

The literary and arts  
magazine of Wayland  
Baptist University

embers<sup>'16</sup>



# embers '16

*Faculty Judging Committee:*

Dr. Laura Brandenburg

Dr. Candace Keller

Dr. Karen Beth Strovas

*Editors:*

Dylan Clark

Bridgit O'Connell

Kristen Reddoch

Embers is a joint effort of the School of Languages and Literature and members of the ETA THETA Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society.

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**WAYLAND**  
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

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# For Becca

*Haley Bonner*

I've become a prisoner,  
But perhaps the point is  
Less that I am lonely and  
More that I'm alone.

When pain binds us  
Together and we close  
Fragile skin over new  
Wounds, have we begun healing?

Opposite what I feel,  
Tonight blooms bright, blush,  
Brilliant; crisp nightfall before  
Lust begins to dwindle.

Already, our laughs grow  
Stale—forced, fake, false.  
When once we began  
Sweetly, now only dust.





*Frozen - Beluga Point, AK*

*Derick Rowlan ~ Photography*

# To the man with the cello

*Dylan Clark*

The way you smiled  
when our instruments harmonized  
gave me hope  
that I wasn't alone.  
Your deep baritones mixing with  
my lilting trills  
were a sensation  
I never thought possible.  
I remember staring at the way  
you handled your cello,  
your babe.  
You wielded it the way  
a knight gripped his sword—  
with fierce determination  
and confidence in power.  
But when I looked closer,  
when I closed my eyes  
to see better,  
I could see the touch of a father.  
There, between the strokes of your bow,  
your babe sighed  
and you held your breath  
to keep from frightening her.  
Your body swayed with your bow,  
coaxing the world around you  
into a slumber.  
Deeper  
deeper  
into  
slumber.







*Lady in the Sea*

*Audrey Sisemore ~ Watercolor*

# The Crazy Man

*David Ditmore*

I am being held hostage in my own small apartment. My captor occasionally lets me leave the apartment. When I bring back the type he asks for, he tells me to put them in the bedroom, with the rest of the others. I am usually allowed to stay in the rest of the apartment. He makes me do vile acts. I usually vomit afterward.

Sometimes, I fight back against his orders. Especially, when he sends me out to get a little kid. This type of insubordination makes my captor turn violent. There is only so much abuse I can take before I comply. The other day, I told him I didn't want to get any more kids. He began beating me. Eventually, I was bleeding from my ear, and I felt woozy. I knew the beating would stop if I complied.

It varies whom he requires. Sometimes he requires a man; usually it is a woman. But occasionally he requires a child. I hate doing it, but I know he will beat me to death if I refuse.

Sometimes the crazed man tortures the other captives, and sometimes he just starves them. Currently, there is one older man, three women, of different ages, and a little boy, maybe seven years old. They are all so scared. I feel sorry for them. Sometimes I will watch them through a small hole in the wall, or even sneak them food. I have often thought of ways to get help, like when I am allowed out. But he told me that if I did anything to bring attention to myself, he would send someone to kill my family. I don't dare doubt him, after what I have seen him do. I simply try to survive.

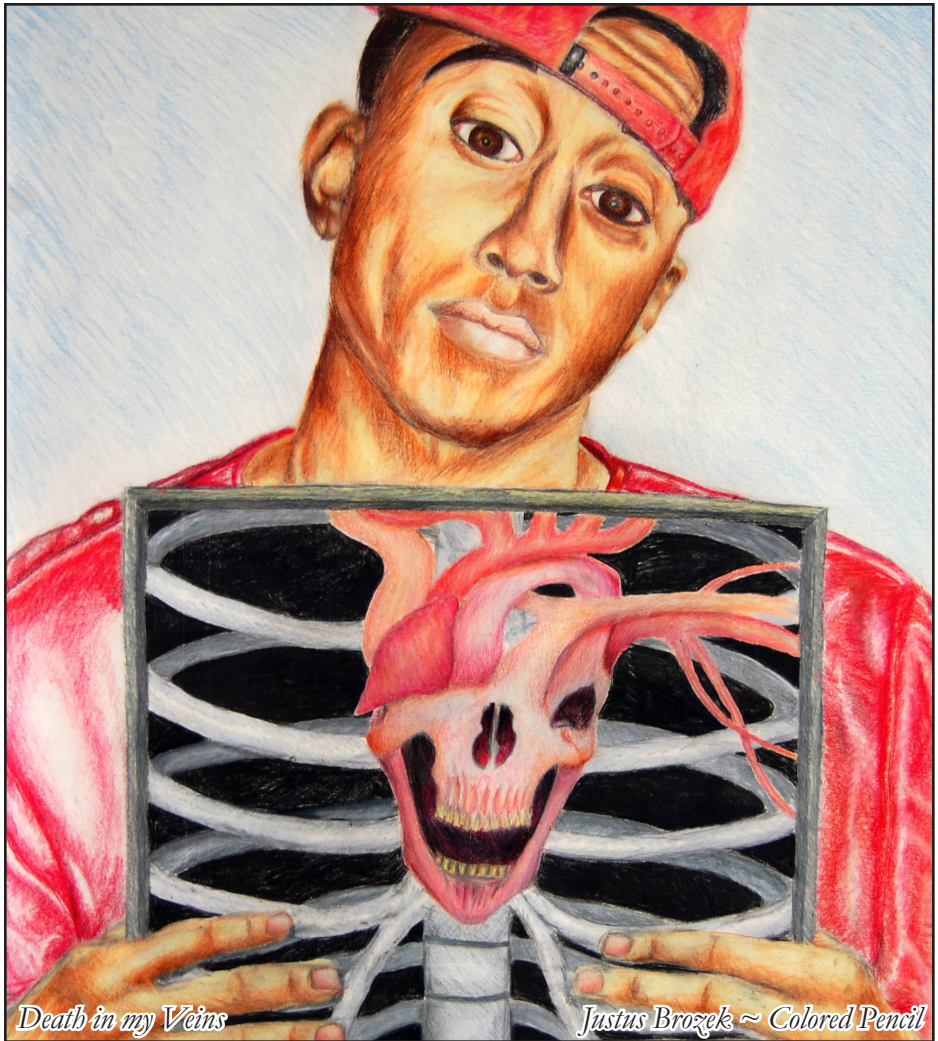
The middle-aged woman has been in the room the longest. She now looks anorexic. The crazy man has beaten her a few times. A couple of times he made me do it. The other day, the youngest girl, a teenager, died in her sleep. She starved to death. She had no food since she arrived, other than the few scraps I could sneak her. I think it was an experiment for the crazy man to see how long she would survive. It took her longer than he thought. He kept talking to himself about why she hadn't died yet.

I am sitting in the hallway trying to stay quiet. Suddenly, I hear a huge thud, and the door slams open. Men dressed in black military gear rush in. It is the police! They point their weapons at me? I am told to lie face down. I immediately raise my hands and fall face down. They have no way of knowing who I am. I lie on the ground, silently thanking them for rescuing me. For some reason they tell me I have "the right to remain silent." I don't understand!

“What did I do?” I ask. “I am the victim. I am a hostage.”

“Shut up,” a cop yells. “You’re the only one here.” Another cop handcuffs me. I slowly scan the apartment from my position. The crazy man stares back at me across the emptiness. The cops in the room just walk by him and then through him. The man begins to fade away, then disappears. I am confused.

I am led from the apartment. I am left to wonder who the crazy man was. On the way to jail, I ask the cop. He tells me I kidnapped and tortured at least five people, and one girl was found dead. I slump over in the backseat. My head is throbbing, and my eyes are burning. I am so confused. Who was the crazy man?



*Death in my Veins*

*Justus Brozek ~ Colored Pencil*



# Indifferent

*Rio Hernandez*

How wondrous it must be!  
Walking free!  
Free from binding chains of a heart  
Free from imprisonment of feeling  
A one-man anarchy  
Rending his way through emotional society  
Impervious to a traitor's knife  
Invulnerable to a lover's gun  
Invincible  
Indifferent



*Just Say*

*Audrey Sisemore ~ Acrylic*



*The Mummy*

*Roger Barr ~ Acrylic*

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# Ready or Not

*Sierra Bailey*

## **Boston Rooftop: October 10, 2:00 AM**

The helicopter drops Cassidy and me on a lighted rooftop. I take a moment to balance myself, bending my knees to absorb the shock. Above us the helicopter disappears, but its deafening roar is replaced by the endless cries of the city. I glance around our drop point and see a second team positioned to our left. It's probably Marissa and Kate from the slender shadows they cast. Our other teams must be stationed on another rooftop. I guess it makes the game more interesting.

"You ready, Tamara?" Cassidy looks ghostlike in the hazy glow of city lights.

Cass will need a lot of luck to make it out of this alive. Actually if we're honest, we both need more than luck, especially if we want to keep our ranking. An AK-47 and bulletproof vests would be preferable. Instead, all we have is the Beretta and our adrenaline-addled brains. Now don't get me wrong, Berettas are nice handguns. I just prefer a longer range. Still, things could be worse—we could be eliminating the target with our bare hands.

A chilling wind rips at my clothes as I peer over the edge of our rooftop perch. Eight stories of nothingness. It's a drop of death. An entrance to hell. Our final exam.

"Ready as I'll ever be."

Together we jump.

## **Hawthorn Manor: October 8, 8:30 AM**

Mr. Jo Kelly leans against his desk in an attempt to project the typical "teacher image." Thankfully it has never worked. Instead, he crosses muscular, tattooed arms across his chest and surveys us with a look that could kill. Most of us find that look attractive.

"This class has top rankings." We try not to smirk, but I can feel the heat of our pride radiating throughout the classroom. Perhaps we're a bit smug, but the sisterhood has trained relentlessly. We earned high marks through blood and sweat. I have the scars to prove it. Mr. Kelly continues, "However, your current rankings mean nothing after this mission. You were taught our creed and trained in combat, but unless you can succeed in the field, your education was meaningless."

Tension replaces the previous pride, and the hairs along my arms tingle at the mention of our assignment. It will be our final test—the factor that decides which unit we’re placed in, if we’re even placed in one at all. My stomach coils into a nervous knot, and I’m glad I skipped breakfast.

Cassidy raises her hand from her seat beside mine. “Mr. Kelly, can you give us any extra advice on how to prepare for the assignment?” Her thick-rimmed glasses slip down her nose, and she pushes them back into place before gripping her pen as if it’s a lifeline. Sometimes I feel bad, but I hope Cass doesn’t make it onto a field unit. She’s safer indoors with her research and hacking.

“Ah, Miss Bradshaw—” Mr. Kelly’s voice scarcely masks his obvious amusement. “This cannot be solved with flashcards and study sessions. You must prepare your mind. Instinct is key in our line of work. Trust it, and you’ll retain your ranking.”

Cassidy’s cheeks flush with embarrassment, but she scribbles his words across her notepad anyways. I chew on my thumbnail. Instinct has never been my ally. It’s usually my downfall. Maybe it’s damaged like my family or my ability to trust. The rest of me is broken, so why should my instincts be any different?

Mr. Kelly’s voice interrupts my wandering thoughts. “Girls, I realize your sisterhood is strong, but this mission will turn you against each other. Show mercy, and you will fail. Your orders are to secure and subdue the target. Don’t let loyalty hold you back.”

I swallow the lump in my throat as Cass sends me a faltering smile. Neither one of us would be able to fight each other. Hopefully we’ll be on the same team. That way I can ensure she stays safe and doesn’t get hurt.

Funny, isn’t it? I attend an assassin’s school where we are programmed to kill. Yet, the one thing I desire is to keep people alive. Instinct might be dying, but irony is alive and well.

### **Boston alleyway: October 10, 2:05 AM**

Cassidy runs beside me and barely masks a limp. I broke my fall, but Cass landed wrong. I bite my lip and try to slow my pace, try to take care of her.

“The target is under level six security.” The automated voice buzzes through my earpiece. Maybe it’s Mr. Kelly or one of the other teachers. The thought makes me feel more confident. They’ve taught us well, and we won’t fail them. “We’re sending coordinates to your GPS.”

My reflection—murky green eyes, brown hair cropped close, freckles sprinkling my nose, and the faint shadow of the scar that flaws my left cheek—is forgettable. The numbers that illuminate the dark screen and replace my reflection are not.

“You ready, Tamara?”

It’s funny that Cass is always asking me this. She’s the timid one, the one who only fights back to protect someone else. I guess that’s why I’m protecting her.

“I’m ready if you are.” My stomach clinches at the lie. Neither of us is ready, but neither of us can fail. To fail is to die, and Cassidy must live.

### **Boston penthouse: October 10, 2:58 AM**

The city sounds fade as we slip through the front door like shadows. The lobby is deserted, except for a middle-aged man too involved with his newspaper to notice two insignificant teens. A list of ways to kill him rolls through my head, but I brush aside the distraction with a flick of my wrist and tap the elevator button instead. Besides, he would be a boring target.

“Tenth floor,” Cassidy leans close and mutters. The sisterhood is never sure where she gets her calculations, but she’s rarely wrong about these things. Tenth floor it is.

We’re quiet as the elevator climbs. Assassins don’t need to speak. We are silent, silent as death. This is our mission, but more importantly this is our life.

My chest tightens as sweat beads along my hairline. This might be our life, but something isn’t right. Mr. Kelly’s reminder to follow our instincts hits me in the gut.

“Cass, are you ready?” I ask.

The door opens with a ding, answering for her.

### **The Tenth Floor: October 10, 3:00 AM**

Empty. The spacious room is spotlessly clean, as if someone has gone to great care to erase a crime already committed.

Cassidy steps past me towards the center of the room, not even bothering to hide her limp, and turns a wide circle. She might not be the most fearsome killer, but Cass misses nothing. If something is amiss, she’ll tell me.

Boston’s lights shine through a wall of glass. Hesitantly I press my fingertips against the cool surface. Evidence, I know, but there’s nothing here, not even another team from our sisterhood. In fact, there’s been no sign



of them at all—no fleeting shadows or muffled footsteps.

No one except me and Cass.

“Cassidy?” Silence—deadly silence. “I think we’re—”

“Tamara, it’s not both of us. It’s one. Only one of us is the target and—”

I close my eyes against the truth, “And the other is the assassin.” Mr. Kelly hadn’t been preparing us. He had given us a warning. “How long have you known, Cass?”

“Since we were given the location. A target with level six security—we’re semester six students. It was obvious.”

Unlike me, her instinct and intuition are intact. Perhaps she’s always been more ready than me. She’s always been smarter, so it shouldn’t be a surprise. Besides, I attend a school for assassins, yet my goal is to save lives. I was never meant to succeed. Even an AK-47 couldn’t save us. Only that’s the point: one of us can’t survive.

I open my eyes and swallow the suffocating lump in the throat. “So each team was given a different location? A standoff to see who dies?”

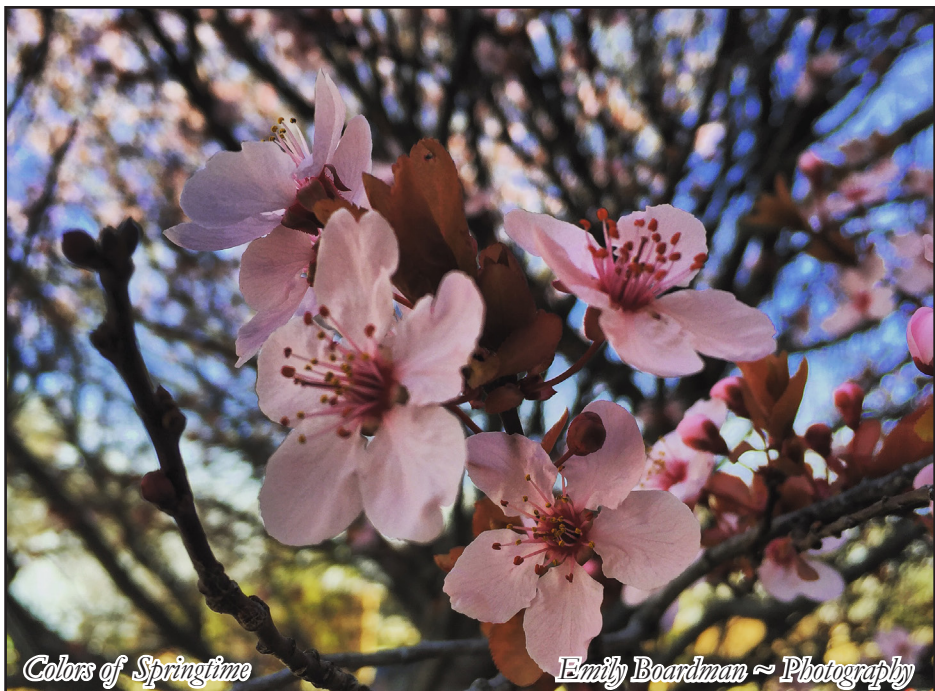
“No, Tamara, it’s a test to see who can break the sisterhood.” Even without turning I can tell Cass is crying. The tremble in her voice gives it away. “We were never meant to be loyal. Not to the school or the teachers, not to the sisterhood, and certainly not to each other.”

The click of her gun’s hammer is almost imperceptible, but my senses were trained too well. Turns out my instincts aren’t broken. Things are very wrong. However, my heart is shattered, and it will never have time to mend.

“Are you ready, Tamara?”

“Yeah, I’m ready, Cass.” I don’t turn around, but our eyes catch each other in the reflection. My fingers flit towards the glint of her gun, as if reaching for safety. I’m only reaching for death, because I have failed. My smile falters, and my laugh is held back by burning tears. Who wants to be an assassin anyways?





*Colors of Springtime*

*Emily Boardman ~ Photography*



*Palo Duro Canyon*

*Shabala Hawkins ~ Photography*



# Moon Child Triplet

*Sarah Van Der Linden*

## *Moon Child #1*

Running from the brims of strangers,  
over stained beards  
and intoxicated breath;  
the eyelashes of fascinated innocence  
and into the warmth of two lips,  
meeting in the eternal downpour  
of history and time:  
cracked skin,  
praising the rain god,  
blue eyes matching the bruised rippling  
Above,  
clutching at the good luck charm,  
perhaps to grant another day  
Without so much memory.

But I have no good luck charm,  
only the hopeless sound of water dancing  
on my skin:  
skin, with no future of wrinkling,  
or the fresh bud which left me,  
or even the ability to drown myself,  
or the possibility of your love.  
Just the purple blue:  
a lost lover;  
a full sky;  
a cold womb.

## *Moon Child #2*

And I, an immortal thought,  
trapped in these walls of flesh,  
saw the possibility of drifting,  
perfume lightness, crouching  
from my shadows.  
And it was you,  
my friend,  
lover of my night,

enemy to that sacred forsaken—  
and you terrified me to my  
birdlike bones,  
ready to take flight,  
should you attempt to touch  
my impossible soul,  
so insipid.

I cannot love you as I wish,  
or let you melt away into a new...  
...instead I live with loneliness of knowledge,  
torture to my cerebral existence,  
that once our hearts beat together,  
and I did not feel the need to say any words,  
but  
love,  
truth,  
virtue.

*Moon Child #3*

Children of the same burning matter,  
a pair of starry anomalies—  
painfully same,  
irresistibly polar—  
burning off one another,  
until I turn and you see the blackness,  
empty of what is,  
rather than my eternity.

My moon tears drip.

You love them,  
and how my fiery blood drains,  
every time your fierce shards of  
starry sky melt,  
only edges.

You are nothing to hold,  
only to wonder;  
excruciating coldness, but  
my burning reflection.

You smile, because you know this truth:  
I cannot.



*The Golden Arch*

*Jennifer Hollars ~ Photography*



*West Texas Sunset*

*Sbabala Hawkins ~ Photography*

# Mother Forget

*Haley Bonner*

Forcing my breath in and out in a strong, steady rhythm, I climb.

Nature teems all around me, nothing but dirt, trees, leaves—growing things—and you.

Turning my head, I look to see that you've fallen behind. Again. You're panting with the effort you've exerted; your eyes lift to where I'm standing, and I can almost hear the angry resentful breath you drag into your body.

You did this.

Maybe I should feel sorry, but you did this.

You hate trails and hiking; you've always told me how you despise the close, cool feel of forest air. Still, you insisted, you came.

Turning around and making an effort to slow my pace, I begin trekking along the well-worn mountain path, glorying in the tangible evidence that I'm sharing this adventure with hundreds—thousands—of people who've gone before me. I'm sharing this moment, this journey, with ancients and pilgrims, with pioneers, mountaineers, and modern enthusiasts.

Yeah, maybe you hate it, but I love it.

I lift my head, enjoying the whip of wind across my brow. My feet move faster, caught in the mood of the air around me—light, flowing, zipping, soaring, tucking through the trees, dipping in the valleys, and—wait.

I forgot you, again.

Sighing and turning to see, I note that I've pulled farther ahead.

You struggle under your pack; I told you to take more stuff out.

Your legs shake and burn; I told you nobody hikes this far without preparing.

Maybe I should feel sorry, maybe so—but I don't.

This trail—this hike—has been my dream for years.

Redirecting my gaze to the trail ahead, I burn with impatience.

Shades of color capture my attention—white oak, red oak, yellow birch, beech, sugar maple, fragrant green moss that litters the sides of the path and grows on trunks. Rich, loamy soil moist from morning mists and slate-shaded rocks, smooth and sharp.

Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath in. This moment, this place, is home to me.

I check your progress and allow myself to begin climbing again.

Thinking back, never have I felt more welcomed than when I stand surrounded by the Mother: Nature. She sings a sweet song over my soul, reminding me of good things, precious things with her beauty. With every blister, Mother teaches me respect and preparation. When I lay down on Nature's blanketed floors and rest, she speaks of provision.

How could I not love her? She resonates truth in ways that a small suburb house, kitchen sets, and clogged toilets will never communicate. She speaks with words that children and fish and barbeques with friends can't compare to. She frees me in ways that those things only fetter me.

I climb higher, faster.

She lets me soar; she lets me breathe; she lets me learn; she lets me be—wait.

I forgot you. Again.

I wait.



*Taking Flight*

*Jennifer Hollars ~ Photography*



# I lay in bed

*Bridgit O'Connell*

I lay in a bed with sterile,  
sickly pink covers. The room  
was cold and the walls sparsely  
decorated with things I could  
no longer love.

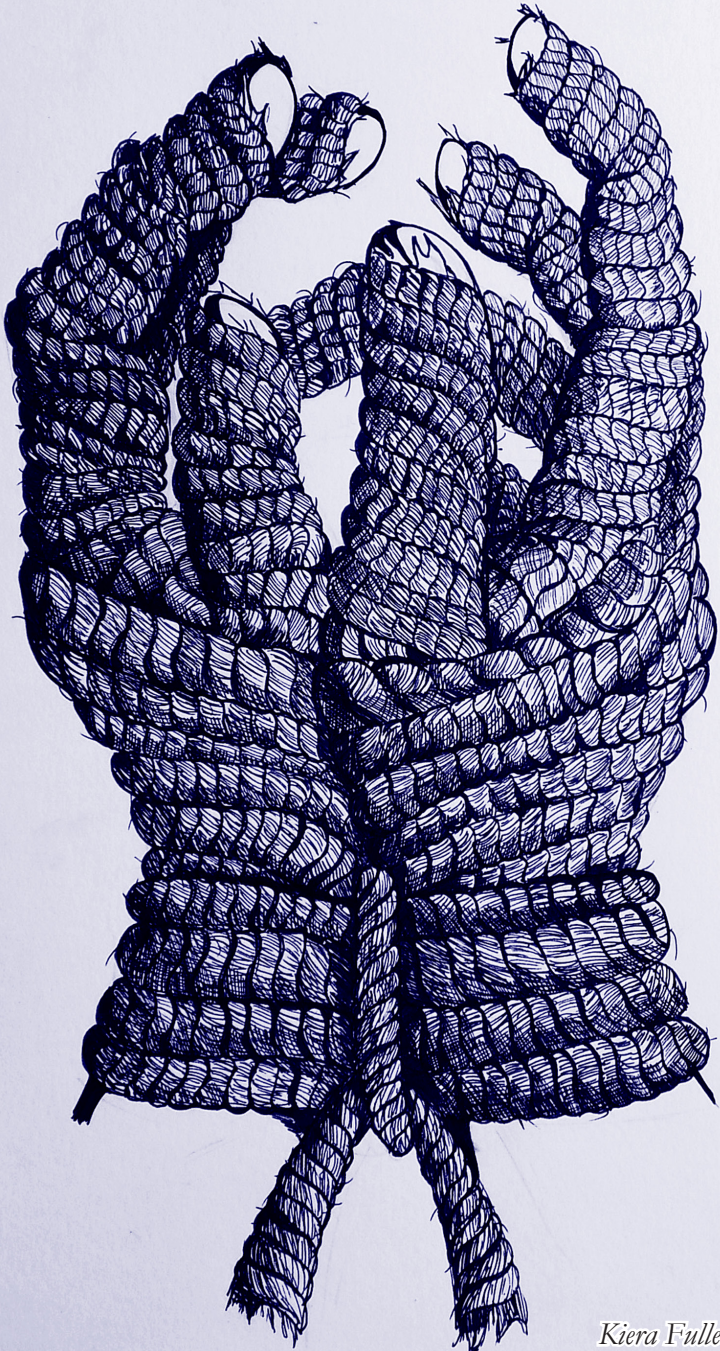
I did not gaze upon the pictures  
lining the wall, my eyes were  
locked on the ceiling, the  
white blank ceiling  
and I wondered if I had ever  
seen the blue sky or felt green  
grass beneath my feet.  
Were these not myths from  
childhood tales?

Was I not always trapped in  
a body, in a mind I did not want?  
Happiness was a liquor, bubbly  
and sweet and  
absent from my veins.

My head pounding  
with regrets I didn't know  
were mine.

I questioned whose eyes met  
mine in the mirror,  
were they my father's?  
Did I see the disapproval of my  
mother line the corners of my mouth?

To be free, what I would give,  
to be free!



*Bound*

*Kiera Fuller ~ Ink*





Audrey S.

*Dry and Dainty*

*Audrey Sisemore ~ Watercolor*

# Dancing with a Shadow

*Sierra Bailey*

She hesitates at the door of the cafeteria and waits for the gaggle of girls to pass. Head ducked and eyes averted from other students, she slips past me without a word. This is our daily routine, and I wonder if I ever cross the dancefloor in her mind. I imagine that it is a swirl of twirling sentences and foreign syllables—all the books she loves and the languages she's learning. We walk to class together but alone, sit at opposite ends of the room.

Our paths collide throughout the day, but she hardly looks up from the overflowing journals and tattered texts, as if ignoring reality is her sole purpose for breathing. On occasion she pushes wide-rimmed glasses up the bridge of her nose, tucks auburn hair behind her ear, and bites her bottom lip. I think it's a nervous ritual, just like biting her nails seems to be a nervous habit. Sometimes, I wonder if the dance of life is what makes her so anxious.

We meet again each evening in the library where she fades into the rows of dusty volumes. Her angular fingers drift along the creased spines, lingering at times to pull a book off the shelf. These are the moments when her hands seem to tremble from excitement instead of fear, and I wonder what has terrified her into only living between the pages of manuscripts long forgotten. I wonder if she feels invisible. I wonder if she will ever look up long enough for me to know the color of her eyes, for her to notice that I am watching. Mostly though, I wonder if the look would last long enough for her to realize that I am not scared of dancing with her shadows.

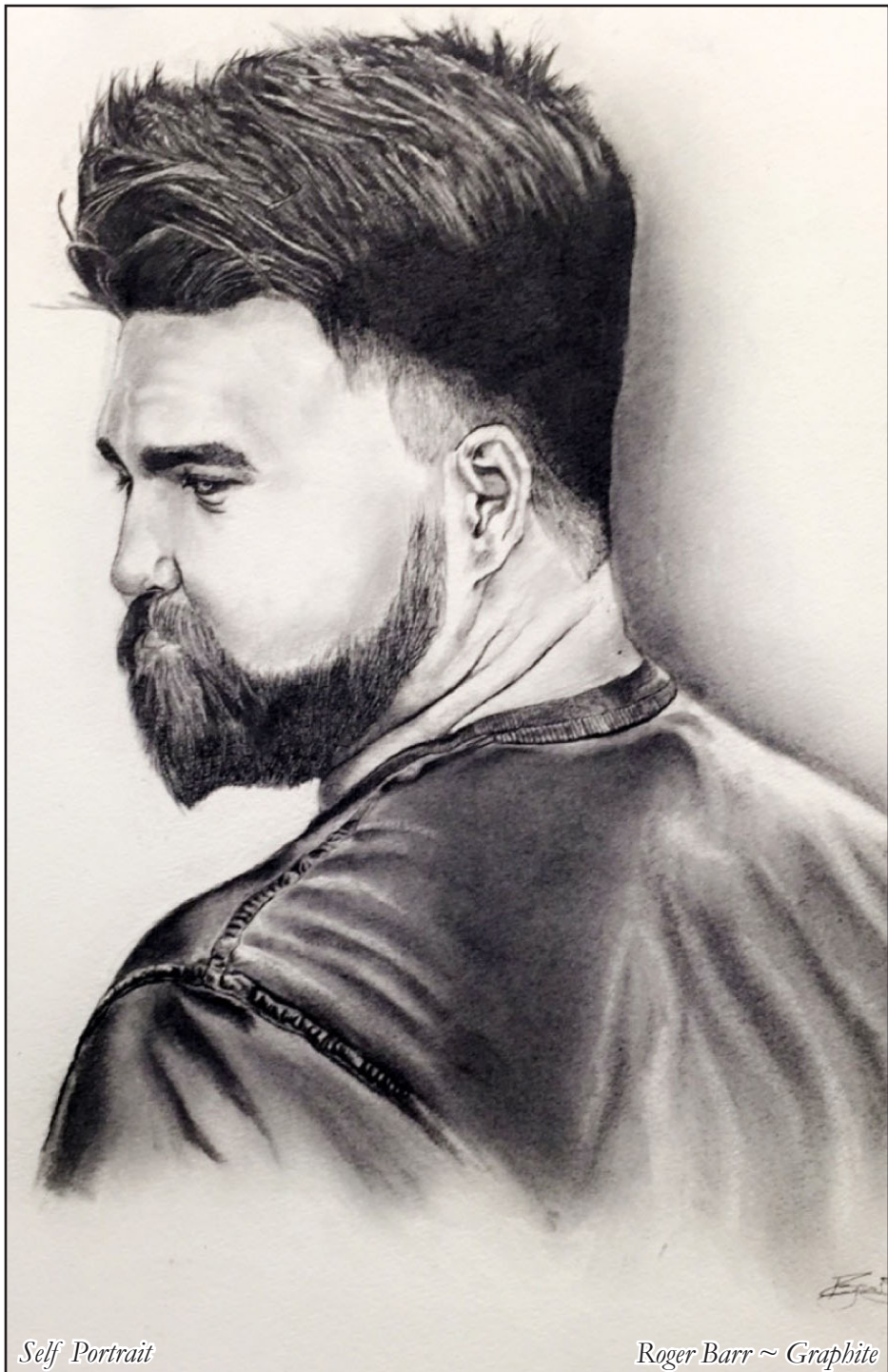


# My Childhood Has Changed

*Virginia Espinoza*

As a child, innocent and full of fear,  
My mother wrapped me in your soft embrace.  
Every night there you were always so near.  
Your warmth and comfort just felt so real.  
I never realized the smile you kept on my face.  
You kept me warm and wiped away my tears.  
My loyal friend throughout the years.  
There were some very great times and many bad.  
Sometimes you were the only thing I literally had.  
The years have gone by and our adventures too.  
All the while being the only friend I really knew.  
I never once thought that you wouldn't last.  
Our time together flew by so fast.  
We went away together on that trip.  
I came back without you, wondering how I let you slip.  
You were always there, even when everything wasn't quite right.  
Where is the comfort that little girl held so tight?  
They say nothing lasts forever and maybe they are right.  
Or maybe someone else needs you more than me, tonight.  
I love you old friend and thank you for loving me.  
Your owner in all places, no matter where you shall be.





*Self Portrait*

*Roger Barr ~ Graphite*

# Ticking Clocks

*Morgan Dixon*

The booming voice rings out, “Begin.” This is it. This is the moment I have been waiting for, preparing for, making myself sick for. I can do it. I can do it. I hope I can do it. I scramble to start and push through the front line. Facing my first obstacle, I conquer it with ease and move on. It’s the same scenario for the second, third, and even the fourth.

Confidence floods my veins. A cocky grin spreads slowly across my face. This is what everyone has been stressing over? This is the source of countless horror stories told throughout time? Friends, teachers, parents, grandparents, even—and THIS is the Big Bad Scary? I should have known it was all bologna. I begin to soar across the white expanse, dark marks trailing behind me.

It isn’t until I meet the fifth obstacle that my confidence gets shaken, and I remember why I was unable to sleep last night. Almost eighteen years of training darts just out of my grasp. I’m floundering. Two men, two trains, different speeds. My mind is blank. I’m reeling. Yelling something unintelligible, I throw my all at them and sprint past. “Surely the worst is over, right?” If only there were some wood nearby to knock on. The ticking in the distance gets louder, louder. Sweat pours off my face, and I try to wipe my palms off on my pants, to no avail. The scratching, shifting, erasing, and squeaky footsteps surrounding me become deafening. I try to concentrate and focus every ounce of my being on the next several tasks. Sans the once-cocky smile.

Looming in the distance, I see it! I see the finish line! I close my eyes and quicken my stride. Freedom, I can smell it. It smells...disgusting. Wham!

Something solid and breathing slams into my body, or I slam into it; I’m too disoriented to sort out which. With eyes wide open, I stare. I start to count. Fourteen watermelons and twenty-three cows. Praying it isn’t what I think it is, I slowly read the sign next to the strange scene before me. Dread. I can’t do it. Cows don’t even eat watermelon! They eat grass, which does not need to be calculated and divided. I slump to the ground in defeat, rest my head upon my arms, take a swig of water, then stop and stare at the fat, roaming, unsuspecting mammals. This is it, then. All of my hopes and dreams—my future—shattered by such a stupid task.



I guess I don't really need to go to college. I can be one of those high school grads who lives in her parents' basement forever and works at the local convenience store. The thought sends shivers across my skin as I immediately erase this insanity from my mind. If only the pen were actually mightier than the sword! I could just slaughter the things, eat the watermelons myself, and be done with it.

"Get it together. This is one tiny question. How much watermelon does each cow get to eat? This is not a difficult thing!" It is. I'm lying to myself. After twenty minutes in the same spot, I scribble something down and hope for the best, knowing this question and those stupid cows are going to be my ruin. They are going to be what sends my ACT score crashing through the floor of average and into the realm of mediocrity.

Somberly, I fill in the scantron with my dull pencil, turn it in, and leave to face my bleak future. I hate math.



# Leaving

*Lisa Gunkle*

Leaving, not cleaving...  
Who would've thought  
you could split two peas from a pod?  
One day it grows hanging from the branch—  
On another it is plucked.  
Day to day one cannot predict  
what will happen—  
adversity...pain...  
unrelenting circumstances.  
What is one to do  
except bear up under pressure  
and allow the winepress to have its way?

My tears have been squeezed out of me  
like wine from a grape.  
Receive them, drink them,  
take them in.  
Perhaps they will taste sweet to your palate  
and you will remember the vineyard from which they came.

Does a grape cry out as it is being squeezed?  
Does the juice anger as it is fermenting?  
Neither will I cry out or become angry.  
I freely gave you the only thing I can offer—  
everything I have inside.







*Palla e Vita*

*Gian Scalke ~ Photography*



*Summer Dreams*

*Emily Boardman ~ Photography*

# Sunsets on Instagram

*Seth Rosenthal*

Wait, you don't have a smartphone? Come now, this is the 21st century! How are you going to increase the number of your "friends," navigate across the street, or discover what the weather is like outside? People around the globe have comments, emails, tweets, likes, pokes, just for you, and you are missing them. I have good news for you, though, because for a limited time you can give up your hard-earned cash and acquire your very own smartphone. Having a smartphone will place a virtual world of limitless power at the tips of your fingers. Through modern innovation, the smartphone is the most rugged, reliable, and useful asset you will ever possess.

We live in a world which requires interaction with other *Homo sapiens*, and this can be quite frightening. Thankfully, with a smartphone you can limit these scary interactions or avoid them altogether. This creates extra time for whichever virtual world you desire to be in with your virtual friends. If you are one of those unique people who has relationships of some sort with other *Homo sapiens*, you can continue to share with them the things you love, hate, and feel, anytime, anywhere—all without interacting with them directly! Don't just take my word for it. The next time you are at a restaurant, on a bus, or sitting in traffic, look around you. Everywhere you will see people using their phones to pursue many things, rather than living in the dull "here and now." With a smartphone you can be just like those people and live in your very own custom reality.

Are you having trouble finding things to do with your day? To assist you in getting through your hellacious, twenty-four hour day, there is an application (or "app") for anything you can imagine. Care to hit a stapler a million times, all absent of waste and mess? Would you like to drink a beer, yet can't or shouldn't? Would you like to kill your boss 27 times without harming a soul? How about raising a virtual animal, or building and destroying a virtual realm? Still not satisfied? You can play games, read books, make travel arrangements, and complete work assignments. The latest numbers indicate there are over 2.5 million applications between Android and Apple alone!

Today there is no need to fear an impulse to throw a fit (or the phone) because of a dead battery. Technological advances in both batteries and

charging abilities have made dead smartphones a thing of the past. Should you find yourself needing to throw your phone for any reason, it will not shatter like the smartphones of the past. Design improvements yield smartphones that are crushproof, shockproof, dustproof, and even waterproof! Never go without your favorite phone to shower or swim again! Furthermore, if your lifestyle requires more protection than your smartphone offers, you can purchase a case, which will make it bomb-proof!

Now smartphones do come with some risk. “Texting thumb” is a new medical condition affecting those without the superior awesomeness required to handle certain apps. The joys of “autocorrect” can be just as frustrating as they are humorous when you are texting with your friend and send “Idiot” instead of “I don’t.” This has been known to provoke people to throw their phones in a fit of rage (no damage is done because they have bomb-proof cases). It can be said one can do more than simply “survive” without a smartphone. However, this would require creating actual relationships, which involves time and a level of sincerity. Instead of experiencing the world through virtual means, you would have to actually experience it for yourself. Experience a real sunset or view thousands of them on Instagram? Your choice.

#### *Author’s Note*

It saddens me to see a family at a restaurant with each of the members on their smartphone, eliminating the opportunity for family time and bonding. I do believe that used as a tool in proper context, a smartphone can be practical, even beneficial; however, I share the sentiment of Albert Einstein who stated: *“I fear the day technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots.”* We have a generation who, for the most part, are so wrapped up in virtual worlds that they miss out on the joys of life and real, tangible relationships. These individuals will readily “look it up” yet miss out on learning or experiencing life for themselves.

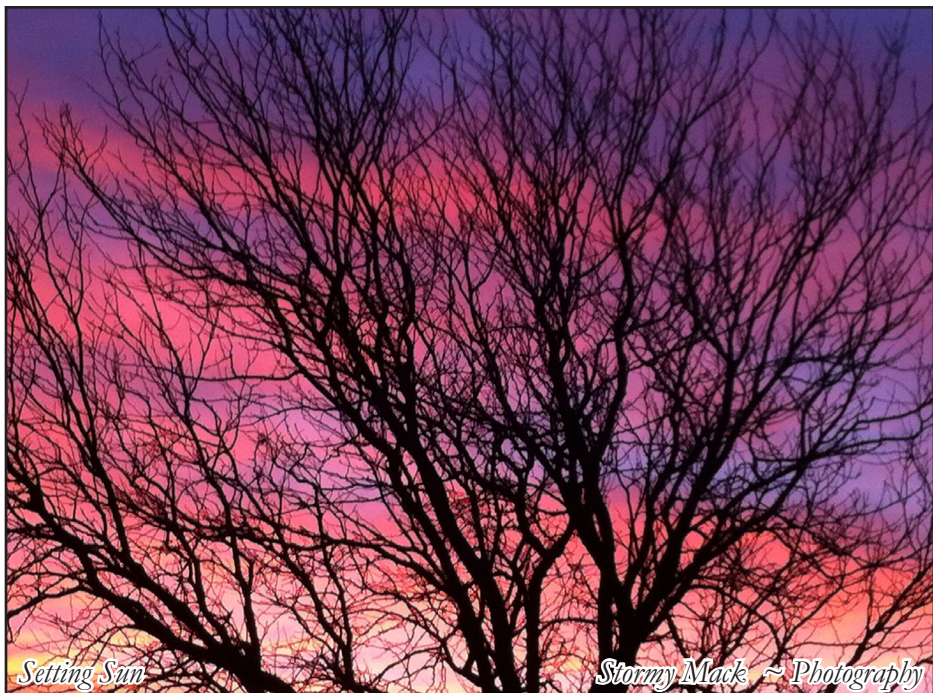






*The Black*

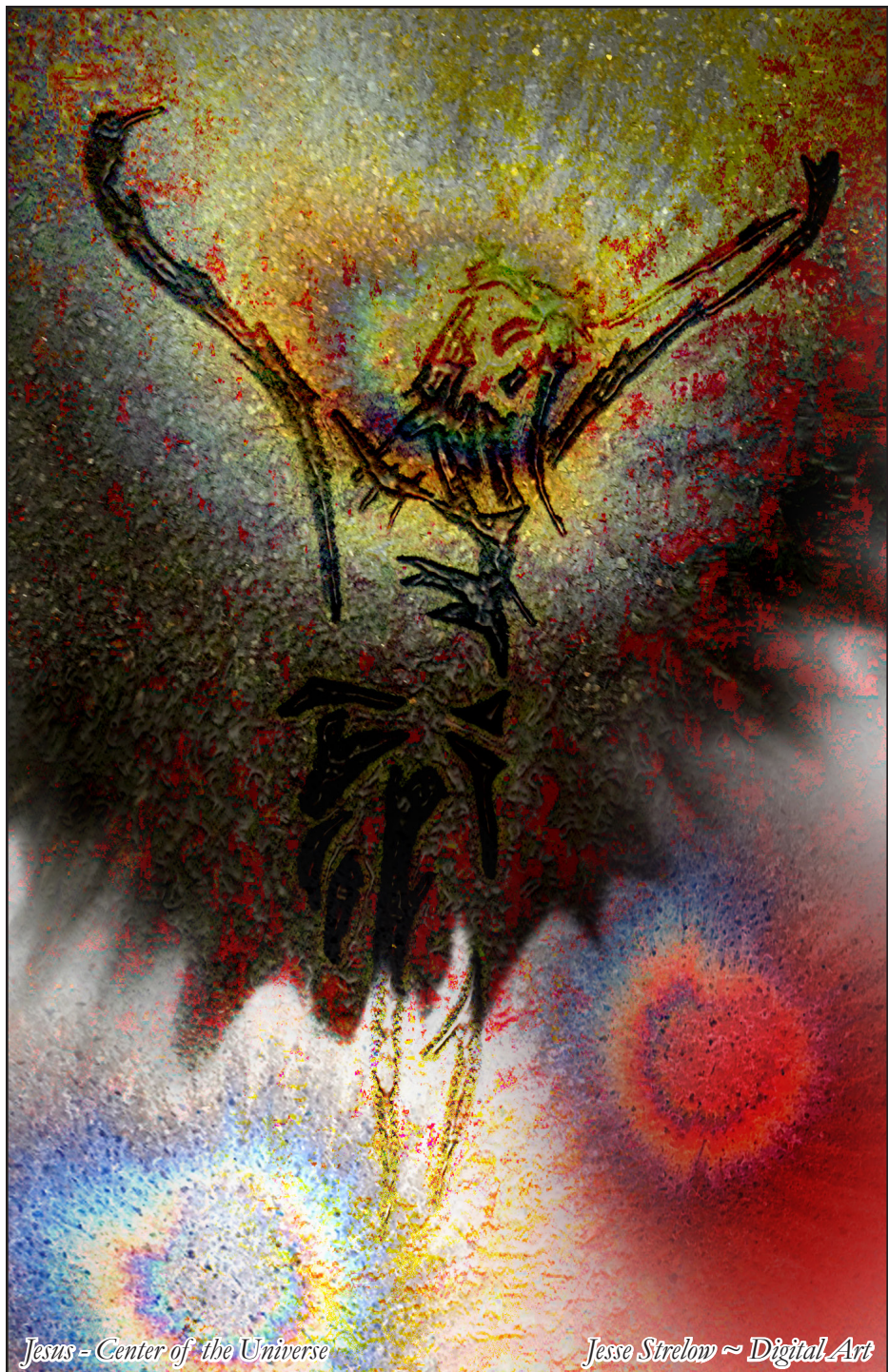
*Morgan Holliday Fibner ~ Acrylics*



*Setting Sun*

*Stormy Mack ~ Photography*





*Jesus - Center of the Universe*

*Jesse Strelow ~ Digital Art*

# What Name

*Paul Brennan Wallis*

What word hast thou placed upon my heart, that such tender affections  
have I come to know  
Such a foolish rogue as I, who could not but deny the everlasting love you  
offered free  
Yet now waves of gold'n light do issue from thy loving sight in sublimely  
peak of flow  
That secures my very soul as a suckling child doth gently roll 'tween loving  
arms to which I now belong.

'Twas at my ruddy worst, as I flourished in this world that you sought me  
out, and not by happenstance  
A line you uncoiled to which bottom knot I fastened hold, as you plucked  
me from the mire of my sin  
And from the covering of my filth to the marrow of my bone thy  
cleansing hand refined my soul  
That in the looking glass I'd see the very One who set me free, that I  
should never fear of death again.

Free of bonds of sin and doubt I perceive my steps are measured now by  
your strong and loving hand  
And by your Providential care all creation does now fare better by your  
tender ministrations  
Your longing for our restoration presupposes adoration for a children lost  
and searching still  
That for your glory you created all in nature which abounds, you bend and  
shape it to your very will.

Upon alabaster thrones you've raised up kings, and downward struck them  
as matched your will  
In ignorance and Providence with quietly full obedience they've done your  
work and do it even still  
Supposing in their vanity that all that falls before their feet comes  
trembling at their might and power  
They deceive themselves, and so suffer the wage of prideful fall, their  
necks stiff against your glory.

The Psalmist rightly strode through the lovingkindness of your Wisdom  
whence once he pondered

How great are your works, and how profound your thoughts, that humbly  
in his obeisance deep  
Did he summon up words both wise and meek, in bitter angst of longing  
so tenderly did he weep  
Knowing at last that in righteousness flowing from you as brook from a  
spring would he find his rest.

Your perfect servant, upright as man could be could not but help only see  
that which thought he just  
In horrid speech did he accuse his God, his Maker of abuse that could not  
rightly be so consigned  
‘Til on that day when thought gave way to splendid majesty of truths  
unknown to the man  
In forceful fits of tender love did Lord and King set from above the  
record with his servant as He must.

Apostle, thy pedigree certain and thy lineage without blemish, you show  
only your own vainglory  
That Christ the Son should find you about your wicked business and  
intercede for His own design  
Humbling you, even you, Hebrew of Hebrews, as with the scales fell away  
your pride at His own story  
And in service did you take on that new mantle of the small one, and  
make Him Lord of life of thine.

Of your power and glory there is ample testimony, of your lovingkindness  
a trove of truth unbounds  
Unchanging, unsearchable is your Wisdom, the furthest depths from  
which no cry resounds  
From the founding of the earth and all that is within her seas and upon  
her shores we have no memory  
While in stark relief against our canvas view of thine world, you, Lord  
recall the passing of bird and tree.

I seek to gather in from you that tender love in shades and hues that suit  
the work to which you’ve had me come  
You send me to this broken world with hope-filled news and Grace-filled  
views, your Gift to man is Glory undefiled  
And now I know what thing you’ve written, scribed on my heart, a  
growing part is working to the glory of your Kingdom  
The word you’ve etched upon the throne that occupies your servant’s own  
heart, my Father, is the name of child.

Amen

40 ~ embers ’16





*Lion in Masai Mara, Kenya*

*Don Ashley ~ Photography*



*Doves*

*Timothy Brady ~ Photography*

# Light of a November Morn'

*David Ditmore*

First light shines of a November morn'  
Father sits upon the side of the bed  
Fumbles for house shoes with his bare feet  
The beloved family dog joins him  
At his feet she eagerly awaits  
He slips on pants and sweatshirt

The light of a November morn'  
Peeks through the hanging drapes  
A quick bit of coffee is poured  
A light coat is put on to bundle up more  
A leash is placed upon the dog  
Together they embark out

Into the light of a November morn'  
They walk as the wind stings the face  
The sun saying good morning to all  
Especially the early risers like dad and dog  
The dog completes her morning duties  
Father uses the crisp air to renew his spirit

All accomplished in the light of a November morn'  
They return to the porch as a duo  
Father sits in the rickety oak rocking chair  
He sips the remainder of his warm coffee  
The dog grazes on the dry morsels provided  
Finally, mother steps outside to join them

Father and mother join lips in the light of a November morn'  
They both go back, into the home  
The dog eagerly behind  
The children awake to the kisses of the dog

They grumble, as kids on weekday will do  
They sit and eat the most important meal of the day

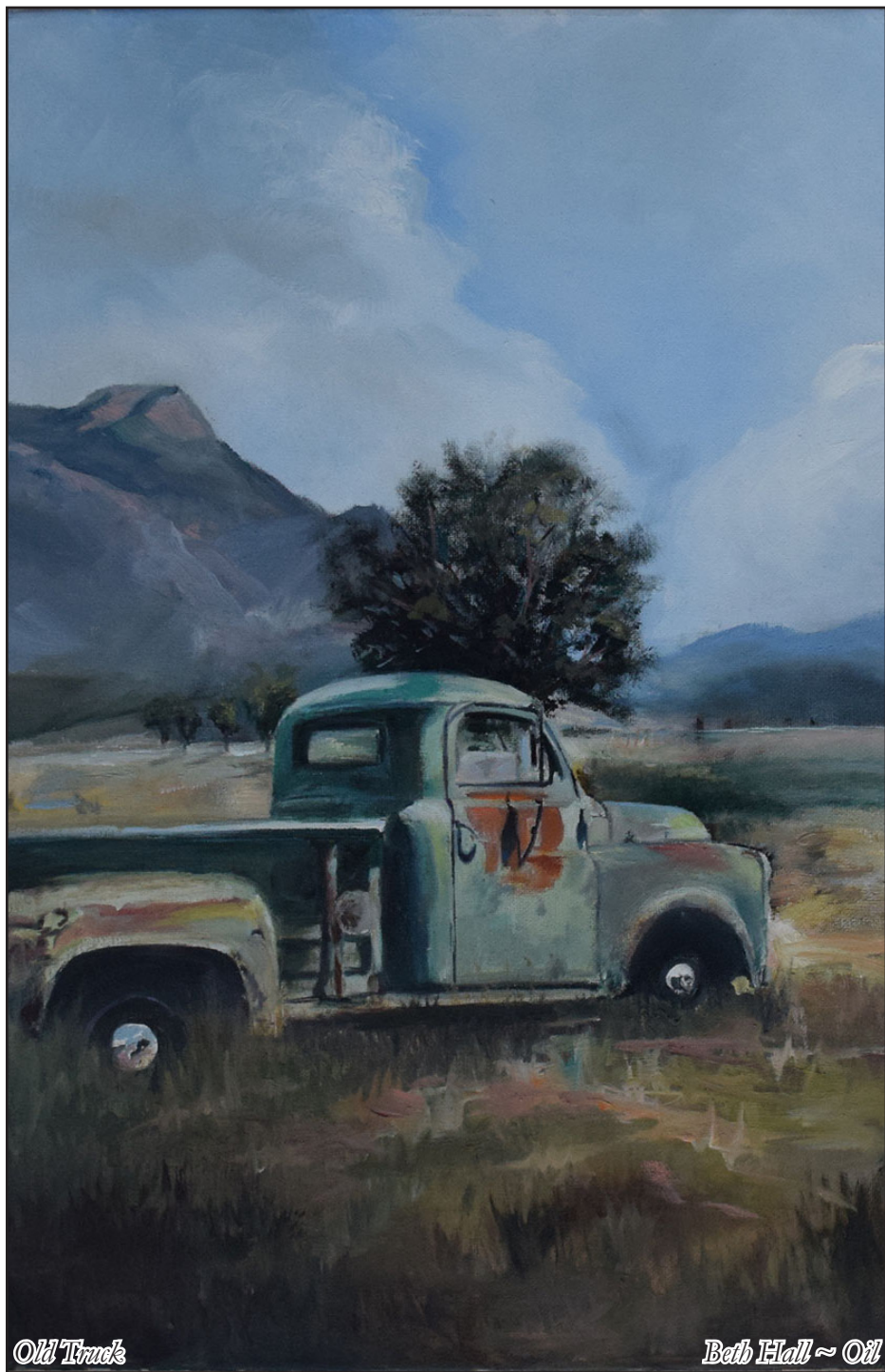
The breakfast table is illuminated by the light of a November morn'  
The family is together as one  
Soon they will depart their various ways  
To conquer the day  
A day that starts with the light of a November morn'?



*Savanna Snacktime*

*Hannah Goble ~ Acrylic*





*Old Truck*

*Beth Hall ~ Oil*



# Double Yellow Line

*Holly Falkner*

The day is warm and mostly sunny. A few rainclouds drift through the sky, trying to decide what to do with their fluffy white lives.

“Do you remember when we were kids, and we used to lie on the ground and watch the clouds drift by?”

“Yeah,” she replies. Short, sweet, like always. That’s how Annie talks.

We sit across from each other in the grass of the little central town park, the one with the running trail and the kid’s playground. A large, over-stuffed backpack rests beside her. Filtered sun brushes her thin shoulders.

I watch her in silence. She has plucked a flower from amongst the grass and now sits, aimlessly pulling out the petals, one at a time.

A shadow of a raincloud makes her look up, then at me.

“Do you think it will rain?” she asks.

I shrug. “Maybe.”

She sighs and plucks another petal.

“There’s a lot of ‘maybes’ nowadays.”

A sudden wind brushes her red-brown hair away from her face. I can see the freckles on her cheeks, and the shine of her hazel eyes. My heart quickens a bit.

“Are you sure about this?” I suddenly ask. She looks up at me again, her lips parted just slightly.

“Yes.” She pauses. “I have to, Collin.”

“But we’ll be so far apart.”

“I know,” she sighs. “But it’s too late now. Are you sure about your decision?”

I feel her piercing gaze searching my soul. I look away.

“I can’t,” I tell her, as I’d told her before. “I can’t leave. I...don’t think I can.”

She nods, but looks back down at the flower in her hands. A few petals remain. “I understand,” she says, in a way that tells me she really doesn’t, but won’t ask further.

We lapse into silence again. Annie likes silences. She always says that the best words are the ones left unsaid, so the speaking won’t destroy them. I break the moment when I check the time on my phone, sigh, and stand.

“We should go,” I say. “You’ll be leaving soon.”

She nods and stands as well. In one hand, I see she still holds the flower. Two petals remain.

With a heave, she swings her backpack over her shoulder, and we walk together down the sidewalk. We don't talk again. I watch her for a short time, reading through the silence and the stillness of her features: her jaw set, her young face alert, eyes staring off at a distant horizon. Her dusting of freckles stands out sharply against her pale-ish skin.

Eventually, I look away. Our footsteps pound out an uneven rhythm on the hard concrete, baked in the warm early-afternoon. False images of water ripple before us, vanishing as we near.

Two kids nearby jump through a sprinkler; my mind drifts as we pass them. I recall summers when Annie and I had spent our days splashing and playing like that. One year, our neighborhood even gathered together a water gun army to do battle. We'd split up into teams—me on one, Annie on the other. We must have drained half of Lake Erie in that battle.

The next year, I moved.

My family didn't go far—just a mile or two away. But Annie's mom didn't like her riding her bike by herself to our new neighborhood. Our games of water-tag came to an end.

Two months ago, we'd celebrated our eighteenth birthday party, since we shared the same birth-month. As kids, we'd always had our parties together, Annie's parents providing the traditional white sheet cake with our names written in gender-specific frosting colors, in accordance to corporate bakery law.

We hadn't had a party together since I'd moved, but this year, I wanted to do it again. Mom had said we could, since we were "adults" now and could make our own decisions. Annie didn't like parties much, so we threw as brief and small but exciting a celebration as we could. At her house, of course.

Sometime in the middle of the party, I remember seeing her walk outside. I followed her onto her parent's porch, wanting to talk.

"Annie, are you okay?" I'd asked, concerned.

She shrugged her slim shoulders, staring off into the distance at the just-setting sun. I came to stand beside her.

"Cheer up," I said. "We're eighteen now. We're like, adults."

"But we're not, really," she retorted. "I mean, what's so special about being eighteen? I can legally buy tobacco that will give me sixteen types of cancer, go to federal prison, and finally buy things over the phone from

1-800 numbers. What's so great about that?"

I blinked. She sounded almost bitter.

"Okay, yeah... But we're adults now, anyways. So says the law."

"We're not adults, Collin," she told me, softly. "We're just kids with too many expectations."

"You're more cryptic than usual tonight."

A pause. For a moment, I thought she might just let the conversation die, like she tended to do. But finally she spoke again.

"I'm going out-of-state."

For a moment, I didn't know what to say. I simply stared, dumbstruck. Speechless.

"What?" I finally asked. "But...I thought you were going to the community college."

"I thought so, too," she breathed. "But I decided to go away."

Words left my brain. I continued to stare, unable to speak. An outdoor light blinked on, back-lighting her. I struggled to read her face, trying to see through the dark.

"There's a scholarship," she told me. "They're going to pay for almost everything. My parents'll pay for the rest. It's a really good opportunity."

"But..." I stuttered, trying to force my words together, like a frustrated toddler trying to fit two mismatched puzzle pieces. "You'll...you'll be so far away..."

She moved gentle fingers to touch my arm, but even as I felt their usual coldness press against my skin, it seemed like I could feel every single atom of space between her fingertips and me. Even as her hand brushed against my wrist, even as I knew she stood right there, next to me, I felt as if she had drifted as far away as the stars shining over our heads.

I'd never quite felt that distant from her, even after I'd moved away. But now that I thought about it, I realized she'd been drifting for years. I'd just never noticed it. Our friend choices, the parties I'd gone to and she hadn't, even the classes we'd chosen. But I'd always chased after her, never realizing that as I chased, reaching out to grab her, she kept pulling away, inch by inch, further from me.

She was a ship I'd been chasing for years, only to realize she'd sailed out to sea, while I was still tied to the dock.

Annie always used to say that if you give up on life, life will give up on you. She would say it during those water gun battles as kids when someone wanted to surrender. She'd hold her little water pistol up in her little

seven-year-old hand, standing like a war commander in a kiddie bikini, and proudly declare that if we give up on life, life would give up on us. With those words, she'd lead us, with all the dignity that a seven year old waging war with water can muster, into another assault.

She said those words again to me that night because she must have seen the tears glistening in my eyes when I told her I'd given up on anything after high school. As her hand lay thousands of miles away from my skin, she told me that same little battle cry she'd used so long ago.

Now it seemed to have lost its charm.

"I am giving up, okay?" I told her, my voice heated, boiling the tears I desperately tried to hold back. "What else can I do?"

"I'm sure if you just—"

"No, Annie. You've got so much promise and stuff like that. I've got nothing. Big fat nothing. Go to college. Graduate. Get a job. I'll just...stay here. I can't come with you."

Annie didn't say anything for a long time. She took a deep breath, and I realized she'd taken her hand off my arm.

"Okay," she said finally. "If that's how you feel.... Happy eighteenth birthday."

With that, she walked away, back inside, blending in with the partiers until I couldn't see her anymore.

Not that I was looking. I was too busy sobbing quietly on the porch railing.

The memory fades, and I walk with Annie now, down the road towards her house. The quiet Sunday morning means no traffic on the two-lane road that will eventually lead us to her subdivision, where, once upon a time, I had lived, too.

Two solid, yellow lines run down the center of the black tarmac. Annie walks along one, graceful as a tight-rope walker. I walk a few paces behind, nowhere near as graceful. I think about reaching out to take her hand, but we are just a little too far apart, and I can't quite reach. Instead, I stare down at my feet, tracking their way across the straight, yellow stripe, doomed to run forever parallel, but never touching its partner.

That road eventually takes us to a side street, into her neighborhood, at some point passing my small, once-home. Hers stands a few doors down. A minivan in the driveway sits with its trunk open, filled to the brim with suitcases and college dorm stuff, waiting to swallow a final few boxes. We pause at the edge of the tarmac, and Annie turns to face me.



“I guess this is it,” I murmur, my head down.

“It doesn’t have to be,” she says. “It’s not too late.”

My fists clench. “Yeah, it is. I can’t go.”

Silence fills a long pause.

“I’m...I’m really gonna miss you,” I tell her. And it is the truth. I will miss her. But I won’t just miss her after she goes off to college. I’d been missing her for a long time. I didn’t realize how much until I knew I’d never get the chance to stop missing her.

As if unsure how to respond, she turns and walks up the driveway, slings her backpack into the already over-filled trunk. Then she comes back down to me, stopping on the edge of the concrete drive.

“I’ll see you again,” she promises me. “I wish you could come. I...I hope things change for you.”

I look down at my feet again.

“So do I,” I whisper, lying.

To my astonishment, she suddenly takes my hand, leans across the tarmac, and kisses me, really kisses me, like I’ve wanted her to do for a long time. But it doesn’t last long enough, and she pulls away again, steps back onto the concrete driveway. Then she turns, jogs back up to the minivan. As I watch, both of her parents come out of the house for the last time, shut the trunk, and climb into the car. I stand back and watch as Annie looks at me one final time, before disappearing inside and shutting the sliding door. The tinted windows hide her from me.

The van engine turns over, and I step away from the drive, watching them pull out. Annie’s parents wave to me. I don’t know if Annie does.

I clench the hand she’d held and feel something against my palm. I look down to find the flower she’d picked, now almost bare of petals, except for one last one, still clinging to the yellow dot in the middle.

The van switches into drive and pulls away. My eyes follow it a short distance out onto the main road again, where it turns finally and drives off.

I watched until it vanishes, standing on the other side of the double yellow lines.



# When Words Fail

*Sierra Bailey*

Her pen is poised above blank paper  
With a soul ready to transform to ink.  
An ocean of a tear, full of the ineffable,  
taints the page—the offering of her mind.  
Her pen is poised above blank paper,  
but when words fail, she lets ellipses speak.



*The Cove - Turnagain Arm, AK*

*Derrick Rowlan ~ Photography*



# PLAINVIEW, TX

*explore the opportunities*

Special thanks to the Plainview Cultural Arts Council for supporting *Embers* through grant funding.

