother,

I am happy to report to you that I did in fact make it into the gym. Here, the merriment and festivities have begun to distract everyone from the soon-to-be battlefield outside. There are corn dogs and cupcakes and Miley Cyrus songs playing over the speakers; alliances have formed between friends, and there is an overall sense of camaraderie amongst students from all sides.

But there is also a begrudging timer above all our heads, counting down the minutes before the bloodshed. The odds of survival have taken full effect, and I know now that my chances are slim. If I do not make it out of this battle, please tell Addison that it was all for her. My love for her could fill oceans, and there is no one more deserving of free tuition than her. In the event that I find one of the three grand prize eggs, and it is pried out of my cold, dead hands, please make sure that it gets back to her.

I'll see you on the other side.

Your daughter,

Dana



*Snuggles with Mom*

Photo by Kara McCleary

## The Future of Cryonics



Sandra Schroeder

The citizens filled the room to capacity, and grew restless as they waited for the evening's speaker to begin. While the crowds were certainly interested in the topic, they were more interested in what followed - the celebration dinner. More bodies were trying to enter, squeezing the attendees into an uncomfortable number of packed bodies. From the right hand of the stage, their speaker entered, and made his way to the microphone. "We have gathered here this evening to discuss the future of cryonics," he began. "Now, as you know, I am speaking to you this evening in the tongue of the indigenous species. While it is a bit archaic, I felt it somehow fitting that we honored this language through speech before taking part in tonight's meal. Those of you wearing translation devices, please let me know if you are having any issues," he perfunctorily stated.

More entered the cavernous meeting room, creating a rumble of protesting voices as the masses squeezed together. Impatiently, their speaker continued, "Ah hem! If I could please have your attention! That's it, settle down. Young ones in the front please, I don't want you to miss a thing. What a large crowd we have here this evening! I am honored that you could all be here to enjoy our gathering and evening meal. Now, as you all know, we are here to discuss the topic of cryonics. Cryonics, the freezing of a body to maintain its integrity for hundreds of years has finally been proven successful! It is a joyous occasion of triumph for our scientific community, and the reason of our celebration today. As many of you know, our race has been around since the Cretaceous era. We have struggled long and hard since then to evolve and survive the

conditions of this planet, oftentimes against great odds. At times, it seemed as if our very populace were under attack from gases, poisons, bestial appetites, traps and the like, placed before us time and time again by our enemies. This circumstance, this very attack upon our population, our peaceful co-existence, made extinction a possibility ever looming closer on the horizons of fate. I am here to tell you today, that cryonics has proven to be the saving grace in our time of need.” The speaker excitedly paced back and forth across the stage as he gestured and punctuated his remarks with expressive gesticulation.

He continued, “Cryonics used to be only for the entitled ones amongst our enemies. Those that wished to have themselves frozen in time so that they may see what the future held. Those that wished to recover from imminent death, or those that filthy rich and wished to live forever... it was a rich man’s science to benefit from, and not for the likes of us. We were left to fend the ravages of time off for ourselves. However, being the stalwart and resourceful beings that we are, we persevered. We embraced the challenges placed before us, and accepted the new standards of existence, changing our diets, hearts, minds and strategies to outwit and outsmart the odds. Now, the time has come where our enemies are indeed one with us, in fact, they are part of our very beings, intertwined with our very cells, nourishing our bodies and minds from the inside out. Their very culture has been analyzed, with the most notable attributes being streamlined with our own culture, so that our species can put its very best chances of survival on the young, leading us ever onward into the blank tomes of the future, waiting to be written with the stories of our kind.”

As the crowd leaned in as one, the speaker went on, “Even

though it was the mind of our enemy that discovered cryonics, it is ours to reap the benefits of. Even though our paths have veered into different directions, our gathering here tonight is symbolic of the new future, the new rulers of the planet. We the victors, must take the spoils with gratitude and a humble heart. These offerings that have been kept for us are ours by birthright, ours by victory, ours by natural selection. It is our duty to honor them completely, by enriching our young offspring with the blood, sweat and tears of our labors, and the very essence of our fallen enemy. Indeed, with the very lifeblood of their offerings! Cryonics - it is the science that has saved us.” From behind the speaker, a large gurney rolled onto the stage, carrying a bulky figure covered by a moving sheet. Moans could be heard as the sheeted body thrashed on the gurney...

Face red with passion, eyes beady with concentration, the speaker boomed his final celebratory point, “Please join me tonight as we enjoy this very healthy but rare dinner of essential proteins and carbohydrates. This evening’s offering comes to us from the exploration team that discovered the rare room of frozen preservation, with 15,000 cryonic frozen dinner specimens for our nourishment. Each frozen entree has been called by names of our forgotten enemies from so long ago, so let this serve as a reminder that indeed, anything is possible. Rat kingdom, gather round, and let us enjoy tonight’s meal of “Fred Smith”! The sheet was yanked from the body to reveal the crazed eyes, duct taped mouth and restrained but thrashing body of Mr. Fred Smith momentarily as the stage was completely flooded by the starving occupants of the crowded room.





*Mirror Image*

Artwork by Cindy Cedeno

## Contributors' Notes

**Glendy Aponte** is a South Bronx, New York, Dominican native, who resides in the Mid-West. Glendy has dedicated life towards mentoring and healing through her career in Social Work. She's a mother of one toddler — Jair, an untamed, unreserved, energetic, and adoring toddler who enlightens any space in the environment. Glendy encourages Latino and Hispanic underground writers into capturing and publishing the culture in any given time in the literary world.

**Mariah Boehl** is a senior English major at AU. She is the editor-in-chief of the Elysian magazine, an AUSA senator, and part of APB. She has an interest in editing, public relations, and marketing, and dreams to one day tutor English in South Korea.

**Tiffany Brown** is a Senior at Aurora University who loves writing poetry to express herself. Born in Aurora, IL, Tiffany provides a glimpse of her reality using vivid imagery that will capture and leave readers in awe. Faced with multiple obstacles in life, writing poetry for Tiffany is a way to escape reality.

**Huri Cocilion** is a senior Graphic Design and Communication double major with a primary focus on design. He loves watching films, discovering new music, practicing photography, and going on runs when he can.

**Jennifer Davis** is an Adjunct Professor and a Writing Specialist at Aurora University in addition to being a Partner at The Junto Institute, an entrepreneurial leadership program, and a Life Coach. She lives in Downers Grove with her husband, Chris, and her two bulldogs Hugo and Petunia.

**Alyson Deering** has loved taking photos since she was a kid and would use her allowance to have disposable cameras developed. She is the mom to an amazing four month old baby boy and graduates with her Bachelors in Communication from Aurora University in May 2020.

**Dana Drier** is a Junior at Aurora University majoring in English and minoring in Museum Studies. Dana considers herself to be more of a cryptid than an actual person. Legend has it that Dana is friends with Mothman and the Loch Ness Monster, but don't mention Bigfoot, because apparently there is bad blood.

**Emily Hughes** is an Early Childhood Education major. She loves poetry, dogs, and dogs who write poetry. Her aspirations are to be a teacher, have a garden, and

be a published author.

**Julia Kranenburg** is a senior nursing student on the George Williams campus of Aurora University. In between clinicals and exams, she still manages to find time to write poetry.

**Taylor Krause** is currently a Communication and Media Studies senior at Aurora University. He has a love of talk radio, writing and all things Seinfeld.

**Kourtney Lipps** is a Junior Communication and Media major at Aurora University. She is currently the assistant editor of Elysian, as well as the vice president for honors society Lambda Pi Eta. Her favorite pastimes include writing stories, playing video games, and hanging out with her two cats.

**Kara McCleary** is a senior Human Animal Studies major. She enjoys photographing the animal kingdom whether it be in her backyard, local zoo or Walt Disney World. This photo was her grand prize winner at the Sandwich Fair in 2019 for Black and White Photography.

**Jollyana Martinez** is a local Aurora abstract artist currently experimenting with mediums. Her work is known for having underlying messages and hidden details. You can keep up with her art in the instagram account @jolmartart

**Judith Mencia** is currently a Senior at Aurora University pursuing a bachelor's degree in Social Work. She has a heart for helping and empowering others in person and through her writing. Her ultimate life goal is to allow others to see and feel the love of Christ through her.

**Alejandro Muñoz:** In today's rushed society, he uses photography as a sense of physical meditation. Photography has allowed him to take in life slowly and focus in on the small details that we often overlook. Challenged by not using color in his work resulting from a course he developed fondness for black and white photography.

**Sandra Schroeder**, a senior in Business Administration at AU, lives in Oswego, IL, with her husband, three children, and their very naughty boxer-mix puppy, Talia.

**Kailee Seppelfrick** is a Junior at Aurora University who is majoring in Secondary Education and English. She uses writing to express thoughts and

to relate her life into her text, while she uses reading to take her to different realities. Kailee is currently involved in Educators Rising, Sigma Tau Delta International English Honors Society, and Phi Eta Sigma National Honors Society.

**Jakub Smolucha:** Computer science student with a passion for photography

**Kara Stiver** is a junior English/Secondary Education major. She is a member of Sigma Delta Gamma sorority and Kappa Delta Pi honor society, as well as the secretary for The Elysian. She likes poetry, dogs, and naps.

**99** is a sophomore majoring in Early Childhood Special Education. They are very involved around campus; Theatre, Music, Kappa Delta Pi, PA and SA. They have always enjoyed writing stories and is so happy they are able to share a part of themselves with you. They hope you enjoyed.



Glendy Aponte  
Bryce Batts  
Brandon Belair  
Mariah Boehl  
Tiffany Brown  
Hannah Carter  
Cindy Cedeño  
Huri Cocilion  
Jennifer Davis  
Alyson Deering  
Elizabeth Deluna  
Jordan Devera  
Dana Drier  
Leslie Gaeta  
Emily Hughes  
Shae Hunt  
Hope King

Jenna Koerner  
Julia Kranenburg  
Taylor Krause  
Kourtney Lipps  
Jollyana Martinez  
Kara McCleary  
Judith Mencia  
Alejandro Muñoz  
Joshua Nelson  
Tori Ruby  
Ruby Sacedo  
Lara Salazar  
Sandra Schroeder  
Kailee Seppelfrick  
Jakub Smolucha  
Sierra Sotelo  
Kara Stiver  
99

Aurora University  
347 S. Gladstone Ave.  
Aurora, IL 60506

[Elysian@aurora.edu](mailto:Elysian@aurora.edu)

[www.auelysian.wixsite.com/theelysian](http://www.auelysian.wixsite.com/theelysian)