

# INSIGHT

2021





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# *Dedication 2021 Insight*

## *Mr. Hoolan*



*This year's literary magazine is dedicated to a teacher that, every year without fail, gains the respect and appreciation of students and teachers alike. Christian Hoolan is a staple within the Haldane community, with his dedication to his students and band, The Blues Devils. If you ask any student their feelings on this teacher and his ability to be patient, kind, and attentive to the needs of others, all would reply with pure gratitude for the time they spend with him in the classroom. Without Mr. Hoolan, the Haldane experience would never be what it is now.*

# Table of Contents

<i>WILL</i> - Ziarie Mickell	Page 1
<i>SPIT</i> - Shea DeCaro	Pages 2-3
<i>Toxic</i> - Seren Yiacoup	Pages 4-7
Artwork - Shannon Ferri	Page 7
<i>Fair and Friends</i> - Alex Carone	Page 8
Artwork - Shannon Ferri	Page 8
Art Work - Rachel Iavicoli	Page 9
Art Work - Sense of Place - Minori Shiga	Page 10
<i>Tale of the Four Princes</i> - Jackson Twoguns	Pages 11-17
Artwork - Delaney Corliss	Page 17
<i>Good Days, Good Days</i> - David Burke	Page 18
<i>Nonsense Poem</i> - Madeleine Knox	Page 18
Artwork - Quin Carmacino	Page 19
Artwork - Robbie Baker	Page 20
Artwork - Vanja Booth	Page 21
<i>Lady Light</i> - Camila Saldana	Page 22
<i>Side by Side</i> - David Burke	Page 22
<i>Inn and Out of Time</i> - Arden Conybear	Page 23-27
Artwork - Vanja Booth	Page 27
Artwork - David Fisher	Page 28

Artwork - Dancers - Erika Bauer	Page 29
<i>A Promise Poem</i> - Percy Parker	Page 30
<i>There Once Was a Girl</i> - Mikayla Santos	Page 30
<i>Villainous Instincts</i> - Robbie Baker	Page 31-33
Artwork - Shannon Ferri	Page 34
<i>Empty Streets/Artwork</i> - Ziaire Mickell	Page 35
<i>Dracula</i> - Shea DeCaro	Page 36
Photograph - Liam Gaugler	Page 37
<i>No Name</i> - Shea DeCaro	Page 37
Artwork - Minori Shiga	Page 38
Artwork - Rachel Iavicoli	Page 39
Artwork - Eric Mauro	Page 40
<i>Andromeda</i> - Erica Bauer	Page 41-42
Artwork - Julian Ambrose	Page 42
<i>As An Average Human Being</i> - Mikayla Santos	Page 43
A Christmas Carol Poem - Minori Shiga	Page 43
<i>Dimension Door</i> - Robbie Baker	Page 44-45
Artwork - Giancarlo Carone	Page 45
Artwork - Rachel Iavicoli	Page 46
Artwork - Fiona Shanahan	Page 47
Artwork - Molly Siegel	Page 48
Artwork - Seren Yiacoup	Page 49

<i>The Sky is a Pale Blue</i> - Madeleine Knox	Page 50
Photograph - Ziaire Mickell	Page 50
<i>Bad Guy</i> - Andrew Aiston	Page 51
<i>Dear Future Partners/Photographs</i> - Ziaire Mickell	Page 52
Bloom - Minori Shiga	Page 53
Photograph - Dashiell Santelmann	Page 53
Artwork - Nate McPherson	Page 54
Artwork - Albina McFadden	Page 55
Artwork - Olivia Flanagan	Page 56
<i>Jungle on My Mind</i> - Ben McEwen	Page 57-59
Photograph - Stephen Robinson	Page 59
Artwork - Zoe Silverman	Page 60
<i>Just A Character on the Side</i> - Percy Parker	Page 61
<i>poem about stuff</i> - Jackson Twoguns	Page 62-63
<i>A Children's Story</i> - Percy Parker	Page 64-66
Photographs/Clothing - Chloe Rowe	Page 67
<i>In Perpetuity</i> - Zach Shannon	Page 68-70
Artwork - Robbie Baker	Page 71

## **WILL**

Will today be the last day I see,  
Will today be the last day I look in the mirror and look at myself,  
Will I get shot just for being black,  
Will I get racially profiled and get murdered near the one train track?

Will I have to get beat to death to make sure I'm not a threat,  
Will the cops shoot knowing that I'm unarmed,  
Will the world keep fighting with us and help take a stand,  
Will we African American people get the proper justice for all those names?

Will I have to tell my family my last goodbyes as I bleed on the cold hard highway,  
Will I have to cry hoping the cops will show even a little sympathy,  
Will my friends be at my funeral crying and trying to process what really happened,  
Will my teachers have to pack up my locker and try to think of me and my happy smile and a funny memory.

Will my siblings forever hate the cops even the nice police officers,  
Will my death mean nothing if a White Nationalist attacks for fearing the color of my skin,  
Will the earth take better care of me as they lay me six feet under,  
Will I make one small forgetful mistake that will cost me my life.

Will I be in a cell for one hundred years for a crime I didn't do,  
Will I have to plead and tell the court I am not of a part of a gang or a crew,  
Will they listen if I tell them I can't breathe as there knee or elbow is on my neck or chest,  
Will I come home knowing that I might not leave because the cops have followed me to my place of rest.

**Ziaire Mickell**

## **Spit. - Shea DeCaro**

I hate spit.

The smell.

The taste.

The texture.

But I don't seem to mind it

When we're interlaced

Hand and foot

Under the covers

With your gum in my mouth

and your hair in my hands.

I forget my hatred for simple things

And rely on the mere smell of you to guide me.

I hate spit. And I hate sweat.

But when your tongue is down my throat

And your clammy hands wrapped around me

I can't even hear the television anymore.

I'm not afraid of the wind

Or the thunder

Or the snow trapping me in

Suffocating me.

No matter the time of year

It is spring with you.

You are the breeze ripping through my hair

Grazing the sweetest spots on my back

My neck

My arms

My shoulders

You taste like honeysuckle  
And the sea.  
You'll pick me apart and lick off the dew  
Like these sweet summer plants.

I hate summer.  
The way my thighs chafe together  
The way sweat coats every nook  
Every dark corner  
And festers.  
But when I'm in the shower  
Thinking of you on these hazy  
Suffocating days  
All I do is breathe  
And hold my thighs tighter  
Closer together.

You are my sex.  
You are my tears  
My sweat  
My voice  
My nails  
Aching for your skin under them.

When I was younger  
I'd crave the days when the breeze would tear my clothes apart  
But with you  
I needn't crave.  
I have all I need.

## ***Toxic by Seren Yiacoup***

The world is a yard sale. Every sidewalk is someone's portion of an antique shop. The air feels like Bodrum, but this is Montenegro. Serafina is looking for her boyfriend. She is way out of his league in every way, but she likes the way he makes her feel. His words cause her stomach to be the Valley of the Butterflies. She finally finds him at the end of the port where a big man set up his yard sale. He got rid of a wall to his dining room to make more room for his meaningless items. Her boyfriend hugs her with the man as his witness. "Good to see you, Sera." He says in a light excited tone. His voice is cotton candy so she is able to disregard being called Sera. She expected to feel the heat radiating from his body, but instead he feels wet even though he's dry. She doesn't feel electric today. They go into the man's open dining room just as something to do together. It was awkward. Something's wrong. She feels it. It consumes her. Suddenly it disappears when he puts an old little league soccer medal around her neck. He has another one of his own around his neck. He giggles at her because they're matching. He's so basic. Then suddenly, he takes her hand and runs out of the dining room with her. They run fast and hear the man yelling loudly at them. He didn't bother to catch them though. They stop running when they are in a more crowded area, the middle of the port. Her boyfriend tells her that he needs to suddenly go. She looks at a chair set displayed on a boat. He is gone when she turns back around and she sees someone else's yard sale.

The owner is sitting above her like a king. A vampire king. He's different from her boyfriend. He is stylish and beautiful. He smiles at her, showing off his fangs. Her big brown eyes widen. "What's your boyfriend's name?" He asks her randomly. She takes a step towards him and his shop and starts to look at the unique pieces he's selling. "Cole O'Niser," she says, as if he has a special title. The stranger pauses for a moment then simply laughs. There is a purse in the shape of a palm tree. Her eyes narrowed and she slightly furrowed her eyebrows. "Take it, Fina," he says to her, over enunciating the second half of her name. "Excuse me?" She asks sassily, "Who are you?" She takes a step back from his shop again. Even though her heart is afraid and beating hard in her chest, she makes sure he doesn't know. He stays seated in his throne and taps one of his fingers against the armrest. He looks deep into her eyes with his own blue ones before answering in a deep voice, "Your new boyfriend, Fina." This fear starts to get overwhelming and spreads from her chest to her stomach. He chuckles as he gets up from his throne. "I make you nervous," he simply tells her. He comes to her from around his shop. He is over a foot taller than her so she has to tilt her head up. She shakes her head as well, in denial.

"You think you know me? Because you don't." In response to this, he quickly grabs her throat and squeezes it before letting go of her completely. It all happened so fast. She smacks his arm until he grabs it. "Watch yourself," is all he tells her before he walks her through the city. His grip is tight so she cannot break free. He's hurting her. The city is uphill since it is on a mountain. She finally stops resisting and just goes along with this stranger.

Suddenly, he stops at a house. On the balcony is her boyfriend. This is not her boyfriend's house. She raises an eyebrow then looks over at him again. "Just look," he tells her in a softer voice. She looks back and suddenly there is another girl's arms wrapped around his waist. Her thick eyebrows start to furrow until she's glaring. Her jaw is clenched. "Looks like you are my new boyfriend after all...." She pauses, waiting for him to say his name to her while he chuckles at her words. "Panayiotis." He answers. Panayiotis. His name repeats in her head. She nods in response then starts to make her way to the strange ugly house and barges inside. Her body is warm from the blood boiling inside of her. She goes up the unpolished marble staircase and hears them giggling in the room with the balcony. Panayiotis had followed her. She opens the door hard, making sure it hits the wall. This grabs the pair's attention. "Sera? What are you doing here?" Her supposed boyfriend asks. Fina's eyes stay cold. "Do not call me Sera." She says firmly as she walks up to him. He backs up. He is scared of her. "Listen, don't do something you're going to regret. I didn't tell you because I knew you'd be upset. You can't blame me for not saying anything. Look at how you're reacting right now.." He gets cut off as her hand wraps around his throat and pins him against the balcony door, hard enough to cause the house to shutter. She gets on her tippy toes to whisper in his ear. "I am going to ruin your life," she says before taking the little league medal from around his neck so she can return it to the man. She smirks before starting to leave. Before Panayiotis follows her, he smirks at Fina's now ex-boyfriend. "Guess we will be seeing you around, Colonizer." He teases and laughs as he starts to leave.

Fina smiles at her new boyfriend she met a few minutes ago. Their connection is strong regardless. The spell he casted on her helped a lot too. She takes his big strong hand in her smaller and softer one. "So you have a thirst for blood, right?" She asks in a whisper. "Yes." He responds. "Good." She says.

It only took a week for Cole's reputation to be completely sabotaged. Suddenly every girl he interacted with is missing then later found dead with all of her blood drained. Now any living girl avoids him. He storms over to where Fina and Panayiotis hang out, some rocks by a trail where tourists walk down to go to the beach. They are like sculptures. "How much longer are you going to punish me, Serafina?" Fina sits up from the rock she's sunbathing on and turns to

look at him. "Forever," she says bluntly. Panayiotis sits up now too. "As long as you are alive, you will never find love." She tells him firmly, stabbing him with her words. Cole is weak and he always has been. He grew up in charge of Utopia. No one dared to challenge him up until now. He is absolutely clueless so he simply walks away like the pathetic pigeon he is. Fina's expression becomes warm again. She turns to her side to face Panayiotis, smiling at him. He smiles back, his hand resting on the side of her neck. "I am really enjoying spending time with you, Fina," he tells her. "But, you have this rage that just makes your blood so fragrant. I just want to devour you." He squeezes the side of her neck. "I don't want to break up with you so just do me a favor and lose that attitude." He smiles at her as if he didn't just tell her what to do. She starts to get up. "Then I guess I'm going to have to break up with you." She steps down from the rocks and starts to walk to the beach, attempting to blend herself with the bland tourists. Panayiotis gets up to go after her. He does love her, but his love for being in control beats it. "Fina, get back here," he calls out firmly. She doesn't listen so he has to catch up to her. When he does, he grabs her wrist hard. She can't hide her pain anymore. She frowns and furrows her eyebrows. "Ow.. let go of me," she whines. He pins her against a wooden railing that keeps people from falling off the ledge and into the sea. He keeps his grip on her. He finally sees her face and lets go. Then he kisses her on the lips hard. She kisses him back, only to bite his bottom lip hard enough for him to bleed. He pulls away and looks at her. She has him in a trance with her eyes. At this point, he knows he can not live without her and her eyes. He decided to transition her. Tonight.

Several years passed like days since the night Panayiotis transitioned to Fina. He helped her adjust to her new form. After all that time they spent together she also finally learned to like him without needing that spell. Today they are wearing black, like the rest of the small group they're with. Cole's sister is the only one Fina recognizes. She has aged. Horribly. Paired with her ugly crying, she is a mess, but she can't help it since the last of her silly little immediate family finally passed away. Her beloved brother died alone and unloved. This was satisfying, but not enough. Serafina still wanted more. She walks up to Cole's sister. "Hey you, I'm so sorry for your loss." Her tone feigns sincerity. The sad woman looks up after wiping her black tears with a handkerchief. "Serafina?" She is taken aback by her. It takes her a while to process her eternal beauty. "Yes, it's me. I haven't been around in a while, but when I heard poor Cole passed, I just had to see how you are doing. You must be devastated." She rests her hand on the crook of her neck, feeling her pulse. She bites the inside of her cheek to restrain herself. The woman nodded along as she continued to wipe the tears streaming down her face. Fina takes her hand away and eyes her up and down before batting her naturally long eyelashes at her. "Would you like to

come over to have drinks with us tonight? I'd hate for you to be in that massive house all by yourself," she offers generously. The vulnerable woman accepts the very kind proposal, nodding with a small smile on her sad face. Serafina smiles back and tells her, "Good."



**By Shannon Ferri**

## *Fair And Friends*

The county Fair

Candy apples, churros, popcorn, pretzels, ice cream, cotton candy

Sweet yet bitter air

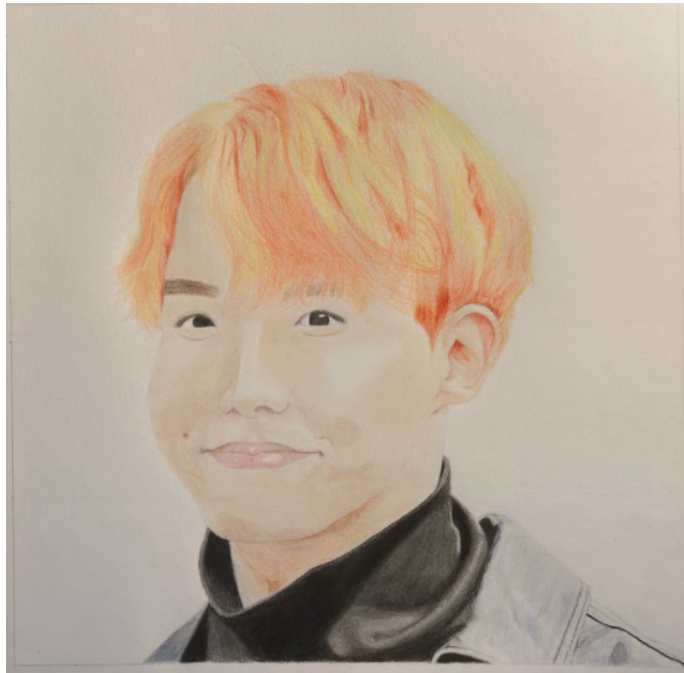
Cheering with screams and laughter with a background of arcade games

The engulfing aroma of treats

Dreamy, nostalgic and blissful

Friends making jokes and having a good time

Alex Carone



**By Shannon Ferri**



Rachel Iavicoli



**Minori Shiga - Sense of Place 2**

## The Tale of the Four Princes – Jackson Twoguns

Once upon a time, a kingdom was riddled with a plague that decimated much of the population. After the King himself contracted it and fell ill, he lay on his deathbed with his four sons surrounding him. The king knew one of them was to be crowned, however he also knew that they were young and arrogant and he wanted to make sure that only the best of his sons was to become king.

And so the King said to his sons, “By tomorrow’s time, each of you will be abandoned in the forest surrounding the palace. Follow the old path leading to the sea, but when you arrive at port, move down the other path and exit the forest at the gates of the castle. The first of you who manages to do this will be King.”

“I am obviously destined to be king,” the first brother bragged. “For I am the most lavish and smartest of us all.”

“You are wrong, brother,” said the second one. “I am the strongest and can take the crown from you if needed.”

“You are both wrong,” the third brother laughed. “I am the fastest and can outrun all of you. Try to match my speed, you cannot.”

“You all overestimate your abilities,” the fourth brother said, smiling softly. “For only the forest truly knows which of us are superior.”

The first brother laughed. “You have no significance,” he said. “Come time tomorrow afternoon, the forest will surely swallow you up, small thing. And if for some elusive reason, you best me, I will surely be the most embarrassed in all the land.”

The King then died, and as he requested, the four brothers were led into the forest behind the castle and abandoned. The first brother, the oldest, dressed in golden robes, extravagant jewelry, and a large, golden crown, entered first. The second brother, dressed in silver robes and crown, with his illustrious and sharp sword, entered behind him. The third brother, dressed in bronze robes and crown, sped out behind them. And the fourth and youngest brother, dressed only in plain, blue robes and a copper crown, calmly went in last.

Despite their orderly entrances, the third brother, a small man, was speedy and quickly made his way to the front. The second brother was strong and hot headed and pushed through to maintain second place. The first brother however, was weighed down by his possessions and had a hard time keeping up. The fourth brother was in the rear and in no rush at all.

When nightfall came, the three brothers in the lead pushed on, desperate to emerge first. However, the fourth brother decided to settle down and spend the night under the stars. He wove a net out of some vines and caught, cooked, and ate some food. He was well rested and come morning, he quickly advanced down the path.

When the third brother was about half way down the path to the shore, he was blocked by an owl perched on a log in his way.

"Be gone, owl," said the third brother. "For can you not see that I am in a hurry? You would not understand, as you are only an owl but I have important business to attend to."

The owl ignored him and simply spoke a riddle:

Voiceless it cries,  
Wingless flutters,  
Toothless bites,  
Mouthless mutters,  
Whispers softly,  
Hides from the eye,  
Cannot catch me,  
What am I?

The third brother laughed and dismissed the owl. "A drunk goblin," he answered, sarcastically. It was then that the owl swooped down and pecked out both of the brother's eyes. And it was so that the third brother was not to be king.

When the second brother came across the log with the owl perched on top, he noticed his younger brother wandering wildly through the woods in the wrong direction but alas, he did not become frightened.

"What is your business, owl?" The second brother asked, clutching his jewel encrusted sword hilt.

The owl spoke:

You must be wise,  
To get through to the sea,  
Answer the riddle,  
And I will let you pass me.

"Sounds easy enough," the second brother said. "What is your riddle?"

The owl spoke out the riddle and the second brother sat in silence for a good moment before coming to an answer. "The wind," he responded. The owl simply let out a shy nod and rose up, allowing the second brother to pass.

Shortly thereafter, the first brother came to the path and found the owl blocking the way. Before the owl could say anything, he asked, "Owl, have you seen any of my brothers pass before me?"

The owl responded:

Ay,  
One passed through,  
A strong one with a sword,  
The first of the two,  
My riddle, he ignored.

The first brother, hearing his brother's moan emanating from the forest grew fearful and angry that the second brother was ahead of him. However, he realized that the fourth brother was just behind him and knew that coming in last place would be disgraceful. "I have a better idea," he said. "If you grant me passage and do not allow my youngest brother to overtake me, I will give you my golden ring."

The owl eyed the ring and after only a breath, he agreed. The first brother slid it off his finger and presented it to the creature, before speeding off to the harbor.

When the fourth brother arrived, he calmly stopped himself short of the owl. "Good morning, Mr Owl," he said. "I see you have stopped me. What is it you need?"

And with the new ring around his foot, the owl spoke:

Higher than a house,  
And higher than a tree,  
Higher than the sky,  
What could I be?

The fourth brother only needed a second before answering, "Why, a star of course."

Despite the fact that his answer was correct, the owl still let out a defining screech before ascending upon him. However, all the fourth brother needed to do was toss up his vine net and tangle up the owl in it. He then made a fire and cooked the owl before taking the cooked carcass with him.

After some time, the brothers all rounded the harbor and continued on their way, beginning to circle around back to the castle. The second and first brothers both continued at a rapid pace, however the fourth brother decided to stop and trade his vine net with a sailor for a glass jar. He filled the jar with some sea water before continuing on his way.

Only after a short amount of time, the second brother came across a large wolf on his path. He was not afraid, as he knew the wolf was alone and could easily be killed if needed.

"Why do you block my path, wolf?" he asked arrogantly.

"Because I have a task for you to complete for me, my child," the wolf purred. She sat herself down in front of him and ran her eyes over him. "You seem strong, child. Maybe you can assist me with knitting up this blanket to cover my young and warm them this winter." The wolf turned and used her teeth to pull out a spool of red yarn and a large needle, before dropping the stash at his feet. The second brother grew concerned because he knew not how to do such a trivial task like sew. However, he knew that if he was to ever escape the forest with his life, he could not fail. Instead, he settled with an alternate option. He unsheathed his sword and made to behead the wolf, but before he could, two more wolves sprung from the bushes, one on his left and one on his right, grasped each of his arms in their teeth and tore him in half. And it was so that the second brother was not to be king.

When the first brother entered the clearing, he found the wolf awaiting his appearance, but he did not see his brother. He asked the wolf, "Which of my brothers have you seen before I?"

"A big, strong one," the wolf answered. "But he was unsuccessful in helping me."

"What have you done to him?" The brother asked.

"Devoured he was," the wolf replied.

The first brother knew that he could not fight the wolf and if he tried, he would surely end up just like his sibling. "What are your demands?" he asked.

"Knit me a blanket to warm my young," she said. "With the yarn and needle at your feet."

The brother looked down to see the supplies before him, yet he knew that he could not sew. "How about a compromise?" he offered. "Instead, I

will give you my golden robes. It will be much warmer and dryer and much, much more expensive."

The wolf examined his clothing and began to desire the golden silk. And so the wolf agreed, however she was asked, as a condition, that she prevent the youngest brother from passing.

When the fourth brother came by, the wolf blocked his path. "Good evening, Mrs Wolf," he said. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, you can," the wolf said. "Would you be so kind as to knit a blanket for my pups? It will be mighty cold this winter."

And so the fourth brother agreed. He took the yarn and needle and began to make the blanket. After a little while, he managed to make a nice quilt for the wolf. However, the wolf, remembering the agreement, called her fellow wolves into the clearing. But the fourth brother was smart and threw his bottle of sea water over the wolves' faces, so that they were partially blinded by the stinging of the salt water. He then dropped the cooked owl, and with their impaired sight, the wolves pounced on it while the youngest brother quietly slipped by.

Over the course of the night, the fourth brother used his yarn and needle to sew an improved net and caught some food. On the other hand, the first brother, way ahead on the path, was naked, cold, and hungry.

In the morning, the first brother came across a fox blocking his way. Anticipating another challenge, the first brother said, "What would you like from me, Fox? I do not have the strength to do any tasks, yet I need to exit this forest before my brother who is advancing upon me."

And the fox, eyeing his golden crown, his only possession left, said, "If you give to me your golden crown, I will let you pass and prevent your brother from overtaking you."

The first brother gave the crown to the fox. "Do what you can," he said.

And when the fourth brother arrived at the end of the trail, he came across a royal fix before him. "Hello, Mr Fox," he said. "Your crown is very nice. I wish I had one like yours."

The fox simply laughed, "If you manage to pass my tasks, it will surely be yours. But be warned. If you fail to accomplish what I ask of you before nightfall, your life will be mine."

The fourth brother agreed to the terms.

"Bring me three hares from the forest," said the fox. And so the brother went out, waited patiently for hares to pass, wrangled them up with his new net, and killed them with the sewing needle. He presented them to the fox.

The fox became annoyed. "Go out and find for me a large stash of elderberries. Then, I will be satisfied." And so the fourth brother went out again, and after searching around for some time in the sunny clearings, used his seawater jar to collect a large stash of elderberries for the fox. He cooked them and mashed them up with some mint so as to not upset the fox's stomach and presented the tasty treat to the animal.

Now, the fox grew angry. "Go out one last time and collect for me six snakes, as poisonous as you can find." And so the fourth brother went out and made a pit trap, and after an hour, returned and picked out six of the most poisonous snakes. He presented them to the fox.

Now the fox became annoyed that the brother had not yet failed and grew furious.

"Why are you angry?" the youngest brother asked calmly.

"Because you have succeeded," the fox cried. "If I do not kill you as your brother has asked, I do not deserve this crown." And the fox sprung on the fourth brother. However, the brother, unbeknownst to the fox, had a seventh snake hiding in his sleeve, and released it upon the fox's face. It bit the fox in the eye, giving the brother enough time to tangle the fox up in his net. The fox, disorientated and angry, was forced to retreat into the woods.

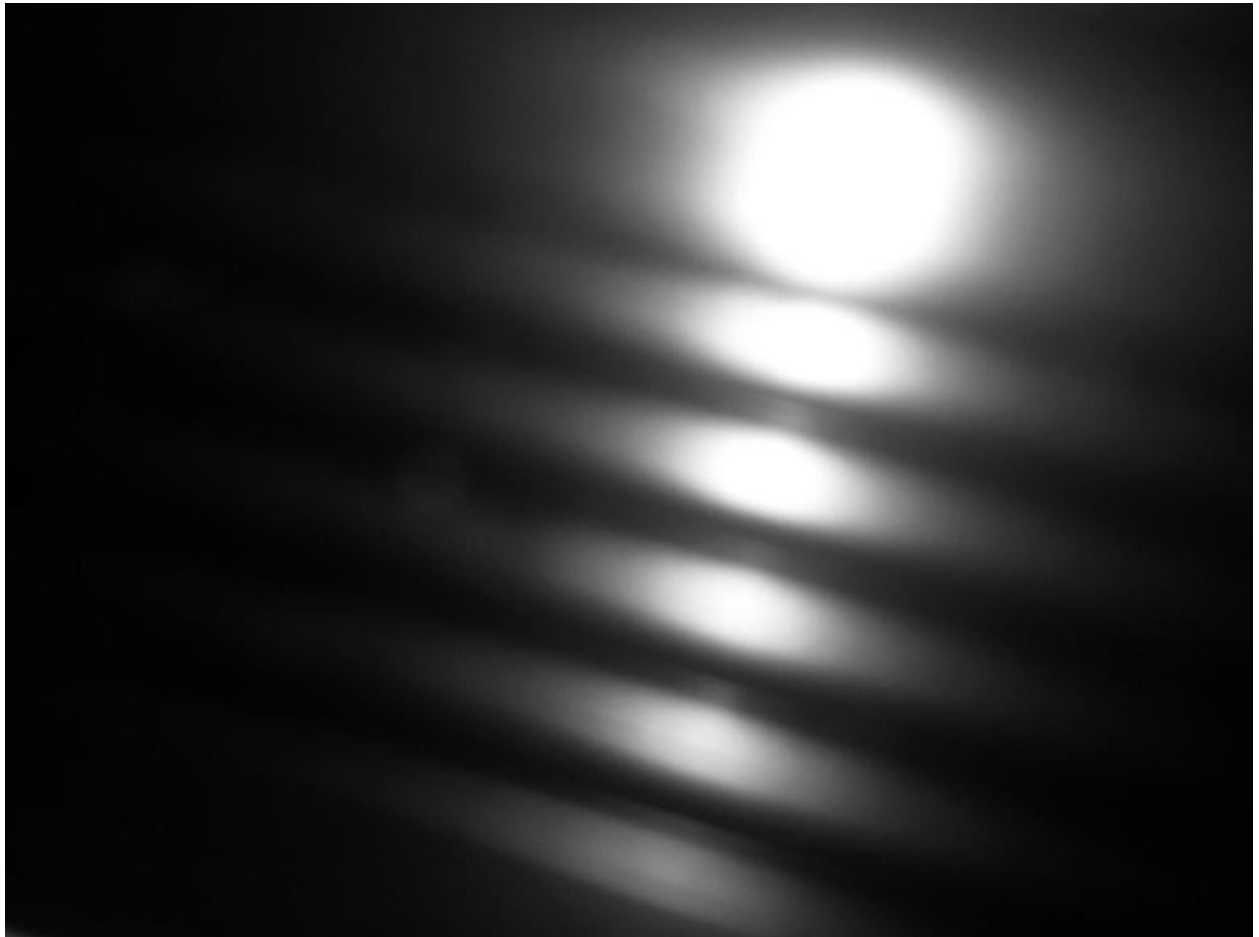
The fourth brother quickly passed through to the end where he found his sibling sleeping along the path. The eldest brother awoke, and ran to the gates of the castle, beating his brother by only a minute. However, the people waiting at the castle saw the first brother, naked and crownless, and did not even recognize the gaunt figure before them. The first brother, looking down at his reflection in a puddle, became disgusted at his own frame and suddenly became aware of the hundreds of people looking at his ugliness. He grew embarrassed and ashamed that he had spent everything only to fail before the eyes of his subjects and threw himself down into the dirt in defeat.

"Forgive me, brother," he said with his face on the ground. "For can't you see that I have already lost everything?"

"I forgive you," the fourth brother said. "But as your new King, an assassination attempt will certainly anger my new subjects."

And just like that, the first brother was seized by the crowd.

At the coronation, four crowns were presented to the fourth brother, one for each of the children of the King. The second, third, and fourth crowns were melted into one and given to the new King. However, the first brother's crown was dipped in tar and set ablaze. Then, by his brother's side, the burning crown was placed upon the first brother's head until he died.



By Delaney Corliss

Good days, Good days  
Wish things could go back.  
Wish we could live life in our old ways  
Wish we have what we had and now lack.  
I remember riding around with my friends  
Basking in the sun's rays  
Feeling as though the good days would have no ends  
Good days, good days  
Reminisce the good times  
Close my eyes and tell myself it's okay.

**David Burke**

His floofy ears piddled on his face, covering his watery bright eyes  
Piddling and paddling across the floor, like watching a surprise  
His tongue swirled and swayed  
And his fur brushed every way  
His paws whittled and waddled in every room  
wish-washing his tail  
As he ran with a zoom  
Leaving small prints across the floor  
As he zootled straight into the door

**Madeline Knox**



Quin Carmacino



By Robbie Baker



By Vanja Booth

### **LADY LIGHT**

**Lady looking so lovely  
Luminous lady, so loyal  
Love the light in her laugh  
Looking so lovely, oh dear light  
Luxury to have you laugh  
Look at the sky, lovely laugh  
Lesson in your eyes  
Lace the sky, with your light  
Lucid eyes, lucky I  
Love lady, lace the sky  
Lead life with your laugh  
Like largess, lasting love  
Leader of my liberty  
Lady so limpid  
Lady you are lively  
Light of my heart  
Lady of my life  
Lordly lady, lissom you are.**

**Camila Saldana**

Side by side hands bound together  
You and I no matter the weather  
Let the sails unfurl and take us where they please  
And sweep us away with love's fine breeze  
Like soldiers take up their arms I will take yours  
And hold you forever so you can rest assured  
That I love you and that's a promise I'll keep  
Until I sleep under the ground 6 feet

**David Burke**

## **Inn and Out of Time - By Arden Conybear**

The doors of the kitchen drift open as if by a strong breeze and the innkeeper steps through. He runs his fingers along the hardened wood counter, relishing in its solidity. Despite the ever rotating world around him, the timelessness of his little inn continues to bring him comfort. He is not alone in his never-changing world so long as his home remains anchored in time. Many years it's passed since the little building was brought into existence, and yet each piece of his life continues to hang on its walls, untouched by the years passed. There, on the mantel, a small figurine of a sleeping kitten. Once detailed, the miniscule hairs on the top of its head are worn away from the countless times the innkeeper's fingers have brushed atop it. An insignificant ritual, but a daily movement nonetheless.

The man's eyes drift to the smooth stone presented proudly on the little table in the lounging area. A gift given to him by his wife, found on the rocky beaches in a town that they once visited every year. She had spent hours looking for the perfect rock, and then hours after that painting an intricate design on it. The rock was covered in large swaths of color, every inch decorated with constellations and animals and flowers. The design was ever-changing, different each time the innkeeper set his eyes on it. Each year she refurbished the paint on the rock so it would never grow dull, and could continue to be displayed proudly for each patron to admire. The rock has not been touched for some time now. Soon it will return to pale grey, only an echo left of the love and joy it was once filled with. Yet on the table it still sits.

The innkeeper wanders through the quiet chatter of his dining guests to stand in front of the old grandfather clock in the corner. It was a family heirloom, once stood by the fireplace of his childhood home. He stares at its unseeing eyes, wondering what it has observed while perched in houses for generations. It has watched him grow up, ticking on as he grew from boy to man. Each hour the clock would play a little jolly tune, one he and his mother would dance to. As a child she would pick him up and spin him in merry circles. Years later he would stumble around on clumsy feet, attempting to replicate his mother's graceful movements. Before he left the house, he had grown able to dance smoothly with his mother. Hand-in-hand, they would twirl around the living room, the hem of her dress teasing the ground beneath it before lifting up again and rippling through the air. The clock's musical chords have long since been silenced. No longer does it tick away, counting the seconds go by. Yet still it stands, silently observing the monotony of the inn and its lonely keeper.

Still caught up in his memories, the innkeeper's feet move as if of their own accord, lightly repeating the steps they had learned years ago, forever imprinted in their muscle memory.

The man floats through the room in a dream, stopping only when his foot collides with the leg of a chair. He turns to apologize, but when his eyes land on the victim of his hazy wandering he finds her unaware of the accidental assault. Instead he catches her mid-laugh, reaching across the table to lovingly grip the forearm of her partner sitting across from her. Beneath the table emerges a moon-faced little boy. As the innkeeper watches, the boy leaps up and flits around the table, giggling to himself and whatever imaginary beings surround him. His eyes sparkled with the naive wonder that only the young can hold, fascinated with the simplistic world around him.

The innkeeper remembered how it felt to be filled with hope, the vast future full of possibilities. Oh, how he was ignorant to the haunting loneliness that lay ahead of him.

The loving atmosphere of the mundane scene before him brought with it memories of a childhood he longed to forget. If he could only dull the thoughts of his past he may perhaps find contentment with his lonely existence. But to observe this family only makes him long for a life he can no longer have a past that he has already experienced. The innkeeper felt a sharp pain in his chest, and he turned away, no longer able to stand still and witness other people live through the moments he yearns to experience just once more.

The innkeeper steps away from the table, beginning to wonder if perhaps being alone is better than being surrounded by people and yet still lonely. At least when he is completely alone, he is met with the companionable silence of the inn, rather than the stifling pain of witnessing others rotate through his home, only a small forgettable pitstop in the fulfilling lives they lead.

He approaches the bar instead, hoping to attend to customers rather than observe from afar. He spots a couple sitting on two of the three wooden stools, facing each other and deeply engrossed in their conversation.

"How can I help you two?" The innkeeper asks quietly. His voice is hoarse from his lack

of speaking, for what is the point of voicing your thoughts if there is nobody around to listen? The couple ignores him, continuing with their conversation. His eyes slide to the woman as she blows angrily out of her nose, leveling a disbelieving stare on her partner. As the man opens his mouth to continue the retort that would only dig him into a deeper hole, the innkeeper politely casts his gaze down to give them space. He studies the floor beneath his feet as the couple continues their bickering. He believes that arguments are useless in the grand scheme of things, just wasted time that could be spent appreciating the moments that will soon pass. But what the innkeeper would give to have even five minutes of bickering with his wife. To watch as her eyebrows draw together and her mouth quirks down, her nose scrunching at some distasteful thing he has said. She was always an expressive speaker, and an even more expressive arguer.

Her passionate rants always filled the inn with life, leaving it cold and empty when she passed. The innkeeper sours at the memories rising from the couple's useless quarreling and realizes they will not expect his help or care to acknowledge his existence.

He quietly slips away from the bar, navigating through the inn from memory alone, no plan for where his feet may take him. He finds himself wandering to the library, craving peace from the unaware causes of the burning in his chest. Shutting the door behind him, he closes his eyes and rests his head against the solid door behind him. How can being alone possibly be a comfort for loneliness? Perhaps it is not quite a comfort but merely a soothing balm on a wound far deeper than can be healed with such a weak remedy. Yet he knows that too much time spent alone with his thoughts only becomes suffocating. Finally his eyes slide open and he takes in the room around him, and is surprised to find an older man sitting alone by the fireplace. The man has a book open in hand, but his eyes are on the fire in front of him, flames dancing in the dark pools of his pupils. Grown used to being ignored, the innkeeper drifts further into the room, content this once to observe without being watched in return. He perches on the chair across from the man and stares deeply into his eyes, wondering what he could possibly be contemplating that could be so engrossing. The innkeeper wonders if this man is alone by choice or by circumstance. Perhaps, if it be by circumstance, he will have finally found a like-minded person, one who shares the longing to feel connection once again. To remember how it feels to talk and be listened to, to exist and be acknowledged. Finally, the innkeeper's curiosity overwhelmed him.

"I can't help but wonder what you see in that fire that interests you so," he says. His inquiry elicits no response from the man. The innkeeper's brow creases. To be ignored, he is used to, but it is near impossible to be so unnoticed in a room filled only with the low crackling of the fire and the quiet brushing of the pages in the man's hands. The innkeeper reaches out and rests his hand on the man's knee, pressing down firmly before pulling away. The man's eyes do not stray from the fire, and after a second his hand reaches down to scratch the spot the innkeeper's had just touched, as if but a small breeze had tickled his skin and not the weight of another's hand. The innkeeper's breath begins to become shallow. It is as if he is only a picture on the wall, a lamp by his side, becoming just another trinket in the inn along with the other pieces of his life left behind. Standing shakily, the innkeeper walks to the table in the corner of the room and stares into the small mirror perched on it.

His breath stops-  
and does not start again.

His hand shakily rises to his face, feeling the familiar sculpted angles of a face he has carried with him his whole life. They rise to his forehead, tracing the scar he knows is there from an early childhood fall. His eyes scan the mirror to track the movement, but fall short.

The mirror is empty.

In the place where his face should be stands the bookshelf behind him, the worn spines of books he has cracked open hundreds of times showing in startling detail. Where his shoulder should be shown instead the battered wallpaper of the wall to his side. Every inch of the scene he looks into is painfully familiar, the picture perfect image of a room he has looked into countless times throughout the years. Yet his own face is absent from the picture. The innkeeper whips around to stand in front of the man. And for the first time in years, he yells. He screams at the man, demanding him to acknowledge his existence, to startle at his hoarse screams, to even tear his eyes from the fireplace for just a moment. But the man does not even lift a finger. His eyes remain steady on the flame in front of him, sitting statue-still in the paisley armchair.

The innkeeper falls silent, and slowly begins to collapse in on himself, sobbing quietly. For loudness is not in his character, even in death. Gone is he from the ever-changing world around him, stuck inside the place he has forever called home. He steps out of the library and stands in the dining area, staring at the patrons going on as if his world had not been just torn

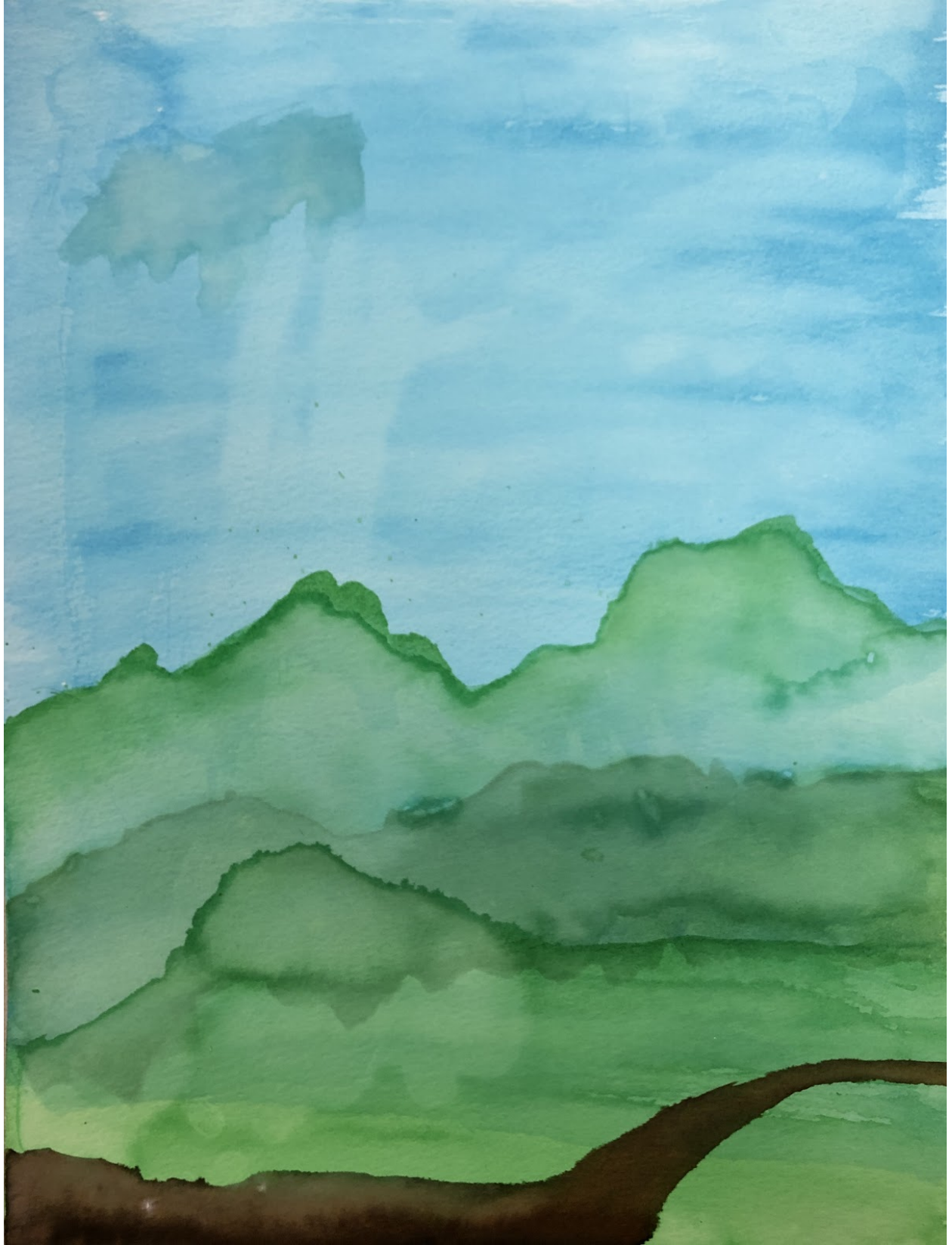
apart. But they have always acted this way, have they not? For years, decades even, not a single passerby has looked the innkeeper in the eye. He looks around, studying the garb of the guests and not recognizing the style of the ladies' skirts, the trim of the men's tailored pants.

"What year is it?" the innkeeper wondered to himself, staring unblinking at the people who are his only glimpse to the outside world. For time has truly stopped in his little inn with his memories pinned on the walls and his past decorating the coffee tables. And outside the stained windows, time has marched on, his death not even a blip on anybody's radar. For there was nobody to mourn him and nobody left to remember him. The innkeeper closes his eyes, spending another timeless moment letting life circulate around him and time pass through him. He walks back towards the kitchen, straightening a family photo on the wall before disappearing behind the closed door.

And life continues on.



**By Vanja Booth**



**By David Fisher**



**Dancers by Erika Bauer**

### **A Promise Poem**

A promise can be a praise, a promise can be a prayer  
A promise can be a poisonous plague for a person who will break it  
A promise is a privileged prince, pitying the poor and promising to help them, knowing he never will  
A promise is a pair of pinkies linked, two precious kids promising friendship for forever  
A promise is a proposal, a private promise of love  
A promise is a parent giving their word that unicorns and phoenixes are real  
A promise is as flimsy as plastic, or a promise can be prioritized  
A promise can be paper thin  
A promise can be a projection of what one pretends they don't worry about  
A dream is a wish your heart makes, but a promise is made by the mind  
Promises please and fail, but their purpose is to protect the truth  
Does a promise poorly do its task?  
Let this poem decide

### **Percy Parker**

There once was a girl who counted by the day,  
While her loved ones are gone and so far away,  
Her best friend was stolen,  
Which left her heart swollen,  
She just wished that everyone she loved would stay.

*Mikayla Santos*

## **Villainous Instincts - Robbie Baker**

*I can burn down that bank.*

Moira didn't know where the thought had come from. She didn't need to, the sheer thrill that went up her spine and echoed through her chest was motivation enough. Why would she be sitting in a dollar-a-piece garbage pizzeria on her lunch break when she could do anything else in the world, like completely decimate a bank? How dare whoever hired her give her only a twenty minute lunch break, as if stocking canned foods was ever so important. They'll probably be pissed when they find out, or scared, or traumatized. They should mind their business. Stock dog food themselves.

It took ten minutes. The flames hadn't fully consumed the building, which pissed her off, but they were clearly seen from the windows outside, maybe. Funny how one guy trying to smoke near a corner, creating a flame from the tip of his finger, and a stack of newspapers could lead to events like these. She was laughing, she forgot she could do that, the heat scorching her legs, and wondered if there were sirens yet. She couldn't make out much noise, besides screams. Moira'd probably be screaming as well, but this was an instant where her usually stupid special power was actually good for something. How lucky was she, able to pull off a thoughtless plan so thoroughly. She could practically hear her mother scolding her now, how she should be running by now, at least five miles away from the crime scene. How she should grab the money from the safes in the back, then Moira could live rich for like three weeks before running out of funds.

She kicked, broken from her trance as some poor woman was grabbing at her skirt, probably to beg for help from the ground. Most people were on the ground now, either to avoid the smoke or because they couldn't bear to stand. It must have been strange, she realized. She was still standing, not even breaking a sweat. She stuck her hand in a nearby flame and wondered at the sensation. Like smoke, or wind, that's what it felt like. Soft and unreal, serenely quiet, perfect, in her opinion. She smiled.

...

It had been two weeks since the whole bank fiasco. When asked about it, how stupid it was, why she didn't take any money (really she should've), Moira dismissed it with either a slight wave of her hand or an absurdly vocal cough. She didn't remember much, just woke up the next morning with all her stuff. She was able to connect the dots, though, and not because the answer was on the news. After the fire was put out, police investigated and quickly found Moira Breen to be the culprit. Within two hours they busted her apartment, but by then she was long gone. As hazy and vague as her mind was, she had some villainous instincts.

That's how she ended up explaining the story to Dale, anyway. They drank their respective alcoholic beverages at way too early in the morning and contemplated. When Dale coughed like he meant to say something, Moira automatically let her mind drift away. His voice was practically white noise, and while she appreciated the concern, she'd much rather drink her failures away. Eventually he left the bar. It was a shabby old thing, found by some back allies in some sketchy area, a villain safe place. More like a breeding ground for bargains and crime deals.

It kinda sucked. She'd never done anything like this on her own before. Usually she was one in a group of assholes out to set an example for someone, or go make a mess of things to cover up someone else's back alley crimes. Sure, she was probably in the police records for incidents like these, but this was a solo mission, so to speak. No one to cover or back her up.

Exposed would be the right word, maybe. Like Moira was before some elegant cliff overlooking the water far down below. Like the ones in Ireland or Scotland or somewhere. Grassy moors shielded by fog, air fresh and sweet. What a better place to be than here. In another life, or maybe this one, Moira might have a cottage, with goats or chickens or some shit, she'd paint or write or sing or sew. She could be the witch of the wood, perhaps, with a twirly long skirt and herbs bundles hanging from her ceiling.

...

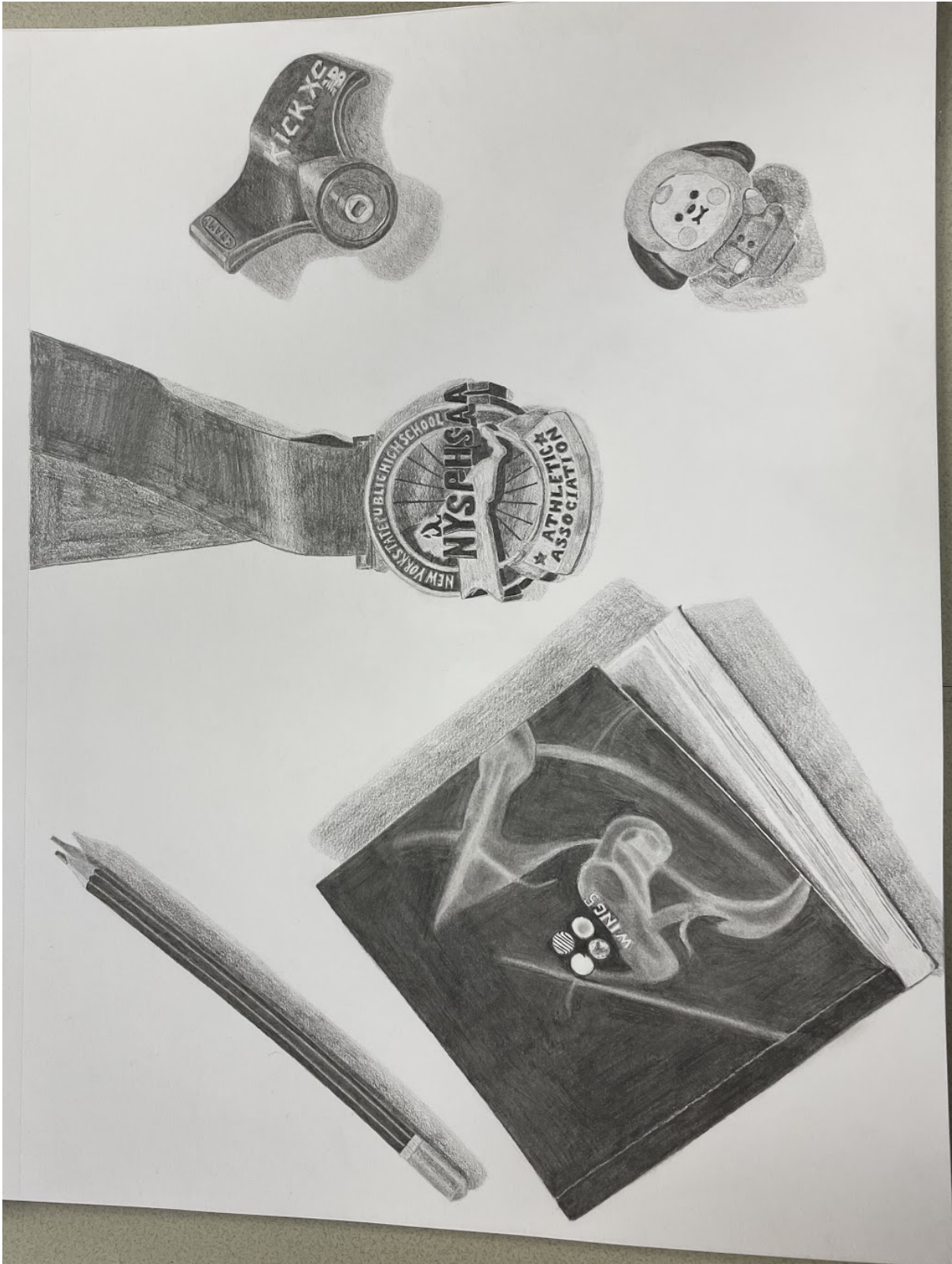
Okay, she was a bit off for a little while, but now she was back on track. Instead of a shitty pizzeria or bar, now it's a warehouse. With big crates full of god knows, and

tables covered in evil diabolical plans, this was Moira's scene. She was working with three other people, none of them knowing each other's names, just their powers and their positions. One in each corner of the warehouse, needing to see whoever gets the little black package. It was a group of 'doctors' meeting at the center, hopefully unaware of their presence.

Moira wasn't big on villain politics, but the gist was one Dr. Bad stole another Dr. Bad's something serum and now they need to get it back and have every other Dr. Bad killed. Fairly simple, kinda funny how all the villain names bounced around her head. The only real problem was that this little client didn't know the super powers or weapons of the doctors. There was the only one thing she knew about her three partners based on the job description, they all probably had some form of immunity similar to Moira.

Sounds of shuffling shoes were what alerted her. There were six participants of the known-unknown meeting, all of them going off in pairs or triplets, except one. Of course, she had to do all the work. The guy was tall but thin, balding with stains on his lab coat, a villain passing as a normal psychotic doctor. She watched as he swerved through the maze of crate and machinery, lost in his thoughts. As he approached the door, she made her move. Jumping like a cat pouncing its prey, she was on his back, his chest against the soot covered floor. His eyes were wide, before giving her a wolfish grin, and he grabbed her arm. He sunk his fingers into Moira's skin, laughing slightly at his presumed win. It was supposed to do something, probably, maybe poison or kill her, but soon it was Moira laughing. What a good day to have her immunity, she thought, before taking a knife and slicing his throat. The man gagged on his own blood, struggling to get up, but it was pointless. Moira stood up and stuck her foot directly on his middle and watched as he bled out.

Once he was over, Moira searched his pockets and quickly found the black velveted prize. Opening it, there was a small test tube with some clear liquid sloshing around the bottle. She pocketed the package before making her escape through a broken window. The only contact she had with her teammates was a message deciding that they should all meet up before presenting the serum. Like shit that was happening. She jumped a fence, and scurried under a bridge, weaving her way back to the bar. She could brag to Dale about this win.



By Shannon Ferri

## EMPTY STREETS

Yes I wish we were in class right now,  
Watching the news and complaining like a cow,  
We're all scared more frightened than if Freddy or Jason showed up to the door,  
The only thing I feel like doing is watching the dust particles hit the floor.

The roads are clear hardly anything in sight,  
No church bells ringing or cars honking or even a wailing ambulance siren,  
The Earth must have gone through a blackhole depression,  
Babies are tired of looking at the ceiling,  
The President can't comfort us; his words are never healing.

The highways are all taking a left to the next exit,  
The bridges feel lighter not stressing with all that weight,  
Expressways leading to big cities with not a living creature out,  
The animals are even hiding from us and winter just ended.

Most people are upset and taking it seriously while others think it's all for play,  
Paradise is fun until you bring unwelcome visitors in your home that can kill the people you love,  
A mask won't protect you all that much because the air contains Corona--tag your it.

Singing out loud with the rushing foul smell of the sewer,  
There are no options but to stay off the sidewalks,  
Six feet away is not enough because a sneeze can reach three hundred without a problem,  
The Covid-19 will drive us under its tracks unless we put up a red light.

**Ziaire Mickell**  
**March 15 2020**



## **Dracula**

**By Shea DeCaro**

There are always ulterior motives on these stagnant nights.

When you drag me to these caverns

And the lights contrast the shadows on your face

I want to touch the concrete of your skin.

But you look at me

And say I may not feel

Or make contact

With these deep corners.

You leave me in between the sheets

As if I'm intertwined with many lovers

Caressing my legs

And sticking to my skin

I may touch

But only if I accept the consequences.

As you may bite.

The sensuality between pleasure and pain

Leaves me yearning

Burning

For these extravagant nights.

But as I lay here

Naked on my cotton sheets

These hot summer nights assaulting the skin on the back of my neck

And attacking every fold on my body

I am left reminiscing these shadows you have left me

When you held me by the neck as I begged for one kiss

I loved when I didn't get my way

But the gas in the lamps ran out

Which meant our time was over.



**By Liam Gaugler**

When my breathing turned light from the wind stinging my lungs  
And the grass itching my scars  
I turned to you under that sky and released myself into your soul.  
In the most elegant of ways I left you,  
But you found these shards of myself still in your hands  
And cheeks  
And eyes.  
Now every time I look up at the stars  
your reflection stares back at me  
And I realize how far I have traveled.

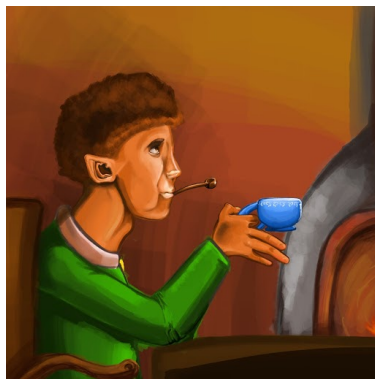
**By Shea DeCaro**



By Minori Shiga



By Rachel Iavicoli



By Eric Mauro

## **Erica Bauer - Andromeda**

When I remember the events of that night, it is almost like it happened yesterday. It was the summer of 1969 and I was around 23 at the time. I was home visiting my parents for the summer and the moon landing was broadcasted on the television a couple weeks before. It seemed like it was the only thing anyone would talk about. Especially myself. Ever since NASA had started doing these missions, I had been so completely engrossed in anything space related. So when I turned 23 in July, my parents bought me a telescope. I would take it out to the backyard and look up at the moon. How wonderful it was to think that humans have finally walked upon it. I wished that I could too, but I was way too scared to actually embark on a mission like the astronauts did. I would prefer to sit and study the stars from the ground. That one night in particular though, I decided to take my telescope to another area where there were less trees crowding my view. And that's when she came. At first I thought she was a shooting star. But she came from the sky and landed gracefully right in front of me. Her skin glowed like a lightbulb and her hair burned like a pink sun. I never in my life had seen anything like her. Her eyes pierced my skin, they were a flaming orange. Her body was covered in clouds of stardust, almost imitating a gown. I asked her if she was God. She laughed at me and politely told me that she was a "celestial being". I had never heard of that term before that night. She told me that her name was Andromeda and she lives among the stars. She has been alive since the beginning of time and quite often becomes lonely, so she visits different galaxies for fun. She was looking for fun, so I took her to the first place that came to mind: the diner. We sat at the table and everyone stared at her. They were in awe of her beauty, and so was I. She became quite fond of those milkshakes and ended up having 5 more that night. She thanked me for the milkshakes and left the diner. I assumed that I wouldn't ever see her again, but she visited me the next night at the same spot where I sat with my telescope. She wanted to hang out with me again. This time we went bowling. She had quite the arm because she accidentally broke the wall. Of course I had to pay for that. But at the time, it didn't matter to me. I was absolutely enamored with her that I could care less about what she did. I was just happy to spend time with her. It had then become a habitual thing. Every night, I met Andromeda in the same spot and we would go do something fun. Pretty soon, we ran out of new things to do, so we started to repeat things that we had done previously that we had fun doing. Eventually, I had to leave my parents house to go back to where I was living. I was sure that I would have to say goodbye to Andromeda, but she told me that she wanted to go with me. Of course, I said yes. We had been living together for more than 50 years. We did fun things everyday and got milkshakes every friday. She made me the happiest person in the world. Now in the winter of 2029, I am 83 years

old. Andromeda has left me. She woke up one day and said to me, "It's been so fun hanging out with you! I don't want to waste your time anymore, so I'll leave now." I didn't understand it. How could she want to leave now? After spending the majority of my life with her, she acts like we are only two acquaintances who have been making small talk with each other for a few minutes. I asked her why she suddenly wanted to leave me. "I'm just getting a little bored of you. I want to go play with someone else now." That was all she said, and it was enough for me to understand. Andromeda had mentioned to me before that she had been alive since the beginning of time, and is unable to die. She doesn't think about time the same way that I and the rest of humanity does. A lifetime for me is just a few minutes for her, and I am just one of the billions and billions of people that she will meet in her lifetime. She gets lonely up in the stars, so she comes down to Earth to play games. What I thought was love, was just a game to her. I watched her walk out the door. Even if I could make her stay with me, she still would feel no different about me. I recall the events of that night when I met her and started sobbing. She was once the person that made my life worth living, but now I am counting down the days until I am no longer alive.



**By Julian Ambrose**

As an average human being,  
I have a lot of fears,  
They always leave me scared,  
As they build up through the years,

There are certain things that calm me,  
And certain that do not,  
Like watching pink sunsets,  
Where there is not a fear in thought,

With the pretty white clouds,  
And the faded yellow sky,  
It makes all my problems disappear,  
In just a blink of an eye.

**Mikayla Santos**

Ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there,  
splitting into artificial little snow storms.

The shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist,  
pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts,  
the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose.  
It was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day.

**Minori Shiga**

## Dimension Door - Robbie Baker

The trek out to the bunker was as hot and miserable as always. Sunlight beamed through the gaps of vines woven between trees, mosquitoes feasted on our blood, and I kept getting my muck boots stuck in elusive mud puddles, hidden by the tall grass. I didn't dare voice my complaints to Cidney, though. She probably cut at my arm again, tell me to live through it.

I shifted my fishing pole to my other hand and adjusted my bag heavy on my back. I silently cursed the Old Man for overpacking our supplies. The others insisted that it was all necessary, every bit of rope, water, food, ammo, and matches. What was really ridiculous was that I've been cleaning stragglers out the bunker longer than most of them, including Cindey! What you really need are two pickaxes, a single water bottle, and a gun. When we finally reached the top of the marshy hill, it took a few minutes to find the entrance. What can I say, the damn thing likes to change. Cidney found it and seemed proud of herself, she even told me to stand back when she fished out the keys from her pack. It was a round door looking thing in the ground, with a thin metal ladder leading down.

I went down first without hesitation, Cidney cried out for me to wait. The smell was as ratchet as ever, the slight sweet scent didn't mixwell with the sewage and rot. The halls were lit by dim, flickering lights attached to the bronze walls. Some of the metal sheets had been half torn off, allowing dirt to spill in. But the real focus was on the rotting carcass. It looked like a messed up mix between a moose and cantaloupe head, parts of its ribs were strewn around a hall leading left, and some of its rib bones were stuck in the wall.

Cidney gasped at the sight, stumbling back and nearly falling to the disgusting floor. She looked at me with horror, like she was expecting me to do something. Either help her up or have the same reaction but I just laughed. She was acting so confident just minutes ago, and now I have to take the lead. I shrugged the pack off, Cidney making a noise when it landed in a small stream of blood, and pulled out the gun and two pickaxes, attaching them to my belt. I set the fishing rod too, not seeing it as useful. All we needed to do was catch the creature and close off the door that got it here.

"Okay, so it's carnivorous." I addressed Cidney. "It probably chased that," I pointed to the carcass," into the bunker and now it's freaking out. Luckily I don't think the opening is too far and we can just follow the blood trail." Admittedly I was relieved. Old Man made it sound like an overnight stake out kinda deal.

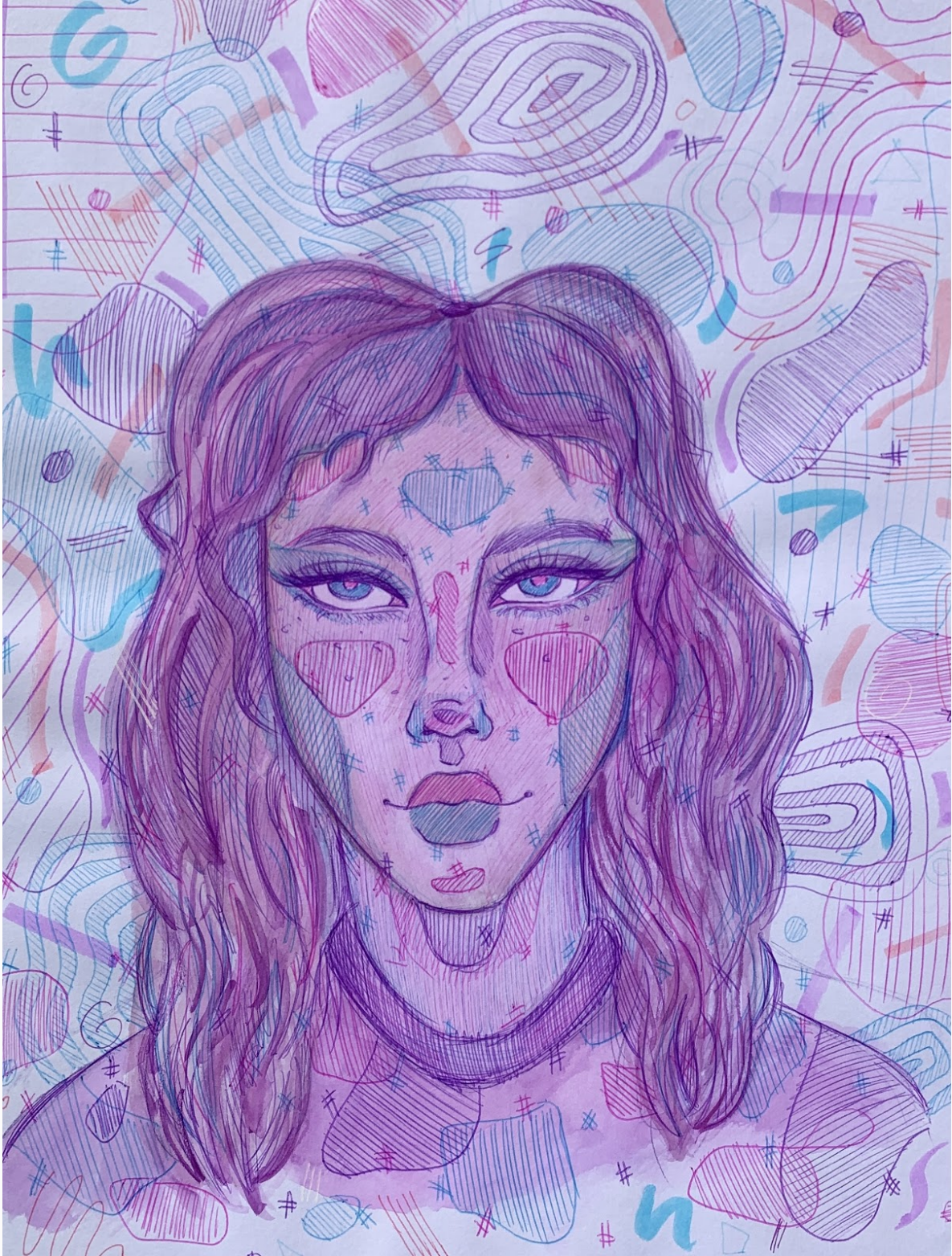
"But what is it?" Cidney asked, nodding to the dead animal. "That looks like a kinda hybrid animal, and whatever killed it has enough brain power to play darts with its bones." We

both looked at the bones in the wall. This might've been the worst she's ever seen down here, I realized. I nearly laughed aloud and tried to remember her first mission to the bunker. She probably helped some poor soul who found their way into the bunker back to the world where they belong.

That's probably why she was acting so confident. Never seen any of the really fucked up things that can end up in this bunker. Probably never been through any of the doors before, either. Well, no more peaceful sleep for Cidney, cause we have to go creature killing before too many other beings that shouldn't be here show up.



**By Giancarlo Carone**



By Rachel Iavicoli



**By Fiona Shanahan**



By Molly Siegel



By Seren Yiacoup

The sky is a pale blue  
Pink petals soft and clear  
Their greens stems itching from the ground  
With yellows and purples brushed against her ear  
Laying in the meadow  
Clouded in flowers  
Thoughts of the near future  
Would soon devour  
Her innocent mind and heart  
Would be turned away  
Because being joyous  
Was not a place you could stay  
Instead a building  
With walls of beige  
And staring at computer screens all day  
With money barely enough  
To make herself dinner  
Her old friends like the rest  
Their souls become thinner  
So all she did was stare at the clouds  
Breathing in the last of her youthfulness now.

**Madeleine Knox**



**By Ziaire Mickell**

## *Bad Guy*

*The Raconteur was Ramshackled but rambled on*

*About risque Ricky, the raunchy man.*

*He Told the tall tale of the tasteless Ricky*

*truculent the man is, not a truce to be had.*

*Quick like a rabbit, he probably has a habit*

*Capricious by nature, captious by nurture*

*He loves a capacious and neat room*

*When his chum went for a chump to throw some chunks.*

*He made a clanger and clammed up,*

*You couldn't circumscribe him.*

*They saw no contrite, they set him up right.*

*Culpable for his deeds, the cumbersome load.*

*He zoomed and boomed all in his room,*

*Suddenly stopping for his heart was popping.*

*Andrew Aiston*

## DEAR FUTURE PARTNERS

I want to hold you tight,  
So tight that you can't let go of my fastened grip,  
Seeing you happy in my arms is a joy that I won't forget,  
Feeling your blonde fuzzy stingy or black curls is a sensation my fingers will always remember.

Kissing your soft lips is something that I want to wake up to every morning, Roughhousing in the fluffy vanilla covers like two pieces of colorful M&M's in a sundae is such a lovely moment,  
Seeing the sun shine in your hazel brown or ocean blue eyes makes my heart explode as a star does,  
Puffy cotton clouds rise up inside me like a gorgeous day in summer.

I want to smell your hair like sniffing a line of cocaine,  
Your aroma makes me hungry,  
It's like your a chef that knows my every order,  
The scent you have is so mysterious that I'm intrigued by the interesting enigma you are for me.

I want you to find my heart like a lighthouse finds lost lonely ships,  
Searching for you with a compass is hard, Until I followed the magnetic north which me drew me toward you,  
My sweet urge for all the things you have is worse than all the drug addictions combined.

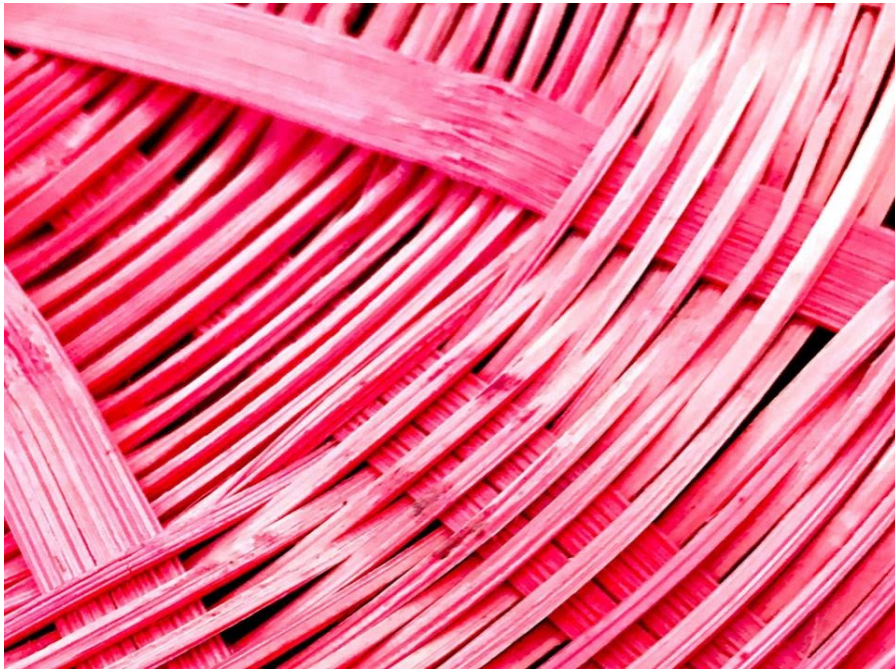
**Ziaire Mickell**



## Bloom

Winter blooms into spring  
Ripe berries for picking and fresh garden vegetables,  
Chirping birds, singing birds,  
The grass smells new and alive.  
The earth awakening with a cheerful green grin,  
And the feeling of butterflies fluttering inside and out,  
And the sprouting of the purple crocuses,  
And the thawing of the world,  
Always feels nostalgic.

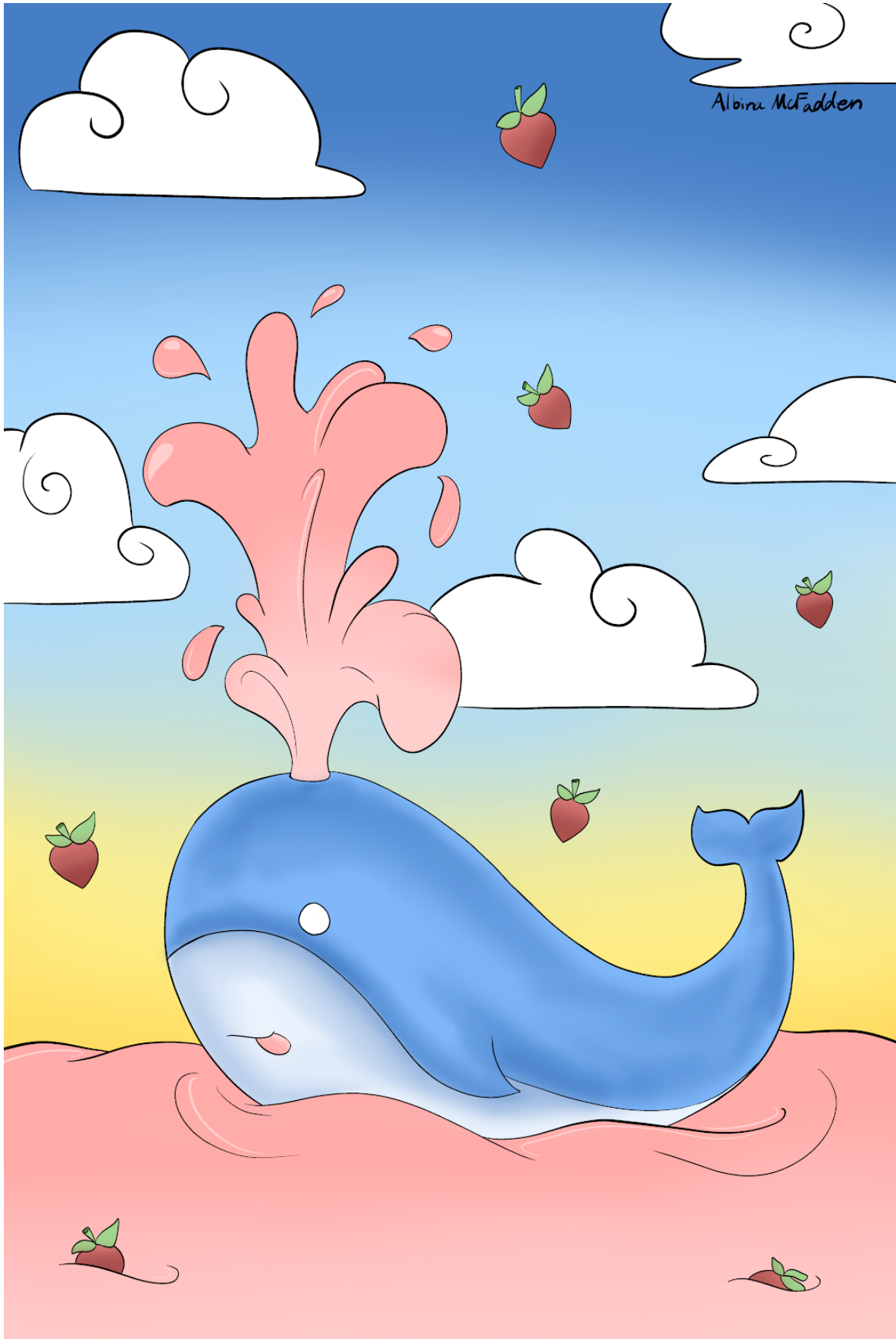
Minori Shiga

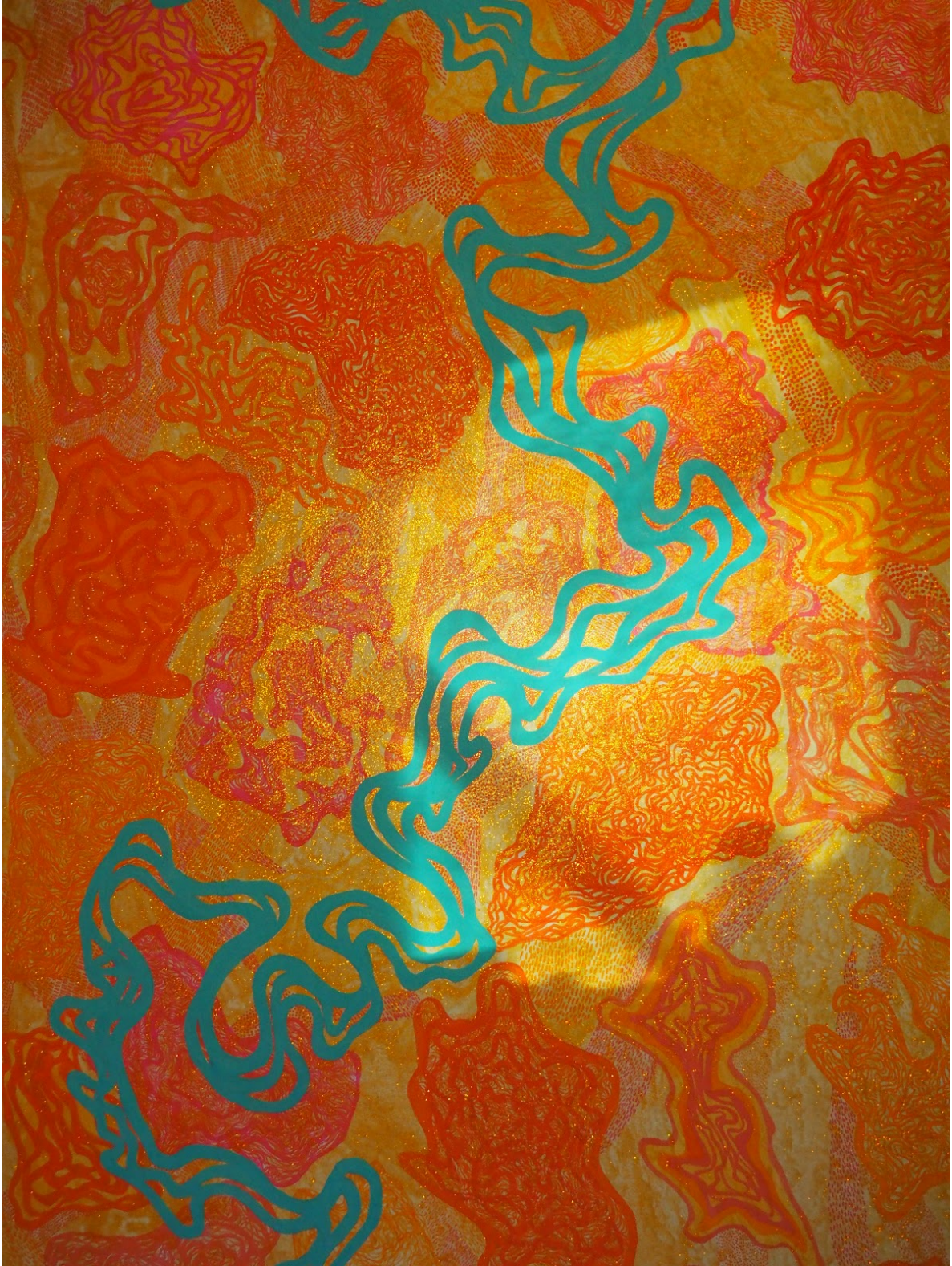


*By Dashiell Santelmann*



*By Nate McPherson*





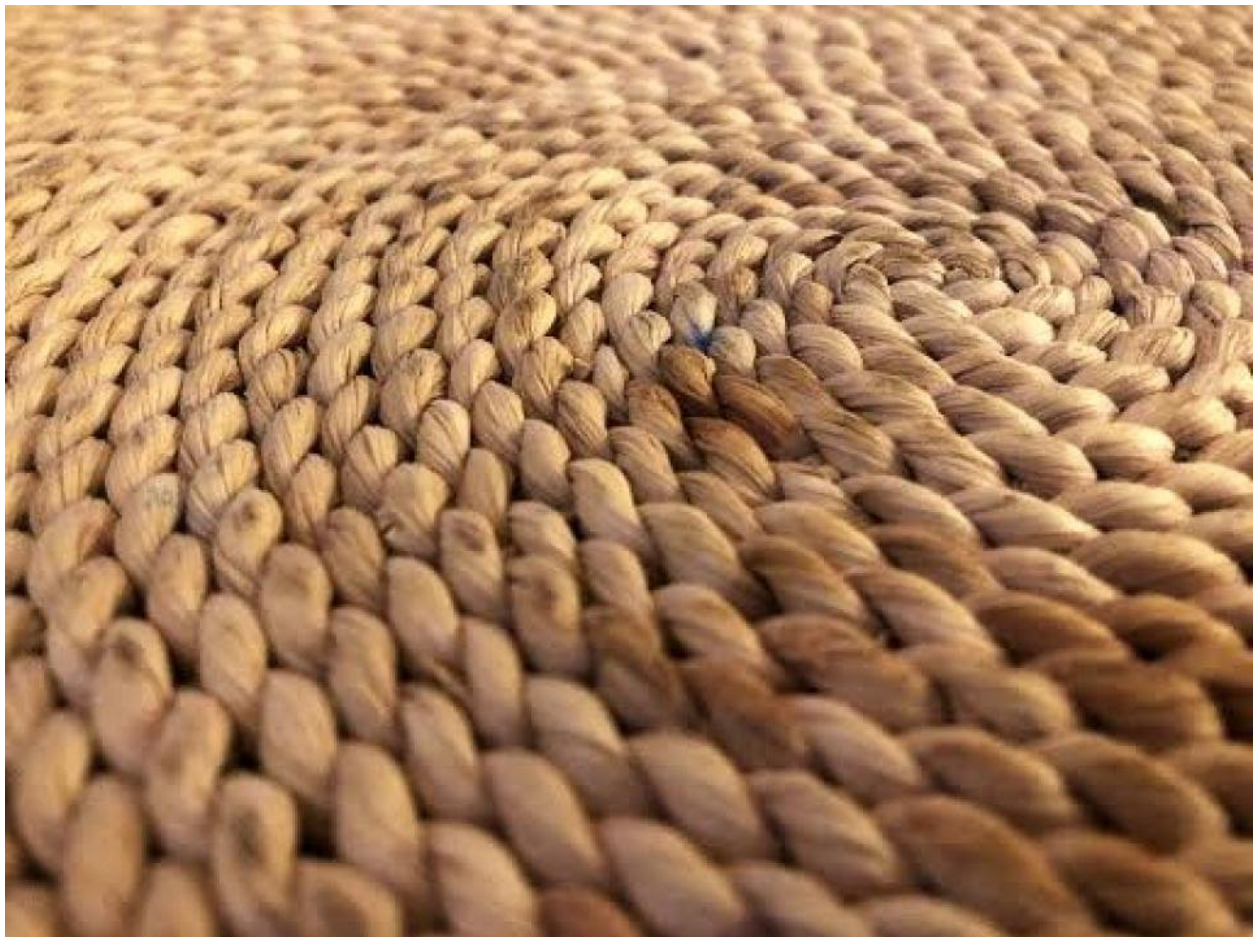
*By Olivia Flanagan*

## **Jungle on My Mind - By Ben McEwen**

Tick. Tick. Tick. It seemed like the sound was drilling into my head, slowly picking away at my skull. The sound was so percussive you could hear behind any closed doors. It always loomed over me, like the gong of death. It gave me such a headache I had to get some water from the cooler by the bathrooms. "4:32!" my boss said in a sneering voice. "You can get a lot done in 28 minutes, so get to it, apply yourself! You won't regret it!", his forehead dripping with a mixture of hair gel and sweat. "Sure thing, boss!" I responded, almost like a reflex. "Good man!" he said over his shoulder as he shuffled to his office, head bobbing side to side, his tacky shoes clacking on the linoleum floor. I made sure to use my "work" voice so he wouldn't engage and try to ask me about my day. I looked to see him disappear behind the corner. The fluorescent lights seemed to be getting brighter and brighter, the persistent hum of the bulbs droning throughout the whole building. Tick. Tick. Tick. "This is what I came back for?" I mumbled under my breath. "4 years of fighting for my country, scarfing down rancid rations, watching my fellow men die in my arms, this is how I'm honored? A desk job that I hate and a car that limps across the street?" It was a quarter to 5. I could see I was getting concerned looks. In an effort to look sane, I pulled a cigarette and patted my pockets trying to find my lighter. I knew exactly where it was, in my left pocket, but I kept scrounging for it to make them forget that I had another one of my episodes. Upon seeing me struggle, Daniel tapped me on the shoulder and offered me a light. I took it just so he wouldn't feel bad. The intern's hands shook as they raised towards me. Daniel was always trying to talk to me, mostly vapid stuff, shooting the breeze. Today though was especially bad. He kept talking his head off about this business trip in South America. His voice started to fade out as the thumping in my head intensified. I nodded my head like I was actually listening to him. I started to walk to my desk to get my things and followed right beside me. I couldn't shake him. "... This will introduce our brand into new markets and show what we have to offer! It's such a great opportunity, it will look so great on my resume!", he sporadically exclaimed with each breath. "I'm so glad the boss put me on the trip with you!" Just then I stopped in my tracks. "What?" I said looking him dead in the eyes. "Oh good, he told you!" my boss said with a sinister grin. "I figured since you've shown so much passion for the job you would be thrilled to go!" I darted my eyes back and forth between my boss and the intern and without saying anything else, left. The whole way home I couldn't get my thoughts straight. It all seemed too much, the trip, the lights, my boss's shoes. When I got to my front door all I wanted to do was drift away under the covers and leave this world for a while. "Hey, you're home late." my wife said as she hung up my coat. "Yeah, the freeway was pretty backed up." I lied. I really just wasn't in the mood to talk. "There's something we need to talk about.". She said it firmly, as

if she had been practicing all day. "Ok. What?" I sighed as I slumped into the couch. She handed me a stack of papers. "I want you to mull it over and let me know what you think. I just think it will be the best for both of us." She sat there eagerly waiting for me to say something. They were divorce papers. I couldn't believe it. I stared at the stack in my hands, as if staring at them would make them go away. I slowly got up, papers under my arm, keys in hand as I started for the door. "Where do you think you're going? Don't you have anything to say?" she shouted frantically. "I'm going out. I need to think." I stated with my back towards her. The sun was almost below the horizon, it's reddish hue staining everything it touched. I just kept on driving, Elvis's blues kept me company. I had no direction. No rhyme or reason to my life anymore. I saw a Motel 6 down a ways and shackled up there for the night. I called my boss and said I'll take the trip. Anything to take my mind off things at this point was welcome. I drifted off to sleep. Saturday morning at 7 AM I was 38,000 feet in the air with a bunch of stiff. One was humming Sinatra off-key, one was asking everybody if they were gonna finish their peanuts, and the rest were eyeing the stewardess. My boss was nowhere in sight. I tried to lean back and take a load off but something kept shaking me. Suddenly everyone started to notice it, too. "Probably just turbulence." somebody said. "Yeah, that's what planes do," said another. The nose took a deep dive. We were losing altitude and fast. The windows all caved in sending shards of glass and gusts of wind throughout the whole cabin. This was it I thought, gripping my seat and thinking about all I've done to get me to this moment. I felt the thud as we impacted the unsuspected ground below. For a brief second I could see the light at the end of the tunnel until I blacked out. When I finally came to, I found myself alone. The wreckage was still smoking and I was miraculously still buckled into my seat, not a single scratch on me. The plane was split in half, giving me a gorgeous view of the verdant environment around me. Was somebody trying to tell me something? Was this a sign? Whatever it was, it wasn't long before the panic set in. I quickly got out of my seat and jumped down to the jungle floor below. I tried to get my bearings but it all just looked the same. I started walking around, tree after tree, vine after vine, each one reminding me of how far away I was from home. "You lost, friend?" an unfamiliar voice shouted from a distance. "No, I'm doing just fine. Just looking around." I responded without realizing that it was the first voice I've heard since the crash. I looked around trying to find who was talking to me when I saw him standing on a cliff, observing me. "I see a lot of people like you here," he said. He was a shaman of sorts, he looked very stoic perched up there. "You do?" "So many people wandering, circling around and around but never making a decision." "What are you talking about?" "Don't you see? You're always going with the flow but you never stop to see where it's taking you." "I don't understand." "Sure you do. Dead end job, unhappy wife, all of

those episodes you've been having? You can't keep running away from every confrontation, every decision. They don't just blow over." "How do you know all of this? Who told you?" "You told me just now. The look in your eyes and the way you carry yourself told me everything I needed to know." "Well, what do you want me to do?" "This isn't about me, you have to do this on your own. But if you want my take, I'd say do what you know is right. Do what will make you both happy." "But wait, I have so many other questions!" I cried out, but he was gone. I cried out again, seeing if he would come back, but he never did. The light was shining through the blinds in big beams directly at my head. I sat up and leaned on the backboard. I was still in my suit with the papers in hand. I looked down at them and left the motel. I knew what I had to do.



**By Stephen Robinson**



**By Zoe Silverman**

## Just a Character on the Side

Not everyone is the main character  
Some of us are just on the side  
We watch the leads stand front and center  
And wonder what kind of rotten luck it is that we aren't one of them  
My best friend is the main character  
He had his first kiss in sixth grade  
He argues with his dad and pierced his ears with a needle to defy expectations  
He gets pushed around in the hallways, but he's never once been ignored  
His life isn't easy, and I'm not saying I want it  
But at least no one questions why *he's* in the spotlight  
Sometimes I think I'd rather be bullied constantly than be so ignored that it's just a couple incidents  
per year, incidents I almost *enjoy*, because if someone calls me a slur, it means they saw me and made  
the effort to come talk to me  
It means I was noticed by someone, albeit an asshole  
In order to hate someone, you have to know they're there  
I'd rather have my mom yell at me than give me vague, passive aggressive looks but not say a word  
I'd take a love story with a dramatic, sorrowful ending over the piercing loneliness that doesn't break  
the heart, just makes it ache a little more each day  
I want to be the main character of this story  
Instead of laughing at the jokes other kids make, and going home and retelling them to my dad saying  
*I was making the jokes with them*  
Noah Sweetwine is the main character. Percy Jackson is the main character. Joe Fontaine is the main  
character. Scout Finch is the main character. Katniss Everdeen is the main character. Harry Potter is  
the main character.  
But what about the kids who sat behind them in the classroom, who watched them succeed, who are  
just nameless faces on the outskirts of their story?  
Why can't we ever hear about them?  
Because I am one of them  
And I've tried being a main character  
I dyed a red streak in my hair, I started wearing bold clothes, I learned guitar, listened to loud music  
But there's no changing your part once the movie has been cast  
Us side characters, we're destined to always be witnesses to the action  
We never get our grand love story, our character development, our plot twists  
We just observe  
Quietly in a classroom, watching, making jokes in our head that never make it out of our mouths  
In the eyes of the leads, we are nothing but maybe someone to tease a bit if we're in the way, but not  
noticeable enough to be actively picked on  
We are no one  
Just a character on the side

**Percy Parker**

## poem about stuff - Jackson Twoguns

when my hands are dead and refuse to move  
it's really kind of boring  
they want some words but i'm all tapped out  
but who would i be to rebel

after all words were never really my thing

but if they want something then here it goes  
get ready for something big  
just give me a second to think  
any minute now  
get ready  
wait for it  
here it goes

nah i got nothing  
maybe tomorrow

U still here?

okay  
well if i must  
then how about something cliché

*When the summer wind blows,  
And life is at its peak,  
I dance on the lawn, a sea of cherry blossoms,  
The green grass beneath my feet.*

gross  
who even talks like that  
who even goes outside anymore

well if that's what i got then it's what i got  
if it ain't broke don't fix it  
after all people like that mushy stuff  
*it speaks to the human soul*

yeah i believe that  
take a look at any tax-paying adult and tell me that's what their soul looks like

whatever  
if people like it who am i to judge

don't look at me like that  
i'm not a very sophisticated person

1 + 1 = 2

the sky is blue

take it or leave it

## Percy Parker - A Children's Story

Charlie spent so much time reading that sometimes he forgot his life wasn't just another story. The characters in the books he read seemed much more like his friends than the other kids in his third grade class, who he never was brave enough to talk to. He didn't have any friends, and while he often wished he did, he still had his imagination, and so he was never alone.

On the day our story begins, Charlie was walking home from school, thinking about a book of fairy tales he had just read.

He was taking the long way back from school, on a little path through the woods. He saw a flash of red dart ahead of him on the path. He shook his head, deciding he had been thinking about fairy tales too much, but then he heard a girl scream.

He ran down the path until he found the source of the noise. A girl was standing in front of a huge wolf, who was growling at her.

"Hey!" Charlie shouted. The wolf turned to face him, and he gasped. The wolf bent back as if it was about to pounce. Charlie made a rash decision and kicked its stomach. As it reeled back in pain, the girl picked up a fallen branch and hit it over the head. It fell to the ground.

"Is it dead?" the girl asked after a moment.

"Just knocked out, I think," responded Charlie, his voice shaking a bit.

"You saved me," she said.

"No, *you* saved *me*," said Charlie. They smiled at each other.

"I'm Red, by the way."

He raised his eyebrows. *Red as in Little Red Riding Hood?*, he thought to himself. He decided if he was wrong, it would be too embarrassing to mistake a real girl for a character in a fairy tale, so he didn't say anything. "I'm Charlie," he said instead.

"Do you want to walk home with me? I'm going to bake some sweets for my grandmother."

Charlie nodded and followed her down the path.

As they walked, the two children spoke to each other easily. It occurred to Charlie that maybe, for the first time, he was making a friend.

Eventually, Charlie began to notice crumbs of bread littering the path. They went along as far as he could see ahead.

"Maybe it's leading somewhere exciting," Red exclaimed.

What they found was a young girl in a white silk dress holding a basket of crumbs. She hummed a song softly to herself as she walked.

“Hansel! Hansel, please stay on the path,” she called out

A boy who looked similar enough to her that he must have been her twin came barreling through the trees and onto the path.

“Gretel, there’s a house made of candy in the woods over there! It’s crazy!”

*Hansel and Gretel? I know this one*, thought Charlie.

Hansel and Gretel started to walk back through the trees, but Charlie knew the fairy tale, and he knew they should *not* go explore the house made of candy.

“There’s a witch in there!” he shouted. They all looked at him. “Don’t go. Stay on the path!”

Hansel and Gretel looked at him, but before they could ask how he knew, the sound of an old woman cackling filled the air. They all raced down the path at top speed.

Red took a sudden turn, and they all followed her, but what they saw was shocking. It was a huge palace- in the middle of the woods! The four kids sat down on the grass next to the moat, catching their breath.

“What is this place?” Charlie asked. The other three looked at him like he was crazy.

“This is the royal palace,” Gretel said. Charlie knew for a fact that there were no “royal palaces” in his town.

Before he could ask any more questions, a young woman wearing a blue ball gown ran down the stairs, and straight past them into the woods. One of her shoes fell off, landing next to Hansel. He picked it up and examined it.

“Hey, lady, your shoe!” he called out, but she was long gone. A man appeared at the top of the stairs, peering into the distance.

The other three kids dropped to their knees and bowed. Charlie quickly did the same.

“You three, peasant children. Did you see a young woman run past here?” he cried from the top of the staircase. They all nodded. “Where did she go?”

Red pointed down the path, and Hansel stood up, holding her glass slipper. “Uh, your highness, she also dropped one of her shoes.”

The prince dashed down the steps and yanked the shoe out of Hansel’s hands.

“Perhaps you could have every maiden in the land try on the shoe, your majesty. Then you eventually would find her?” Gretel said, looking up at the prince.

“Quiet, child,” he said, and then he clapped his hands. A servant came running out, leading a brown horse. The prince mounted the horse and looked down at the servant. “She left her shoe behind, so I will have every maiden in the land try it on. Eventually, I’ll find her!”

The prince mounted the horse and rode off into the distance, shouting nonsense. His servant ran behind him, struggling to keep up.

The four children looked at each other and shrugged.

Charlie realized with a shock that the sun was starting to go down. He knew his parents must be worried about him, but he didn't know how to get home. He was in a new world, in front of a castle that didn't exist, on a path that shouldn't be there.

"How do I go home?" he asked his friends.

"Here, we'll show you," said Hansel, and he led Charlie down the path Cinderella had run down. Charlie knew that it should be the same path that they had run down to escape the witch, but instead, the path led straight out of the woods and to the front of his house.

"How-" he started to ask, but as he turned back to his friends, he saw with a shock that they were transparent, like ghosts.

"We can't go any further," Gretel said. "We'll leave you here."

"Do you mean none of this was real?" Charlie asked. Gretel just smiled sadly.

"Bye, Charlie," Hansel added.

"It was nice making friends," Red said, and the three of them disappeared completely.

Charlie looked up at his house, and then back to the path, but his friends were still gone. After one last glance into the woods, he turned and ran into his house.

The next morning, Charlie woke up and went to grab a book off his shelf, so that he could sit in his room reading it, like he did every Saturday. As he walked past his window, he heard the sound of kids his age laughing.

Usually he would ignore them with a twinge of jealousy, but in that moment, he realized something. Whether he had imagined the other world or not, he had been with kids his age yesterday, and he had made great friends. He ran outside to where the other kids were playing kickball, and he asked if he could join the game.

As he ran around and laughed with the kids who might become his new friends, he turned back to the path into the woods. He knew it couldn't be, but he could have sworn he saw three kids beaming at him, waving happily.



Clothing by Chloe Rowe

### ***In Perpetuity - By Zack Shannon***

A hooded man, awash with an air of malice and vengeful spite, marched down the road of black rocks. The sword in his sheath quivered, as if itself wondering when next it could draw blood in the name of glory and pursuit of their shared goal. The man's face, briefly illuminated to other travelers by an overhead light, was seemingly stuck in a twisted scowl, as if eternally upset about something. He received many odd looks from passers-by - not necessarily because of his dress, nor his weaponry. There were many like him, glory-seekers and bloodletters who wished to fight with sword or sorcery for no reason better than to fight. No, the odd looks came because he was walking in the middle of a busy city road in Pittsburgh, and any warrior of power or soldier of fortune was smart enough not to walk towards oncoming traffic. No, he clearly must be either an utter moron, or have a death wish, which was not totally uncommon. Many warriors would lose interest in life having fought enough battles, and would either retire early, go into sports, or find some odd or standout way to end their lives. One fighter, Bernhardt the Immovable, earned posthumous fame by leaping off of the Eiffel Tower's pointed top six times before finally succumbing to his wounds. He was given a statue, which he would likely be very proud of, as it was carved from granite and embedded with iron ingots where his eyes would be. However, it seemed more likely that the former was more likely of our apparent protagonist, as he was not dissuaded by the eighteen-wheeled cattle truck blaring its horn at him to get out of the road. That is, until he seemed to snap out of some kind of trance, pulling an earbud from out of his cloak and looking behind him. "Oh, hell's bells! So sorry about that, truly! I was listening to a recording, you see, telling me to focus my hatred! I'm searching for the men who killed my family!" The trucker, who could not possibly care less, once again honked his vehicle-mounted foghorn. The cloaked oaf, finally realizing his mistake, leapt from the road off onto the curb, and the truck trundled past. Pulling his hood down reveals a bright shock of stark white hair (clearly bleached and dyed; the roots were a boring brown) and dull grey eyes. He promptly removes his other earbud, stowing both in some secretive pocket under his all-consuming cloak, and continues off towards the object of his quest; a grocery store. He had accidentally eaten all of his flatmate's toaster strudels while in a vengeful trance, and was going now to buy him more as a sign of reconciliation. After all, his flatmate was a warlock, and he would rather not be cursed over some pastries. Our as-yet unnamed protagonist, with no sense of urgency to the story, languidly strolls into the local supermarket in search of his objective. After a quarter-hour of searching the crowded mart, our insipid main character finally retrieves not only the brand-name frozen pastry, but a six pack of weak beer as well. His flatmate drank quite a lot, though has a very low tolerance, so 4% ABV would do. Narrowly dodging a brawl between an orc and a

minotaur over the last can of beans, he swipes his long-sought rewards through the self-checkout machine and exits the market without paying - he has learned the secret technique of placing a rock on the weight to fool the machine, because he was broke. He starts back down the street, towards the slowly setting sun, his quest at an end and his story coming to a close. He suddenly and rather conveniently (we need more meat to this story's bones, after all) hears a giggle from an alleyway. Normally, this would be creepy but altogether nothing of note. However, this particular giggle resonated deep with his vengeful soul, filling him with rage and apprehension. He recognized it. The same sound he heard upon the death of his parents once more rattled through his skull, as our now rather interesting hero draws his sharpened steel and turns toward the dark alley. "Hark! Hark, you foul heathenous beasts! Sorcerers, warlocks, who have wronged me, and will now be struck deeply to your cores by my power!" The two cloaked figures stayed where they were, just in shadow, continuing to laugh at him. He continued to grandstand and shout, doing little other than gaining confused looks from passers-by. Finally, the two mysterious menaces advance from the alley, far too tall and far too thin to be normal. They were opposites in fashion, one wearing black with a silver mask and one wearing white with a golden mask. One seemed to be weeping, the other laughing. Nobody else seemed to care. "Ho there, little one! You challenge us without reason, and more importantly without any skill! This would be suicide for you, and as we want a fair fight, we shall take our leave." It took him several moments to realize the two spoke in tandem, somehow. One spoke far too fast, one far too slow, both impossible to understand, and yet he comprehended them easily. Undeterred, he raised his sword, swinging it with a keening whine towards their twiggy midsections. Both deftly stepped aside, weeping and giggling each, and stepping out onto the sidewalk as if planning to take a nice stroll home. Our protagonist, of course, has other ideas. He swipes again, cracking part of the pavement with a downward swing and horribly frightening an unfortunate old woman passing by. Inexplicably, the offending pair have ended up behind him, once more mocking him with their otherworldly expressions of emotion. "It's no use, you know. Stop flailing about, it won't help anyone. Especially not you. Come now, stop and take a moment of introspection." Panting, with a silent refusal to do anything of the sort, the hero of this story continued to swipe and strike at them. Repeatedly he would miss them, and repeatedly more and more citizens would flee from the scene. Clearly, he has to slay these twin blackguards, for both his own retribution and to restore the peace! He would be a hero not only unto himself, but to all others! With this in mind, he reached into his ragged cloak, pulling out an ancient artifact. His aforementioned warlock flatmate had given it to him, saying it had the power to kill any man instantly. He would now test his theory - on the bright side, if it wasn't effective,

he would get 20 dollars from the bet he had made against the claim. The expressions of their masks seemed to become less harsh, more mellow, almost sympathetic. They were not afraid “You poor fool, still you cannot see? That tool will earn you nothing. It will just take away what little you have left. Will you be stuck in this cycle forever? If your mind will be wrought with such tar in perpetuity, then do what you must. We’ll be back again, until you get your head on straight...” With a valiant cry, our hero pulled the mechanism on the gleaming metal artifact. A massively loud report sounded out, feeling as if a bomb had gone off in his ears, causing him to step backwards in surprise and pain. When he looked up, they were gone. He had won! He had avenged his family’s killers! It was over! A crowd had gathered, surely to cheer him on, despite the looks of pure fear and disgust on their faces - it must have been directed towards his opponents. With a smug grin, he turned towards the crowd, his trusty weapon in one hand and newfound artifact in the other. “I have done it! Me! I am the victor in this contest of wills and strengths! Shower me with praise, for I am the pinnacle of a warrior!” The sound of sirens was all that interrupted his tirade. That surely signaled the approach of the police, there to bring him to the mayor, the president, the king of the world for his reward. He stood smugly in the street, twirling the artifact around one finger to put on a show. Eventually, but one car pulled up in front of him - a meager escort, but it would do for now. Two pale and worried-looking officers exit the car, staring at our hero with something akin to nervousness. He had never really met police before. Most of the time he had spent in life was wandering from place to place training for his fateful fight. They seemed to have similar artifacts too! More square, and a black color as opposed to his rounded silver one. What power these paragons of law must hold! Approaching slowly, almost regally, he has not a chance to announce his great deed before he is cut off. “Sir...drop the gun. The crowbar, too. We have to take you back to the station.” These words didn’t quite register. Gun? What was that? He knew well what a crowbar was, it was a tool, but in his hands were only the artifact and his sword. With a puzzled look, he approached once more. One of the officers, seemingly scared, pointed his artifact of power at our protagonist. His reflexes kick in, and in a flash he uses his own artifact to strike down the officer. A moment later, he finishes the second officer. Another surge of victory and power sweeps through him - they were the enemy, of course! Machinations of those two dreaded shades. He hadn’t slain them, not yet! Hearing the sounds of screaming and more sirens kicks our intrepid hero into action as he runs off into the night, dead set to complete his valiant quest. He would be up there with all other famed heroes, even if it killed him. After all, he is the hero of the story.



**By Robbie Baker**

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*“No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.”*  
— Robin Williams

*“I never paint dreams or nightmares. I paint my own reality.”*  
— Frida Kahlo