

GENRE

Literary Magazine

SEEDS SPROUTED IN THE WRITERS' ROOM



*Art by Ruby Tilder, Senior
Capital Area School of the Arts Charter School
Creative Writing Program*

THE GENRE EXPERIENCE

Genre Literary Magazine is written and produced by students in the Creative Writing Program at Capital Area School for the Arts Charter School. It is a showcase of works that have been written throughout the academic year. In addition to writing and workshopping, seniors and juniors learn magazine creation, while freshmen and sophomores learn to write query letters and submit to literary magazines. This gives students valuable experience and insight into the world of professional writing, editing and publishing.

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and all those who have inspired us.

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Genre Literary Magazine is a project of the
Creative Writing Classes of the 2021-2022 school year

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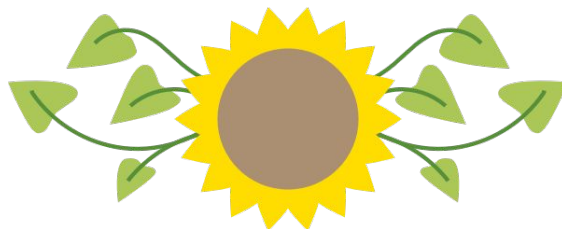
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UNDERCLASSMEN

This year, 9th and 10th grade students learned about literary history, script writing, poetry, short stories, and literary journalism.



SPRING TREE

By Anelle Jones, Sophomore

The roots of the softly spoken tree
embrace my mourn.
Soprano notes of the birds
hypnotize my ears.
Fresh air comes in peace,
waving a white flag.
Petals fall,
a soft breeze like molten candy
strokes my warm cheeks,
velvet ovals tap my face,
the color of a blushed boy, petals fall
this love full of life
speaks through its gifts of beauty and grace—
Spring tree, your petals fall.



WEDNESDAY

By Sekou Bryan, Freshman

Dr. Harold P. Sullivan's wife loved Wednesday more than life itself.

If she were put into that position of having to decide who should get the last parachute... guess who'd be toast?

Wednesday was grossly overweight.

She insisted on sleeping in their bed, this although she snored incessantly, and that she regularly broke wind - she hated Harold.

Wednesday may have been well past her "sell-by" date and legally blind, but she was no fool - far from it.

She seemed to have a sixth sense of sorts.

Harold merely had to contemplate a romantic notion with his wife, and Wednesday would growl.

Should she as much as shake his hand affectionately, then Wednesday would conjure up the most mournful of whine that would reverberate deep in Maude's maternal wound, releasing flights of guilt-feathered arrows into her tender heart.

To say that Wednesday had become a bone of contention in their marriage would have paid only a pittance to the sum.

Wednesday insisted that they sleep in separate beds; she was presently guiding the architect's quill for the new home - two separate cottages with a commonage - I kid you not!

Wednesday was ruining the marriage.

He, the man who had sailed five of the seven seas... single-handedly!

He had women from every continent and subcontinent... other than Australia of course - Harold hated Australians.

They adored him, lusted for him!

He had survived two shipwrecks, a light airplane crash, and a war, allegedly...

He who had personally counseled umpteen mousy men through countless rejections and divorces had been beaten by a moth-eaten, blind mongrel!

Harold had tried his best, honestly, he had, but the problem had gnawed at the very foundation of his sanctuary and sanity.

He finally came face-to-face with the extent of his inner turmoil one day when he found himself peeking nervously through the kitchen side window, his hands visibly shaking, a madman's giggle brewing maniacally from the depths of his gut.

Harold had moved the mahogany coffee table.

Dr. Maude W. Sull...Cuthbert.

Yeah, Cuthbert.

Cuthbert would have bid farewell to her last patient by now, and would at any minute be hooting as she drove down the driveway... a ritual of years standing between them.

It was always the highlight of their day - Wednesday would spring to her feeble paws, and drooling with glee - snort her whining way through the kitchen on a well-memorized path, to welcome home the reason for living.

Unfortunately for all parties involved, an irreversible sequence of events was about to change their lives forever.

All went perfectly according to plan initially - Maude hooted on cue... Wednesday's ears shot up, her milky eyes sparkling with delight.

Adrenalin-charged, she gained momentum - a slow-motioned, bloated, fur-lined steam engine...

Just as she reached full speed, she collided headlong into the Mahogany coffee table with a sickening thud.

The impact was so impressive that Grandma Ellen's big crystal urn launched itself into the air, spewing clouds of grey ash as it flew, then hit the corner of the table, smashing into pieces, the largest of which thrust itself deep into poor Wednesday's quivering form.

HOURGLASS

By Carrine Lawson, Sophomore

pressed against the wall, her hair peeking through the loosely tied cloth. chestnuts spiral around her crown, hypnotized.

her cheeks, sun-glazed like a sheet of freshly baked donuts, the honey-brown beating off of her skin. droplets of sweat get caught in the hairs of her eyebrows.

she looks out her window. i look out mine- a glimpse into what should have been.

i couldn't help but notice the array of trophies that stood proud behind the dancing curtains whereas my shelf was arranged to be married with the veil of cobwebs it collected. even the termites have died off with nothing left to eat.

but i never cared about her perfect hair or her perfect voice. i didn't care about her at all. what i wanted was the old hourglass sitting in the window. i wanted it so terribly, i'd *kill*.



WHO?

By Isis Braxton, Freshman

She makes my blood boil.
Her words, my new triggers.
I lie awake at night hearing her voice,
Bones chilling as I walk—
The girl who taints my soul.

She makes me contemplate my life.
She finds my insecurities.
She is like a fly in my life.
The one that does the most.

I hate her words.
She hates my reasons.
She hurts my life.
Does this satisfy her?

Why does she do this?
Why does she hurt me?
How did we fall apart?
Why do you tear me apart?

You wreck me.
YOU ARE....ME?



BANISHMENT

By Deladem Dzimega, Sophomore

I was born branded with shame
But the night I struck your gates
Like a scorned angel,
I thought you would heal me.

Instead, I found the devil around my mother's neck.
A chair lay like a fallen soldier
In the soft grass.
Empty promises fell like autumn leaves,
Each lie stripped away,
Until I was bare in my ignorance.



HUNGER

By Sal Chaisson, Freshman

I began my day on June 26 accompanied by a particularly strong and unnatural feeling of hunger, yet I continued along with my usual business. I walked to the bathroom and stared at that familiar man in the reflection. I studied his features: his hollow eyes; the collared shirt that hung loose from his thin frame; the long, tangled, rat-brown hair that framed his pale and sunken face. I brushed his teeth. I splashed cool water on his face. I ran my fingers through his hair, and I left the room shortly after.

That day I had a gathering planned with a handful of work colleagues. Those who worked where I did were always either outgoing and social or very much the opposite, and I fit the latter without a doubt, as most journalists do. But I was hungry, and an art gallery sounded like a lovely place to gather. Those delicious hors d'oeuvres melting on your tongue, tasting wine while you watch others turn their noses up at something they could never create. I never said I enjoy their company.

“Mr. Whitlock Arden,” he said to me. His voice held a certain tantalizing quality, but I couldn’t be sure of what that quality was. Perhaps it was the lilt of his tone as his amber eyes flicked from the business card in his hand to my face; perhaps it was the way he brushed the curly hair from his eyes as he looked at me. “That’s quite the name.”

I recall inquiring back to him; something like a simple “oh, is it?” or a “mine?”, but I can’t be so sure of the details beyond how he looked. He was possibly an inch shorter than me. He tucked the business card into the pocket of his button-down shirt and met my eye without missing a beat. I thought maybe I wouldn’t be hungry for much longer in the event of gaining his trust.

Nevertheless, we had a conversation that brimmed with small talk. I asked him his name; he replied, “*Francis Rosaline Lysander*.” I responded in a compliment, saying his beautiful name fit him well, and he smiled against the rim of his wine glass. I always found coqueting particularly exciting; the racing of my heart, the knowledge that you have someone entirely wrapped around your finger, wound tight like red thread, or intestines... where am I going with this?

Ah, right. I don’t think I’ll know many feelings that are better than the way I felt for Francis Rosaline Lysander. It truly is too bad that things turned out the way they did—that my aforementioned hunger was too great to manage. In a perfect world, I’d be spending my life with him instead of the knowledge that I caused his horrific demise.

It was roughly 18:30. I had arrived two hours prior, and due to the nature of the gallery we were at, the concentration of people had quickly diminished while the hours progressed. Perhaps the art truly was terrible; I didn’t care. It felt as though the only other thing present was Francis, but that could simply be because of how distracting his lips were. I pondered the taste while I fidgeted stupidly with that small bag in my shirt pocket. I had made my decision. I was sure it was terribly noticeable, yet nobody seemed to pay me any mind.

Perhaps they should have.

EXULANSIS

By Sophia LaSalla, Freshman

“When you get into these moods, do you ever—” My mind can't focus. I feel as closed off as a stone wall. “Are you listening to me?”

“Yes,” my voice is no louder than a weak whisper.

“Okay... Clover, you are booked for two weeks on the eighth. Is that okay?” I know my therapist wants to help me, but she can't. I don't believe her when she says, ‘I understand.’ I know she doesn't. No one will ever understand.

“That's perfect.”

I've outgrown my therapist. I don't need to sit in a small room for an hour every other week. My problems are not as huge as they may seem. It's simple, I need to stick with one person. I find someone, and they are for me, and me only.

I tend to get humiliated, a lot. It's something that always makes me feel angry. I have all of this built-up rage inside of me. If I don't listen, I don't have to give an answer. It's like my body is stuck on barbed wire, and my voice box is ripped out of my body. And now I sit in a cold classroom, wishing I had someone.

“Okay kids, I hope you all enjoyed the reading last night... That is if any of you read it.”

A couple of the students laugh, others just look around at each other.

“Does anyone read the books she assigns?” A guy with light brown hair whispers to me. I've never spoken to him, but I have seen him around.

“I usually do, just not last night.” My tone falls flat at the last second.

“I don't think I've ever read anything in here, all the books she assigns are just so boring.” I don't respond to him, I don't know what to say. “I'm uh, I'm Justin.” Never did I think his name would be Justin. He looks like anything but Justin. When I hear the name Justin, I think of dark brown eyes, but his eyes are green. They are petrifying to look into. You can see a mirror of all your past mistakes in his eyes.

“I'm Clover,” I responded before my eyes dropped to my desk.

It's been three weeks since Justin and I spoke. That one conversation made me watch him. I find myself watching him eat lunch. I watch him pack up his bag in English. I know that Lord of the Flies goes into the second pouch of his backpack.

No one knows that I watch Justin, it's my little secret. I play with the food on my plate, thinking about Justin. That is, until my mom ruins it.

“Did you sleep last night?” My mother asks me. We eat Sunday brunch together every week, just the two of us. I guess it's a way for us to bond since our relationship tends to be strained.

“I did. I love the weekend, I can finally catch up on my sleep.”

My mother cuts into her breakfast sausage. “I remember when you didn't get any sleep. Two years ago, or was it three?”

My mom always loves to bring up the past, especially when it's about me. It's not my fault that I had too much anxiety that I couldn't function. I wouldn't be able to sleep without being heavily medicated. I couldn't think properly, I could barely eat. That was the whole reason why I go to therapy. I just wish my mom would drop it. It's a time in my life I would rather forget.

“Can we not talk about that?” I ask, my eyes start to plead.



"I'm just saying that you weren't the only one suffering."

"You make me aware of that every single Sunday, Mom. I mean do you seriously think I would have just forgotten about it? I was the one living through it!"

"Calm down Clover."

"No, you always start this stuff. I don't want to talk about the past. I've been told by my therapist, to move on. She even said it to you! How can I move on, when you always talk about it?" My mom has a specialty on making me feel bad about myself. She knows exactly what buttons to push, and exactly what to say.

"I am just saying, you weren't the only one suffering. I went through nights where I couldn't sleep. I was worried sick about you!" It's typical for my mom to make everything about herself. It's normal for her to make me feel bad about myself. All I want is for my dad to talk with her. He's great at putting her in place. I just wish he was around. He's a lawyer so he's always busy doing cases. He's helping everyone but me. Sometimes I want to get in legal trouble just so he will pay attention to me.

I stand up from the table and push in my chair. "Clover, we are in the middle of Sunday Brunch!"

"I'm not hungry," I say under my breath. I can tell from the look on her eyes that her brain is thinking. I know better than anyone that she is going to hound me with questions. "I'm doing fine Mom! Geez, just leave me alone."

I walk up the stairs, leaving her alone in the big dining room. Just two more years, two more years and then I can leave. I can finally be on my own. I've been counting down how many years I had left at this place since I was seven.

"It's been two weeks Clover. Have you felt any better?" In the last two weeks, I've been getting plenty of sleep. All I want to do is sleep. All I want is to skip to the moments in school where I can see Justin. He's all I can think about.

"I feel much better now. I think school was just in my head. I had a big test coming up, so I was worried about that." The old test lie, it always saves me. I know I should talk about the stuff in my head, but this is easier. Opening up has never been easy for me, and being forced to open up makes it harder. A grin grows on my face. For once the silence between my therapist and me isn't awkward.

"Is there anything on your mind?" she asks.

"Nothing bad." While that is true, it's not the whole truth. I wish I could have a good mindset about everything, but I've never been able to do that. Justin is the only thing in my mind. I've been saying he's all I can think about. But I never said to what extent. Justin should be worried because once I start obsessing, I can't stop. I've started to leave my house earlier. If I tell you why you have to promise not to freak out. I found Justin's address. I now know exactly where he lives. The house isn't far from mine either, it's only a ten-minute walk. The last two Sundays I've gotten out of brunch with my mom. I've been able to fake sick, and it's all so I can sneak out. I walk to Justin's house and I watch him. My thoughts of Justin go out of my head once I see him. When I see his green eyes I can't think, I can't function. "Justin!" I say before I can stop myself. I've only spoken to him once, but the urge to talk to him has gotten so bad.

"Clover," he questions himself. I feel tiny pieces of my heart break in response.



CONTINUED - LASALLA

“Did you do the English homework?” I ask, walking up to him. The dimly lit hallway is crowded with many students. It's hard to hear anything from one person because I hear everything from everyone else.

“Did we have homework?” He asks in a panic. It's not a bad panic. It's the type of panic where he can smile and laugh.

“It was to read the last chapter of *Lord of the Flies*. I read it this time,” I let out a small laugh. My mouth forms a grin across my face, and I can't stop it. I don't want to stop it. Being in the presence of Justin, even talking to him, makes me extremely happy. It makes me forget about everything else but him.

“I guess you'll find out once we get inside the classroom,” we approach the door of the English room. “After you, Clover.”

He says my name and I almost melt. The way he says my name makes my heart jump. We enter the cold classroom and take our seats. Justin still hasn't told me if he's done the homework. I can see him smiling from the corner of my eye, I can't help but smile with him.

“I am assuming everyone read the last chapter?” The teacher begins to speak. “All of you will be broken off into pairs. Your project for this book is to pick a chapter you enjoyed, and analyze it. It will be due by next Monday. You guys have all of this week, plus the weekend. So please, actually do this.”

I can tell the teacher is burnt out. She's tired of kids never completing the work she assigns, or maybe I'm just thinking too much. I could be completely wrong. She starts to list off groups and finally she calls my name. “Clover, you are with Justin.”

My eyes widened in surprise. I'm going to be right there, with Justin. We are going to work on a project together. I am going to talk to him. Everything that I want, everything that I need is falling into place.

“Partner,” Justin nudges me. “We should get to work.” He says. I'm starting to realize that Justin jokes most of the time.

“Okay,” I start to pull my copy of the book out of my backpack. “What chapter did you like the most?” I ask him.

“The one with the plane,” he answers.

“So you did read the book?” I lift my eyebrows.

“I sorta... Looked it up,” a smile grows on his face. His face is the only thing I can think about. It's the only thing I see when I close my eyes. I see his face on my school books. I have a plan to make Justin mine forever. He will be with no one else, but me. He will think of no one else, aside from me. I was able to get his phone number, and I've planned to hang out with him. He thinks we are going to work on the English project, and we are. But I have a bigger plan.

I am in my trashed room trying to tidy it. I need everything to be perfect. I hate everything about my room, I hate how pink it is. There isn't a single item in my room without some sort of pink. My mom likes to control how my room looks as if it's not my own.

My mother knocks on my door. “You can come in!” I chime.

“Are you cleaning?” she jokes.

“Yes, it's too messy for me to think.” I grab a white trash bag and shove school papers into it.

“Oh that's right, aren't you meeting with your partner tonight?”

“Um, yeah.” My movements start to get frantic. I don't know if I'll have enough time to clean my room, get everything prepared, and get myself ready. “I'm meeting him at Willows Park. That won't interfere with dinner, will it?”

“No, you'll be fine. Your father and I are going out.”

“Oh,” I haven't seen my father in a week. I assumed he was out doing business, or maybe I was stuck thinking about Justin. I have been planning non-stop for weeks about tonight. When we got

CONTINUED - LASALLA

partnered up in English, it wasn't by luck or fate. I went up to my teacher and asked her to put us together. I knew that he had to be my partner. I had to have him be close to me. It's been two hours and I've managed to get everything ready, including myself. I want to look perfect for tonight, so I'm wearing a black dress. It's important that when he looks at me, he thinks I'm the most beautiful girl alive. I even curled my hair and did my makeup. The best part is, I got everything in my car ready! Justin, will not know what is going to hit him. Now, I'm on my way to the park. The sun has just barely set, the breeze is perfect, it's not too much, or too little. Justin texted me saying he's already arrived. I can feel the excitement in my stomach, I can feel it running through my bones. I've turned the radio off, I need complete silence. I need to perfect my plan. I've gone over it in my mind, but I need to make sure everything will go perfectly. As my car turns into the parking lot, my headlights reflect Justin's shadow. I can tell he's on his phone, it looks like he's texting someone. I glimpse down at my phone, hoping for some sort of text from him. Nothing arrives. But, that's fine. Soon enough he's going to wish it was me he was texting. I turn my car off and step out, shutting the door quietly. I like my presence to be known on my terms. I start to sneak up to Justin, his body is turned away from me.

"Justin," I whisper. His head moves frantically, but he doesn't see me, "Justin," I whisper again. Finally, he turns around and spots me. His eyes are filled with surprise and horror. "You really know how to sneak up on someone." He scratches the side of his head.

"I brought my copy of Lord of the Flies, but I have a surprise for you." A smile starts to grow on his face, his cheeks are slightly red. He may want me to give him gifts. Maybe he's shy, and that's why we haven't spoken a lot. "Can you go with me to the back of my car?" I ask.

He looks through my eyes like he's searching my mind. "Sure," he starts to squint his eyes. "It's nothing bad," I reassure him. I slowly lift my eyebrows in a caring way. He needs to think he is in complete control, even though he doesn't know my plan. He isn't aware that while I seem sweet and innocent, I am actually a monster. But then again, no one knows that. No one knows what I think in my mind, what I dream about.

I bring Justin over to the car and I open up the hatch. Within seconds I can see his brain start to work. I can tell he's thinking. I know he's thinking. His eyebrows tighten and his lips purse. All that is in the back of my car is a rope, the rope that is so tight your throat will go dry. I also have a plastic bag and some duct tape. But the biggest thing, the thing that he won't stop looking at, is my hatchet. I just had it sharpened by my uncle who does woodwork. It's freshly cleaned. Justin knows what is going to happen, and I don't reassure him. I want him to feel threatened, feel fear. He should've texted me more than once. He should've talked to me. He should have known I liked him without me having to tell him. Liked might be the wrong word, I mean obsessed. Justin's guard is down. You would think in a moment like this he would be aware of everything. But he's not, so I push his head into the back of the car. He lets a grunt out. I quickly grab the rope and tie his hands. It's harder than I thought. He won't stop squirming. Now I'm wishing I would've given him the drugged water, which was my other plan. But it's too late.

"Be quiet," I whisper into his ear. "Stop moving and you will be okay."

His movements slow down. He knows I am ultimately the one in control. Justin isn't necessarily strong and muscular, but he isn't that scrawny either. I kick the back of his knees, making him fall. He cries out. "Please, what did I ever do to you?" He's pleading for me to stop. "I-if it's something, anything, that I can fix... Please- let me know."

Foolish little man, he should know I'll only want to do it more. I grab the duck tape and cut it with my teeth. The harsh taste of plastic and leather stains my mouth. The duck tape goes over his lips. If I mess up here, he can run away. I tie the rope around his knees. He's given up fighting, which is strange. If he wanted to live, if he wanted to get away, he could. I push Justin onto the parking lot ground. His head falls into the pavement, leaving little droplets of blood.

CONTINUED - LASALLA

“I've waited to do this. I stalked you, I've watched your every single move.” I reach for my hatchet. I can feel the stiff wood in my hand. I lift the axe over my head and bring it down as he screams through the duck tape.

“Shut up!” I yell.

I bring the hatchet down again. Within seconds the noise stops. His harsh rasping, his arms flailing, everything stops. I drop the hatchet and put my palm on his chest, I don't feel anything. There's no movement.

Justin is dead. The man who I have obsessed over for months is dead. There was no way to stop this. There was nothing anyone could've done. I should feel relief, and I do. But I also feel empty. The only good thing in my life is gone. No, I don't mean Justin. I mean obsessing over someone, having something to do with my empty time. Now I have nothing. Now I need to find someone else, someone to fill this void.



MASKS

By Stacey Geigel, Freshman

I sit here with a wide grin,
teeth gritting against each other
till my cheeks ache.

I hear the indistinct sound of mingled laughter.
Sometimes the smiles seem real,
but I cannot figure out if they are.

My eyes stare into the distance
of this colorful room filled with
people who seem to comfort each other.

I sit here alone in my own thoughts
not knowing how to feel,
confused about what those around me feel.

Yet, I sit here with a wide grin on my face
Teeth gritting against each other
till my cheeks ache.

*Poetry inspired by The Little Book of Cheerful Thoughts by Jeffrey Harrison.
"Small Enough to Fit In Your Shirt Pocket"*



REDEMPTION

By Mari Cornelius, Sophomore

Do not fault the sinned who have longed for the light
but honor their deed for redemption.

Mirror their mistakes as they shall seek mountains

Encourage the misguided

Find the lost souls who deserve happiness
and along they reach the skies, finding the open gates.

Cheer for them

Weep in their arms

Kiss their faces and pat their backs

We do not sin for ourselves

but we sin for the rotten.

A man who embraces the wicked

He paints the mask of the deceiving child

Honor him as one or you are nothing.

Throw me away like a broken toy

Enslave me for your desires

Tie me with your strings.

The man shall not channel me in his bidding

Nor shall I suffer through his attorney

but kill me a thousand times as you wish

Falter me to my knees

Erase my humanity over and over, again

but you cannot erase the light.



DARKNESS AND LIGHT

By Je'Shawn Bobbitt, Sophomore

Dark

Dreadful Dark

Why must the dark be treated as the bad?

Why must the dark wish for something it needs but will never have?

Light

Lustrous Light

It gets what it wants without so much as to putting up a fight

It get what it wants fast, faster than the blink if an eye

It get what it wants fast, faster than the switch of the light

“Didn’t you know?”

That in every darkness there's a light

That the darker the night”

The brighter the light?

Take the Yin and Yang

It shows how neither is absolute

And that without the other it would not be a thing

“Without the Dark there would be no light to shine

Without the Light there would be no dark to hide”

Without a Start there would be no end

Without an Enemy there would be no friend

Now take all I’ve said and apply it to the color of our skin

Take a look at the darker skin and see our light within

See how we too have a light inside them as you have a darkness in you

See how both make each other exist and that there wouldn’t be with the two

Remember

In every Darkness there's a light

And in every Light there's a Darkness



MADNESS OF REALITY

By Je'Shawn Bobbitt, Sophomore

Is this madness? Is it creativity? Or is it intelligence? Whatever you think
you may see is only subject to your own reality.
Infinite spirals into a cup of the freshest brewed tea. Time bending, gravity defying,
mind boggling "Illusions". What you see, is it truly there?
You have ears to listen but to listen you must hear. Falling towards the sky while
the sun's out in the middle of the night.
Does this really make sense to you or have you used your own reality to fabricate
to what is most normal.
The hands on the gyrating clock, round and round and round and round, they
seem as though time is accelerating forward but backwards yet at the same time.
Which direction is time flowing, have you molded it with Your reality or have you
come to terms and let it settle?
Chitter chatter, pitter patter, you hear as individuals walk by. You take a glance in
delusion but soon gets worse as you see no face.
Speaking in sentences yet no mouth to form or release words. They then sprout
their wings taking to the color-filled sky like birds in the night.
You begin to reminisce, the sweet memories of your days of youth, drawn to the
scent that's striking these memories. You look around where you find a garden
full of breathtaking scenery.
Each flower in this garden triggers its own smell. It brings back memories from
each depth and crack of your mind.
This reality you reside in is thriving in full color. So bright, so pure, not the dulllest
color in sight.
You admire such beauty when like wet paint your color dissolves right before
you, your time now slows, as the people now land, faces forming, everything
becoming bland. This is reality, the one known to most.



EVEN GODS OF UNITY SIN

By Faridah Moussa, Sophomore

Love has conquered more souls than any disease ever could. It has won far more battles than all of the greatest armies in history. Capable of being someone's strength, yet also being the reason for someone's downfall. Able to cause strong unions yet also merge lifetimes of bad blood. Able to destroy an empire's very foundation with just a simple giggle or a look of passion. How does such a dangerous, complex weapon fall into the hands of creatures like humans, you may ask? Well, it is because of a mistake I made long ago.

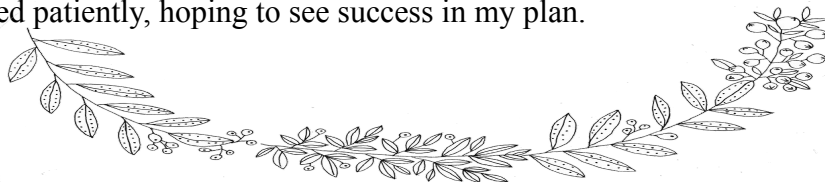
There once was a time when the only reason for marriage was procreation. Not because some gentleman made your heart flutter or some lady's giggle kept echoing throughout your head. It was for the sole purpose of reproduction. It was a duty that fell upon humans to ensure their own survival. By the age of 18, every man and woman belonged to one another, despite their hearts being unable to ache for the other. It was a system that had gone on for centuries prior. A system that worked and allowed humans to walk the earth for many more years to come.

That was until Unreq was born. The idea of him belonging to some woman for the rest of his life tormented him. He would do all he could to try to stop the marriage that had been planned even before he came out of the womb. He would pick battles with his fiancée, Trian, every opportunity he got. When they were seven, he filled her trousers with mud and told everyone she had relieved herself. When they were nine, he stole one of his father's tools and used it to completely shave her head. He had once even contemplated running away to avoid the marriage, but that idea was quickly shut down after he realized he knew nothing about surviving in the wild.

As he was brought closer to his 18th birthday, the more invasive his approaches would become. Trian had grown to despise him. Going two years of her life without hair and having gotten in trouble because of him many times had deeply infuriated her. It ignited a fire that burned so bright even the other villagers were blinded by it. She soon started reciprocating the attacks. Unreq would slaughter a lamb and place it in her sleeping quarters, and she would respond by putting worms in his drinking water. The villagers would awaken to sounds of screaming because of the traps the two would lay out for the other. They grew tired of our antics; so did many of the gods.

Unreq and Trian had started influencing bad behavior amongst the children, which infuriated the gods even further. Kids began to act out and state that they would not live their lives for anyone other than themselves (after getting lectures from Unreq, of course). Because of their bickering, the fate of humanity could be compromised. Therefore, the gods held a council and the Duty fell on me, the God of Unity, to come up with a solution to stop this madness once and for all. This deeply annoyed me. There are hundreds of gods, why did I have to be the one to find a solution? I mean, yes, I am the God of Unity, but that does not mean I have to unite every mortal soul.

After pondering for what felt like centuries, it finally hit me. I could just make them feel an emotion completely opposite of what they already felt. If there was night, there was day. If there was water, there was fire. Boy to girl. Sun to sky. Life to death. There was always something to cancel out the other. There came the solution that is more commonly known today as "love." I was thrilled. The gods would finally stop pestering me and I could finally return back to my normal duties. I visited Unreq as he slept, lightly placing my hand on his heart, releasing a feeling that would completely alternate his views of Trian. As morning came, I watched patiently, hoping to see success in my plan.



He awoke like it was any other day. Bathed, dressed, ate. Everything was normal. That was, until he saw her. I watched as he found himself unable to keep his eyes off of her. It wasn't his usual stare of distaste: it looked rather yearnful. Unreq would catch himself wanting to follow her and assist her with her duties. He wondered why her lips looked pinker than usual and why her laugh had more of an angelic tune. *What the hell has gotten into you?* Unreq thought to himself, sickened by his own thoughts.

The entire day he had tried to drown out his thoughts but they were much too loud. He even went as far as crouching down and covering his ears, rocking back and forth in a manic manner. He knew his thoughts weren't his own... but part of him did not want them to stop.

He began to trail her. His body was doing everything it wasn't supposed to do. Smiling when she smiled, crying when she cried. He absolutely hated it. But he could not make it stop. His body felt overwhelmed with the need to have her in its embrace, and the next thing he knew, he had her pinned against a wall.

Trian was quite startled but figured it was one of his little antics. She forcefully smacked him, but he did nothing but hug her in return. She began to question him, and he said nothing. He could not speak, his mind was in pure euphoria, a feeling of bliss that had never been known to man. Eventually, she pushed him off and left without saying a word.

Days went by, and he kept making advances toward her. Even the village people had realized his sudden change in hostility. But people were more put off than pleased. He was too affectionate. He spoke to the kids only using words with positive connotations, describing a feeling none of them could comprehend. People had started to think he had gone mad. Could you blame them? He was speaking of an impossible feeling.

One night he found himself unable to restrain himself any longer and charged towards her sleeping quarters. She was quite startled as he advanced towards her. She started asking him what he was doing and saying how she didn't have time for his games, but she was quickly cut off by his lips. After a while, he separated and made deep eye contact.

"You... I despise you. I despise everything you do. I despise that you exist. I despise that you are always happy and smiling. I hate that smile of yours. I hate the way it makes my heartbeat quicken. I hate the way you get excited every time you see that it rains or that we have completed another good harvest. I hate that you are all I think about, and I hate that your name is the very thing that I breathe out. I hate you Trian. I hate how beautiful you are. I hate how much I want to hold you and be in your embrace. It feels as if my only being for existing is to be by your side. And that is where I want to be. "

After a few moments of silence and a very confused Trian, Unreq tried to kiss her again, but this time she forcefully resisted. "You... you are sick," she breathed out before turning to walk away. However, Unreq grabbed her. She became quite frightened because of the look in his eyes and began to scream. The screaming awoke the villagers and they rushed to Trian's home. The village men quickly forced him away from her as the women quickly went to comfort the now sobbing Trian.

He was restrained and brought to the middle of the village where the chief was made aware of his actions. The other villagers had spoken how he had a history of harassing her and how he had begun to speak of her in a very concerning manner. The chief and the other villagers in unison voted he'd be sentenced to death for his crazed mentality and harassment. Unreq pleaded as he was dragged to the Ngulu.

"Trian, don't let them do this to me," he pleaded.

"You're supposed to be my wife in fourteen days time! Please!"

She sobbed quietly watching as he got dragged off into the distance.



The town's chief and two other men approached him while the villagers dunked his head into the Ngula. Unreq continued to plead and tell the entire village that he had felt something no other man had felt before. But the town's chief wiped Unreq's tears and said, "May the gods have mercy on your soul."

Unreq pleaded desperately, going into detail of how badly he loved Trian until his final breath. I was not allowed to interfere in these sorts of matters. Being the God of Unity only enabled me to do so much. I had been tasked by the gods to stop the bickering and I did. I did what I was told.

The Goddess of the Night had seen everything and informed the other gods. They were furious and blamed me for his death. They demanded I do something to restore balance to the human world or else they'd trade my soul with Unreq's and return his life. They said I must restore his honor and clear his name of all the mentally deranged claims. I am a god, but only the God of Unity. I unite people. I don't save their reputations. But I did not want my eternal life to be stripped away from me.

The only way to prove Unreq was not crazy was to make everyone feel what he felt. It was a risk: if it failed the humans would just kill each other endlessly which would mean my end. But if it worked, it would provide another reason for unison and procreation. I took the risk and blessed the entire population of humanity with the ability to love. And soon enough, order was reestablished and Unreq's name was cleared. However, the woman he had loved quickly realized her feelings for another and married them on the date she was supposed to have married Unreq. Unreq's love remained unrequited. Trian made her way out of a love triangle into a mutually loving relationship. The first man to love was also the very first to be heartbroken, but he allowed other kinds of love to form, not just unrequited.



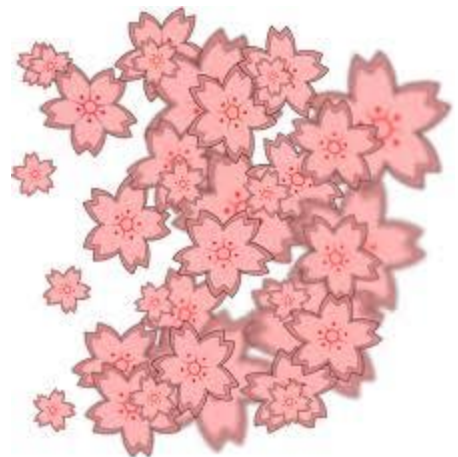
THE LITTLE THINGS

By Daniya “Niya” Royster, Sophomore

A collection of buttons, pins, broaches, and rings
Small enough to fit in your shirt pocket
Simply because power is in the little things
Not because they're expensive
But because power can be found in the little things

A collection of “silly things”
Cookie cutters, porcelain bells, ribbons, love letters
None of which are expensive but one just a tad more important
All because power is found in the littlest of things

Even the littlest of things have power
And I tell you this is true
They hold so much of that power
Because they have a connection to you



THE CALLING OF THE FELDSPAR STONE

By Lilia Molina-Bomberger, Sophomore

The dust from the drafty room clung to my shirt, and the thick scent of incense rushed up my nose. I grabbed the midsection of my pants and gave it a sound shake, trying to clean the muck of the room from myself.

The floorboards were rotted and hollow, clinging to their stronger neighbors for support. It was a mystery how the massive dressers and display tables managed to stay atop of what, fundamentally, was nothing more than mold. Putting aside the fact that there were a dozen or more antiques strategically weighed on top. Skulls, magic orbs, old books, and strange statues of cats with elongated necks were all placed according to height and functionality. I wasn't here to purchase any of the strange knick-knacks that suffocated me in the small room. I was here to talk to the most feared merchant known to the south side of Pemberlin. I was here to talk to a demon of a feared craft, the demon of sorcery.

I walked to the center of the room, an upside-down unicorn horn hanging from the ceiling marked the spot, the last horn of its kind. *God help me*, I thought to myself before tying my hair into a tight ponytail, *I hate this part*. I tapped the tip of my shoe to the sound of what most people say is the "sound of secrets."

I felt the vibrations of falling rocks before I heard loud crashes and rumbles beneath me. I took a deep breath and gently shook my body, resting my arms to my side, readying myself for the fall. A perfectly circular hole opened up, splitting the wood in half and swallowing it into its abyss, taking me along with it. At that moment I broke my promise again to not scream. My eyebrows began to furrow at the thought of what was going to happen next.

I bent my knees slightly to absorb the impact. The sound of howling laughter came from in front of me. I straightened my spine to look up at the sorceress, scowling. I dust myself off for the second time since I walked into the pawnshop.

"Do you insist on having your place be incredibly dirty, or are you really as insufferably lazy as everyone says?" I bat all the dirt from my ponytail and pull a chair to sit in.

"It wouldn't seem so messy if you didn't have the compulsive need to fix everything, old friend," the sorceress responds. She was a tall woman, evenly proportioned, and wore a gentle smile. It was difficult for me to find a reason for anyone to think she was a danger to society.

"Even the chair you are sitting in is perfectly angled to the table you stole it from." She giggled. Even if her world was dark she would always find a way to laugh, no one could take that from her. "You run your ship the same way, I presume? You know that I haven't visited in quite a while."

"Yeah, yeah," I said dismissively. "You mentioned that you have a story to tell me?"

"Ah, yes!" She grabbed her "odor pot", as I called it, tossed some reading leaves in, and moved her hands back and forth accordingly. The smoke from the pot rose, dancing along the dirt ceiling. Then, the scene began to set, the smoke taking its position and transforming into vapor figurines.

"It all starts with a boy with great power, my power. He was unfathomably witty and knew how to solve any problem. It made him charming, in a way, the pride that he took in his own knowledge and power. It made him open to sharing this gift with those who asked and people would venture from all over just to see his magic at work."



The young boy cured everything, from things as small as a scrape on your knee to things as large as a disaster after a storm.

“Do the magic, Aspen! Do the magic!” The people would shout at him, and with a flick of his hand sparks would go flying through a crowd, healing all that it touched.

Although he was content with his newfound responsibility, he was suffocating. He was lost. How do you continue to help others when you don’t know how to help yourself? So, to improve his power and cure his dismay, he set out on a journey to the Combahee river- beyond the mountains that surrounded his beloved village. He spent a week studying the river and its properties, a being that controls life, death, and peace. The boy knew that to be filled with your own peace, you must seek to be the river.

On his last day, a pink feldspar rock was caught in between his feet. It smelled of magic, so for better or for worse, the boy let his curiosity take over him as he picked it up and headed home.

One would suspect that the village would be happy to gain their magic boy back, but they cursed at him.

“How dare you leave us! You are a devil in it for yourself all along.”

He tried to explain, pleading that he did it for them. For his first and last time, he cried for help, but no one came. The people drew a consensus and burned him at the stake on the night of a blue moon.

“They say that the magic stone, the pink feldspar was the only thing to make it out unscathed.” The sorceress finished.

“And you want me to steal it, I suspect?” I said, slouching in my chair.

“It’s not stealing if the founder is dead.”

“I suppose,” I pondered. I did need something to pass the time, and I never refuse an adventure. I sighed before looking at her. “Ok, let’s do it!”

Then, the ceiling shook.



UNNAMED

By Widdershins, Freshman

I like to believe that I was born to the woods, her motherly branches enclosing me in a lush embrace. Her limbs always wave to me, recognizing me as one of Her own every step I take. She always catches my eye, a leaf twirling with me, landing on my head. Hearing the whispers of Her breath through the twigs and brush. Calling my name.

I like to believe that I was born of the woods. My first memories take place playing in Her soft moss, my small fingers grazing the gentle breeze, reaching to grab at nothing. My head rested on tree roots, never to be moved. The older memories of swinging in the trees, laughing with the wind as the tops of the canopies sway. I loved it when She tried to shake me off like that, always finding time to play with me.

But Mother had other responsibilities. She had to knit the notes to the birds' song, place vines, and chisel stones. So while She was working, I would go play elsewhere. I wouldn't bother Mother, I knew better than that. She has responsibilities, as do the rest of us.

So I would find things to do. My responsibilities, if you will. I love running up our creek, the muddy waters flowing against me, splashing my clothing, dirtying my hair. The crayfish jumping and floating through tangled mounds of creek-weed, or that's what I call it. When I'm not in the waters, I'll climb the trees and admire the never-ending stretch of branches, enclosing everything in itself, keeping everything safe. And I thank my Mother for that. She keeps everything well-mannered, clean. I'll breathe in the cold air and let it flow out of my pores, becoming one with the wind-chilled spirit of everything.

Mother would always come back, however. When the birds' song sounded lovely and the stones were round and soft, She would return to me. Mother would blow wind through my hair and the forest would smell damp and mossy. I always loved the smell of the forest.

I like to believe I was born to the woods. But I've spoken to Mother. From a young age, she chiseled me a stone in which to sit, where she'd whisper words in my ears, allowing conversation between the both of us, whispering back. I would curl up in that stone and touch the leaves surrounding me, my knees pressed to my chest, facing the sunset. We talked during sunsets, me watching the sun slip below the horizon and disappear from sight as the trees grew quiet, illuminated under the burning stars and sometimes a sliver of moon.

"Mother, why am I unlike you?" I ask, defeated. Mother wasn't a physical being. She was the wind, the shaking leaves in the fall, the spirit of the woods, the clouds about to rain, the love of nature in everyone. I never understood why I was so different. "I want to be the smell of the rain, just like you."

"It wasn't written in the stars." The wind tussles my hair. I tighten my grip on my shins and sigh.

"I wish it was." I stare at the inky black sky start to seep into view. The stars shine in my eyes and I navigate constellations as Mother taught me.

"You are made from the stars. Stardust makes up your flesh, it glows in the light of its own kind." She whispers, the wisdom of words consuming me, making me feel safe.

"Are you made of the stars, Mother?" At these words, she sighs into my hair.

"I am not. I am a pure idea of what you recognize as your creator. To you, I am somewhat materialized, but to others, I could simply be the innocent thoughts of a child. I may be nothing, I may be everything. It's up to one's mind to decide for itself."

I'm entranced by her words, but they're all unknown to me.

“Since I am kin to the stars and you aren’t, what does this mean?” I grow tired, the sliver of the moon seducing my eyelids to grow heavy.

“It means we are different. I am your Mother in spirit because you were born in this wood. Your true mother knew you would be safer with me, and I took you to help you grow in the ways of pure nature. Pure love.” She whispers.

“What about my mother? Who is she?”

“She was a beautiful woman. She looked much like you and loved you with such intensity. She never wanted to let you go.”

“Why did she?” My eyelids grow heavier still, my eyes glossing. I thought of those words.

“She didn’t have a choice, she was headed toward a grave desert to run from a fight she thought she could get through if she hid.” My eyes didn’t tear, but they threatened.

“She passed in the desert, didn’t she?”

“Yes, my child. But we must remember that everything that happens is destined to.”

“Yes, Mother.”

And down a rabbit hole, I fall, wondering about my true mother, sleep entrancing me in the cool night air.

“Goodnight, my child.”

My Child.

“Goodnight, Mother.”

And to sleep, I fall. Dreaming of the vines and bugs of the woods.

Safe paths to find deer.

And the undying desire to know the material from which my flesh was formed.

The same nose and hands I’ll never know.

And I reminisce in the unknown of who I am.

I won’t ever know.

And I have to realize that I only *like* to believe I was born to the woods. But alas, I am not.

THE FEAR OF THE FOLLOWED

By Bodie Ko, Sophomore

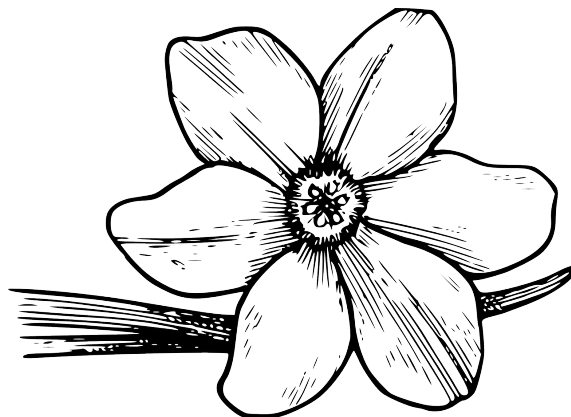
Somewhere in the crushing darkness, I slide from unconsciousness. Eventually, I realize the abyss that surrounds me is just the back of my eyelids. Blinking heavily, I open my eyes and groggily look around. Vaguely wondering what time it is, I reach for my phone. But something catches my eye and there, standing in the darkest corner of the room, is the figure. All the sleepiness that hung around me like a heavy blanket evaporates and I slowly slide my legs out from under the blanket trying not to catch its attention. As my feet touch the floor I throw the bedsheet off and sprint for the door. Then, pausing, I look back and see it following me. I throw the door open and run down the hall. Then, I rush down the stairs, even leaping over the last few, and throw the front door open. I take off running down the street. I look back to see the figure standing at the front door dressed, as always, in a large overcoat and a fedora that launches its face into darkness. With each step, it moves unnaturally fast and quickly starts to gain on me. Heart pounding, I run down the street. Sparse moonlight shines through the trees, illuminating the road. As I turn down a side road, feet slapping the pavement, insanity tears at my mind. Fear pushes out all logical thought, leaving behind only primal instincts. I glance behind me and panic builds in my chest. It's getting closer. Fear closes around my lungs, strangling me in its cold grip. I turn down another side road and another as my vision becomes hazy. Driven purely by instincts by now, I try to lose the figure tailing me. I turn this way and that, following no logical route, but it only gets closer.

As I run, my warped mind takes in the strange details around me as I sprint by. The tree roots reach up from the ground, trying to grab my feet. Then, the road swallows my legs up to my shins like quicksand. As I continue to run under streetlights, their light collapsing around me like a heavy blanket, a searing stitch erupts in my ribcage. Unconsciously my pace slows, the pain mounting steadily. Then, turning down an alley, I trip over a garbage bag that had been left by the side of a dumpster. I look up and see that a brick wall blocks my path. I look to my left and right to only be met with more brick walls. I've run myself into a corner.

As the figure walks into the alley after me, slowing to a trot, my vision begins to clear. The fear, which had been pulsing through me for so long, builds in my head and threatens to burst. I turn onto my back and try to crawl away, screaming incoherently at it. My back hits the alley wall and all I can do is watch as it draws closer and closer. A cold, clear laugh emanates from it, like rolling thunder. Then, the laugh rises in pitch and volume until the figure sounds like it's shrieking in pain. A scream rips through me, the sheer force of it tearing at my throat, as it looms over me. It gets down on one knee, the silhouette of its still indiscernible face inches from my own. Then, everything goes dark.

UPPERCLASSMEN

This year, 11th and 12th grade students learned about speculative fiction, magazine publishing, screenwriting, and surrealism. Seniors specialized in their own high quality creations, and students worked in teams with other arts to develop the 2022 CASALive! production.



THE FLOWERING DOGWOOD -

FROM HIS SENIOR PROJECT, AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF TREES

By Owen Trufahnestock, Senior

The Flowering Dogwood has an average height of 20 feet with a trunk diameter of about 2 feet. The flowering dogwood leaves are classified as simple leaves that grow opposite each other, are oval, and are three to six inches long. The leaves are half as broad and have smooth edges. Flowering Dogwood bark is a grey-brown to grey color with a rough texture divided into irregular square plates. A great time to see this tree in its glory is in late April when the Flowering Dogwood blooms red, pink, or white.



MORTAL REBELLION

By Griffin Kent, Junior

the illegitimacy that resides in my heart, my lungs, my soul
my back breaking from the weight of immeasurable disrepair
 eyes sagging and sinking into shadows
 my bones are rotting
disgusting decaying secrets secreting from every crevice of my being
 ravished rodents feast on my lies
 they dine on my deceit
 they prey on my potent past
 preventing my body from its holy prevail
a translucent, glitching hollow halo sliding off of my fragile mind
 i must keep it together
 rough tacky duct tape lining its flickering fluorescent rim
 a sliver of cold metal rod piercing it into my brains
 a master of my craft, it appears to float in their eyes
 i must keep it up
fraying ruby fabric falling over my protruding swollen ankles
vivacious velvety robes wrapping my gross graying skin
 delicate dazzling words disguising dental dysostosis
 morphing masks over a gross grimace
 my being is an illusion
 they follow blindly



LUNAR SOLSTICE

By Griffin Kent, Junior

the moon phasing,
shifting in sequence with
the phases of emotions
the stars shed light on
broken hearts and tattered pasts
the moon heals wounds and
shares peace as it moves

the cycle is infinite
repeating night and day
it's the passing of our lives
and we are but stargazers

shooting stars kiss our foreheads
they bring light to the darkness
when we're together my pain subsides
you are my night sky

this cycle has ended
you're no longer in my grasp
you are now one with the moon
my heart lives there too



THE RAT EXPERIMENT

By Rowan Valera, Junior

Noah was a rabid dog muzzled by stifling silence. He was not chained nor locked, yet he was trapped in desolation. The cooing ticks of clocks and the cicada's hiss have softened to a buzzing haze of quiet. Noah's eyes wandered across his walls, his hands fixated on and fiddling with metal needles. He could barely see the deep champagne color behind the amalgamation of sketches, paintings, photographs, and yarn creations on his walls. It was a slightly ridged surface; not truly flat nor gnarled with novice. Unless someone was truly looking, they would not notice. When the dryness became too much, his eyes shut in an almost mechanical fashion.

The cool clink of knitting needles only embittered the man; he glanced at his hands. The yarn was a gray web, latched on to his tool. The blanket layed disheartedly on the floor, folded in on itself. There was nothing wrong with the half-finished blanket, on the contrary it was perfect.

Yet, he did not enjoy knitting, nor painting nor playing instruments nor creating. They were means to fill the void of the barren lands. Setting it down on the nearby table, he remembers how yarn can't converse with him- nothing can.

He could out knit the machines from the Past, the time before, when Noah could walk outside and be greeted by another human rather than the hostile roar of the untracked lands. He leaned back into the brown aged couch and stretched, a guttural yawn escaped him. Frowning, Noah begrudgingly pushed himself up.

He stepped over the unorganized chaos covering the living room floor, stumbling over plastic bottles and plates that he hadn't brought himself to finally clean. The door shook when he slammed it, trembling slightly. It was as though the sun was piercing every pore on his body. Sweat beaded at his hairline. Squinting, he cast his eyes to the familiar relics of a forgotten past. Scanning the area in front of him, he studied his surroundings. There were tall, looming buildings all around his home. They were all a lifeless gray, the walls were crumbled incomplete versions of themselves. Broken pieces bestrewed the little town, dust and massive chunks covering the roads and sidewalks. It's almost impossible to traverse.

Noah was sure that at some point those buildings had been overflowing with people living lives more fulfilling than his. He was sure that this was a popular town at some point. There were traces everywhere of the lives he could never have. Half-burnt baby toys and trinkets could be found in a majority of the homes. He despised how, whenever he ventured the town, the pictures of the smiling dead were shoved down his throat. They mocked him. They laughed at him. They *loved* at him. At times he wasn't sure whether he was lucky to be alive, or damned. It ate at him on days like these.

YOUR NAME

By Shelby Rudy, Junior

The stars know your name,
I told them about you.

I told them about you and your sapphire eyes,
The way they sparkled in the light.

The way they sparkled when you looked at me,
I couldn't help but love you.

I couldn't help but love you even when you didn't feel the same.
My heart is made of broken glass.

My heart is made of broken glass and every time you laughed, it cracked a little more.
Band-aids can't fix bullet wounds.

Band-aids can't fix the wounds time has left on me.
I couldn't tell you what I needed to say.

I couldn't tell you the words that flooded my head when I saw you,
So I told them to the stars, they know your name.

BREATHE

By Shelby Rudy, Junior

I feel as if I am drowning,
But I can still breathe.

I can still breathe the salty water into my lungs,
Large waves crash over me.

Large waves crash with such a violent force,
They push and pull me into the current.

They push and pull me rocking me into eternal sleep,
I tell them I am not tired, that I am not ready to leave.

I tell them I am not tired and still my eyes grow heavy and my body weak.
Water still is filling my lungs.

Still filling my lungs with words I wish I said.
There is a storm at sea.

There is a storm in my head, anxious rain falls, angry currents roar and tides steal away my thoughts.
I feel as if I am drowning in myself.

BABY CANDLE

By Rowan Valera, Junior

Negligence and generations of wrong ruined me.
It robbed me of my inner self.

It robbed me of my inner self,
and raised me to believe I am my body.

I am my body when I dress it nicely.
My mother and negligence are at fault.

My mother and negligence allowed for the blown candle.
I did not know about the candle then.

Should I have known about the candle then?
I was too young to know such a right from wrong.

Now it's too late to pull the right from wrong.
Hes and hims are now complicated enigmas-

I am weary of hes and hims.
My person is not mine when they come.

It is not mine when they hurt me.
It's a commodity, I am a commodity.

As a commodity, when I dress nicely it never goes well.

CHANGELING

By A.J. Smith, Junior

The feeling of emptiness and loss,
warmth and oven-baked hugs went cold
All the while of my love, draining and falling to the abyss of hatred.
The push away of my heart, closing all holes and letting the beat stop.

The cold whispers of the voices
circling my mind and focusing my eyes on the trickling blood.
The blue flame kindled until my hand reaches and touches the tip,
the sprouting hurricane bursts and flew me away,

The aching pain and the standing figure approach me,
cold eyes fixate on me, and the masking of the ruthless figure.

Closer I look, the focus is so clear,
the deserted eyes, the look of anger,
the look of loss, the look of...murder...

“What’s wrong...? **SCARED?**”

There’s not enough room for the two of us,
so one must go. Rip my heart and let it bleed,
but take my place and you can fix my heart with ease.

DAY DREAM LOVE LETTER

By Davis Sherer, Senior

Oh, Belladonna!

My Belladonna!

Why do you flout such a weak heart?

Have you been struggling with the villainies of a fair maiden?

My, how dastardly!

You butcher me!

Aroint thee evil feelings and come now to embrace me!

Do you forbid it?

Does this thriftless game give you passion?

Oh my, Belladonna do not be a herald and torment me!

Oh, the temptation you are soliciting in my dreams!

The wanton of my heart can not be contained for thee!

For you are a serpent who wreaks havoc to my Adam!

Yes Belladonna you are harbinger to my Eden!

Now Belladonna!

Take thy metaphysical crown and erode it!

If only wouldst thou holily take my heart!

You tempt me!

You tempt me!

Oh, Belladonna!

End these dismal dreams!

Be a sorry temptress and take thy cut.

MURKY UMBER

By Jonah Caudle, Junior

I don't think you know who I am, and I'm not
quite sure I know you.

A childhood indolently studied through empty
glass is a sorrowful one

The murky umber that plagued you
dismantled my innocence

Scents of carcinogen filled my head

And rankness permeated the living room
when the sun set.

Dusk's final rays of day would stretch across
the mahogany walls

Without uttering a word, your robust, bistered
arms would reach for the battered Ovation

How you worked the instrument with such
delicacy and intricacies fostered my
bewilderment.

Through the befuddlement past your eyes
you'd manage a lulling melody

One that fills a juvenile dome with teetering
tinges.

Eyes would watch as you drowsed into
slumber

After a final sip of that murky umber.

WISTERIA LANE

Jonah Caudle, Junior

Grit of the rough gravel road besmirches our
car's exterior

Winter's bitter reign coats it in epsom

Following its frigid departure, the mountain
side receives an inundation of warmth.

The fawn shaded hillside reverts to its
illustrious viridescence

Through the month of April, the establishment
of Spring

In anticipation, I await your arrival

And when May manifests

Your buds begin to bloom with hues of mauve
and midnight

Spring's breath cradles petals to nature's floor

A sugared aroma sings a benign melody

Florets waltz and sway with the weeping
branches that hang,

Hanging over Wisteria Lane.

DEAR FEBRUARY

By Ruby Tilder, Senior

In February sat like swans
In brown and white and gray
Cranberry street and flocking geese
Honk and flap and bray

In February branches bend
Bark corpses crunch and snap
Decaying wind whips and whirls
And warmth gathers on my lap

In February true as can be
We lean over iron wrought
Confess love to the water below
And pray we don't get caught

In February leaves still linger
Grass is insect-free
Statues shiver, foot-to-finger
Chilled from knee to knee

In February, merry, hairy
We bluster in breathy breeze
Foreheads exposed to shiny sky
Wind likes to laugh and tease

In February things are dark
And snow is all but gone
Skies cloud captivating gray
Rare sunspots dapple fawn

In February windchimes shrivel
Into brushes of naked branches
Bricks and windows freeze over pale
River rain drips and dances

In February rocks cuddle, huddle
Pavement ripples and lumps
Rain-sogged grass and dirt-bogged mass
Grow beneath sidewalk humps

In February air is fragile
Breaths can feel like glass
Shards discarded, souls departed
Freezes frighteningly fast

In February stuck between
The Ferry Harrisburg
Birds part the mist
A wasteful wist
A plea for life to be heard

In February bench's spine
Curves concerning medically
Shrubs and weeds and river reeds
Curl up around its feet

In February roses taste like rot upon the tongue
And from our tooth
It tells the truth
Of Springtime yet to come

In February by the water
Lovedrunk riverside
I will say
To remember the day
Winter lived
And Springtime died

WORTHY

By August Patterson, Senior

I know that I'm not held as highly as others, aware that your golden crown laced with wonders of praise and fulfillment will never grace my brow. I will never feel that sense of happiness knowing that my efforts to achieve more are fruitless in your vision— like some bitten peach now tossed into eerie shadows to rot toward the pit of despair. That limelight won't shine upon me like it does to the others, yet I am not jealous or angered.

What I tell myself isn't true. In reality the latter is a comforting realm of falsehood festering in some wretched mind, blood curdling solid in an attempt to make this body feel whole. Because who am I to attempt to have your sun bless this body if I was never even considered a planet in your solar system to begin with? No, I'm simply some meteor flung too quickly in your lifetime for you to care and soon enough I'll burn up under your stare.

RESTRICTED

By Kylie Mah, Junior

Oh, you poor soul
Forever belittled and small
You always wondered if you'd ever be it all
I watched you rummage in wrenching illness
Your body falling frail
The bones protruding from your flesh
Deny, deny, deny
Everything that was handed to you
Deny, deny, deny
I never knew it would suck you up for over a decade
You put on such a pretty façade until your face went opaque
Though you sought the solution
You projectiled uncontrollably
The crunch against something soft
The cold half meeting the smoldering underside
The racing uncontrollable thoughts
Left remnants underneath the toilet seat
Or residue in the sink
You had to close your eyes praying it would stop
Hefty breaths and glossy orbs
A hint of acid inside of your nose
You could feel it lodged inside of your throat
Oh, to devour that same plate of poison once more
Derived of nooses and faux flavor
Made you recoil and tense
Please, unchain me from these everlasting ropes
My body won't take it much longer

CASA'S RENAISSANCE

Recreating

— OURSELVES —

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