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Pioneer Pen

2019

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Pioneer Pen is an annual student publication produced by Volunteer State Community College every spring. The magazine, founded in 1995 and originally called *Squatter's Rites*, features student creative works, including art, poetry, photography, fiction, cartoons, monologues, and more.

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Pioneer Pen

Mission Statement

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 their artistic freedom.

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2019 John MacDougall Literary Award Winner

Origami

Kirstie Frank

I know it doesn't look
much like it, but I'm trying.
Trying to catapult myself
out of the pit of despair
I'd thrown a house warming
party in. I truly don't
know my limits, I don't
know what's too much
until it's too late
and I start tearing my
papers once they get
too hard to fold.
Origami is hard to
appreciate in shreds.
Shards of myself keep
reappearing in the people
who don't intend to
stay in my life.
I write too many love letters.
I find one piece of myself,
then lose several more as I send
them away with the bits
of my heart I couldn't
keep hidden. No one
asked me to love them
without condition,

that self-assigned condition
being I must collapse
like an old star when
they expand into
spaces I don't exist it.
In another timeline, you
might have loved me.
Or, at least, we never met.
I think that could have
been enough like love.
I keep trying to
fold myself into
a beautiful crane,
paper-cutting my skin
when I come out distorted,
ripping another page from
the book I can't finish.

2019 Fusion Art and Design Award Winner



Almost Heaven
Justin Hopkins

Ever Really There

Sara J. Eaton

She was the rhythmic heartbeat of your favorite song,
The one you despise for its lyrics
But can't help losing yourself to the beat.
She was the highway at night,
Where pitch-black expanses of road fade in and out of the spotlight.
She was the mystery of light's tricks when it flirts with its death:
Black and white, and day and night, and a lone candle in a windowless
room.
She encompassed night's fatal attraction to its conquerer.
She was the click-clack of six inch heels biting into a slick tile floor.
She was the shadows that fluidly rise and fall from darkened corners,
Drawing you into their terrifying embrace.
She was the night's children.
And just like her siblings, she vanished with the sun,
Leaving you doubting she was ever really there.

Shades of Grey
Helga Skinner



Chapter 1

I stood in a cramped cattle car with approximately 300 to 400 men. The smell was the first thing that got to me. The scent of sweat, blood, and festering wounds was overwhelming. There was no way to escape it. The stale air held a somberness that would only worsen whenever we arrived at our destination. Unfortunately, the cattle car was the most pleasant part of this “adventure.” To keep my mind off the dire circumstances, I began to take in the faces of those accompanying me. Some around me looked as if they were in shock. They were so pale that, if they were replaced with ghosts, I suspect no one would know the difference. Others looked relieved. They had their fill of war and this new destination meant they were not likely to set foot on a battlefield again. Still others seemed full of dread, because they knew many of us would never make it back home again. There was one man, however, who looked different than the rest. He looked chummy and content as he tried to strike up a conversation with the man next to him.

“What part of a fish weighs the most?” he asked. After a few minutes of silence, he answered his own question. “The scales!” The man next to him was not amused. But I was and I felt a giggle bubble up in my throat and float out of my mouth. I couldn’t help myself. I immediately felt ashamed, however. How dare I muster even a smile in such a serious situation? To relieve my guilt, I chalked my behavior up to shock and moved on. There was no use dwelling on simple mistakes now.

“Ah. At least someone has a sense of humor,” the jokester said as he eyed his neighbor and gestured in my direction. My laughter must have been louder than I thought.

“Aye. But it still feels wrong to be laughing at a time like this,” I hesitantly replied. He shrugged.

“A merry heart doeth good like medicine.” He shoved his way through all the men and stopped in front of me. He struck his hand out. “I’m Thomas Buckley. And you are?” I took his hand and shook it, being sure that I was strong in doing so.

“My name is Alex Harrington.”

“How old are you, Alex? You don’t even sound like your 12.” For a moment, my brain couldn’t form a response. I hadn’t even considered that the pitch of my voice might be cause for suspicion. I put on the most confident face that I could manage.

“I... I’m old enough to no longer be considered a child, but young enough to not be considered an adult,” I stuttered, hoping my response was enough to keep his questioning at bay. I was so tired that I was afraid I would let something slip.

“Hmm.. a riddle. I like it,” Thomas Buckley said as he grinned. “It’s good to meet you, boy. I think we will get along just fine.” I almost laughed out loud again, more out of relief than anything, because I was not a “boy.” I was a woman and I was on my way to Camp Sumter.

The Motherland
Rachel Keyes



Evergreens
Adam Callis

The holly tree glows greenest
in the gleam of winter frost
and bears its flaming fruit
in bleakest night
Such is the way of evergreens
in barren places lost
whether leaf, or loving friend,
or looming light



Blue Eyes, Grey Skies
Trevor Blaisdell

Snow

Sara J. Eaton

From above, the world was a landscape of white. Everything was buried under a thick layer of snow. Everything lay dormant, like the bears in their caves or the empty nests of birds that flew south long ago. Nothing stirred.

From the ground, a mother called out to her son as he waddled away in his snowsuit. "Be careful out there! I want you back inside and in front of the fireplace in twenty minutes, alright?"

He waved a gloved hand and set off into the great unknown, running towards the tree line as fast as he could when the snow was nearly up to his knees. Perhaps someone else would have paused at the wall of trees that stood there as an unspoken boundary to a different place, a different world where a hush covered everything and the only sound one could hear was their own breath. But he was a young adventurer, ready to conquer the icy forest and everything living in it. Well, everything that surely lived in it, their hearts beating slowly somewhere under all of that snow.

He ran around, screaming and yelling as he rolled down little hills and cracked frozen branches off of trees. He made snowballs to throw against the tree trunks. They barely left a mark on the formidable trees, the old beasts of nature that had been there before the boy's birth and would be there long after. It almost felt as though they had been there since the beginning of time and would be there long after.

The boy was in the middle of fighting an imaginary foe when he heard his mother's voice calling him inside. It drifted softly over the snow, reaching him and enveloping him in a warm embrace. He suddenly realized how cold he had been and started back towards the house. As he began walking, though, he noticed a line of footprints to his left. This in itself wasn't odd, seeing as he had just galavanted through that area, but the footsteps looked ginormous compared to his little ones. He heard his mother's voice once more, but it seemed to be coming from deeper in the woods now. Looking back at the footsteps, the boy shivered. He was so cold, but weren't these steps proof that his mother had come outside to play with him? He heard his name called again, and with it came warmth. He turned and began his trek.

As the forest canopy above him grew thicker, the cold began to

to surround him until it felt like it had entered his bones. His breathing seemed to grow louder and louder, making it hard to focus on the steps that were leading him. The sound seemed to echo off the trees, multiplying and growing and expanding until his ears ached with the noise. All he could think was that if he could only find his mother, he would feel warm once again. Every time he began to turn around, the voice would call him back, but it no longer carried any warmth.

He finally broke through into a wide open space. Looking around him, he realized that he was enveloped in a perfect circle of trees, their branches all tangling over each other as they fought for the sun. The perfect ring of trees wasn't what took him by surprise, though, as much as the fact that the footsteps seemed to end in the middle of that circle without a trace. He called out for his mother only once, because the reverberation of the noise brought him to his knees. He put his gloved hands to his ears and winced as a few tears escaped and froze on his cheek.

He felt something cold land on the back of his neck where his jacket and his scarf had separated. Looking around him, he saw fresh snowflakes gently covering the earth. The noise began to subside, growing quieter as the snow fell faster. He noticed that his own footsteps were quickly disappearing, as though nature were reclaiming the mark he had left on it. He saw it, but he felt so numb that all the sirens going off in this brain went unattended. He was starting to feel a bit warmer now, but he was also so very tired. He decided to lie down, just for a moment, his back to the icy snow and his face up towards the twisted branches. He could barely make out the sky beyond, but he took a deep breath as he realized that it wasn't snowing at all. The branches above were moving, almost like they were trembling in the cold, and the snow that covered them was falling back to earth. It was peaceful, almost, until it suddenly wasn't. The branches began to move faster and faster, almost as though they were being moved by a storm. He rolled to his side and began to climb to his feet, but the trees were faster. The snow from above came falling down, burying him beneath it like all the other creatures who had entered the forest before. His heart beat slowly somewhere deep underneath the snow. And once more, all was peaceful.

A Life

McKenzie Burden

Pitter Patter

The rain falling on the roof.
It has gotten heavier since I arrived;
Or else I would have left by now.
Instead, I catch your eye.

Pitter Patter

My heart seems to play hopscotch when you take my hand.
My eyes smile whenever your mouth does;
And your eyes sparkle whenever you look at me.
They sparkle like the diamond on my finger.

Pitter Patter

The sound of little feet running down the hall.
Then there's the sound of your feet behind her.
You make sure you're there, in case she falls.
I stand in front of her, urging her on.
Soon her feet will be big and she will no longer need us,
But we don't think about that right now.

Pitter Patter

I hear your heart, soft as the rain, as I fall asleep.
I take in this last moment,
Remembering the night we met and every night since.
I kiss you tenderly before drifting away.

Fish Out of Water

Kirstie Frank

I can feel this separation
deep as the unexplored ocean,
its potency overcoming me,
reducing me to a shell of
a person who tries too hard
to latch onto something that
makes me feel for once
like I might be worth something.
A fish you keep throwing
back out to the water and reeling
back in to show off when you want.
I'd rather you'd left me to suffocate.
I will not be your trophy.
What if someone else would have
had the chance to catch me
and put my bones to use?

In the Cards
Rachel Keyes



Soulmates

Savannah Stover

Have you ever felt it? The recognition of a soul?
Time slows down and every motion, every word, every blink of the eye
seems suspended in the air
The mutual, simultaneous awareness of the unspoken seems momentarily
palpable
The resplendent transcendence of overwhelming enchantery
You are stunned at the familiarity of the unfamiliar
Fate's orchestra heralds her arrival in one penetrating instant
You can no more go forward than can you go back
An instant before will no longer find you the same person; You have seen
A step forward uncharted and unknown; You cannot see
Temporary frozenness thaws
Your souls step forward and take a bow, one toward another
"Hello. I believe we have met before."
"No, it cannot be."
"No; I know, I know. I cannot know you. But, yet, my soul does."
Enraptured, they dance. It feels as if they have danced together since be-
fore the foundation of the
world.
Home: Revealed instantaneously within the recesses of two that come from
different places, different
times, seemingly different galaxies
Destiny has been subtly entwining each wayward ribbon of life and you
see:
Your steps have not been arbitrary; they have been the kaleidoscopic tap-
estry of the hidden design of
predestination
All you know for sure is this is the one your soul has been waiting for
"I've been looking for you."
You never want to leave that moment
How can you freeze time?
The darkness holds the secret eternal whisperings of these two souls
What of tomorrow?

The sun will rise, and will it burn away from with the darkness the delicate
sweetness of this magical interlude?
Neither knows; but their souls cling to one another out of love and quiet
desperation
"You have been missing from me. You cannot leave," she cries
The unknown weighs heavily on them both
He cannot offer any solace
Bowing his head, eyes closed, "We've got tonight," his soul whispers.

A Girl with A Crush

Amber Nicole Kittrell

A girl with a crush,
He walks past me,
My breath pauses, filling my lungs with his aroma
I can't catch up with my breath,
Does he notice me? Probably not,
I sit in the back, to be invisible
He looks at me, I look back.
Damn, what have I done now
I get lost in those honey caramel eyes
I daydream of what ifs. getting lost in that world
Do you wonder?
When he speaks to me
I can't just say hi, words get jumbled together
When he touches me
The goose bumps come,
The nervousness overcomes me
I can't, I just can't
Am I missing out, probably
I need to be strong, confident,
I should tell him, NO!! YES!!! NO!!!
I am... Do I?



Paroxysm
Rachel Keyes

Change of Heart

Leah Van Hooreweghe

I used to drink sorrow
 Bottle by bottle.
Now I just swallow,
 Words too hard to speak.
Its taste of bitter melancholy
 Was mild between my teeth.
Now, the humming of my heart
 Follows a different tune.
And, though I am sad to say it,
The end could never come too soon.

Blue

Christella Gannon

I couldn't get past the feeling that she was watching me. Her pale blue eyes looking deep into mine. I cannot shake the feeling that she was, but I have to remind myself that she's not because she's dead. We don't know her, so we called her Jane, as in Jane Doe, an unidentified person. I started at her wondering what she was like, what her dreams might have been. I was more interested in that than how she died. If you work with the dead, eventually to stop caring on how they died and more about how they lived. I looked at her for God knows how long until I was satisfied that she was, indeed, dead. I pulled the white sheet over her when we were done with the autopsy and turn the lights off, staring at the body with a chill. Has it suddenly gotten colder? I could feel the wind tugging on me and eyes stabbing me as I closed the door, the ghosts waved goodbye as I left.

I hate this job. I love this job. I don't have a relationship with it until I see the body. I hate the word "body" it makes it seem like it was nothing but flesh. That body was somebody a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a child. I try not to use it but sometimes it slips. 'The body... I mean...' a common slip up. I walked over the bridge, which the officer said he found her floating in the dark water. I stopped and peaked over the edge, did she jump off? The officer seems to believe that although never saw her jump. Don't make assumptions but it would make sense. No, it doesn't. I don't understand suicide, I feel sympathy for them. They say killing yourself is selfish, that same person would say the opposite, that letting them live is selfish. I continue to walk home, the rain dropping softly over the pavement.

What a lonely house I live in, the silence of it shows it. I scamper along the walls trying to find the light switch. When the lights came on, the first thing I did was to make dinner. I reheated leftovers from a week ago. The taste was bland but edible. I chewed slowly, the texture of the food made hard for me to swallow but I manage. I didn't know what to do after I was done. My mind wandered off of the girl, lying on the steel table with only the white blanket to keep her warm. I worked on so many "bodies" but somehow she what I been thinking about all day. A nameless girl with a pretty face that might have, or possibly, killed herself. Does she have a family? Do they even care? Did she even care? If someone did care, they

would have claimed her and cried out "That's my baby girl. Oh God, Oh God." Yet somehow no one cried, no one cared. I laid awake for hours trying to sleep way the pale eyes that stare blankley at me.

I'm tired and hungry. I skipped breakfast this morning to get more sleep but now I am more tired than ever. When I yawn, Tom yawned. Has he been thinking too? I greeted him without saying a word. He nodded, and we headed to the blue double door where she is waiting for me. We worked on a different body, this time an old man. He died of natural causes, a heart attack. I didn't pay too much attention to the old man, laying down in his blank peaceful expression. My eyes drawn to the cabinet, its steel door gloom ominous under the dim light. "Did anyone claim her?"

Tom answered, "no," sowing up the old man. "How much time does she have?" I snapped out of my gazed. "You know it is not wise to get attached to a corpse." He put away the equipment.

"I know, it's just... She's different."

"Because she killed herself or because she's a Jane Doe? Look I know you been here for three months and this is the first Jane Doe, but you cannot dwell on it. Just do your work and if you want you can pay for her funeral expenses." He left me there staring at her steal door.

A few hours went by and no one came for her, so we had no choice but ot get rid of her. No one looked for her, even if her face was splatter all over the internet. Maybe no one did care so why should I? I ne ver known her in life only in death, but I'll remember dead. That's a good thing, I told myself, that at least she'll have someone remembering her, even though she haunts my memories. It's a good thing.

A good thing.

A good thing that I was there placing flowers on her gave marked Jane Doe 2010. The wind stood still, and the animals were quiet as they mourn the nameless woman. The sun mocked the evening shining over me, making me hot in the black suit. I stood there sweating peaking over my shoulder. A woman in black standing right beside me, I jumped almost tripping over the grave. " Do you know her?" I stared at the woman,

whom seemed not to notice me. She repeated my question back at me and I answered, hoping she would answer mine. "Good," the woman in black placed a bouquet of daffodil on her grav. Her blue eyes looked deeply in mine, "It's better that way."

Bad Prom Night
Justin Hopkins



Falling

Kirstie Frank

like the simultaneous jump
of a stomach lurching
and the drop
of a heart that's breaking.
The words feel empty
as they tumble out
between trembling lips
you once kissed
with such eagerness
I thought you might never stop.
I'm losing you.
Like a toddler whose attention
is constantly being pulled away
towards something new, unknown.
I call you and
we sit in silence for 20 minutes
both of us wanting so badly
to say something to the other
but knowing nothing
is sufficient.
Are we falling out of love?
Or is this just a falling out?
Out of time,
out of place,
out of energy.
I've tried so hard
to tell you how to love me
You've tried so hard
to keep me at arm's length.
We both did what we could but we're

f
a
l
l
i
n
g

a p a r t.

There's nothing to talk about anymore.

It's only when I see you

when I can hold you

when I can feel your warmth

that I know there might still be something

underneath it all.

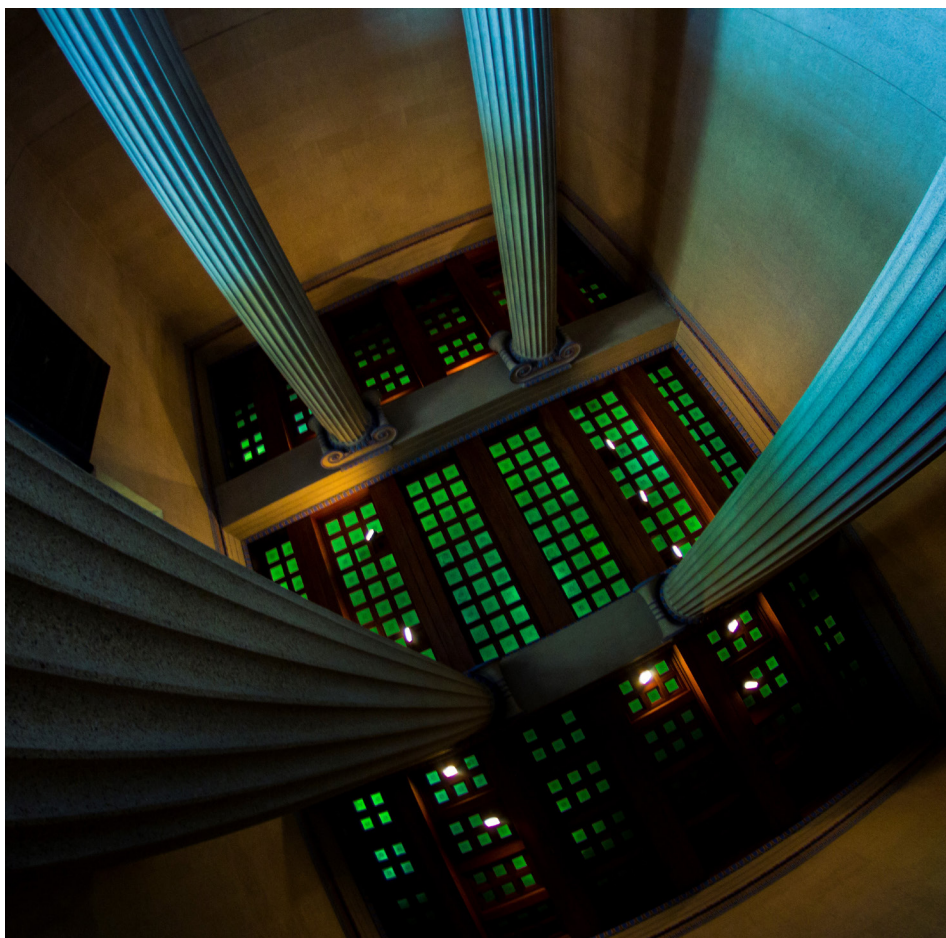
But in the mean-time

things are falling into place,

and maybe it's a place

"we"

don't belong together.



Down to the Ceiling
Ethan Gorham

Fire and Water

Nicole Shelley

You fan the flames of war,
Unfeeling toward those beneath you.
You burn away all happiness,
And have no regard for life other than your own.
Everything you touch turns to ash under your fingertips;
Even the smoke curdles in your presence.
But there are those like me, who will quench your fire;
Wash away the ashen destruction you created.
I will rinse your impurities out of me,
And soak in the all-consuming love of others.
Let the rain erase your imprints upon my life;
There will be nothing left but fading scorch marks when it's over.
Your fire will smother underneath my water,
Because I am strong enough to overcome you.

The Marker
Ethan Gorham





Capitol
Trevor Blaisdell

Crosswalk
Trevor Blaisdell



The Lady Lives in Smoke

Katie Doll

A star lives to see another day
At least that's what she thinks
Fifteen years gone and only an ashtray
To prove her eyelids still blink

Her charcoal lungs breathe in agony
The stuttering breath proves just that
She inhales the devil's kiss on a balcony
By now her pale lips take a great impact

In front of the camera she shined
A moment caught forever
Foolish followers stood aligned
To greet their majesty in the numbing December

A gracing presence swept men away
Her polished diamonds attracted women
Seven o'clock at the ballet
Saturdays in the gallery mumbling opinions
Sooner she'd sit at the table
Round figures and cigars come together

Sooner she'd sit at the table
Round figures and cigars come together
Her days were numbered on the playbill
But the victories were freeing under pressure

Her loss was in a blurry perception
Without a moment her work meant nothing
She'd question if they made a correction
The chips were never trusting

With her Malibu escape and road to corruption
Not much left to stay as company
A dial away for an old friend
Left her ringing for somebody

There she'd sit alone in her days
The neighbors take pity
For the lonely old lady had lost her way
Every smoke led her to the forbidden city

Every so often she'd ask for a picture
Her voice too raspy to land a dialogue
The backgrounds snickered when they see her
As the audience left her fifteen years in the smog

One thing can change it all
One friend request
One text
One call
One question
One yes
One hug
One kiss
One three-word sentence
All it takes is one thing

How It Feels

Kirstie Frank

Something like a
heavy chemical
high, how you
stop worrying
about dying while
you're forgetting
how to breathe.



Never Stop
Justin Hopkins

Caterpillars

Deidre Long

I am the carefree child
that once you knew

who could play all day
in the hot sun
and never get tired

who could get sick
from eating all the junk food imaginable
and do it again

who could stay inside on a rainy day
creating my own little world
and be content

who could make anything from worms to weeds
seem bright and beautiful

and not know
how special a gift
I really had

Cream-style Corn

Deidre Long

a picture's worth a thousan' words
blue sky's filled wi' beautiful birds
you 'n me 'neath the climbin' tree
wonder as far as the eye can see
 fields o' green
 air so clean
purdiest thang I ever did see
 clouds all fluffed
 my beau's all buffed
I never seem to git enough
 a southern gal
 'n her country honey
 yonder hops
 a snow-white bunny
 sun's a fallin'
 the moon's a callin'
 the stars to come out 'n play
sittin', holdin' hands and courtin'
nothin' now seems importan'

I paint a picture in my mind
so later I will come to find
that when I close my eyes I'll see
wonderful you next to me

Doggies and Pups

Deidre Long

Kisses and wags
and love galore...
it's doggies and pups
that I adore!
To pet their heads
and squeeze their cheeks,
those are the
things that make my weeks.
I love to hold 'em
and kiss 'em and hug;
I love to play
on the couch or the rug.
I love to snuggle on the bed or the floor;
It's doggies and pups that I adore.

Abstraction
Rachel Keyes



Out of Nowhere
Amber Nicole Kittrell

Out of nowhere.
He came to me.
Out of nowhere.
He wanted me.
Out of nowhere.
He called for me.
Out of nowhere.
He kissed me.
Out of nowhere.
He had me.
Out of nowhere.
He tossed me.
Out of nowhere.
He called me.

Alter Ego
Rachel Keyes



Sketchlove

Dalton

(selections from sketchlove)

Every day I walk through art and windows
Six birds burst into the sky out of a mirror puddle
Wonders in muted colors after a rainy day
Still saved all their light for late at night

the first clear morning I was on my way to work
I didn't notice blistering rainbows coming out of the grass
Smiling shards of daylight bust through my windshield
I didn't even know I had a dashboard
pulling in I forgot I even had a body
forgot about the door, the smell, and the buzzing.

If you watch me in pictures, I obviously forgot about my face.
Sometimes wonder on paper brings the color in
windows spill in like water or something else poetic
but I used to feel red.

Leaves fall and rush back up to do it again.
I skydive through mood swings becoming who I am.
Again, let's go to work. Let's go to work again.
Outside a childlike storm front falls into their window

(selections from sketchlove)

cool orange blades scrape

(You aren't far away.)

your daylight from the ceiling like helicopter fans

chopping shadows and leaves

I want to travel across the country with you

White hot lights against the cold black sky

(Steaming from the pressure running under hmmhmm aiye)

Spiralling and cutting windowbars

humming warm light like daylight into my broken shadows



Hidden Emotions
Haily Schroeder

Those Words Who Have Betrayed Me

Katie Doll

I hate when I can't think of anything to say
My mind wanders off a cliff of betray
Will I become a product of anger?
A rage so deep my words become the commander

I try not to go too deep
In this abyss too far to make a leap
But it grabs me by the throat
And pulls me away from the antidote

I am afraid of what's to come
My shoulders shiver through the cold
The people around me don't notice
That my mouth speaks on the behalf of hypnosis

I made a list of things to say
Just have to make the trip to convey
My anger isn't twisted thoughts
It's just they've been held on too long

I am not even on the last page
But I feel locked in this golden cage
Of a waging war bound to transcend
Into the place where I have friends

I take two or more steps
And will surely fall into the spider's web
This delicate and complex creation
That will prevent me from an accurate translation

I am not positive I will finish this thought
My head pounds with the tension of a gun shot
The pain takes turns on where it stands
This is no metaphor for my head lays in my hands

I write faster with every wince
Now I wonder how my words will look on print
Surely they won't leave my mouth
So the rage won't lead them down the wrong route

I am tired and feeling drowsy
My eyes urge for a sky that's cloudy
They can lay under the covers
As my words quietly hover

White-Out Scream
Dalton



Prudent Lessons From a Student #3

Gregory Crenshaw

Sometimes it pays to be optimistic,

So I made my decision by thinking outside the box to realize there is no
box because I've been in it,

And being taught only certain things paints a fraudulent figment, which
leads to people to believe different just like in certain religions,

See love in something you shouldn't waste,

And to the person that gives it to you them for granted you should never
take,

Don't settle for good think great!

Like Tony the Tiger I got my strips, but I'm not the type to boast, niegh, or
brag on the past and that's the reason I got locked up,

So who really got the last laugh?

People say you learn from your mistakes, if so then I should be the next
Einstein or Isaac Newton,

But life often makes me feel like the ride at the park that you can't wait to
get off because it's not amusing.

Or if I was at the race and was gone try to win, but my sock were too thin
and both shoes didn't fit,

Now in my mind I'm not ready or set to go like a prom so I tried to quit,

However, I learned that life not a game and lessons from a student can be
very prudent,

But it may put some people's pride to shame.

An Admirable Dancer
Sophia Sharp



Whitman's Shoe Repair

Adam Callis

Patrick pushed open the door to Mr. Whitman's shoe store, and a string of bells jangled against the glass as it opened. Patrick had known about the little store for years, but he'd never actually been inside. It was one of several brick buildings connected to each other on the main drag of his hometown, and painted right on the brick, up above the front of the store in red and white paint was a sign that read "Whitman's Shoe Repair," written in a fancy style. On both sides of the door, there were large glass windows, filled with all manner of boots and shoes displayed in various arrangements.

As soon as Patrick stepped inside, the scent of leather was so strong that it felt as if he'd just pressed his face inside his baseball glove. That thought was the first that came to mind, since he actually had the glove in his hand. That was the whole reason he'd come to Mr. Whitman's store anyhow. Someone had mentioned to him that Mr. Whitman used to fix up old ball-gloves years ago. Earlier that week, Patrick had been tossing fly balls up to himself when one came down and busted its way right through the glove, just missing his face on its way down. The remaining strings were so rotten that each one tore apart when Patrick tried tugging them loose.

It was an old glove, and he'd picked it up at a yard sale from a man who thought it necessary to fill Patrick in on the glove's history. He told Patrick about nearly every game he'd used it in, how he'd sat on it in-between innings, and how he'd tied it up with shoestrings when he wasn't using it. Patrick liked the look of it from the start. The color of the leather was the lightest shade of brown he'd ever seen on a glove, almost like the color of cream. The man told him that he'd misplaced it once for about a month or so, and when he finally found it beneath a tree outside his house, the sun had bleached it white. Patrick never even asked the man if he could buy the glove. The man simply placed it in his hands and said, "You just hold on to this for a while."

When Patrick came inside, the only kind of commotion he could hear was the sound of a sewing machine running in the back of the store. He looked toward the back but didn't see anyone, so he browsed around for a minute and looked at some lace-up boots on one of the shelves.

The sound of the sewing machine stopped, and after a moment, a man's voice called out, "Hello?" The man stepped out of his office, and Patrick turned and saw him. He was a short man, bald on top with grey and black hair on the sides of his head. He had on a small pair of glasses, flat on top and round on the bottom, and there was a silver chain attached to them to hold them on his neck. He had a long, skinny face, thinner around the jaw than it was above it, and he had a big nose, wide all the way down.

"Well, hello there young man," he said in a quiet voice. "What can I do for you?"

"I've got a glove here that's falling apart," said Patrick, raising up the glove so the man could see it. "Someone told me you might be able to fix it."

"Did they now?" said the man, smiling. "Well, I'd hate to make a liar out of them. Let's have a look at it."

He reached out and took the glove from Patrick, holding it out far from his face. He pushed his glasses down on his great nose and tilted his head forward.

"Well now," he said, "looks like this thing's darn near rotten all the way through." He pulled at one of the torn strings. "Did you have one bust through on you?"

"Yes sir," said Patrick.

"Well, I don't see that you've got a black eye," said the man, "so I assume you must've seen it coming." He raised his eyebrows, and Patrick smiled and nodded. "Come on back here to the office and we'll see if we can't stitch this thing back together."

Patrick followed the man back to his office, which was more of a shop than an office. There was a metal storage cabinet in one corner, and a few scattered binders and papers, but everything else was shoe related. There were shelves stacked full with shoeboxes and spray cans, strings

hanging from hooks on the wall, two electric sewing machines, and another machine with a big wheel on one end and a foot pedal on the bottom. The man slid out a chair for Patrick and pulled up a wooden stool for himself.

"Been a long time since I've worked on a ball-glove," said the man. "I only had granddaughters, and ain't none of them cared much for playing ball. Guess I can't blame them." In a moment he added, "Ain't much too it though. I'm Jack by the way."

He reached out his hand, and Patrick shook it and said, "I'm Patrick."

"Good to know you Patrick," said Jack. "You a big-time ball player?"

"Yes sir," said Patrick.

"I was once one myself," said Jack. "Played in the minors, if you can believe it."

"You played in the minor leagues?" asked Patrick, moving forward on his chair.

Jack laughed. "I did. On a single-A team in Iowa."

"What was it called?" asked Patrick.

Jack laughed again. "The Quad City River Bandits. Ever heard of them?"

Patrick shook his head.

"Well you're not the only one. They called us 'farm teams' on account of someone saying they were raising up new players like corn."

"What position did you play?" asked Patrick.

"Second base," said Jack. He had a rag in his hand and was wiping off the glove. He pulled out a tub of cream and started rubbing it onto the glove, and immediately the color started to brighten. "They called me 'Hoover' Whitman back then 'cause they said I sucked up grounders like a vacuum."

He oiled the glove without paying much attention to his work, as if he'd been oiling baseball glove all morning. When he had the entire thing greased up, he set it down and went over to one of his drawers. He pulled out a few strands of leather and finally settled on one, then he came and

sat back down and started to relace the glove. It already looked brand new.

"Yeah," he started again, "I couldn't hit worth a dang, though. I reckon I only averaged about one-fifty, probably less. I had a knack for advancing the runner but never for getting on base myself."

Patrick knew the feeling. "Did you ever get upset?" he asked.

"oh, you bet I did," said Jack. "Every time I struck out, I thought about walking away right then and there."

"Did you?" asked Patrick.

Jack smiled and shook his head. "Couldn't do it. I just loved it too much." He set the glove down and raised his head up toward the ceiling. "There's something about that game that's unlike anything else-the sound of a bat when it cracks against a ball, or the smell of old leather, and dirt clotted up under your shoes. It's a bit like magic."

He lowered his head back down and finished lacing the glove. He pulled it between the fingers and stretched it out.

"Now there's a good-looking glove," he said, and he handed it to Patrick. "Go ahead and try her on."

Patrick took the glove and slid his hand down into it. He opened and closed it, and he rubbed his finger across the palm. Jack had shined it up really well, and it was still greasy to the touch. The polish had brought out some of the brown in it, and Patrick liked the way it looked.

"It'll probably be a bit tighter at first," said Jack. "But use it enough, and it'll stretch out for you."

"Thanks!" said Patrick. "How much do I owe you?" Patrick only had a twenty dollar bill in his pocket, and he hoped that would be enough.

"Yes sir!" said Patrick.

Jack walked Patrick back up to the font of the store and shook the young man's hand again. "Glad you came in," he said.

"Thanks again," said Patrick, and he turned to walk out the door. The bells jangled again when he pushed it open.

"Say there, Patrick," said Jack. Patrick turned his head. "Sir?"
Jack smiled at him one more time. "Catch a little magic for me."
Patrick beamed. "Yes sir."

Sentiment

Heather Richmond

The calm erupted—peace was none—
But shattered tears did fall
Silence stirred the restless mind yet—
Despite the siren's wail

Light grew heavy—the edge had come
And whispers pale with judgement
That Final Goodbye—subtle lies
Bear witness—in the pews—

I loved my kindred—Not enough
To hold you to the Earth
This solid ground—and then the stars
Lit melodies just so

From which—I could not find my way
Called out to you—my blood—
Guilty shadows—cast down—
They knew I knew each one

In Bloom
Kirstie Frank

Even when I've been
dried up between book pages,
pasted on art projects,
even when my brittle leaves
break off in pieces
I am still the flower:
so beautiful
you needed me, immortalized.



The Day My Father Died

Jennifer Chenoweth

Yesterday my father died.
So many feelings of hurt and sadness I hold inside. Though his love for me
was never present,
years of estrangement made that evident.
My heart remained open with reconnection on my mind. All chance of
that gone
the day my father died



Raison d'être
Rachel Keyes

The Mug

McKenzie Burden

She grabbed a snowy blue mug from the cabinet without a second glance. She placed a tea bag inside and paced the house as she waited for the water to finish boiling. She walked into the sunroom to chat with Mammie. After a few minutes of that, she found herself standing in the doorway of the bathroom, watching Momma fix her hair. She wandered around like the Israelites in the wilderness until, finally, the water began to boil and she could begin making her cup of tea. She waited another ten minutes, letting the drink steep. As the ten minutes came to an end, she stirred in two small packs of Splenda and took a sip.

It was a delightful sensation to feel the warmth of the drink travel down her throat. There was something about it that felt cozy. Mammie left the sunroom and came to join her at the table. They naturally began talking again because neither one of them had ever liked the quiet, and they especially didn't like the quiet now. They talked about coffee, food, and their plans for the day. It was a usual morning conversation on an unusual morning.

In the midst of this exchange, however, she did take a second glance at the snowy blue mug she had grabbed from the cabinet. Etched on the side was a picture of a little house, and under that a name: "Grandad." The name they were trying to avoid bringing up in their morning conversation because the man it belonged to wasn't there to join in. He wasn't there to drink coffee and eat donuts. His deep, strong voice or familiar laugh wasn't echoing on the walls. All that was left was a snowy blue mug that he would never drink out of again.

She hid the side of the mug with his name until Mammie and Momma had left to run errands. Then she stared at it. She couldn't quite comprehend the notion that he would never be back, but she couldn't live in denial of it either. So she let the tears forming in her eyes fall onto her cheeks as she rubbed her finger over his name. Grandad.



Pretty in Pink
Trevor Blaisdell

Julian
Trevor Blaisdell



Michael

K.C. Steele

She wakes suddenly his name on
her lips.

The breath taken from her, empty
fear plagues her.

She takes refuge from where she
came.

A child of the water she is free
here.

She wipes the blur from the
mirror.

Staring into her reflection, not for
vanity.

The lies she's given herself.

Her green eyes.

Many find comfort, wisdom,
solace and safety here.

She fears the fight hidden behind
them.

She slams her fist against the
glass.

Broken shadows of a past.

Her reflection broken now like her
dreams.

She wakes most nights the same
way, calling out to whispers in the
wind .

She finds comfort in his name.

She knows he's in her dreams
fighting what she can't face.

The demons strong, not forgiving,
tearing at her soul.

He protects her in sleep.

She fights back the fear and
terror.

With memories and smiles.
Warmth trickles down her finger
tips.
The blood pools around the
broken glass.
She feels nothing.



Sagel
Trevor Blaisdell

Winter Comfort

Morgan Jolly

The sky outside reigns colorless and chilled.
Clouds skimming its endless surface,
Leaving a thin blanket over all.
Darkness rises and clouds grow heavy.
Rain starts to pound on the roof,
Rhythmically tapping;
Tapping the heartbeat of nature.
If you listen close enough you might even be able to
hear it whisper:
"Peace,
Peace,
Peace."
Over and over again without cease.
But inside hums a different tune,
One of two souls huddling.
Warmth and love wraps them in a snug embrace.
With a gentle nudge they cuddle closer.
Taking comfort in each other.
Blanket tied close around their shoulders,
Flannel warmth reassuring.
The bed beneath them inviting and mounded high
with soft pillows and thick quilts.
They rest in a nest of cloth that echoes past memories,
Memories of evenings just like this.
Like the rain outside, they tap out a rhythm,
Of two hearts blissful in each other's presence.
Singing only slightly differently:
"Love,
Love,
Love."
Both hold drinks that warm them inside and out;

Warm apples and cinnamon,
Bitter leaves and wild honey,
Curling scent deeply familiar.
Steaming the air.
Battling the cold tempest outside.
Though, alongside the rain comes a different song.
Lilting voices and calm adventure,
A movie playing out while the two cuddle and rest.
Each of these things:
Love, warmth, rain, movies, hot drinks,
Each aspect combines to sing a hymn as ancient and everlasting as the
rain.
One existing since time and the blowing of the winter wind.
A ballad of love,
Of comfort and trust,
And of a peace that washes the strain of the world away;
Leaving only the love freely given and happiness maintained.
A world of calm whispers rather than harsh arguments.
Of agreement rather than battles.
And of a deep love that overrules hate.



Jane Doe
Trevor Blaisdell

The Eldritch Puppeteer

Derian Dodge

A letter and a large crate, so far not the weirdest thing I've been mailed but then again something about the crate seemed off. An eerie sense of foreboding filled my veins chilling my blood. The air seemed to chill, and a breeze that shouldn't have existed filled the room. Opening the letter that accompanied the refrigerator sized crate I pull out what seems to be a hastily scrawled note and begin to read

My Cousin Des,

First, I must say I am deeply sorry for thrusting such a burden upon you. Likely you do not know who I am, nor my family, but I assure you we relatives however distant. As you are reading this our bloodline is being systematically hunted down and exterminated. My hand has been forced, and for the sake of knowledge and not letting secrets go I had to send the books and the apparti to a bystander such as yourself, for they are keeping close tabs on all who know our family secret. With all that I have sent, you will be able to begin our work anew, though I warn you, do not dig too deep. Our collection of tomes is complete, but when you touch them you will understand. Excess curiosity may earn you a fate worse than death.

W. Winfield

P.S- Do not fear our pursuers, they are reasonable people. It were we who erred. Keep your power secret and they will not harm you.

Letting the letter slowly slither its way to to the ground I let the new knowledge sink in until only one rational thought forms in my mind. What kind of terrible hoax is this? A letter from a 'distant relative,' a stupidly heavy crate, and a shadowy world that might, emphasis on might, hunt me down. This had to be the worst prank from my friends ever. Picking up the letter again I wad it up into a ball and toss it relatively near the trash can. Storming over to the crate I kick it and feel pain shoot up my foot. The jerks probably filled it with bricks or something. The weight felt about right when I had to help drag the thing in. Pulling out my phone I call the first person who would waste money on a joke this dumb. Listening to the ringer I plop down on the couch and nurse my toe. Hopefully I didn't break it.

"Hello?" A hoarse voice asks from the other end.

"Hey Jimmy I got your package." I say still annoyed.

"What package?" He asks his voice full of almost convincing confusion.

"The fridge box full of bricks asshole."

"Des... while that is an amazing idea, it wasn't me."

“So if I open the box sitting in my kitchen it won’t have a note in it with your shitty hand wrighting.” I ask stomping back over to the box. Hearing Jimmy grunt was all I needed to cut the taping from the box and throw the cardboard flaps open.

“Jimmy.... I’m going to have to call you back.” Quickly ending the call I drop my phone back into my pocket. Looking at the contents of the box I can feel the icy fear in my veins return. Most of its space, and certainly its weight seemed to come from dusty old tomes. Thick papyrus looking paper bound in ancient leather, folders of yellowed pages with scrawling handwriting, and a myriad of scrolls and other texts. Resting next to the covered in dust and shards of its own body, lay a doll. The doll, she seemed far too life like. Looking straight at her I could see the way the porcelain shined and other obvious tells that the.... That she wasn’t real. When I turned away however, it seemed to become more human. Pulling the doll out and sitting it on a chair I take a step back and examine it more carefully. About the size of a ten year old child, the doll was dressed in black victorian garb with a shawl over its shoulders. The actual facial features were nondescript other than the pieces of porcelain missing from the right cheek and the waist length white hair that matched its skin.

“Shit you’re creepy.” I mumble to myself as I return to the crate. Looking in I see a note where the doll had been laying. Picking up it and a shard of porcelain I carefully examine the note.

'Return the shard to return the doll.'

"And the creepy grows." Returning the note to the box I roll the shard over in my hands a couple of times while thinking about what 'return to the doll' could mean. I mean it's not like the doll can come to life right? Returning the shard to its place on the dolls cheek I hesitantly move back, and when nothing happens I release a breath I didn't realize I was holding. For the next couple of hours I read a book titled 'Light and Dark' and most of the scattered notes found stuffed in between tomes and books. The notes seem to have cliffnotes on the others or the writer's own scattered thoughts in writing that was slanted and in cursive making some of it hard to read. The pages were slightly yellowed and crisp. Someone had kept these safe for a long time, yet the condition was so pristine it was hard to tell or how long they had been around. Feeling the drain of the day I decide to turn in and leaving the doll, the books, and the box where they are for the time being. Before I could even get in my room I could already tell tonight would be a tough one.

Monstrosities, dolls, knights, mages, pain, curiosity, gratitude. All sorts of images and feelings filled my nightmares causing me to jolt awake. I was drenched in sweat and my hair was stuck to most of my skin. I feel a hot tear running down my face. Quickly wiping it away I storm from my bed in frustration and into the bathroom. Looking into the mirror I see my reflection looking at me, iridescent green pools

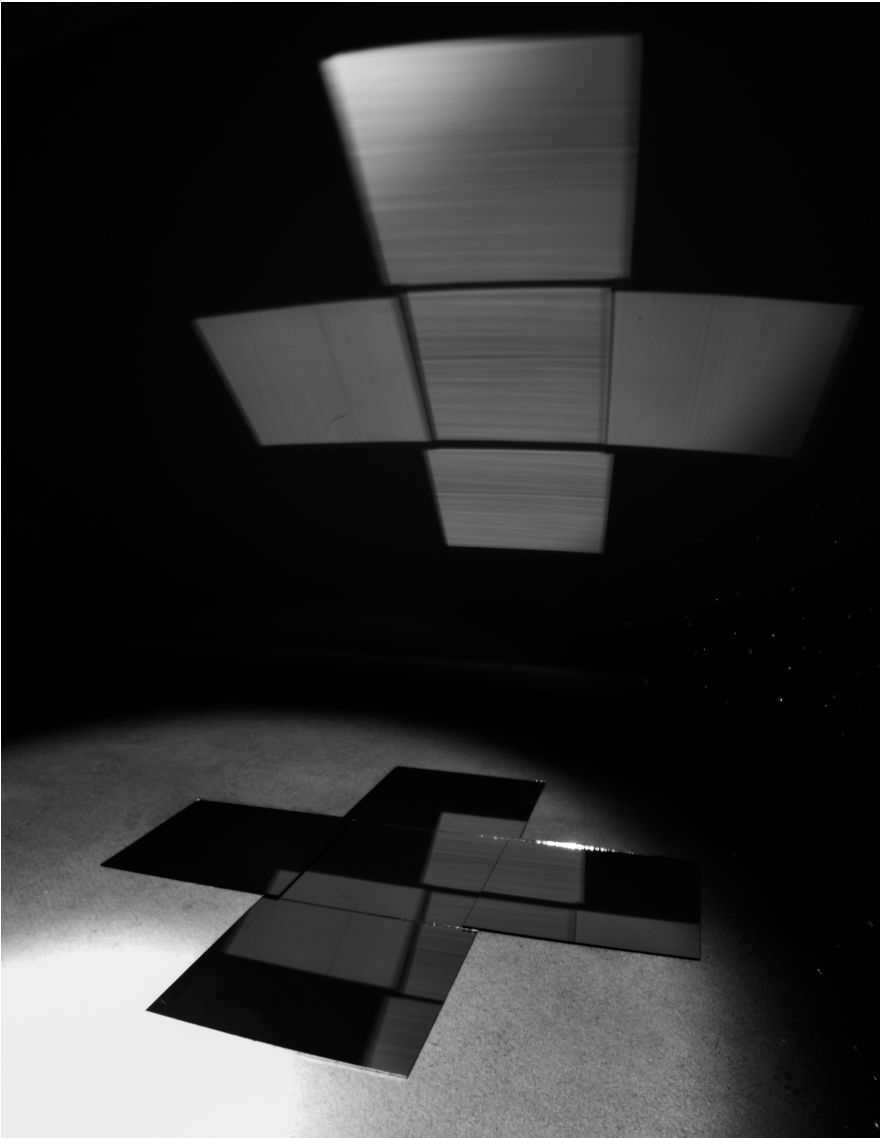
glaring at me as usual. I brush away a single strand of black hair and tuck it behind my ear, somewhat frustrated because of its length. At its longest the onix strands reached the small of my back. I stand at about five feet and five and a half inches tall, yes the half is important. I was by no means ugly, in fact I like the way I look, but I wasn't naive enough to think I could be something like a supermodel. Still I couldn't help the glare the was fixed a my own reflection. I was to be frank angry at myself, angry for many reasons, and I hated each and every one of them. I also hated myself for having these thoughts.

"You shouldn't think like that Miss." A voice says from the bathtub. Jumping away from the voice I slam my back into the mirror with a resounding crack.

"Who's there?" I yell grabbing a shard of mirror for defence.

"Don't be scared it's just me." The voice says again as the shower curtain is moved away by a child sized hand. There sitting in the tub was the doll looking even more human than when I brought her out of the box. Trying to rationalize this away I fail desperately, and the only though that comes to mind is W. Winfield's note. This doll was alive and I was and it was and and and.....

With a groan, I open my eyes to see only the toilet, the tub, and the broken mirror.



Reflections
Vanessa Lassiter

Mus Musculus

Sara Tinnon

SNAP!

I hear the sound as clear as a bell on Sunday morning. I roll over and let out a long sigh. I don't want to get out of my bed to see the squirming half dead mouse that is now caught in the mouse trap. I already felt guilty for setting the trap in the first place. The mouse didn't deserve death, but I was tired of waking up in the middle of the night to nibbling and scratching sounds. What was it nibbling on anyway? I could never tell when I searched. But now the mouse is caught, and I feel sick.

I've been told since I was young that creatures have lives and families just like us. The thought of a dad mouse running around with a brief case and glasses would have amused me as a child. Now it just makes sad. The mouse was just going about its life trying to make a living, and I killed it. Isn't it weird? I'm sure other people wouldn't give two thoughts about killing a mouse. I thought about it for weeks. I would wake up every night about two in the morning to hear this annoying scratching sound, but I just couldn't do it. Now, I have a mouse corpse in my room. I guess I better get up. I roll out of bed and head to the trap. I've never been afraid of something not living anymore, but tonight there's a pit in my stomach. I don't want to see the tiny dad mouse trying to make an honest living, dead. Please, be dead, I don't think I could handle a half dead mouse.

I make my way over to my desk and stop. I put the trap behind my desk, because that's where I hear it the most at night. I'm petrified, like a mouse caught in the eyes of a cobra. Ironic. I grab a dirty shirt off the floor, in case I have to pick it up. I've got this, I've lived through all kinds of bullshit. I can handle a dead mouse. I swallow my fear, I can feel it drop to my stomach and rest there, making me feel even more nauseous. I hold my breath and look.

I instantly jump back and vomit on the floor, some made its way on my desk. Oh fuck. I'm a murderer. I use the shirt to wipe my face. My life has been a series of "what-the-fucks" and this is the proverbial cherry on top. Seriously? On top of having a dead mouse in my room, I have to clean

Twitch.

WHAT THE FUCK!?!

I drop the mouse to the ground. It's still alive?!? I run to the opposite side of the room, as far away as possible, and I watch to see if it moves or makes a sound. I'm breathing so heavy, I'm sure everyone within a 10-mile radius can hear me. My whole body is tense. I finally start to relax when the mouse doesn't move again. My muscles ache from vomiting, running, and being so fucking tense. I slowly walk back over to the mouse. It's dead. I must have hit something to make it twitch. Disgust travels down my back to my toes. I am done with this mouse. I regret killing it, but I'm over it now. I want it out of my room so I can sleep.

I finally make it outside, carrying the dead mouse gingerly. I don't want another freaky twitch to happen. Maybe I should bury it. No, that's too weird. I wrap the mouse with my shirt. Good thing this isn't one of my favorite shirts. And lay it in the field next to my house. I just realized I'm barefoot in the dark outside. I'll say a few quick words, because why not? Then I'll go back inside.

Mouse, I am sorry you're dead, but I need sleep. I know you were just trying to live. I'm sorry. Maybe in another life you'll be the human, and I the mouse. Oh, that's a terrifying thought. I make my way back inside. My feet are muddy and cold, and my breath tastes like vomit. I go back into my room and clean up the vomit. This has been a long night. I lay back down in my bed, roll over. Finally. Hopefully I won't have any nightmares. I'm drifting into unconsciousness. Sweet sweet sleep.

Scratch.

Scratch.

Scratch.

Son of a bitch!



The Palace
Trevor Blaisdell

Hush

Kirstie Frank

There's something tragic
in the way a lover might submit
herself in the arms of a liar.
How she convinces herself to feel
the warmth in a touch that's not there,
or how she begs to wait out in the storm
for a rainbow that never comes.
How she'll dance in his shadow
as he eclipses her in his insecurity,
and she bows
as he steals her bouquets
picking each petal
one
at
a
time.
He loves her not.
Some say she was too young;
too young to understand
how empty the promises were
and would leave her.
Others brag, "she should have known."
like knowing his fingers
would pluck her strings
so hard he'd break them
would have convinced her naïve mind
he might never replace them
Insult to injury,
attempting to wash what's been dirtied
wringing out blackened water
only to blacken what's clean.
oh, when she's "in-love"
she's deaf to a symphony,

even as it echoes
what all along
her heart had been singing.
Silence is sympathy
when the music's a screaming reminder
of being deceived.
So now quiet calming,
releasing her from the impossible loudness
of manipulation and agony.

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Awards

Each year, Pioneer Pen chooses two winners from the submissions received from Volunteer State Community College students. The 2019 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 Kirstie Frank and her poem "Origami."

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 Justin Hopkins and his piece "Almost Heaven," which is featured on page of this issue.

Pioneer Pen

2020 SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Volunteer State Community College students interested in being featured in the 2020 edition of Pioneer Pen should submit art, photography, poetry, short stories, fiction, cartoons, short films, animation, and excerpts from longer creative works to pioneer.pen@volstate.edu by March 2, 2020.

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 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 615-230-3200

Class information: ENGL 209P (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 the 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 receiving institution. This course is collegiate level work but has been developed with a purpose, other than being university parallel course. Prerequisites: Permission of Instructor.
Credits: 1-3

For more information, contact Pioneer Pen, Professor Emily Andrews (emily.andrews@volstate.edu) and Professor Laura McClister (laura.mcclister@volstate.edu).