

# lines

from the middle of nowhere  
*a literary and arts journal*

Issue 28 | 2016



**FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
SIGMA TAU DELTA

*Forward thinking. World ready.*

# A Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

Within this volume you will find just a few examples of the creative work of the superbly talented students at Fort Hays State University. May the literature and art held within these pages bring you solace and joy, compel you to question our world, and give you insights to our world. Just as the artists and authors have left part of themselves in their work, I hope captured within them you find a piece of yourself.

This journal would not have been possible without the unending help and support of Sigma Tau Delta, Dr. Lexey Bartlett, my diligent board members, Fort Hays State University Printing Services, and Lyndsey Dugan. Thank you all for your help creating this edition.

Enjoy, dear reader.

Jera Gales  
Editor

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# When It Rains

Arianne Fisher

*Psychology Senior*

It is raining. This is the only observation he can make as he drives through the forgotten city. His windows are down, and the icy wind blows the droplets through empty space to land on his cheeks, his nose. He always drives with the windows down when it rains.

It is quiet, when the rain is falling.

The air drifts in through the open window, and it smells like long nights and wet grass on their backs and the moon high in the sky as the clouds clear and the world softens in the gentle, forgiving light.

It smells like memories.

He would say it smells like home, but he doesn't remember what home smells like. But still, the rain is comforting.

The droplets play across his skin like fingers so long ago played across ivory keys, coaxing notes and melodies from their depths that ran through his ears and around his body, holding him, lifting him, grounding him. The smile that touches his lips when he pictures the dust on those keys now is not a smile at all.

He drives on, through the seemingly empty city. There is no music; the radio in his car went out long ago. He does not care for music much, anyway. All he hears is deep, still silence, and the quiet pitter-patter of raindrops on the roof of his car. If he listens very carefully, he can even hear their journey as they slide down the metal roof and off the windshield, splashing onto the gravel below before being obliterated by his tires.

The rain smears his windshield, blurring the trees and streetlights and buildings into nothing but shapes, shapes with no edges, no curves, and no distinction. There is no way to tell where one thing ends and another begins, where they overlap, where they fade away. He thinks people are like that too, maybe. Maybe that's how they used to be. So tuned in to each other, perhaps, or so blurred together by secrets and words left unspoken that no one could tell where one ended and the other began, where they overlapped, or where they faded away. Their borders were there, but hidden so well in each other that maybe, for a while, those lines started to fade and blur into soft curves and delicate traces, mere shadows, of the hard edges they used to be.

It was when the lines started to appear again that things got complicated.

He sighs, turning on his windshield wipers at last. The rain clears from the glass, and the fuzzy shapes blur back into focus; they are trees and buildings and signs with vibrant colors and sharply clear boundaries. Maybe that's what happened.

A soft fog settles on the city as he continues to drive the never-ending road. Around him, the buildings and streetlights stand tall, casting long, black shadows on the pavement despite the murky gray sky. The wipers move with a relentless rhythm in front of his unblinking eyes. It is hypnotizing, in a way; excruciating, in another.

He thinks maybe he would like to turn them off, let the water distort his vision again, smear and smudge the world around him. He knows as reality blurs, his mind clears.

He remembers the phone call; the song that played had been unheard for so long, and yet he had never changed it. When the sound had reached his lonely ears, he had nearly dropped the phone in shock. That song echoes now, all around the car, all around the mute city, in an endless loop. So, so long.

He recalls the silence the first few seconds after his trembling fingers, as if of their own accord, had lifted the phone to his ear. He had nearly hung up, thinking that it must have been a mistake, a fluke. A terrible, cruel accident.

Then, he had heard her voice.

"Hi."

It had been gentle, with a slight edge of uncharacteristic hesitation, but still. It was her. He had nearly fallen to his knees.

She must have mistaken his stunned silence for something else entirely, for she had rushed on, continuing, "I'm probably not allowed to say things like this anymore, but." She had stopped, and he could picture her tiny white teeth poking out to chew on her bottom lip, like she always used to, as if she still stood directly in front of him.

"But I miss you."

Still, he could not speak.

She had inhaled, sharply, almost painfully, and he begged so desperately for his voice to be freed.

"Can I see you?"

He had not believed, at first, afraid his trembling fingers had rattled the device against his ear, creating too much distortion, and he had misheard. He should not have even considered; he did not need to see her, he could not, he had someone, he had moved on—

But no one would ever measure up to her.

That is why, now, he drives aimlessly through the ancient, crumbling town. The rain blurs the always-familiar house; this is the third time he has passed it. He still cannot bring himself to stop, knowing it stands empty, forgotten.

The windows are dusty, so smeared that he cannot see through them as he walks up the sidewalk. He knew he would eventually. Even when every single sense was screaming at him that he should not, he had never been able to resist her.

Inside, the floors look just the way he had left them that day—the day he had finally decided she was never coming back.

He crosses through the kitchen, down the hall, and finally, into their bedroom doorway. He cannot force his foot to take that final step, across the threshold, back into the past. That would be too much like admitting it was real.

It is dark, gloomy, near-frightening in a few corners. The ominous shadows cast by the murky shapes outside the windows slide across his face, cloaking nearly half his body. This suits him just fine. Half his mind is all that is controlling him now. He is in discord, dissonance threatening to tear him in two. He knows he should return to his car; it is just as he had thought (feared). She is not here.

His feet leave prints in the thin layer of dust that coats the floor as he crosses the still, soundless room.

Against the wall, a mirror rests. It is large, with an intricate brown frame full of swirls and dips and carvings, intricate enough that even dust and time have not dulled its beauty. There is a new crack in the corner, he presumes from the slide to the floor, that runs several inches up the right side, yet the glass still remains in place. This had been her favorite, a lifetime ago. She stood for hours, watching him move about the room not directly, but through this mirror. He remembers glancing over to it to see her glowing face reflected back, and his breath catches in his throat. Returning here has brought everything back, sharper than in years, and even though the rain still pours outside and cloaks everything in its unrelenting haze, he can see himself, everything he was and is, all reflected in this mirror that cannot even reveal the floor it sits on through all the dust caking its surface.

This time, he does fall to his knees.

He slams his fists against the floor, denying everything right in front of him, concentrating on the rhythm of his blows, blocking it out, pushing it away, not thinking about her sleepy smile, her shining eyes, her arms around him, and her heart, her beautiful heart, that he had and he lost, and that he cannot get back again. She took it back the day she left. He knew that all along. He had thought he had his own back, too.

He was wrong.

Just as he is telling himself for the second time that it's over, she's not coming home, he stands, he turns, and there she is.

The dust does nothing but soften the hall behind her into a distant mist, like a halo, and it makes her form even more sharply brilliant, shining, and beautiful. She is beautiful. And she is there.

Her steps are hesitant, as if she is afraid of crushing the dust that lines the floor under her shoes. She walks slowly, cautiously, but halts as she sees him turn away.

Slamming his fist against the wall, he shuts his eyes, as tightly as he can. It does not matter if she is here now, because he is already shattered. He swore that he would walk away from this meeting unchanged, indifferent, and he would never see her face, her beautiful face, again. He smashes the wall again and again, wishing he could walk away now. He knows he cannot.

At that moment, he feels her arms slip around his waist, hears her voice, soft, and just as gentle as he remembers, whisper, "You're okay, you know." Her lips press against the back of his neck, light and soothing, and he knows he should not, he cannot, but he holds on. He holds on as tightly as he can, and he does not fall, even as his knees buckle and his walls crumble.

"You can't be here," he whispers, to the empty, suffocating air.

"But I am."

"You'll just leave again." He squeezes his eyes shut, trying hopelessly to close this reopened door again, to slam it forever.

"I won't."

He spins around, defeated and exhausted and exhilarated and so, so free.

An empty room is all that greets his burning eyes.

He turns away from that endless expanse of space to the window, streaked with muddy rain, so thick that he cannot see the even a shadow of the world beyond this house. It is fitting. Then, there was no world beyond the walls of this room. Now, there is a world—the lines are just blurred.

This house smells like no home he remembers, and suddenly, it is not warm anymore; it is icy, severe, inaccessible.

His feet carry him through the doorway, the hall, the kitchen, and out the front door. He does not recall a single moment.

He knows now, he cannot go home. He never had another. His hair is heavy with rain; it presses against his forehead as he walks down the sidewalk for the final time. He gets in his car with no radio and the windows down. And he drives.

If he had just looked again, he would have seen the tiny spot on that mirror where the dust had been cleared away. The recent remains of a pair of small lips mark the glass. But he did not look again. He never will.

Now, with the windows down, the rain blows again onto his cheeks as he drives. He does not feel the bitter sting upon his face. He feels her soft arms around his waist. He does not try to push the feeling out—not anymore. He sees the lines of the buildings begin to smear and distort through the streaks that line his windshield. He turns the wipers off.

He likes the world better when the lines are blurred.



Fly Girl Detail  
Nicole Merkens  
*Ceramics Graduate Student*

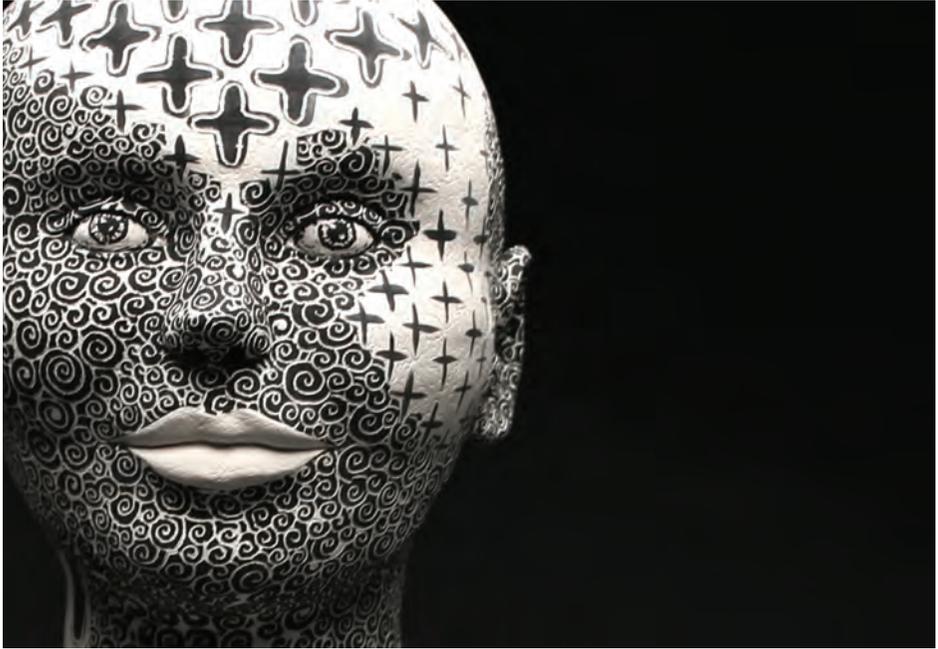
In  
Nicole Borchers  
*Art and English Writing Senior*

I walk among these walls  
A slow panic rising  
I see a man following behind me  
He wears a security suit  
I fear he is coming after me  
Because I don't belong  
These halls I've walked multiple times,  
Close in around me  
Everyone is staring  
They see me as the fraud I feel I am.

# Tick, Tock

Uriel Campos  
*English Writing Junior*

Time is the most precious luxury  
It is more precious than any rocks or jewelry  
Time is money that's why it is spent  
hours and minutes  
equivalent  
to dollars and cents  
its exchange rate is only one way  
for time can buy many things but one more day  
in return for any material things is out of the question  
Everything has a price but time is the only exception  
It only moves clockwise  
each and every tick keeping tally  
of each passing moment which cannot be revised  
only reminisced upon as we walk through the darkest valleys  
and climb the highest mountains.  
Time always counting down can always be counted upon.  
But this is a beautiful thing, once you realize the fountain  
of youth is nonexistent, you rarely do wrong  
with regards to how you use it.  
You spend as much as you see fit  
with loved ones and doing what you love.  
At that point, time rises above  
its state of an invaluable currency  
and is no longer spent, but cherished  
in the form of a language that holds fluency  
in every culture and always holds merit:  
Love. So never fret over how limited our time is  
instead keep yourself in a state of bliss  
For you have no time to waste  
if you truly want to enjoy your stay in this place.



## It's Not All Black and White

Lauren Baird

*Fine Arts Graduate Student*

July  
Nicole Dankenbring  
*Elementary Education Junior*

And with his pause, he left but one thing  
One minute, impenetrable idea  
A notion that brought forth hostility  
And peace

And within that pause, she became something else  
One minute, weakened speck  
A speck that brought forth invisibility  
And silence

He became a warrior  
In his secret conquest  
He became full of pride  
And vanity

She became a doll  
In her secret shell  
She became full of sorrow  
And melancholy

Another pause,  
Another one for Dante  
A spoken word gloated  
And silenced

Another pause  
Another burden released  
A spoken word for all  
And silenced no more

A victim  
Became  
A survivor



What Have We Done  
Kaitlyn Lammers  
*Painting Senior*

# *The Old, The Worn, The New*

Nathaneal Holland

*Organizational Leadership Junior*

The shoes that are guaranteed to make a kid run faster, jump higher, and make him come to life: Pf Flyers. These are my favorite kind of shoes. I wear a size twelve; they come up to my ankles. Their black color is faded; there are traces of dust and dirt everywhere on them. The grip on the bottom has been rubbed down and worn out and reduced to what looks like just a smooth surface. I have had these shoes for about two or three years now. They might be growing old, but they are quite comfortable and sturdy! You can still see where I wrote my name in them. On the bottom of the tongue, in rough handwriting and black ink it says: Sterance Postumus Vestor (not yours, mine).

My world is called Hollingsmong. In it, are only desolate, dying cities and pathetic, pitiful towns. The grungy, abominable waste-yard where I live is known as Middle of Nowhere. It's a poor excuse for a town. I like it though. It might be the disgusting filth of the earth, but I love my subtle, two-story home here. It is homely and living here makes it pleasantly effortless to isolate myself from the rude, obnoxious, and paltry jerks that I am surrounded by. They tend to linger by my art gallery and make fun of my awesome murals and epic, but somewhat disproportionate paintings. Mongrel buffoons, they wouldn't know art if it crossed their putrid chests.

Yes, I am an artist. A struggling one at that. Painting might not be the best occupation for me, seeing as how I barely survive on it, but it is what I thrive on. It is what makes my heart beat faster, what my body longs after. Now, a particularly awesome thing I must mention, is that I cannot distinguish the difference between my left and right shoes. Some days, I put them on backwards, on the opposite feet. When this happens, a terrifying, awesome, awe-inspiring fire leaks from my shoes! And since I cannot make out the difference between my shoes, I never know when they will leak until I step out the front door. I am a twenty-four year old man. I know things. I know people look at me and think "there is another punk metal-head. Just another loser in society." But then, when they stare into my gruesome, dark, black, eyes, parts of their soul become devoured into the seams of the world. I also know that clocks tell time. Keyboards are used for typing. Cold toilet seats are a minor inconvenience. Many times, I ask people, "Do you know things?" I question how much people really know; I lose more of my faith in humanity every time I ask that question.

I must diverse about the awesome feat of my Pf Flyers that I mentioned earlier. People fear me! It is quite excellent. Keep that in mind as the rest of the story begins to unfold. Also keep in mind the description of my shoes in the opening paragraph, because that is an almost exact replica of the description of me and my inner emotions.

"Eat my shorts man. This painting sucks! My friend's acquaintance's wife's three-month old fetus can paint a better picture than that with her undeveloped pinky toe and some pocket lent," said a young man browsing through the art gallery. I simply glanced at him, with my soul devouring, life diminishing eyes and said "Buy it." With that, I also looked down at my shoes with a threatening look to switch them on.

"Alright," he said. After he bought the apparently hideous artwork I said to him, "Get out of here you demented old circus monkey." And he left.

These are the every day instances that I deal with. At first, the hurtful comments and words got to me, made me dark and brutal and full of hate; but I would just let that hatred build up inside of me. It made me sick to my stomach. That is when I learned how to forgive; and accept this cruel world and the scum of the earth in it. I know everyone, all the sick and wicked people, will pay. They will get what is coming to them and burn eternally in a dark furnace of scorching flames. Wanting to die, but they will

not be able to. They will have to suffer through burning alive for the rest of their lives. It will be glorious. Knowing this dark and caliginous fate comforts and satisfies me.

There are other things that comfort and satisfy me. Beautiful night skies, warm campfires, peaceful fields and pastures, kids playing baseball in the summer, playing the didgeridoo. These are pastimes and pleasures that I thoroughly enjoy, and they bring happiness, joy, and peace to my heart. There is something else though: I remember it as the most glorious day I could ever recall. It was incredible, and this is how it started.

I looked up at the clouds in the sky today and I saw an argentous, billowy blanket made of a vast abundance of rich, flowing ice cream, with gaping holes placed randomly throughout it. Of course, that is all a metaphor and a description of what the sky and the clouds looked like that day, but it was all too real. The holes were actually openings in the sky, portals from which great stallions and wildebeests, with eyes of burning fire, and with magnificent purple and green breast plates made of a bullet-proof and unbreakable alloy, came through and trampled and battered down the wild and wicked peoples and beasts of Hollingsmong.

All of the wildebeests and stallions had long, brown horns with them. Some horns were tied to their backs. Others had horns in their mouths, ready to sound and summon giant armies with sharpened spears, war horses, and battle axes. Ready to pillage towns and demolish the world as we knew it. Towering sea monsters and war mongers came out of the sea, with swords coming out of their mouths, striking down and decimating the weak.

“What is the occasion?” I called out to one of the great stallions I saw approaching.

“Judgment day has come. The day of reckoning is upon you,” spoke the creature to me.

“Then why am I not being prosecuted and killed with the rest of these fools?”

“You are righteous. Your day will come though, as will every person’s. However, your pain has already been taken care of. You are a free man.”

“How? I am a sick man.”

“The living sacrifice has been made.”

“Right on, thank you for sparing my life kind sir.” Then he continued on his way.

During that whole day I was isolated, distant and cold from the rest of the world. I felt as if I was in paradise, but my body was still in Hollingsmong except nobody knew I was there, like I was an invisible being. The part of me that felt like I was paradise was the awesome brutality and pure demolition that was happening all around me. It was absolutely glorious and magical to watch! I felt like I had come in contact with God himself, that all my prayers had been answered, and that all my faith had finally paid off, and it proved to me, for the millionth time, that God was and is all too real.

That experience changed my life forever. That was also the day when I first got my Pf Flyers. We have been together ever since. The shoes are significant, because through them, I learned the characteristics and lessons that I know today. One of the most important things I have learned is to keep on keeping on. And, always forgive the unforgiving, love the unloving, and teach the ungraceful and the unfaithful.



# Winter Night's Snowfall

Tamara Lohman  
*Graduate Candidate for  
Liberal Studies*

# The Sweetness of Small

Ainsley Smith  
*Speech and Language  
Pathology Sophomore*

If only I were smaller  
Then maybe I could see  
The inside of a bubble  
And make the sink my “sea”

If only I were smaller  
Then maybe I could feel  
The warmth inside a just-poured mug  
Of calming chamomile

If only I were smaller  
Then I could show them all  
That there is nothing better  
Than sometimes being small

## Café

Ainsley Smith  
*Speech and Language  
Pathology Sophomore*

Twelve different voices  
Eleven coffee cups  
Ten vibrant table covers  
Nine aromas blended up

Eight piping pastries  
Seven large bags  
Six ringing smart phones  
Five tail wags

Four tiny laptops  
Three macaroons  
Two smiling faces  
In this one room

# The Carotid Vein

Carson Lopez

*Psychology Freshman*

Behind her ear  
My tongue traces  
Like the artist's brushstroke  
Painting the red, thumping pieces  
Of her  
That are burning like roses

Her body lost to her  
But shuddering under my hands  
Like feathers whose colors  
Are layered  
Her head tilted  
She plays with surrender and resistance

She knows it is past the point  
Where she has become mine  
Her skin is the violin's thread  
That I strum with my fingers  
I perch her between my neck and jaw  
My body rocking harder than hers  
But she is the one who makes the music

# Invisible Perfection

Dalton Steinert

*Accounting Junior*

She was perfect,  
in a different shape.

She wanted love  
but couldn't bear  
the idea of people  
seeing her.

She was ravishing,  
but  
invisible  
at  
the  
same  
time.

With no one to  
love her,  
nurture her,  
care for her,  
she felt lost;  
uncertain of  
where to go.

With those words in mind.  
she ended it.

Life.  
The art of being.

She destroyed herself,  
knowing not one person  
would see.

Inside her torn,  
shredded body  
lay unseen perfection.

With each cut  
growing deeper  
deeper  
and deeper  
she bled pure radiance.

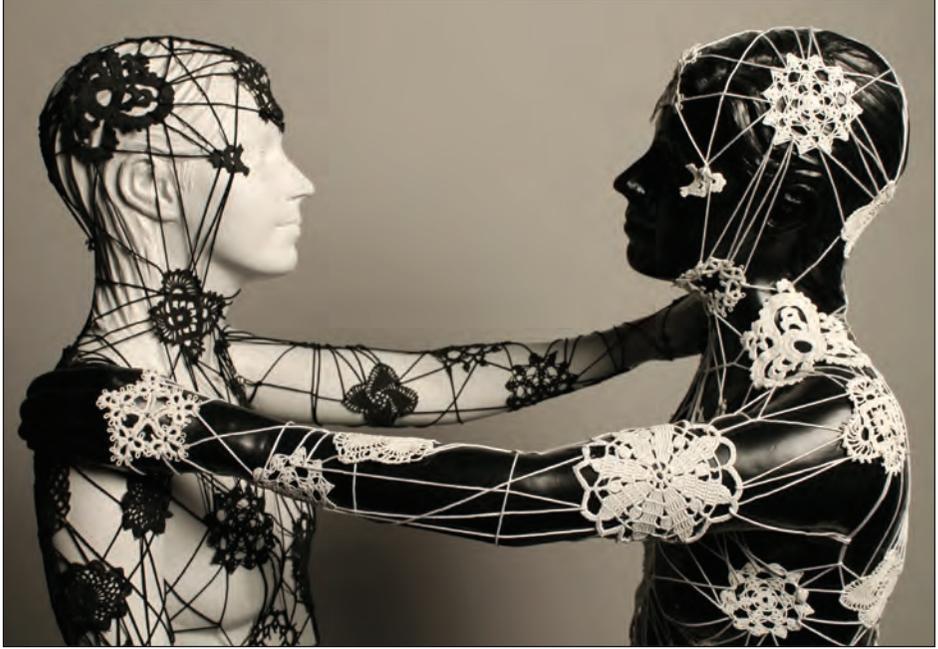
Beauty leaked from  
those intricate cuts  
like spilled water  
from a well.

The essence engulfed her  
in a white-hot sheen  
radiating as if she  
were molten silver.

No one around  
witnessed such  
marvelous destruction.

She died alone.  
Her wish  
complete.

She became beautiful.



Yin and Yang  
Lauren Baird  
*Fine Arts Graduate Student*

# The Hidden Affection of Payson Galloway

Dalton Steinert

*Accounting Junior*

So... I guess that's the story of how I figured myself out and who helped me along the way. I hope it wasn't too... dark? I'm sorry if it was, but there's no better way to describe how I was lost before I fell in love with Marshall Macaulay, how he sprinkled stardust throughout my entire world, and how I lost him but didn't lose myself.

Before Marshall, I had nowhere to run and hide, no one to confide in, to cry to, and to ask for guidance, acceptance, anything. My entire life was loneliness, so to combat this, I hid my sorrows, hid them in closets, and they gathered dust and withered away. I isolated them from my life.

But this didn't last forever, no matter how hard I tried. No matter how many locks I put on those dark doors, they escaped. Each night they ravaged my brain and toyed with my emotions, my body, everything. The pain that followed hurt more than anything I'd ever felt. I had no way to stifle the horror my own sorrows caused me.

Until Marshall's affection shined brighter than any star in the universe, igniting a fire in the deepest corners of my brain. The places I tried so hard to keep hidden from myself were obliterated by his magnificent light.

Marshall was my beautiful creature, the person who saw all of my sorrows and pain, gathered them all, and destroyed their very essence. To simply say thank you is not enough.

*How do you thank someone for literally saving your life?*

You can't; at least I don't know how. I don't think I'll ever be able to give him the thanks he deserved.

He gave me a second chance in a life I didn't want. He allowed me to see goodness, and he taught me how to love someone, inside and out. Thanking him is the least I could've done.

But now he's gone from the world he painted for me, and I'm left with the burned remnants of the canvas ignited by his passing. He may be gone from this world, but not from mine. He will forever hold a spot engraved in my soul, and that, to me, is everything.

People die every day; it's unavoidable. Still, we try to hide from death instead of facing the reality head on. That's what I'm doing now, facing the reality that though he may be gone from my physical reach, he will be by my side for the rest of my days.

That's why thanking him will never be enough. He touched me so deep that he can never leave, and that's something I'll never be able to give back to him.

I was weak, I still am, but I'm stronger than I was before, because one person showed me the brilliance the world holds. He deserves an endless life full of love and devotion and care, and I tried my best to provide him with that. I can only hope it was enough.

I can't help but think that in his process of saving me, he was losing himself.

*Why couldn't I see his pain, his worry, his sadness, the darkness shadowing his magnificent aura? Why was I so oblivious to his own hurt?*

Because he didn't want me to lose myself again. He saw how far I'd come with his help, and he didn't want me to lose everything I'd worked so hard to achieve. He wanted to make sure I would be okay. He put me first, jumping in front of the bullets meant for me, taking my pain and replacing it with his love.

God.

He was amazing. Is amazing. He showed me that in darkness, light consistently shines through. He guided me to accept and love myself for who I truly was, and gave me the ability to adore him at the same time.

I remember once while we were in my room, he told me something that gave me the ability to overcome anything. We were laying together on my bed, two bodies intertwined into one. His dark brown hair was a mess from the static electricity of my pillows (and also probably because my heart was beating ten thousand times a second, producing a field of electricity strong enough to destroy an entire army, because hello, Marshall Macaulay was in my house, my bedroom, MY. FUCKING. BED.).

He looked at me with those dark blue eyes, lifting us both into our own universe where there was just us, together, floating endlessly through time and space.

“Payson?” He inquired, voice sounding a bit off-kilter.

I responded, “What’s puzzling you? What has you worried? What can I do? Are you okay? Talk to me.” But it came out, “Yes, Marshall?”

Idiot. I’m the worst communicator in the entire world.

He continued, “I... I want to tell you something, and I don’t know if it will affect what we are, but I can’t keep it inside anymore, and I really want you to know that I love you and-”

In a second the world stopped along with my heart. In the next, everything came alive again, brighter and filled with more hope than I ever thought possible.

The most beautiful being in the entire universe told me he loved me, and I didn’t even know what to do or say, and my mind became a jumbled mess of words and letters and I couldn’t even think straight and-

“..Payson, are you okay?”

I came down from my inability to process information to realize that Marshall was looking at me with more worry than I had ever seen before. His eyes were flashlights that searched me for some sort of reaction other than the shocked look stuck on my face.

“Payson, I need you to say something...Anything. If I’ve said too much, I can leave. I just can’t keep this inside anymore, and I want you to know that you’re the first person I’ve ever loved, and I cannot continue what we’re doing without making what I feel inside a reality and-”

He was crying. Hard. Tears fell down his beautiful face like meteors in the night sky. They left trails of fire that burned across his precious face, making mark after mark that I knew would scar him. But somehow I knew that even with these streaks, I loved him and he loved me. The love I had wanted to voice for so long (an eternity maybe?) was now in the open, and my heart skipped several beats and my mind raced with the possibility of forever with Marshall.

I had to think of something, anything, to save his precious soul.

I didn’t know how. My mind was a mess of words and phrases I couldn’t say because I:

1. Didn’t know how to, and I
2. couldn’t because I was an idiot

I told myself, “I am here, on my bed, with Marshall Macaulay (!!!), and I can do this. I can save him just as he saved me, and I can pick up the world on my shoulders like the Greek god Atlas and protect both him and I from all the pain between us.”

But how the hell was I supposed to convey it into speech? It was him. It had always been him. Ever since I had first laid eyes on his beautiful face, he had filled my fractured mind with images of recovery.

He saved me, and I needed to do the same.

“Marshall, stop. Calm down. Please,” I said, too stunned to speak or even think straight. Now my words were flashlights, searching for a way to make him happy, to make him shine like the night sky from the woods in my backyard, the same woods where we shared our first kiss, where Marshall first held me close, where he told me we had to keep it a secret, where he told me about his mom and cried in front of me for the first time. So to counteract my inability to save him, I did the one thing I knew how.

I sat up, leaned over, and kissed my love on the lips.

His lips felt soft but scratchy from his patchy facial hair, and the way his lips moved across mine filled my head with fireworks that ignited again and again until my entire mind mirrored a never ending Fourth of July celebration.

He tasted of cinnamon gum and the salt from unshed tears he’d kept inside of him for many, many months.

He sighed (moaned maybe?) and released the tension he had built up for so long. And in that moment, we grew closer than ever before. I wanted him, and he wanted me, and we moved closer and closer until we became one.

He suddenly stopped and moved away, ripping apart the stitches that bound our two beings together. He looked up at me with wonder.

*God, he was so beautiful.*

His eyes searched for something, but I didn’t know what he wanted. I never did.

“Payson... I-I really do love you. Really. I’ve never wanted to tell anyone something more than I have to you right now. I can’t control it. We’re on two separate spectrums, but somehow our lives collided, and I can’t bear to continue what we are without letting you know how I feel about you.”

He truly loved me. Wholeheartedly, emotionally, mentally, physically, everythingally. He loved me the same way I loved him. Maybe more.

“Marshall,” I stammered, trying to hold back the emotions ravaging my insides, “Spending my days with you is like wishing on infinite shooting stars, each one brighter than the last, in a spiral that continuously grows brighter and brighter until the night becomes day becomes a glorious heaven.” But it comes out, “I love you too. No one in my entire life has allowed me to truly be myself besides you. I love you because you gave me what I never thought I had, Marshall. You gave me life.”

I was crying then, not slow tears, not happy tears, but the tears of a hundred emotions, flooding the room. To save me, Marshall became my ark. He pulled me in, held me, and never let me go.

He was crying too. We both drained ourselves of the love we didn’t know how to express in words, and everything we kept inside rained furiously from our eyes, drowning him and I together.

I loved him, he loved me, and we both found each other in our darkest times.

*It’s like I was walking this entire world alone searching for a specific blue needle in a jar filled with similar blue needles, and somehow, with his help, I found exactly what I was searching for.*

Thinking about this unshared memory now, I realize what love really means. It's not about the physicality of the relationship; it's more than that. Love fills every crack on your body, even the wounds that tear at your insides, the ones that you hide, like I did.

*How dare you, Marshall? How dare you leave me here in a world you crafted, unsigned, like an unfinished painting?*

My life is complete having known him. It has been a roller coaster; for most of the beginning, I only saw the bottom I was rushing toward at breakneck speed. Then, he came and lifted me into a world of adventure and exhilaration, and I saw the world from the top of the hill.

*How dare you leave me here to ride the rest of my life alone?*

Marshall was my risk, my roller coaster, and without him, I wouldn't have had a life full of laughter, love, and happiness. Without choosing to try him, I would have missed an extraordinary experience. So I give you this: live life on edge; be free, happy, and live it knowing you will have to make a choice that you know you won't like. Life races you down a hill of seemingly unending chaos. You reach the bottom, look up, and see the crest of happiness. The journey to reach the top, although long, treacherous, and almost unending, overcomes all the hardships you encounter.

*I am moonstruck over you Marshall, and if you're reading this, wherever you may be, I'm not being figurative anymore. I'm literally in love with who you made me, and I cannot show you enough thanks for destroying the darkness that encased me. I'm here, you're there, but together we fixed both of our fractured beings. I love you and will never forget how you filled my days with love and light. I miss you, and I will see you some day. I don't know when, but I will. I will find you, and together we can embrace forever.*

*With love,*

*P.*



## Rhodigir - Son of Winter Watch

Joe Borra

*Wildlife Biology Senior*

# The Little Town of Solomon

Nathaneal Holland

*Organizational Leadership Junior*

Does real peace even exist?

If so, I have not found it.

Stillness is foreign to our planet.

Everything is always moving, all the time.

From the cells of the tiniest micro-organisms,

To the nuclear warheads of the super powers.

What is true peace?

I will answer my own questions.

Yes, true peace is resting in God's presence.

The better question is, how does one obtain?

Again, I will answer my own questions.

Is death the only escape?

Connections are the only way.

Even the dead keep theirs alive.

This haunting cemetery, in the little town of Solomon –

So peaceful and still on the outside,

Yet inside these graves are screaming skulls.

I pray for peace and souls to take.

Amen.



## Artifacts of the Future Along I-70

Eleanor Heimbaugh  
*Ceramics Graduate Student*

# Recycle

Nathaneal Holland  
*Organizational Leadership Junior*

Piracy is a lifestyle, not a crime.

Internet piracy, specifically.

Unless one means the Pirates of Somalia.

Until then, my brothers and I

We are the pirates who don't do anything.

Just enjoying our lives, without harming anyone intentionally.

Thank you Veggie Tales for shaping America with laughter and love.



A City in Ruin  
Kaitlyn Lammers  
*Painting Senior*

# Walk

Paul Kirkwood

*Media Studies Senior*

There is an angled light. I rise with the sun.  
I tend to my ablutions.  
The wetness enhances the air's crispness.

...

The road is long today. The winds are harsh.  
I set out now like all the times before:  
Eyes low, but steadfast. Quiet, but knowing.  
There are a few people on the road.  
Occasionally, they wave. Less often, they smile.  
Maybe they offer a greeting, perhaps an invitation.  
I nod, but decline. I am mired here, in all this space.  
My eyes are declined to the road so I do not misstep.  
That would cost time, which I spend profligately enough.  
It was different when all whom I met smiled,  
All whom I met stopped and talked,  
Back when smiles were genuine.  
Greetings, farewells, conversations:  
Goods and services found nowhere else  
But in the concourse of friends and associates.  
Now there is only the road. It is important I finish it,  
Because today the road is long, and the winds are harsh, and  
No one talks anymore.

...

My feet hurt. I have spent much time on this road.  
The distance behind me is great, but I can never add to it enough.  
The winds have stilled some, but they are unsure of themselves.  
Mostly they remain silent, so I have their silence for company.  
Rarely they roar, and my companion is their anger.  
In these winds, no one smiles anymore.

...

I am worried.  
I have been on this road too long a time.  
I am afraid to look up. Afraid to see all I have left to travel.  
I am afraid to look behind me. I imagine horrid things:  
Red blood-prints behind me on the road.  
I cannot feel my feet anymore.  
There are no buildings, no shelter, no trees.  
But the wind is silent, too. It is not angry anymore. Not anything.  
And there are no people.

...

The sun has outpaced me.  
Having reached its zenith long ago, it had no place to turn,  
And fell, purposeless, dimming all the while.  
It splits open upon the knife-edge of landscape before me.  
The clouds rush to daub its bleeding,  
Orange-red with its blood before a darkening sky.  
It dies, under suffocating good intentions.

...

There is no light anymore.

# Syllable Soup

Uriel Campos

*English Writing Junior*

This one's for your mind

For those cold and lonely nights  
When your thoughts are your only companion  
For those sunrises without sunshine  
When lying in your sheets seems easier  
Than lying to the world about your happiness

Happiness is hard  
Just remember you are loved  
It lightens the load

This one's for your heart

For those shattered pieces you consistently have to pick up  
Only to stick together with something as temporary as tape  
Because you have come to expect the worst in people  
For that music beneath your ribcage  
That keeps you alive and continues to drum, regardless of circumstance  
That sometimes quickens its tempo at first sight  
Only to slow down after those dreaded last words: "I can't do this anymore."

Love starts at yourself  
And through all of the heartbreak  
Your soul mate awaits

This one's for your soul

For that flame dying inside of you  
Nearly burnt out from the harsh roads traveled  
For those moments of unreasonable doubt  
In your own potential and self worth  
Causing you to be stuck without motivation

It's okay to fail  
Your mistakes don't define you  
They make you stronger

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