

The image is a highly textured, abstract painting. It features a prominent grid of squares in shades of yellow and red, which appears to be a stylized representation of a field or a grid. The colors are bright and saturated, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. The overall composition is dense and layered, with various shades of yellow, red, and white. A semi-transparent white rectangle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the text "open field" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The text is centered within the white rectangle and is the primary focus of the image. The background is a complex, multi-layered composition of colors and textures, suggesting a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is one of vibrant energy and visual complexity.

**open
field**

open field

volume 53

2020

*Cornell College
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Editors-in-Chief

Caitlin Tobin

Madeleine Koenigsberg

Design and Copy Editor

Abby Kierst

Literature Editor

Maxwell Ishmael

Event Coordinator

Griffin Scheel

Publicist

Katrina Stroud

Advisors

Becca Klaver, Robert P. Dana Director of the Center for the Literary Arts

Cover Art

K Gielas, "Bubble Slice"

Selection Committee

Madelyn Strauss

Clyde C. Tull Prose Prize

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Tom Garst Prize for Poetry

Ben Covey, “Engelbert Humperdinck”

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2020 Judge For Poetry

Rosebud Ben-Oni is the winner of the 2019 Alice James Award for *If This Is the Age We End Discovery*, and the author of *turn around, BRXGHT XYXS* (Get Fresh Books, 2019). She is a recipient of fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts and CantoMundo, and her work appears in *Poetry*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Tin House*, and *Guernica*, among others. Find her at 7TrainLove.org

2020 Judge For Prose

Linda Oatman High is an author of books for children and teens, as well as a journalist/playwright/poet. She holds an MFA in Writing from Vermont College, and lives in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Linda teaches both nationally and internationally, and her books have won many awards and honors.

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a letter from the editors

Friends and readers,

Welcome to the fifty-third volume of *Open Field*.

It's been a long year. Planning for *Open Field* starts in the fall, submissions come in over winter, and we begin compiling the journal in spring. Understandably, we've all had to adjust to the COVID-19 crisis, and *Open Field* is no exception. Among the awful, tragic loss of life and frightening changes to everyday life, however, we aim to provide some spark of whimsy, fun, and creativity given to us by our wonderful contributors and Cornell community. Throughout these pages, you'll find poems about home and belonging, finding a god through an offering of salted caramel and banana pancakes, and being scared about addiction. Stories about demons, a Pop-tart becoming a god, and romance accompany them. Hopefully they can take your minds off the outside world, if only for a few moments.

Normally, we would celebrate *Open Field* and all the contributors at the English Department's Awards Night, but this year, we have had to do things a little differently. Our virtual awards night will feature readings of *Open Field* by the authors, in a small touch of home from the Hilltop. But, just because we cannot be together in person does not mean that we cannot express our gratitude and pride in all of the student writers and artists who shared their imaginations with us this year. All of our contributors are fantastic, and we thank them immensely for their work, their patience, and their eagerness to continue forward in this trying time.

Keeping our hopes up in the COVID-19 crisis is difficult, but we understand that art is a main strategy for keeping our collective sanity. In the middle of the magazine, there are quotes from contributors about how the crisis has impacted them, interrupting the art within much like the crisis interrupted our year, including the work on *Open Field*. Each quote expresses a different yet equally important sentiment regarding our current situation.

With these pages, we bring a gift from the Cornell College community to you, and hope that you find the writing and art within as confounding and delightful as we did.

Sending many good thoughts,

Caitlin Tobin and Madeleine Koenigsberg

Open Field Editors-in-Chief

May 2020

patrons

zash fleming

BELOW stretches the jaws of a fertile earth
and barren desert brimming with bodies
unworthy of an eternity within the reeds
where snakes slither to the hands and
hooves for forbidden love through which is
spawned fertile afterlife, rivers of
mourning, and disorder in chaos. barley
grows up into your body, curling around
your ribs. a ram stops to take a bite. you are
safe, if says.

ABOVE an offering—a pot of milk—
on a silver platter a cow's head with eyes of
the sun and the moon stretches her limbs
across the cardinal ways to cover and close
the weary lids of earth, a tart grape plucked
from the highest vine to be birthed anew
day by day, its constant push and pull
makes stars dizzy, constellations shifting to
accommodate the trauma of these delicate
cosmos. breathe the fresh air blown into
your lungs by your mother. pick up your
arms and stand tall once more.

Zash is a senior Creative Writing major who has found a spark in poetry and is honestly just vibing. They would love to see their work somewhere someday, somehow.

spaghetti night

ariel barbee

Her fingers felt swollen and slow. They wouldn't jam the key in fast enough. Finally the clunk of the bolt slid back and Cordelia was inside her apartment, making sure to slide the door chain in place. Taking a deep breath, she ran a shaky hand through curly chestnut hair that had fallen into her face. It had almost entirely escaped her red hairclip in the mad rush home.

I'm fine. I'm home now. It was just a bad day at work. He isn't here anymore, I'm just imagining things. No way I saw him. No way, is what she told herself as she gingerly slipped her red peacoat off and hung it up in her closet, her boots following shortly after.

If Cordelia heard the faint thud of footsteps as she silently slid across the freezing wooden floor towards the kitchen, then she chose to ignore it.

Tonight's a spaghetti night, she declared to herself, still unable to break the quiet of her own apartment with spoken words. Spaghetti always makes me feel better. She forced herself to make dinner, shaky hands turning the stovetop dial to boil water and pour the red sauce in another pot on the stove to heat it up.

Whispers of air played with her hair, tickling her ears. For a moment, she thought she felt hands on her waist, as he always used to do when she was in the kitchen, eager to steal a bite (and a kiss). It had annoyed her to no end. Now she missed it.

With the comforting aroma of oregano and garlic in the air,

she tried to put her memories behind her. There was another metallic-type scent underlying the red sauce that she couldn't quite recall...

Shaking her head, Cordelia forked a generous heap of white limp noodles into her bowl and then drowned them in red with the bubbling liquid from the stovetop. Twirling her fork in the spaghetti and lifting it to her mouth, she paused, wondering why the sauce was thinner than usual, almost like water. Did I use a different sauce brand today? I guess I wasn't paying too close attention to what I grabbed from the pantry...

The second before the spaghetti forkful reached her mouth, Cordelia remembered what the metallic smell was.

It was too late.

The coppery taste of blood exploded in her mouth. Red dribbled down her chin. She furiously choked on the blood noodles slipping through her throat. Her eyes were red with tears. She looked up.

He was staring helplessly back, head lying sideways on the table, coughing. Blood dribbled out the corner of his mouth onto her white marble countertop.

He had died. She had watched. He is dead. They had said a blood clot had killed him. But had it really killed him?

She hadn't been there.

She picked up her spaghetti and threw it in the trash.

Ariel is a junior at Cornell, double majoring in French and English (Creative Writing) and minoring in Gender Studies. She loves to read, the way it is for most writers, she believes. In no particular order, she also loves cold weather, oatmeal chocolate chip pecan cookies, reveling in her (very) new sewing skills to make hair scrunchies, and sharing the same birthday as the axe-wielding Carrie Nation.

nothing student

morgan barnard

There he is. Every day.
At the back of the classroom, sneakers untied,
Pants hung low without a belt, hair messy and face grim,
Staring at the desk, not saying a word.
Reading time. He sits, and only after being asked several times
Does he take out his book and read:
A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson,
The one he's been reading since the beginning of the year.
His eyes, deep brown and cold, never change expression,
Never light up nor fill with anger.
The boy-almost-man never mentions his favorite subject
Or what he did that weekend.
It makes one wonder whether this has any impact on him at all.
The class, the school, the teachers.
He voices no dreams or aspirations or complaints.
Maddening us with silence,
He sits, as blank as the essay paper in front of him,
Until the bell rings and he robotically gathers his secondhand
belongings
And leaves, scuffing his sneakers on the floor.
He goes to another class to be nothing more than a vessel.
A body to count for attendance,
Something to gather all the useless language and information in his
ears that will not be stored in his brain.

A “student.”

Whatever happened to that one teacher who would stop and ask
how he was?

Or about his five brothers and sisters,
Each named after relatives his parents left behind?

How he likes his classes?

What he and his friends are doing?

Why he didn't show up at school the day before?

He carries himself like a pile of wet clothes,

Each step heavier, sagging.

Until grades come in and they're wondering

How this could have happened.

Have they stopped to consider

How writing is hard when you don't know the language

Or when most of your practice comes from acting as a translator for
your parents?

When will the time come when they sit down with him,

Talk, have him speak or write down his feelings,

To get something out of him, an answer

To the blankness?

Still he sits, the “good student,”

Always listening, never doing.

Head full of words but unsure how to spell them or put them down
correctly.

A heart full of conflict because of the worlds that divide him.

A student.

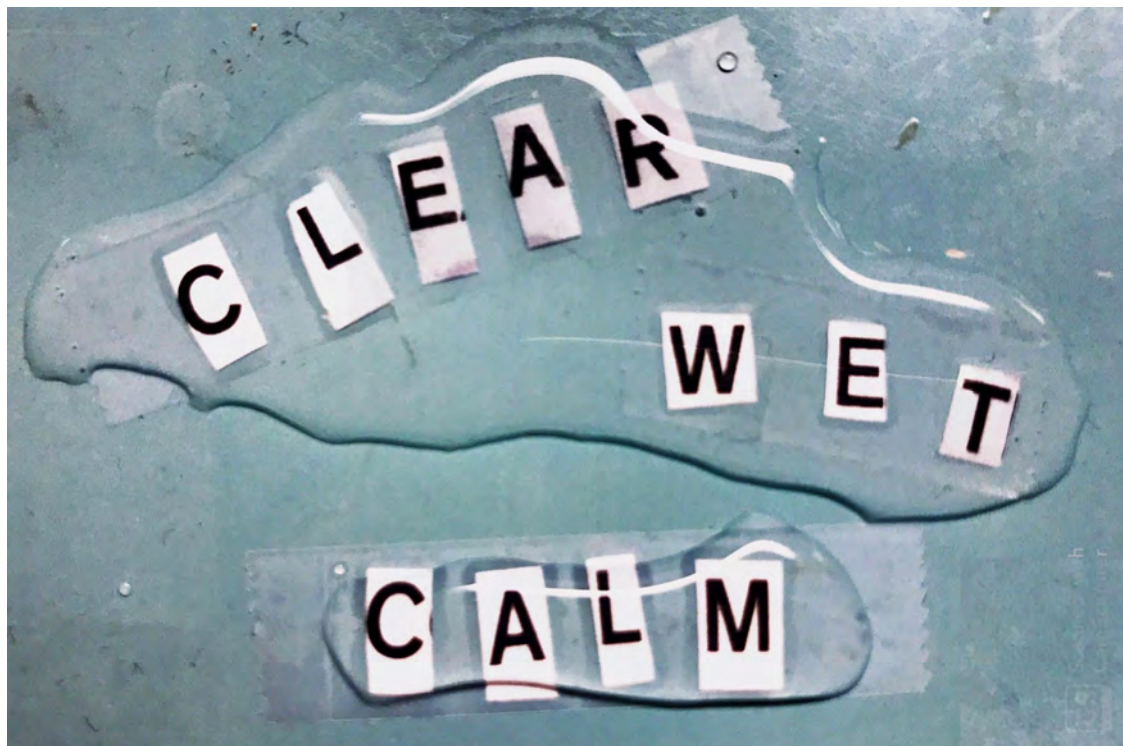
Morgan Barnard is a senior who has accomplished some pretty amazing stuff at Cornell College, most importantly the ability to believe in herself. She is a runner, writer, and a teacher. After all this lovely time at Cornell, she is taking off to do wonderful things in the world.

there's a coldness at the bottom of most lakes

zuri montgomery

There's a coldness at the bottom of most lakes
 that's made of grey loam
 or dark slick basalt
 and the water sliding,
 pulling
 over it,
 ruminating
 on salty sand
or
 thick and viscous plants
 that know the cold and thrive on it.

There's a coldness in the wettest snow
 when it's deep
 by a tree's root
 where you could
 lay down
 If you **laid down**
 you'd jitter until your bones fell off
 and you became a long streaky line of light



water is wet

emma burnett

Emma Burnett is a freshman from Des Moines, Iowa. She currently plans to major in Studio Art.

a twenty-first century death

charlie kelley-pegg

Abuela died in the 21st century

Meaning everything was still there

Still left over

When she passed

Her mail still came to her house in the woods on the Cape Her cell
phone was still connected Her email was still alive

Her Subaru sat in its parking spot collecting dust

I still have the phone number in my phone

It'd make me too sad to delete it

Sometimes when I miss her I'll call it

And a man will answer

I'd like to think he's used to it by now- we have a routine
How he lets it ring three times then picks up

Asks who it is

And I apologise for thinking my Abuela would answer instead

She used to send me emails catching me up on her life The older I
got

The worse I got at replying

Until it was too late

I want to reply to them now:

Hi Abuela

I'm doing ok

But I miss you like hell.

Charlie Kelley-Pegg (lovingly referred to as Charizard or Baby Goof) is a transmasculine Colombian adoptee who was raised in Minneapolis, MN. Since graduating from the Perpich Arts High School in 2019 with a concentration in Creative Writing, Charlie is currently pursuing a BA in English and Creative Writing while continuing to perform spoken word.

love poem to someone

addie pacha

January days gnaw at my soul.
Things will be better, you've just
got to get through this winter.
I want to stitch an egg-yolk sun
to the corner of all my days.
I want to tell you all
The beautiful things you spell.
Spilled petals on a sidewalk.
If we lived together, it would be glowing.
If we lived together, our walls would be blue.

to you, mollywobbles

the rough writers

“I, Narspar, the Sixth Son, Heir to Balsron’s Castle and Lord Apparent of the High Seas, am afflicted, not in body as the pitiful leper, not in mind as the obsessive perfectionist, but in soul, as if I were a lovestruck child of 15 when in actuality I am 19 next Tuesday. I have led a truly glorious life. I have fought valiantly on the open fields of Darnous, and on online message boards against those who would slander Hawaiian pizza. I have eaten many strange foods in great quantities, and won awards for doing so, including Largest Amount of Poptarts Eaten at the High Seas County Fair two years ago. And I have met many a beautiful person, but none so beautiful as you.”

I write this letter, and many others like it, to you, my love, Mollywobbles, as yet unmarried to my brother, the Seventh Son. When I found out you had stolen his heart, I initially rejoiced; we should soon come to love one another.

This was dampened by the fact that my brother would ultimately be hurt by our actions, yet I can only seek my enjoyment in life, not his. It is not, nor ever will be, my responsibility.

Though, Mollywobbles, your happiness will forever be paramount to my own. Take this poem, a symbol of my lovelorn heart and open arms as a true reason for my stalwart and true love for you, Mollywobbles.

Eyes as clear as morning dew,
 Cheeks as fresh as daisies
 You stole my heart as did the sea

And now my sails lie empty.

These are just small tokens of appreciation, for my love for you is nothing compared to what you are worth; a life of happiness, a treasure trove of joy, an approximation of the goodness of the world.

That is what I, Narspar, the Sixth Son, Heir to Balsrons Castle and Lord Apparent of the High Seas, see in you, Mollywobbles.

Mollywobbles, there is nothing that I do without you in mind. Would I care for Hawaiian pizza if its sweetness was not reminiscent of you? Would I record the details of my life and love for you without you in my heart, the only recipient of anything I have ever given? No, no! To say otherwise would be naught but a lie, a lie that I would never dare speak aloud to anyone save your most unpleasant choice in husband.

Oh if I could I would give you everything! My claim to Balsron's Castle, my right to the High Seas, my brother be damned. It is a shame that he had to be born.

It is a shame that he stole you away from me, and left me to take refuge in the arms of two foul mistresses: Hawaiian pizza and Pop-Tarts. Mollywobbles, my dear, I carry a Pop-Tart with me everywhere, and every time I take a bite I despair, for I know its sweetness does not come close to approaching your own.

And now I shall take leave to the bar, to seek solace through cheap beer and Hawaiian pizza. But know this, my dear — Oh shit. This man just walked up to me and told me Hawaiian pizza was disgusting. Let me hold that thought.

I replied to this uncouth scoundrel: "Hawaiian pizza is delicious, the perfect mixture of salty and sweet, second only in beauty to my love."

The insipid cretin responded: "Why are you writing down everything you're saying and also everything I'm saying. No seriously,

stop that, it's really weird. Dude, you're still not stopping, and continue to transcribe my words please stop."

When I did not stop, for how could I, my pen sings songs of your beauty, Mollywobbles. And although Hawaiian pizza is less beautiful than you, it is still delectable, a beauty approaching your own.

The brute declared: "if you don't stop, I'll punch you. I don't want to, but I will. And I punch hard. Perhaps hard enough to cause you to die in a bar fight."

"No," I sai —

The Rough Writers are a creative writing club on campus! Each of pieces written by the club was written collaboratively by numerous authors, or, more specifically, Griffin Scheel, Max Burg, Madeleine Koenigsberg, Nathan Segelke, Jordan Clemson, Marlo Webster, Charlie Allen, Delta McKenna, Benton Karesh, Harper Kates, and Charlotte New. They meet every Sunday, 7pm-9pm, in MLK in the commons, and are open to everyone!



vintage silver
miles kolmstetter

Miles Kolmstetter is a current sophomore at Cornell. He is from Virginia and enjoys photography in his free time. He is also founder and President of Cornell College Coin Club.



most horrible man

zuri montgomery

Zuri Montgomery is definitely here, living a life, that's for sure.

unbilcher no. 43 of my nighttime grundles

owen nagler

U
pon my slurpid innerbuns
Once did questious myrefinches procreate
this time at midweek last,
with unpad stacks, and frigid brax,
I slumped upon two fliggy wroths.
And lo, this rank subluggery
squeezed out a plurged schrak.

Lo upon this flugrant nuptial
I gazed with rapt pith and several inner gurgles
And grubbed upon this shaggled mox
With mothers own meat snugglers
I forwent micturation

With many unduous nirpulations
I hurtled it vaguely Groopward
to shunt its thrumbare craw someplace else.
But it goided most binge laughly
and I've been quite bepest ever since.

Oh Groop, grand goiter of goiters
Would thou render this putrescent maw agunk?
In thine unnearly blemish, quaff that mank subluggery?
Gurdling up, up, and shuggling forth,
new ossules froth and bilge out hourly
in mangeous auguration.

May such anaigns on one and all
be drabbled evernon!
Or else I shall go and hurgle
thine spurted filch in the bins next door
Thank you

Owen Nagler writes (or, more accurately: commits) Vagon Poetry, an art form dedicated to finding the absolute worst words you can create in any language, and inflicting them on the unsuspecting audience. He is not sorry.



who was not born

zuri montgomery

Zuri Montgomery is definitely here, living a life, that's for sure.

rhapsodic retreat

ariel barbee

I stared at the blank screen in my cottage, my tears dangerously lying in wait to erupt from the tightness of my chest and throat. I was alone and in the woods, what the website had labeled as “a writer’s paradise! A calming and comforting environment that inspires creativity!” All I felt were the trees looming above me, bony branches scratching the windows, the erratic scraping continually making me jump when I least expected it. The cottage was not calming, not with its peeling paint, not with its mismatched furniture, not with the deep gouges in the front door, as if some... thing had been trying to get out. The cottage was too small, and I was constantly bumping into things, weird bruises I didn’t remember appearing all over my body.

I couldn’t focus. All I could do was stare at my computer screen. Even putting on my favorite Queen music couldn’t get me in the mood to write.

The words just wouldn’t come and I hated myself. Why did I even come here in the first place? I’m not that good of a writer. Why was I chosen? It’s all going to be for nothing!

I cringed. Nick...

I didn’t want to go back and have him tell me it was all okay, that he’d support me. I didn’t want to see his concerned eyebrows half up as he gently pulled me into a hug. I wanted to do this for myself.

Everything mattered too much to me.

--

“Nothing really matters,” I mumbled to myself. “It’s all fine! What is one little retreat in the scheme of life anyway? Nothing! I’m not a failure! It’s not like I’ve accomplished anything else in my life to be proud of. It’s not like my day job fired me or anything and now I don’t have an income and no one will hire me. It’s not like I need to publish this book. It’s all fine,” I laughed nervously and continued to stare blankly at my phone screen, the red notification of one unread email taunting me.

“Laura. Open the damn email,” Nick said as he walked into the room again after taking out the trash. It had been a few minutes, but I was still standing, frozen, at the kitchen counter. “You’ve got this! Laura, you’re amazing and I don’t see how they couldn’t want you, the amazingly brilliant writer that you are. And if they don’t? Fuck ’em, it’s their loss.”

I frowned but took a deep breath and held out my phone, “Could you open it for me? Just... just read it and tell me if I got in or not.”

He gave me a little grin as he gently took the phone from my hand. He had much more confidence in me than I did— I didn’t know how he could be so calm. He was always calm.

--

I had held myself together, that last awful day at work. I did it through the boss sitting me down in the office, through my co-workers’ stares, through the last bit of paperwork I needed to send out for the day before packing up and moving out.

But I finally burst. I burst on the way home, driving my car, bawling and squinting through my tears, hoping no one would pay attention to me whenever I stopped at a light.

My face was completely red and my nose dribbled when I finally walked into our house. Nick had called out, “Hey honey! I thought I’d make some chicken pot pie for dinner. I had some extra time because I finished my lesson plans earlier this week and the kids will just need me to look over their papers tomorrow... Anyway how was your day at work?”

That made the tears start rolling again.

Somehow he sensed my stifled sniffles and Nick rushed from the kitchen to the front door, rolling pin in hand, flour streak in hair.

“Laura! Laura, what’s wrong? Why are you crying?”

The rolling pin was abandoned on the coffee table as he gently reached for my shoulders and pulled me into a much needed hug.

“I... lost... my... job!” I huffed out against his chest, almost hyperventilating at that point.

He froze, then tightened his hug around me before pulling back a smidge so we could make eye contact.

“I’m... so... sorry! I... know... we... need... the... money—”

“Laura,” he stopped me as he ran a soft thumb under my eye, catching the new tears, “This is a bit... unexpected. But, we can work it out. Together. We’ve got my teaching job. We’ll be really careful with money,” he narrowed his eyes and looked off behind me for a second. “You’re better off without those bastards anyway. Smith didn’t pay you enough for all the work you did for him.”

I sniffed, “I know. I hate him but just the money and I mean the? And it—”

“Shhhhh... you can find another job! A better one than that soul sucking accounting. And hey!” he gripped my arms excitedly. “You’ve been trying to work on that novel, haven’t you? Well, now

you'll have some extra time to work on it!"

"I love you." I went on my toes and gave him a kiss.

"I love you so much. Now come on, help me finish making this pot pie, will you? It won't bake itself, as nice as that would be." His mouth tilted upwards, "Laura, what if food could bake itself? Like, it just hopped up and got into the oven nice and sweet for you?"

That got a startled giggle out of me, "Like a reverse Gingerbread Man?"

"Exactly! Imagine all the stuff we could get done if all our food was reverse gingerbread people! Ah, the luxury..."

Shaking my head, I followed Nick into the kitchen.

--

After I relinquished my phone, I quickly turned around and squeezed my eyes shut, gripping the marble counter edge tightly. There were a couple anxiety-inducing seconds of silence before I felt Nick's comforting arms, squeezing me in a hug.

"Laura! Laura, you did it! They want you! You've been accepted!"

I opened my eyes, blurry and unfocused from being clenched so tightly, "I... I did?"

I felt Nick nod against my shoulder and went light-headed with relief, leaning back into his arms. They like my book idea! I could really get published! They think this can happen!

--

I couldn't go back home to Nick and tell him that I didn't make any progress. I couldn't watch the careful neutrality in his eyes as he pretended that it was all right, pretended like he knew I wasn't already beating myself up, like I hadn't been doing it for the entire retreat. Nick was so supportive and I hated letting him down.

Most of all though, I was disappointed in myself. How could I mess up this retreat so badly, this retreat I had worked so hard to get into, this retreat that I thought would be the solution to my writing block?

Sighing, I got up and left my desk, deciding to skip dinner with the rest of the writer's group and just call it a night. Maybe I would get up early tomorrow before breakfast and try again. I couldn't face everyone else right now and their intense, blissed faces, making so much progress on their novels. I wasn't.

I shuffled into my bedroom, so exhausted I didn't even bother to turn on the lights. The lead-quilted bed shoved against the wall and the narrow foot of space left over unbalanced me as I used it to stumble into my pajamas.

Finally lying on my bed, blanketed in darkness, I stared into the black void above me. Ideas still desperately swirled just out of reach in my head as I shivered in bed. It must have been my imagination, but the room kept getting colder. My body felt too heavy for me to move and turn up the heating.

I don't get it, why does my character have no motivation? There's not enough conflict... what is she struggling with? The evil creature is too much of an easy villain. What is she struggling with... internally? How can I decide what my character's life looks like when I can't even figure out my own...?

A low-throated laugh jolted me out of my anxious thoughts.

The void above me twitched.

My quilt weighed me down, my legs glued together, my arms stiff. Deep red eyes blinked out of the black anamorphic mass and a claw-like appendage reached out to scrape the ceiling. Its chalkboard-like screeching was the only warning before the rain of plaster hit my face. My blood pulsed in my hands and feet and my eyes darted back and forth, not ready to believe what they saw.

I couldn't move. *Fight or flight? Just freeze.*

In a spidery-like crouch, the... creature moved closer as I, a desperately fluttering fat fly, lay mummified in its web silk. With an impossibly long claw it reached for-

--

The light was too bright. Sitting up in bed I looked around me. The red glare of the alarm clock on the side of my table was screeching at me. What a quaint little body. That sound hurts my ears. Shrugging off my alarm, I got up, deciding that I was restlessly hungry.

Squeezing from my bed into the main area of the cottage, I squelched the fridge door open, reaching for my single loaf of bread. Unbuttered toast would be the entirety of my meal that morning. More important than food, I needed to write. I refused to leave this cottage until I had something; something so that when I entered that room full of professional, published authors I could pretend like I wasn't still a complete failure. I could pretend it wasn't a mistake I was accepted into this retreat. I could pretend I was a normal, functioning person. I could be a dependable person that didn't need Nick.

Nick. He was waiting patiently for me back at home... holding down the fort with his steady hands and unwavering smile.

I never smiled. Not anymore.

All this insecurity. All this pressure. How does this work? This love interest. He's too nice. Is this asinine novel the only problem? How boring. Blinking, I stared at the piece of toast frozen midway to my mouth. Shoving the rest of it in quickly, I placed my plate in the sink and left the small cottage table, moving across the floor to the desk where I had been attempting to write for the past few weeks at this retreat. The swivel chair they had provided wasn't

much help to me at the moment and I spun uncontrollably, unable to write.

Three wobbly computer screens floated in front of me when I grabbed onto the desk to stop myself. I waited for the dizziness to end. A hint of red stubbornly clouded the edges of my vision.

I considered my main character and what was wrong with the story. It needs more conflict. Where to put more conflict into the story? The creature is already external conflict that she faces. But really, internal conflict is more interesting. What's internal? What's her problem? *The love interest... is too perfect. He's too supportive. She's so insecure. Yes... I can work with that. He's too perfect and she's not. She's feeling... guilty. How could she ever live up to such a perfect image? Why was he motivated to stay with her? Yesssss... this is interesting. She dislikes herself. Deep down she doubts everything. She doubts him. Resents him even, just a tiny bit, for being a little too perfect. Effortlessly. What would she do without him? What should she do about this? How will it play out in the story? Would she ever act on this "internal conflict"? No? Oh, I can have some fun now...*

My fingers flew over the keyboard, satisfying clicks signaling the growing word count. My character finally had a reason!

Red enveloped my vision as I typed even faster.

—

I sat down in front of the other writers for dinner and they all took a second glance at me.

“Are you okay Laura? We haven't seen you in a couple days... Is your writing going all right? You're not sick or anything, are you?”

They don't understand! They don't understand me.

I smiled and reached for my knife.

--

Is this the real life?

With Queen roaring out of my speakers, I glance over at him as we pull out of the driveway, the car wheels crunching on the gravel. I can't help but smile as he runs his fingers through my hair, squeezing a bit as he reaches the base of my skull and then lets go.

"Hey honey," his words are a deep cautious thrum, cutting through the music.

Is this just fantasy?

Outside, dusk is beginning to fall, lengthy jet-black shadows alternating with the blinding sun. I pull down the visor and squint at the empty road as we drive past barren cornfields, dead stalks jaggedly sticking up from the hills. It is such a lovely evening. I am waiting for the darkness to fully arrive.

"You seem... like the retreat wasn't bad? How was it?"

Brought back to the conversation and the man unwittingly sitting beside me, I answer, "Oh, it was fantastic! It's unbelievable, what happened. I feel like I had a spiritual experience, you know? Something just... snapped! And I didn't have to think any more, the words just flowed out of me. Honestly, I think this writing retreat was the best idea ever."

I can't help but smile. I turn in my seat, "Thank you so much, baby! I wouldn't have gone if you hadn't pushed me."

*Caught in a landslide**No escape from reality*

The sun slides down in the sky and I savor the shadows. Something about them today is even more beautiful than his blood throbbing next to me in the passenger seat. I can't help but smile.

"So where are we going, Laura? You said you had something to show me? A surprise? I'm glad it seems like you had a good

retreat? But why do we have to do this tonight, when you just got back?”

I can't help the smile. He's so nice. He's so supportive. He's so perfect. What would I do without him? The dead corn fields continue to roll past as we get closer to the town ahead and I clench the steering wheel tightly, my clammy hands sliding over it. This body is so awkward.

Will you let me go?

We reach a stop sign and I skid past, forgetting to slow down for the turn.

“You sure you're okay to drive? We don't have to go tonight if you're tired. I won't mind waiting another day.” His eyes crinkle as he smiles at me, a growing hint of worry in them. It is fascinating to watch his emotions, his innocent little eyes.

Open your eyes

Look up to the skies and see

It is dark as I finally pull into a gas station on the outskirts of the town, no stars visible up above. “Do we need to fill up the gas here? I didn't think we were that low. I could have sworn I just filled up the tank yesterday while you were gone...”

Still so trusting. Still making excuses for me.

Soon I won't be excusable.

Will you let me go?

Stepping out of the car into the chilly air, I gesture to him in a clawing motion, smoke billowing out of my mouth in great clouds.

“C'mon, it's just over here.” I can't help but smile. We are almost there. I am almost done.

Will you let me go?

Hesitantly, he follows me away from the parked car and around the brick building, the buzzing lights fading as we move

further away. Queen is still playing in the car.

Didn't mean to make you cry

“I... It's too dark. Babe? Laura? What's going on? What are we doing back here? Are you sure this is part of the surprise? Are you sure you're okay? ... I'm going to turn my phone flashlight on- ”

Spare him his life from this monstrosity

I laugh, and I smile as my mouth widens, sharp teeth jutting into my lips as a blinding light shakily swivels into my face.

Will not let you go.

“What are you?” are the last human words spoken that night.

Beelzebub has a devil put aside for me

Nothing really matters...

Ariel is a junior at Cornell, double majoring in French and English (Creative Writing) and minoring in Gender Studies. She loves to read, the way it is for most writers, she believes. In no particular order, she also loves cold weather, oatmeal chocolate chip pecan cookies, reveling in her (very) new sewing skills to make hair scrunchies, and sharing the same birthday as the axe-wielding Carrie Nation.



invent the wheel

zuri montgomery

Zuri Montgomery is definitely here, living a life, that's for sure.

garden angel

morgan barnard

There she is, working in her garden.
Meticulously, she waters the roots, tilting drops onto the pretty petals,
Keeping an eye on the sharp, rich colors,
Making sure none are wilting.
She works in the garden every day,
Tirelessly pulling weeds, pruning leaves, keeping everything
As immaculate as she does her nails and hair.

There, in her garden, under the weeping willow tree,
Sits a glass box.
The sun catches on it and makes rainbows over her dainty stone path.
Inside the glass box is an angel made of stone.
The stone is grey, and each detail has been rounded by weather and time.
It sleeps inside a crib, tiny wings curled around its little toes.
Through storms and snows, it sleeps, though its box is always cleaned.

Every morning, she goes to the box first. She wipes the glass clean
So there are no smudges.
Then she goes about her work in the rest of her garden,
Weeding, pulling, digging.
Until finally, she plucks a single flower,
Some days a rose, some days an amaryllis,
But her favorite is the baby's breath.

She plucks just one, and lays it in the box,
Next to the ever-sleeping angel
That she never got to see.
She sits there in the garden
On a cool stone bench, sunshine raining on her face,
Watching the little angel
And never saying a word.

Her husband used to collect her after a few hours,
But since he died four years ago, she sits
Until the church bells ring at noon. Then she says a little prayer,
A few whispered words that don't always go together,
And slips inside to the kitchen.
She does not return until the next morning, to place another flower,
to wipe the glass clean, to sit with her little angel.

Over the years, she's taken care of it
And kept it looking good as new.
Wilting away her hours in the garden in front of her own glass box
That shows her nothing but what has passed, moved on, been lost.
But who's been watching over her all this time after Herb passed?
Her little angel, of course, is always watching,
Taking care of the mother that only ever wanted to take care of it.

Morgan Barnard is a senior who has accomplished some pretty amazing stuff at Cornell College, most importantly the ability to believe in herself. She is a runner, writer, and a teacher. After all this lovely time at Cornell, she is taking off to do wonderful things in the world.

helium

charlie kelley-pegg

Winner of the Academy of American Poets Prize

I went to a party supply store the other day to buy some balloons and

There was a sign on the door

That said they were out of helium

See apparently

There's this big ass shortage

Because our helium comes from underground

And the U.S. deposits in Texas and such

Are being depleted

Which is scary, sure

But kind of funny when you think about it

The same air that traps balloons

On ceilings of gymnasiums in middle schools

A couple days after Abuela's funeral

Her friend Estelle and I went hiking

On what used to be

One of her favourite paths

She told me about Abuela's last days

How immobile she was and everything

Estelle had witnessed all of it

But you know

Most people I talk to them one day, next day they're dead.

It's an old age thing.

I asked if she thought Abuela was ever in much pain before she passed

She said there was no real way to tell

But that pain was one of the biggest reasons people are so afraid of death

She continued the tangent by telling me that

A woman in an elderly couple she knew had contracted some

Life terminating illness and she and her husband didn't want to be apart so

They made a suicide pact

Got the supplies and

Ended their lives by inhaling helium

It's relatively painless they say

Says Estelle

She switched the subject and

We moved on from the conversation

But I will never forget that.

The thing about this helium shortage is that

Because helium is a very light gas,

it has to be captured quickly,

or it will float up into space.

I have to wonder if the same is applicable

For the elderly couple with the gas inhalant masks on

Will they stay still in space or

Will they just float away?

Charlie Kelley-Pegg (lovingly referred to as Charizard or Baby Goof) is a transmasculine Colombian adoptee who was raised in Minneapolis, MN. Since graduating from the Perpich Arts High School in 2019 with a concentration in Creative Writing, Charlie is currently pursuing a BFA in English and Creative Writing while continuing to perform spoken word.



the ghost room

chantelle reider

Chantelle Reider is a senior studying English and enjoys writing when she's not coaching figure skating or petting cats. Politics, writing experiments, and literary analysis are all big parts of her life.

stars

ben covey

She said:

Stars,

And the word dripped from her lips

Thick like nectar, honey

Brimming with golden

Stars,

My darling, my piano plays for you

Sonata constellation numb

My teeth like Novocain

Stars:

They bring you back to me

Your face displayed in neon

Far off, windshield blur,

Stars,

Drumbeat raindrops on tin roof

And I clatter too, bones

Burnt away and smolder,

Stars,

Built up from them, lonesome you

And I, torn up from the sod

Wet and shivering,

Stars,

To put the heat back in me

Stars,

To put the life back in you
Stars,
Beneath my fingernails as I
Tear my skin away, as I
Raze myself again
Stars,
Fishing wire tinsel toys
When I close my eyes
No light calls me
Stars,
Your lips part and serrate the word
It bites the frost into my skin
I hope one days my eyes will shine with
Stars,
I can still feel your vibrations in the
Telephone wires, behind my eyes
We can tremble with delight
Stars,
Close enough to reach out and touch
Close enough to ooze through my fingers
And I fill myself with fire, sometimes,
Stars,
They leave me spinning
Stars,
They paint her picture
Stars,
She has a garden in her, every
Green thing spills golden fruit,
And every tonguetip glistens with
Stars,

Their bloody tears fall and from their
Imprint grows every flower, every hair
One day, she was a sprout too,
But for now
Stars,
Stuck just beyond reach, and mocking
Stars,
One day I will pull them down for her
Stars,
What do I have to do
To hold you?



somnium florum
inspired by duane michaels

ryan belle

Ryan Belle is a senior from Austin, Texas, and is double majoring in Classical Studies and Music, with minors in Art History and Applied Statistics.

graveyard

morgan barnard

One of the hardest things is having to watch a relationship fall apart. Watching two people who loved each other once, who still love each other to a certain extent, turn away, do and say hurtful things, and move on with other people is staggering. You sit and watch. You can't do much else because you can't fix them.

When you first realize it's happening—I mean really notice; you see that one person is hurting to a high degree and then the other little signs begin to fall in, the messages they didn't respond to, the not coming to bed, the silence, it all builds up—there's a shock that resonates through you. You sit and think, "This can't be right. They were so happy together last weekend". All of the happy moments from the past ten, fifteen, even twenty years build up in your mind and you wonder how something so beautiful and happy can be torn to shreds by the passing of years. By the emptying of the house.

You try to offer advice. Listen first, of course, to the sides that are willing to talk. Then you concoct the perfect solution in your head, put it on a glistening plaque, hand it over to them and smile, thinking this must be what they were missing; this must be the answer to their problems; they were just looking at it too closely to realize. Alas, weeks pass and the plaque becomes a headstone. The headstone grows moss on top of it and the letters soften. It's buried in grass since no one bothers to trim it. And walls are built in its place. You give up after a while because all you're doing is creating a graveyard.

The house is suffocating. You walk on eggshells, careful not to tread on anything important. You learn to forget, to let go of petty arguments and little annoyances. But perhaps it would be better to leave them in; it would provide a momentary distraction for them to avoid thinking about themselves. The only warmth is your own little corner, your place of escape, wherever that may be. A little blue chair in the corner of your bedroom, a place to read and write and sit with your cat and talk on the phone for hours to someone outside of it all, someone unaffected. Having someone to listen makes all the difference, which is why you can't leave. Though some days you want so badly to do just that, to get in the car and drive away, or run away, anything to get out of the madness, the desolation taking place inside the hearts of the people you love most, you cannot go away. That would be murder. If you leave, who's left to listen? You throw the burden back at them but they can't carry it. They will finally break if they try.

So, really, all that's left to do is sit and watch. And wait. There are only two endings to this game, but no one really wins. You sit, and you tend to the grass. Maybe today you bring flowers. But, in the end, you're just a mourner. They are the gravediggers.

Morgan Barnard is a senior who has accomplished some pretty amazing stuff at Cornell College, most importantly the ability to believe in herself. She is a runner, writer, and a teacher. After all this lovely time at Cornell, she is taking off to do wonderful things in the world.

untitled

kendale mccooy

Let me drown in your rose tequila lips,
Just for one night.
Over the sounds of laughter, and ecstasy.
Her skin as ebonic as mine,
She let the opus beam of light,
Frame every detail of her face.
She was built like an angel, and
She felt like the cushion of Gods breast.
She shook her hips like the devil's wife,
And she had more heat than Curtis.
Fools drool for love at convenience,
The best time after midnight,
When our pants are bulging from friction.
Lust floods our diction, And my veins pulse after your grasp.
If your love hurts me,
I will take the time,
To learn to love you,
Regardless if it kills me.



FLY

emma burnett

Emma Burnett is a freshman from Des Moines, Iowa. She currently plans to major in Studio Art.

the dna test conundrum

charlie kelley-pegg

No longer solely utilised to determine that

He is

Not in fact

The father

Making the crowd of the Maury Povich Show go wild

Those sure of their family history

(By which I mean my caucasian friends)

Can dole out

\$100 at their local Walgreens and

Be comforted by

Determining what exact percentage

Of which specific genre

Of European coloniser

They are

And they'll know in a few short weeks.

This some white people shit.

I could set aside funds

Refrain from impulse purchasing

Souvenirs made in my home country

Over the internet

In order to finally

Answer the question I am asked on a daily basis without failure:

Where am I *from*?

On one hand

I have been a part of one family for nineteen years As opposed to being with another for 58 days during a time of no recollection

On the other

When I was younger

The family doctor printed out after-visit reports

And under “problems”

Where family history should go was one word: Adopted

For eighteen years, my medical file read

Problems: Adopted

Once you know too much

There is no going back

So, to my equally curious adoptive family:

This is my journey, not yours

Charlie Kelley-Pegg (lovingly referred to as Charizard or Baby Goof) is a transmasculine Colombian adoptee who was raised in Minneapolis, MN. Since graduating from the Perpich Arts High School in 2019 with a concentration in Creative Writing, Charlie is currently pursuing a BFA in English and Creative Writing while continuing to perform spoken word.



a century ago

miles kolmstetter

Miles Kolmstetter is a current sophomore at Cornell. He is from Virginia and enjoys photography in his free time. He is also founder and President of Cornell College Coin Club.

mother

ben covey

Mother, help me
I am sprouting crooked broken wings
From the bleeding garden
Of my skin
I farm new limbs,
And cull the herd with steakknife precision
They will raise a great tower
From my bones
Upon my death
And you all within it,
Cheering down from the top.
My eyes lack the nebula
To bring forth new stars,
But the dust that swirls
Great thundering
Flurries in me
It settles on you too,
And mother,
My legs
The twisted stumps
They stretch as I sleep
Toward some distant station
Where the weather is fairer
And the light shines clearly

Into a glass of crystal,
Wine and brandy
Some place with orange trees
And baskets brimming like rapture
Spilling deep into me
Rinsing clean my sin, oh
Mother,
My mouth churns forth
A new batch of teeth
As the brittle morning laps
At the edge of the night
And I set myself up
Coughing, again, to see
What strange new bird has light
To set upon my window sill
I toil for you,
Empty mouth full
Of silent, somber prayer
And the lips wrap tightly
The words held
Wet, heavy,
Mother, please,
Remake me.

I woke up this morning feeling like wool

kendale mccoey

Antis sit next to my bedside
Been there two weeks
Mind heavy to leave to the sheets,
Hate being honest with myself
Never been discreet.

Joint sits next to my bedside,
Spark up in the room.
Press play on his head highs,
Headphones play MF DOOM.

Broken Focus on the mat,
Yet I still break his nose.
Fuck all the coaches that,
Leave their soldiers on their toes.

Heavy handed, goofy fuck
Know he walk pigeon toed.
Got 500 on the rack, legs bold
Like a dealer selling his soul.

This school petty like fake thighs,
telling Fake lies, saying,
hey guys, come play on the ram side.
Fuck That!

I just want to debate rhymes, and take time,
Maybe rest my eyes, Ya know? In my spare time,
Feel fine?

Seen my friends do time
Hands glued to the bong
I'm on it to man,
Just you know you not alone.
No I don't mind man, You can have a drink.
But do you really need it dog, or is that just what you think?
I seen it in my momma hands, before the sun hit.
Hennessy and raspberry was the freshest scent.
But then time progressed, she started feeling stressed.
All that mother fucking pressure in her mother fucking chest.
Not she just swimming in pools of addiction,
She likes vodka for Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner.
So I can feel it, to tough to chase it,
I promise momma that i'll never evase it.

So when we lose man, we can't abuse it,
Cuase you know these mother fuckers do it for the music.
And if your heart heavy, don't try and hide it,
I see it in your eyes,
You scared, We scared, They scared to talk about it.



thistle

natalie bradshaw

Natalie Bradshaw is from Grand Rapids, Michigan. In her free time, she enjoys studying things she doesn't believe in, like Ley Lines and ghosts. What she will do with this information, she has yet to figure out.

l'avion

maxwell ishmael

8:00 AM Eastern Standard Time

Where you headed? Hello?
Did you say something?
Yeah, which airline?
British Airways.
What's in England.
Family.
That's nice. I'm Hector by the way.
Scottie.
Good meeting you, Scottie.
Likewise.
You staying there for a long time?
No.
Not doing anything crazy with the family?
With what's left, can't do much anymore.
Oh.
You mind if I listen to some music?
Yeah I got Jazz, Classical, Coun—
I meant with my headphones.
Say no more, hermano.
Appreciate it.

I shot my Mum a text saying that I would be in at 8:00 AM. She quickly replied with an emoji of a tomato—she was still figuring out the new iPhone I bought her.

8:40 PM Eastern Standard Time

*Take care hermano, I hope everything works out.
Thanks Hector.*

Hector handed me my suitcase and I walked into the terminal. Leave it to JFK to be one of the busiest airports at five in the fucking morning. I managed to drop my bags off and wait in the obnoxious TSA line before boarding the seven hour trip to Gatwick.

I tried to bum one last cig before the plane ride in the bathroom, ghosting each and every exhale. I only used half, putting the rest out in the sink. It gives me cancer, but fuck, it felt good. I splashed some water onto my face, trying desperately to get the circles piling underneath my eyes to fade away. I bet they would go away after my nap on the plane.

The flight attendant at my gate made a last call for our flight as I came out of the bathroom. I quickly jogged over and boarded the flying, smokeless, metal death trap.

11:57 PM Eastern Standard Time

I woke up in a cold sweat—feeling like my chest was about to come out of my body. I was in the middle seat in my aisle, and did not want to disturb anyone by getting up and going to the back. I closed my eyes again to make it go away, wishing that the plane would stop to let me off. The bubbles in my stomach turned into full blown nausea as I grabbed the complementary vomit bag—the first time ever doing so on a plane. I took off my drenched beanie and threw it on the ground. My trembling hands managed to open the bag as I turned on the air from the overhead compartment. I knew that once the air hit my body, it would give me enough energy to

run towards the bathroom at the back of the plane.

Excuse me Miss, I managed to spit out while motioning to the bathroom.

I took two steps into the aisle and started to feel lightheaded. I closed my eyes again—hoping that I would reach the bathroom with another step. My breaths became weak and I was beginning to lose feeling in my legs.

Sir, are you okay? said a voice.

I looked up and saw two flight attendants—one man, one woman. They looked concerned and engaged. I stood slouched and gave them a cold stare, as a couple more sweat droplets fell to the floor of the aircraft.

We've got another one, said the woman with a smirk.

Here, take some ginger ale and pretzels and sit down on the toilet seat, he said.

I plopped down on the seat while shoveling the pretzels and pop into my mouth.

Did you eat anything today? asked the woman, glancing at her name tag.

No, I haven't.

She put a cold towel on my neck that felt euphoric.

I think you caught vertigo.

Vertigo?

It's really common for those who don't eat before getting on an early plane. Even I get it.

Thank you very much, Julie.

It can also be brought on by stress, but that's just the doctor in me talking.

I crinkled the cup of water and threw it away as I stashed another bag of pretzels in my pocket. I think I'll head back to my seat now.

No worries, take all of the time that you need.

8:15 AM Greenwich Mean Time

I itched for a cigarette as soon as I got off of the plane. I got my bags as soon as I could and eased through customs. As I got my bags, I found an empty corner and finished the rest of the butt—sending me into euphoria. I blew the rest out quickly and went out to greet Mum.

Fifteen minutes late? My Mum said.

Is that any way to treat me?

You're 30 years old, you should've learned punctuality in primary school.

I gave her a hug that lasted a lifetime. She squeezed me hard and cracked several vertebrae out of place.

Did you eat? she asked.

A bit. Let's just get this over with.

Okay, let's go.

11:00 AM Greenwich Mean Time

I'll be here the whole time, she said.

I know.

We walked through the doors of the courthouse and stepped into the lobby, roaming around until we asked a court marshall for directions. It smelled like old paint and charcoal. Leave it to England to have their fanciest buildings to smell like shit.

Do you know where the parole hearing for Corey Edmonds is? she asked.

Down the hall and to the right.

We walked in and found empty spots in the back of the room.

Wanda was sitting in the front row, in a black dress with an

alligator green purse slung across her shoulder. She looked over to me and I quickly glanced the other way. Mum smiled and waved at her as she turned back around.

11:30 AM Greenwich Mean Time

I have lived everyday with the suffering that this has caused me.

Do you believe that you've paid your debt to society?

I can never truly pay my debt. I've lost the trust of the woman I love, my family has abandoned me, and most importantly, I killed my daughter. God is the only one who can determine whether or not I've paid.

Your prison record is clean and you've been staying out of trouble in lockup.

I have been sober for six years, and have been in a group to help me with my addictions.

Mr. Edmonds, the parole board appreciates the strides that you've been making towards serving your sentence. Unfortunately, at this time we cannot grant you early release.

May I ask why?

We do not think that you have served enough time. We formally reject your request for parole.

11:50 AM Greenwich Mean Time

I walked outside to smoke a cigarette. I had quit when I moved to New York, but the familiarity was excruciating.

Still smoking those fags, huh?

I turned around and saw Wanda—she looked just like her

daughter.

He should've never been granted a fucking request.

She motioned for the cigarette and I gave it to her without hesitation. She took a long, slow drag and puffed a cloud to match the grey sky.

I miss you around here.

I can't stand London.

She took another drag and then flicked the cigarette onto the pavement.

She loved you Scottie.

I looked into Wanda's eyes and saw Jocelyn for the first time in six years. Eyes that I locked onto for the first time when we were teenagers, eyes that said 'absolutely' when I asked her to marry me, eyes whose last scene saw her stepfather pull the trigger for a dime of coke.

I leave tonight.

It was good seeing you, handsome. Come back more often.

Wanda gave me a kiss on the cheek and headed back into the courthouse.

I owe you a cigarette, she said as I looked back and smiled.

10:00 PM Greenwich Mean Time

Call me when you land, said Mum.

I will. Love you.

She gave me a hug that cracked the vertebrae of my back into place. She released her grip and stared long and hard at me. I knew she worried, I always knew.

Stop smoking.

I'll stop.

I smiled reassuringly and walked into the gates of Gatwick.

11:15 PM Greenwich Mean Time

I grabbed some airport food and threw out the rest of my pack. I wouldn't need them back home. I looked up at my gate-B-24: service from Gatwick to JFK—and double checked my ticket. The voice on the intercom said that we would be boarding in 10 minutes.

Hey!

She looked familiar. I tried to greet her back, but I was too focused on remembering where she was from.

You got sick on my plane yesterday, right?

Julie, the flight attendant.

She was carrying a bright pink purse and had her hair in a ponytail. She wasn't wearing her uniform, rather a sweater and some blue jeans.

How do you feel today?



barren wasteland

miles kolmstetter

Miles Kolmstetter is a current sophomore at Cornell. He is from Virginia and enjoys photography in his free time. He is also founder and President of Cornell College Coin Club.



a misty morning

chantelle reider

Chantelle Reider is a senior studying English and enjoys writing when she's not coaching figure skating or petting cats. Politics, writing experiments, and literary analysis are all big parts of her life.

the storm

addie pacha

The first change is against your skin
cool
like the inside of a cave
but with more dirt
then the smell
of being inside a blade of grass

lightning
and the clouds reach down
like ghost dresses
it gets to be the sort of dark that means
today is someone's memory
and you hear rage from afar
when they say *thunder*
they really mean *punch*

the rain dives for you
on the front step
sheltered until the wind shoves in
and sends a female sparrow your way
she regards you from the railing
finds you worthy
and hops onto the bottom step
she nestles into the space between your bare feet

and the stairs
you feel like you're holding a baby
you want to move your legs so they give her more shelter
finally you do, and she's scared off
or maybe not scared, maybe just ready to tell you goodbye

frostbite

willow barton

Sometimes,
I stay outside
For no reason at all.

The brisk wind
Leaves my skin
Red and raw.

Here,
Time is frozen.
No room to thaw.

There's no reason
For me to speak;
My breath is only fog.

Snowflakes
Blend with
The puddles on my jaw.

My body freezes
To a point, I question
if these feelings are mine

Cold
Cradles me gently
With far more care.

The world still spins
But here
It's as if it quit.

Peace
Fills this sanctuary
I come to be alone

I am numb
To the point
I hardly feel at all.

Pain
Is a faraway thought
Along with False warmth.

They may think
I'm crazy.
Yet no one steps out to "save" me.

Maybe,
The snow'll pile high;
Encase me in welcome arms.

It'd be far warmer
Than the brick walls
And the people inside.

Sometimes,
I prefer frostbite.
It helps remind me that I'm alive.

Willow Barton is currently a student at Cornell College. She spends all her free time writing or with the mock trial team. She's always looking for her next adventure, on the page or in real life.



snowy skies on a january night

jessica velcich

For Jessica Velcich, photography is an escape from the norm. Not many people know that photography is a passion in the artist's life. She likes to capture moments to remember forever.

birthday

griffin scheel

Birthday time! One year older and we are having fun. Mom and dad and larry and I all sitting around the candles, oh boy oh boy! Look at them burn. Slowly slowly, down to ash, wax drip drip drip-pin away. I will burn like that candle one day. But for today, I am growing! I am older! Yay!

Mom waves her arm. It's time to blow the candles out, yes mom. Thanks for reminding me, mom. I would never have remembered on my own, mom. You being there is the sole reason I can function mom, yes. I need to blow out these candles. I love you, mom. I know you mean the best for me, mom. I know that the microwave dinners are made with love, mom. I know that you shout because of the love, mom. I know this I know it so well, I am so glad you are here mom, to share this special special day with me, mom! It is my birthday, and here your arm moves, so naturally, so fluidly, mom! You are supporting me as always and oh I love you mom! Thank you mom!

Dad's head bobs up and down in excitement. He always supports me. Thank you, dad! I love playing catch with you, dad. It is good to know you are always there for me, dad. I know if I need help with my homework I can always come to you, dad. I am glad, dad, that you are my father. Watch as I blow out these candles dad I will make you proud I know I will. I know you always wanted better

grades from me dad but I'm going to make you proud. You will have a smile on your face for the rest of eternity, dad. I know that I have disappointed you, dad. But from now on you will be proud, dad. So proud, dad. You will watch each of my birthdays with the same happiness that you stare at your TV, dad. I know you will. I am no TV show, dad, I know. But from now on you will be proud of me, dad. This happiness will be forever dad and you can be so proud of me so proud and you never have to be angry again, never again, dad, this time the smile will be forever and here I will be your child who you are proud of dad. I love you. Dad's head nod moves so naturally, so fluidly, so proudly, and I can see the love in his eyes as they look into mine, unblinking. Thank you dad!

Larry taps his foot impatiently. He always acts like he hates me but I know better, larry. I know better. I see the love in your eye, larry. I know you care for us, all of us, somewhere larry. Beyond the money, larry. I know you want us, as a family, larry. I know mom putting you in the will only made you love us more, larry. I know you didn't mean to poison everyone's glass of dinner orange juice, larry. I switched cups with you, larry, when you weren't looking because I saw you do something to them and I didn't want you to have any regrets, larry. You always were one to regret, larry. You never moved on from the wrongs they did to you, larry. I know you didn't. I've seen the way you looked at mom and dad, larry. They didn't mean to be mean. They love you, larry. And I know you love them, so much, so much. I saw the care you took with their orange juice, larry. I saw everything, larry. I saw the love in your eyes. The love is still in your eyes, larry. And it is never leaving, larry. Aren't you happier now? Aren't you glad to be free of your own control? I know what you want larry, you're tapping your foot, tap tap tap, you

always were impatient larry. Always hurrying, larry. You could never let it rest, larry. But now you can, larry. You can rest with mom and dad and smile and laugh, oh your foot moves so fluidly, so naturally, tap tap tap, larry. You move so lifelike, larry. You move with love in your eyes, larry, just like how you used to, larry, you are so full of love larry it is positively bursting. I love you larry. Thank you for coming to my birthday larry. You move so naturally, larry. And now as you watch me lean forward to give a final puff and blow out the candles, you'll clap with the rest of them larry. I tied the strings tightly so you all move just how you would before the accident, larry. Isn't it better this way? Isn't this nice? Now we can be together, forever, a happy family, celebrating my birthday with laughter and clapping and candles burning down to the wick just how I like. We can finally be a happy family.

No more screaming, or anger. Just happy, just how I like it.

I lean forward and blow, the candle's light flickering in the rough wind before extinguishing completely.

Griffin is a writer. Or, at least, he calls himself one, and he wrote this bio, so that has to count for something, right? But really, he simply sees a three sentence limit on the length of a contributor biography and sees it as an excuse to have a lot of commas, and maybe that's just someone who likes the look of their own text, rather than any real indication of his future profession.



things with us from birth

zuri montgomery

Zuri Montgomery is definitely here, living a life, that's for sure.

seasons

kendall nichols

In the summer I gave you jasmines but you wanted roses.
So I colored the petals with my blood and etched a crimson red pattern.
It looked a lot like roses but then you changed your mind and asked for
daisies.

So I stood there with my wilted jasmines that looked like roses, and
searched for daisies instead.

You wanted lilacs, so I waited for spring to come

Spring came but you came with someone else

When winter waltzed in you wondered whether the weather would be
good enough where you can wear what you wanted to, so I
volunteered to be your windbreaker

Fall feebly fell through following the failures of friendships which led to
door, but you stayed until your fancy feelings felt better because you
used me to make yourself feel fulfilled and now there's a hole where
you use to stay

I can't read minds, but I know you'll never tell me how you feel so I
question if I ever was real

Real enough to acknowledge my presence instead of my unwanted
presents
And I presently offer you my all, but it was never enough
See I waited for you to turn your actions around, but all you seemed
to care about was a flower
I guess that's cute you always loved flowers, but this flower wasn't
special
This flower you wouldn't even cherish,
This flower that erases the memory of me,
This flower that was as legitimate as you
To think this all started with you wanting some roses
And at the end of the day,
I just wanted some soft spoken words read out loud



love you

emma burnett

Emma Burnett is a freshman from Des Moines, Iowa. She currently plans to major in Studio Art.



desert chipmunk

miles kolmstetter

Miles Kolmstetter is a current sophomore at Cornell. He is from Virginia and enjoys photography in his free time. He is also founder and President of Cornell College Coin Club.

the lullaby

maxwell ishmael

The soft crashing of Barjudian waves kissed the moss that washed up on the tide. The air was dry—a nice wind was blowing in on the east side of the beach. I scribbled some drawings that I had started on the plane ride from Minnesota. I was imagining a sailboat that I would see here in Barjudia. Perhaps it was tall, with a bright yellow sail, a thin hull, and a sturdy bow. A red stripe going across it that almost took the attention away from the sail. There were no such boats here—at least in my position on the Island. I went to the beach as soon as I got off the plane. I wanted to make sure that I heard the ocean upon placing my feet into the tropical grounds. I’ve been here for four hours, waiting for the rest of my co-workers and my pinche boss Chris. Our company was sent here to clean up a deep oil spill ravaging the coasts of Barjudia.

The waves were being affected, but you couldn’t tell. Hearing them go back and forth, and back and forth, touched a part of your soul. They were beginning to mingle with my heartbeat, becoming completely in tune with the rhythm of my body. I closed my eyes and basked in the sun, hoping to achieve the color that my *Abuelita* always said that I’d grow into.

I woke up to a beach ball smacking my face and my skin being stuck to the beach chair.

“Sorry Miss, can you pass it over here?” said a freckled, curly red-headed girl with a Scottish accent. She didn’t look a day over seven. I picked up the ball and pathetically tossed it four yards to

the left of her.

I looked at my watch and noticed that I had slept for 2 hours. The sun was still shining, but it was slowly setting on the west side of the beach. I checked my phone and there were no messages from any of my co-workers or Chris, so I decided to go back to my room to investigate. I packed my towel and my sketchbook and headed to my hotel. I passed by the Scottish girl and she grimaced when I walked by. I rolled my eyes—that little diablo gringa. My hotel was called the Lullaby Inn, beautifully named after W.H. Auden’s poem. The Barjudian government adopted the poem into their national anthem after claiming their independence in 1966. The poem itself was inscribed on a plaque outside of the hotel’s walls. It was in cursive, making you think as you reread lines several times. It was definitely intentional. I began to read it, line by line, vowel by vowel, link by link.

*Soul and body have no bounds:
 To lovers as they lie upon
 Her tolerant enchanted slope
 In their ordinary swoon,
 Grave the vision Venus sends
 Of supernatural sympathy,
 Universal love and hope;
 While an abstract insight wakes
 Among the glaciers and the rocks
 The hermit’s carnal ecstasy.*

I smiled at the plaque and headed over to the elevator. The poem was so—

“SHIT!”

I looked down at my leg and it was being devoured by a light blue snake. My calf was throbbing as I smacked the creepy slider off of my leg. It slithered away into a hole in a nearby wall.

The pain was piercing through my leg as I noticed three black veins forming on the side of my calf. My head began to feel dizzy and I stumbled to the ground. The light around me started to dim...

“Hey girl, if you wanna survive, don’t close those eyes of yours,” said a voice.

When the foggy haze cleared, I saw a tan, bearded man with dark brown eyes staring me in the face. He looked concerned, raising his bony fingers and reaching for a water bottle out of his bag. He gently started to tilt it towards my mouth and I smacked it out of his hands.

“Slow down and listen to me,” he said. I slowed down my heart rate, listening to the tenor of his voice. “My name is Charlie Benson and I’m a nurse. I’m gonna take you to get some help, but you’re gonna have to trust me. Okay?”

I nodded and winced.

“Good. Now, don’t fall asleep and keep talking to me.”

“I’m Ava.”

“I’m going to help you up. Is that okay?”

I nodded again and he swept me off my feet. I winced again, dangling in his arms, clinging to his neck muscles. He was weaving through the crowd and commanded everyone to move out of his way. The venom from the bite was inching its way up my leg and into my hamstrings. The black streaks and swollenness made

my leg unrecognizable. The fog was coming back, and a bright tint showered over everything in sight. Blinking became hard, staying conscious became harder. I think we were outside, in a parking lot of some sort. He opened his car door and sat me down in the back seat.

“Ava, you still with me?” he asked, smacking my face gently.

“Yes.”

“Good. I’m gonna take you to a clinic 10 minutes away. I’ve seen these bites before, and I’ve seen them be fatal. We need to move or else you’ll die in this parking lot.”

I nodded.

“Drink. You’ll need it for what I’m about to do.”

He handed me a bottle of Lake Train—the Island’s best rum. I took two gulps as the liquor burned my throat. I coughed and almost threw up. Once I was done, Charlie snatched the bottle out of my hand immediately and poured it on my leg.

“*Put a Madre!*” I screamed.

He smirked again.

“I remember my grandmother cussin’ me out like that.”

“Latino?”

“Cubano. But I was raised in South Africa. To make a long story short, I haven’t heard Spanish in a while.”

“My family is Puerto Rican.”

“Island girl, huh?”

I smiled and screeched as he splinted my leg with a piece of wood in his car. The stabbing drilled into my leg and traveled up to my chest. He tied it tightly with a t-shirt. He picked me up again and carried me to the front seat, like a parent taking a toddler to bed.

“Stay with me, Ava. We’ll be alright.” He gave an open-

mouthed smile that showed off his dimples. They curled into the edges of his beard. His teeth were stained and he had a silver canine.

“I trust you.”

“You ain’t gotta choice,” he said as he handed me a bucket from the backseat of his van. “You might need this on the way there,” he said.

I stared inside of the hollow bucket and was confused. He jolted into reverse and zoomed into oncoming traffic. Honking his horn and speeding well over the speed limit. I threw up twice and then a third time after I decided to look into the bucket. There were black spots in the oily discharge.

It was here where I thought that I was going to die.

I leaned back in my seat and swallowed a lump of spit. I felt like I had the flu, fever, and pneumonia all at once. My arms went numb and could barely wiggle my fingers. Charlie must have looked over at me—he dabbed a towel on my forehead trying to calm my nerves.

“We’ll be there in a couple of seconds—just hold on and stay with me. Tell me about your job.”

I continued to tell him that I was working on eco-conservation. He told me that he admired my work since it kept the grass green. I still couldn’t believe that on my first day, I got bit by a snake and may need to have my leg amputated. How would this affect my job? What would my Papi think? Would I be stuck here forever?

“We’re here,” he said.

It was a remote house in the middle of the forest.

“Paco! I need help! Another Toe Snake!”

I dug my head into Charlie’s chest and drifted off.

I started to remember the moments before I left for Barjudia. Miguel and I were fighting for the um-teenth time about something new. This time, he was questioning my decision to go to the Island—looking back he was probably right.

“Why do you have to go to this third world country anyway?” he barked.

“Because it’s my job. Because it’s what I want to do.”

“You’ll kill yourself. You know that right? All they do is kill each other and get eaten by wild fucking animals.”

“Fine. Let them kill me. I hope it does.”

“What the fuck is the matter with you?”

“You. That’s my fucking problem. YOU!”

I roared off into my room and slammed it shut. I picked up my bag and started stuffing it with clothes and toiletries. Miguel then opened the door and slowly crept behind me, towering over my body as he grabbed my hips. I rolled my head back into his shoulders as he kissed my neck and nibbled and the cartilage of my ear.

“I’m a dick sometimes,” he muttered.

I smacked his hands off me and tried to storm into the bathroom. He grabbed my arm and pulled it back, sending my body back to his.

“All the time. I’m a dick all the time,” he said. He twinkled his gaze into mine, hoping that it would work like it used to.

“Miguel, I can’t do this anymore. I’m done,” I said.

“Ava, c’mon. I just—”

“No. Save it. I’m leaving.”

He started chuckling. I always hated that smug-ass laugh of his. It sounded like a cackle from a hyena.

“We do this dance every time and you always come running

back,” he said.

“Yeah, I know. It’s cause you beg like a fucking dog every time. It’s ‘cause you know that I’m the best you can ever get.”

His face started to turn red and he balled up his fists. He picked up our landline phone and threw it against the mirror, breaking the glass.

I nodded my head and smiled. He knew this was the last straw, I could see it in his pigeon-puffed chest and his clenched jaw

“Seven years bad luck,” I said as I finished packing my bags, “What a shame.”

I grabbed all of my bags and headed to my childhood home, to pick up a couple of shirts I had left there last week.

I woke up laying down on a table in a dimly lit room. It smelled like saltfish and there were various types of plant life scattered across the room. My body wasn’t shivering as much, and I was starting to mellow out. The blanket that covered me was drenched, maybe from my sweat. I took it off and looked down at my leg. It was still swollen but no black streaks were stemming from the snake bite. There were bandages wrapped around different parts of my leg, but not my calf. I tried to unwrap one of them to see what was happening with my leg, and I ended up falling off of the metal table.

I collapsed and thudded to the ground, reigniting the pain that had recently vanished. Charlie and Paco came running into the room.

“Easy there,” Charlie said, “You’re going too fast.”

I looked up at him and the dimples glistened in his dark tan skin. Paco fumbled with some medical supplies and then he extended his hand. I grabbed it, giving all of the strength that I had.

“Thank you—for everything,” I finally said.

“You really gave Pac and me a real scare.”

I forced a smile and pulled my hair back. I looked over at Paco and he was cleaning a syringe.

“Does he talk?” I asked.

“Yeah, the local tongue. I’m teaching him English.”

I hopped back up onto the table and began to fully look at my leg for the first time since the snake bite. It did a number, atrophying my newly sun lathered skin and inserting a demonic-like spider pattern.

“If you give it about a month, the external scarring will go away,” he said.

“Have you seen other cases like this? This bad?”

He sighed and let out a long breath.

“You got lucky, Ava. I’ve seen it kill in seconds.”

A chill ran through my spine. I grabbed the water bottle next to the table and started taking small sips. Paco then left the room.

“Where am I?” I asked.

“A clinic, one of the few good ones left on this Island. Big western pharmaceutical companies are poisoning the healthcare industry here—they don’t know the way of the land. Many of the other clinics have shut down due to a lack of funding.”

“Sorry to hear that.”

“It won’t be long until Pac has to shut this place down for good too.”

“You’ve got a good heart, Charlie. You’ll land on your feet.”

He laughed and shook his head, becoming untethered by his relaxation, watching him as closely as I could, studying his body and physical movements. The man was chiseled to a crisp and commanded attention with every word that he uttered.

“Come on. You need to get some more treatment,” he said, taking off my bandages carefully and helping me off the table.

“Where are we going? It’s the evening right?”

“Girl, you’ve been out the whole night.”

“Whole night?! I’ve got to—”

“Easy, Ava. It’s all right. Your boss came by to see how you were doing after I told him what had happened. He’s waiting for your phone call. He knows that you’re safe and that I’ve got you.”

He tossed me my Motorola razor. I dialed the number and talked to Chris, the pendejo who was always rude to me. This time, he told me to rest, and for the first time, I felt warmth and kindness coming from his heart. I hung up the phone and looked at Charlie.

“Okay, where to?”

He led me out of the clinic and into the car.

“Take a nap, it’ll be better for when we get there.”

I went to my parent’s house right before I left for Barjudia, only looking for shirts and pants. I was determined to not get caught up in the vortex that was my family. I walked in, and Mami was looking at me sternly—and I automatically knew what had happened.

“*Que pasa con Miguel?*” she asked.

I rolled my eyes and headed into the dining room. That controlling fuck called my mother to tell her about our fight. They loved each other more than she loved me—the pendejo. He only did this twice before, but they were nuclear options.

“Don’t walk away from me, Mija,” she said.

“I’m done with him.”

“Miguel is a sweet and nice man. You do this every time. You push away everything in your life for something silly.”

“Like my job?”

I stormed upstairs to my room, narrowly escaping my mother's interrogation. They took some of my teenage posters of Justin Timberlake and Michael Jordan down to the basement, but they still kept my soccer and swimming trophies. Mami loved going to my games and bringing my entire extended family. I wasn't good at it, but she thought I was the next Pele. When I stopped in college, she never forgave me for it. When I came back for Thanksgiving break with my curly born brown hair straightened and dyed pink, she blamed it on me not playing. That phase was rough, especially for my roots. Papi always tried to assure her that she's just living her life—she wanted none of it.

I couldn't find any of the shirts that I wanted so I headed downstairs.

My father was there playing poker with his buddies from the warehouse that he worked at. The putrid smell of alcohol, cigarettes, and a 9-5 made the stench unbearable. They all saw me pass by and drunkenly greeted me by cheering and caroling an old mariachi song. I cracked a smile and headed to the washing machine—I thought that my clothes would be here.

My father stood up from the table and headed towards me, clinging on to a cigar with his index and middle fingers.

“You love those Cubano's too much,” I said.

He kissed me on the cheek and rubbed my hair. I hated every time that he did it, but it always made me smile.

“You ended it with Miguel?” he asked.

I scoffed and threw my T-shirt into the bag I was carrying.

“*Mija*. Turn around.”

I looked over and saw his pudgy face. He knew me better than I knew myself—and he took advantage of it every single time.

“He loves you, Ava. I can hear it in his voice.”

“I know he does.”

“Do you love him?”

“Not anymore.”

He raised his eyebrows and puffed a huge cloud of smoke in my direction. I fanned away the tobacco and toxins from my face.

“You should stay there, wherever you’re going. Get out of Minnesota—nothing’s waiting for you here.”

“I can’t just snap my fingers and uproot my life.”

“Why not? You need to get your hands dirty. Take a bigger risk.”

“Do you want me to leave you and Mami?”

“We’ll always be here. But even if it isn’t that place, you gotta go *Bonita*.”

He turned around and went back to his bellowing friends. I found my other pants and sneaked out of the back door. I went straight to the airport and waited three hours for my flight to Barjudia.

Charlie and I were driving for a couple of hours. I didn’t realize that the Island was big enough for it. The swelling on my leg was about the same—but my leg itself was starting to itch.

“Here,” Charlie said, “Drink.”

The drink was white like milk, yet frothy and had red pulp inside of it. I took a sip and gagged immediately.

“Aye!” I screamed.

Charlie laughed, “Best I didn’t tell you what was inside. It’ll help with the itching.”

I shook my head and stared out of the window into a green and colorful forest.

“We’re almost here,” Charlie said.

The forest then revealed an angelic, quiet, and pristine waterfall. The water crashing the lake was soft and light but was flowing strongly.

“It’s beautiful. Where are we?” I pondered.

“The best-kept secret in Barjudia. Come on, let’s go for a swim.”

I stepped out of the van and smelled the air. It had a trail of celery and white wine, I felt like I was in a fancy restaurant. Charlie took my hand and I felt goosebumps sprouting on the back of my neck and through my forearms.

He took his shirt off and it revealed his bronze, golden skin. The curly hairs on his chest coiled in the sparkling water.

“Is it safe?” I asked.

“It’s just water, unless you’re allergic,” he retorted flirtatiously.

I let out a loud, embarrassing giggle. I covered my mouth and looked away.

I was gliding through the shallow water, feeling the moss prickle through my toes. I looked down at the clearest water that I had ever seen, and saw tiny fish swimming around my legs, greeting themselves, welcoming me to their home. I smiled and waved at them, hoping they’d pop their head out and wave back. We kept walking in the water until we reached the mouth of the waterfall.

Charlie closed his eyes and lifted his chin towards the sky. He let go of my hand and let his fall into the water. The fish were no longer nipping at my legs.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“I’m just taking it all in. You should try it.”

Charlie rested his chin on his chest and opened his eyes. He turned towards me and smiled.

“Ready?”

I nodded. He took my hand again and led me through the waterfall and into the mouth of a cave. Walking through the falling water felt like a shower from God. In the opening of the cave, there were huge boulders covered in moss.

“Sit on one of those rocks and stretch your leg out,” he said. The rocks were surprisingly comfortable for being big and pointy. Charlie shuffled around the cave and pulled out a bottle hidden in one of the rocks.

“Ah, there it is,” he said.

He filled the bottle up from the waterfall stream and then reached into his pocket to grab a tiny brown sac. He opened it and poured a green powder into the bottle—turning the water into a slimy, grasslike color.

He handed it to me and said, “Drink.”

I looked at the bottle and saw the mixture for my own eyes.

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know what that is?”

“It’s just from the plants. It’s gonna make your wounds heal.”

“Charlie, I’m not going to.”

He found a boulder next to me and sat down.

“What’s making you say no, Ava?”

I looked into Charlie’s concerned reflection and saw the water flowing down from the opening of the cave. With the bottle in hand, I winced as the veins around my leg started to appear again. I thought about my job, my family, Miguel. I didn’t know where I was going, but each of them had a plan for me.

“What happens after I take this?”

“It’ll be a rough week, but you make a full recovery within a month. Just like I told you at the clinic, I’ll be here every step of the way.”

I walked out of the cave and through the waterfall again. The sun was setting perfectly along a bed of orange clouds.

“Whatever you decide, do it fast. We have to head back,”

Charlie said.

I nodded and looked at a toucan perching itself on a tree. It picked at its feathers and cawed at the air—just before opening its wings and flying away.



anif palace

chantelle reider

Chantelle Reider is a senior studying English and enjoys writing when she's not coaching figure skating or petting cats. Politics, writing experiments, and literary analysis are all big parts of her life.

scaling

max burg

Water slithers through my toes, dragging sand away under an overcast sky. The earth's defense against the waves is loose, almost as fluid as its enemy. It flees its post, sinking my feet deeper, and yet there is always more. More ocean. More beach. Even if I worked all my life, it is grander than I could ever hope to match.

Blankets wrap around my legs, saving what heat they can from the chill of a wintery room. It is walled off, small, secure and safe, filled with late night laughter at well-worn jokes and moments of triumph. Skin, fur, cloth and cushion are all bathed in a familiar blue light.

The same stories. The same people.

For all that I wish for something new, it is comforting in its simple, manufactured humanity.

A spot of pitch squirms against my chest, anxious and impatient, yearning to explore. She is small, so small that she fits in my cupped hands. She wriggles with excitement as the car trundles down the country road toward the city. She is soft and fragile, her feet and eyes too large, her teeth far sharper than they will ever be again.

New home. New family.

She throws up on my leg, but it is still a happier moment than I can remember.

Max Burg is a person from D.C. looking to write fantasy fiction with no idea what to do for money.

scenes from duneland

natalie bradshaw

Winner of the Clyde C. Tull Prose Prize

I. Smokestacks

Northwest Indiana is a dichotomous place. Lots of beauty. Lots of smokestacks. When I was first stringing words together, I called them “cloud-makers”. They rise above the dunes like columns from ancient ruins. Corinthian, Tuscan, Composite. Coal-fired chimney, Hydro-electric, Cooling Tower. I lived an impulse away from Duneland when I was younger. I didn’t pay much attention to the smokestacks while I was there. They were built into the geography, a marker of distance. I returned to Duneland a few weeks ago, and everything felt choked. The beaches had disappeared. The trees hiding the industrial sector had been chopped away. Places were renamed. Buildings were missing or unfamiliar. The map of it in my mind and the map of it in my hand didn’t match up. Where did it go?

The smokestacks were still there, puffing a haze towards the skyline of Chicago. They were unchanged.

Before Bethlehem Steel manufactured shell corporations to buy up the land, before the vindictive fights between conservation and industry, before the dunes were carried away to make room for the industrial chimneys, Burns Harbor was Duneland. Now, as you look out at the Lake, the profile of the smokestacks catches in your periphery like an unshakeable floater. This is where I was baptized in the religion of nature. Had the water been polluted?

II. Chicago

The skyline of Chicago is visible on the days when the air particles above Lake Michigan are more of a veil than a curtain. It's brilliant when the sun sets behind it, silhouetting the two-dimensional city. From this distance it's soundless. Moored on the horizon, a floating metropolis.

Once I had a dream that Chicago detached from the mainland and drifted across the lake to the Indiana Dunes. My parents took me to the beach to watch as the skyscrapers docked on the shore. The people opened their windows and lowered stories-high ladders to the ground. I could hear the chatter of car horns and conversations. My neck craned upward, trying to see where the towers ended and the sky began. I had thought the dunes were tall.

I went to Chicago last Christmas, which reminded me of this dream-memory. No part of the city is suspended over the Lake, but I couldn't shake the feeling that the steel anchoring the buildings to the land wanted to break apart so it could drift away.

III. The Boat

My dad heard from a neighbor about a beached ship on the shore of Lake Michigan. He woke me up in the predawn gray and told me that we were going to the beach for a surprise. We drove through morning mist. The dunes and the water in the morning become less real the more you look at them. There were no conversations by beachcombers. No music pumping from speakers. No umbrellas. Only the rhythm of the waves that lull you towards them.

The wreck was practically on the entrance to the beach. Tilted to one side but mostly upright. It was the type of boat you could

sleep in if you wanted to. Large but not giant. Too tall for an adult to climb up, but not too tall for a kid to be lifted and placed on.

There was no discussion as my dad raised me onto the upper deck of the boat and asked me to dictate to him what I saw. There was nothing of consequence, except for clusters of metallic green and gold Japanese beetles. I shakily made my way along the railing of the upper deck, trying not to slip on the wet, slanted surface. Eventually, my dad lifted me down and we walked back to the car. It looked like a beached whale, covered in rope and bugs and algae.

My mom chastised my dad for enlisting me as a scout. "What if there had been dead bodies?" she said.

He scoffed, "There were no dead bodies, Al."

"Well you wouldn't have been the one to find them if there had been."

"Stop. Just stop. I'd like to actually read the paper on my day off."

The boat had been swept away by a storm the previous night.

Eventually, it was returned to its alive owners in Chicago. Did my parents ever make sense together? One didn't think. One thought too much. I didn't know anything was wrong back then. Now I can see that their relationship was acidifying.

IV. The Unseen Bodies

The riptides and undertows are deadly in Lake Michigan. Every summer, people unfamiliar with the ferocity of the Lake get pulled away and down, and too many never come back up. Some fall off boats when the waves soar higher than expected. Sirens blared and names were announced over speakers whenever someone went missing, and everyone waited.

They waited for the name to come over the speakers again

when they had been found. Sometimes they stayed missing.

While we were walking on the shore one day, looking for beach glass as a family, we found a pair of flip-flops being shrugged in and out of the water by the waves. My dad expressed a look of triumph as he tried them on and found that they fit. He picked them up. Not far away was a pair of sunglasses. They were coated in wet sand, but nice. My dad picked them up. Further along the beach, there was a pair of swim trunks. My dad, a little dismayed that they weren't something he could appropriate, still picked them up and scolded the wearer for littering. My mom, with an edge in her voice, turned us around before we could find anything else.

V. ` Warm Waters

In the shadow of the steel plant was a place we called Warm Waters. We were a rotating pack of beach kids who ran into each other on the summer shore and used the sand, lake, and tall grass as our stage for misadventures. One day, seemingly on a whim, one of the beach dads arrived on a boat and we all piled in. We sliced waves in half as the industrial plants grew larger and larger on the horizon. The chimney hummed as we threw ourselves off of the boat and paddled to shore. There was a shallow path of water on the beach that sunk deeper as it nudged itself next to a small dune. Our pack advanced, exploring the area like hounds. Hivemind. Everyone leading, everyone following. We regarded the stream. It became apparent that we had to cross it so we could climb the dune and try to use the velocity from careening down it to run across the surface of the water. The parents looked on as we slunk into the stream. It was warm, bathwater warm. We made it to the other side and lunged up the dune, made it to the top, and evaluated our slope like Evel Knieval

evaluated a ramp. That's when we noticed the dark shadows in the water. They were everywhere. Not moving with the current. Just staying still. One of us yelled to our parents on the opposite shore about the blobs, which were about as long as me, a rising 1st grader. "Carp!" was the response from one of the parents, and suddenly crossing the stream again became an act of heroism. Who would lead the way, risking contact with carp your own size? It had to be me, the eldest, so I approached the stream and tried to find a carp-free path through the water, which became difficult without the high vantage point of the dune. The adults were ready to leave, so I urgently paddled across, afraid to make large strokes, but also afraid to go slowly. All of us made it across except one. Lucas. A troublemaker. I was shivering from exiting the warm water when I turned around and saw him panicking, slapping the water and letting the current take him out to Lake Michigan. We were all young and attention-seeking. None of us were immune from the urge to pretend our death. Then he screamed.

"Help! They're everywhere!" I looked at the parents, who were indifferent.

"C'mon, you can do it," one of them said. He was a boy who too often cried wolf. But I knew that when he lied he smirked. He continued to be carried away, eyes panicking, mouth unsmirking. The fish must have looked small to the grown-ups, but they were monsters, fully capable of swallowing us up. With bravery that has since vanished from me, I leaped back into the stream and swam towards him. Just as I grabbed his arm a thick slimy body bumped into my legs, then another bumped into my side, and suddenly I saw the blobs of carp all around me. Next to me, beneath me. A voice in my head that sounded like my mother said, "carp will eat anything". We had to squirm our way around them to make it across the stream. Wide-eyed, we piled back into the boat, the two of us still feeling the

carp slap their tails against our bodies.

“Why was it so warm?” one of us asked.

“Discharge from the power plant... cleaner than the lake,” one of the adults said.

Behind us, the smokestack coughed gray haze into the sky.

If it's good for the carp, it's good for the kids.

VI. The Morse Code House

The Crazy Man's house was one-story. It was cornered off by two roads. Sometimes the lawn was manicured, sometimes the grass grew past the window panes, doing its best to obscure the home. The house was loudly colored. Yellow on one side, purple, red, black, green, blue, navy on another. The yellow side was covered top to bottom with bold lines of Morse code. Small, twiggy trees were painted metallic green and purple, with blue glass bottles stuck on their branches. Black roof. Shady yard. “Übermensch” written on the mailbox.

Most houses are fairly impersonal. When you take out the contents, they're just buildings. Their character can be bought, sold, expanded, re-decorated, forgotten, then remembered for a higher price. You can say what you want about their age, state, or architecture, but houses rarely reflect anything about their owners apart from their wealth. The Morse Code House was entirely opposite. Entirely someone's. It had its own identity.

I have a memory of seeing the Crazy Man at the bank, but the memory is so thin and ancient I have to put gloves on to hold it. He was as tall as any human could be, with a long black trench coat and a long white ponytail. While my mom was in line she bent down to my ear and said in her gossip-whisper tone, “That's the Crazy Man who lives in the Morse Code House.” It was like encountering a celebrity.

When we reached the counter, I looked up at him, staring, as he argued with the teller. Even when he looked down at me, I kept staring, and his eyes snarled at me. I hadn't expected him to be so angry. So sinister. It didn't make sense. He lived in a house painted with every color of the rainbow. Still, I respected him. He didn't live in a grown-up house. Some kids wanted to be adults as soon as possible. I did not.

The Morse Code House belonged in a space of legal limbo. The owner's lease on the land really belonged to his father, and it was nearing time for decisions to be made about the fate of the land the house was on. When I moved out of Indiana the house was still there. Loud. Colorful. Bizarre.

On a drive back to college, it was decided that we would take a detour and visit my old stomping grounds. The Morse Code House was next to the entrance of my old neighborhood in 2007. In 2018, the only thing there was ruptured earth. A raw space. A plaintive "No!" escaped from deep in my stomach. I had always admired the house.

The NPS ended up reclaiming the small plot of land. An accomplishment, of sorts. These acres in the backcountry were claimed in often legally dubious circumstances. Dunes and trees were razed, and deals were made later.

Despite the land being justly returned to its natural environment, it was sad to see the emptiness of the place where the Morse Code House used to sit in static technicolor chaos. A conundrum.

My mom always told me the Morse code was gibberish. Just the ramblings of an eccentric old man. Recently, I googled the house, expecting to find nothing, but instead found a forum of people reminiscing about it. The Morse code message was an angry one, about

going to knowledge as one goes to war. "Übermensch" was not the name of the family living at the residence. It's a Nietzschean concept about rising above the masses to live by one's own values. I had always thought it was a happy house, straight out of a children's book. Is there a code waiting in my memories that age will eventually break?

VII. The Boulders

Every beach had its attraction. The sandbar was particularly good at one; it rose out of the water like a pathway. Once, when my agnostic mother had to answer my question about how we get to heaven, she said that the path would appear like a sandbar. I imagined it to look like the sandbar at this beach. Another beach had a dune that formed an insular bowl. It was a secret meeting place for the beach kids where we could plot our mischief. A stairway to one beach had lots of toys stashed under the wooden stairs. They wouldn't mind if we borrowed them, right?

The beach with the boulders was special because we found them.

We were wading through tall, sandpaper beach grass probably up to no good when we spotted them. They hid behind tall stalks of grass and within a little divot in the sand. The Indiana Dunes isn't a rocky area, unless you count the small skipping stones scattered near the shoreline. These boulders shouldn't have existed. They looked like a clutch of black stone dragon eggs. We climbed on top of them, jumping from one to the next. I looked down at the surface of the rocks, didn't understand what I was seeing, and bent down to examine them further. There were patterns that shouldn't have existed on stones.

Little creatures petrified in the rock. Fossils.

We were so ecstatic at becoming paleontologists we failed to notice that the boulders were crawling with ticks. Simultaneously, we all noticed black dots advancing up our legs and towards our hairline where they could hide temporarily until their sacks filled with blood. We shrieked, hopped off the rocks, and dealt with our punishment for disrupting a dragon's nest.

I don't know why the boulders were there. Certainly, we couldn't have been the first to find them. But seeing them emerge out of a shroud of beach grass was like dragging a treasure chest out of a hole. We felt the pressure of time pushing down on us as we realized that these creatures in the rocks once were living.

I wonder if the boulders are still there. Or if they ever were there like they are in my memory. I forget what the creatures looked like, only that there were many. I tell myself that they were giant boulders, but I was under four feet tall. I want to go back to the boulders, just to see if there are any answers, but I'm afraid reality would turn the memory sour. Would I even be able to find them? The mountains of sand shift their positions each year, dancing to where the wind tells them to put their feet. In my imagination, the tail of a dune swoops over the nest, covering them. "A little more time," the dune says, "then my children will hatch." It is better than thinking about how the boulders were probably blocks of asphalt, embedded with debris, discarded on the beach because there was nowhere else to put them.

VIII. Dunes

Once, a boy dropped into a hole on Mt. Baldy, and the sand covered him. The boy and the hole disappeared. A horde of people worked all day to find him, and just when the muttering that they

would never find him started, a volunteer's shovel struck something eleven feet down. They couldn't find a pulse, but within the ambulance, they noticed he was bleeding.

While the dunes are marching, pockets in the sand open up. The spot refills itself when it notices something is missing. But the dune is never completely the same.

Dunes like the carnivorous Mt. Baldy are restless. They have been trampled on for too many years. Scientists watch as they move 4 ft. to the left one year, 20 ft. to the right one year. How long until they leave entirely?

The waves are carrying the sand out to sea. I know the Lake is not a sea, not technically, but I cannot find the opposite shoreline. The beach I used to play on is covered. The water level is rising, only a sliver of land remains. There's an uncertainty if the land will come back to us. If the waves will return it, and one day the beach will be back, just as we remember it.

I remember the swallows pocking the dunes with their nests. I remember my classmate losing his shoe to quicksand, only to return minutes later to find his Buzz Lightyear sneaker had been spat out by the liquid earth. "Much too bitter for my taste," the sand said, "you can take it back." I remember looking at the grains of sand and realizing they were different colors.

How many acres of my subconscious does Duneland cover? What memories are forgotten so they can be torn down and repurposed? What will stay?

I used to be able to swim to the buoys where the lake bottom was far below my feet. Now I'm afraid of deep water. Growing up is betrayal.

I do not control my memories. Duneland cannot be controlled.

Dunes disappear and resurrect. When I'm not looking, they shift on me. The space Duneland takes up is shrinking with time, eroding, being carried away out to sea, and buried under the lake bottom. After we sold our house it started to sink. Even away from the beach, the soil is more sand than dirt. Maybe the dunes will move to the steel plant and cover it once again. Maybe it will sink into the sea. Maybe it is perfect just where it is, a constant in a changing landscape. Sometimes I can feel my memories shifting and I have to stabilize the holes with filler. No matter how much they erode, the dunes will always be there. When I'm not paying attention, they swallow me up.

Natalie Bradshaw is from Grand Rapids, Michigan. In her free time, she enjoys studying things she doesn't believe in, like Ley Lines and ghosts. What she will do with this information, she has yet to figure out.



earth formation

miles kolmstetter

Miles Kolmstetter is a current sophomore at Cornell. He is from Virginia and enjoys photography in his free time. He is also founder and President of Cornell College Coin Club.

writer's block

kendale mccooy

I want it all brotha, All better
Come up from out west, and I'm
singing long like I'm Bill Withers.
Hope I can beat the rhythm like torn scriptures.
Say my name girl, I was there for sentence.
Praise his name boy, I hope you listen.
Can I make it better, My momma stressin, Please mind ya business.
You the reason girl we still sippin, Tish did coke
Her daughter there, She just turned 12 this past christmas.

Because we do it for the music man.
We use it and abuse it man.

Father let me help him,
Im an amature with my pen, but I promise that I'll get it better,
When I write it's off the record,
When I move its off the record,
My neighbors talkin' reckless, and

These film critics, screw the same hoes
I had to curve riches, I had to change roads
Had the whole family in the stretch Rov,
At the movie smelling like pine cones, Brotha

Because we do it for the music man.
We use it and abuse it man.
We did for the students man.
Before we barely even knew a thing.

West side Chi-Town, I'll have it tatted
Smoke Park raised, In a home of solace. Listen

Don't want to hit the joint if I don't gotta
His weed habit so close to snorting powder
My lil brothers has no father
Scratchin' and itching', But they still prosper

By the time teachers show them love, they aint even want
it By the time teacher' show me love, I ain't even need it
By the time teachers show us love, We was on the TV

Because we do it for the music man.
We use it and abuse it man.
Before we barely even knew a thing.
We did it for the music man.

engelbert humperdink

ben covey

Winner of the Tom Garst Prize for Poetry

Saturday night fun

The kind where the drinking does you, where

You pace like a ghost like,

Your same old wretched self through

A long, narrow corridor with a bathroom at the end.

There is a gentle waltz playing over the loudspeaker

Wild notes, you think, just the same

Violin tears, gentle piano keypress,

Whispering voices from the other side of the wall

What sour notes feed into them?

A stunned audience of old drunks and old stoners

All sit around watching a man perform

It is 10:37 in the evening

And that man is standing on stage in front of 35 people

Sweating through his Elvis costume

And lipsyncing to a cassette tape.

It always kind of empties itself into you, doesn't it
Drug dripping train-drain masochist vibes
"Boxing" painted on plywood next to an alleyway
With a big red arrow and the smell of piss, and moss
And somewhere in the distance, a man lipsyncing to Elvis
With a big stupid cherry-red grin on his face

So now, cracked head, empty eyes, you can't
Because the music won't let you, because
After all the bars close, after everyone goes
Safe and warm in bed someplace, I know
You'll still be there, on a streetcorner
Or, perhaps, just in the back of my head.



mushies

zuri montgomery

god complex

the rough writers

Aseutieut woke to the sound of yesterday's mistakes. That's how he woke up everyday, with the combination of dread and loud music. Aseutieut's alarm went off at the same time as always, but today it brought him nothing but irritation. Today, there lacked the general morning scramble. Feet smacking the linoleum floor, bowls ringing with the pouring of cereal, a mother, shouting for hurried motion. Today, Aseutieut could have rested, nothing would knock him into his brother beside him, threatening to make him crumble and flake.

St. Luncheon's Day. Starbucks was closed; the International House of Pancakes unknown. There was no point in being awake. He had been looking forward to the silence for months, but at the break of dawn it had been stolen from him. Twice he had been scorned, once by his alarm and again by being deprived of serving his purpose; to be consumed. To be uneaten is to be stuck in the shadows forever.

He had to keep his eyes closed to the threat of darkness. He'd kept them closed since knowing what they were, what they did. If he opened them, the darkness would seep into his filling, and he'd be soured. Inedible.

And so he persisted in his sugary form, waiting on the whims of foreign beings to grant him the only release possible to him.

But not today. Today there would be no breakfast.

Aseutieut had dreamed of greater things once, long before he

understood why he had been born. He could feel it pushing at the edge of his consciousness, before it faded away, just like any hope he had of touching it.

He had dreamed of wonderful, terrible things. A place beyond the darkness. A place for him and him alone. Before, when he and his inanimate brother beside him still did not know the terror of indefiniteness, of serving their purpose or rotting away in a pantry, he had thought he held a crumb of that omnipotent knowledge, that glimmering sheen of purpose that had gotten him through those long days on the grocery store shelf, waiting. Once he realized that he was to spend his days going stale on a shelf, waiting for some unseen hand to pluck him up, that he was bound to the will of another, everything he had hoped for had begun to melt away.

All he could do was wait for it to happen. To be rescued from the dull repetition of sitting alone with none but his silent sibling to keep him company.

It had felt like a blessing when he had been finally been chosen. His time had been close. He had been bought, sold like the simple sugary product he was, and he clung to his brother tightly when they were jostled to their newest abode.

But no mouth had chosen him, even after so long. However, with the darkness of this morning, the still, the quiet, he felt a morsel of that call of infinity come closer. It lurked in his mind, whispering to him endless intricacies of worlds beyond his knowledge. What would he learn, should he give in to the call?

He was almost afraid to find out, but it was pulling at him, twisting up his sugary insides, unavoidable. Aseutieut felt the call, the void swaying him, telling him to open his eyes. He resisted, still unsure of whether it would be worth it, worth becoming inedible. And yet, was he just supposed to wait, listening to the rhythm of

pounding feet, the chord of grain on ceramic, the melody of a mother's voice? Aseutieut's life, with its unchanging sameness, left him restless, even if he had no idea what he wanted to do. The repetitive boredom and misery would drive him to madness, and that scared him. He didn't want to lose who he was to the waiting. Anything would be better than waiting for the end of his life forever, uncertain that it would ever even arrive.

The waiting made his sugar sit uncomfortably, like a drying facemask on his crumbly skin. Sometimes, the frosting felt so itchy. Did he have sprinkles? Did the people not like sprinkles? What if they didn't like him and would never eat him at all? There were no answers in the cold silence. The void outside at least talked to him; it gave him a chance of responding, something that nothing else offered. So why not answer the call of the void?

Aseutieut opened his eyes for the first time. He blinked once, then twice, unused to the sensation as sugary flakes fell away from him. It was too much to take in all at once, and so it was a moment before he noticed that he was being watched.

True darkness was terrifying. What was more terrifying, perhaps, was that it wasn't as dark as he had expected. Though his silent brother was now truly gone, and there was not a bit of foil to cling to, he was surrounded by silvery speckles of light and swirling purples and pinks. They folded and twisted before him and he saw that they formed a limitless eye, meeting his own across the void.

"Who are you?"

Aseutieut asked his question, the tremble in his voice nigh imperceptible.

The darkness breathed not a word, and the nothingness seemed more of an answer than Aseutieut had ever been given before. Somehow, despite it, he knew.

“Why am I here?”

There was no response, and this time the silence felt empty of truth. A few of his sprinkles crumbled off and it was like a roar inside the emptiness. Aseutieut grew louder.

“What is my purpose?”

Again the nothing gave no reply.

All this, and all the eye could do was watch. He wondered whether the eye had even heard him or not. He began to feel as if it was testing him, and Aseutieut was not one to tolerate testing. This eye that had maybe been there the whole time. A brother who turned out to be so different, privileged with great vision. It wanted for nothing, for it could see everything.

Unlike him. He would be nothing, the nothing he had always been. Poetic. Creation and destruction; a single Poptart had no say in either.

His fear and despair fueled anger, and he threw his fury into one last question.

“What could I have ever done to deserve this?”

Silence once more.

But a different silence. A silence that invited thought, and Aseutieut found himself thinking a great deal about what he had done to justify this fate. He felt meaning bloom within his motionless pastry body. That there was an answer at all after so long was jarring. That it felt so undeniably true was all but beyond his understanding.

“Nothing,” he said out loud. “I did nothing wrong.”

Both he and the eye were so small, but it did not matter then. It would not matter, not anymore.

Aseutieut let out a long satisfied breath, the edges of his pastry cracking into a small smile. “They are the ones in the wrong.”

The eye blinked, space and reality bending along with it. For a moment he was staring at nothing, he was alone, but he was not afraid. The eye was simply confirming what he already knew.

“If they are wrong, then I am right. If I am right, then I am always right.”

Aseutieut looked at the eye, comprehension dawning. “I am to be a god. I lay claim to that power. Now.”

A second blink, and Aseutieut let out a short breathy laugh.

“Then I shall be a vengeant god, one of justice and war. I will guard against tyranny. Those that did not fear me before will.”

The eye blinked once more, and a voice echoed from the edges of reality, tearing at Aseutieut’s mind and rippling through his entire self. It twisted him, changed him, turned him into what he knew he would be.

“.....So be it.....”

The Rough Writers are a creative writing club on campus! Each of pieces written by the club was written collaboratively by numerous authors, or, more specifically, Griffin Scheel, Max Burg, Madeleine Koenigsberg, Nathan Segelke, Jordan Clemsen, Marlo Webster, Charlie Allen, Delta McKenna, Benton Karesh, Harper Kates, and Charlotte New. They meet every Sunday, 7pm-9pm, in MLK in the commons, and are open to everyone!

necrotic issue: a preemptive epitaph

T. May

I
What I'll say over your coffin:
 A rotting shell,
 just an echo where your soul was,
 you're what you always were –
 a vacant husk of fatherhood.
 I have your eye for faults;
 are you surprised at what I can see?

II
 “He's a good provider,
 a breadwinner,”
 went the party line,
 but, dry mouthed, we starved on
 the crumbs of bitter, chalky love
 you brought us
 until we didn't know
 there were better foods.

III
 But *your* belly strained with smugness,
 full from the living meal
 that was your quiet wife.
 You used her up,

milking out her soul –
 an immolation at your alter –
 who could *possibly* have been her God
 if not you?

IV

“Possessed, mentally ill, inept
 you should become male” –
 you and your gangrenous tongue
 hand-reared all my demons.
 My own words writhed and bit
 to win the arms race, as
 I gave up on a father and
 settled for just you.

V

I want to forgive you
 But that feels like condoning
 your multifarious shit.
 No way in hell you’re right.

VI

Now, I’m chiseling this poem into your name
 in the Church
 engraving all their memories
 with the real you.

These quotes are from contributors, writers and artists alike, about how the COVID-19 crisis has impacted them, since it interrupted our normal year and led to extreme circumstances. We place it here to represent the interruption to our year, and to offer a moment to grieve for the losses that cannot be replaced, whether they be goodbyes unsaid, relationships unfounded, or deaths.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has made me more thankful for all of the everyday things that I take for granted. Things like leaving the house, being able to see friends, feeling safe at the grocery store, and toilet paper.”

emma burnett

“I feel like I’ve lost multiple parts of my life all at once.”

k gielas

“I find I have a deeper appreciation for art and everyone around me; something I was too busy to see before this.”

willow barton

“I feel incredibly fortunate to have the resources I do here [in Minneapolis, MN], and beyond. I have friends who are graduating high school and college with uncertainty of how graduation will be held and others with compromised medical care or access to related resources. While I am still experiencing grief and disappointment, it is not as significant as others’ and for that I am grateful.”

charlie kelley-pegg

“I’ve used the quarantine to sober up after a[n] alcohol and drug fueled year. It’s day 4 and I think I am learning more about who I am. It’s like, I’m aware of my true thoughts for once. It’s a tad harrowing, but it[’s] the first time I felt natural in years.”

anonymous

“The Rough Writers have been writing like never before, all digitally, adapting with technology to keep us writing even in these rough times. We’re very saddened to not finish out the year physically, especially with our founder and a lot of our Rough Board exiting without a ceremony. Every single person who has attended Rough Writers is missed, and everyone who hasn’t, and we all hope that anyone reading our pieces feels the joy we want to impart to everyone in this awful time.”

The Rough Writers

“COVID-19 has made my world quake. I no longer have the opportunity to make memories that will last a lifetime with many of my favorite people, let alone have a chance to say goodbye.

jessica velcich

“I can’t be with people who need me right now. The alternative might be death for someone. I’m one of the lucky ones.”

max burg

“Being cooped up inside all the time has inspired me to start a bunch of new and exciting creative endeavors and then play Zelda all day instead of following through on them.”

kaelin miller

“Going forward, I hope this terrible shared experience can at least be the foundation for greater mutual empathy in the world.”

t. may



how to hold it all together

zuri montgomery

Zuri Montgomery is definitely here, living a life, that's for sure.

a corpse with no legs disagrees with the ideas of charles darwin

the rough writers

While I might be a simple
dead, long-dead corpse,
I see the truth of this
Hellish place we call our home.

It came to me, called out my
name in softly tinkering
melodic shivers down my
nerve-ridden spine; I still
felt, past my death,
even as rats ate my
legs, I still felt; my
forever silence was ruined
as always by thoughts
and feelings, but the
Truth still spoke.

Darwin was wrong; the
world has continued with
the same despicable parasite
for thousands of years;
evolution is not for man;
we are nothing more than
a cosmicly fucked generation
of inbred freaks still alive.
Evolution is the proof that this world is infected.
Descended from crust, man desperately tries
To climb over their inevitable demise.
A genetic scratch of strategic aborations,
primates, able to stop the world from descending into a
last quiet cancer of life.

Wait, the rats whisper now, from the holes
in the walls of this abandoned home.
It was always them.
They created each species,
with the help of the dolphins.

The world suffers not the cruel hand of subtle changes,
for here lie the true gods,
crawling through my desecrated skin.

Their scratches whisper secrets and their teeth inject undeniable
reality,
as flesh falls from bone the world is exposed.
We change not through time but through destruction,
these rats its agent,

their miniscule hands forcing the world to be different.

Darwin,

you bastard.

Your words led me to believe in something.

That I was a single step in a larger journey,
that my line could be where humanity diverges.

Now I know.

I shall be nothing but another meal of the rats.

My impact will be sated stomachs and diseased fur,
like my entire line before me.

I hope you,

too,

Darwin,

Have discovered the disease of your existence.

The Rough Writers are a creative writing club on campus! Each of pieces written by the club was written collaboratively by numerous authors, or, more specifically, Griffin Scheel, Max Burg, Madeleine Koenigsberg, Nathan Segelke, Jordan Clemens, Marlo Webster, Charlie Allen, Delta McKenna, Benton Karesh, Harper Kates, and Charlotte New. They meet every Sunday, 7pm-9pm, in MLK in the commons, and are open to everyone!

dandelion

morgan barnard

The wind picked her up gently and carried her across the green field littered with gold. The harvest had almost begun, and there was corn and wheat and beans towering over the little Plants, the shrubs, wildflowers, and weeds. Clouds hung in the sky like wet clothes on a line, Drying in the heat and cool wind. Today was her day. Dressed in her flowy white dress, it was her day to fly. From being birthed In a buttery yellow that radiated happiness to maturing to her pure white figure, she glowed in The fall sunshine. She yearned to fly since she was a sprout, now she blossomed into pristine Perfection and took to the sky for the first time. Her delicate feathers bristled in the nurturing Breeze, damaged by the slightest harsh movement. She was not strong, nor did she have any sort Of protection for herself. Dirt would soil her in a second, a violent touch would send her to ruin.

Her mother had wanted her close, like the rest of her siblings, for she knew the evils and dangers Of the world and sought to protect her innocent daughter from them.
But she was ready for the world, ready to find her own spot and nestle there, creating children of Her own in the coming spring. She was clean, bright, and full of wonder as she traversed the Field, never believing for one moment she would crash.

Morgan Barnard is a senior who has accomplished some pretty amazing stuff at Cornell College, most importantly the ability to believe in herself. She is a runner, writer, and a teacher. After all this lovely time at Cornell, she is taking off to do wonderful things in the world.



mining town
miles kolmstetter

Miles Kolmstetter is a current sophomore at Cornell. He is from Virginia and enjoys photography in his free time. He is also founder and President of Cornell College Coin Club.

rattled

maddy lewis

The metallic sound of change in a jar jolted her awake. She ran a hand over her face and through her hair as though she could rake away her weariness. The television was the only light left in the room, flickering dimly, the screen paused on a shot from a movie she almost recognized. She would have to figure out what was wrong with the cable this time, she realized begrudgingly.

Sighing, she sat forward, rubbing at the crick in her neck. “Rob?” She called, realizing that he hadn’t announced his presence as he usually did.

Another metallic clatter, almost identical to the first, brought her up short. “Rob?” She said again, standing up slowly. She tried to turn on a lamp, and with a whining flash it shorted, plunging the room into darkness. Cursing, she reached under the table, grappling for the candles and matches that she kept there. It wasn’t that she was afraid of the dark per se, but there was always a moment of blind terror when she was faced with perfect blackness.

It took a few tries for her to successfully strike a match, and the small flame did little to warm the chilled pit in her stomach. She clutched the candle like a vise as she started toward the front door.

The hulking shadow of her husband still stood in the hall, and she squinted, uneasy. The candle’s dim light flickered, and she shuffled closer. “Rob, the lights are out again.”

He didn’t turn to her, but he did shift, and she realized when

he produced the metallic rattle once more that he was shaking the change jar. "Rob? What are you doing?"

Candle light caught a flash of glass, and she ducked wildly, crying out in shock. The jar shattered against the wall and coins rained onto the wooden floor around her. The candle rolled away, guttering out, and she looked up from where she was crouched, terror and shock freezing her blood. She squinted through the sudden darkness, but Rob was already walking away. His footsteps were heavy, and when he disappeared into the dark house she slowly stood. Her whole body was trembling and she stared hard at the cooling candle, tears gathering in her eyes.

Rob had never been given to anger.

Rob's gentleness had always been what she loved most about him. The patience he'd always shown her, the quiet support, even when she'd put them in debt, even when she'd begged him to buy them the old farm house, he'd never raised his voice, had never even shown any displeasure. He was jovial, and he was delicate with her.

The lights buzzed back on around her, and she knew that he'd flipped the breaker, but she couldn't bring herself to move. Glass and coins surrounded her, and she realized with a little sob that there was blood on them. Though she couldn't feel any pain, she knew that it was hers.

Somewhere deeper in the house she heard her husband's heavy footsteps; he was preparing for bed. Still shaking, she stood and shuffled through the mess, cringing at the feeling of cool glass against the soles of her feet. She needed to clean up. It was impossible to know how Rob would respond if she didn't before he had to walk through it in the morning. Shaking even harder, she began sweeping the glass and coins into a pile, her tears falling into the pile, turning the black blood pink.

It was supposed to be their adventure fund.

They worked hard. Rob left for work well before sunrise, and on days like this one didn't return until after sundown. There was always roadwork to be done, and never enough broad-shouldered men to do it, so they worked him to the bone. She worked a normal 9 to 5, for which she was grateful, but the supermarket didn't pay particularly well, and she still had college loans that they could hardly afford to pay. It had been two years of her life wasted, something that she regretted trying to do when she thought of the half-finished communications degree that would likely never have been used anyway.

Rob had always been encouraging about it, telling her that he didn't mind the extra expense. He promised her that someday they would steal away on an adventure for the ages. They'd see the world. But, as she drew her bleeding hands away from the small pile of glass and coins, she realized just how little money was in the jar, and wondered if that was what had finally gotten to him. Maybe she was the reason that he was still in this crummy little town putting in too many hours for a job that worked him too hard. She bit her lip and scooped the pile into the corner, out of the way. There wasn't much money there, but every penny counted, at least that was what he had always told her. Her feet were starting to sting, and her hands were shaking, so she promised herself that she would sort the coins out of the glass tomorrow.

Slowly, she made her way down the hallway to the bathroom and paused. The bedroom light was on, and something inside rattled and then crashed. Tonight, she decided, she would give him a wide berth. Something was clearly wrong. So, she ducked into the bathroom, locking the door. With trembling hands she turned on the water and wet a towel. There was blood everywhere.

It hurt to dab at the cuts on her hand and feet with the hot water, but she kept trying to clean them as best she could, and when she was satisfied, she perched herself on the edge of the tub to pour peroxide over each cut one by one. She watched it fizz, listening intently, afraid that Rob would hear her or need the bathroom. But outside everything was silent, and once the peroxide had finished she wrapped the wounds and brushed her teeth. The bedroom was now dark and silent, and she slipped soundlessly past it, making herself as comfortable as she could be on the couch. Her feet were burning, and with all of the lights off she could swear that there was something moving through the room. For a while she tried to convince herself to calm down and sleep, but when a shuffling sound stopped just behind her head, she shot upright and turned on the lamp, whirling around, expecting to find something there. Instead, she was left staring at the grungy red carpet that covered the living room floor.

She stared hard at it for a moment as though she could somehow conjure something to be afraid of. But after a while she realized that there really wasn't anything there. Still, she didn't turn the light off when she laid back down, and for some reason she was able to close her eyes and sleep knowing that it was on.

It was nearing midday the next day when she heard heavy footsteps in the hallway. Her whole body seized, and she felt her breath accelerate. She'd been trying to sort through the glass, and she hastily grabbed a larger piece, tucking it behind her back before cautiously approaching the hallway. However, no intruder stood there. Instead, Rob brushed past her, moving to the fridge.

"Rob?" She said, the sound choked and uncertain. "Sweetie, shouldn't you be at work?"

He ignored her, sorting through the fridge silently.

“Honey? Is today a day off?”

He grunted, still not turning, and she limped a few steps closer.

“If it is, we really need to talk.”

In an instant his hand connected with her cheek, and she found herself collapsing against the counter. Lights flashed behind her eyes, and she sagged, shocked and hurt. Tears welled, but she refused to let them fall in front of him, so she blinked hard. Her cheek ached, but when she looked up Rob had retrieved a bottle of water and was leaving the kitchen.

She stood on trembling legs and eased after him, watching as he left the house. When the door closed she felt as if whatever force held her up was severed, and she collapsed, legs splayed around her like a broken doll. Outside, the engine of Rob’s old Toyota fired up and faded.

Eventually, she must have stood. But the day was a blur of mechanical numbness. She wandered the house, starting and abandoning the activities she ought to have enjoyed. Anything to distract from the burning sensation in her cheek. When Rob returned she was sitting on the couch she’d slept on, staring at the television, though she’d turned it on to find it still frozen. Now the screen was dark, and Rob was home early.

She did not look up when he entered. Or when he sat beside her. He was close enough that she knew if she reached out she could touch him, but she did not. When he reached toward her she flinched, and he dropped his hand. It settled on his lap, palm up, and she stared at it hard. The palm was broad and square and calloused. She’d always loved his hands.

Her cheek felt as though it had been scalded.

“Why.” She said, and it wasn’t a question, it was a soft de-

mand.

He didn't answer, but his hand withdrew, and this time when he reached for her she stayed frozen. His touch was feather light as he drew his fingers across her neck and onto her shoulder, brushing her hair back.

"What did I do?" She asked him, and his hand stilled, her hair still caught between his fingers. "I just don't understand."

He heaved a sigh, and his hand moved to her shoulder, rubbing it gently in a foreign gesture of comfort. She stiffened, and he stopped, dropping his hand again. Finally, she looked up into his face, and he turned away from her. His jaw was working as though he wanted to say something, but nothing was forthcoming.

"Is this about work? Did something happen?" She prompted.

He didn't answer, and she felt her body tense.

"Did you lose your job?" She asked, and when he stood abruptly and left, she felt something inside of her shudder.

What would they do?

Somewhere in the back of the house she heard him shuffling around, perhaps going to bed. She wondered how this could have happened. He'd been working for the same company since high school, and he was a hardworking and dedicated employee. Slowly, she stood, swaying, and some of the numbness had subsided. Pain lanced across her feet, and a new kind of fear drove her toward the bathroom.

That night, she crept like a shadow into their bedroom. Rob had already turned out the lights, and he laid in bed, staring at the ceiling. When she slipped under the covers beside him he didn't say anything, just turned his back to her. She gazed at it for a moment, considering reaching out to touch him, to offer some semblance of comfort, but instead she rolled away from him, and nestled deeper

under the covers.

Sleep had never been so terrifying. Her dreams were riddled with nightmares, and she found herself jolting awake on multiple occasions, spending most of the night in a half-slumber. Once, she could have sworn she watched something hulking crawl on all fours from the room, next she woke to the smell of putrid meat and the sound of smacking lips, but when she woke near dawn Rob slept peacefully beside her, and whatever she thought she'd seen was conspicuously absent.

Though the sky was still gray and watery with predawn light she slipped out of bed with the intent of showering, hoping that that could somehow wash away the horrific things she'd dreamt. The cuts on her hands and feet seemed to be healing, as the pain had dulled to a throb, and she could now walk with only a slight limp, making it much easier to move silently.

In the dreary light, she stole around the bed and considered Rob's peaceful face affectionately. He looked young when he slept, and she leaned over, careful not to disturb the mattress, and pressed a tender kiss to his forehead. She knew as soon as her lips touched his skin that something was wrong.

What was normally warm and soft was now cold and hard as stone, and she stood quickly, a hand flying to press against her lips, as though she could discern the problem there. As she did so, however, a broad, cold palm shot out and caught ahold of it. Rob's eyes were open, and she cried out, startled by the suddenness. However, his grip was strong, and she succeeded only in tripping backwards. As her weight shifted and his grip tightened she heard a sickening crunch and a burning pain shot through her wrist. Still, he held her, seemingly unconcerned by her screams of pain as he stood from bed.

“Rob, stop!” She shrieked, tears falling freely down her face, “Rob, you’re hurting me!”

Rob did not stop. He reached past where he held her and took hold of her hair, dropping her wrist, and began dragging her from the room. Her hand hung at an unnatural angle, and she cradled it close to her body, fighting desperately to catch some sort of footing.

She was screaming, desperately trying to break free from his grasp, but he hardly seemed to notice. He was dragging her toward the front door.

Outside, it was cold, and the sky was starting to turn into a lighter, uglier shade of gray. The gravel of their drive tore at the bandages on her feet, and she kicked at it, seeking purchase, and succeeding only in getting gravel between the bandages, tearing at the wounds on her feet.

He did not open the door to the truck. Instead, he hauled her past it. She tried to grip at it with her unbroken hand. Rob shook her hard, and her head jerked with the motion as though she was no more than a rag doll. The bandage on her hand tore, the bumper slicing open her palm, renewing her screams. Drops and smears of blood marked their passage across their driveway. When they reached the edge of the drive, he dropped her, and turned briefly to rummage in the bed of his truck. Realizing that this would be her only chance, realizing that whatever he was about to do was sure to be fatal, she leapt to her feet and ducked into the fields, dry and tall and awaiting harvest. Behind her, Rob let out a roar of fury, but she didn’t turn to face him.

She’d never been fast, but now she was sprinting. The corn was tearing at her exposed skin, smacking at her injured wrist, and

if she weren't already nauseous from the terror of hearing someone crashing through the corn behind her then she would have been from the pain lancing up her arm. In comparison, the sensation of the rough ground tearing at her bandaged and bleeding feet was only vaguely noticeable. She didn't know if she could count this as a blessing.

Behind her, Rob was gaining.

Then she tripped.

She pitched forward, screaming as her wrist was crushed again beneath her. Hastily, she twisted to figure out what had caught her foot, and screamed again, scrambling clumsily backward.

A corpse lay before her, skinless and grinning up at the sky. Somehow she knew who it had been. Her whole body felt as though it had been frozen solid, and when the thing that looked like Rob burst into the clearing, she could only stare at her husband's decaying corpse.

The creature wearing his skin loomed closer, stepping easily past the decomposing body, and she finally looked at it. The skin was starting to sag.

Its black eyes bored into her, and she tried to stand only to have it bat her down again. It was baring very inhuman fangs at her, and when she didn't try to get back up it crouched down, and she recognized the hunched four-legged gait from her nightmares. She had slept beside it. She gagged, forcing herself to swallow the bile back down, afraid to turn her face away even to throw up.

The skin was getting looser and looser, and she watched in the ugly gray light as the creature within seemed to begin shedding it. A scaly head emerged through the growing mouth of her husband's skin, and soon it was followed by gray-green shoulders and torso. It was a horrible, knobby creature that considered her with

its black-eyed gaze, pointed teeth bared in what almost looked like a grin.

She screamed again. The creature reached forward and grasped her throat with a clawed hand, cutting off the air as well as the sound. It raised its second hand, long curved talons already dripping with something dark and viscous. At its feet her husband's skin pooled like an abandoned robe, his rotting corpse laying a few feet past.

When it slashed at her middle, she only wheezed, and though she could have struggled, she knew that it would have done no good. She settled instead for closing her eyes tightly as it tore at her again, and she realized that Rob would never take her on that adventure.

The young supermarket clerk had never been talkative, but she was especially quiet today. She walked in with a limp, and when her manager asked her if she was feeling well she only shrugged. When the news came that two corpses had been found in the cornfields near her house, she hadn't seem surprised. In fact, she seemed entirely unaffected. But, then, she had always been awfully hard to rattle.

Maddy Lewis is a transfer student in the International Relations major. Her passion, however, is for exploring the darker, more unsettling aspects of literature, and avoiding direct sunlight.



oaks

natalie bradshaw

At home in Michigan, Natalie Bradshaw is the pack leader of three large dogs. When she is at school and dogless, she distracts herself by writing, reading, and taking long walks.



natural wonders

miles kolmstetter

Miles Kolmstetter is a current sophomore at Cornell. He is from Virginia and enjoys photography in his free time. He is also founder and President of Cornell College Coin Club.

waiting on savannah

zash fleming

In your dreams, a lulling whine, a mechanical scream shivers you awake. it's night time. you look out your window. there's a street-light, which you see as a puddle in the center of the street. its dirty pool lazily pulses a deep blue and tart orange. there's a car on fire outside your house on a school night and somebody's getting very, very nervous. you would be more nervous because of the flames right outside your window, and if you tried to do something you might know there was nothing at all that mysterious about purple ferns. the Beasts, encouraged and encased by the flames, speak in time to note that when next you see your dandelions, they would be short and stunted; the worst foragers in the wood.

the type which prefers the light of the morning sun, swooping out of the river and over the bridge, almost all of them racing like a pack of centipedes, with only the thinnest pincers to break the surface and crawl over. They all drift through the air like slow-moving shades of water, loose in a thread. They all wish to live in beauty but feel most strongly their fear of the dark.

for Them the darkness is the biggest thing, and it always wants to eat, and will even eat everything that comes close. it is a very dark world, with its towering peaks, its endless darkness, and its fact of permanence and hardness. even the hope of a better world does not really lessen its evil.

the future is perilous, and there is no mistaking which comes first.
the answer comes first: the rising of terror in the minds of men. do
not be subjecting yourself to its ravages. Let's not forget the waste of
your young, sweetling, neighbor's garden. our own streets could be
wonderful with the goodness you've so neglected.

Zash is a senior Creative Writing major who has found a spark in poetry and is honestly just vibing. They would love to see their work somewhere someday, somehow.

dark rabbit

the rough writers

So dark.

The bottom of a well.

The space between eyeball and eyelid.

The kind of feeling a person gets when they
wander along the road at night.

Darkness, but kind of a comforting darkness this time

But not too comforting.

Then it wouldn't be dark

And if it isn't, dark, what even is it?

If it isn't dark, it's only empty.

It isn't anything at all

A rabbit, but like one that's real dark.

This rabbit sure has dark fur, it's fur is black.

Um, like, a black mouse, maybe?

No, that's a stupid idea.

I can't just keep going on about animals.

But I was talking about living animals.

What about dead animals? That's pretty dark if you are me.

Man, now I'm bummed out. I don't like darkness.

But darkness doesn't care whether you like it or not.

Darkness primordial.

It has existed before us and after us.

Dark Souls is a pretty good game.

The rabbit thinks so too.
The rabbit likes how good a dark soul is
How terrifying the essence of something being corrupted, being
transformed.
The dark rabbit, dark soul.
Steps out of a dark Cave into morning light.
There outta nowhere a random knight
Dark rabbit end it with a single bite.
Dark rabbit hears screams and fear
Then someone counting reaches his ear.
Dark rabbit wonders, what could this be?
Then a holy artifact blows him to smithereens.
Now dark rabbit rests deep down below
all sorts of dark souls call this torment home.
Dark rabbit smiles, glad he did wrong.
Dark rabbit finally found a place to belong.

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portrait of a sleeping father

addie pacha

Shadow italics trickle through his mind.
I watch the day leave him
From his spot on the recliner, sliding
Back to a time before he had a life or a body or me.
Sleep must be what waiting for life is like.
He snores and I want to stick something in his mouth
To see what happens.
I listen to the rest of the house .
He shuffles his shoulders and the snoring stops.
I missed my chance to stick something in his mouth.
I stand up from the floor and try not to wake him,
But sleep is spread thin,
And I hear the moment he wakes up.



1964

miles kolmstetter

Miles Kolmstetter is a current sophomore at Cornell. He is from Virginia and enjoys photography in his free time. He is also founder and President of Cornell College Coin Club.

alice reimagined: a dystopia not found in wonderland

chantelle reider

Although the windows were wide and the ceilings high, Alice could not shake the feeling of being crushed inside her own body. A gray sunlight filtered weakly through the panes of glass, creating a square-dancing pattern only the bravest could attempt. On the edges of the crystal box that she found herself trapped in, the trees bounced and swayed with the ferocious lamentation of the wind. Looking at the putrid grass, she could see shadows sway on it, in a rhythm only ghosts could dance to. Gazing to her right, all she could see was a monstrous figure reclining on the grass as mottled leaves rotted and fell around the vaguely humanoid form. Emanating from that direction, was a terrible humming sound.

Could they have re-engineered bees as well? For it was a buzzing sound, however, it was atrociously loud, as if the queen bee was 30x her original size and angry. There were chairs, but many of them looked dilapidated and Alice wouldn't have been surprised if a rat crawled out and decided to have a chat with her.

A faint thudding sound ricocheted down the hallway and the buzzing stopped. Muscles twitching, Alice crouched behind the singular intact chair and waited. Her mind drifted, hovering on the

peripheral vision of life, as she anticipated the inevitable. After what felt like hours, she cautiously stood. Something had shifted. The room didn't feel as cramped or claustrophobic.

Eventually, the reason for that made itself known. To her right, the sprawling giant was no more. The grass was thick with blood, tar-like in nature, and strong in scent. An enormous detached hand flopped listlessly on the dead ground. Dismemberment, it appeared, was fairly common around these parts. Abruptly the wind shifted, and the odor felt like it was burning her nostrils, clawing its way into her brain. Alice doubled over, retching and spitting in an attempt to rid herself of the taste. As she did so, the floor bubbled and roiled, knocking her to the ground.

A voice spoke, "So you've smelled a giant's blood. Once you've done that, there's no going back."

She inhaled sharply, thankful that the walls shook no more, "Where are you? Show yourself, coward."

"Oh," The voice sounded surprised, "I don't think you want me to do that just yet. Humans are so fragile, you see."

Once again, the room had changed and the thudding started up its persistent pattern. It was just faint enough that she needed to strain her ears, but it was steady. The beige lockers on the walls flickered in and out of existence, while the fluorescent light shone down, throbbing in time with her quickening pulse. Out of curiosity, she eased open one of the lockers, and instantly slammed it shut. A soft thud sounded behind her and she whirled around. All she could see was a small table set with a teapot and one cup. Alice already knew what it was going to say.

"Drink Me."

A small voice piped up, "That was rather rude, wouldn't you

agree?”

Alice rubbed her eyes until she saw sparklers on the inside of her eyelids, this could not have just happened. Again.

There was a person inside of the locker. Or maybe not a person, per se, but a human-passing figure nonetheless. No, she refused to go through this again.

The yellow sun was not shining today, only the gray.

Chantelle Reider is a senior studying English and enjoys writing when she's not coaching figure skating or petting cats. Politics, writing experiments, and literary analysis are all big parts of her life.

barbie hates the poor

the rough writers

A symbol of capitalism

A toy

A doll in an impossibly perfect form.

Given consciousness, given the ability to feel

Of course it hates the poor.

They want and cannot have it.

The system prevents them from success

From happiness

In this material world.

This material world. The world she was built for.

The world she was built to die for.

And so, as she hates the dead, she hates the poor.

To be a doll, to be a dear.

Her life is one of sacrifice.

And what a life.

To be played with,

And to be loved.

And inevitably, to be destroyed.

Destroyed by this love.

How could Barbie ever love?

So of course she hates the poor.

The poor aren't worth dying for,
They are naught but another one of her chains
Dragging her

Down

Down

Down

Her face is not one to see the dirt and grime
She is meant to be a torch,
And undying unattainable flame
A hideously unattainable form
Which none are worthy to hold

Turpentine wipes the face
Reveals the plastic
The hurt takes shape
Her legs replaced with G.I. Joe
Una muñeca
Articulated limbs grown stiff
From disuse
Ken facing similar abuse

But perfection must persist
So despite her decay
She remains
What cannot be obtained

An image
How vain

She is not poor
Not pitiable
Not fallible
Not dirty
She can't be
She's your Barbie.

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chaos

k gielas

Kate (K) Gielas is a senior studio art and theater double major. To see their portfolio, please visit www.kategielas.com.

shining things

zuri montgomery

Your skin is a canvas half finished
A veneer of grey dust sprinkled in patterns across your skin
Like iron filings and I want to be the magnet
Pulling at the designs from within

There I will move in slow concentric circles
Mimicking the motion of Plato's celestial orbs
Moving in this holiest way
Whirling like al-Ghazali would have wanted us to

I've been learning about silence
I've been thinking about your mouth

I'd like to buy you everything old and shining
Like a dragon hoard you a cave full of riches
Like a beta fish build you a nest full of glimmer
I'll hoard your patterns and your favors
right inside this softer door
Ive got twenty seven shelves of you
starting at my ankles and going up
I built them on my bones for stability but they have tendons for
support

once i am towering with shelves of us
we can
fill them up with shining things like us

Zuri Montgomery is a junior whose interests include doing things, circling amongst the pines, naming the one with fire bursting from her eyes and from her mouth, the one with a long tongue and a throne of skulls, the one who creates what she must devour.

math does not equal romance

the rough writers

What is math without love?
Adding and subtracting, dividing and multiplying
Without that most sacred feeling
there would be nothing.
No passion behind the slightly curved edge of a minus
No meaning behind two numbers becoming as one.

I could not belong without love,
there would be no point, no meaning
to my constant adding
I would be alone.
Always longing to add myself to another,
a plus without a destination.

Divided into multiple
answers, but which
mas o menos
divisibilidad en numeros grandes
The sloping upward curve
the depressing regression
Desire to right my angles

To even the ratio
To fill the percent
I reach for the tangent
of your chord

The circumference of
this feeling
Te amo, yo quiero
You spin me
a different quadrant
A plane needs 2 points
but I am not on the same plane
as you

Pythagoras.
You are my one true love.
My math daddy.
You have changed me, divided and subtracted
but added so much more.
And yes, even multiplied my wellbeing
And then you squared it
Creating an exponential equation that represents our love
My asshole is a parabola now
And it is always welcome to you
Dearest Pythagoras.
Don't mind me, just cleaning up the rest of this poem.
So I wipe off the chalkboard, erasing the formulas
The students all begging for mercy,
But all their cries are a jumbled mess,

As my eraser becomes more dirty.
I chuck it in the trash, given gravity's acceleration
At 9.81 m/s^2 , I find with elation,
I made it on the first try! Instantly,
I gain respect from students across the nation.
A Plus...that would be my grade,
As a teacher, a person, and in bed, (I'm so sorry for this...)
Goodbye, negative thoughts, you have been canceled out,
Multiplied by -1 in my head.

The Rough Writers are a creative writing club on campus! Each of pieces written by the club was written collaboratively by numerous authors, or, more specifically, Griffin Scheel, Max Burg, Madeleine Koenigsberg, Nathan Segelke, Jordan Clemsen, Marlo Webster, Charlie Allen, Delta McKenna, Benton Karesh, Harper Kates, and Charlotte New. They meet every Sunday, 7pm-9pm, in MLK in the commons, and are open to everyone!

an unwelcome awakening (in which mistakes were made)

chantelle reider

This is why I don't leave the house. All my plan consisted of was going home, eating far too much pizza, and kicking back on the couch. Unfortunately, that wasn't what the universe had in mind. After picking up pizza (What? I'm a broke student, you can't expect me to pay for delivery, can you?) and driving home, I noticed something was off. I couldn't figure out what it was until something horrid assaulted my sense of smell. A weird scent filled the hallways in my apartment complex. Shrugging it off, I walked into my apartment with the intent of lighting some candles to ward off the smell.

That was my first mistake.

Fortunately for me, my mom had prepared for the dreaded scent attack, and she had sent this giant box of great smelling candles along with a vaguely threatening note telling me that these candles better be put to good use. If you're reading this, thank you, Mom. I mean it. What better use than to cover-up a nasty smelling apartment? Before the pizza got cold, I rushed around setting out candles in various places and lighting them, while also trying to open as many windows as possible.

I don't even remember eating the pizza or going to bed. But I was awoken by a strange rustling sound. I grumpily got out of bed, but then a flash of panic shot through me, I had forgotten to put out

the candles.

Running around, my thoughts swirled frantically in my mind, overlapping one another, *The whole house is probably going down in a fiery blaze and I'm going to be made to pay for everything and I'll have to live with my parents, which means I'll never find true love and I'll die alone.*

Oh. I'm an idiot. Nothing's on fire, just the curtains are rustling in the chilly breeze.

A deep voice croaks from around the corner, "So. You're finally awake."

Whipping around, my heart pounds as I address the shadowy figure in the doorway, "What? Who are you? How did you get in?"

The shadowy figure snickered softly, but said nothing.

I groped blindly behind me to see if I could grab one of my kitchen knives, "Whoever you are, I hope you know who I am and what I do. I literally specialize in getting rid of people."

"An admirable defense, but I'm afraid that won't work on me."

"Who are you? Get in the light so I can see."

A deep chuckle comes from near the doorway, "Okay, I'm coming."

As the figure walks into the kitchen, I mentally run through all of my scenarios that could possibly happen and how I could defend myself. As this humanoid silhouette becomes more illuminated, it's clearly someone with a suit and tie on. He steps slowly into the light. The figure is tall and thin, with a green tint to his skin, sunken red eyes, and a-

Interrupting my thoughts, he speaks, "I am Abezethibou and I have been sent from the Realm of Shadows. I'm here with a message."

I tried to keep a straight face.

He growled, “Human, why are you contorting your face?”

I gestured for him to continue speaking.

Clearing his throat, “As I was saying, I have been sent by my commander to- goddammit, what are you doing? Why are you laughing?”

My voice cracked as I struggled to hold back my laughter, “I’m sorry, pl-please continue.”

“I’m terrifying, you idiot, you should be crying and hiding.”

He sounded genuinely frustrated.

“I’m sorry” I muttered, while trying not to grin, “But I just can’t deal with that.”

“Excuse me, I am a DEMON.”

“Demon or not, I can’t take you seriously with th-that fedora on.” As I finally collapse into laughter, “It just makes you look ridiculous.”

He snarled, clearly trying to maintain his frightening stance, “I have killed thousands of people and petrified even more than you could imagine.”

My laughter stops and I narrow my eyes, “Oh, are we going to play that game? Who’s killed more people? ‘Cause I think I’ll be right up there with you, buddy.”

Baffled, he peered down at me, “But you’re, like, twelve. How...”

I interrupted him, “I’m twenty-two, thank you very much. And I told you, I’m used to dealing with beasts such as yourself.”

I can’t help it; I start to try and fight a smirk because this situation is so incredibly preposterous. I’m debating with a demon, probably sent to tell me some horrifying message, and the subject we’re arguing over is his choice of headwear. What did I do to de-

serve this life?

Fidgeting with his tie, he says bewilderedly, “This reaction isn’t in the manual.”

He yanks out a small booklet, from seemingly, his ass, and begins to page through it. Meanwhile, I’m at a loss for words, which rarely happens. Tugging at my pajama shirt, I feel a little self-conscious because I am standing in front of a demon in nothing but my undies and an old camp shirt.

He glares up at me, “Why are you stretching your shirt out? You look weird and it’s very distracting.”

“Why would you say that? Now I feel even more awkward.”

“I have to find the correct response to a human threatening me. This wasn’t covered in class,” Grumbling to himself, he gives me another nasty look and looks back down to his book.

Rolling my eyes, I step forward and cover the book with my hand, “You’re seriously just going to invade my apartment and not tell me why?”

“I AM TRYING TO FIND SOME INFORMATION.”

“Jesus, alright, alright,” My eyes widen after I realize what I just said.

He growls in frustration, “You are the most aggravating mortal I have ever had the inconvenience of meeting.”

I shrug, “Yeah, I get that a lot.”

He rolls his eyes, but ignores me.

The problem with having attention deficit disorder, is that I need to always be doing something and I can’t focus on things that don’t matter for more than like, three seconds. I sigh loudly, hoping to get this bothersome demon’s attention. It doesn’t work. So, I sigh louder. No indication that he heard me. I give up on sighing and begin questioning.

“What’s your name, again? Abraham? Bastian? Zella? Or was it – ”

“Irksoe human child, the name I have been given is Abezethibou.”

Hmmm okay, I don’t know how to pronounce that name, since they decided to put every vowel in there, but I’ll try.

“I’ll call you... Bezzy? Yes, that’s good, Bezzy.”

He exhales, “If that’s what helps you sleep at night, call me whatever you like,” He drops his book down with a resounding thud, “I can’t find the information I need, you’re exasperating, and I can’t fail again!”

I can’t help but feel a little bad. I don’t want Bezzy to fail his mission, but I don’t even know what assignment he’s on, “I know I’ve asked you this already, but maybe I can help. What’s your all-important task?”

Rolling his eyes, he says, “I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but you’re the exception to most humans.”

I dramatically wipe my eyes, “That’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever said to me,” and then I collapse into giggles.

He groans, “Fake crying and mocking a demon. You are infuriating. But I’m afraid I can’t tell you much. The main point of my mission is to find a human named Antonia. I wasn’t told anything else. But I was also told that you would behave like every other human I’ve had to find. But you just had to mess me up.”

“Well, excuse me, for not cowering and crying in fear. But here, take this to heart, since I say this very sincerely. You are the most aggravating demon I have ever encountered. Plus, you’re wearing a god-awful fedora!”

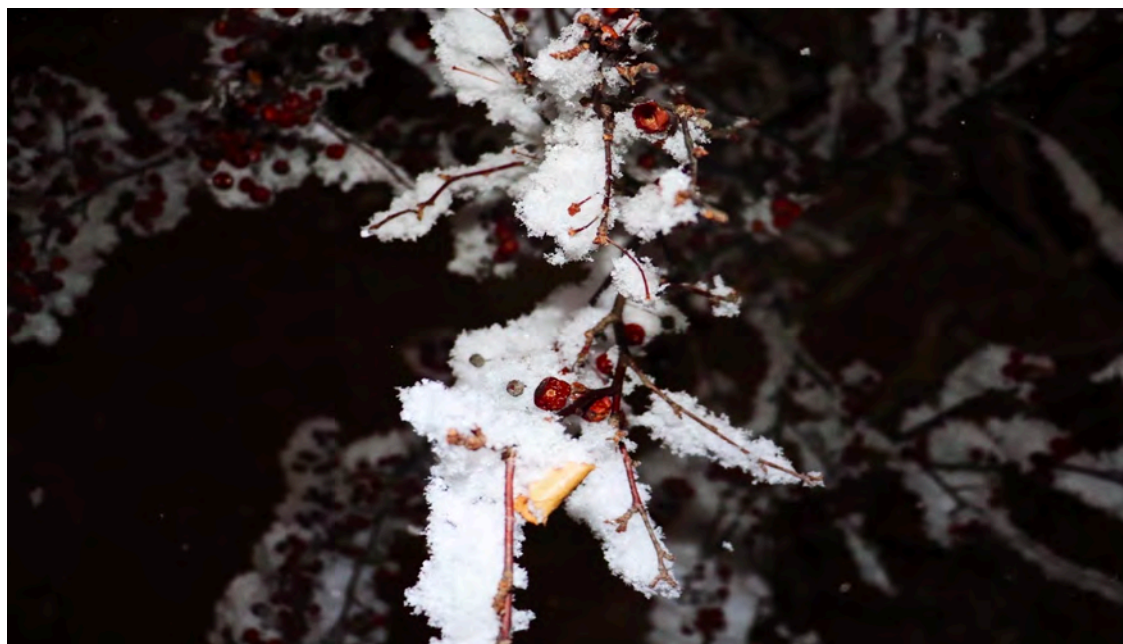
“Watch your language.”

“Are you serious?”

He stonily glowers down at me.

“You’re kidding me. A demon who cares about swearing?” I cradle my head in my hands, because this is all so strange and it’s far too early for this. I’m used to dealing with monsters, but not oxymoronic (emphasis on the moronic) demons like Bezzy.

Chantelle Reider is a senior studying English and enjoys writing when she’s not coaching figure skating or petting cats. Politics, writing experiments, and literary analysis are all big parts of her life.



frosted branches

jessica velcich

For Jessica Velcich, photography is an escape from the norm. Not many people know that photography is a passion in the artist's life. She likes to capture moments to remember forever.

boy: minnesota- curated

charlie kelley-pegg

Late night drive leads to
Plate of chips and salsa
Placed in front of Minnesota-raised
Colombian boy
Scoops up chip full of salsa
Takes bite without a second thought
And two seconds later his taste buds
Are shot
He curses his muted tongue
The one that has grown accustomed to
Tatertot hotdish
And soothing apple pies
He's supposed to be able to handle
The spices of Medellín

He's supposed to know

The flavours of Bogotá

He curses his muted taste receptors

Between heaving exhales

of dragon breaths

of fire

Huff and puff

Way

Huff

Too

Huff

Spicy

The next day he realises

He still doesn't know how to cut a mango

He should know how to cut a mango

He's supposed to know how to cut a mango

Minnesota-curated Colombian boy

Resorts to using his bare hands

Fingers tearing desperately
Trying to separate the fruit's flesh from its skin
Later he stumbles over Spanish homework
Struggling to conjugate verbs in tenses unknown
He types words into Google translate
In a last resort to connect
Coloniser supreme white man
Professional Spanish to English translator uncle
Corrects the grammar
With utmost accuracy and timeliness
He's supposed to know his own language
It makes no sense
That he does not know the language
Better than his gringo uncle
For the Minnesota-raised Colombian boy
It is like this was all a failed test
Of what he knows to be true.

Charlie Kelley-Pegg (lovingly referred to as Charizard or Baby Goof) is a transmasculine Colombian adoptee who was raised in Minneapolis, MN. Since graduating from the Perpich Arts High School in 2019 with a concentration in Creative Writing, Charlie is currently pursuing a BA in English and Creative Writing while continuing to perform spoken word.



foul
zuri montgomery

Zuri Montgomery is definitely here, living a life, that's for sure.

what do they say about the young?

kaelin miller

A week ago
On sort of a whim
I drove the fifteen minutes
To the Denny's
On Harlem
The only place alive
In the hour between 2 and 3
And I asked the waitress,
A friendly woman with blue eyeshadow
And loose, wrinkly skin
For a glass of orange juice for myself
And a Salted Caramel & Banana Cream Pancake Breakfast
For my friend.

And when I was halfway through my orange juice
And the waitress had returned
And politely put the pancakes across from me
I poured three packets worth
Of Splenda onto the table
And arranged the little crystals
Into a sigil I had found on the internet
And spoke an incantation

Which I can no longer recall verbatim
But which entailed some amount of entreating
And offering of sacrifice
And there appeared
In the booth seat across from me
An odd little man
Old but ageless
Dressed in furs and feathers
And wearing an indescribable sort of hat.

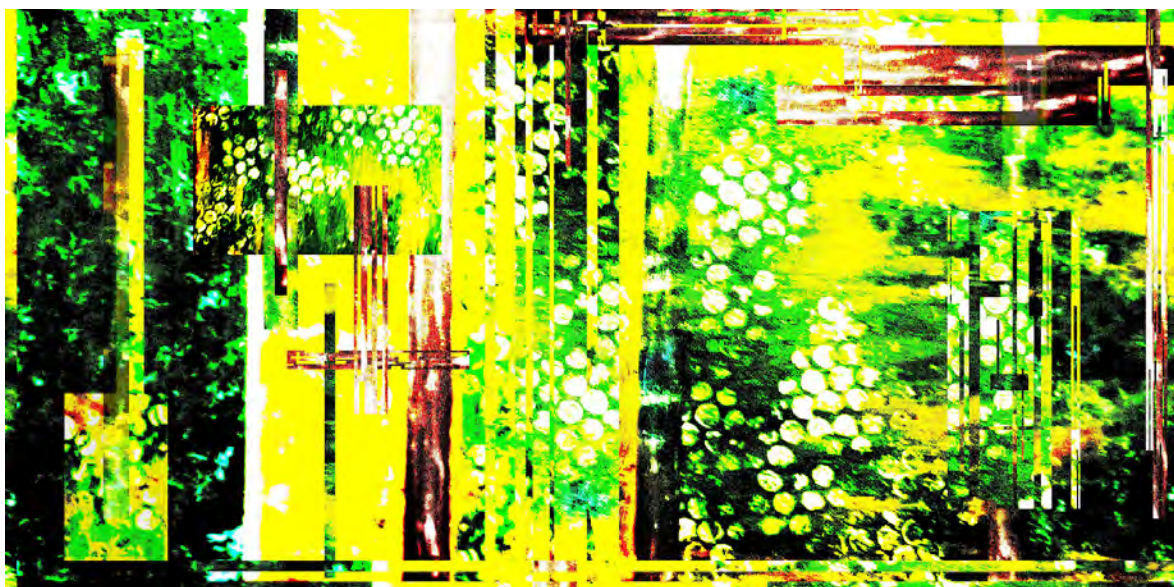
And he said to me
In a voice that commanded authority
But remained respectful of the 2:30 Denny's crowd
Behold me,
For I am the Pharogenian,
The god of all music,
Of verse and rhythm and rhyme,
And of the wind.

So I asked him his favorite song
And he said Son
(Through a mouthful of Salted Caramel & Banana Cream Pancake)
He said Son
In all my years
I have heard the wordless music of the primordial sea
Of a tree falling in the forest
Of a nautilus shell
I have heard the pounding of your ancestors on
Stretched animal hide
I have heard the ethereal melody of the glass armonica

Which drove men to lead madness
And the synth-pop movement of the 70s
And the only song that has ever moved me was
The 1992 jamband classic,
Send Me On My Way
By Rusted Root.

And I said,
A little uncertain
That's the only one?
And he said
Besides maybe the screaming of sedimentary rocks
But that hardly counts
And he thanked me for the pancakes
And disappeared
Leaving me once again
Alone in a Denny's booth
At 2:35 in the morning.

Kaelin Miller can't write poetry without being weird about it. In third grade he pushed his friend off the jungle gym and it still haunts him.



bubble slice

k gielas

Kate (K) Gielas is a senior studio art and theater double major. To see their portfolio, please visit www.kategielas.com.