

lines

from the middle of nowhere
a literary and arts journal
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FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY
SIGMA TAU DELTA

Forward thinking. World ready.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers,

Throughout this volume, you will experience joy, happiness, and hope; however, you will also find confusion, sadness, and heartbreak. The artists and authors have left you with a little piece of who they are and have given you works to spark all emotions. I hope you enjoy the work that these talented, hardworking individuals have decided to share.

This would not have been possible without the constant support of Dr. Lexey Bartlett, Sigma Tau Delta, the hard work of the design team with Fort Hays State University's Printing Services, and my excellent group of editorial board members. Thank you for all of your work.

Enjoy.

Maleigha Siglinger-Albers
Editor

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You in Form

Dalton Steinert
Accounting, Senior

The man wearing a pink, velvet mask heard a rap at the door. A staccato noise, like rain against the pavement, buttons dancing on a wooden floor.

How peculiar a sound, the resonance of unexpected company—which jolted the door from such a sudden and sharp force. Typically, the man sat alone before his performances, isolated from the sights and the sounds typical of a circus. The rest of the performers knew to leave him secluded in his caravan. His costumes and he enjoyed a private conversation: the inflated price of fabric, the webs of spiders, the beauty of cotton seeds floating through the wind. Crafty chatter.

The costumes he created himself, tucking thread into needle to produce the most lavish, articulate designs any sight-seer had witnessed north of Oklahoma. More often than not, masses came just to look at his costumes more than the circus itself.

He had developed a name for himself, one that today he sewed red diamonds intermixed with gray and blue stars, elastic cuffs, and puffed arms. Tight corduroy pants, patched here and there with various shades of the colors on his sleeves. A black polyester torso cinched just until he could hear his ribs creak under the unnatural shift of organ and flesh.

They screamed, “Stop! No more, please!”

He cared little for the screams of marrow.

He seldom empathized for much these days, except for his craftsmanship.

A deep purple wig rested atop his head, shaved on the sides and curled tightly along the top: a Mohawk. But not quite. Something more profound, something stronger. Hair with a meaning, a purpose. A statement that left an impression. One that, coupled with his midsection and face, brought awe to crowds each weekend. One that shouted, louder than any human voice.

Wondra, the Persona-full!

Tap...Tap...Tap...

Yes, the door. Someone was waiting.

Wondra stood up from the sewing machine, where he had been working carefully on his next creation. This one, more pastel and gray-toned, mirrored a child’s television character. A pale green, bulbous waist with barely any leg and neck needed several more stitches before he could attach it to the head, which sat behind the sewing machine. The head, also pale green, had large brown pennies for eyes and two teensy holes for nostrils. A u-shaped smile gave the impression Wondra intended.

Happiness.

Tap. Rap. Tap. Rap.

The stranger was persistent.

Wondra opened the door slowly, a sliver of cloud-blocked light entered the caravan. A sudden whoosh of cold, damp air eased its way through Wondra's oval eye holes, bringing tears to the surface. The breeze shivered his purple curly-Qs.

He peered outside.

"Hello. Sorry to bother," said a short, round man who had as much hair as he did neck, which was to say, very little. He wore a large brown hat that kept a heavy rain out of his face, though the rest of his person fared much worse. "I'm looking for Wondra. Have you seen him?"

Wondra had not considered the rainy atmosphere. A steady stream of crystal beads that broke into shards on impact. Sometimes, the outdoors and the sound of the sewing machine blended into a soft hum and subtle vibration. Rhythms of life, a beating heart. He liked to believe he was creating life with the fabrics and threads he wove.

Wondra cleared his throat, a sign of how long it had been since he had conversed with another living person. Any reasonable fan of Wondra's would know that he cared little for dialogue and even less for unmasking. He could count on one hand the number of people to have seen his real face. Fewer who had seen him smile.

"I am Wondra."

The man, wet and still dripping, widened his eyes. "Oh, how could a man tell? With that mask you've got there. You look like a child's plaything. Took you long enough to answer the door, what with this rain outside. I could've sworn I was floating just now!" The man spoke in the style of a poorly written nickelodeon.

Wondra laced his speech with sarcasm, "I thought you would have gotten the hint." He fastened it as if he were quilting a maiden's costume for a Victorian-themed performance. The swirls of white layered on black silk, a puffy dress with shoulder pads and a lengthy train. The stranger had the dialogue, needing only the costume to match.

"Ah, I can't say I'm an impatient man, can I? May I come in, this rain is horrendous?" The man's eyes batted the dripping crystals from his lashes violently. Wondra could also see his need for dry clothes, could feel it in the way the fabric on his skin cried for air against the soaked material.

Wondra did not want this man to come inside. Any intruder might scare his collection. His creations did not take kindly to breaths that had a different rhythm. Many designers had hired spies and thieves as an attempt to steal Wondra's secrets. The man in the doorway, short and round, felt wrong. His presence appeared forced, fulfilling a duty not necessarily of his own desire.

He needed an outfit change. Overtly fake leather, tinted tan with smeared burn marks, a manifestation of this man's intent. A carrier bag hung from around his neck, hand resting on the side, as if to keep its contents dry. Wondra would take the bag and form it into a pack for the back attached to the jacket itself. Water ran rivers down his broad shoulders and small arms, dripping diamonds that pooled in the grass.

The man's hat made Wondra ill. He imagined himself burning it and watching the flames dance along the brim, breaking the binding of bill and panels. In place of brown, Wondra would then crown the man with a deep gray boulder, the color

of clouds filled with rain. Wondra would pierce the hat with a red plume that twirled in a soft wind, the broken tendrils of a spider's nest.

Malevolent men wearing fake fabrics held little room in Wondra's heart.

The rain continued to sing a song of six pence.

Wondra spoke after a short silence. "I'm sorry, I have a costume to finish before. Do take care."

The man jumped up, pulling his hand from his side, "Wait!"

Wondra, uncomfortable in front of this man, stood with annoyance, then stammered. "What?"

The man gathered himself like the tufts of a dress. "I'm not here to bother you. I was told to deliver this by hand, from the owner. He said it was very important and that I was not to waste a second of time delivering it." With the last word, the man took a sharp inhale, like he had finished a daunting task, the sound a seamstress exhales after zipping a Queen into a crinoline-dress.

Wondra stood silent for a spell. "The owner has a message?"

The man nodded his head, pulling a thick yellow packet from his bag. He put out his hand in the direction of Wondra and said, "Yes."

Wondra did not know what to think. The owner had never contacted him directly. He had hardly ever spoken to Wondra. They had a silent agreement that it was best to leave each other be. Somehow, they understood each other without ever so much as speaking a word to one another.

Wondra took the packet from the man. The daffodil-paper crinkled under his hands, almost as if the paper had been sitting for too long, the way starched pants stood straight if not washed for a while.

Wondra thanked the man, now less worried that he would come inside for a while.

He shut the door, hinges creaking with an extended release of tension, and the sound of fabric ripping ever so slowly.

This man left a taste of cotton in Wondra's mouth. Not necessarily that the man himself was the essence of the dryness, but the messenger always fared the worst blow.

Wondra removed his hands from the door and stared at the packet. The parchment seemed untouched, except for the few drops of rain staining the paper an orange color. The packet had a clasp at the top which seemed unbroken.

Wondra hated to break the seal and pull out the contents. He had an idea as to why the owner had sent him a messenger, and opening this packet would cement that fear into reality.

The time had come.

Wondra walked back to the worn wooden desk where his unfinished project lay waiting. Upon the way, he admired the closet where all of his costumes hung. A variety of colors, fabrics, and styles rested along a wooden rail; all of the wonders through the years.

Wondra had joined the traveling circus nearly thirty years ago, but even then, he was at least ten years older than anyone else in the group. After a short career as

an office employee turned into a worse hell than Hell itself, Wondra believed his life to be worth more than a mundane cycle. That was when he saw the poster advertising a new and exciting travel opportunity. He left little in his passing from one job to the next.

He had started as a costume designer, weaving new designs every other show for all the main acts. He enjoyed the work, even though he hardly slept. The demand for perfection on the costumes meant Wondra had to pay close attention to detail, which sometimes meant going several days without sleep. He had not minded, although there were some nights he wished to be lying in the grass, resting on a patchwork quilt to examine the stars. They reminded him of pearls that he could utilize as buttons for the circus acts.

Sometimes, the performers did not revere his work as much as Wondra thought. More often than not, members would laugh at his costumes and gawk at what they considered to be poor attire. There was even a night when the elephant tamer guided the elephants to tread on his costume.

Wondra recollected how hard he had worked on that design especially. He remembered the attention to detail he gave on the back of the costume, the tiny elephants he patched all along the shoulders and down the spine. The elephants were dancing, playing, and relishing each other's company. What a beautiful way to display all things Wondra wished he could do, and how suddenly his messaged disappeared under the gray dust.

He had even dressed the tamer's elephants in gauzy skirts of various colors for audiences to admire. Wondra thought the skirts made the elephants more human. He always liked the elephants because they were gentle, soft-spoken giants. He yearned for humans to have a thread of the elephants' kindness.

He wished humans cared for his hard work.

Wondra traced his fingers against the differing patterns, the smooth silk, rough wool, and bumpy corduroy. He had worked hard to become the attraction he was today.

Wondra wondered if this fame was worth such little fortune.

He enjoyed the sewing and patching of pieces, but he never asked for such a celebration of his mind's conceptions. He wanted more than anything to be his own audience, his own crowd. Give him a standing mirror, and he would desire nothing else save for heaps of fabrics and endless spools of thread.

His designs could applaud him louder than any crowd he had cat-walked before.

The people, the men, women, and children, all eating their popcorn and wasting their time witnessing such mindless entertainment, do they care about the impressions they leave? This question troubled Wondra, even more so as he continued to consider his collections, the packet a heavy burden under such delicacies.

Do these people wear masks like their entertainer?

A time ago, not long, a few months maybe, Wondra remembered a little girl, with pigtails and chubby cheeks.

He had worn skin that day—a mixture of several fabrics and colors: black wool, crème felt, brown leather, and white linen. The uniqueness of a single race, the textures of

the human body: bumps and scars, creases and wrinkles. He had beaded the costume with buttons and marbles, all to show how humans can vary in styles and impressions. People praised, roared at the novelty, but the message remained forgotten.

All except for the little girl. Her dress, long and stiff, waddled with her body when she jumped and clapped in the stands. The design of the dress was what amazed Wondra the most. The white surface, the way it shined—probably silk—beamed as did the young girl’s eyes. Edged with red ribbon, the bottom and waist of the dress acted as a fence to hold the innocence inside.

Wondra wanted to preserve her in that state: smiling, cheeks dimpled, hands clap clap clapping, and her tiny legs bouncing up and down. He desperately tried to cry to her.

Don’t face the world with a smile.

Wondra liked to believe she understood, that her undeveloped brain could comprehend the complexities of his message.

She clapped and laughed all night.

That moment, that knot of purity. That’s why Wondra created such extravagant designs. To send a message without words, to create art that was realistic.

Humanity had a long road ahead.

Like the man Wondra had spoken to just moments ago. Had he known of Wondra’s profession? Admittedly, a man seeking Wondra, the Persona-full! had to have realized that Wondra only wears masks and wigs. His appearance outside of performances was as rare as the man’s presence earlier.

The nerve of him to pound the wood! An innocent bystander to the brutality of the world. Always dressed for different seasons, abused by constant openings and closings. People hardly appreciate the importance of doors: a blank canvas, an opportunity to display character. Without doors, a house would feel unsafe. Someone could walk in at any moment and steal a costume.

Wondra shivered at the thought of a bare wooden rod. How characterless his square room would become. He pondered his door for a spell, silently thanking it for its protection.

He approached the desk and sat down, the chair aching with the sudden weight of a thousand bottled ideas.

Wondra looked at the packet again, noticing the new creases around where his fingers held it tightly. Wondra hesitated for a moment, taking a long breath in, inhaling the aroma of his caravan: the scent of old wood, a closet never left untouched.

He broke the silence with a tear.

Wondra pulled out several papers, wincing at the sound their edges made against the walls of their prison. They almost sounded in perfect harmony, the way a held breath exhales once free from worry. Wondra thought they sounded like a dropped dress, the hem filling with air and releasing it once falling onto the floor.

The papers stared at him, and Wondra had a hard time reading their eyes. He caught several R’s and a few E’s, but the jumbled mess of letters made no sense in his mind. He knew this day would come, eventually, but to him, today had not been the day in question. Tomorrow, maybe, but not today.

He was tired, hands moving slower than before the man knocked. Maybe he would cancel the show tonight for the first time. The numbers in the stands had slowly dwindled through the past several years. Humans, they just did not appreciate the tangibles anymore. Where little girls had danced and played, children now stared into boxes, eyes illuminated with a blue and almost haunting light. Elephants that previously trumpeted now helped pianos ring. What once was found had now been lost.

Wondra sat the papers on the table, hearing their rustle with anxiousness. He started the machine, welcoming the familiar hum, the vibration of the needle against thread. Life in the lifeless, soul in the soulless. Wondra impregnated the costumes, giving them seed to breed thoughts in the minds of the hopeless.

God, he was so tired.

The world had changed, and with newness came a longing desire for fastness. That time could be quickened, like the concept itself were a thin sheet that could be ripped, folded, and re-sewn. The process was still there, but the appreciation had since fluttered away as do drying garments on a windy day. The age of costumes had become obsolete. This new age, where papers could signal an end, a new dawn was breaking.

The pale pastels screamed at him for some sense of existence.

“Fill us. Form us. Set us free.” They pleaded.

He could not remember why he had chosen the color scheme.

Innocence? No, he had already made a costume for that. An adaptation of the little girl’s dress, only his flowed with liquid, instead of stiffness. Innocence was not stiff leather, but silken ribbons for brushing the cheeks of children.

He had made all the children dance that day, gave them ribbons to tie in their hair and on their heads. Their parents marveled at the play, a shimmer of jealousy wrinkling their brows and in the creases of their pouted mouths.

Wondra smiled for the third time in his life watching the children twirl liquid ribbon through the air. The first time, he had just completed his first costume, the tamer’s jacket. The second was when he saw the way the elephants’ skirts haloed around their hinds. They all played with each other, trunks moving against the lace, curious of their new attachment.

Throughout his life, Wondra realized that the most resilient minds rested in the purest creatures. Children and elephants knew of the human world, but not enough to understand the corruption, the itchy fiberglass of politics and guilt and shame.

His eyes glanced over the packet again. He could finally make sense of some of the letters on the topmost paper.

Letter of Resignation.

Wondra was right.

For some, a new dawn was just about to break. For others, the dusk had long since passed.

Wondra’s time had come.

The owner had made mention several month ago, referencing the empty stands and the feedback from the little crowd that did come. The owner had tried to help Wondra find a new place to start, possibly a new career, but Wondra had worked with the circus for so long that starting over again felt foreign. Wondra insisted that he would draw in the numbers again, that the age of costumes was not dead.

Wondra hung his head in shame. He took off the pink velvet that covered his face. His fingers traced the soft texture, leaving streaks in the tail. The mask had no mouth or nose opening and ovals for eyes. He had cut this mask for a way to change his daily emotion; he could draw a smile, a frown, a face of shock, or he could remain expressionless. As he stared at the mask, the blank and empty face, he began to imagine the fabric as a reflection. He drew a smile, tightly curving the lips in a wide c-shape, but the design looked wrong. The way the mask mimicked him, taunted him, Wondra could hear shrill laughter echo through the caravan. He wiped it clean.

His skin, damp from the humidity and sweat from the heat, tingled with a newness, the static shock of fresh fabric. It had been years since he had shown his face to the world, to himself, and Wondra was scared to start again. People might not recognize his true skin Not that the thought of invisibility startled Wondra, but that he would be in the land of the gray again frightened him. His caravan, the deep hues of life, was the only place Wondra called home. That was something the owner could not take away. Despite how much the thought ribboned his mind, Wondra would sacrifice his costumes before anyone would take away his caravan.

All of these thoughts unmotivated him to finish this pastel heap.

Setting the mask down—the pink blending nicely amongst the pile of similarly shaded colors—Wondra rose to his feet, slower than in his youth, and stood straight. He began with the wig, the purple curls and bare sides. He could feel his brown hair stretch and try to cling to the mesh material of the underbelly. He hung the wig on the left spoke on the back of the chair. He moved on to his shirt, pulling at the sleeves. He hoisted the collar over his head, the elastic snaking gently over his still-tingling face. He slid the sleeves from his arms, feeling the cotton puffs tickle his goose-pimpled arm. He lay the shirt over the back support of the chair, then, he released the tension of his cinched waist, pulling free the binding threads of ribbon. His ribs sighed with relief. He dropped the corset to the floor. Stretching his back, he heard the cracking of vertebrae and joints, and exhaled. Finally, he unbuttoned his corduroy pants, admiring the places he had cut and patched with different patterns. He slid the velvet-like texture from his legs and folded it into a square, then sat them on the seat of the chair.

The air was alive with silence.

Displayed before him was his past, the psyche of a good-willed man. He only hoped he had cemented his ideas into the minds of a hopeless race.

As he stood in the dim caravan naked, he began to cry. His eyes started to form drops that became rivers, infused with salt and the ideas he wished he had created. He wept for the future, and he wept for his past.

He cut the little girl's stiff gown into boards, the elephants' skirts into gauze. He would splint his breaking heart with the red-tipped boards, the deep maroon a

match to his blood. The gauze, the lacy purples and pinks, now deeper shades than their former states, soaked with the wetness that seeped from sorrow-filled hearts.

Minutes passed, and when he had emptied his mind of the ideas that would never be displayed, the cerulean sorrow and violet loneliness, once the bare wooden floor had absorbed the crimson tears of a desperate heart, Wondra considered the mirror.

What mask will you wear tomorrow?

He looked at himself from sole to soul, and every fiber in between. As he studied himself, his red eyes, the draping black bags and damp skin, one final thought came to his mind, a closing thread of hope. A hem to patch together what humanity had lost appreciation for.

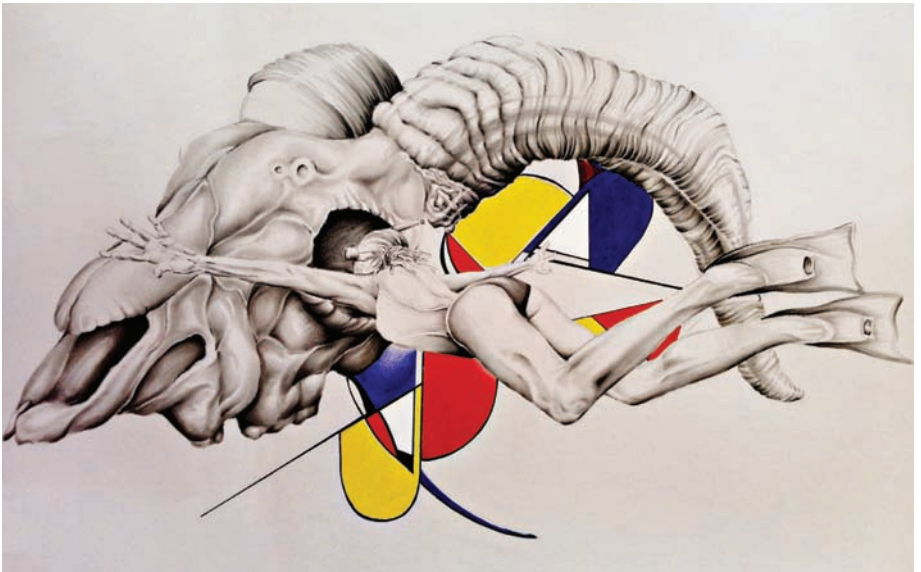
An ending signaled a beginning. Once a costume was done, a new idea was born and the process began again. This letter was not an ending, but the chance to start anew.

He would put on a new face tomorrow. Soft and tacky when brushed with the back of a hand. Rugged and bumpy where angles met curves. In some places, the new mask felt hollow, sunken in on itself. In others, it bulged as does a bedsheet in the evening breeze.

Somehow, Wondra felt that this new creation was his best work yet, a design that audiences would finally respect for its intended purpose. Where silence once filled the air, now the roaring of wonder and awe resonated from the walls of the caravan.

The crowds understood. They finally understood.

And what a crowd he was.



Dive

by Randi Nielsen
Senior, Studio Art
Charcoal, Graphite

Yesterdays

Cassidy Locke

Secondary English Education, Sophomore

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to see all of your yesterdays in motion?
Funny... because I know my yesterdays would look pretty different without you in them. It's ironic because even though my yesterdays make me think of you, you're the only person I want in my tomorrows.

Before we met, I thought nothing of the idea of you.

Now, the idea of you brings all my creativity together like bees in a beehive
My unchosen muse—darling, you keep me making honey
some artists create a pseudonym, but with you, the anonymity resists to exist.

How do I accept the reality of the normality of your magnetic pull?

Why don't you see it?

Every moment with you continually builds my yesterdays

I guess at this point all I can do is hopelessly wish for our yesterdays to turn into our tomorrows.

Cold Coffee

Cassidy Locke

Secondary English Education, Sophomore

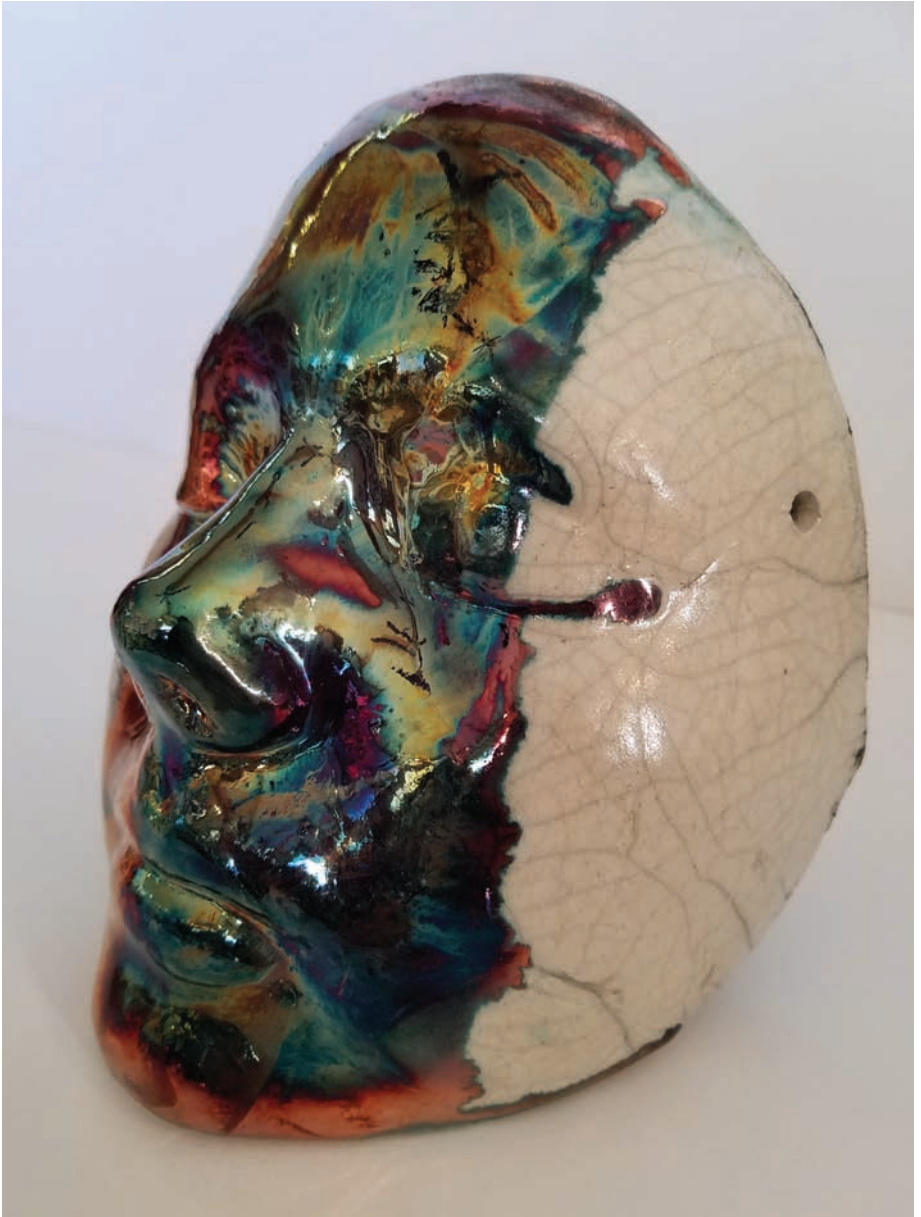
the same disgusting taste of cold coffee
I taste it when I think of you

what you did to me
makes all the flavor in my life
instantly falter
to the bottom of the mug

the pain refuses to dissolve
what was once soluble
fights to be known

the bitterness
hides away
until it grows chilled
eventually so chilled
that it demands to be dumped out

and the process starts
all
over
again



Lone Metallic Face
by Chandler Reich
Art Education
Ceramics

I Don't Want It to Be Like This

Julia Blasdel
Graphic Design, Senior

This one is for the feelings I'm not allowed to say.

Love is not black and white, but shades of grey.

I'm tired of pushing all this shit down,

My mind so wandering like a fucked up playground.

I feel love and attraction but it's called sin,

I want to talk about it but where do I begin?

I wrote my first love letter when I was a child.

She lived across the street where we ran wild.

Even then I knew it was horribly wrong,

As I grew up I learned my part and tried to play along.

It's said The King of Kings created me,

Yet I've prayed to Him to set me free.

Here I am still caught in my own thoughts

O Father just take away these binding knots.

Every morning I look at myself in the mirror,

It seems growing old only makes things clearer.

I wish you knew how hard I've fought,

But lately I've been feeling so distraught.

In the end I don't know if I'll give in

To what I've been taught is shameful "sin."

Mommy, Was It Love

Julia Blasdel
Graphic Design, Senior

I think it's funny when people ask if you drank, like if only they knew.
I was kept in the basement apart from the family, when the monster was you.
I remember that morning when you sipped from the can while lying in bed,
I made my way to you, yelling your name because I had yet to be fed.
You jumped to your feet, cursing my name, saying "I'm going to kill you!"
And fear rose inside me, my heart in my ears because
I knew what you could do.
You grabbed my wrists and dragged me to the kitchen, looking for a knife,
Oh God, how I hate this forgotten strife.
You laughed as you grabbed my biggest one,
holding it to my skin with tears down my face,
I knew with my might you were taking me to my final resting place.
In my screams I prepared myself to die,
In your laughter you began to cry.
With swift motion you pushed me to the ground,
Where I learned to lay in solemn found.
Rest this heart of mine in tender be...
This indeed was the worst memory.

О Мама , Ты Бы Гордился Мной

Julia Blasdel
Graphic Design, Senior

To my supposed prostitute
Life-giver
My birth mother:
Sometimes I feel like
All I am living for
Is to prove to you
That I was worth the money
He paid
For your body.

To Be Loved by You

Tristan Wilson

Secondary English Education, Junior

Hands.

I dreamt of hands that would hold mine with steady strength—ones that would wipe away my tears when I was broken.

Eyes.

I dreamt of eyes that would look upon me with wonder—ones that could read deep into my soul.

Lips.

I dreamt of lips that would kiss me with intensity and tenderness all at once—ones that would whisper I love you.

Each time I felt that I had found the one they belonged to, I was proven wrong. Whether it was timing or location or anything in between, something was keeping me from them. I only had myself to rely on. For years, I lived worrying about the person I was meant to spend my life with.

Society filled me with the pressures of relationships. Cosmo told me I needed a man. My mother told me she wanted grandkids. The elderly members of my church always asked when I was getting married. All of my friends were getting engaged or having babies.

I had walls built up around my heart that defended against the emotions I felt. My heart was on the inside, then there was a wall made of stone and steel and bricks and chain link, then there were my emotions, then another layer of walls and moats and defenses. I wanted nothing to do with anyone that was going to hurt me. The best way to protect myself from feeling emotion and from letting emotions impact my heart was to seclude myself.

But then I saw a boy, and he smiled at me, and I blushed, and I felt my heart rate increase. He was everything I thought I wanted in a man: tall, handsome, kind eyes, genuine smile, nice laugh, deep voice, athletic, religious, etc. We texted and flirted and got to know each other. I met his friends and he met mine, I cooked him meals, and we went on unofficial dates.

After weeks and weeks, I asked, “So do you see this going anywhere?”

As soon as the words left my mouth, his palms got clammy and a nervous sweat broke out on his forehead. He stuttered and mentioned how he thought I was a cool girl and all, but he just wasn't ready for a relationship yet. That settled it. I texted and called and tried to get in contact with him, but he'd ghosted me. The only way I would ever hear from him again was if, by some universal mistake, we ran into each other. Not likely. It was a small college town, but not that small.

I receded into myself again. For months I remained content in solitude—I didn't need a man to be happy. I was strong and independent and powerful on my own. My friends pushed me to put myself back out there while my family pressured me to find a man. What they didn't realize was how greatly I felt them breathing

down the back of my neck every time I held eye contact with an attractive stranger. It was almost like he could see them too. And, just as quickly as his eyes locked with mine, they moved on to the eyes of my friends or the girl across the room. I had no need for a man whose gaze could pass over me so easily.

Living in the secret room of my heart was so much easier and relaxing. I was completely content making eye contact with strangers and flirting so casually that I didn't notice it happening. Any man that tried to pursue me or talk to me or ask me on dates was blown off faster than the wind blows locks of hair off my shoulder. I fell in love with myself. I took myself out for dinner with a good book or spent entire days doing things I enjoyed. I was happy. I had finally found myself and I didn't need anyone else to provide me with happiness.

Then I saw you.

Your eyes looked so deep into mine that I felt naked standing there on the street corner. I wrapped my arms tighter around myself, not because of the cold winter wind whipping around us, but because I needed to hold my heartbeat inside my chest. I don't know how the butterflies didn't escape the pit of my stomach and blind you. I don't know how you didn't warm from the heat radiating off my cheeks that turned them every shade of pink.

Surely you could read all of that in my eyes.

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't contain the colors swirling in my mind from the deep perfection of your voice. I couldn't form words because your smile was melting all the thoughts that tried to form in my mind. A curl fell from its proper place on my head and you were like lightning. I had barely noticed its presence before you tucked it back behind my ear. I noticed that. Although it was twenty degrees outside with a wind chill to freeze bones, your hand was warm and strong and steady against my cheek. I said something then—it was probably ridiculous. You smiled at me, said something, and I laughed.

“Coffee?”

“Yeah, I'd love some.”

“I know the best place.” You offered me your arm. “It's just around the corner.”

I smiled.

“This is the best place in town.” I barely heard you over the blood pounding past my ears. “Not as good as this place I went to in Costa Rica, but it's still good.”

“Costa Rica?” I said the only thing my brain could latch onto.

You smiled down at me where my teeth were chattering from the cold. “Yeah, I spent a month down there this summer at a language school.”

“Spanish?” Complete sentences were impossible for me.

You nodded and held open a large glass door gesturing for me to enter. The smell of coffee filled my nose and your voice floated over my shoulder, “Do you speak any Spanish?”

I nodded.

That was it. That was when you turned my world around in spirals—making my world simultaneously bigger and smaller all at once. Your voice, deep and quiet, made me lean in and closed my world to consist of just us, but you spoke of adventures and got me to speak of my own and expanded my world to cross continents. We talked in those spirals for over an hour that first day. Spanish then English then Spanish and back to English again. Bouncing between languages based on which country we were telling a story from. I taught you lines of sigh language and you taught me bits of French. Together we traversed the globe in a coffee shop. You hadn't lied: the coffee was delicious, but the conversation was better.

That became our place.

We went on dates all over the city and created our own fun out of the small expanse we called home, but we always went back to the coffee shop.

I won't ever forget that day you looked at me in the book section of the secondhand store. Your hand was poised, about to pull a book from the shelf, while I had three staked in my arms. Your smile was soft, and I could see a thought turning in your mind.

"What are you thinking about?"

You didn't answer with words. Instead, you took two long strides and ended up face to face with me. Your lips were on mine before I could blink. My brain turned to putty. Your hand caressed my cheek; your thumb traced lines along my skin. The books fell from my hands as your free arm wrapped around my waist, pressing our bodies together, and my palm slid against your chest until it rested at the base of your neck. When the kiss ended, you rested your forehead against mine.

I heard a chuckle leave your chest. "You dropped your books."

My eyes fluttered open to look into yours. I smiled bigger than I ever had before.

After weeks of dates and laughter, the question that had ended so many almost-relationships before bubbled up in my mind. The day it was strongest, you took me out to the highest hill and we sat looking at the city lights in contrast with the stars. The question was stabbing at me like a thorn in my heel; I knew if I asked there would be no going back. The stars were so beautiful. They made me want to bury the question and let the moment be perfect. My thoughts rolled over and under and around my head.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing."

Your eyebrow raised. "That's a lie."

I took a deep breath. Opened my lips to speak. The words wouldn't come out.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"It's just, I'm scared." My heart was pounding in my ears. "I just, I don't know where you see this going. I don't want to push things, but my dumb girl brain won't leave it alone."

"Don't call yourself dumb. Why are you scared?"

Tears threatened to build in my eyes. “Every time I feel myself falling for someone they leave. If you’re going to leave, I want it to happen sooner rather than later.”

Silence joined us, but a moment later you turned to face me. “I don’t know who made you feel like that, but they were an idiot for leaving you. You’re wonderful. I actually brought you out here to ask if we could put a label on this. Like, would it be okay if I call you my girlfriend?”

I don’t know how my smile didn’t blind you from shining brighter than all the stars and lights from the city. “I’d like that.” You pulled me closer to you and we sat back drawing constellations in the sky. The moment was perfect.

My family was ecstatic when I brought you home the first time. You fit in and stood out all at once, and I loved you for it. The old ladies at church loved the way you took my hand and leaned your head to mine to pray for the world and the people in it. My friends thought you were exotic and fun and exciting, and they loved the way I spoke about you to them over glasses of wine and face masks.

Our adventures carried us over oceans and across continents. Every coffee shop we visited got compared to the one at home. Though some had better coffee or comfier seating or were quieter or louder, none were that corner shop in that tiny city in Kansas. Each time we pulled back into town from an adventure, we didn’t go home to unpack or sleep off the jet lag; we went to the coffee shop.

I won’t ever forget the day that we walked into the shop and the baristas smiled at us bigger than usual. You kissed my head and went to order our coffee while I sat down and shook my coat off my shoulders. It was three years to the day that we had our first cup of coffee in there together. You rejoined me at the table, and we started our usual comfort of conversation. The barista brought us our coffee once it was made, and that first sip warmed me instantly. We talked on and eventually the conversation turned to us. We were whispering all the things we love about each other to one another.

You looked down at my coffee then back up into my eyes. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” I lifted my mug to my lips.

“I never want to spend a single day of my life without everyone who sees you knowing that you are loved. I want every pair of eyes that look upon you to know that there is a person willing to do anything for you—buy a house with you, get a dog with you, then another, come home from work to you, kiss you, take a bullet for you.”

I smiled lovingly at you and took the last drink from my mug. You always spoke to me like this when you were speaking from your heart.

I set down my mug.

There was something written on the bottom.

I looked closer.

Will you marry me?

I looked up at you.

You were down on one knee—a beautiful ring gripped between two shaking fingers.

Tears were in my eyes, “Why are you shaking?” A tear escaped. “You know the answer.” I slid down to my knees in front of you and wrapped your hand in mine. “I would love to marry you.”

Like a bolt of lightning, your arms shot around me and held me to your chest. We kissed and cried and smiled and laughed. You slid the ring on my finger and it was a perfect fit.

“My great-great-grandmother’s,” you whispered.

Your hands hold me with steady strength.

Your eyes look upon me with wonder.

Your lips kiss me intensely and tenderly.

Everyone before you caused me pain. But, without the pain, I would have never known how wonderful it is to be loved—to be loved by you.



Constricting Thoughts

by Ashley Smith

Sculpture

Iron, Bronze

Bloodletting

Uriel Campos
English, Senior

I fear one day the ink flowing in my veins will run dry
My pen no longer able to map a journey to zen
Then the rhyme loses value and can no longer buy time
Mines turned crypts, hollowed out—leaving only fading hieroglyphs
Gibberish their new tongue, while mine is found dumb
Numb from all the slamming, tied and cramping
Damning Heaven & Hell for I couldn't foretell
Four tails w/ hooves & men set loose
Oozing apocalypse from my lips
Sips turn gasps as I grasp
Ask for last words
Slurred—heard none
Kingdom Come
End
Of
I

Post Communion

Uriel Campos
English, Senior

A swallowed crucifix is regurgitated	Body and blood turned to wood and metal
Its sharp edges scrape the esophagus	Finally the relic falls with a thud
The sides cut both cheeks at once	In between pews of sandalwood
The face of a man in agony reveals itself	The gagging and coughing stop
In between jagged teeth and hushed lips	A shaking hand picks up the crucified man
This man never reached the heart	Studying and examining Him
For He couldn't even be stomached	Through bloodshot eyes
Thoughts of one man dying for the rest	Stained glass that reveals a lost soul
Overwhelming and nauseating	Searching for what is not visible
Nailed feet appear now	Longing for what cannot be touched
Bathed in the same saliva	Wondering and pondering
That once dissolved the coat of sugar	The piece of peace
Sugar turned to bitter salt	Seeking once more

Legacy

Trey Basa
Secondary English Education, Senior

She has no plans
To leave a legacy
She just exists
In all of her beauty and grace
She pays no mind
To her past or her future
Only cares about the here and the now

She's one of those people
Who have no plans
To leave a legacy
Because
She's one of those people
You write about
You write her legacy for her

You see
She's always the poem
Never the poet

Rattler

Tristan Wilson
Secondary English Education, Junior

He rattles a warning
I should turn away
Anticipation rises
The steady gaze
of a snake approaching prey.
Nowhere to turn
I don't want to run
My life is the price I'll pay
I reach out my hand
He smiles
He moves my way
The snake devours me



Metamorphosis
by Kendra Hall
Studio Art, Drawing
Soft Pastel, Colored Pencil



Tuesday at Chuck's
by Kendra Hall
Studio Art, Drawing
Soft Pastel

The Pink Bible

Tiara Bollig

English, Senior

Look at that Bible over there on the edge of the bed,
Waiting for the prayers I no longer care to pray.
I can hear it screaming at me,
Making me feel more worthless than I already am,
As it haunts me and it taunts me,
With the gold inscription of my name on the front cover,
And the handwritten dedication on the first page,
Sloppy and slanting slightly to the right because he had the handwriting of an artist.
What power has this Bible?
The gift that I wanted so badly from the man who made me hate it,
With the ability to make me question all of my thoughts.
My father, a youth group leader, a pastor's son.
How can a man who is so "right with God" be so wrong?
I can hear God yelling at me for something he did.
Why do I feel guilty, knowing I am innocent?
I didn't do anything wrong, but that is just it,
I didn't do anything at all.
The Bible yells the profanities that God cannot.
Telling me I asked for it, I deserve it,
Because no good man would have done that on his own.
The pink Bible sits on a blanket of a deep crimson.
Its pages are open,
Flipped to the one page that is so well read,
1 Timothy 4:12, my favorite verse,
Now fading from use.
It tells me not to let others look down on me for my youth, for my purity.
But those were taken from me.
My youth only lasted eleven years.
I listen to my fears in black and white print, surrounded by hot pink leather.
I did not say anything or do anything to stop him.
But what does a daughter say to a father that is not acting fatherly?
God is going to punish me for sending a man to prison,
For never letting him see his family again,
Even though I was supposed to be his family.
Patterned leather stings my palm as the Bible sits in my hands, the inscription shining.
A wall the same shade of pink shakes as the Bible slams against it,
And the screaming is silenced.

An Open Letter to Those Searching for the Meaning of Life

Trey Basa

Secondary English Education, Senior

Don't. Rush.

You don't need to already know
what you're going to do with the rest of your life.

Don't. Panic.

You will soon be dead.

Life will sometimes feel long and tough and God is it exhausting.

You will sometimes be happy
and sometimes sad.

And then you'll be old.

And then you'll be dead.

There is only one sensible thing to do
with this empty existence
and that is to fill it.

Life is sometimes learning as much as you can
about as much as you can.

Taking pride in whatever you're doing.

Having compassion.

Sharing ideas.

Running.

Being enthusiastic.

And then there's love and travel and wine and sex
and art and kids and giving and mountain climbing,
but you know all that stuff already.

It's an incredibly exciting thing.

This one meaningless life of yours.

Beauty Mark

Emily Linder

KAMS, Senior

Raccoons reapply their masks,
Touching up their sneering grins and shifty eyes.
Worse than sirens, trusting those doe-eyes is all it takes to
bleed out, left for dead.
If anyone should know, it would be her.
The cast-aside girl in the bathroom stall,
Where the locks are installed upside-down
And privacy relies on the constant pressure of her boot tread on the door.
As flimsy a shield now as it was a year ago,
The word “bitch” still scratched into the chipped grey finish.
Never again will she worship at another self-centered altar,
Airbrushing and plucking every flaw before that final bell.
She will, however, sneak into the predatory church,
And take up her spot in the fifth metal confessional, awaiting the inevitable.
Rue 21 and PINK enter on cue, HOTKISS trailing behind
Skipping study hall in the name of contour and cover-up.
Voices blend, a chorus of gossip and slang,
Painting themselves a false shade of perfect.
Emerging only after the congregation of scavengers have tamed themselves,
She goes to the sinks, sprinkled with porcelain powder, and washes her hands.
Inevitably, she will look up,
Not in worship, but in acceptance.
All-natural brows frame the hooded icy blue eyes, unadorned.
A mole rests to the side of her brow; a period, the end of an unspoken
conversation.
Farther down, an aquiline nose perches above a thin, pouty mouth, the home of a
sharp tongue.
A year ago, a different girl peered back from the depths
Until she didn't.

The stranger in the mirror turned her back and walked away,
And the wounded animal the girl had become attacked a polished metal canvas,
Her protection from the empty reflection, her onslaught a single word.
Bitch. As much for them as it was for herself,
For the false idol they still cling to as the actual goddess gets buried far beneath.
That dot by her eye finally exhumed from its painted tomb
The need for plastic friends washed down the drain.
Senior year finally finds beauty in her face,
And the girl behind the glass has been set free.

What Stays After a Pen Rests Too Long

Dalton Steinert

Accounting, Senior

You left

And I filled my room

With books and shelves

Bursting with white space.

Maybe to see the infinite futures

We could have written,

Instead of the one

That bled through the page

From title

To our end.

Fleeting

Caitlin Arrieta

Secondary Education

The street lights glare at the blurring pavement, and Marie’s eyelids flinch under them. The wind blows beads of sweat out of her hair, and the cold burns inside her nostrils. A slight ringing sounds deep in Marie’s ear. Pulling her glossed vision back inside the vehicle. Camilo mouths inaudibly before her head rolls back against the door. With closed eyes, the stead motion of the vehicle mediates calm. Though it begins vibrating, the ringing transforms into violent screeching. Marie shudders, suddenly awake to the overwhelming flares of red, white, and blue approaching rapidly. She closes he eyes and the lights continue to dance dimly in her mind; her breathing echoes shallowly, and nausea clogs the rest of her sense. “Where are the streetlights, she thinks, searching, struggling to untangle her words to speak. She leans forward and places a hand on the dashboard to stabilize herself. She glances around. Smoke smothers the air, but the light peeks through and Camilo’s face illuminates—cracked. Marie reaches for him, but a swell of terror fills her as she realizes, pain surging through. Broken glass sticks to skin, and Camilo stares icily at her from through the windshield. His pooling head resting on the hood, the light bursts as a group of hands rush Marie; she struggles. A swift current of wind blows her hair back. The streaks of light begin to pulse once more overhead. She catches a glimpse of Camilo driving, they lock eyes for a moment, and the sound of ringing persists.

Wet Sand

Meritt Hammeke

English, Senior

They take a seat among the rocks
And watch boards leave the beach.
They watch the gulls—in great flocks—
 Lead those boards to sea.
They watch night riders climb soft swells
 And gently ride them through—
 Some glide back to the bank;
 Some wash into the blue.
 The hours fly, far too quick,
 When sitting hand in hand—
But when they leave he'll find a stick
 And write their names in sand.



Pregame

by Randi Nielsen
Senior, Studio Art
Charcoal

The Lengths of Time

Dalton Steinert
Accounting, Senior

The end began with the light.

He shuffled into the room, house slippers sliding on the linoleum. With the light came the whirr of the overhead fan. The hum of it all, ritualistic. A sound so sudden and then constant that a listener forgets its presence.

He opened the shower curtain and turned on the water: two full turns on the left, one turn on the right. Nothing more, nothing less.

As the water from the shower began to warm, he examined himself in the oval mirror. His face sagged a little on the left, the way water holds itself to the surface of an edge. Close to falling but gripping desperately as to not drift off into nothingness.

It shouldn't be long now; the water.

The reflection in the mirror began to gray. The fade gave him the opportunity to pretend that perhaps it hadn't happened. That the drop froze solid and held firm against the rising heat from below, resistant to changing states.

He stepped into the shower, surrounded by a warmth that bathed him in newness. With his eyes closed and head held back, he could feel the movement of the water across his forehead: up, down, to the middle, right, and then left.

He grabbed the soap and lathered it in his hands, moving them in circles around his body. As if more than once presence was in that humid space, feeling and rubbing and massaging palms across nape and back the way a child might grasp a mother's finger; unaware of futures yet to come.

The door to the bathroom opened, breaking his concentration; yet, this intrusion was nevertheless expected.

The familiar sound of hobbled, muffled steps entered the room. The turning on of the faucet, the click of a toothbrush against porcelain. Brush, brush, brush; again, the water; spit; and the opening and closing of the mirror.

The hobbling sound occurred once more, then silenced by the door.

He turned off the water and stepped out, inhaling the faint scent of clean mint and mahogany.

He grabbed the spotted purple towel and dried himself, then put on the pajamas folded on the lid of the toilet.

He hung the towel, opened the door, and stepped out into a large bedroom, dimly lit by a lamp on the side of the bed nearest to the door—her side. He sat down on the mattress and turned on his lamp. Resting his hands on his thighs, they began to move mindlessly forward and backward, distracted.

Standing up again, he moved to the extended dresser that faced the foot of the bed and opened the top left drawer, pulling out a pair of white tube socks. Moving to the drawer below that, he pulled out a navy long-sleeve thermal shirt and a pair of jeans, then took the clothes and sat them on the wooden chair resting next to the dresser.

“The wind is so strong tonight,” she said from the door to his back.

He hadn’t noticed the sound of the wind, but that could have been because he had left the bathroom light and fan on, which canceled out any faint noise.

“I thought the weatherman said tonight was supposed to be calm,” he responded.

Once he turned off the light and fan, he heard the whoosh of the wind against the side of the house. An angry wind, cold and intruding, seeping through tiny cracks in the windows.

She huffed a muffled laugh. “Well, sometimes men just aren’t right at all.”

He rolled his eyes.

“What?”

He stared straight at her through the vanity, a tall and busty reflection by the side of the bed. The angle of the lighting gave her soft edges, which started light and slowly shadowed across her face and torso.

“Do you have to start this talk again?” He countered, turning to look at the dominant force behind him.

She sat down on the bed in a rush. “What stuff? That men cannot typically predict the future with a vague sense of accuracy?”

He retorted, holding himself strong and steady. “I think men and women can predict the weather in similar manners. The simple fact that the weatherman reported a light wind tonight is contrary,”

She sat, deadpanned. “...contrary?”

“Yes,” he said sharply. Walking towards his side of the bed, he sat down, his back again to her.

“If you say so.” She upended the covers and nestled herself under them.

He, opposite to her actions, upheaved the covers and rested them only atop his legs. Remaining seated against the bedrest, he picked up his copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the nightstand, where the trial was about to begin.

She groaned a hollow, uninterested sound. “Again?”

“What?”

She shuffled further into bed, turning herself so her back was to his right side. “You’re reading that dated paperweight again?”

“I don’t think *To Kill a Mockingbird* can be classified as a ‘dated paperweight,’” he retorted.

“Well, I do think there are more recent releases that more accurately describe the experience of African Americans in the United States.” She took several quick breaths after finishing her testament.

He chuckled. “What would you know about the African American experience in the United States?”

She rolled over to face him. “Plenty, I’ve read about it. The women were forced as housemaids while the men did yard work, all for rich white families.”

“Okay, you’ve generalized about a hundred novels. The issues are more complex than simple housework.”

She paused for a moment. “Do all of those novels involve a black maid resisting her placement in society by feeding her ma’am a pie made with her own feces?”

The man contracted his face in disgust, and then morphed it into a smile as the thought rested in his head for a while. “A shit pie?”

She laughed. “Precisely. State-fair blue ribbon pending.”

“If I ever upset you, don’t you go adding shit to my pies.”

“What’s to say I haven’t already?”

His stomach clenched. “You didn’t.”

She stared.

Silence.

“I’m teasing. Of course, I wouldn’t.”

“Good.”

He went back to reading, and she went back to breathing in the air between them, a fish removed from its home. Breaths falling in line with the rhythm of the clock mounted on the wall by the dresser. The hour struck, and the face of the clock opened in sections, rotating away from one another. Filling the room came the brilliant and graceful sounds of Amazing Grace.

She smiled.

He continued reading, undisturbed.

Thirty pages later, he was brought out of the story by her turning over to him again and just looking at him with her blue, blue eyes and lined face. Her thin, short-white hair fell behind her head like the wings of an angel desperate to find its way back home.

“It’s been a while.”

“I suppose it has.”

“Should we try it?”

“I guess it wouldn’t hurt to.”

“I would like to, for the memory.”

“For the memory. That’d be nice.”

So they did—for a while.

“It’s not the same anymore, wouldn’t you say?”

“Maybe it’s not this, but us.”

Making the best of the situation, they stopped.

“We tried, at least.”

“We did.”

“For the memory.”

They laughed, two teenagers after their first time, the newness of the experience damp in the air and on their skin. And in their eyes was the faintest of lights, a twinkle of a single star shining amidst a morning sky.

His breathing became hoarse, choppy and liquid-filled. He tried to clear his throat, coughing into his hand while still in a coital position.

“It won’t be long now.”

“No, I can feel it. Can’t you?”

“I can, in my heart and head. Like meeting an old friend again.”

“An old friend.”

The treacherous wind began to beat against the house with godly force, a wispy hand moving the curtain ever so slightly.

“It really isn’t so scary, you know?”

“With a friend, I suppose it’s easier.”

“Easier than falling.”

“Yes, easier than falling.”

“You don’t think...”

“...think?”

She took her hand, placing it on his chest, and began moving her finger through his soft, white hair. The ebony hand still peered into the room with curiosity.

“That it will be... long?”

She stopped twirling her finger then—right above the beating. They exchanged a look that signaled an understanding, even without exposing the subject.

“It will be hard, painful, and treacherous. But, hold on to the memory. We’re filled with them, and it’s why we’ve lived how we’ve lived and loved how we’ve loved.”

They unwove and lay on their respective sides, breathing and staring at the popcorn ceiling. Its faint shadows, given off by the lamps, seemed to float from wall to wall. Some sections had chipped from age, revealing plaster behind the white sky. The curtain, unnoticeably, shifted to its original position.

“Like clouds.”

“Little, puffy clouds.”

“Won’t it be pretty?”

“I’ve heard it must be.”

The house creaked and vibrated, a stronghold against the gusts outside.

“It’s calming to think about it, you know?”

“Yes, but I don’t know if I’m ready.”

She broke her heavenly gaze to look at him.

“We have to be.”

“...but, what will happen, once it’s done?”

“Only the clouds and clocks know.”

“And the birds,” she said. She looked up to his dark brown eyes with wonder, searching for some sort of comfort amongst his bare chest and calm face.

“Yes, cardinals especially.”

“You will look for me, won’t you?”

“I will find you, day and night.”

As if almost expected now, their voices hushed with an appreciation of company; they believed that holding one another spoke more than their words. Hand in hand, fingers interlaced, and arms tangled in a spiral that would never unravel they became a single twine instead of two threads.

“This has been fun,” she said.

“It was time well spent.” His voice hung in the air, echoing against the walls with an ethereal reverb. The wind blew much calmer now.

“What will the kids think?”

“They’ll be sad, for a while. Of course, I will, too.”

“But we’ve raised them well.”

“We have. We’ll be alright.”

The house released a sigh, shifting the dust on the clock.

“I’m tired. It’s been a long day.”

“It has. Long days lead longer lives, they say.”

“Who’s they?”

“You know, the doctors and pastors.”

“Oh. They would know, I suppose.”

They rested a while longer, backs to the mattress and eyes to the sky, fingers holding strong.

The clouds, at first stationary, seemed to move faster now. As their speed quickened, so oppositely did the life of the clock on the dresser, ticks and tocks suddenly silenced.

“Do you hear that?”

“The wind?”

“No, that.”

They held their breath for several seconds, room quiet despite the gentle breeze calmly passing over the house.

“I don’t hear anything, dear.”

“Me neither, that’s it.”

“The clock?”

“The batteries must have gone out.”

“That hasn’t happened for years.”

“Should we change them?”

“It’ll be alright for tonight.”

So they laid and eyed the plaster ceiling, imagining that this moment could last longer than a lifetime.

“I guess it’s time.”

“So soon?”

“It must be past midnight.”

“Who knows? It could be ten, one, or three.”

“I can check, if you want.”

“No, it’s warm with you here. Don’t leave me just yet.”

“Okay.”

Despite their closeness, they fell into each other more intimately, like a string on a rock holding a cloud in its place.

“I love you, despite your lack of appreciation for the classics.”

“Oh, please. We all love our own versions of the same thing.”

“That’s why I love you now, more than before.”

“What do you mean?”

“As we aged, so did my heart.”

“It’ll be the death of us both.”

“Come on, don’t say that.”

She turned to look at him.

“But it will, and we can’t ignore it.”

He sighed, his shoulders sinking deep into the mattress.

“It’s a shame; to leave because of the thing that keeps you here.”

“But it won’t be long, I promise.”

“Then enjoy it, while you can.”

“I will.”

“Goodnight, dear.”

“Goodnight.”

They both turned to their lamps, he resting his book face open on the nightstand and she reaching for her light switch. Her arm brushed the edge of her King James, knocking it onto the floor with a muted thud against the carpet.

She looked down, noticing the soft black leather of the back cover facing her.

“You can get it in the morning,” he suggested.

“You’re right,” she agreed. She pulled the cord dangling from the lamp.

The room, now encased in darkness, seemed anything but empty. They turned towards one another, finding each other’s eyes in the absence of light, and kissed each other deeply in a passion found only in a love strengthened by tribulations. An inseparable bond, those lips; the unbreakable vow.

He was the first to fall into dreams.

She followed.

They dreamed of flight; an effortless gliding upwards and down, moving through the air as if time were immeasurable and they could drift back and forth with ease. They witnessed the first cries of doves and babes, the laughter of a new family on freshly mown lawns, and the sorrows that come with passing. Yet, they faced these moments together, as if they too took part in the acts.

She awoke to a quiet black, soft and foreboding. A still air.

The house seemed calm and reassuring.

Silent.

She turned to him and knew his dreams carried him away into the clouds. His chest did not rise, nor fall.

She smiled.

Rising from bed, she bent over and picked up the fallen bible, placing it back in its place on her nightstand.

She made her way to the window next to his closet. The sun was just beginning to rise through the bare trees in the distance, branches paused and undisturbed by forces unseen. The sky was clear except for one cloud towards the left of the horizon. She watched as it drifted farther and farther into the distance

“It won’t be long now, dear.”

The end began with the light.



Cry for You
by McKenna O'Hare
Drawing
Colored Pencil, Ink

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