

lines

from the middle of nowhere
a literary and arts journal

Issue 29 // 2017



FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY
SIGMA TAU DELTA

Forward thinking. World ready.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As Editor, I am thrilled to present the 2017 edition of Fort Hays State University's Lines from the Middle of Nowhere.

First, I'd like to recognize the tremendous individuals on the board who helped bring this journal to fruition. Many thanks must also go to our fantastically talented graphic designer, Meghan Oliver, who created the journal's layout.

A special thanks to the Rho Psi chapter of Sigma Tau Delta for providing gracious funding and advertising for the journal throughout the years. Of course, our appreciation also extends to Dr. Lexey Bartlett for her encouragement and support throughout the publication of this journal.

I am truly honored to have been involved in the publication of this journal, and won't soon forget the experience of creating it. As you read, consider the commonality of the content. We shaped this edition with our readers, along with their struggles and aspirations, in mind. I hope that you, as readers, find yourselves within this journal and enjoy the edition as much as we loved creating it.

Kristin Allacher
Editor 2017

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EXPERIENCES

by Ethan Owens

Computer Science

Raw talent
Pushed to the limit
Boundaries broken apart
New experiences to be felt

Push forward
Try new things
Aim for the new
The happy

Break it all apart
See it as something new
Perform a little magic
And watch the good times roll

With the new experiences
You'll find that you only
Regret that which you didn't do

THROUGH CHILDISH EYES

by Kevin Darkis

English

Through childish eyes I have become mature
Carrying burdens that are not my own
To protect her who looks up to me
And to honor those who gave me life
Out of love for those who I honor I carry these burdens willingly
Never calling out for help
Because to mature eyes I am childish
But little do they know
Through childish eyes I have become mature



WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

by Trey Basa

English/Secondary Education

Photo



BURNT AND THY SCRAPED

by Tristan Lindo

Studio Arts (Painting)

Oil on canvas

THE BROKEN WINDOW

by Marissa McHugh

English

Away, away the curtains come.

Broken shards of glass

Through my thumb.

I rub it into the carpet

Hoping to stop it.

Oh, the throbbing pain.

A broken window

I narrowly escaped.

Wind roars wildly.

Outside becomes inside.

Oh the pain roars.

Terrified, I go into the living room

To wait the storm out.

THE TIPPING POINT

by Ainsley Smith

Speech Language Pathology

Throwing seeds to ashes

And yet we are surprised

The crop no longer serves us

Drought before our eyes

We are the damned and the forgotten

We are reckless, we are bold

Oh the ignorant, we fought them

But they've taken all the gold

THE SHADOW IS MY HOME

by Judy Sansom

English

Born into the Solitary confinement of
Darkness,
Dark clouds of memories engulfing my past,
Demanding I hate myself.
If I resign myself to the darkness,
I would shrink into nothingness.

Fear of the dark,
Leaves me reaching for the light.
But the warm light threatens to reveal
My insecurities handcrafted by your insults.

So, I choose to live
At the corner of light and
Dark, where the two worlds whisper back and forth.
I immerse myself in the shadow and
Discover the beauty that lies within.

The Shadow causes me no discontent.
I find strength in this place.
The strength to laugh, even though the past isn't behind me because
It has left its stain of sorrow embedded within.

The Shadow is my Home.
My dwelling place.
My safe haven.

I WAS RUNNING AWAY FROM THE COMPETITION, BUT AWAY FROM MYSELF

by **Grahm Schneider**

General Studies

I was an addict, addicted to the active lifestyle, being involved in sports, being well-liked by my friends, and being someone that always wanted to feel accepted by everyone. Even though I was a four-sport athlete in high school, no amount of training was ever enough to carry the weight that I had bearing down on my shoulders.

Sports became my outlet in life. I relied heavily on the ability to release my emotions, feelings, anger, and fear through sports. I was always busy and constantly involved season year round since the time I could walk, because sports were the norm in my family. It wasn't until a pulled hamstring during my senior track season in high school that my reality had finally caught up to the scared young man running away from it. I was a gay man, who was growing up in conservative Nebraska.

Soon after the hamstring injury, I finally got time to myself, a concept I was not used to at the time. From an early age, I knew I was gay and it was not the norm for everyone around me. Growing up, no gay role models to look up to and connect with were present, let alone a gay athlete. In the span of just a few months, I became severely depressed. I was no longer the happy and carefree man that my friends and family had known me to be. I was fighting a battle that no one could see. On a lonely, star-filled summer night, just four short years ago, I hit a bottom I was hoping I would never hit. The weight of not only being gay, but a gay athlete, something that was considered an anomaly, finally caved in on me. I was alone in my bathroom, silently sitting in the corner yielding a serrated kitchen knife, scared and lonely. In my head, I thought there was no one who could help me and no one that I could turn to help me. I then cut myself three separate times on my left wrist, scars that are still visible to this day and will be forever a permanent reminder of that dreadful and lonely night.

I soon realized that I could no longer do this on my own. I needed help and I needed it quick. I found it through my best friend and teammate. I will never forget his reaction on the night I finally said those two words aloud for the very first time, "I'm gay." His reaction, in a way, supported my notions and actions. No one had known that I was gay and it came as a shock, but what he said after the fact are words that I carry with me forever. He told me that he would always support and love me

no matter who I am and what I do. It was in that moment I felt the weight come off my shoulders—I was becoming myself again. With the full support of my closest friends, I knew it was time to finally tell my family. When I told my parents I was gay, I was still very afraid and unsure of what my future held. It was confusing at first. I sent my parents on a roller-coaster ride that seemed to shatter their dreams for the man I was becoming. However, one thing was for certain, they loved me no matter what. It was an odd few months, but with the support and help of my two siblings, my parents became accustomed to the gay man that I am. Our family has become closer since that day as I was able to finally be who I was around them and feel loved.

Finally, I felt able to breathe again, renewed, and inspired. Sports became my go to again. I was still rehabbing from yet another hamstring injury, but I became more focused and determined to come back from this injury now that I had a clear mind. I rehabbed for 18 months, 18 incredibly frustrating months of continual work in order to get back on the track. After completing my first year of college and finally kicking my depression and almost a year's fight with the mental illness, I had decided to transfer schools in order to get a fresh start. I took this fresh start as an opportunity to finally be my true authentic self from the get go. On my visit to Fort Hays State University, I had informed the track coach that I was gay and the rest is history. As a track and field athlete, I became the first openly gay athlete in the history of Fort Hays State University. Although my first year competing at Fort Hays had left me even more frustrated as my times had taken a dramatic drop, the hunger to improve was still present. During my junior year, I finally pulled it all together for a 9th place finish at the outdoor MIAA conference meet in the 400 hurdles. Being able to compete again, I was competing for me, not trying to run away from the “monster” that was chasing me. Track became my solace and happy place. I was extremely proud of what I had accomplished. No I didn't place at conference, but I overcame 26 hamstring strains and competed well enough to earn a track scholarship. My proudest accomplishment was finally being true to myself, an openly gay athlete. I became that person that I was looking for growing up, an openly gay man that competes in sports and overcomes all of the obstacles thrown at them in their life. I wanted to become someone that people can come to with questions, and I can proudly say that I have helped numerous people who are following in my footsteps. In rural western Kansas, I am a proud, gay ally in a highly conservative state, an unlikely place for someone like me, but what I found here was nothing but acceptance and support.



“Shield-brothers! Sword-sisters! Wardens of Thistledown! Long have our lands been kept safe, by your blood and your sacrifices: today I ask you to bleed with me once again. Drive these bastards back unto the dark shores whence they’ve come! For your children, your mates, your home. For Thistledown! Go forth, fear neither tooth nor claw: Frar Arronglanys!”

“FRAR ARRONGLANYS!”

by Joseph Borra

Wildlife Biology

Digital painting

WHAT'S UP?

by Uriel Campos

English

I spend most mornings sitting down
In front of a white board,
Bored outta my mind
'Til I get to leave and chow down
On mounds of Ramen.
Afternoons I'm face down in books
Or forcing friendly looks
As I run down totals at work.
Afterwards, I turn on the TV
And all I see are fists raised,
Throwing down over differences,
Or is it a lack of respect for them?
Soon I shut it down and shut down.
Weekends are for downing downers
In brown bottles by the liter
'Til the fabric of my reality
Feels like it's been drenched in Downy
And mounting stresses wash away.
The stress of getting tied down,
Putting a down payment on a house,
And holding down some desk job
Constantly weigh me down.
I keep this all on the down-low
For all people wanna know
Is who's down for another round?
Who's the baddest in the crowd?
Who's willing to get down?
I save the low-down
On my upside-down smiles
For the close friends
When I'm broke down.
This cycle then repeats itself.
A system I've got down pat
So when my therapist asks,
"Why so down?"
I flip a frown and respond,
"Just another day..."

A DISTILLED DESTINY

by Aaron McGovern

English

A youthful emergence

Diluted by smoke and liquor

Strong emotions with strong drink

Make for a Volatile Voice

But in a scene that is clouded and crowded

Only a low bass or a high chorus can be heard

Trying to connect to a generation surrounded

By bridges built of ash

Crash and burn, no urge to learn

Libraries of music, but none of books

The American Dream replaced by hallucinogenic trips

Lost in a place of nothing but sharp looks

Crooks and nannies, the confines where many are found

Drunk and high, with little room to look around

But if all this leaves you feeling down

Take this lighter, and brighten up.

WHITE NOISE

by Uriel Campos

English

Can you hear me, dearest friend?

Pleading for rescue

In between these words and lines

Won't you save me now?

From this vast and blank abyss



OOPS

by Kat Goetting

English

Bronze

MAMA LOVES A MASK

by Ainsley Smith

Speech Language Pathology

Mama loves a mask
And if she'd only ask
The questions right
She'd know

Mama loves a mask
A girl inside a flask
Smoldering sleepless nights
Throwing crosses out the window

He could never lie
No he could only make me true
But they won't understand the colors
Inside the brilliant mind that I call you

So please lay low, just smile
Play the game for now, beguile
Duplicitous and all the while
She loves me so

Mama loves a fairytale
The girl who'd never sin
Taking sips of ginger ale
Instead of shots of gin

Mama loves a fairytale
And once I loved her too
I never knew that when I'd think
I'd lose my mind and start to sink
And as I learned I grew
Out of the mask you made for me
You'll love me someday soon

THOUGHTS OF YOU

by Aaron McGovern

English

I still think of you
though I'm not always sure why.
When we were kids,
I couldn't think of you
without the tears forcing their own presence.
Tears that tried to fill the hole
that you left.
Now all that's left
is me and memories.
Now, when I think of you,
that familiar sadness always accompanies me
taking that place that you once filled.
Now, every time you interrupt my thoughts
I can't help but ask, why my mind holds onto you.

Was it because of what you did with your life (despite how short it was)?

Was it because of what you did to my life (despite how little or grand it
was)?

Was it because of the way you left us, me (despite how painful it was)?

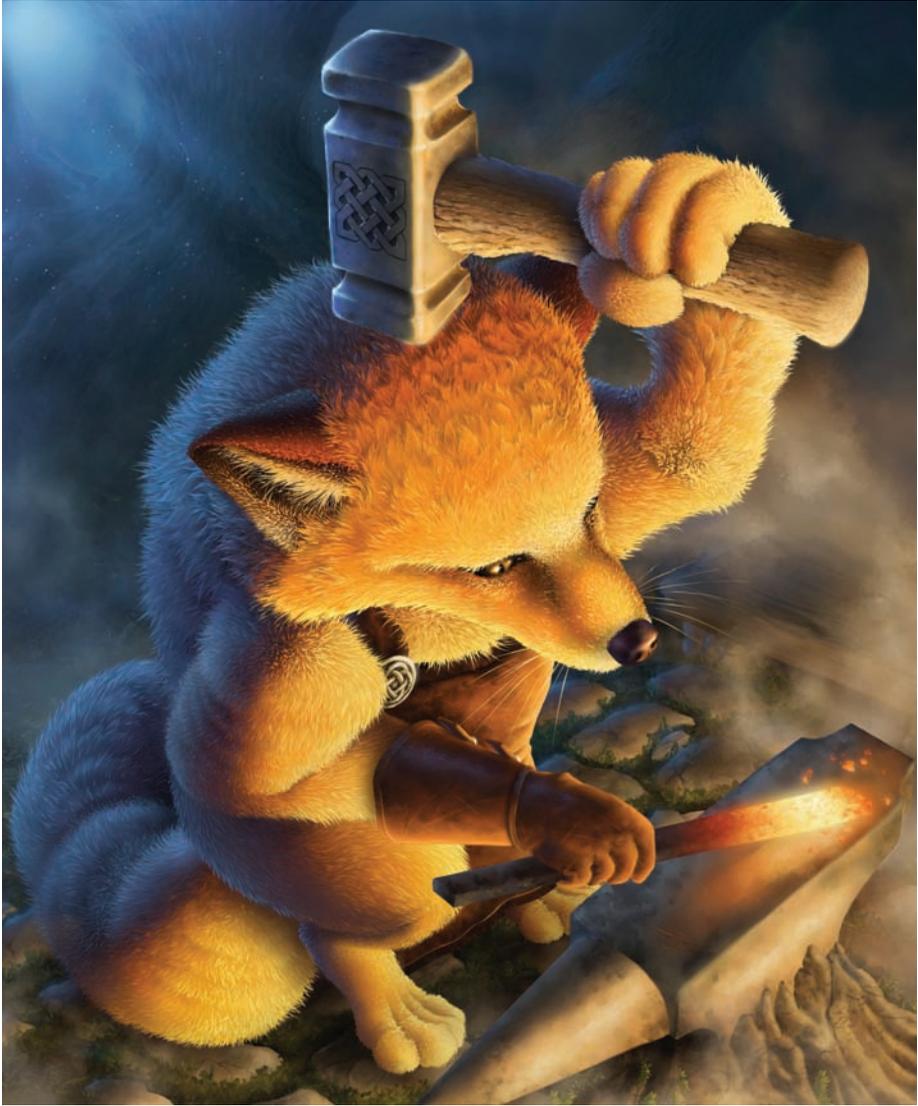
Or was it because you were my peer,
and you left light years before
any of us
had even thought about
Dying.



THE TRAGEDY OF A CLOSED STATION

by Tristan Lindo
Studio Art (Painting)

Oil on canvas



Deep near the heart of Thistledown lies the village of Hammer N' Tongs, the ancient abode of the Ironsmiths. Revered for their near-mythical craftsmanship, these metallurgists, smelters, armorers and ironwrights craft many fine works: from magnificent spears and unbreakable axe-heads to finely wrought chalices and decorative candelabras... but all for a price, of course!

THE IRONSMITH

by Joseph Borra

Wildlife Biology

Digital painting

THE BREWERY

by Aaron McGovern

English

What have you done society?
Brewed a monster out of
What is condoned by society?
Bottles sold, bottles taxed.
Bottles drank, livers taxed.
Blacked out blacks,
Mistakes that can't be whited-out.
Drunk drivers and Congressional Writers
Yellow lines merge, cars converge
Mothers mourn, wives weep, I die
Where I lie, there's no lies.
My actions, though disoriented,
Drove me to the grave
Not brave, nor behaved
But laid to a rest.
That was not peaceful
Cause it takes two to fight
And collide.
And my liver met its match
Just as my car met his car
And together,
Our mothers mourned,
Our wives wept,
And we died.

CLOSE COMBAT

by Ainsley Smith

Speech Language Pathology

Her barracks are the bedroom
Her gun, washing machine
Her M.O.S. is simply to
make sure their plates are clean
Her uniform, a skirt and blouse
Her tank, an S.U.V.
When thinking of him, weeps and asks:
"Why couldn't it be me?"

SECOND THOUGHTS

by Sarah Holzmeister

English

You left on a Tuesday afternoon. It was pouring outside and you had just brought the kids home from school.

“I have some work to do, so don't wait on me for dinner,” you said without looking me in the eye as you turned to leave.

You didn't seem yourself and I wondered what could possibly be so important.

Two hours later—I received the call.

The police report said your car was struck by a semi on the highway by the airport. Apparently, you were making a U-turn.

When the officers asked if I knew where you were headed, I told them no.

I had no idea why you'd be on that end of town in the first place.

“He wasn't going on a trip?” They asked.

Through tears, I told them you wouldn't leave without letting the kids and me know.

“There weren't any bags in the car, but we thought we'd check just in case. Maybe check his phone for the last calls he made,” they said as they handed me your belongings.

It's been two weeks.

The doctors told me the medically induced coma was necessary, but there's still no guarantee you'll survive.

I've held your hand and prayed every day for you to pull through for your family.

But as I watch you fight for your life, I wonder if it's for us, or for the woman I've seen pacing outside your door.

OUR MUSIC

by Cassidy Locke

English

you gave me a fermata
when my heart begged
for staccato

TO MORGAN

by Trey Basa

English/Secondary Education

Nobody ever does, but there are a few
who bother to ask me why I love you

It occurred to me that the answer
wasn't as obvious as I thought it to be

I had never really put it into words
only into sobs and tears and angry puffs of air

And I look at them, as they expect me
to list everything about your appearance

how I love that blond that reaches down your back

how I love the crystal clear waters in your eyes

how I love that gleaming grin

how I love that kiss that stole my breath

again

and

again

and

again

And I look at them,

I smile, and I say

“She made me feel alive.”

A LEAF, A LEAF

by Dalton Steinert

Accounting

A leaf, a leaf, how queer to think
That trees discard their precious leaves.
While people fear their thinning hair,
A tree's lifeblood glides through the air.

A child awaits the coming fall,
"The leaves, mommy, they've lost them all.
I'm bald and bare, these trees are me."
In silent death, she grins with glee.

A leaf, a leaf, how queer to think
These trees release frond in a blink.
A mindless shelling to the wind,
The Trees of Winter, nude and trimmed.

That child finds herself a friend;
In naked bark, she can pretend
A tree can shelter her from rain
That showers down in forms of pain.

A leaf, a leaf, how queer to think
These children's minds form paper links
Like leaves that twirl through steady breeze.
A little girl with brown eyes sees

A future where tree branches sway
In Barren Land, an air's melee
With wooden fingers shaking hard.
A tree so scared to break in shards.

A child's dream is soon realized
To be her life; unauthorized.
"These trees, mommy, they shake like me.
Why must strong leaves from these Trees leave?

Why does my hair fall from my head?
Did God make me so sick I shed?"



DOUGHERTY/DURHAM WEDDING DAY

by Trey Basa
English/Secondary Education

Photo

HERMIONE

by Kat Goetting

English

“She’s going to rip my arm off.”

“No she isn’t. Just move slowly.”

My mother’s words offered little comfort, as I was elbow-deep in a large blue dog kennel housing a hissing, spitting ball of grey fury.

The objective of reaching in to this death pit was to toss a kitchen towel over the beast within, to allow safe handling.

“She’s just a kitten, Katie,” my mother sighed impatiently, as if I were trying to choose between a Coke or Pepsi, and not waist-deep in a demon’s lair.

“You do it, then.” I huffed, backing out of the kennel.

My mother took the towel from me and without hesitating, reached inside. But something was different about this unholy creature when she extracted her.

“Listen to her!” My mother said. “She’s purring. Poor baby.”

It made no sense. This little cat had been full of piss and vinegar a few seconds ago, and now, pressed against a warm bosom, rattled out a purr. Her eyes darted around fearfully, but she didn’t struggle in the warm embrace of the kitchen towel.

Safely swaddled, claws hidden, I managed to touch her head. I expected her to growl and possibly bite, but she did neither. Instead, she closed her eyes and purred louder.

During her first vet visit, we discovered that her pelvis had been cracked. The nurse my dad got her from thought she had been run over by a car, but she was most likely kicked. Hard.

She needed as much love as physically possible.

“Heeeermiiiione,” I sang softly one cold November morning, looking at the front-left tire of my mother’s 2001 Corvette.

Within seconds I heard a small mew, and a slender grey form emerged from under the car.

Hermione knew her name, and more importantly, she knew I was a friend.

She padded over to me, purring before I was able to run a few fingers over her knobby spine.

Soon Hermione was acclimated to indoor living and our other cats, Jack and Loki—both at least three times her size.

Hermione loved chasing as much as being chased, especially up the stairs where she could wiggle through the banisters to evade capture from the heavier cats.

* * *

One day we noticed her stomach felt hard—as if she had developed a rock for a colon.

We made a vet appointment, and upon closer inspection, it was clear that she was rather “backed-up”—unable to pass hard stool due to her mysterious spinal injury. Although a laxative was prescribed, she was so plugged up that they had to perform an enema.

Needless to say, she was not a happy camper when we picked her up the next day.

Although she was empty, we still gave her a daily dose of medicine. Easier said than done.

“Katie,” my mom called from the basement. “Can you give Hermione her medicine?”

“Sure,” I yelled back, glancing at Hermione, who was half on my shoulder and half on the pillow I was lounging on.

I must have startled her when I shifted, because she dug her claws into my arm and hissed. She was very aggressive when it came to beauty rest.

I filled a syringe with the vile gel and sat back on the couch. I picked her up tenderly, and tried to poke the nozzle into her mouth.

As soon as I poked around, she smelled what was coming and tried to wiggle out of my grasp. I had to pull her under my arm and pry her jaws open by squeezing gently on either side of her mouth.

Once her mouth was open, I eased the goo inside only to have it bubble out onto my shirt.

I was frustrated, and my mom could hear it.

“What’s wrong?” she asked loudly at the foot of the stairs.

“I can’t get her to take it. She keeps spitting it out on me.” I yelled angrily as Hermione clawed herself away from me, shaking her head, gagging as she licked her jaws in disgust.

“You have to squirt it into her throat,” she called. “All of it. Really quick.”

“But I don’t want to choke her!”

“You won’t.”

I really didn’t want to force-feed this fragile scrap of fur. After all, I wouldn’t want someone shoving something down my throat. I have a sensitive gag reflex.

Fortunately, I was able to pull her back, pry her jaws open, and administer the laxative although she protested loudly.

As the months passed, Hermione began to feel a little backed up again, so we upped the dosage to 3 CCs twice a day. That seemed to do the trick for a month, until a severe flare-up required a second enema.

The ritual of 3 CCs twice a day continued a little while longer, and once we noticed a firmer-than-normal belly, we panicked and gave her 5 CCs twice a day, which helped tremendously.

She was a lean, mean, pooping machine...for a little while.

It wasn't long before she was rock hard again. She became lethargic, and appeared to be in a great amount of pain. I was going to college in Hays, Kansas, at the time, a three and a half hours drive from home in Lawrence. My mother took her back to the vet, and I got a phone call a dreary December afternoon.

Hermione wouldn't survive a third enema.

Her body was slowly giving up. She was being poisoned from the waste cemented in her bowels.

My mother put Hermione to sleep during that visit.

She didn't expect the appointment to end in heartbreak.

Neither did I.

I stared at the wall for what seemed like hours when I felt my phone vibrate. A text message from my mom:

"She's gone."

I wept for days. It was just last week I curled up on the couch with her between my knees in our favorite microfiber blanket.

Hermione had such a hard life.

Abused.

Broken.

Starving.

The poor thing couldn't perform a simple bowel movement most of her life. We were able to help her heal, at least a little. We did everything we could for her. We spoiled her rotten, quite honestly.

I mourned Hermione well over a year. After several more years of guilt and anguish, I brought it up to my dad.

"Why does it still hurt so much?" I asked.

Peering over his pink reading glasses (stolen from my mother), he laid his Popular Mechanics magazine on his lap.

"Because," he sighed. "Because she had such a tragic life. She was in pain when she entered and left our lives. But I'd like to think the middle was good—that she wasn't in pain."

“I know she wasn’t,” I began, choking back tears. I hated crying in front of my dad, especially over matters involving animals. I felt so weak. “She would run up and down the stairs, bat paper across the floor, even wrestle with Jack and Loki. I heard her head hit the ground pretty hard when they’d get rough and it didn’t seem to faze her.”

“Well then,” he smiled. “Sounds like she had a pretty good life to me.”

2009-2011

1-1/2 years old

WHEN WE GROW OLD

by Dalton Steinert

Accounting

one day, when we are older,
we will intertwine our hands
and breathe our last.
one day is some day,
and some days are longer than others;
but, one day will be
shorter
than them all.



MENTAL CONCEPTION

by Tristan Lindo

Studio Art (Painting)

Oil on canvas

LIBROCUBICULARIST

by Ainsley Smith

Speech Language Pathology

Once upon a time
I sat to read a book.
I started in my bed
And there began to look.

I watched the words and phrases creeping
Hoped to find the plot
Each dog-eared page, each moment seeping
Off the pages, to my heart

The characters enthralled me
Stole me from my world to theirs
Whispered all their hopes, desires
Wishes, dreams, and cares

I delved right in but quickly found
That once I was addicted
This book I thought was once a treat
Now had me afflicted

The characters I felt were real
Ended when the story did
Once there was no page to peel
I was left disheartened

Once upon a time I read
And reading I did learn
That these small words were all it took
To make me one sad bookworm

Librocubicularist- one who reads in bed

TRUST

by Tristan Wilson

English/Secondary Education

I trust him. I trust him with my heart, but the past week has been a rough one. He said he needed time to think about 'things', and I've given him that. Saturday he asked for space; today is Friday, I still haven't heard from him. I can't take the not knowing anymore.

So... are you still thinking about things or...?

Snapchat confirms what I knew before opening the infernal application three hours later. The message was opened, read, and left unanswered. The microwave clock reads 12:37 a.m.

I can't take this... Why are you ignoring me? Did I do something?

Sinking into my comfy mattress topper, listening to an episode of *Friends* isn't helping. I wouldn't be able to describe the plot if my life depended on it. It's hard to know what the gang is up to when your eyes are glued to a phone screen waiting to see the little, filled in, blue arrow become an outline. I throw my phone down on the mess of teal, black, white, blue, and pink blankets at my feet tangled from all the tossing and turning of my mind. Chandler Bing's voice reaches my ears, "It's so hard to care when you're this relaxed." I glare holes through the television before flopping back and pulling my pillow over my face to stifle my scream of frustration. If my neighbors can hear me, they probably think I'm crazy.

Honestly, I can't even say what I'm screaming at. Him? The TV? The universe? When my chest constricts and the pain of my dry, empty, lungs sends ripples of fire up my throat, I embrace the burning for as long as possible until my body saves itself. I throw the pillow across the room as I gasp for air. The pillow connects with my door, then drops to the floor, but I am more concerned with the ache inside my rib cage. I swing my legs over the side of the mattress before launching my feet onto the cold tiles. Every time I feel their hard surface, I shiver thinking of all the other bare feet that crossed this floor before I moved in. The remote on the desk takes two steps to reach, and I mute *Friends*.

Feeling the rug under my toes gives me comforting vibes. The soft gray fuzz warms me, and I curl my toes in and out several times thinking of when I did this in the sand by the lake with him. The sound of the lake rushing up at us, then fading back in on itself takes over my imagination. The feeling of his arms around my waist and his chin resting on my shoulder with the sun rays beating into our skin overpowers my

senses. I close my eyes trying to imagine that moment again, but take in the sounds of my dorm building instead.

I can hear music coming from down the hall, gun shots from a video game the guys below me are playing, the familiar squeak and crack of the stairwell door to my right followed by the laughter and conversation of a group of girls, and the Kansas wind that echoes through the hollow center of Wiest that my window looks out to. After a moment, I hear shouting. I strain my ears and decipher it as a couple fighting. The yelling voices rise and rise until I hear a door slam, and my imagination takes me to his front yard. His dad is in the house to pick up his little sister; every time his parents are together an argument or fight is bound to break out. I can hear the yelling from outside the house. His pickup door slams and he yells at me to get in. I trust him, so I obey.

Then I hear *it*. The familiar ding of a Snapchat notification. I throw myself at my bed, launching to its raised position like a dog for a Frisbee, and frantically search through the blankets to find the small hunk of metal that I'm so addicted to. I stop when I see that the name on the screen is not his, but my classmate's. My fingers type the four-digit passcode with lightning speed, muscle memory taking over from the thousands of times my thumb has padded across this path. Before opening her message, my eyes glance at the arrow by his name. Filled in. That means he hasn't opened it. That means he isn't ignoring me; he's just busy. It takes less than a minute to respond to my classmate and when I return to my conversation list, the blue arrow next to his name is still hollow.

Immediately, my heart starts beating wildly and blood is rushing past my ears. Pounding. Pounding. Pounding in my ears until I can't take it. I put the phone down, slip on my moccasins, and leave the room. I do the slowest walk around the hallways of my floor five times before stopping in front of my door and staring at the sign that has my name written on it in swirling font. The sign was a gift from his mother for graduation. She said this way he would know which room was mine; except, he hasn't been to see me since I moved in.

My hand grips the cold metal knob, and I figure I probably look like a crazy person - again. My shoulders rise and lower before I realize I made the decision to take a deep breath. I hear the knob turn and the small creak of the door as I push it open and shut it behind me before walking over to my phone. I press the circular home button and see a photo of my friends and I laughing with our arms wrapped around each other's backs. We're in a house with a stack of dirty dishes in the sink behind us, and I remember it took six tries before we could all agree that

the photo was acceptable to post on Instagram. But no message blocked my view of our faces.

Why am I even still awake? I should just lay down and go to sleep. That's easy, right? I roll my eyes at myself in the mirror. I think I might actually be crazy. Maybe that's why he's acting like this; two years of dealing with me, and he's had enough. I busy myself with four more episodes of *Friends*, telling myself he just hasn't replied yet because he is typing his answer in his Notes app before sending it to me. I trust him. I always have. I trust him blindly and without question because that is the kind of person I am. It's 2:57 and I have had enough.

So is that it then? I'm not even worth a reply anymore?

I plug my phone into the charger and pull the blankets up around my neck. Eventually sleep takes me off into a black abyss of dreamlessness. When my alarm goes off in the morning, I immediately hate myself for staying up so late. At that thought, I shoot up and snatch my phone from its resting place. There's a notification blocking our faces on my background. My heart leaps in my chest and I rush to unlock the phone. However, when I tap the ghost and Snapchat stares me in the face, my smile disappears and my toes go cold under the seven blankets.

I know what's coming.

I stretch forward and grab my notebook and pen from the ledge. I wrap my wild hair up in a bun and begin writing: "I can taste the bitter, sting of heartbreak on my tongue. I wasn't blindsided either. Cold has slowly been creeping over me day by day. The warmth I used to feel when I was talking to him has been fading fast." When I feel brave enough, I tap his name and read his response.

Yes you are worth a reply, you did nothing wrong. I don't like you like you like me, and that's not fair to you, because you deserve so much more.

"Right now, I'm numb." I can't cry no matter how hard I try: "Deep down, I knew he was never going to truly love me. You can't force a wild thing to love. Something that has been damaged by its past. Something that thinks love means nothing more than saying things you don't mean and making promises you don't intend to keep. All you can do is love them with all you have and hope they let you show them what love is; hope they allow themselves to love you back." My phone dings again and his name fills my vision.

I'm sorry.

"In the end, all that will come of this is pain. This story won't have a beautiful epilogue about how our kids look just like us, how our cute little house smells like pancakes every Sunday evening, how we kiss each

other goodnight, and how we whisper I love you over my morning tea and his coffee." My fingers fly across the screen, the placement of the letters on the keyboard are more known to me than my address on campus.

Me too...

"Honestly, I'm not even sure our paths will ever cross again. Maybe next year, at a party, I'll see him with another girl dancing all over him. I'll chase away the pain with another shot straight from the big plastic bottle filled with that cheap alcohol that tastes like gasoline. I'll smile and dance like nothing is wrong while I'm crumbling on the inside." The thought of his arms wrapping around another girl and pulling her to his chest just how he always did with me makes something inside me turn to stone and drop into my stomach. I take a few slow breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth trying to fight back the nausea that is making my head groggy.

"I was never what he wanted. I just tricked myself into thinking I was what he needed; what was going to show him real love and keep him close forever. Things like that never happen. That is just an image I have in my mind because of all the books I read and movies I watch. This doesn't feel anything like the heartbreaks described in my books. Those are shattering. They rip sobs from your chest and make you feel like every thread in your heart is being cut. This just feels like emptiness." I feel myself forcing air into my lungs ending in a sharp pain every time the oxygen reaches the place where my heart should be connected: "The only thing letting me know I feel anything is the sound of the pen moving across the page."

My eyes follow the ink as it creates a continuous river of twenty-six different symbols that stream across the page like the LED lights of a heart monitor: "Words have always been my lifeline; they always will be."

"When people fail and my thoughts are too destructive to keep inside, the words are there." My eyes drift over to the forty-nine books sitting on my shelf. Some I have yet to read, others are the favorites that I needed to have with me during this life transition called college. "The words hold my friends, my heroes, my family, but most importantly, they hold me and who I am. Like a sweet caress, they hold me and tell me that everything is going to be okay."

"I feel them in the air." My skin tingles with the electricity surrounding me. Even the darkness can't hold the words back. They are attracted to the sound of the pen flying across the page, striking and gliding and rolling and pounding against the paper. The words seem to be daring the page to respond, taunting the lines and denying to be held

within their restraints. With every loop of a y or cross of a t the words remind the page what gives it its beauty.

“They aren’t inside my mind, flowing out of the pen through me. The pen pulls them out of the air and puts them on the page. The words help me to feel again. They bring about all sorts of emotions. The words won’t judge me.” The pressure in my head is lessening, and the tears are flowing freely now: the words did that. They broke down the walls in my mind and helped the pain escape, the pain that could have damaged me if it would have remained locked away.

“They are like vibrations in the air.” I can feel them now as the tears run down my cheeks. They understand. They know my hopes and dreams before I do, and they feel pain approaching and come to help cushion the blows.

“I don’t feel alone.” Breathing is coming easier, I feel the words healing my heart. They aren’t my words of course; I can’t even honestly say whose words they are. They belong to the air. I am simply the scribe.

“I will always love the words.” I try to come up with a way to thank the words for being a part of my life, but I can’t form the sentence. I realize it is because the words already know what is in my heart. They don’t need to tell themselves how much they mean to me.

“Nothing could ever change that.” A tear rolls from my cheek and splashes against the page, but the blue ink refuses to blur. I think of a phrase my English professor said and write it in large cursive letters at the bottom of the page.

“Trust the paper; trust the pen.”

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MANMADE STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

by Tristan Lindo

Oil on canvas

BACK COVER

“I, TOO, SING AMERICA”

by Hanna Selman

Porcelain/Mixed media

