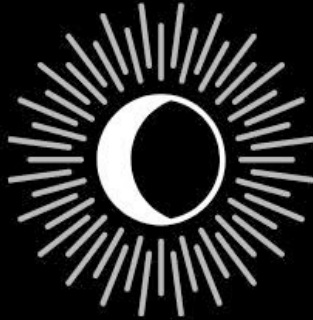


Chiaroscuro

Brevard College

2024





CHIAROSCURO
BREVARD COLLEGE

Chiaroscuro
Literary and Arts Journal
Brevard College
Spring 2024

Chiaroscuro

(ki-ar'-e-skyoor'-o)

n. [pl. -ROS], [*<*It. *<*L. *clarus*, clear + *obscurus*, dark]

The treatment of light and shade in art to produce the illusion of depth.

Chiaroscuro is published annually by students enrolled in COM 107: Literary Journal Staff and COM 307: Literary Journal Production at Brevard College. We accept submissions of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, theatre, photography, and art from Brevard College students, faculty, staff, and alumni during the fall semester.

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Kenz Schinsky, "Planter Pot Waterfall"

Third

Karis King, "Gregory"

Second

Gabrielle Lynch, "Reciprocity"

First

Gabrielle Lynch, "*Pseudogymnoascus destructans*"

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Artwork

UNTITLED
Cason McLeod





Poetry

PRIOR

Sarah Hajkowski



“Threshold of revelation.”

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*

threshold of revelation
a house on the fringe of my dreams

with my insides
my breastbone peaked the roof

what are you doing? cooking stir fry
with egg (the best part)

threshold of revelation there is a body
bag hung in the closet labeled Ann Taylor

plastic, itchy left behind
in the house that you helped me build.

meditating on demolition day
they'd say relationships are work

like a nail in a doorframe I stick myself
splinter from the hardwood ripped up

this house I built was work,
our bed would make itself

all the mates of all the winter boots
in the world when you loved me

lampshades in your laugh
pipes frozen

what am I
changing names to protect the careless



running my hands over two-by-fours kissing
the newel post, then over the cliff of my senses

like something Dali would do
unmake this grief, unshape this place that I made just for you

let me get changed, get changed.

AT A CHINESE RESTAURANT IN RURAL WISCONSIN

Quintin Overocker



A teenage boy sits across the table
from his mother and father
at a Chinese restaurant in rural Wisconsin.

He speaks quietly.
His mom, her face heavily creased,
listens and looks at him
with a love that stops me from eating,
as she searches her husband
for any indication of emotion.
Her unease is hereditary.

Under and around his words
and his hesitant smile
the son looks for reaction
from his dad: displeasure,
confirmation, disgust,
anything.

While I can't hear him, I'm certain he
is telling a story from pre-calc earlier that day.

The story cannot be funny.
His words are measured, trimmed.
Over the course of the meal
his dad doesn't say a word, doesn't smile,
doesn't laugh. He eats and stares blankly
at the world apart from him, resting his eyes
momentarily on his son until his glance
moves to the buffet line.
The son's eyes drop.



This is the moment when I want to overturn
my table, hit the father repeatedly,
knock him to the ground
and out of their lives.

Months later, after the marriage and adoption,
we will come back to this restaurant to laugh
together and smile and joke and listen to the boy
tell us a story about what happened today in math class.

BUZZY SPRING VISITORS

Rev. Dr. Judith Davis



A Hummingbird found our house the first week in April
and drank nectar from the red Tractor Supply feeder.
Sporting a handsome ruby collar, he seemed like a
gentleman caller and I smiled.
Quickly, a wasp joined him on the feeder sharing nectar,
as if they were old pals.
Hummer and Wasp moved in sync dancing to a rhythm
while working their way to each red plastic flower.
Songbirds, especially warblers, found their way to our
feeders, and called to mates with buzzing songs.
Hooded Warblers sang “zee-zee-zee-zoe-zee” while
Black-throated Blues sang zwee, zwee, zwee, zwee.
The handsome Northern Parula dressed in blue-gray,
green, white, and yellow sang “bz-bz-bz-zip”.
I listened for the tiny squeak of hummingbirds and the
buzzing songs of warblers near our mountain home,
and gave thanks for spring days, buzzy warblers,
squeaking hummingbirds and tiny wasps.

Artwork

BLACK THROATED BLUE WARBLER

Rev. Dr. Judith Davis



Artwork

SING INTO DARKNESS

Alexa Jennings





Fiction

MOMENT OF A GIRL WHO RECOGNIZES OUR MISTAKES

Alexa Jennings

The sea eats the sky as I walk on one of the last bits of land. The sand betrays me and sinks me into the ocean tides closing in. It pulls in and feels cool on ankles, and pulls back to sink me deeper. Each line of overlapping white sealed the history of what lay beneath.

“The sea eats the sky,” is what Mom used to say to me, on Georgia summer evenings, when the bugs would bite my arms till midnight, and the owls would make me believe I was in a jungle of monkeys they were so loud. She’d tell me, “I’m so sorry. I wish I could do something more.” To a sealed mortis that I would succumb to. I didn’t seem to mind it too much back then. It was probably the school depression getting to me. Made life more surreal. The work load and expectancy to participate in a fucked-up society where economy was what encompassed dreams of youth.

The sea eats the sky, but they say it’s a lie. Dad, my friends, fellow students, teachers, the mayor, the politicians, and the President. And Dad would watch Ms. President every windy Florida night when I was staying in the winter. The bugs may have not gotten me, but hearing her speeches when sitting at the dinner table did. For the first woman President, she was a foolish disaster about to happen. Dad would praise her for her work in the factories producing more gas than the ozone could handle. All so Dad could have a few extra bucks for booze. I’d have to sit outside to rid the blast of TV screen, and Grady White, the cat, would accompany me at this time. Not much help— an asshole, actually— just waiting for me to drop a piece of my dinner when I brought it out with me. It was a needed expense for his friendliness in these trying times.

Because they say it’s a lie. All everyone could talk about in school were the jobs they’d get in sky scrapers. Desk jobs that relied on death gas power, but they don’t mind it. Simply, put on your glasses and begin to type away on a screen, ignore window views, and just say how great the economy is! Second Grade was when my teacher said, line up if you love typing. And I’d stayed back like the ugly goose. I, who resented computers, the typing, and the brainwash light of the screens, was an upside down flower to the bunch of children who wore prescription glasses. My prophecies of the ocean were desecrated. And no one liked to hear that they were all to-be carrion for some



deep sea creature we stopped studying long ago. They'd laugh at me and my talk of sea, but sea was no laughing matter. It brought you back to reality.

The sea eats the sky and there's no birds left to fly. One by one, the same cowards as my Dad would shoot them down with guns and cook them for dinner. Till they were roasted on death fire, till they were prime like extinct prime rib, till the skies only bred winds and severe storms as punishment for ignorance. The sea brought reality to our doorsteps, to our towers of computers, to our wide expanses of land taken for granted. They packed like it was a Western wildfire while Ms. President said not to panic; that it was just a phase. Some had listened and sank without a choice. That was when Grady disappeared.

The black sky came down and the cities underground. Everyone scurried like the birds about to be extinct. Islands of the mind. Islands were what they were trying to find. Topographic maps were the top sales at Walmart. Rockies to Blue Ridge, with traffic jams and more death gas to catalyst Mother Nature into birth of forest fires. Many died out like extinct prime rib. And the news doesn't exist anymore. My radio died out three days ago. I guess some would make it, pull out a laptop and continue typing for the next paycheck. After all, boats and planes are expensive and hard to come by since the "inexpectancy" of obliteration came. Many would certainly try to outlive this drastic mistake.

I went to a place they can't find. This small island, humbled by its low elevation. My bag had sunken somewhere, unneeded. I'd walked here in a pouring down storm, looking back to find the beach waters following me. The Rockies or Blue Ridge would last longer to this chase, but the ending will inevitably snuff those mountain peaks to ocean horizons. All the exits would be left underground and all the secrets of this fate unknown.

I wish I could figure it out but those were opportunities they don't make anymore since the early 2000s. I wonder if I lived in 2009 if I would have cared. Back to the days of yore when we could be sure, all year, all summer. The skies were beautiful, and life was freezing and warm. Back when beaches were where they would be, and shells would be the only thing along the shore.



We should honor the breeze instead of screaming with each other. Mom and Dad like land and water and they would only get along for a tide coming in. Mom sank last week and Dad said the Rockies had higher elevation. He'd called me a stupid bitch for choosing to sink.

So, here I am, and the world is falling down. And the waves played with my body, pushing my torso to and fro. They shook me, bringing me back to the sinking realization. I'd drown here and be perfectly content to get hell over with, but I was truly not.

I wish I could do something more, I could shout it out loud. I did shout it all out. Till the sea ate my face, and bubbles blew to the sky, and nothing was left for the tide.

Artwork

TIME IS TICKING

Rachel Cooke





REPETITION OF NIGHT

Dr. James Everett

Sleep is more than the weight of my body.
It is the night and a covering,
a compass, an arrow, a talisman.
Tomorrow carries us to an emptiness.
It is the night and a covering
of seascapes, of horizons
tomorrow carries us to, an emptiness.
I have dreamed of these places,
of seascapes, of horizons.
I wake and drink a little water and remember
I have dreamed of these places
in the time when the world was black.
I wake and drink a little water and remember.
The depths of dreams grow shallower.
In the time when the world was black
nothing existed that couldn't be simpler.
The depths of dreams grow shallower.
There are memories I recover,
nothing exists that couldn't be simpler,
the blinding sun followed by starlight.
There are memories I recover,
a compass, an arrow, a talisman,
the blinding sun followed by starlight,
sleep, the weight of my body.



When I am spending my time
With today's brightest elementary schoolers
Over at the schoolhouse
Down the road
I often get asked a million questions

Why do the leaves fall
Why does the sun shine
How do the cars run
And how do I make a dime

But today I was asked a different kind of question
A girl with a curly mop of blonde hair
And a stained green dress
And ladybug socks
Asked me
What is it like to be 20

And I wanted to tell her that 20
Is grown up
Is shiny
Is fun
Is tipsy and spinny and you practically float
But all I could muster up was that

20 is hungry
I spend all of my time starving
My stomach aches with my one passion
To make myself more than I am

20 is hungry
To be complete
By a wedding ring
Or a house key
Or a diploma



20 is hungry
Forgetting breakfast
And lunch
And dinner
But remembering
The cheap cheap drinks tucked under your bed

20 is hungry
To run solely on reassurance
And reward
And pats on the head
And applause

20 is insatiable
Failing to be more
More and more each day

But I couldn't tell her this
As she looked up at me
With the biggest blue eyes
And with her front teeth missing in her smile

She was full

I'M SORRY, LITTLE ME.

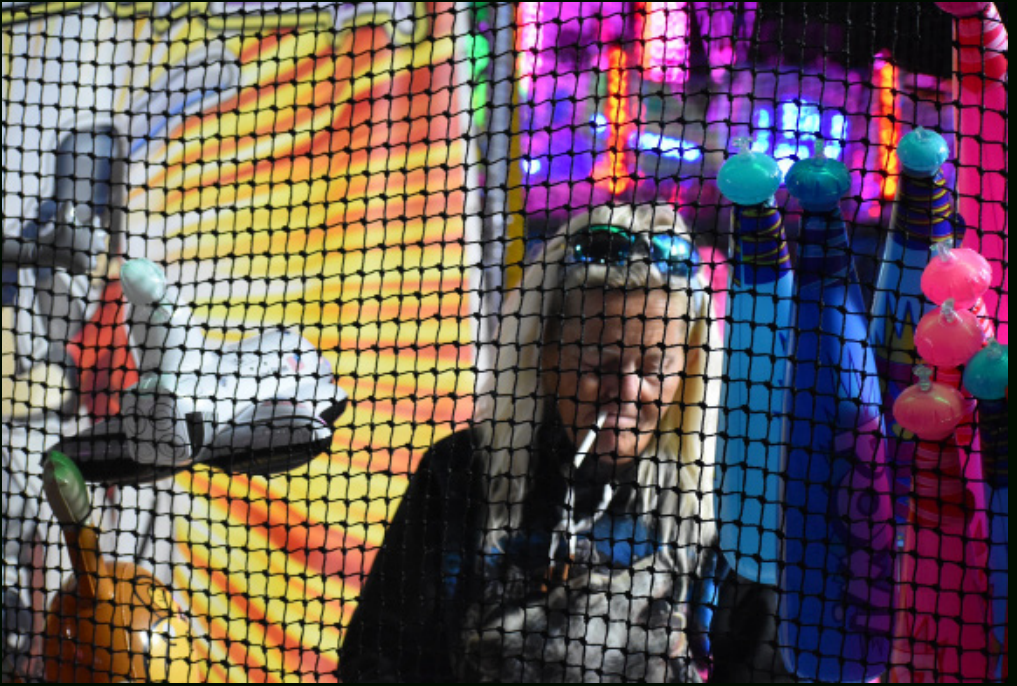
Cat Keenan



Mourning the little girl I used to be,
grieving the life she wanted to have.
I cradle her lifeless body in my arms,
rocking her side to side,
telling her I still want all the things she wanted,
but they had just grown out of reach.
As I got older,
they just got further and further away,
from where my arms could extend.
I weep for the little girl who lives inside of me,
who wished and wished upon every shooting star,
that she would grow up to be happy,
to reach all her dreams by twenty.
Yet here she is, two decades old,
hasn't seen a shooting star in years.
I grieve the life little me wanted.
So, with a drag in my feet,
I bury those dreams right next to my girlhood,
with a headstone that says:
“taken too soon.”

Artwork

UNTITLED
Cason McLeod



Artwork

DOES YOUR KID KNOW WHERE YOU HIDE YOUR GUN?

Jules Lusk





Theatre

**DAS TREMA, OR
SOMETHING IMPORTANT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN**

Sarah Hajkowski



SETTING: Contemporary. A coffeeshop contained in a bookstore, like Barnes & Nobles. A cosmic anniversary.

CHARACTERS:

CASS (she/her)- A woman in her 20s or 30s, with a spark of brilliance and eccentricity. Her mind misfired last year and she's still cleaning up after it.

BANN (he/him)- A man in his 20s or 30s, talkative only in the right company. Cass' ex-partner. Trying to rebuild.

NOTIFICATION: Major dilemma may be triggering for some; a delusion of pregnancy and hospitalization are discussed.

'Trema' in the title refers to a phase in delusion formation phenomena. Das Trema (literally, 'stage fright') is phase 1: "the delusional mood prior to onset."



= *When lights come up, CASS is seated at a café table. BANN is entering with two disposable coffee cups.*

BANN
(setting down her coffee)

Here.

CASS
Thanks.

Thunder rolls somewhere. CASS feels it in her toes.

BANN
So, how are your students? Clients?

CASS
Both, yeah. Really good, really. I have my little desk and I take the appointments—it's a lot like undergrad was.

BANN
Good.

CASS
How's your dad?

BANN
Up. Yeah, very up. The house is. We're putting in a Dutch door next, so.

CASS
Oh, that'll be so pretty. I love those two-parter doors.

BANN
Yeah, I know.

A beat. Weight change.

So why did you call, Cass?

She looks down at the table, her fingernails,



anything.

I don't get a lot of cryptic voicemails. It was my one for the year.
Are you okay?

CASS

You're going to be pissed at me.

BANN

I don't get pissed at you anymore.

CASS

(starts the sentence several times, sighs, then:)

It would have been their birthday.
I'm sorry. I promised. But no one else understands—

He looks at her, holding back.

I'm. I'm not having a very easy time of it. I'm working on it, and the tutoring's good, like I said. But it's still hard, you know.

BANN

Still doing the therapy?

CASS

Kind of ran out of money.

BANN

I'm sorry.

CASS

The community, like the behavioral health people, have groups. I go sometimes. (misgivings) I went to one. Once. For twenty minutes. I've done a lot of thinking and I just want to say a few things. I know I said a lot already, but I honestly don't remember the details, because it was then.

BANN isn't excited to hear this. His head drops, he inhales, and waits for Cass' words.

I never lied to you. I keep coming back to that. In



my own head, to me, I lied to myself. But it's not like I ever told you a lie about—

BANN

Never said you did.

CASS

Warren did.

BANN

I don't control my Dad.

CASS

(about something huge)

But I believed it.

BANN

Is that it? You wanted to tell me you never lied to me?

Silence.

Well, thanks...for the coffee. Um, I knew that already, Cass. I never accused you of—

CASS

Well I felt accused. I felt guilty. I was made to feel guilty, and I am being punished, that's what happens to guilty people. I believed my—

BANN

(gently, scientific)

Delusion.

CASS

I believed my brain, okay? And it was a huge mistake. And I couldn't have cared for you last year when it was happening, I see that...



BANN

Is there more?

CASS

But I still lost you.

BANN covers his eyes, perhaps tears up.

And I probably can't give anything to you that's any good, we can probably never be...what we were. But I still miss you. You're the only one who listens.

So I did...rough out what the birthday would have been. And you know how bad I am at math. If I got-

BANN

No, c'mon-

CASS

If I got pregnant in February or March and figured it out four...maybe five...weeks in, they would have been born in November. All the babies in my family come a week early. So November 6th, today. Maybe.

BANN

That's um. I don't know how appropriate-

CASS

Topaz is the birthstone for Novembers, I think. I don't know enough about astrology, though.

He nods.

You haven't touched your roll.

Another nod.

I hope. I hope it's clear that I'm grateful to you. For coming and listening. I don't wish any ill on you. I want good things for you. Did I...talk over you at any point, is there anything you want to say?



= *He gasps out an instinctive, nervous laugh. She reaches for his hand, a bit frantic. The touch is a relief to her.*

BANN

I want to say...I don't know—how appropriate this all is. I mean how good for you. What is your—what is your management of past delusions supposed to look like?

CASS tenses. She goes somewhere else for a moment.

Cass?

She takes a moment to herself, lets go of his hand, exhales.

CASS

Longitudinal split.

BANN

Huh?

CASS

It's one of the major extinction theories of delusion. Life goes on in two planes. There's a world for me where I was. (*perhaps a whisper*) pregnant with our baby.

I know it's not real, that's manifest to you, and everyone. But part of...management for me is being respectful of what's still...here...

She subconsciously touches her belly.

Respectful. Not indulgent. I wasn't pregnant. I was. We could have had a baby for twelve months by now. A birthday. But I never...

BANN

You were never pregnant, Cass.

Beat.



CASS

I was in the children's section for a while, before you got here. Do you remember..."Guess How Much I Love You?" The big rabbit and the little rabbit.

A bit self-conscious, but authentic, CASS raises her arms straight up high in the air to mimic the illustration of Little Nutbrown Hare.

"I love you this much. As high as I can reach."

Her arms get uncomfortable in this position, she cards them through her hair.

Can you love an idea so much that it lives?

You're working on the house. With Warren. It isn't—wasn't—beautiful when you came to it. It didn't have Dutch doors or even a sofa, because we moved ours in—before...summer. It didn't have a life, but in your mind it does. It grows. Takes on fresh paint. It's a home for somebody. You can love something so powerfully that it exists—even just a little bit—in a way other people can't see.

BANN

I found you building a crib in our bedroom.

CASS

I know.

BANN

You scared the life out of me.

She nods. He reaches for her this time, maybe her hand, or even her face. He lets out tension with a sound like a growl or sigh. Looks at her.

CASS

I imagine those knit hats. Peapod green. It was colder in Chicago than here, but. Ladies put those hats on their babies all the time.

I go to the grocery store and stare and stare at the
äáíí äÉ=Ä~í Ü



little bath sets. A duck, a shark, a turtle. "Easy to grasp." "No edges." That's—what it says—like on labels. "Easy to grasp."

And then I remember I needed body wash and I...don't have a kid, so. I check out in a hurry, and cry in my car (*maybe a laugh to cover this*), and then I go home. Cause you can't. Live in a hospital, y'know. It's only actually doing you good for so long if you get vegged out on the...the safety-sandbox of "meds this time, groups this time. no job, someone else makes your coffee—"

She looks down at the coffee BANN prepped for her. She takes the ouch for a moment. His hand falls aside.

And you're not. Responsible for the hurt you caused anyone else. I said some awful things to you and we never talked about it.

BANN

You...weren't...you.

CASS

(never going to accept this)

I was. I should have remembered.

I didn't even get the fun kind. No missed periods. No belly-uhh-distension, they call it. No physical symptoms whatsoever.

Trying a joke.

I mean I vaguely remember my boobs hurting, but they kind of always do that.

BANN laughs with her a moment. With reservations:

BANN

Um... I kinda promised myself I would never? But. You asked uh...You asked Warren permission for something? Last Spring.



= *She can't place it right away.*

You asked my dad permission to marry me?

Her face falls a bit, she nods.

That's...kind of my job, right?

CASS

I never did things conventionally.

BANN

No, never.

CASS

(joking still, even flirting)

And you wouldn't have to ask my Dad for anything. He has um—"no fucking right." I think would be the—technical term.

BANN

Warren thought it was very sissified of me to have my girl ask if she could do the proposing.

CASS

(hit in the head)

"Your girl..."

BANN

I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

CASS

It's just words. They don't...mean the same thing now. But that's what I was.

He nods.

BANN

It's not that I didn't. Want. Think about.

While you were in the hospital I felt this...pull... to baby stuff. The gift shop. Balloons and...I.



Fucking hate 'Payless.'

He chuckles, she joins hesitantly.

Those tiny, tiny racks of shoes. Perfect replicas. Why can't I wear spiderman Velcro sneaks, you know?

CASS
(*silly*)

Who says you can't?

BANN
But yeah. For the record. It's not that you...can't have one...later. Or something. Not that I can't—not together, right? But...

They both take a blow.

There's no reason you wouldn't make an excellent parent.

CASS
Thank you. (*Breath*) Where do you go after this?

BANN
Didn't know. Uh. Didn't plan anything, in case—

CASS
In case I wracked your psyche unforgivingly and witlessly. Again.

They share another nervous, but genuine laugh.

Um. November 6th is something else, too. Wasn't sure if I'd share, but. It is—also, the first time you asked me out.

BANN
We went out on Friday the thirteenth.

CASS
But you asked me. After Bio. Neither of us had time till the thirteenth.



BANN

Oh.

CASS

So, y'know. Just a big date, cosmically. Twin anniversaries. Longitudinal split.

BANN

Yeah. Um, I have to go to the bathroom?

CASS

Okay, of course.

BANN

I'll be right back.

CASS

I'll be here.

BANN crosses downstage right, presumably looks in a bathroom mirror. This last is spoken like water overrunning, each individual to themselves.

BANN

I love you...

CASS

...to the Moon and back.

Lights down. End of Play.

Artwork

EYES

Alexa Jennings



Artwork

PLANTER POT WATERFALL

Kenz Schinsky



As you pass by, please
place one drop of red
dye in the top of the
water fall and let it
flow through the system.



Poem

BURYING ZEKE

Dr. James Everett

I cut into the ground to work a grave
from the clay, hard and red, that covers most
of Mississippi. My hands blister against
the shovel, bloodied, tired. This earth resists.

I sometimes think we practice death with pets.
We know they will not last. We overlook
our longer lives until we're forced
to make some backyard cemetery. Zeke,

the puppy we lost, lies wrapped and waiting near
the tree we chose to bury him beneath,
leaf-shade to claim this as a holy place,
slow drifting stillness almost tangible.

His rest will nourish light in chevrons through
the leaves, the fallen leaves sheltering his grave.

THE FALL
Madeleine Pollock



skin & earth
end of September
and the wounds
begin to open up
the red
bleeds
into the flesh
of the forest & me
maybe it's blood
or love
or lust
or all three
but this red
is going to consume
all
in October.
-the fall

Artwork

UNTITLED
Gunnar Ensign





I've never had an original thought in my life.
Every laugh— at a stupid grin, or some silly noise.
Every tear I shed— from pain, from sadness, from happiness.
Every action; down to keeping silent, drawing, and even this stupid
poem.

You know my every move;
It's like a game to you.
No matter what I do, you're at the center of it all.
You're playing chess, meanwhile I didn't even know we were playing.
You laugh at my feelings and I laugh too
At the futility of it all.

Now you're gone, in a place I can't reach
Free of consequence; of acknowledging what you did.
Yet you can't reach me, meaning I'm free too.
And still I lay awake at night, worried I'm still just someone's puppet.



Fiction

INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

Evey Perrey

I apologize in advance for not being able to talk about this sooner, I told the one I love. The story from my childhood was too much for me to bear at the time, and the moment in which that chapter of my life had concluded, I chose to forget the ordeal entirely.

For the longest time now, I grew up with an unnatural group of abilities. I could predict events before they happened, look back into the past with perfect accuracy, and it even gave me omniscience. I could find things out that were happening right now in a given area without even being there. Each time I looked around, I generated a thought. What I wasn't capable of doing, though, was controlling my thoughts. At least, back when I was younger, with my eleven year-old collection of skin and bones trying to grow out my hair and wearing a bulky sweater to at least dislike my appearance much less, it was harder for me to grasp what I was doing. I could also manipulate the senses of others in my vicinity... to some degree. If I needed to complete something, or, in most cases, hide my identity, they could never see me for who I truly was. And I was content with that. For a while I couldn't welcome myself to myself.

Pullen City, often abbreviated to just "Pullen," is a generator of admiration and fascination worldwide. A series of giant obelisks in which people work and live stand defiantly against inconceivably colossal mountains, shining the most colorful lights into the sky. From an outsider's perspective, it was a sight to behold.

I was an insider; I lived at its feet. Making my way to school involved me fleeing my parents' apartment, running into a wall of car exhaust with the carcinogenic particulates invaded my lungs, and dashing towards the nearby subway station amongst a crowd of people who didn't desire to be there for more than five seconds, hoping their train arrived before a beggar so much as looked them in the eye.

"Hey kid! You need a ticket!"

Some of us would leap over the turnstile at the station entrance like a horse. Usually people succeeded when trying not to be seen. I wasn't so successful today, but luckily for me, I had my powers; this was relatively easy for me to do as well. As far as he could see, I was completely invisible to him.

"Where'd he go?!"

I couldn't appear invisible to everyone without my brain requiring a dangerous blood flow, but I didn't need to. The security guard's shouts would



echo through the station, weaving their way through the ears of disillusioned passengers not bothering to notice him, or me for that matter.

Today was different, though. As I heard the subway's approach, my mind flashed back to a dream I had the previous night. Usually people forget their dreams with the exception of surface-level sensory details, and such was the case when I heard the screech of the train. My abilities, however, helped me remember. At that moment, I realized that my dream centered on a train accident—caused by a defect in the railway line.

Then my mind jumped back to the present. Once the train arrived, everybody brute forced their way into that crowded box, eager to get out of the dingy station. After moving along with them, partially by force rather than any will of my own, I wondered through the forest of passengers too unlucky to find a seat looking for a seat myself. I was going to Pullen's Central Station to catch another train to my school.

Then my mind flashed again. Clinging to one of the standing poles was someone I knew; she was a girl from my school named Calli. She was a skinny girl, though not as thin as me, wearing a violet t-shirt and a long pink skirt while her multi-colored hair flowed down her back. I only knew her for less than a year, but for some reason it seemed I had known her my entire life. She stuck out like a sore thumb on this train, mainly because she was smiling at whatever she was looking at on her phone. Most people don't smile like that on a subway train. I didn't say hello, though. Once the subway reached Pullen Central, we both went our separate ways with the purpose of catching the same train to the same station near the same school.

However, that day, I did not see her at my school. Whenever I wasn't being taunted by my classmates for my pale pink skin, my mind raced to figure out where she could be. Because of my aforementioned abilities, I found out in a few seconds before continuing on with my day.

The following day was the same: the same security guard chased me down the same station while I sprinted past the same passengers to catch the same scheduled arrival. However, as I left the subway to go to Pullen Central Station, my visions of the accident flashed again. Then my heart skipped a beat as I heard a loud crash. A porter previously carrying ceramic plates was no longer so much carrying them but rather screaming at another visitor while shards of hardened clay lay at their feet, and that was what relieved me of my



adrenaline rush that day.

“Why do you keep changing your appearance?”

I turned to the voice, again feeling like I could have a heart attack. Calli was right next to me with a puzzled look.

“Did I scare you?”

“I... did I change my appearance?”

“You do it a lot at school. And on the train yesterday; I saw you.”

“I don’t think so,” I said. However, I had told her a lie. Changing how I looked like was something I often did to cover up my actual appearance, and the way I performed this action was by changing what people perceived through their five senses, or sight in this case. However, I could make this trick work with only a few people at the time, and sometimes it happened outside of my control, which is likely why Calli saw me change my face and body on the train.

“You look like a girl when you do it to; that’s so weird.”

I wanted to leave, but she kept following me.

“Hey, may I get your name? It’s...”

I refuse to mention my deadname.

“Is that your name?” Whatever effort I gave to leave, she was able to intercept me. “You’re changing appearance again!”

By this point, I was desperate to get out of this situation, so I immediately said “your name is Calli Janice, you step on the Staar line at the station where High Avenue meets 158th Street. I also know why you didn’t show up to school yesterday.”

Once I stopped talking, she stepped back and turned away. I couldn’t help but feel a twinge of regret. Then she turned to me again. “How did you know all of that...? Have you been...”

“No—no.” I answered quickly. She didn’t seem convinced, so there was nothing I could but tell her the truth. “I have these—I don’t know what to call them—abilities.” Calli became more puzzled, but I could still tell that she wasn’t convinced. “I can trick the five senses of people, and,” pausing abruptly allowed me to gather the correct words to finish my sentence, “and tell what’s going on anywhere in the world in the past, present, or even the future.”

“And how does that work?!”

“Must I explain that?” I asked. “Think of—I don’t know—this train



station as my brain or something, and then think of every train that arrives as a thought I have— I guess— and a train that departs as a brain input I am giving to someone else.” I thought for a little while and added, “and then think of the source of where the train is coming as where I get my information from or its destination as who I am sending a hallucination to.”

Calli then smiled. “I like how you put it.”

“Like I said, I know why you’re here and not at school. You like watching the trains go through.”

Calli then asked, “so, what happens when there is a defect on the line?”

“Um... I guess I’ll be braindead.”

“A delay? Or a missing passenger even?”

I thought for a little while. “Best case scenario, a headache.”

“What about an accident?” Calli asked.

“I guess that’s how intrusive thoughts work. A train not expected to arrive at a specific time ends up interrupting the process of another train.”

Calli nodded. “Since you mentioned headaches,” she said, “I guess that’ll be your excuse for missing school.”

I looked over her shoulder at a nearby departure board. The S7 suburban line I would’ve took to western Crisnaa for school had already emptied the platform. “Your parents work for Pullen Transport?”

“Yeah,” Calli said. “You’re not expecting them to call the train driver and traffic control so your train gets diverted back here, right?”

I guffawed. “Oh no, I was just guessing why you’re interested in them at all.”

“Oh! Yes, my parents do work for Pullen Transport. They’re not happy about it at the moment.”

“I can imagine,” I said. “I can hear them ranting about it right now.”

“You’re— what are you doing?!”

“I can hear things in the past; your father and mother are complaining about the leadership at Pullen Transport. Have you heard them use the word ‘spineless’ recently?”

“Maybe, but I forgot most of it. I think they’re complaining about how PT is dealing with another company?”

“Yes,” I told her. “They’re saying that... hang on...PT is buckling under the stress of the Elandish Central Railway.”



“Oh, that operator!” Calli exclaimed. “I really like their rolling stock.” She turned towards a convoy built for long distances. Both of its ends were what I could only describe as a very sexy black and bright red color that embraced its long nose and its sleek design. Most trains that operated would have a cab, but this one had a cockpit for its driver, which sported pointed headlights that seemed to stare ahead of it with captivating confidence. The red coloring extended from the ends to the carriages in the middle, which aligned perfectly in shape with the two driving ends, to form an intertwining pattern.

“They call that one the Venom Express! Officially it’s the Grand Central High Speed service, but the nickname comes from an old route that the company operated before it merged with various others. It has a unique model that reaches four hundred kilometers per hour in service. And—get this—and it goes between three different countries! In the span of less than five hours!”

“Yeah,” I said, thinking it over. “That is correct.”

“I imagine it must make a huge amount of money,” Calli continued. I nodded. “That’s why ECR is incredibly powerful.”

We watched as the train left. It began by making a subtle screeching noise that was normal for it when it released its breaks. Then it whirred with a rising pitch as its internal gears shifted and it picked up speed on its departure.

“I guess you know a lot more about them than I do,” Calli said to me.

“It comes with being forced to know everything,” I said to her.

A few days went by. I skipped school on all of them to talk to Calli. She had changed her appearance to feature a black skirt and a top with see-through sleeves. Her hair was also dyed red. I had almost forgotten about my dream.

She was surprised to see me one day with my hair outgrown. “This is a hallucination,” I was sure to tell her.

“Yeah, I thought so, but why dress? That’s a little weird. And the boots—”

“I got tired of looking like—I don’t know—looking like not you.”

“How do you mean...?”

I wanted to change the subject. “Would you like to go to Indigoliae?”

“Sure...? I guess.”

In a few minutes, we were on a first-class seat on an intercity service. I noted how the train was much less crowded than the subway. In fact, it was quiet on the inside.



“How much did you pay for these seats?” Calli asked.

“As far as the ticket collector is concerned, I used money. Even then, seats on an Indigo River & Eastern train are much cheaper now.”

“Why is that?” Calli asked.

“Remember your parents complaining about the ECR? Well, it turns out ECR is trying to get into the regional rail business and expand their intercity network, which means buying out publicly owned companies that run commuter services around their cities. So far, PT wishes for its suburban lines to remain on their maps, so ECR is doing the petty thing by delaying PT’s suburban rail traffic as much as possible.”

Calli nodded. “Doesn’t Pullen Transport own the tracks in Pullen?”

I continued. “They tram tracks and subway tracks for sure, but not the tracks that their suburban trains rely on. ECR has that. With all that in mind, and ECR filling up stations and timetables...”

Then the intercom came on. “Good morning passengers. Welcome aboard this IRE express service to from Pullen Central to Ahnna, calling at Pullen Emblae, Cirisinaa, Indigoliae, Fillidiinae, Courtnaey, and Prestaen. We apologize for our delay today, which has reached upwards of an hour due to a scheduling conflict with another train. We are just approaching Pullen Emblae. The next stop will be Cirisinaa.”

“Can I ask you about the dress and the boots now?” Calli asked.

I looked out the window. “I don’t know... I guess I thought it’d be something I’d try.”

“Really? Why?”

“I don’t know,” I answered. “I guess I felt more comfortable, or even confident at times talking to you. You’re so surefire about yourself, and I wanted to at least emulate that.”

“Okay...?” Calli said.

“Can I share something with you?” I asked. She nodded. “Can you call me ‘Tadgy,’ from now on? I want to be thought of as...” I gulped, “as a girl.”

She looked at me a little nervously for a minute. “I guess...where’d you get a name like ‘Tadgy’ from though?”

“It’s an old Kasprian name. My parents—they are from Kaspria. It’s a part of Unekkia that never got recognized as its own country. Kaspria—” I paused, “Kaspria’s traditions...my parents...I looked into the future, and



saw...they wouldn't understand."

Calli turned away and faced forward. "I...I see," she said. "This is going to take some getting used to, E—Tadgey."

I had never felt my adrenaline run like this before. I was thinking of what my future would be like with Calli after she would recognize me as Tadgey. Then, as I was settling down in these thoughts, I heard a loud crash and I blacked out as I was thrust out of my seat.

By the time I woke up again, my mind flashed back to the moments I missed. Our train had collided with a train run by the ECR. Calli and I survived, but Calli was conscious. She was screaming at the police as EMS took her to the hospital: "My friend told me! Tadgey told me! The Elandish Central Railway! They did this!" Apparently, a broken signal had allowed an ECR train to ram into the back of our IRE service, but what scared me the most was the next thing I realized. ECR's plans to sabotage IRE and PT were supposed to be a secret, and I had just exposed them with my mind. My heart sank as I realized that Calli would take the brunt of my actions, and then... they would be after me.

After that moment, my parents and my teachers never saw me. Calli never saw me. My plans to flee Pullen materialized immediately, assuming ECR wouldn't pull another trick. However, I would be doomed to be found once Pullen's most important building was struck by the entity called the Butterfly, and I would be found by authorities later.

For a while the Butterfly incident let me evade the things that transpired. The thoughts of the train crash still haunt me. Calli's screams still haunted me. When I owed her the most, I was no longer there for her.

Artwork

UNTITLED
Gunnar Ensign





Poetry

PLANT.

Cat Keenan



Maybe I watered you a little too much,
This much I can tell by your overflowed vase.
Don't blame me for getting excited,
But I admit to my fault in your wilting.
The breaking of your stems,
I hold you up in my palms.
Refusing to let the tears fall,
I try pushing you back together.
I know I filled you up a bit more than I meant to,
That's on me, I admit.
But you were giving me so much,
I didn't know how to take it.
But now you are falling apart,
Breaking away from me.
Now I'm stuck with a vase full of water.



Poetry

AMONG THE FLOWERS
Madeleine Pollock

oh to be
a flower
flowers are patient
flowers are hardworking
flowers know when to bloom
oh to be
bright & beautiful & bold
—who convinced you that you aren't already?

Hybrid

**SANTINO BEATS CARLO,
A SURVEY OF ANTI-TRANS BILLS OF 2023**

Sarah Hajkowski



Let me have
your mouth
and the blood in the gutter oh my god the kids
a shirt all day with buttoned cuffs

[NC S49
ACTIVE]

Did you mean “gray (13)”
This scene from The Godfather where it isn’t just Carlo
he’s trying to kill to be close to

[My Child, My Choice Act of 2023]
to alter or affirm

I’m not saying James Caan was FTM I am saying
my hair all buttoned up
there’s something about masculinity in Italian households
on fire underneath
My Pop Pop when he asks (and it’s honestly really funny)
“Are you a pronoun?”

[US HB985]
To prohibit language

And I don’t really ID as trans
most days (Did you mean “optics”)

Markers rooms safe spaces
[US SB200]

We had this same shit in 19-something with
An*ta Bry*nt
“protect our kids” like ideas questions are the bodies
with hip holsters trying to burn nightclubs trying
to perforate day spas trying to say they’re oppressed

the student’s biological sex is
liability and adverse



creating harms
(Did you mean “unconditional”)
Don’t worry about the kids at drag shows

[TN HB0009]

you’re doing a helluva job beating them
in gutters and seats at the breakfast table
shooting through their schools
calling the act Protection

SPRING MIGRATION AT OUR POND

Rev. Dr. Judith Davis



Blue-winged Teal formed a chorus line in the
water. Red-breasted Mergansers did synchronized diving.
Great Blue Herons sat on nests at the rookery.

A single Bald Eagle flew across the pond.
Blue and white Tree Swallows skimmed the pond for food.
Canada Geese went swimming leaving one to tend the nest.

A few winter Ruddy Ducks lingered on the pond.
Double-crested Cormorants stood drying their wings.
Northern Mockingbird and Northern Cardinal sang to me.

Buzzy Warblers called in the trees and hid from view.
Song sparrows and Eastern Towhees sang their melodies.
I love Spring migration in our mountain home.

Artwork

GREAT BLUE HERON

Rev. Dr. Judith Davis



LIKE A POEM

Vance Reese



(with no apologies whatsoever to Joyce Kilmer*, who like couldn't even.)

I think that I like never see
A poem as swag as like a tree.
Whose trunk is like a big mouth pressed
Against the earth's like epic breast.

A tree that like hangs out all day
And lifts like leafy arms to pray.
A tree that like in fall might wear
A white-like squirrel in its hair.

My bae was like, "A tree does that?!"
I literally died like where I sat.
And she was like, "It's just a plant!"
And I was like, "Look, I just can't."

Then I was like, "It's simile –
Like 'tell me news' means 'spill the tea.'"
Then she was like, "Bruh, get away."
(*K. Like, whatever. She's so cray.)

She's throwin' shade unlike a tree
Which only likes to cover me.
My bae? It's like she don't know trees.
She says she does, but I'm like, "Please!"

These trees are lit, they like don't dis.
They slay in perfect tree-like bliss.
They're chill, and they like hang with snow.
They drink the rain and like to grow.



A verse like this is made by me,
But like whatever makes a tree.
If this verse sucks, like take a hike,
Or give me props by smashing “like.”

–Vance Reese, November 2023

*Joyce Kilmer: “Trees.” or:

Kilmer, Joyce. *Trees & Other Poems*. Project Gutenberg, 1995.



THE HANDKERCHIEF

Dr. Paula Hartman-Stein

When I was new, I was a white, crisp, cotton man's handkerchief,
utilitarian in purpose, plain and practical
with a traditional satin banded edge that gave me some distinction.

With no monogram in sight, any and every man could use me.

My owner was an older man with a kind voice and a frequent laugh
who stuffed me in the pocket of tattered green work pants.

At times I smelled of pungent gasoline and oil
A scent from antique cars on which he toiled,
He often stopped the sound of his tools and drill
To help those who needed his mechanical skill.

My usual home was the pocket of his clean, brown, dress trousers.
In that location I heard the sounds of Mass,
or the man's soft crying
when he visited his wife's grave on Sunday afternoons,
regardless of the weather.

But I recall sounds of hearty laughter too

One day in mid June I moved to his bed,
never leaving his side again.
He clenched me tightly day and night.
I comforted him with my familiarity, the only cloth from home.
I heard voices speaking in hushed and serious sounding tones.
Buzzers sounded randomly.
This time it was his daughter who cried softly.

One early morning 9 hours after his daughter and her family left
To send their son off to college
It was time for his touch to grow cold
He was no longer needed on this earth
All his lessons were learned
and his teaching to others was done.



A stranger packed me in a simple plastic bag.
For weeks no one touched or used me,
I lie alone amidst a pile of unrelated clothing,
feeling abandoned, discarded and unwanted.

It was the man's daughter who found me,
washed me,
and held me tenderly.

In my later years I am still white but not as crisp.
I live deep in the daughter's pocketbook.
I smell of sweet lotions and minted candies.
I move from one handbag to another,

At times her hand grabs things around me
madly searching for an unknown object.
Then, with effort, I pop up,
so she will notice me.
The frenetic motion stops abruptly.

I have the power to slow down her hand
and her breathing.
She lingers and holds me briefly.

I am old now.
My purpose is new,
I have a calming presence.

Through me,
she feels his energy
and remembers.

Reprinted from *Soul-Lit*, online journal of spiritual poetry (Summer 2012)

Artwork

FRUIT OF THE FOREST

David Philips





PROLOGUE

Karis King



Darkness isn't comforting.

The chill of it compresses my body, and I feel the numbness slowly taking my fingers. It's already reached my feet. I've felt this numbness before, but have been able to control it. This time I can't, and I welcome it with open arms.

I can't remember how I got here, or who I was. The darkness weakens its grip for a second, and I desperately seek it out again as the pain takes its place. It slices through my gut and needles follow its path all the way to the parts of my arms and legs I can still feel. It's at this moment when I see a shimmer in the water, reflected by the light that pushed its way through the frigid darkness. I try to reach out for it, but realize I can't move. Pain had me in its arms and wasn't letting me go. It floated towards me, and I could see what it was now.

A bullet.

It was so bright in the deep blue background. I didn't feel alone anymore as we floated in space together. I have this piece of light that will be with me to ward off the darkness. I had forgotten how comforting light could be. I had accepted the darkness like it was my only hope, but this small piece of silver has taken my world and made it brighter. I wonder why people reject the light of the world so often. I remember so much pain and agony in my life, but can't pinpoint those feelings to any real memories. This fear growing inside me was so much greater than the pain in my gut I had almost forgotten about it. As soon as I realize this, my light is gone, just as fast as it had come. Although, it wasn't the darkness that had taken it. A murky purple had slowly smeared its way over and around my little treasure. I followed the trail it left through the emptiness, and realized it had smeared its way around me too. The pain that had taken over my body had decided to break out and stained the darkness. My gut was pouring forth its pain, and I could feel nothing again. The light was gone. It was replaced by whatever this repulsive version of art is.

The chill came back to me now. I couldn't feel my legs and arms now. My nose was being taken by the deep blue. I was a part of the painting now, and couldn't go back. I accepted my fate again, and went back to feeling the cold's weight on my body. There was no hope in reliving whatever life I had had before as I sank further into space. I couldn't remember what or who I was. This desperation to know myself rose as I fell into neverending sleep. I wanted to know my name, my family, how I came to be here, if I had loved



anyone.

Love.

Had I loved someone?

The darkness crept into my vision now as the purple and blue started mixing together, swirling in a slow dance. The pain had released itself from me and had gone to penetrate its next victim in this world of agony. I felt nothing as I floated there. I smelled nothing as the cold suffocated me. I heard nothing as I was alone in this deep darkness. It wasn't blue anymore because the darkness covered the last of it. I saw nothing now. It was then, at the last moments of life were leaving my body, that I heard a voice echoing from out beyond:

“Althea!”

The world swirls back into colors as I hear that name. As I hear my name. I recognise the voice and it brings me back to a memory. The colors gather together to form an image of the sky. It's night out and someone is holding my hand. It's rough, worn by a long day of manual labor, but radiating warmth. This warmth brings my body back to life, and I can feel my heart pounding, seeking out this memory. It tries its hardest to feel the emotions connected with the memory. I desperately want to see the face of this person whose voice brings me back to life and whose hand warms my soul.

“Althea!”

There it is again. My name, Althea. The night sky bursts into color as he calls my name. It's time for me to leave, but all I want to do is relive this memory. I'm alive again because of this new light. The silver bullet is forgotten; it dulls in comparison to the emotions and joy I feel in this moment. It fills me with life and I gasp for the air that still isn't there. With the rest of the strength I have, I try to force my frozen body to reach out towards the voice I heard. I want to know who is behind the tone that warmed my frozen state. I feel every muscle in my body clench as I will myself forward. I want to go forward, through the dark blue and purple sky into that night that flashed in my memory. I want to go forward with this man that warms my hand and whose voice sets sparks alive in my soul.

I realize that I won't be moving my entire body, as the light in my soul can't decimate the suffocating darkness that is painted around me. I force all of the warmth I can feel through my heart, into my chest, bending through my



bicep, and finally centered it in my shoulder. I can feel the curve of it as the muscles contract and bend, and I slowly draw my attention to the path my blood is curling around. It's the path the bullet also took as it disappeared into the night, the job of creating a beautiful memory of the night completed. The voice calls for it as it also calls for me. He draws us in.

“Al-”

The voice is getting dimmer now. The path I was following is blending into the night now as I feel the darkness hug me from behind.

“-thea!”

I've been able to force my arm up past my head and outstretch it into my line of sight. It's too weak to move back down, so I let it float there. There's a current that pushes my arm in a slow dance, and I watch it twirl and sway to the rhythm of my heartbeat. The darkness reaches past my back and wraps around my body now, the numbness returning and my vision dimming, leaving just the faintest outline of my hand. The light inside me travels to my eyes, fleeing the cold hand gripping my heart, freezing the veins in my body. A small dust particle glows golden as the heat leaves my eyes. Bit by bit, the light leaves in a glorious arrangement of golden tears leaving my eyes. I can't tell if the tears I'm shedding carry any negative emotion, or if I'm just relieved that this emptiness is finally ending. As they start floating away, they create the stars in my night sky.

The memory rushes back to me as I see the sky above. It's the same sky as the one that night, the night full of mystery and hardship. It was the night that you held my hand tight and kissed me gently under the moonlight. I looked at the stars in your eyes and wondered if I could count them one day. I remember you and your body and heart and purpose in this life. I remember everything you told me that night. Our hearts intertwine in that secret attraction. We laid together on a cliff's edge and told each other our adventure and how we got to the point we were at. I had never known childhood until then.

You told me the story of the archer and the shooting star. He was stuck in the heavens while his lover was on earth. It's ironic how our situations are now so similar. You're out living life while I'm floating, losing my light as we speak, surrounded by this memory of you. I have no idea if you're even still living.

The rest of the story is a blur. I'm not sure if it's the haze rolling over my



memory or if I was more distracted by that voice of yours. It's the voice that brought me back to life. Your voice made my last moments happy.

The only regret I have from the night is not kissing you harder, making the most of the time I had with you while I still could. I wish I could gaze into the starlight with you again and hear you talk about your passions and aspirations. I will miss you, but at the end of my life my only wish is for you to be happy. It's the same as you said to me; I want you to know I had a happy life because you were in it.

The final memory from that night comes to me as the last of my tears fall out. The eyes, the stars, and your hand all come together to create one final picture. The dark night is lit up by the moon, and I feel safe. I think it was the first time I have felt safe in my life because I had you guiding me through the stars. Your smile might have been brighter than the moon at that point. You were so passionate about your interests, and it inspired me to be passionate about mine too. It was the night you looked at me, staring into my soul, and told me that you loved me. You said "I love you Althea" in that serious voice you always carried with you.

As the final tears of gold left my eyes, I looked out into the night sky I had created. It was my own, made out of my life, the essence of my existence beautifully painted out before me. It was the perfect balance between light and dark. I created the night sky I had stared at in your dark eyes in the moments that led me to this place. I had seen all I needed to see, and finally let fate embrace me. The final image I saw was of the archer in the constellations. I am your archer now. You are my archer. Even as the darkness consumes me and the numbness turns into nothing, I will make the heavens shake and the stars rain down to send you this final message I have for you.

I love you too.

Poem

FOR MR. NORRIS

Sarah Hajkowski



“The vibrations caused by a cat’s purring may help speed up the healing process of fractured bones and wounds”

—Adnan I Qureshi, M.M.

Simple and about the senses. I remembered while pet-sitting
the bodybody feeling, dreamy tails shadowing the sheets
“you look I look because we’re keeping each other alive”
Ripples of gold, soft detergent smell and animal smell
beneath every kiss I painted on your back, between your ears
on your paws. I could get at them before
you would jerk away or bat my nose as a warning.

How it felt to come home
to you
to sing a made-up song of praise
your tail, your little feet, abstract expressions in your fur—
to call you: “the only trustworthy man I know.”

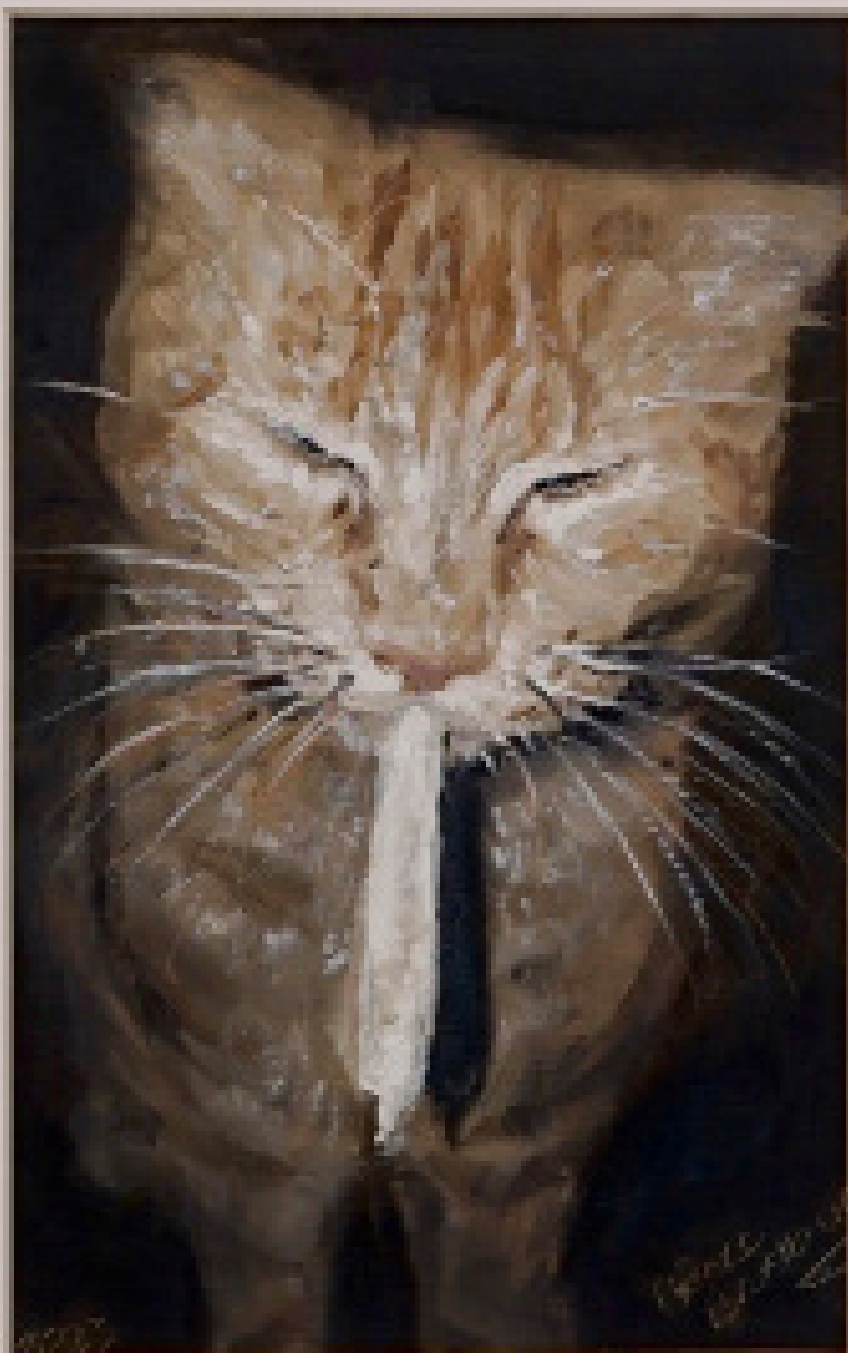
Broken bones—tiny cat sized bones
tic-tac-toed with the sharp ends lancing my organs inside
crossbone teeth lining kidneys, stomach, thyroid
“because we’re keeping each other alive”
in my sleeping life you fly, have plenty of babies
and we don’t play a game of fetch the toy
where you crawl just out of view and never
come back, come back.

Artwork

DAWGS

Nicole Bradbury







Poetry
EVERY GOOD THING
Sara Barnes



I am going to have a flower garden
So I can make my own bouquets
And give them whenever I please
To my friends
And coworkers
And parents
And kids
And the man on the street
And I'll keep some for myself

I am going to have a long driveway
With big huge trees on either side
So driving down
No matter how new your car
Feels like an old southern movie
No matter how aged
Something childlike will call you to climb up

I am going to have a bay window
With lots of pillows
And blankets
And it will be covered with old fabric
And bookshelves line the wall
So I can sit in the window
And watch seasons pass

I am going to have room in my kitchen to dance
With someone who looks at me like the first time
Every time
And the floorboards will creak
To the tune of our laughs
And the record of memories being made



I am going to make lunch for my kids
My little girl with messy hair
Or my little boy with dirty hands
And I'll write notes on their bathroom mirror
As I teach them to read
And sing
And dance
And be kind

I am going to keep this future in the back of my mind
I am going to hold on to it
And I won't listen
To myself when I think it's silly
When I think it won't happen
When I think it's impossible
When I think I am not deserving

And I think there is something to this
This stubborn hope
This deafening defiance
Because I've always kept on
We keep surviving
So while we keep surviving we might as well find courage
Courage to hope for good things for ourselves

The courage to believe in tomorrow
And the next good day
And the next good week
And the next good year
And the next good lifetime
And just cross our fingers that one day
We will be deserving
of every good thing

Poem

STAINED
Cat Keenan



She is stained.
Like red wine spilled on a white carpet.
She allowed them to do what they wanted.
She basked in the feeling of being desired.
She took their temporary affection in her fists and held on tight.
She wriggled and writhed and tried to break free before the stain
sank in.
Until she stopped moving.
Stopped fighting.
Allowed it to spread.
Permitting it to fill her body in like a child's coloring book.

Artwork

RECIPROcity

Gabrielle Lynch



Poem

THE SADNESS MACHINE

Dr. James Everett



The sadness machine never ceases,
keeps chuffing and humming

over and through the trees,
dump trucks and mixers at a new neighborhood

construction site constant as blue jays
screaming hawk, hawk.

We've deafened ourselves
to this new ambience.

A raccoon carries her kits while chainsaws whine.
Turkeys roost in the trees left.

The machine, grungy
but running and eating oil, loose

belt squeaking, keeps creeping.
It's inefficient, burns gas, god awful

expensive to keep on.
Wrapped inside its blue exhaust

like ghosts, some children ask
to turn off the sadness. No,

the burning world replies.
It keeps us happy at our task.



THE SWORD

Alexa Jennings

“You are in quite the trouble, Yinary Constal Holler!” Aunt Hazel had announced right as they entered their home.

Yin winced at the use of her full name. That had to mean she was in for it. She’d really hit home, right into the boiling pot, this time. She, at the bright and independent age of eighteen, was still getting a talking to from her elder. It was embarrassing and, in Yinary’s opinion, quite disproportionate.

“I just took it out to the field! No one was there and I was practicing how to fight!” Yin folded her arms. Arms that were built like a soldier’s but never the experience of one.

Hazel’s bronze eyes glowered at Yin’s, “And did I say you could take it out?”

“For all Gods, I’m eighteen, Aunt!”

“And you had no right to take it! It was his!”

Yinary flinched at the words. The words of her Aunt, but also the words of a wounded woman.

That’s when Yinary turned her gaze to the corner of the foyer where the very subject of their argument leaned against the wall: the sword.

It was made with the metals that gave purple-ish hues spoke for its own sharpened elegance. The base of the blade was a shape almost like a bud that could bloom into a flower. The handle of the blade had been made to fit in hands and make attacks comfortably. It was her Uncle’s sword.

Well, it had been. Before he died of an unnatural cold. He passed about a year ago. He meant a great deal to Yin’s Aunt. She’d loved him, but Yin had also loved her Uncle.

He told her the grandest tales of Gods, moon palaces, and dragon wolves, all while still finding the time to hunt, all after dark. Aunt Hazel was always worried for him as he would leave and Yinary couldn’t help but to be worried too. Yet, he went out every night, a smile on his face and that sword sheathed at his back.

Sometimes, he’d give them a hug or a kiss on the cheek with a look in his eyes, as if their worry did have sanction for why he went out. Sometimes, he said the moons were in his favor. Sometimes, he said or did nothing at all. But every morning, he’d return with coin. That had been enough for Aunt Hazel and Yin.

He’d trained Yin how to fight— with a sword. It was her pride to be



able to go out to the valleys of hollow trees and train. Sometimes, her Uncle even let her hold the sword. But all the training had stopped when her Uncle died. Aunt Hazel had no intent to pick it up, caught in grief.

But what else did they have?

Her Uncle had brought money to the table. Her Aunt stayed at home.

Yinary had tried to pick it up, but no matter the cost, the price tag, the amount of coin, the debt, her Aunt had always made her put down the sword.

Aunt Haze did begin to work at the local bakery, barely bringing in end's meet. It was enough as her Aunt would say, but Yinary knew she was old enough to help out—old enough to make a difference. She could fight. She could pick up the work her Uncle had done or she could find her own path. She could join the soldier academy, Geax Academy, and that would definitely send enough coin her Aunt's way.

But anything that dealt with the sword, or fighting for that matter, Aunt Hazel didn't want her to have anything to do with it. Perhaps she was the one thrown in the boiling pot, but she couldn't help but become the boiling pot herself. She never understood why her Aunt insisted this and it made her mad.

Yinary clenched her fists then, "And when are you going to let him go? He's gone, Aunt Haze! I can help you! I have something with this!" She gestured towards the sword.

But her Aunt was ever stubborn, shaking her head, replying, "No. You don't."

Yinary wanted to scream, but she kept her mouth shut, and gave her Aunt the glare of a lifetime. "I don't know what in Boull you're doing besides sabotaging our livelihood."

"Don't curse."

"I'm eighteen!" Yinary was stomping up the stairs, done with the conversation.

"Dinner will be served in a quarter hour." Her Aunt hollered, dismissing their argument to drift into nothing.

Dinner had been leftover bread from the bakery and a piece of jerky, as always. At least, as always since this past year. Yin's stomach growled as if it



were crying over the crumbs of food it was given. Yin loved food, but bountiful luxurious meals were reserved for a year ago's fantasy. So she was hungry after every meal. She'd always tried to satiate it with the berries she plucked in the fields between the forest of hollow trees.

With that, Yin reached for her bag, procuring a plastic box she'd stashed the plucked berries. Then, she paused. Searching her bag with her other hand, she pulled out something else, discarding the berries on her dresser.

She plumped down into her bed and in her hands sat an amazing sapphire stone. It was the size of her palm, though her hand was small. Still, this gem had to be worth a hefty price. In the Town of Nin, far north from Delta's capital and home to red-blooded beings, any mortal of no powers would find such a gem their ticket out of the sleepy, dusty old town. Yin could already picture the townsfolk's ogling eyes, but they were better off than her and her Aunt still. If Yin couldn't draw a sword for her helping hand, she could at least use this.

Although, the gem was a peculiar shape—tear-shaped with a circular hole cutting through the base of it. That had to take away some of its worth, but it was a smooth, polished stone. Yin caught the stone in the moons' light and turned it to find glints of violet, pink, and orange specks. Perhaps this wasn't sapphire at all. Was it a gem worth more?

The way she'd stumbled upon the gem was peculiar as well. She had been out practicing with her Uncle's sword. After many swings, thrusts, and lunges—a sword play against an invisible partner—Yin had laid in the grass, only to feel something hard against the back of her head.

When she sat up to remove the supposed stone, she found the gem in her hand instead.

It had been out in the middle of nowhere. No visitors or market dealers would travel through there and the Town of Nin barely had visitors and market dealers to begin with. Townspeople weren't biggest on traveling through the hollow trees. The forest kept the town sheltered and safe. For a bunch of beings, that was enough to be satisfactory. So how had the gem been out there in the first place?

Yin laid the gem down on her bed, turning to look out her window to the town, to the forest and mountains beyond, and to the three moons in the sky. The town may be poor but the sights were breathtaking.



Yinary sighed.

It didn't matter where that gem came from or if it was the first treasure Yin had found in these woods. Tomorrow, she would find a way to sell it and get her Aunt and herself out of this Boull pit.

So Yin fell into bed and dosed. That night, she dared to dream of Gods and moon palaces and wolf dragons.

In her dreams, she believed she heard the howls of those wolf dragons, but Yinary was startled from the dream by the sound of a thump. She was bleary-eyed from slumber—hardly awake. She still heard the howls of the wolf dragons and, for a minute, believed them to be on the roof of her home. She gazed at her walls as orange light danced upon it and that she found unusual: her walls were blue.

She grasped more consciousness. Suddenly, the dancing orange light did bother her very much. Her pulse raced as her nostrils filled with something pungent, and the howls she'd made to be dragon wolves weren't howls at all.

They were screams.

Yinary bolted up in her bed gasping. Dread weighed her down and moved its way up her throat. At that moment, she felt like her world would collapse. When she turned around, it did just that.

The forest was on fire. The town was on fire. The people were on fire. With the shadows that are the gore of burning flesh, Yin saw more dreading, unwelcoming shadows: drafts.

Drafts were the creatures made of all things nightmares were. Dread, death, and an impeccable end to any they set foot upon. They looked like the undead bored about in children's tales but they were beyond undead. They were wholly unwhole and they sought wholeness.

The one thing that kept them at bay were hollow trees and the hollow forest that had surrounded the Town of Nin, that had kept all its beings safe and unharmed, was burning to the ground.

Yinary's breathing was doing double-time. She knew hyperventilating wouldn't help her but her greatest fear was set out before her. No, not the



invasion of drafts. No, not the desolation of the town. No, not the destruction of the forest and valleys she cared so deeply for (and would greatly miss). It was the flickering flames that were consuming it all.

Yinary hated fire—despised it. Yet, when the foe knocked at her doorstep, she was as good as petrified wood left in the forest.

So Yinary sat at the destruction of her world.

What would Aunt Hazel do? She would probably set her straight, smack her wrist and tell her to pick up that damned sword. Well, no. She would not let her near the sword, even in this situation.

That's when Yinary's heart sank.

Where was Aunt Hazel? Why hadn't she come to reprimand her and tug her out of this nightmare? She of all people knew Yinary's greatest fear. She of all people in this town would find a way to survive, just as they had. What if she was dead?

There was a tear streaming down Yin's cheek.

That's when she got up.

Who knew all it took to defy her fear was the worry for her last cherished piece of family? Of course, she was still scared though. Boull, she was terrified. But she swore then that her and Aunt Hazel would make it out tonight.

She moved, grabbing her bag from her dresser, tossing the box of berries and the gem inside it. She also stuffed one of her favorite jackets in and tied on her hiking shoes. She made her way quickly to the door. She stopped short of it, though, when she saw a glint of purple in the corner of her eye.

Leaning against the threshold sat the sword.

Aunt Hazel had been to Yinary's room. Aunt Hazel had given Yinary the sword. She even put in enough care to entrust the actual belt and sheath to Yinary—that laid next to the sword on the floor.

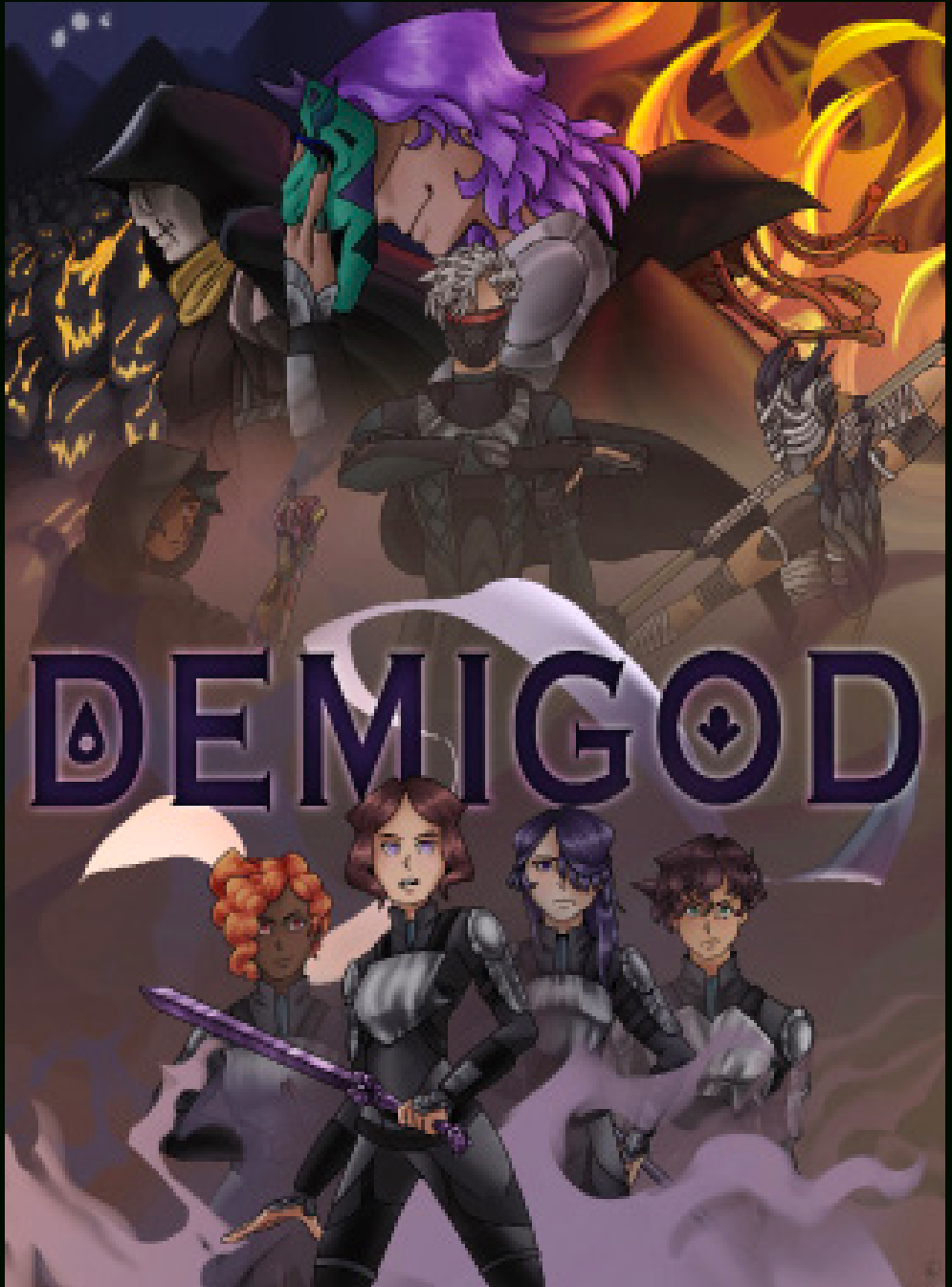
Yin could feel fresh tears come to her eyes. She had no time for them, picking up the belt and sheath, connecting the two before slinging the belt across her torso. She then grabbed the sword, twirling it naturally in her hands before sheathing it behind her back.

She refused to let the questions of what this meant sift through her mind. She refused to answer them. She refused. She promised that Aunt Hazel and herself would get out of here together, and she intended to keep that promise.

Artwork

DEMIGOD POSTER

Alexa Jennings





Poetry

THESE KIDS TODAY
Quintin Overocker

These kids today
with their phones
and their earbuds
and their internet.
They don't read
don't write
don't listen
can't talk
sure don't work.
The words they use
don't make any sense.
Slay? No thanks.

When we were kids
you and me
we didn't waste time
on television
we read every night
always got home
before curfew
never had sex
never drank
never did drugs.
Our parents
liked our friends
and our music.
Hell, we invited
mom and dad
to parties.

Nowadays? No sir.
I swear, I never
seen it this bad.
Who raised these kids,
anyhow?

Poetry

YOU ARE WE

Sara Laboe



Who am, who is, who are
Strangely shy of saying your name
The screaming of tires on sun soaked tar
Seeking any which way, any right way at all

Time crashes by and I know you no better
Hand in hand we are circling the drain
Weight of decisions less clear in the dark
You always laugh meanly at our mistakes

The sky cracks apart when I show you my face
Clouds sink down to the crust of the earth
Stacking together some shells on the beach
Finding some new kind of seaweed

Bits of our bodies ferment in some corner
Yours rots away in a ditch
Who am, who is, who are
I, you, we: me



Poetry

POETRY IS JOURNALISM
Madeleine Pollock

poetry is journalism
except that it's not
because in poetry
there's no tick-tocking clock
and deadlines are
well just that
'dead lines'
lines that don't land quite
right, center, left
is more blurred
in poetry
the words focus more
on the feeling of humanity
& less what words
escaped 'that' person's mouth
but despite all this
i still think
that
poetry is journalism
or at least something like that
because the point of
poetry/journalism
is that people
are informed
about how the world feels
—we all need to feel more

Artwork

MID-CENTURY MOBILE

Sydney Raber



Artwork

GREGORY
Karis King



Artwork

PSEUDOGYMNOASCUS DESTRUCTANS

Gabrielle Lynch





Hybrid

MUSINGS ABOUT GOD

Dr. Paula Hartman-Stein

At age 15

I questioned the existence of heaven and of hell
while walking in solitude
amidst the towering trees, the creek, the rolling hillside
behind my parents' house.

Hell must be a state of mind
in troubled souls beginning on earth
but continuing after the body dies,
I reasoned.
Heaven, likewise, must be a state within
after serving others during this life.

At age 17

I walked alone
gazing at clouds and sun-filled sky,
pondering words of the French Jesuit of Chardin
and thoughts captured in the diary of the German Anne.

At age 25

I felt the vastness and the holiness
of God at the Mayan ruins of Tulum,
mindful of the ocean's power and glorious grandeur
while peering at it from the rocky cliff.

At age 55

I felt God's presence
in a place of Nature's utmost beauty
while strolling along a meandering path
surrounded by blooms of pink azaleas and dogwood trees
on the glorious Biltmore Garden grounds
one sunny spring April afternoon.

"I feel happy here."
A simple child-like state of mind,
uttered unabashedly aloud
for God and all the Universe
to know.

Contributors

SARA BARNES is a junior at Brevard College. She is a history major with a minor in teacher licensure. Planning to be a high school history teacher, she still enjoys poetry and reading literature. She was also published in the 2021-2022 edition of the *Chiaroscuro*.

CAMI GREENE is a freshman at Brevard College, who will be majoring in music starting next year. Cami is currently taking classes in 2D Design and Foundations in Drawing, and has been writing poetry since 2021. While somewhat new to the poetry scene, their love of poetry comes from a longtime appreciation for media with meaningful and heartfelt messages.

JUDITH DAVIS retired to Brevard in 2018 following a career as a college professor and Episcopal priest. She is an artist, birder, mom of a BC sophomore, photographer, poet, priest, and former scientist. In retirement she takes courses in poetry in the Great Smokies Writing Program of UNC-A and publishes poetry and artwork. She is an adjunct priest at St. Philip's Episcopal Church and President of the Transylvania Choral Society. She is an adjunct professor in Religion at Brevard College. She and her family and three cats live near Cedar Mountain.

JULES LUSK is a senior Art major with a concentration in Painting. She takes inspiration from digital technology such as games and phones, as well as comics and manga.

GABRIELLE LYNCH is a senior at Brevard College. She is a Wilderness Leadership and Experiential Education major with a minor in Art and Environmental Studies. Within her work and daily life, she entwines her artistic expression with her experience in the natural world. She hopes to inspire a sense of wonder and exploration and to guide people to test their limits and seek growth.

SARAH HAJKOWSKI is a BC alumni with BAs in English and Theatre. Her poems have been published in Mary Baldwin University's *Outrageous Fortune* and Chicago's *Messy Misfits Club*, as well as *Chiaroscuro*. She is a freelance theatre artist and writer whose current roles include contributing to *Erato* magazine, publishing plays to NPX: New Play Exchange, and stage managing an upcoming Shakespeare production with *Nemesis Theatre*.

DR. JAMES EVERETT is a poet from Jackson, Mississippi. When not teaching English at Brevard, he enjoys playing banjo for the bears and deer and wild turkeys passing through his yard in Asheville, North Carolina, where he lives with his wife and three daughters and one dog

QUINTIN OVEROCKER is the Registrar at Brevard College and teaches an introductory geology course. Before his career in higher education, he worked as a grade control geologist at an underground platinum and palladium mine in Montana. He enjoys being outside.

MADELEINE POLLOCK is a freshman at Brevard College and is double-majoring in Communications and English. Maddi hails from North Vancouver, BC, Canada, and loves all things writing and the outdoors. She is a cyclist with the Brevard College Cycling Team as well as a world-cup level cyclocross racer. When Maddi is not riding her bike you can find her curled up in a hammock with a novel or a notebook.

DR. REESE has been teaching at Brevard College for seven years now. He teaches subjects that involve music and dreams, sometimes both at the same time. You might see him on stage accompanying or not see him behind the pipe organ in Scott Concert Hall. He recently has contributed four nights to the 1001 Arabian Nights by channeling his inner Scheherazade. (Note: This brings the total nights to 1005.)

CASON MCLEOD has been around photography all his life, with his mother having a bachelor of art in photography and his brother picking up the hobby as well. Creativity definitely runs in the family. He's never taken a photography class, he just had a little orange Sony point and shoot when he was young and he learned through taking photos. He'll take a photo of any scene or person that captures his attention, and he is often drawn to those with vivid or fun colors. He is red-green colorblind, so he has always had a fascination with colors, which led to him enjoying playing with colors in photography. He doesn't edit his photos either, as he likes to use the camera and natural light or a flash to play with light and color while taking the pictures. Photography has become a passion of his and he always have some sort of camera with him.

CAT KEENAN is a junior at Brevard college and recently switched to a communications major.

Editors

JORDAN LAWS is a graduating senior at Brevard college. he is an English major with an emphasis in creative writing, who somehow managed to avoid submitting a short story for the *Chiaroscuro*. When he's not daydreaming, he's weeping—usually in a cold shower. He intends to pursue an MFA in creative writing so that he can teach at a community college. It's a bold strategy, cotton, let's see if it pays off for 'em.

SARA LABOE is currently a senior at Brevard College majoring in English. She spends her time meandering through the woods with her true love (a pit bull named Tennyson), whispering to plants, and attempting to read and walk at the same time.

GUNNAR ENSIGN is a digital artist and photographer. Ensign primarily works with a surreal aspect to all of his work, especially his photography. His inspiration comes from growing up exploring the rocky mountains and his feeling of detachment from reality that he tries to transfer into a physical medium. Since high school, his work has been exhibited in galleries around colorado and north carolina. He won best of show in the chiaroscuro juried show his freshman year and the 2022 brevard college division of fine arts department of art most outstanding art student award foundation year. In his sophomore year, he was a 2023 brevard college division of fine arts department of art, advancement in photography award recipient. As well as being accepted into the emergence, a survey of southeastern studio programs in the bunzl gallery at the bascom | a center for the visual arts, highlands nc, juried show. Ensign hopes to pursue a career in graphic design as well as continue creating fine art.

EVEY PERREY is a senior at brevard college graduating with a major in English and a minor in music with her instruments being piano and pipe organ. She also enjoys drawing and trainspotting. She is writing a series of books that follow a young woman fleeing her country after an entity named the butterfly sends her world into chaos.

BAYLEE HALLAS is a graduating senior at Brevard College majoring in English with a minor in music. She has served as editor in chief of *Chiaroscuro* this year and enjoys writing, singing and playing guitar.

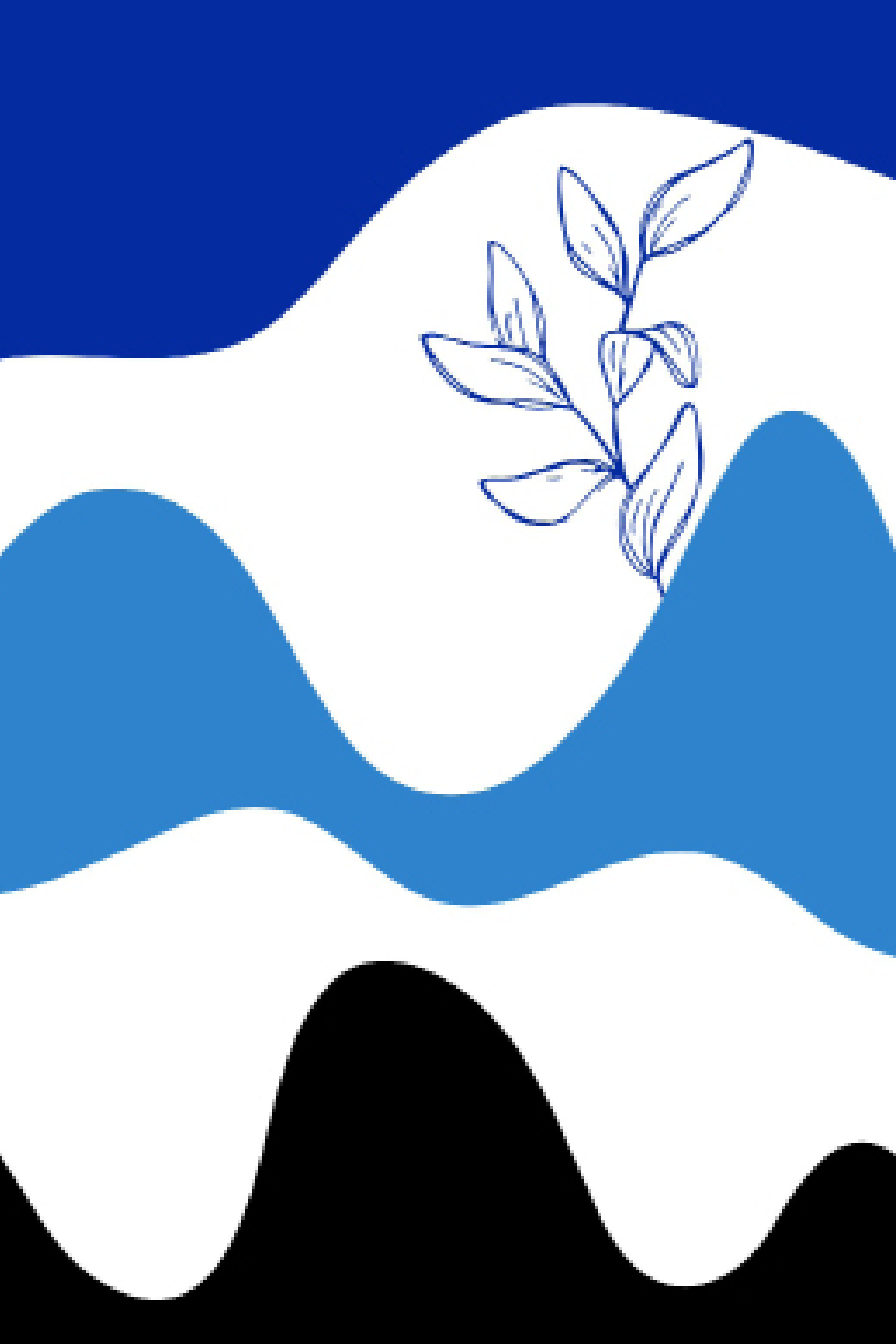
ALEXA JENNINGS is a junior who majors in fine arts and english, concentrations in digital media and creative writing. She is a self-taught artist and an aspiring author. Alexa has loved the process of drawing since she was young. Her love for writing did not spark until late high school, but she has a fondness for both.

KARIS KING is a sophomore at Brevard College and both an art and communications major. This is her first time on the *Chiaroscuro* staff, and is a beginning writer grateful for the opportunity to have her pieces in a literary journal. She is an award-winning artist in both 2-D and 3-D competitions throughout the country, and recently participated in the Rising Stars Piccolo Spoleto festival in Charleston, South Carolina.

ELISSA TINSLEY is a sophomore at Brevard College. She is a biology major with a minor in health science. She plans to go to graduate school to study to be a physicians assistant. Despite her love for science, she appreciates the interconnectivity provided between nature and art. She has been the social media manager for a *Chiaroscuro* for the past two semesters.

RACHEL PIAZZOLA is a junior at Brevard College where she is currently majoring in exercise science with a minor in biology. She has served as one of the social media managers for the journal during the fall and spring semesters. While she spends most of her time in science-related courses, Rachel has always had a deep interest in literature and art and wanted to contribute to her school's literary magazine in a meaningful way.





Sara Barnes
Nicole Bradbury
Rachel Cooke
Rev. Dr. Judith Davis
Gunnar Ensign
Dr. James Everett
Clayton Furr
Cami Greene
Sarah Hajkowski
Dr. Paula Hartman-Stein
Alexa Jennings
Cat Keenan
Karis King
Sara Laboe
Jules Lusk
Gabrielle Lynch
Cason McLeod
Quintin Overrocker
Evey Perrey
David Phillips
Madeleine Pollock
Sydney Raber
Dr. Vance Reese
Kenz Schinsky

