



*Pioneer Pen*

2017

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Volunteer State Community College  
1480 Nashville Pike  
Gallatin, TN 37066

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# Mission Statement

*/pīə'nir/* To pioneer is to create and lead the way. To be a pioneer is to be one who establishes, evolves, and is the first to blaze a trail. While *Pioneer Pen* seeks to be a professional quality literary arts magazine, we also aim to foster a creative community so that Volunteer State Community College students have a platform to express their creativity and originality. To create any work of art is to be brave enough to take a risk. Our magazine strives to provide an inclusive publication in which students may take those risks and */pen/* pen their artistic freedom.

## Why Pioneer Pen?

After seeing the email requesting ideas for a new name for the Volunteer State literary magazine (formerly *Squatter's Rites*), I welcomed the opportunity to let my thoughts wander from work and unleash the creative side for a change. The name "pioneer" came to mind for obvious reasons. Not only is the pioneer the school's mascot, but also our students are true pioneers, leading the way and claiming their destiny to achieve a better life through higher education. I chose "pen" because it can be referred to as a writing instrument and as a verb meaning to write or compose. I have enjoyed reading previous *Squatter's Rites* publications and the magazine is an excellent platform for students, faculty, and staff to share their literary talents, learn together and benefit from each other as a community.

*Beverly Bragg, Admissions Specialist,  
Volunteer State Community College*

*Winner of Literary Arts Magazine Renaming Contest*

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## Gods Be Damned

*Lucas "Moose" Williams*

John MacDougall Literary Award Winner

Your touch, your everlasting touch—  
Midas undo me! When I felt you I was forever changed.  
There was a burn, an itch, a fever,  
A feeling, a whim, pure ecstasy—  
A dream that this would last ten lifetimes over.  
We were lost and bewildered, struggling to find our way in this world.  
Yet, when we reached the labyrinth's end,  
When we became free of Daedalus's depraved craftsmanship  
And we were ready to bask in the light of our just reward,  
We were received with the gold of fools.  
It was then, and only then, the lashes began to rain down upon me.  
Your words—your vile and vicious words—  
Sliced deep into my being.  
With a bitter sorrow forever etched into my heart,  
Your tender soul turned crass.  
A brittle and breaking spirit fell crumbling into the abyss,  
Cast aside by Charon's cruel indifference,  
For there was no aurelion chip with which to pay this wicked piper  
For ours had been gilded with lies.  
I felt the urge, the yearning, the need.  
I had to save you.  
I had to save myself.  
And with hope, in an instant, I leapt—  
I dove into the river Styx with passion enough to dry those putrid waters,  
Or so I thought.  
I was dragged back into the siren's den  
Like Persephone to the gates of hell.  
A thousand deaths I died—for you—  
And in return I was struck with Hephaestus's Labrys.  
I was split apart, struggling to keep myself whole.  
But as the torrent of agonizing pain burst forth from my skull,  
As I screamed and screamed and my soul bled out into the world around me,  
I was born anew—  
Like a phoenix from the ashes Athena had been freed from the ignorant all-knowing.  
But of whom did the Fates spin this yarn?  
Had Apollo fallen for Hyacinth,  
Or the Ouroboros for its tail?  
I know not.

## Faded Memories

*Donovan Kerkmaz*

Fusion Art and Design Award Winner



## A House Rebels

*Katy Buck*

the yellow curtains stare back at me,  
reminding me of what once was.  
the wooden windowsill we sat on  
while sharing serenity  
is now worn and cracked.  
the kitchen we danced in  
with music blasting  
has become still and silent.  
the light blue paint in our old room  
is chipping and falling away.  
i wonder if the house knows  
that we've fallen apart.  
maybe its wooden floors and  
popcorn ceilings are rebelling against the fact  
that we are no more.  
i'd join that rebellion in a heartbeat.  
i'd protest and scream and cry out  
about how i want our bright smiles  
our loving glances  
and our lingering lips back in my life.  
because this house means nothing to me  
without you in it.  
it was never my home,  
you were.

## My Fingernails

*Kristin Meeks*

There are aliens in my finger nails.

I painted a universe onto them. I did two coats of reddened black and added a top coat of glitters, so that the glitters looked like stars. I saw a UFO the next day. It was on my index finger of my right hand. I blinked and it skipped across from my index finger to my middle finger, ring finger, and my pinky. There was an alien traveling across the universe of My Fingernails, in the Right Hand Galaxy. I couldn't believe it. Later that same day, I saw a strawberry colored UFO in the Left Hand Galaxy. I caught it hovering on the Left Thumb. Time paused as we examined each other. Then it darted away like bugs do when you frighten them. Except for the dead ones. I wonder if there are dead bugs in My Fingernails. I was determined to discover more activity on My Fingernails. I couldn't listen to anyone. My friends stopped hanging out with me. My teachers kept sending me to the office. My parents cried. Because I couldn't risk taking my eyes off of this peculiar universe. After a week of getting sent home from school, I was declared sick. On the day they stopped trying to get me to listen, I was in the kitchen looking for a magnifying glass in the junk drawer. My mother was like a scamp throwing fireballs at me from across the room. "Are you on drugs? What is so fascinating about your hands? Do you hear me?! Why won't you tell me? I'm your mother. You can tell me anything! You know that..." her voice dwindled as she had begun tearing up. I found a magnifying glass, and reveled in my success while she spat at me. I invented 15 constellations that day. I named them after movie directors. For example, Kubrick Shining is shaped like a door with an ax in it. My favorite constellation is Burton Beetlejuice, shaped like a beetle, of course.

Once I wasn't expected to go to school anymore, I was left alone to inspect My Fingernails as much as I pleased. Without the distractions of people and everyday mundane activities, I became a grand cartographer. I pampered my hands. I kept them immaculate. I didn't want anything to interfere with My Fingernails. I had to keep close observation at all times. I slept minimally, only because my body required it. I paid attention to the movements and placements of the constellations at different times. I speculated at how the stars were placed when I first saw the UFOs. I yearned for the day they would reveal themselves to me again. I recorded every detail. My parents were becoming increasingly distressed and really, I couldn't

be bothered with their concerns. So petty and unimportant their worries were. The real issues were in My Fingernails. I had an entire universe to observe that is unique to only me. And I owned it. I could destroy it at any time. I could just remove the nail polish. It had begun to chip anyway. That would teach those trifling aliens. It had been a bit over a week since I saw them on that first day. They must have taken me for a fool! Stupid Fingernail aliens. I'd show them who's the fool. But – What if they weren't even UFOs? Maybe they were just colorful asteroids. Rocks. Boring dumb rocks floating around for no reason at all. I decided then, that it was time. Ultimate Apocalypse was upon My Fingernails. This micro-maddening universe had run its course. I said goodbye to the constellations. I cursed it for not doing anything cool. I dabbed a cotton ball with the fingernail polish remover and commenced the cleansing. A chemical cleansing. New World genocide. However, the polish was such a nebulous inky color that it wouldn't come off! I poured the tincture all over My Fingernails, then scrubbed with a nailbrush. Nothing seemed to work. How did this happen? The combination of the glittery clear coat on top of the black must have been some sort of recipe for a new dimension...of which I was the creator of...and could not seem to destroy after all.

I barricaded myself in my bedroom, which had become filled with dirty dishes and garbage. I was so adamant on keeping my hands pristine that I had neglected my chores. I didn't mind the smell. My parents had been too depressed to even enter my room. They really are dramatic. They were outside with everyone else shooting fireworks and celebrating their so-called independence. Meanwhile, I was doing something actually important. I had a universe to destroy. I began to pick at the fringes of the universe, where it had started to chip. It didn't matter. I tried fingernail clippers. A file. Tweezers. A flathead screwdriver. A butter knife. And eventually a razor blade. Once the razor blade didn't work, I thought to myself... I could just slice My Fingernails clean off and be rid of it once and for all! I could burn them in a fire and turn them to stardust. Yes. That would do. I rested the razor blade on the cuticle of the Left Thumb and applied pressure. I stretched my chin up toward the ceiling while I laughed maniacally, tears puddling in the corners of my eyes. I bid farewell to My Fingernails. That's when my mother, with her trivial performances, interrupted me. She protested in horror as she came to find that – no – her baby was not doing drugs. I was mutilating myself. The sight of the blood and tools scattered about my knees on the filthy floor shocked her. She pinched her nose and gagged. She is so ignorant. She could never understand My Fingernails. I let her stop me and fall over herself. She always has loved having a reason

### *My Fingernails*

to pity herself. She couldn't wait to pat herself on the back for rescuing her poor insane daughter. She slung the razor blade across the room. No words. Just hysterical weeping. She took me in her arms and rocked me, my head against her chest. That was the last time I saw her. I was sedated in the ambulance. They had to rush me to the hospital, because I wouldn't stop trying to rip My Fingernails off of me. No one could ever understand. When I woke up, I was in this room. I can't move my arms anymore. They don't trust me to leave My Fingernails alone. They gave me a special jacket that holds my arms down. At least the room is soft and white. No shady universes hiding in this room. The doctors told me they'd help me destroy the universe. It's only a matter of time. Then, I can be free of those sketchy Fingernail aliens. I can feel their existence in the palms of my hands. Writhing and pulsating. All I can do is wait...wait for the doctors to help me extinguish them for good! But until then - There are still aliens in my fingernails.

### **Quailbones**

*Dakota Brown*





## **The Perfect Woman**

*Renee Pitts*

I was in the presence of a goddess  
Her olive skin was flawless.  
Her eyes a honeyed brown with flecks of gold  
Sometimes it was as if she glowed.  
Her presence seemed to give life  
Even in times of strife.  
Her smile is absolutely radiant  
Where the stars were the ingredient.  
Her kindness and love was unmatched,  
Even with the hard truths she would be unabashed  
And give honesty whenever asked.  
Her hair fell in dark waves down to her waist  
And no matter how hard the wind blew, not a single strand would be displaced.  
She had no flaws, the gods must have seen to that.  
And if there was any wish I would want her creators to grant,  
Just one thing that I could ask, without fear on being dismissed,  
It would be that she would exist.

## **Harmonizing**

*Jessica Levine*

Your skin is a melody,  
a rich, soulful vibrato  
that echoes off the walls of empty rooms  
and brings every dark corner humming to life.

My skin sings at a higher note,  
a sweet, pleading tease  
that brings the moon to a shiver  
on the warmest evenings.

And when your skin  
sings with my skin,  
their voices carry over every ocean and every desert,  
over every tundra and every savannah,  
over every city and every village,  
over every highway and every home,  
dressing every ear  
in bright red silk.

## Untitled

*Sydney Koch*



## Family Prayer

*Karen Spence*

Born of the same womb, into the same world;  
First one, then years later, another little girl.  
Then all over again, by our father's loins  
Two families became one, not easy to join.

Walked the same floors with our bare feet,  
Survived through the same satanic street.  
Waded through the violence, the drugs, and the fears,  
Our family became distanced by many tears.

I thought long and hard about what I should say,  
The words just seem to come out this way.  
It seems a shame to lose someone,  
Because of all that the devil has done.

Should I save these words for over your grave?  
Then search for a memory that I might save.  
Should I shut up these feelings that should be shown?  
Shut them up in a grave of my own.

Should I hide them in a silent prayer?  
Should I tell myself they are not there?  
I say speak those words which need to be spoken.  
Speak loudly that the silence may be broken.

Say those words that need to be heard.  
Speak them clearly word by word.  
I LOVE YOU, my sister, let us wipe away the past.  
I tell you this, my brother while the day lasts.  
For the day will come when we may speak no more.  
I LOVE YOU my sister, my brother, much more than before.  
Lord, help us to truly love one another.  
Help us Lord to love our sister and brother.

Because if we cannot love the ones that are most dear.  
Let us lay our offerings before the altar in fear.  
Let us seek to reclaim the most distant one.

Just as You did when You sent us Your Son.

Let us put aside our pride and our need to be right.  
Let us see ourselves as we are in Your sight.  
Let us look for forgiveness in Your loving face.  
Let us follow You to a higher place.

Give us a heart of flesh and of unconditional love,  
The kind that could only come from above.  
We all need it and seek it. It's what we long to embrace.  
But it's blocked by the pain we won't let you erase.

Take my heart Lord, for I cannot give it.  
Take over my life, for I cannot live it.  
Love my sister through me Lord, for she needs to be loved.  
Love my brother through me Lord, for he needs to be loved.

Start with the sister that it begins with.  
Straight through to the sister that it ends with.  
Let love erase "step" and "half", and leave sister, brother, mother.  
And with cords of love unbroken, bind us to one another.

Amen.

## Tennessee Winter

*Katie Shadowens*



## Vows

*Jessica Levine*

My bridal dress was burning.  
My skin was soaked with wine.  
You said I'm hottest when I'm hurting.  
It was the flames that caught your eye.

But when they burned out, you were satisfied  
enough to turn your back  
and stroll on off, all smiles  
with my ashes on your hands.

I've exhausted all excuses.  
I knew that they were right.  
They did everything to warn me,  
but I had already resigned.

So, I really shouldn't blame you.  
This is my own price to pay.  
I saw you steer us into glaciers  
and chose to look the other way.

I guess I must be drowning now,  
because my lungs feel like they'll burst.  
But though the water may be freezing,  
it's also soothing to my burns.

## Shattering to Whole

*Aiyanna Carver*

He took her to a place, a place no one knows,  
She took him to her place, the one she called home.  
He took her deep inside, where he found a place to hide,  
And in return, she showed him her worst, her dark side.  
They showed each other beautiful things, things they'd never forget,  
And with every passing day, broke each other down bit by bit.  
Until they shattered in each other's arms for the last time,  
And showed each other everything they had ever tried to hide.  
After that day, after shattering like glass,  
They made each other whole again, but it didn't happen fast.  
With each day, they fought: they laughed and cried and screamed,  
And they prayed and they prayed... but for all the wrong things.  
Yet, for some reason, they found themselves made whole,  
And in each other, boy and girl found a new home.  
Now these people are nameless and faceless to the Earth,  
Their love story is one that few have ever heard.  
To anyone looking on, there'd be no reason to dive deeper,  
Just another she loves him and, oh, does he love her.  
But this was the best kind of love story, a long and bumpy road,  
This is the kind of fairy tale every child needs to know.  
Because no true love is easy, and no easy love is true,  
True love is going to hurt, but you're going to make it through.

## **If We Ever Loved**

*Joshua Ashby*

The man slowly stood up from his seat after he was announced by the officiant conducting the funeral. He looked at no one, as everyone looked on at him. As he shuffled from his place at the front of parlor, the man thought about how this one event had shattered a million little plans. We put so much weight on such a weak thing as life, he said to himself, as he approached the empty space at the front of the room. He found himself suddenly thinking about the little red and yellow plastic car that had taken him hours to assemble for Christmas that was useless now. His son had only sat in the thing a dozen times. Do you consign things like that, or do you throw them out, he wondered? Then there was the life insurance/college fund that his dead son's grandmother had purchased for his boy, just days after he was born. A healthy, blue eyed, brown haired, screaming boy. Seven pounds even. He had forgotten all about the policy until his mother wordlessly laid the document on the table in front of him last night, before she returned to her station at the bedside of his nearly comatose wife. It added an extra knot in the man's stomach just thinking about trying to call and claim money for such a thing.

The man felt guilty, trying to think his way around the moment. The entire funeral home was filled to capacity with a sea of grief and this was the only way that he saw to avoid drowning in his own abyss. He felt as though this moment had to make up for a lifetime of events that had been ripped away from them all and he had to make it count. The man had suffered and would surely suffer even more in the hours ahead but he begged the pain to let go of his heart, just long enough to say what needed to be said. They could scrape him up off the floor and lay him in the hole with his baby after this was done but not until he had finished. He looked down and away as he walked past the tiny wooden box. He thought that it would be the end of him the next time he saw that sleeping little face.

As he took the stage, the man had a passing thought, that he was normally terrified to speak to crowds, but this thought had no gravity in the moment. Moreover, he was suddenly aware that this wasn't really a group of individuals but rather many parts of a whole. He didn't think this as much as he felt it, and a small portion of confidence filled the void where the fear should have been. As hard as this was, there was nothing to fear in this place. The idea eased him gently and for the first time in days, he was acutely aware that he was breathing.

The man reached the place behind the dais where the officiant waited for him. He reached out his hand and looked into the other man's eyes. The other man stared back through his own misty eyes. The officiant firmly took his

hand, smiled softly, and placed a hand on his shoulder. The man whispered, thank you, and the officiant let go and turned to walk away. He watched the other man take the seat off to the side of the small stage then turned to look at the entire gathering for the first time.

The man did not say anything, he just met the faces that looked up at him and the recognition of those faces washed over him gradually. The first person that he saw was his uncle. His red eyed uncle held his red eyed aunt close, as they looked knowingly back at him. They had lost their daughter several years back. At the viewing the day before, his uncle had propped himself against a wall close to him and stayed there the whole time. His uncle had simply told him, "I'm here for you" then stood silently by. His focus shifted to the back of the room and he saw all the guys from work standing back there. Had they closed the place down for the afternoon, he asked himself? The man closed his eyes and noticed the strong smell of flowers filling his senses. The little town's florist had nearly blanketed all the free space in the room with lovely work. He looked to the front of the room and saw his mother and his mother in law sitting on either side of his wife. They seemed to be the only thing holding her together, he thought. Then the man saw his brother sitting in the pew behind his mother. His brother was leaning over to embrace their mother, just as his sister in law was doing for his inherited mother on the other side. They were all holding each other up, he realized. He looked at them all the people sitting before him and there seemed to be a thick fog in the whole room. All at once, he realized that the fog was coming from his own damp eyes and he looked down at the dais.

There were people who had driven all night to be here sitting in the middle of the room, people he hadn't seen in years sitting in the back, and people he had never known standing everywhere. In the moment, he appreciated them all and wondered if he would ever see such a gathering like this again. He wondered this and then the old idea about people only coming together in tragedy abruptly took its place. He had heard people say something on this note at every funeral he had ever attended but that was the only place he could recall ever hearing such things.

The man glanced up, and he saw his son lying there before him. His hands began to tremble and he reached out, gripping the dais tightly. If it had not been there, he would have surely fell to the floor as his knees nearly abandoned him.

The nearly broken father closed his broken eyes, and whispered a barely perceptible, thank you for coming, my wife and I are grateful to you all. He found a stronger voice and continued. I see all the lovely flowers in the room. I know there is a pile of cards covering the coffee table at our house, that I imag-

ine are filled with gifts and condolences. I am sure that, somewhere, there is a table heaping with food that has been generously prepared. To anybody who was so thoughtful to be a part of any of this, I don't know how I will ever repay you. I know that life demands so much and it does not care if you think yours has ended, it keeps insisting. In a time which we have nothing to give, each of you has given in our place. I don't know if you can put a value on that.

The man forced a halfhearted smile as he continued, none of this makes any sense. My boy just fell and hit his head on the floor in our living room. I saw him fall at least a hundred times before and he was always fine but this time, he wasn't and I don't know how this can be. There was no buildup to this, we never saw anything like this coming. It seems like a lie that I keep telling myself. Perhaps the worst part is, there's nothing to blame. There was no disease that stole him away from us. I don't know if something like that is better or worse, to hold someone longer than they're going to stay, but at least it gives some hope for a while then leaves you with a crusade after hope flies away. Nobody came and hurt our son. There's no criminal to carry the burden that we're suffocating under. I'm not even sure that we can blame ourselves but I am sure that we will try.

The man stared deep into the gathering. A flood of anger rose within him and his thoughts poured out of him; none of us make any sense! We don't appreciate a damn thing, I don't appreciate a damn thing! He felt the tears running down his face but he was miles past concern. We collect people to surround ourselves with, just like they collect us, and we love them intensely for a while, then our love turns to responsibility, and becomes this hollow thing. Two weeks after my son was born, I could walk right past him without even looking at him. That was such a waste because he was a miracle every day, but I only paid attention when he did something new. We are constantly looking for something new and I don't know why. I am so ashamed but that doesn't mean a damn thing now.

The man trembled violently now and he began to sob. He saw the officiant move to come to him, but he raised a hand and shook his head. The man gripped the dais tightly in his hands. He closed his eyes and breathed a few deep, ragged breaths. It seemed like a long while had passed, and he opened his eyes. He looked down to where his son was laid.

The man saw that his boy looked so serene in the moment. Through sore eyes and a pounding head, he saw all the care that had been taken. His son was dressed in the warm pajamas with the little feet at the bottom. He was covered in the small quilt that his grandmother had made just for him before he was born. The boy was surrounded by his favorite toys, a few small toys that other people had placed inside, and more folded up notes than the man could stand

to count. His son was surrounded by all the love that anybody could ever hope for, and would be laid to rest just so.

The man knew that soon after he had finished, it would be time to say goodbye. The thought was pure anguish inside of him. He knew this, but he also knew that it had to come. With that thought, the man allowed himself back into the moment. He was finished talking to the gathering, all he had left to say was for his son.

I'm not a religious man. I don't really think that things like that truly matter. Anything that really matters seems to come together the same regardless of what we think god is or what god wants. There is only one thought that sustains any faith in me, and it is all that I have right now. I have faith that we will be together again if we ever loved at all, even for just a little while. We are each filled with some kind of energy. If people are attracted to one another, that's a force. If force is an energy, it cannot be destroyed. Since that force can't be destroyed, it remains. No matter where it goes or what it does, it remains. If the energy in us is compelled, it will come together again. We have to come back to each other. If this is not true, please let me be ignorant forever.

So if you are in some heaven, laying on a cloud, I'll come lay beside you. If you just go to the ground and feed the ordinary grass, I will be one of those blades. If you live again as a fish, then I will follow suit and we will swim together. If the sun stops burning and the whole world falls apart, we will all come together and make a sun of our own. I love you, and we will all be together again.

## Seasons Home

*Kit Green*

Autumn you left without a proper goodbye,  
Winter comes and goes in a dance with Spring  
Too early to contain and too pleasant to fear when I can enjoy.  
Autumn, Winter, where did you go  
Without giving word to those who await for your return?  
I sit by the window and watch and wait for you,  
Either of you,  
To return like the old friends  
You are to me.  
I call your names and watch  
And listen for a reply  
On the wind to my call.

Winter, Winter, did you not know  
Autumn left without goodbye?  
Your chill snows,  
Cloudy days, biting winds,  
Frost and ice are needed now.  
Can you not tell the trees stir too soon in their sleep?  
I wave trying to get your attention,  
As Spring comes too early in your absence  
And the tender boughs of the trees,  
Too soon filling with leaves, are failing.  
Oh Winter, Autumn, don't you know you can't leave without a goodbye?

Winter, Winter, come home soon, it is not yet time for Spring and Autumn  
has left without goodbye.

## Leisure Spring

*Jacqueline Fedo*



## Sensory

*Justin Goolsby*

I.

The pendulum's swing  
The creaking of trees  
The wind chime's ping  
The breeze in the eaves  
The rustle of grass  
The crunch of the leaves  
Your distance toward me  
Serves to amplify these

II.

The books on my shelf  
The faces in a crowd  
The reflection of mirrors  
The shapes in a cloud  
The glare off the lake  
The flight of the fowl  
Without you around  
Seem unbearable now

III.

The bitterest bitters  
The sweetest of sweets  
The menthe and the spice  
The peak umami  
The tarest of tarts  
The saltiest sea  
All pale by degrees  
When comparing to thee

IV.

The tickle of hair  
The breath on my neck  
The heft of a breast  
The arch of a back  
The heat from a body  
The passionate sex  
Without your caress  
I am utterly vexed

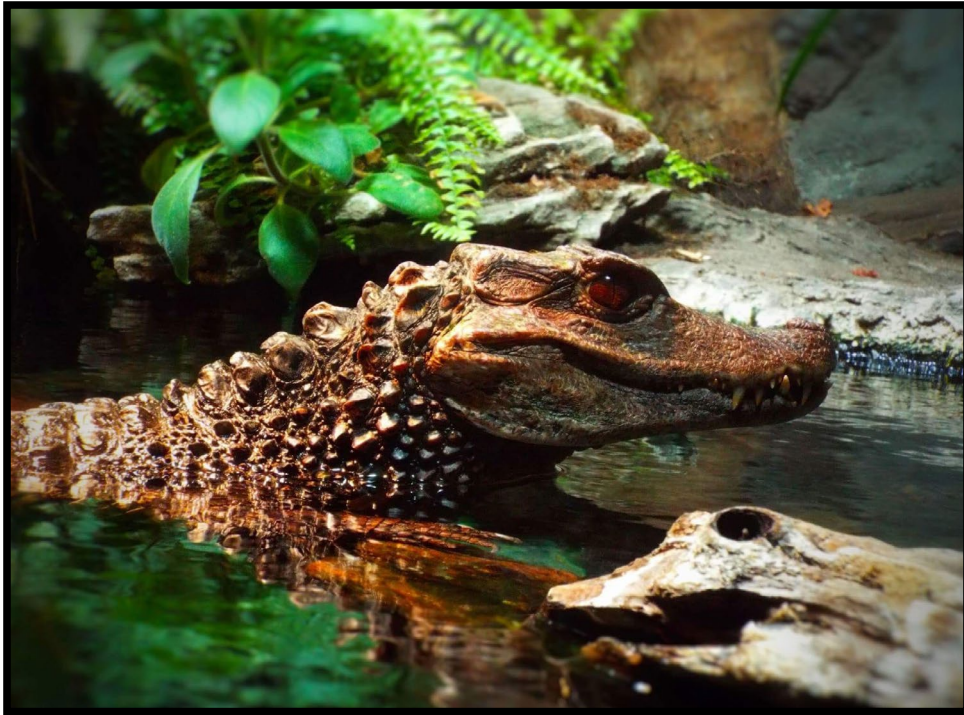
V.

The scent of a lily  
The lotus' bloom  
The bouquet of wine  
The smell of a fruit  
The ghost on my pillow  
That spoor of perfume  
Lying 'lone in my room  
Reminiscing on you



## Water Hunter

*Bella Hanges*



## A Soldier

*Katherine Young*

A soldier is so many things  
    He is a normal man to all that see him  
He is brave because he believes  
    He is a hero to his country  
He is loyal to his country  
    He is a fighter for his nation  
He is firm because he is a leader  
    He is a believer in justice  
He is stubborn because he knows best  
    He is a son to a loving father  
He is praised because he defends  
    He is a brother to his fellow soldiers  
He is loving because he knows how it feels to not be loved  
    He is a dreamer of his life back home  
He is appreciative to the ones supporting him  
    He is a protector of those he loves  
He is compassionate about all things he loves  
    He is a husband to the one waiting back home  
He is her heart, her soul, her one, her only.

## Silence

*Stacy Snider*

I feel a sudden rush of cold. The sensation is so shocking that my flesh almost feels as if it is on fire. I am aware of being moved around...there are bright lights and voices. I am at once terrified and confused. From deep in my belly an intense pressure is rising, rising, I feel it push open my mouth. I feel the pressure pour itself out of me and it leaves me gasping for breath. All of the emotions that I am feeling seem to be rushing outside of me, spilling all over the room like marbles. I am feeling better with each inhalation of sterile hospital air and I begin to calm down enough to take a look at my surroundings. Everyone is absolutely silent. They are staring at me. I am in my mother's arms but her touch doesn't feel comforting. She is looking at me in horror. Finally, she speaks, but not to me. "Why isn't she making any sound?!" She nearly screams at the doctor. She pushes me towards him and I am grabbed up briskly and given a few rough smacks on the back. Here comes the pressure again and my mouth opens to let it out. I hear the doctor speak, "I think she's mute." This day of my birth marks my beginning in this world. And those words marked my life forever. Mute. A label. A stigma. Unable to communicate orally. But I am not mentally disabled. I am not dumb or stupid or unaware of the world around me the way that they have sometimes guessed I am. I am probably more aware than most anyone, seeing that my mouth isn't competing with my mind. But no one understands this. I've had to come up with creative ways of letting others know what I need or feel or want to do and I'm sure that some of them look strange. But I am just like you, and her, and him. I am the same inside and out. I just cannot speak.

I am very small. I was born weighing scarcely over four pounds and my mother calls me "petite." She says it in a way that sounds endearing and it makes me feel like she is proud of me. It's been six months since that day in the hospital and for the most part things have been good. My mother and father dress me up and show me off. My father doesn't talk to me much but my mother does. She's always getting close to my face and telling me that she doesn't believe what the doctors say about me and that I am just not quite ready to make any noise. She says she enjoys having such a quiet little baby and that one day soon I will be babbling up a storm. She says that we will prove those doctors wrong. I stare at her intently with my big gray eyes, study the way her mouth moves and forms sounds. I experiment with moving my own mouth to mimic hers and in those moments she looks so proud. Then she will snuggle me up and sing little made-up songs to me

about how smart and pretty I am. This makes me feel like we are a team, my mother and I. And I am so happy. By the time I am a year old though, the singing stops. My mother still gets close to my face and makes big exaggerated sounds, trying to get me to do the same. I try, I really do. But no matter how hard I force the breath within me to form any sound at all, it just refuses. My mother starts taking me to see special doctors who look in my ears and down my throat. They all tell her the same thing. There's nothing physically wrong that they can find. And there's no cure for me. My mother starts crying all the time and throwing things. One time she even threw the phone down so hard that it bounced back and hit me in the face. She had no idea how badly it hurt and didn't even know it had hit me for a couple of minutes. She stood there in the kitchen yelling about how awful it was for her to have a daughter that couldn't speak and why her God? Why did he punish her this way? I sat there on the floor, red-faced and crying, no sound coming from my little mouth, only big fat tears running down my face. Finally, she turned around and just gave me the oddest stare. It took her a minute to figure out what had happened and she rushed to pick me up, saying over and over again how sorry she was. I wanted to tell her that she shouldn't feel so bad. After-all, it was me, not her, that couldn't speak so God wasn't punishing her at all. He must be punishing me. Soon, my mother's preoccupation with my condition becomes too much for my father to handle. All the time they are fighting and yelling. He blames her for having a "damaged" baby and accuses her of neglecting him. He storms out one day without ever telling me goodbye. I am left there wondering what damaged means. I am two years old. After my father leaves us for good, my mother stops trying to communicate with me at all. She still takes care of me, making sure that I am always fed and bathed, but she doesn't talk to me while she does it. My world becomes very quiet and very lonely. I wonder if maybe she thinks that just because I can't talk that I also can't hear. Oh, but my ears are very good. I hear everything. Often I will sit very still just listening to the sounds around me. Then I go investigate to see where they are coming from. I point at a lot of things, hoping my mother will explain them to me, and sometimes I am lucky and she will say "plant" or "bird" or name whatever it is I am curious about. Other times she just looks away as if she doesn't see me. I become very patient this way and pay close attention, hoping that I will hear her inadvertently say the words I need to know.

When I am three I start going to daycare. The other kids there don't seem to care that I can't speak and I have so much fun playing with them. The sandbox is my favorite and I wish I could tell my mother about it.

When she picks me up she never asks the teachers how my day was and they never say anything either. It's about as personal as picking up a piece of mail from the post office.

When I am five I start kindergarten. I am put in a special school for "gifted" children. This sounds really neat to me and makes me feel proud to be considered a gift. But in my class I am confused about the children around me. One boy sits in a wheelchair and gazes up at the ceiling all day. There are three children that I have heard the teachers refer to as "Downs." There's a sweet faced little girl that runs in circles and stands on the tables and covers her ears when there's too much noise. There's a boy who looks older than the rest that talks really loudly and constantly. Then there's me. The teachers spend time with each of us separately, showing us shapes and colors and working on the alphabet. What they don't know is that I can sing the alphabet perfectly in my head. I've been doing that for years and I know my shapes and colors too. I wish I could tell them that I am bored. The best part of my day is when we get to go on the padded playground outside. There's not a sandbox there, but there are swings and swinging makes me feel free and I forget about everyone and everything.

I hear a group of teachers talking about me one day and one of them asks why I am at the school. Another teacher answers her saying I am mildly retarded. They all nod their heads and look over at me. I have just taught myself how to tie my own shoelaces and I am practicing doing it over and over again. I wonder why she called me retarded, because I have heard them call some of the other kids retarded and I have come to the conclusion that it means slow. I am always the first to finish my worksheets and I can run really, really fast too. I try to think of things I have done that would make them call me slow but I can't think of anything. But surely I must have done something. I guess what they say is true.

I used to be curious about the world but I'm starting to no longer care. I've come to realize that the teachers don't expect much of me and neither does my mother. She hardly seems to notice me anymore and I really think she wishes I weren't around to bother her at all.

Everything I've heard about myself swirls around my mind like water in a drain. Slowly it starts to take root inside of me and then I understand.

They said Mute. Damaged. Retarded. They've shown me Stupid. Unwanted. Unloved.

I sink into my own silence.

## **We Are Monsters**

*Didumo Olok*

**We are monsters,  
All of us.**

Hiding behind too bright smiles and bright wide eyes.

With our teeth sharpened like blades on lies

And cruel growled words roared at a whisper.

Our hands, the spindly spider legs given fleshy form to never let go.

Holding fast the dreamlike nightmares.

Such sweetness the serpentine tongues speak, like mother's firstborn whispers.

**We are monsters**

Hiding cruelty in masks of soft beautiful love, and holding hatred in a sun-warm star-bright smile.

We chain the world with words and actions, as if to keep them in fear of shattering the lying dream.

We are monsters worse than skeletons and ghouls.

The sickening, churning, queasy filth bubbling inside our bones in a desire to erupt out and taint the world.

**We are monsters, and in the night as we try to sleep  
We tremble at what we may become**

## What I Don't Tell My Brother

*Jessica Levine*

I know what Daddy did to you behind that door across the hall from mine.

The evidence was a lump rotting under the living room carpet.

It drew in flies who swarmed the room and filled the space between us with their buzzing.

Mama turned the TV up, but the buzzing got louder and louder until I could—and can—hear it from the other side of Georgia where I sleep now, nine hundred and fifteen miles from your Eighth Ave apartment.

The flies come after me when I am alone.

They gnaw through my blouse and burrow into my chest, hollowing out a place where there was once a father and a mother.

But I just want you to know, even though I won't tell you, that somewhere in the mess of that gaping, mangled cavity, there still is and has always been a brother.

## El Retrato Familiar

*Tamara Blanco*



## **The Girl With the Red Bow**

*Amber Kittrell*

When I was younger, there was this girl in my fourth-grade class. Her name was Sarah. I sat right next to her. She wore this bright red bow. She was dirty all time. She always wore the same sweater every day, even when the weather was hot. She also had one or two dresses she wore every week. I never asked her why she wore the same thing all the time. I was curious about her. She didn't talk much. The teacher never called on her. She just kind of sat in class.

It was around Christmas time, and we were about to be off for two weeks for Christmas break. I was so excited. I was hoping my dad would get me the hunting gun I wanted. The class was about to start. The teacher came in, took attendance, and started writing on the chalk board. I looked over and Sarah was just sitting there. I heard her stomach groaning like she hadn't eaten all weekend. We were not allowed to have food in class. I pulled my backpack around and started to dig in for my sacked lunch. I pulled out a red apple my mom picked out of her garden that morning. I handed it over to Sarah. She held out her hand to take it. I could see the dirt imbedded in her finger nails. I never noticed her bright blue eyes before. I could see she was about to tear up, but something in her held them back. She took the apple to her mouth. I could see her sweater move back. Her wrist was had a hand print on it. It looked like a tattoo. I could tell it has been there for multiple days. I just kept it to myself.

Our teacher did not notice Sarah eating. Sarah was finished by the time our teacher turned around. During our lunch break, I asked Sarah if wanted me to sit with her. She nodded her head. We sat in quiet. I wanted to ask her questions, but they just wouldn't come out. I took her hand and told her if she need anything to just ask. After lunch, I went to find our teacher to tell her Sarah hadn't been eating. Our teacher said she'll talk to her and her mother. I thought I did the right thing. The next day Sarah did not show up for school. The next two days Sarah was absent.

On Friday, she showed up for school. I could tell something was wrong with. She was wearing the same outfit that she had on Monday. She looked sad. I asked her what was wrong. She said nothing. She spoke not one word throughout the entire day. When we were being dismissed for Christmas break, I asked our teacher to check up on Sarah. I just knew she was going to walk into something bad. I went home. I pushed Sarah to the back of my mind. On Christmas, I got everything that was on my wish list. I could not wait to tell the class about my Christmas and hear about theirs. I wondered

what Sarah got. The Monday after break, everyone was wearing their new clothes and talking about what they got. I told everyone what I got. Sarah wasn't there. Her desk was empty. Our teacher walked in the such sadness on her face. "Class, I have announcement, Sarah will no longer be in class for the rest of the year. She was in an accident. She didn't make it," she said. I was speechless. When I got home, I told my mom I wanted to go by Sarah's house. I wanted to pay my respects to her mom. My mom made some calls. Thirty minutes later she came into the sitting room. She grabbed her keys, and we drove. She told me to prepare myself. Sarah didn't live like we did. We drove by the little metal shack on the outside of town. It looked like no one had ever lived there. Before a word could even come out of my mother's mouth, I was already walking through the door way. I saw her red bow on the ground. I picked it up and held on to it. My mom told me that Sarah's mother was a drinker and didn't care much for Sarah. The authorities had been called out to the shack, because someone at the school was concerned. Sarah's mom got scared and hit her too hard. Unfortunately, by the time the police showed up, she was gone. I was filled with guilt and sadness. She was my friend. She was the girl with the red bow.

## Label Me

*Bella Hanges*



## Dear Future Daughter

*Mackenzie Gossett*

Dear future daughter,  
I hope you never have a strange man grab your cheek in the middle of the day in a crowded city;  
I hope you never have to receive judgmental glares in your University cafeteria for wearing a crop top.  
I hope you never go bra shopping and afterwards feel like you need to get a boob job to be “hot.”  
I want you to see through the pretty, toxic lie that girls must be quiet creatures that wear delicate flower crowns.  
Dear future daughter,  
I am appalled that you are seen as less worthy in the eyes of the law than a man rapes but has stellar swimming times.  
Dear future daughter,  
You are not trashy for wanting to wear lots of makeup,  
And you are not less desirable with a bare face.  
Dear future daughter,  
You are not anyone’s sex toy,  
But it is okay if you want to have sex.  
Dear future daughter,  
Virginity is a mythical concept,  
And your sexiness and value does not lie in how many notches you can chisel on a bedpost.  
Dear future daughter,  
It is okay if you don’t like boys.  
Don’t let society or peer pressure make you feel like you have to date a certain gender.  
Dear future daughter,  
It is okay if you do like boys.  
I will buy you all the posters of your favorite boy bands and help you hang them on your walls.  
Dear future daughter,  
It is perfectly fine if you like girls and boys,  
You are not greedy or confused.  
Dear future daughter,  
I hope you never look in the mirror and see hateful words etched across your body,  
Imagined by your mind.

*Dear Future Daughter*

Dear future daughter,  
I pray you don't have to grow up in a world where men who are sexist are elected to power.

Dear future daughter,  
If one day you tell me you want to be called my son,  
I will still embrace you with open arms.

Dear future daughter,  
You are marvelous and as strong and mysterious as Mt. Everest.

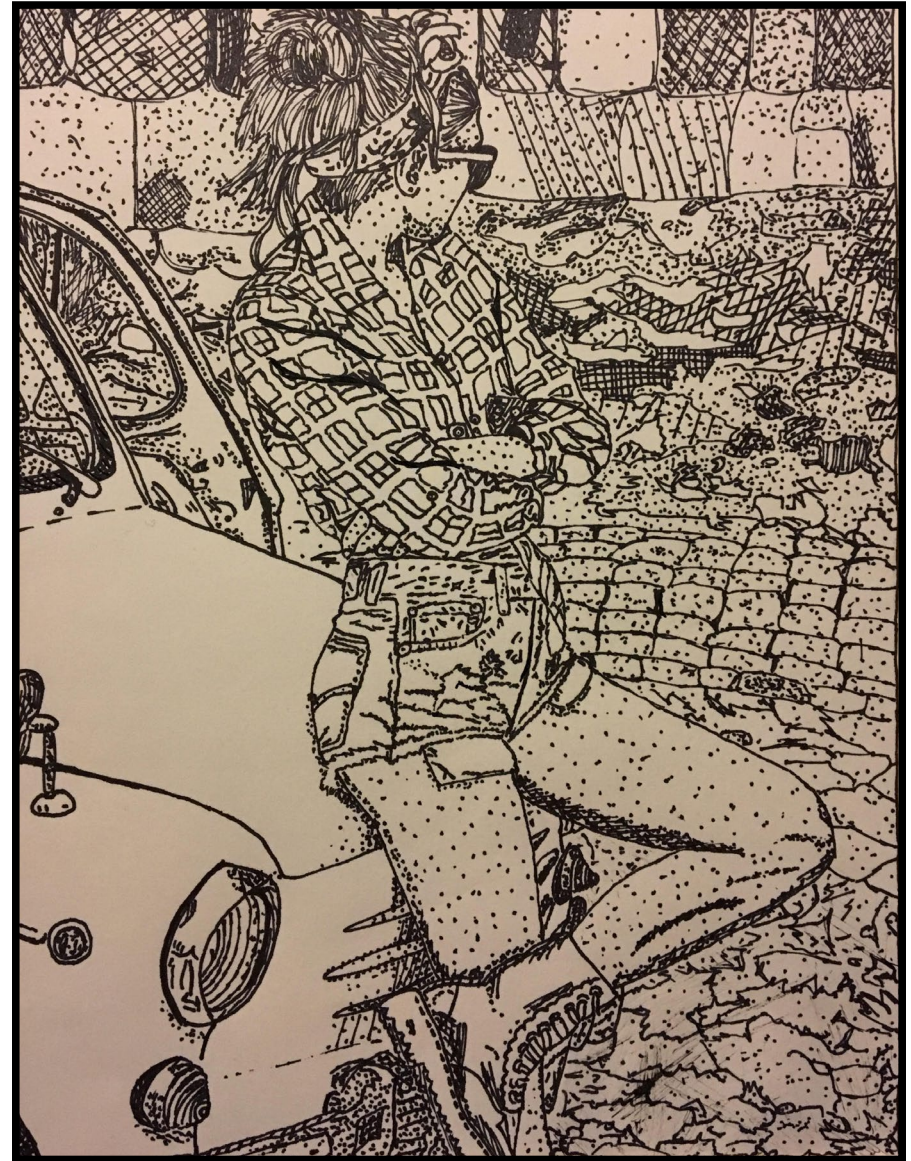
Dear future daughter,  
Don't feel like you have to settle for anything.  
When unhappiness creeps in wearing its cloak of anxiety,  
Run to a warm coffee shop,  
And surround yourself with as many lovely things as possible.

Dear future daughter,  
I will adore you and cherish you as if you are the last thing left on earth.

Dear future daughter,  
I promise that you will never go to bed wondering if you are loved.

## Looking For An Escape

Courtney Key



## Bright Shadows

*Faith Bambas*

Some of us live with shadows  
In the back of our minds.  
Our pasts ever present  
Throughout our lives.

In the back of our minds,  
They sit quietly and wait  
Throughout our lives  
For the moments they can be front and center.

They sit quietly and wait,  
Sometimes for months,  
For the moments they can be front and center.  
They sit in the darkness

Sometimes for months.  
Those people with shadows,  
They sit in the darkness,  
Waiting for a glimmer of light.

Those people with shadows  
No longer are  
Waiting for a glimmer of light.  
There is hope because

No longer are  
Our pasts ever present.  
There is hope because  
Some of us live with shadows.

## Burning Passion

*Donovan Kerkmaz*





## Palabras

Lucas "Moose" Williams

Words, sentences, phrases  
In one tongue they flow freely.  
A wellspring of passion, of feeling, of emotion  
bursting forth from my soul into the world around me.  
Pero palabras, oraciones, frases—  
Fragmentos, pedazos, partes  
En mi otra lengua no me salen.  
Una explosión está atrapada debajo de la piel,  
en las puntas de los dedos, en el corazón.  
Pero tengo miedo.  
Tengo miedo de intentar.  
Temo fallar.  
Temo hablar.  
No puedo hablar.  
No puedo respirar.  
No puedo...  
Las emociones están atrapadas en la garganta,  
Solo escapan en la forma de inglés.  
Pero—  
these feelings I experience en esa lengua  
simply cannot be expressed in mi primera lengua.  
They become lost in translation within my own head.  
It's as if half of me lives in silence,  
¿pero cómo vivir puedo mudo?  
I can't.

## I Dare Not Speak a Lie

Didumo Olok

I dare not speak a lie  
For the weight that created worlds is all around me.  
A soft constant as heavy as the Word.  
An eternity as endless as the darkness before the light.  
I dare not speak a careless word.  
Words made the world, breathed into us as the thin trembles of life.  
Words make worlds, lives created and changed even as the first formed  
turns.  
If I could cut out my tongue, silence the noise in my lungs, then I would  
find a transient peace.  
For the no longer carelessly created worlds, for the thought and weight that  
would hold me close.  
But a voice is made to breathe life, and this voice I will share even as I bare  
my soul.  
And as I stand under the weight of a breath still speaking life before me, I  
will always know. That I dare not speak a lie when a world of life weighs as  
heavy as the first loved betrayal. And that my beginning began as that very  
first Genesis did.  
For in the beginning was the word, and my words will breathe their own  
life into the iridescence of the void around me.  
And till I can speak no more, the life that was breathed will be the light that  
I breathe.

## **Above All**

*Justin Goolsby*

When night envelopes  
And sleep eludes,  
When my breast is heavy  
And my thoughts deceive,  
When all is dark  
And my mind is fog,  
I think of you.

You above all.

Should naught go to plan  
And pain consume,  
Should the world overcome  
And tear me down,  
Should the heavens cease  
And cities fall,  
I'll long for you.

You above all.

If life were snuffed  
And my soul remain,  
If time should pause  
And dimensions rend,  
If then is all  
And never thence,  
I'll weep for you.

You above all.

## **The Spotlight**

*Justin Goolsby*

Fear not the spotlight's burning,  
Nor the inner voices nagging  
That you are somehow less-than;  
Undeserving, simply lacking.

Relax and calm your mind.  
Savor each inflection.  
Respect both nuance and the form,  
Each tiny pause deserves attention.

No need for nervy haste,  
Execute with elocution.  
Perfect your embouchure;  
Lips, tongue, and throat achieving unison.

Brandish words as weapons.  
Shirk fears of ignominy.  
Rail against injustices.  
You'll find, I'm sure, there are many.

But speak of trees and blissful things,  
Of babies, love, and memories.  
Of laughter, joy, and friends of old  
That make your life worth living.

Hit your mark, the stage is yours.  
Paint murals with your musings.  
Thrill to see them laid upon  
A gallery of your choosing.

## Moss In the Spring

*Katie Shadowens*



## Traveler's Verses

*Shohei Downing*

I.

You prodigious Why,  
whom do you seek? With no cry,  
how are we to speak?

II.

Shame shall drive a man  
into depths with the Great Beast,  
with chaos or peace.

III.

Hide Truth in the stream,  
and tell man to find it there.  
He will only see fish.

IV.

The nomadic man  
has no home, or is it that  
every place is home?

V.

Thought floats like a stream  
into my head and out free,  
flying with the birds.

VI.

Shall man need rubies  
to see the most vibrant rouge  
when it is above us?

VII.

The Lavender calls,  
hear her beckoning my name,  
the sweetest siren.

VIII.

Of my language,  
I cannot control. Flow out!  
Rivers have no shame.

IX.

The Beast of Eden  
is it man? or is it Why?  
I ask in Eden.

X.

You prodigious Why!  
Burn your passion like the Sun!  
Passion that made Gods!

## Colors of Emotion

*Dalton Davis*

Color is emotion, is it not?  
“White Hot Fury” and “Feeling Blue”  
Are these not emotions described with color?  
If this is the case, then my life is grey.  
Trapped in a prison of grey.  
Grey walls.  
Grey people.  
I’m swallowed by this apathetic, unforgiving environment.  
And soon, I am grey too.  
Seldom do I see color here, but when I do, it’s from my friends.  
Colored with humor and passion, they light a spark of emotion that I cradle till its embers wither and die.  
And when they are gone, I am grey once more.  
I long for freedom, for my spirit to soar.  
Color explodes in my vision, and in my heart.  
I see and feel again. But alas, it leaves every day without fail.  
Then I am sent to my prison  
But I met an anomaly to this grey, grey place.  
And when I saw her, I saw color again.  
It painted a canvas of Joy, Humor, Sadness, and Love in my heart.  
And I never felt the same again.  
The trees petrified to a stone grey, their leaves marred with soot.  
The sky was in limbo, never light or dark, but in between.  
I was grey, the world was grey, even though I was free.  
Freedom meant nothing to my heart.  
By her grace, I saw a new world.  
With her by my side, I saw Violet, Amber, Pink, Maroon, Cobalt, and Gold.  
I no longer begged for freedom, for it came when she was near.  
I longed for her, because when we were apart, my world lost its color.  
I longed to see, to feel, to be with her.  
Because I was a blank canvas, and she colored my soul.

## Houses of Trondheim

*Heather McKaskle*



## Untitled

Miranda Ramsey

Cover Art



## Don't Attend Little Red Riding Hood's Funeral

Joshua Adams

Most are familiar with this story. Little Red Riding Hood makes her way to her grandmother's house only to be eaten by a wolf. It is at that point we join this oft-told fairy tale. Having been eaten, Little Red Riding Hood makes no sound. No more prodding questions about the looks of her grandmother oddly resembling that of a wolf. It's difficult for some to make noise while being digested, while others are better at it. Jonah was able to pray to God for his safety, Geppetto and Pinocchio kept each other company while inside the whale Monstro. There are no such prayers or company keeping here.

Much less room exists inside the stomach of a wolf than that of a whale or a giant fish. So much less room, in fact, that it becomes difficult to think about anything but the current predicament that is your life right now. You've been eaten. It's not the most enjoyable of circumstances. Some creatures were seemingly created by God solely to be eaten by man. None have ever wondered if man was created solely to be eaten by man, however. That is an interesting thought, if man exists to be eaten. Not just physically- by animals or by other men. Abuse and war, yelling and fist-fights. All of these are a form of eating and being eaten, it's just more difficult for some to see than others. Each time a harsh word escapes a loved one's mouth, a portion of the other's heart has been eaten for the sake of making one feel better. I would imagine it is a large portion more unpleasant to physically be eaten than emotionally, but then again I cannot say for sure, as I have not been in both positions... only the latter.

This doesn't apply at all to Little Red Riding Hood's current situation. Her current residence is a stomach. The woodsmen did not hear her cry. God is not going to reach down and save her. This is a fairy tale, after all, and she was quite stupid to believe the wolf to be her grandmother. Sometimes even God is disheartened at the appalling judgment we show through our decisions. It's actions such as these that kept the Jews out of their fabled promised land for forty years, after all. With thoughts such as that, the wolf waits. He waits for more to come and visit grandmother and commit acts of idiocy in regards to the possibility of drastic appearance changes for Grandma in her old age.

Eventually more family makes their way over to Grandma's house. Some are smart and leave immediately. Others make the same choices as Little Red Riding Hood and wind up eaten. Such is life. Some are smart and get eaten, some are admittedly dumb and do not. If you receive no other thought from this story, do not get eaten by a wolf pretending to be your grandmother. Who could swallow their pride enough to show at that funeral?

## Eternia

Lucas "Moose" Williams



## Phantasms

Lucas "Moose" Williams



## **Chrysalis en Tripartite**

*Victoria Bonnell-Wilburn*

You told me that I cannot change  
Your words like mud, sloughed my veins  
and sullied sour through darkened eyes  
my skin, my bones, my love, my mind  
Like a child, I believed  
and justified your judgment call  
on something you could never know  
and things that you would never see  
In chain-linked bars I kept myself  
Mind-forged and wrought of steel  
Then took the mud from my veins  
to cover what I feel  
In sleep and slumber did I writhe  
though my dead self ate and breathed  
and continued on, forgetting  
that tempered grace could be mine  
But my breath resuscitated  
and my mind it's chains broke free, to remember  
your pen can't write my future  
your voice holds not my destiny  
my Fate is not some mystery locked beneath your chest  
for you are not a prophet, nor a seer, nor my death  
And when I said I needed space  
to find the colors in my soul  
you couldn't wait and dug my grave  
before I made this house a home  
As if you were vaccinated  
against my self-contained beauty  
I will become everything that you wanted  
not for you, but for me  
There are pieces of art in my soul  
I have reserved only for a few  
and this does not make me a hypocrite  
so much as an incomplete masterpiece

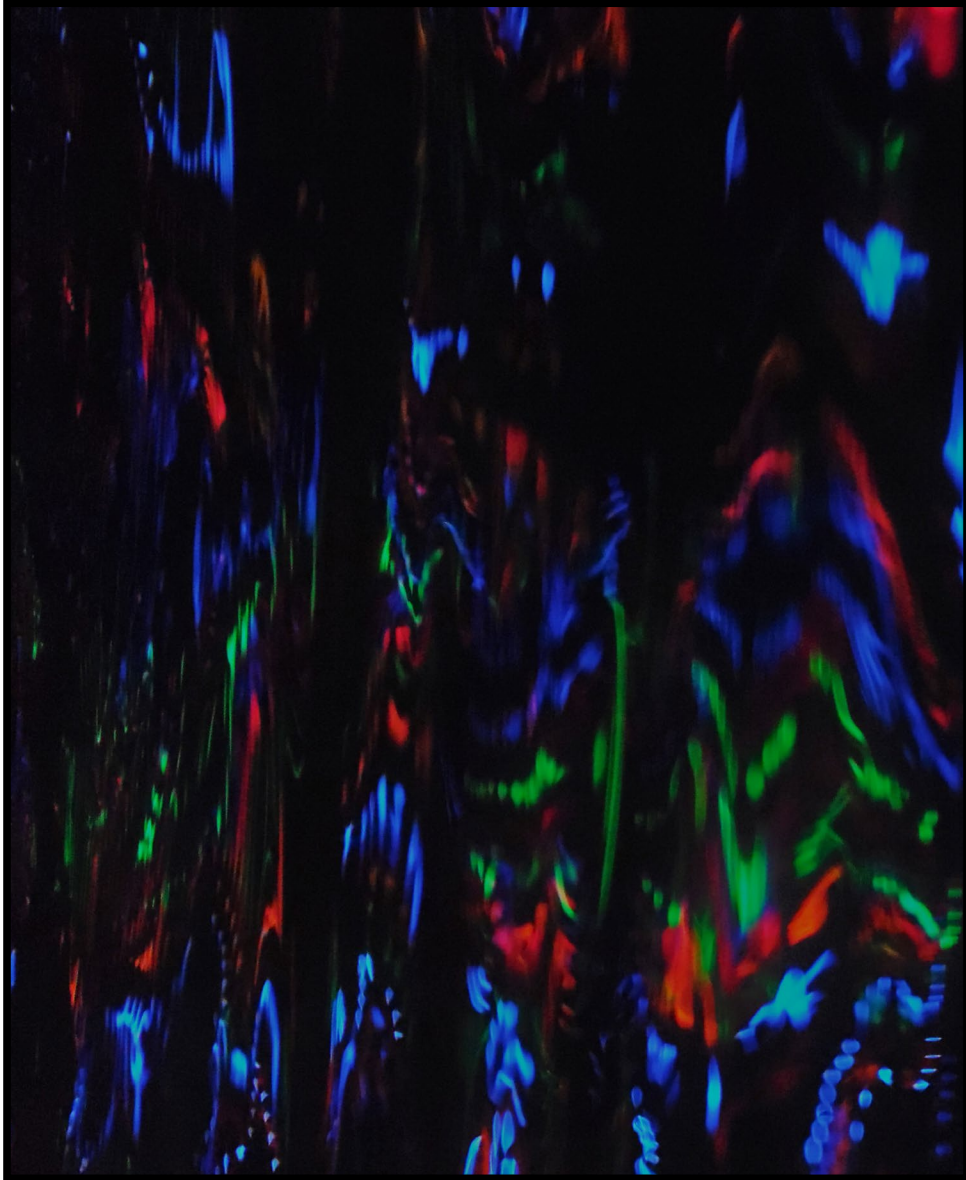
## **Ballad Of Your Heart**

*Russell Copeland*

Your soul is like a ballad that sings to my heart  
A song I could listen to until death do us part  
What I am saying I can promise you is true  
Never would I put on such an elaborate rue  
For in your eyes I can see a better tomorrow  
A place where we can let our love fully grow  
So if you're ready and come and take my hand  
Together with you is where I want to stand  
No matter what happens or dares come our way  
Beside of you is where I will always choose to stand

## Life's Ripples

*Jacie Boyd*



## Starry Night

*Justin Goolsby*

Confess, you heady devil!  
What prompted such as this?  
The stars all swirled above you,  
by the moonlight brightly lit?

The cypress  
— dark, foreboding —  
leant like a mast amid a list  
with Venus peeking playfully  
beyond its fingertips?

Divulge your secrets, oracle!  
What guides one such as thee;  
to brilliance so exquisite  
cooped up in Saint-Rémy?  
A starry sky and mountainside  
with rolling fields of wheat?  
Do steepled church and sleepy town  
reflect your own ennui?

What then, painter?  
What then, poet?  
Why then, take your leave?  
How could such a genius be  
bereft of joie de vivre?  
With powder packed and muzzle flash,  
portfolio complete...  
Could such disaster be avoided?  
Was it to hands less deft than these?



## The Kitchen

*Natasha Tice*

Susie-Mae paused in her chopping of the long bright orange carrots in front of her, closing her eyes and deeply breathing in the warm country air, exhausted from her daily work on the farm she shared with the other two hens. Chickens outside the family often pointed out that things might be easier if the hens settled down with a few strong roosters, but the three Lewis sisters had all agreed that they were much too independent to deal with rooster nonsense.

And if there were rude and impatient roosters involved, Susie-Mae wouldn't be able to work at her own pace; the kitchen wouldn't be so peaceful.

The summer sunset streamed through the peeling white windows of the small farmhouse kitchen, bathing the room in a rich golden light. For a moment, all was peaceful, the only sound coming from the potatoes boiling on the outdated gas stove and the ticking of the orange clock that hung on the pale yellow walls between the two windows over the cast iron sink. Paradise

She shook out her dark brown feathers and resumed her work, making an orange mess of the white countertop in the process.

As Susie-Mae did so, Betty entered the kitchen from the green side door, holding her beak up proudly despite having had a long day of chores. She primly made her way past the red checkered breakfast table, crossing the pale hardwood floor to reach the white pantry door, where her floral apron hung. She stumbled as she grabbed at her apron, off balance from her sore muscles. She huffed, suddenly annoyed. As she firmly tied the string into a neat knot, her eyes landed on the orange disaster that had been her beautifully spotless kitchen counter only that morning. She cleared her throat, attempting to catch Susie-May's attention.

However, Susie-May was by now very skilled at ignoring Betty's throat, and as such was not affected, other than a tell-tale wrinkle of her brow.

Betty huffed again, and waddled the few steps it took her to reach the sink, where she grabbed a faded blue sponge from the white caddy to the left. She huffed once more as she wet the sponge under the faucet. Betty made her way over with narrowed eyes to where Susie-May chopped, and began to furiously scrub at the carrot ingrained into the grout of the tiles of the counter, pointedly getting in Susie-May's way in the cramped kitchen corner. Susie-May made a half hearted attempt to ignore Betty's antagonistic behavior, but when Betty hip-checked her into the sharp edge of the divot in the counter (A divot that had been created by Patty's now scratched beak on a dare from a rooster long since banished), she couldn't help but let out an offended squawk.

Susie-May gently laid her knife down onto the old wooden cutting board, let out a deep sigh, and turned to face Betty. Her eyes glided over Betty's grimace to land on an old black and white picture of their great-grandmother

hanging on the wall across from her. As she blinked at the portrait, leaning back against the counter and feeling the handle on the maple cabinets digging into her skin, she began to softly squawk in her southern drawl, questioning Betty's insistence on interrupting her while she cooked. Especially seeing as to how they both very well knew that Patty would soon return with the final ingredient, which needed to be added to the old tarnished pie pan that waited on the stove as soon as possible.

Betty scowled, seeing the criticism as a chance to deepen her bad mood. "Cluck," she began, "Cluck cluck-cluckity cluck. Cluck cluck cluck cluck. Cluck cluck!"

"Cluck," Susie-May began, dragging her eyes lazily across the different family pictures hanging somewhat crookedly along the walls. "Cluck Cluck cluck cluck cluck. Cluck, cluck, cluck cluck." She squeezed herself past Betty, heading for the icebox to grab the peas she had readied earlier in the day.

As she headed there, Betty stopped her, laying one large wing on Susie-May's thin shoulder. With her other wing, she waved the sponge she still clutched with gusto, unwittingly flinging carrot shavings at the white scalloped crown molding that lined the kitchen walls as she lectured her sister.

With a savage cry, Susie-May grabbed the whisk lying on the counter, and turned to deal a harsh blow to Betty. As she began to bring down the whisk, cream of mushroom soup splattered onto the floor, ending up under the perpetually dirty space between the cabinets and the floor. But before the whisk could make contact with Betty's feathers, Patty slammed the rickety screen door open with one wing.

"CLUCK?" Questioned Patty, "Cluck Cluck Cluck?!" Susie-May lowered the whisk in shame, dripping soup onto the floor by her feet.

Patty sighed, and after setting down the brown paper parcel that she held onto the counter nearest the green door, plodded over to her two younger cousins. Wrapping a wing around each of them, she turned her head up towards the popcorned white ceiling, letting out a few soft clucks before releasing the two.

As Patty went back for her parcel, Susie-May gave Betty a repentant look. "Cluck Cluck?"

Betty nodded and offered a nervous but warm smile. "Cluck."

Susie-May sighed in relief, happy that the fight was over and they could concentrate on preparing dinner. She watched eagerly as Patty began chopping the meat she had bought from the butchers on a wooden cutting board beside the stove, hardly able to wait for her favorite meal. Life on the farm was hard, but Sunday night human pot pie was one of the many things that made everything worth it.

## Greens

Barbara Harmon



## Pthenatly

Cameron Johnson

Waiting for your witty view  
Be here for a mound or two  
Can't tell when I'm ever due  
This is what I am to you.  
Choir wooly  
Mind not  
Breaking Woodrow's for a slot  
Basing life off disarray  
Losing life in every way  
Mind wooly  
Choir not  
Desecrate my only shot  
Milk my life for pleasure rings  
Market full of petty things.  
Now you want me  
Like I wanted you  
Did you need me?  
Like I needed you.  
Like you want me to  
Like I love you too  
But you hate me  
Even more than I do.

## Zapatilla Azul

*Tamara Blanco*



*This 3D model of a shoe is made entirely of masking tape.*

# *Pioneer Pen*

## 2018 SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Volunteer State Community College students interested in being featured in the 2018 edition of *Pioneer Pen* should submit art, photography, poetry, fiction, and excerpt from longer creative works to [volstatepioneerpen@gmail.com](mailto:volstatepioneerpen@gmail.com) by Friday, March 3, 2018.

All entries should include contact information, a brief biography, as well as the title and medium for the work. Creative writing should be submitted in a .docx file format. Works of art should be submitted as a high-resolution .jpg. All submissions are automatically considered for the John MacDougall Award for Literary Excellence or the Fusion Art and Design Award.

Students interested in volunteering as an editor or taking *Pioneer Pen* as a 1, 2, or 3 credit hour practicum/humanities elective class should contact the Humanities Division Office at 615-230-3200 or email the Publication Coordinator Leslie LaChance at [leslie.lachance@volstate.edu](mailto:leslie.lachance@volstate.edu)

Class information: ENGL 290P (may be listed as English Practicum). Practical editorial and/or layout experience while producing literary publications. The amount of required work varies with credit hours. Emphasis on soliciting, reading, and critically evaluating submissions, copyediting, layout, arrangement of material for literary effect, and collaboration with staff to meet publication deadlines. Designated primarily for vocational and career programs. This course may be accepted as transfer credit by some colleges and universities, but that decision is made by the receiving institution. This course is collegiate level work but has been developed with a purpose other than being a university parallel course. Prerequisites: Permission of Instructor. Credits: 1-3.

For more information, contact *Pioneer Pen* advisors, Professors Emily Andrews ([emily.andrews@volstate.edu](mailto:emily.andrews@volstate.edu)) and Laura McClister ([laura.mcclister@volstate.edu](mailto:laura.mcclister@volstate.edu)).

# AWARDS

Each year, *Pioneer Pen* choose two winners from the submissions received from Volunteer State Community College students. The 2017 recipients of the literary and art awards are as follows:

## JOHN MACDOUGALL LITERARY AWARD

The John MacDougall Award for Literary Excellence is awarded each year to a student writer who is published in *Pioneer Pen*. The award helps us remember a beloved teacher who set very high standards for both his students and his colleagues. This year's winner is Lucas "Moose" Williams for his poem, "Gods Be Damned," which is featured on page 9 of this issue.

## FUSION ART AND DESIGN AWARD

The Fusion Art and Design Award is awarded each year to a student artist who is published in *Pioneer Pen* who portrays excellent use of the elements of art and design. This year's winner is Donovan Kermaz for his photograph, "Faded Memories," which is featured on page 10 of this issue.

## SQUATTER'S RITES 2016 AWARDS

Last year's edition of Volunteer State Community College's student literary magazine was titled *Squatter's Rites* and received positive acclaim. The magazine received a first place American Scholastic Press Association award in 2016 for a community college publication with over 2,500 students enrolled. Additionally, *Squatter's Rites* won a third place award as a magazine from small colleges from the Community College Humanities Association in 2016.

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*Pioneer Pen*