



FILIBUSTER

2018



Cover art painted by Cason McDermott
Inspired by Caitlin Celka's photo from Ambleside-Grasmere, England
Study abroad trip, summer 2017

Dear Readers,

The theme of Filibuster 2018 was "Nature." Nature is all around us and it is important for us to take a moment and slow down our busy lives to truly notice it. When we make an effort to stop and smell the flowers, drown out the noise of our walk through the park and solely focus on the sound of the wind blowing the trees and gusting over our skin, tilt our heads back like children and taste the raindrops as they fall from the sky, or see the silly anthropomorphic trees we pass every day, we become more in tune not only with nature but also with ourselves. Nature allows us to escape the hustle and bustle of our daily routines and simply enjoy what it means to be human. When we begin to appreciate the natural world, we develop new perspectives and new hopes.

I thank all of the readers and writers because our magazine would be impossible without you. My thanks go to the co-editors, Michelle Aitken and Bryan Warren, for their constant help and support throughout the semester and to our faculty advisor, Dr. Robert Klevay, for always being there when I needed him. My endless gratitude goes to Megan Lofgren for her patience and incredible artistic eye. Nature has a way of speaking to the soul and I want to encourage anyone who picks up this copy to go outside and sit for a while as you read. Reflect on the beauty of the words and on how far you've come.

Thank you all for this Filibuster 2018 journey.

Editor-in-Chief,

Caitlin Celka

THE TEAM

Caitlin Celka
Editor in Chief



I am a graduate student in AUM's Master of Liberal Arts (MLA) program. Outside of editing for Filibuster, I am vice president of AUM's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, an international English honors society, interning for AUM's Honors Program, and researching for my thesis. I am a huge fan of Kate Chopin whose stories are the perfect combination of fascinating and uncanny. After graduation, I plan to publish a book based on a series of back-to-back dreams I had—I cannot wait to share it with the world.

Megan Lofgren
Graphic Designer



I am a Junior at AUM, majoring in Graphic Design and minoring in Music and Art History. I love reading, music, and making things. When I'm not spending time with my husband or friends I like to bake, play with my dog, and plan roadtrips.

Michelle Aitkin
Co-Editor



My favorite author is Edgar Allan Poe. I love reading and playing with my cats and playing video games. I'm in Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. I'm an assistant editor for THAT Literary Magazine. After graduation, I plan to enroll in the MLA program at AUM. One day, I hope to be a literature professor.

Bryan Warren
Co-Editor



I am from Tallassee, Alabama. I received my Bachelor's Degree in English from AUM and am currently in the MLA English program. In my spare time I like to play video games, go to the movies, go to concerts or shows, watch anime, and read comic books and light novels. My favorite author is Makoto Shinkai. My current favorite book is Your Name. After graduation I hope to go on to get my PhD and teach English at the college level.

Team photos taken by LyAnne Peacock

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Want to join in?

Interested in joining the Filibuster staff? Email Dr. Klevay at rklevay@aum.edu to ask about available staff positions!

We are already accepting submissions for our 2019 edition of the Filibuster. Send your creative works as an attached file to: filibuster@aum.edu. Our deadline for the 2019 issue is December 31st. Don't hesitate to ask us questions!



Left
Still
Cockerham-Buttermere, England
Caitlin Celka

Right
Silhouette and Reflection Study in Blue
Jonathan E. McNulty



POETRY

2 a.m. Snowy Dreams
Destiny Cheyenne Bishop



Two A.M. Thoughts

by Haley Cole

The life and death of all can be seen,
With a compelling and complex insight for
things that may be.
Every aspect in life is a variable, ever changing,
Swirling in a mass of construction or demolition.

How is it possible?
Why is it here?
Two questions that always come forth in rivalry—
The chicken or the egg?

Now leaves once green shift to bronze,
And the sky, its personality originally grey,
Becomes radiant, with a golden array.
But still questions remain.
How can one wage war on a concept born of
Human thought?
Considering our afflictions cause more convictions than progress

Beauty, is it a sin or a virtue?
To this I say, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”
But what of chaos?
To this I say, “Chaos breeds creation!”
Yet, a congress of truths lies within belief.

For instance, one thing can be three at once,
Yet, opposite in every way simultaneously—
Water.

Questions, questions, questions, twist our minds
They make us mad, yet: “All the best people are.”
And we can try of course,
To inch closer and closer to a revelation.
But still I contemplate the consequences,
That may be born in pursuit of answers.
Still answers come in the form of dreams,
Are they images of things to come?
Or simply the potential for what might be?

Lifeforce

by Haley Cole

Imagination flows,
Swirling and pumping, it drives the body,
The mind.
It can take on different personas and possess vibrant hues.
Breeding creation,
Birthing chaos,
Pulsing dark red like life blood.
Giving life—
Or killing it.
Spilling forth from the vein, pooling into mosaics,
But how can that flowing spread be caged?
Only by the barrenness of a pen—
Yet ... there are other ways.



A Poetic Moment

by Haley Cole
(Inspired by Leonid Afremov's "A Loving Moment")

Summer switches to Autumn
from
the
center
Outward towards the edges
the colors are becoming ever darker

The sun is sinking and a freshly fluctuated forest
begins to transform into night
Darkness Darkness
creeps along the edges
and a coolness descends upon the world

Trees sway back and forth yet hold sturdy
branches bounce becoming bold beneath billowing breezes
The leaves
have
fallen
and found a gentle repose on the surface of the crisply chilled Earth

But amidst all aspects of the Autumn evening,
A newly-wed couple stands out from all of nature's alterations.
They stand a bright pillar, watching the seasons shift,
The man cradles his wife in arms draped in blue,
And her arm catches behind his neck.
They're both holding each other—
A loving embrace or a simple source of stability—
Together they are a solid form, surrounded by constant change.

El Burro Rojo y Azul

by Alex Cotton

There it is
Like a cheery hanging man.
Un burro rojo
y azul.

It is soft
Like the grass I lay on,
After I am spun one time too many.

Blindfolded figures flog el burro.
They chant while they do so,
Feliz cumpleaños a ti.
Finally, the fatal blow arrives.

It bursts, tiny plastic bottles litter the ground.
Adult candy rains from the sky.





Ode to Helm Crag

by Caitlin Celka

(Inspired by the rocks on Helm Crag in the Lake District that locals refer to as “The Lion and the Lamb,” Cumbria, England)

All I see is the fog. It creeps out past the horizon and lingers awhile.
Squinty-eyed, I look further and see the blurred, lush green up in the clouds.
The jagged boulders on the mountain are hardly visible through the haze.
I hunger to see them. My soul needs it.
Everyone surrounding me sees them—why can’t I?
Their taunting oohs and ahhs possess me.
Maybe it’s not in fact the thickness of the air or the approaching icy mist.
Maybe it’s me.

Discouraged, I turn my back and begin to walk away.
Has God turned His back on me?
I’m frantic now.
Is God with everyone that sees them but me?
William and Dorothy saw them over two centuries ago—why can’t I?
Anxiety overcomes me.
Why won’t God answer me?
I turn back one final time and look up to the mountain.

There they are.
I truly see them.
Chills wash over me.
My troubled heart is calmed.
I see them side-by-side.
The Lion is walking with the Lamb.
They are together at last.
My hope is restored.

The Lion and the Lamb

Caitlin Celka

A Flower for Every Fraud

by Erin Terrell

Snapdragons in my mouth
Tainted, like wine-stained lips.
“Skirts are for girls and
Shorts are for boys”.

Black and white simplicity
On wooden floors,
On colorless walls,
On scripture.

Snapdragons tangle my hair,
They flutter like flies around me.
“This world is right:
It is wrong to lie.”

I do my homework every day,
Go to choir in the mornings,
Church is on Wednesday.
Am I remembering the right verse?

Snapdragons hit the floor
A mass of dying flowers,
Never to live again,
Caressing a dying dogma.

It gets easier
“You’re right,”
As I age,
“God bless you,”
The lying.

All I See

by Erin Terrell

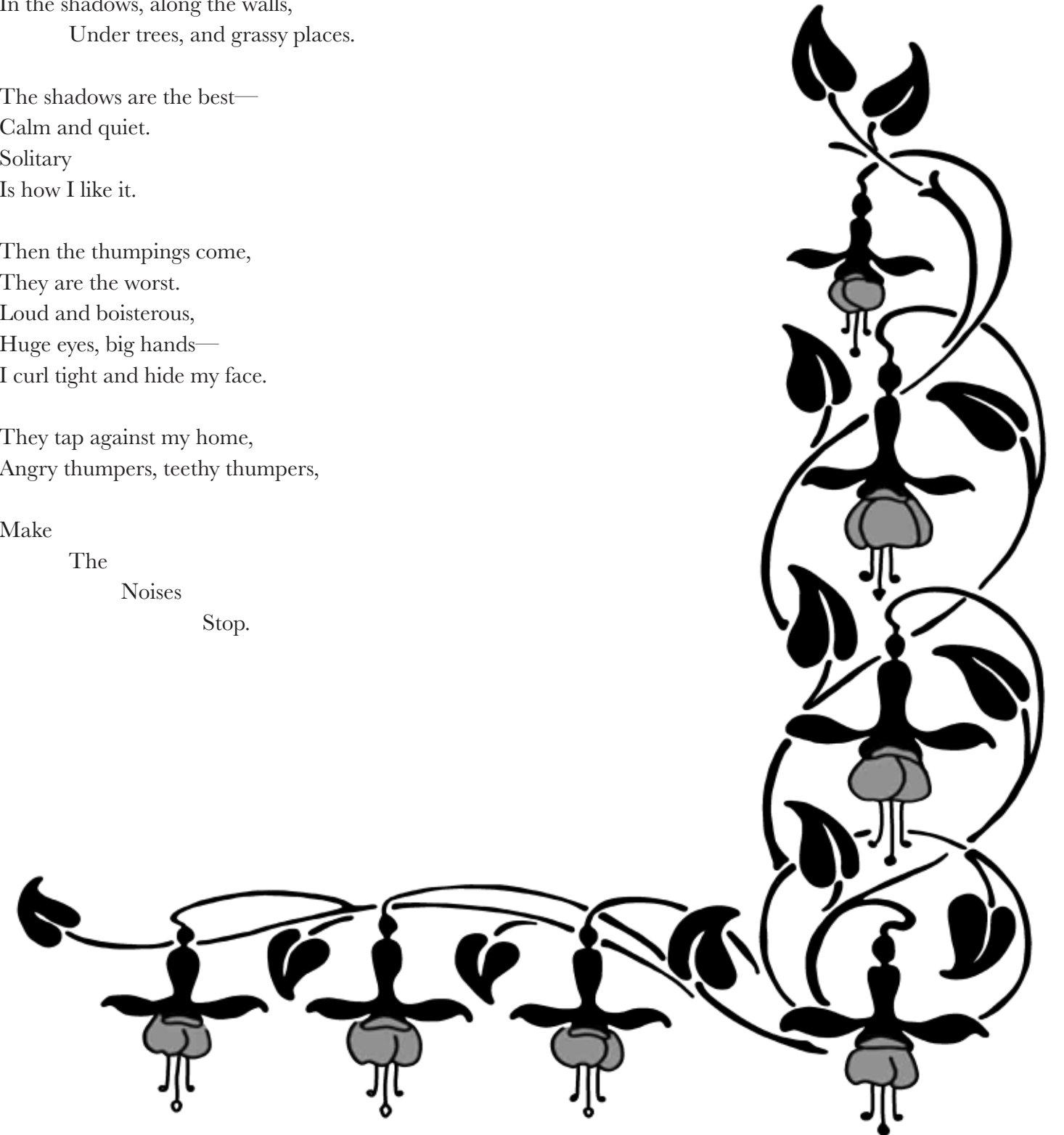
My house is where I make it—
In the shadows, along the walls,
Under trees, and grassy places.

The shadows are the best—
Calm and quiet.
Solitary
Is how I like it.

Then the thumpings come,
They are the worst.
Loud and boisterous,
Huge eyes, big hands—
I curl tight and hide my face.

They tap against my home,
Angry thumpers, teathy thumpers,

Make
The
Noises
Stop.



The Ballad of Harrison Hart

by James Alexander Scott

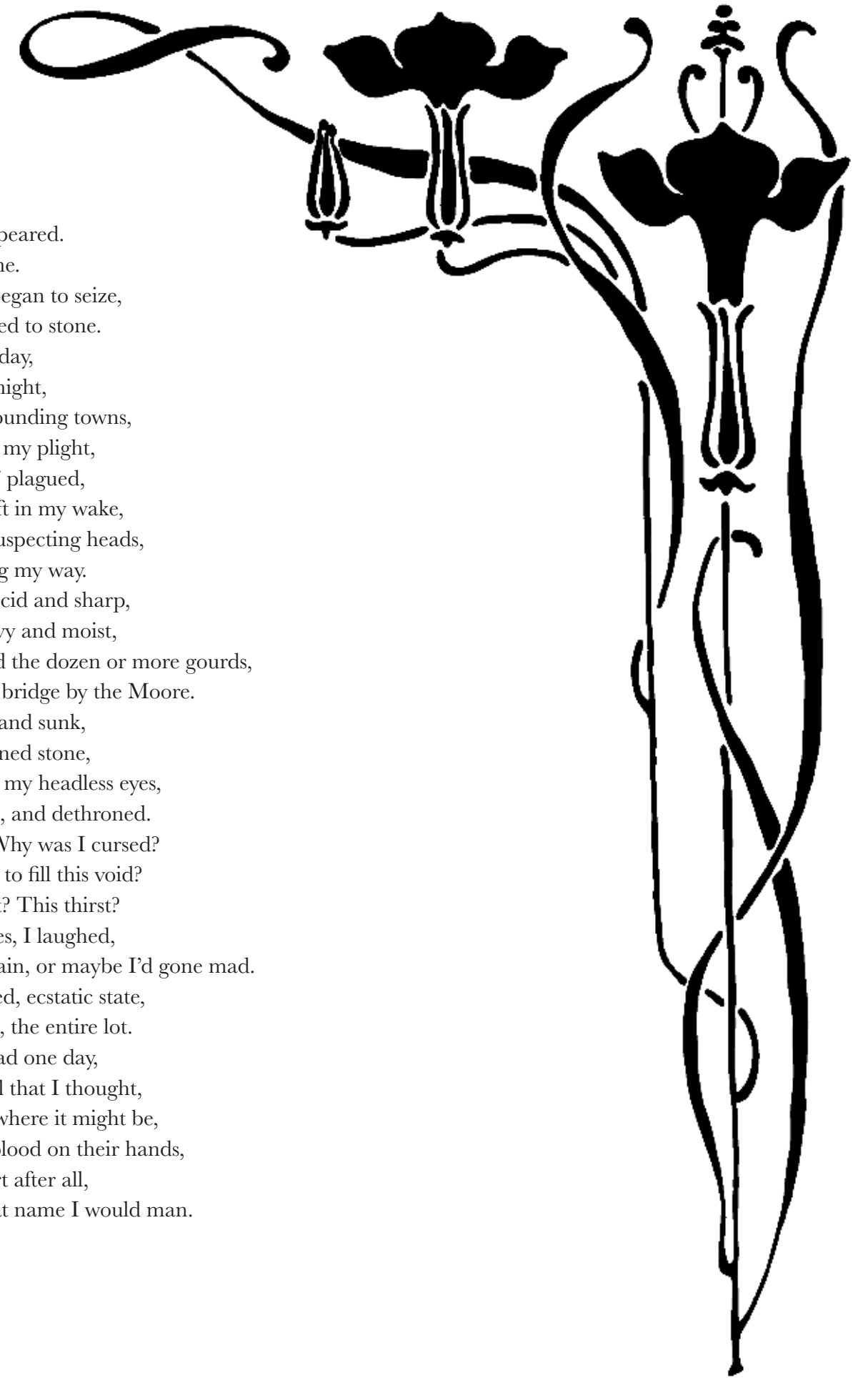
They call me Harrison Hart,
but this name I've never known,
for when the name became myself,
I had no soul, I had no home.
I woke a day in darkness,
head severed from my neck,
and 'twas from that day,
that my soul forsook me and fled.
I remember my dear mother,
I remember how she wept,
when they laid my body down,
headless there I slept.
I hovered like a fiend,
in repose, a hollow shell,
and found myself in sorrow,
for all that had befall.
The casket, it was pine,
the snapdragons were fresh,
the hole they dug for me,
'twas deeper than the rest.
Yet still, a few days later,
I possessed my fallen bones,
and began to search the night,
for my head, lost and unknown.
Rumors began to abound,
of a ghoulish living deep in the wood.
They said he wandered tree to tree,
kidnapping children, all that he could.
I say, it wasn't my fault,
I was only looking for a head.
The children, they were so gullible,
but none of theirs fit my neck.

Eventually, I began roaming,
a trail of headless children behind,
until I found a home where we all could live,
a forest that seemed to stop time.
We told stories, we had laughs,
life was grand amidst the trees,
and I was evermore elated,
for my newfound company.
We lived this way for many weeks,
playing games, and living life,
or the only kind of life we could,
one in death, and one in strife.
Then a man came to our home,
he was tall, and stark, and fine,
he had come to take my children,
take them to the other side.

"They are not yours to take!"
I screamed in my hollow, headless voice.
But with one quick flick of his enchanted wand,
their souls he began to hoist.
I watched as my children vanished,
one by one, they were gone,
it was just myself and the man,
left to bask in the ethereal dawn.
"Why?" I asked the man. "Why take them all from
me?"

"They were not yours to keep," he said. "They de-
serve to be free.
And your time too will come Mr. Hart, I'll return for
you one day.
When your heart is less bound by earthly things, less
tortured by your own dismay."

With that, he disappeared.
I was again left alone.
My own thoughts began to seize,
as my heart, it turned to stone.
Day after dawning day,
night after waking night,
I searched the surrounding towns,
for my head, but in my plight,
I only found myself plagued,
with the bodies I left in my wake,
and the bag of unsuspecting heads,
that I dragged along my way.
The stench was rancid and sharp,
the weight was heavy and moist,
I eventually hurdled the dozen or more gourds,
from a cobblestone bridge by the Moore.
They hit the water and sunk,
as did my heart-turned stone,
and I watched with my headless eyes,
as the moon, it rose, and dethroned.
Why was I killed? Why was I cursed?
With this avid need to fill this void?
This ravenous want? This thirst?
Then I chuckled, yes, I laughed,
Maybe it was the pain, or maybe I'd gone mad.
But in my maddened, ecstatic state,
the world was mine, the entire lot.
I would find my head one day,
and I'd slaughter all that I thought,
had any notion of where it might be,
any inkling of my blood on their hands,
I was Harrison Hart after all,
and it was time; that name I would man.



An Old Relic

by James Alexander Scott

A ring of dust sits on a shelf,
forgotten, unkempt, and uncleaned.
While a polished chain lies on the floor,
beneath a boy's wide-eyed gleam.
He sits, and he plays,
and in the small frame of his hand rests a shimmering disc.

It's silver and it shines,
but its gloss is a disguise
for no ticking within it exists.

"Grandpa what's this? I've never seen one before?
What does it do? What is it for?"

The old man leaned forward,
his white beard draped wild
while his grey eyes, they peered,
then they squinted and smiled.
"That is a relic from a time you'll never know.
Before the great machines.
Before the world began to grow.
That is called a watch. Might be the last of its kind.
Its been dead now many years but it used to tell time."

"Tell time? How so?
It doesn't blink. It doesn't glow."

"Not all things, my boy, require grand lights and show."

And with that he stood,
brown cane his third leg,
and bent, reaching for the charm.
His hands were shaking,
his knuckles concaved,
and bruises tiptoed up his arms.
"This was my fathers,
his fathers before him.

Now it is mine,
though I've not always been,
the type of man to hold a watch,
a glass ring and the like,
and have dirtied more good clothes
than your grandma would've liked."

"If you want it boy its yours,
I never knew how to keep it.
Never knew how to wear it,
show it or clean it."

The boy stood and grasped it,
soft innocent hands.
He then darted away
all that energy unmanned.
The old man sat down,
arms heavy on his chair,
collar wrinkled, fingers weak,
out the black glass he stared.
The world was far too busy,
far too bright and too fast.
But within the arms of a canvas-backed chair,
an old relic can remember his past.

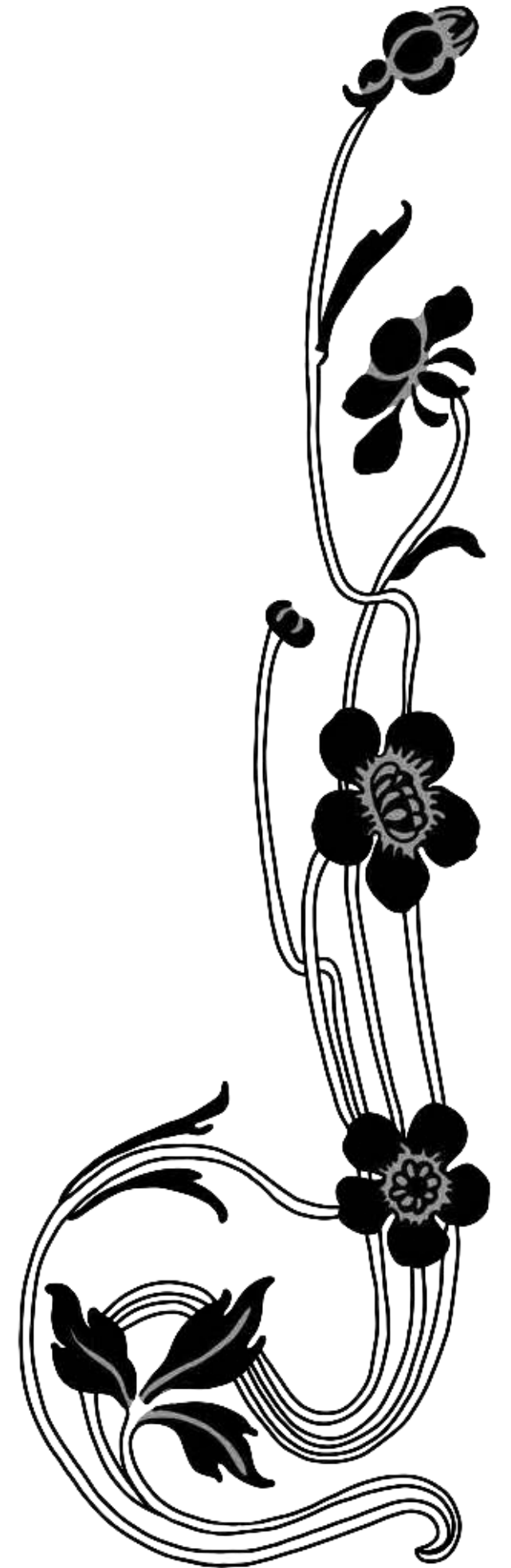
Lolly's Box

by Pamela Harris

A beautiful woman in a frame,
she looks as if she could speak,
delicately pictured upon the dainty box.
Soft pink flowers on faded pale paint,
Four corners with a golden clasp.

It opens to reveal information,
an address and a phone number
of a woman in memory.
To hold the box is to hold her hand;
as the clasp snaps and it opens,
it is a window to the past.

The box had a home with her.
In the morning as we would rise,
the first sight would be Lolly
at the table with the box resting beside her.
When I see the woman in the picture,
and on the ancient gold box,
I see my grandmother in my dreams.



Blood Red Romance

by James Alexander Scott

The night was cold as I ran down the cobblestone street.
My blue dress dragged the road behind me,
and my heels clicked with each step.
I ripped them off and ran for the bridge.
It was my intention to jump,
but I fell to my knees and began crying.
I opened my eyes to find a yellow flower.
I looked around but saw nothing,
nothing but the dark night.
I felt a smile on my face.
I stood and walked away,
that smile along for the ride.

I was sitting on the rail,
contemplating the jump,
when I heard you run.
You fell to your knees,
tears thumping the stone,
as your golden hair tickled the ground.
I plucked a flower from the bricks
and placed it before you.
Your eyes lit up.
You looked for me, but I had already gone.

I watched you for some time,
sending you little hints of me;
a flower here or there or a card or two.
Once I even gave you a bouquet;
it matched your hair
and your golden personality.
You had such a beautiful smile
and those blue eyes,
like portals to another world.
I wanted to meet you,
to have you meet me,
but I stayed in the shadows,
stayed across the street.
And watched you idly sit
while you sipped your tea.

Everywhere I went, it seemed you had been there too,
leaving those yellow flowers in your wake.
I always knew you were near, just around the corner,
but I never saw you.
I could feel you watching me,
but why did you always hide?
I fell in love with you,
but it was just me and my thoughts;
you were only a picture in
my mind.
After a while you faded from me.
I would think of you from time to time,
but never did we meet.
I forgot about you and met someone else,
Someone not afraid,
Someone I could love as well.

I had a strange feeling,
I looked to see a man in a wide-brimmed hat.
He was walking away with a trail of golden petals.
Was that you?
I threw away the thought and got on with the day.
The sun was setting as I danced.
Even though my date was charming,
you lingered in my head.
But after a drink or two, you faded from my mind,
and a few well-placed twirls blurred the rest of the evening.

It was that morning,
you sat in the sunrise.
You had drifted away for some time,
and I knew I had been distant from you.
I had planned to meet you that day.
I started across the street,
a handful of sunflowers,
but someone approached you,
a man.
You stood and greeted him with a kiss.
I turned around and walked away,
dropping the flowers on the ground.

I sat in the dark,
on the side of the street.
The moon was shining bright,
revealing shadows at my feet.
I heard voices in my head;
they screamed your name.
What was I to do?

You left me with a broken heart,
a tainted soul in a tainted shell.
It was then that I decided,
if I couldn't have you then nobody would.
I walked you home.
You were strolling down the sidewalk,
a lightness in your step.
I followed you for a while, then you saw me,
you began to run.

I skipped down the street.
I felt I had found love at last,
or just the drunken illusion of love.
Either way I was content.
It was quiet,
not a sound except my heels.
I had a feeling someone was watching me.
I looked behind to see you.
I knew it was you.
I started running,
thinking I'd be safe if I made it home,
but I never made it home.

That same blue dress dragged the ground,
as that familiar clicking echoed through the night
and those yellow flames trailed behind you.
I grabbed you by your neck and twisted.
You fell to the ground.
The moon shone bright as a laughter came over me.
I guess the magnitude of what I'd done,
the sheer thought of it, was too much.
I stuffed you in a big brown bag
and dragged you to the bridge,
The same bridge where we'd met.
I set you up on the rail,
your hair sparkled in the moonlight.
I uncovered your face for just a moment,
just long enough to marvel at you once more.
Your ivory skin and rose red lips,
all situated under those ever-glowing golden locks.
I leaned in and kissed you,
feeling your cold, moist lips.
Then, with one faithful shove,
I bid you farewell.

Looking Beyond

by Liyang Dong

(Inspired by Paul Hilario's "Toil Today Dream Tonight Diptych Painting No. 1 After Van Gogh")

Under the scorching sun by the undulating mountain
ridges,
The restless world is brewing in the deafening quiet-
ness.
Cicadas screaming at the top of their lungs in the
trees,
Mocking the fools working like mules at the height of
summer heat.

A dozen small blue dots embellish the infinite golden
sea
of wheat, bobbing their giant ears of grain to the
faint breeze.
They were born to tend this patch of land,
As their ancestors have done for centuries.

Their heads stooping and backs bent,
Sickles in their callous palms quickly cutting off the
crowns.
No talk, no smiles—
Large beads of sweat streaming down their cheeks
and parched lips.

No time to exchange a word and rest—
Tomorrow the tax hunter will come for the lion's
share;
Turning in late will incur rage and worse,
And they can't afford the loss of the meager rations.

A lad in red stands facing the sun in defiance,
The sun is so huge and bright it blinds him.
"Burn, burn with all your might,
But I will not yield to your power."

His younger sister is moping in the tree shade,
Looking beyond the mountain as usual.
She sees people in evening gowns raising glasses,
A fabulous feast in magnificent buildings.
She hears the hooves clicking and buggies honking,
Children dressed like fairies going to parties and
concerts;
While she is stuck here in the mud—
No! She will not go back to the field.

No! They will write their own books of life!
They look and look beyond,
And off they go—
They will not look back.



The World I Grew Up In

by Liyang Dong

In the dark grotesque night sky
a red monster was flashing overhead,
darting, glaring, and peeking into my dreams;
I tried to hide—but it loomed everywhere.

My father liberated and came back from Dachau,
and was stationed in Munich;
The stories he told me with red eyes
made my hairs stand while I clung to his arms at night.

The Communism terror seeps through our veins,
They have eyes all over our land;
Their poisonous fangs biting our children,
Our motherland strives for the upper hand.

Our fathers were told to fight the Vietnam War,
Which was just, righteous, and in self-defense.
Thousands of young lives with passion fell in an alien land,
Women wept and children were slaughtered.

Everything was like a hallucination—
It was too late when they came back home,
and woke up to find their wives and children strangers.
Their children became lost orphans in a home not theirs.

The war goes on.
It never stops.

The world is a mess.
It's never untangled.

Ticks

by Sam Dunton

I have time,
Rather a clock, in my brain
That ticks to expiration.

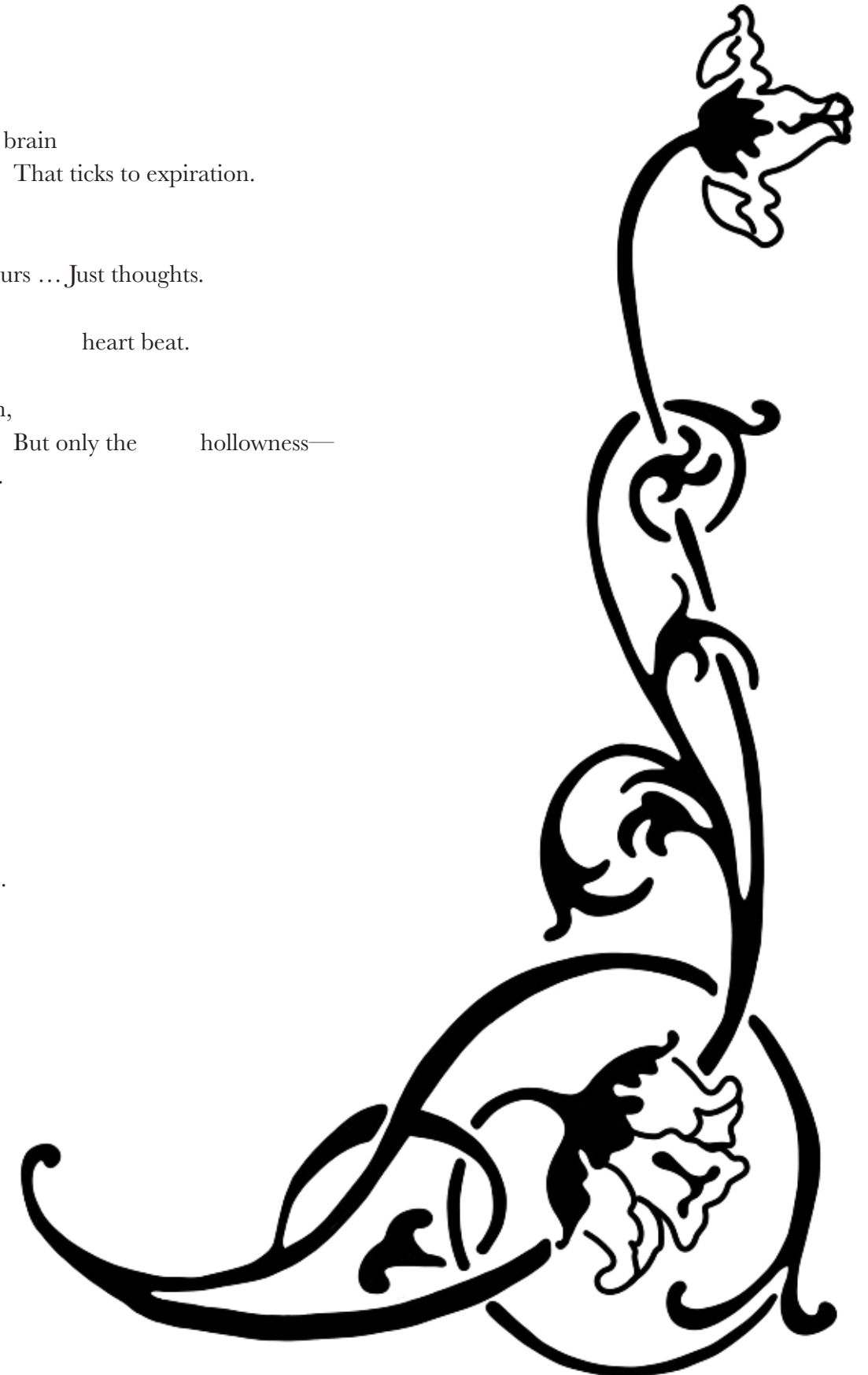
Yet, it contains
No seconds, minutes,
Or hours ... Just thoughts.

The ticks are synchronized
With my heart beat.

And I fear not
My expiration,
But only the hollowness—
Once thought ceases to exist.

But my clock ticks,
For now,
Mind and heart as one—
Harmonious.

My clock ticks,
ticks,
ticks.



Life Bowl

by Michelle Aitken

Swimming endlessly in this
Meaningless mediocrity, looping back on
Myself, day after dreary day, caught in a never
Ending cycle, full of old bottled dreams and bubbling
Thoughts, twirling in the fake flora flourishing around
Me, ramming against the glimmering glass, grasping
For air, careening upwards, running rampant
In search of an escape route—a shining
Light, calling my name home.

A Little Powder and Concealer

by Alivia Payne

Love? Care? Bond?
Lash? Condemn? Batter?
Uttering you love me,
Beating me senseless.
Skin red, blue, purple, fists coated in thin red blood--
He says he loves me! He says he cares!
Lost and confused. Hurt and abused.
Right now, I do not know which definition to choose.
Going to church, family functions, and outings with
friends.
Masking what's going on within.
All I need is a little powder and concealer.
It's my fault, I should've never-
BANG! BANG! BANG! The door resounds,
"You aren't going nowhere, you whore!"
I am scared and hurt,
"God! Please help me!"
I just want to go to worship, but he's filled with
jealousy.
One argument too many,
Flaring with rage!
I decide I am done, no more dealing with love that
results in pain.
He could not live without me, or deal with seeing me
with someone else.
Love? Care? Bond?
Loss of breath! Collapse! Boom!
I went first and he went last.
My body lifeless, breathless, and motionless on the
floor,
My son's first time entering the home without my
warm embrace.
He sees my lifeless body, cold!

Love is not hate, battering, or jealousy, but most of
all
Love is not
VIOLENCE!
Now imagine the unimaginable,
The same substance running from his fist, now
flowing like a river from both of our bodies.
The eyes of the soul contemplate so much.



Embracing the Past, Moving Forward, Learning, Growing, and Leading

by Jeremiah Rodgers

Too busy worrying about things in my past
Feeling like they're chasing me, wondering will I last?
I can't keep running, I need to embrace
All these thoughts of back then, I wish I could erase
I must come to the light and look toward
God Almighty who says son keep moving forward
It's time to make a change, I'm really yearning
I say to myself it's time to start learning
So many wasted years going by in a row
I think it's about time that I finally grow
So many years I spent in my past mentally bleeding
It never occurred to me that one day I would be
 leading
So, don't ever let your past tear you apart
Stick with the one that loved you from the start.

Foolish Wayfarer

by Tye DeVore

Foolishly through starless night
an ambitious wayfarer travels.
Throwing caution out of sight,
secrets of the woodland unravels.

With path clear under foot
and Reason following behind.
The trees covered in snow soot,
ignorance is easy to find.

Reason tries to scream in ear,
to be drowned by Faye chatter.
Luring wander from the clear,
by delivering false flatter.

Never trust the Faye folk,
they cover wanderlust eyes
with sweet words they spoke
and fogs chilling disguise.





SHORT STORIES



Buck
Sarah Sterling



The Child

by Juanita Barrett

Her bright, wild eyes flit constantly. She silently moves, hunting her quarry. She is frighteningly quick, a woodsy child, growing as untamed as the damp, green leaves she adores.

Her parents don't notice her. They never have since her impromptu naming ceremony after birth. Immediately after which, they fell with dedication back into their chiseled routines. Their careers are more important than the child. Sometimes she likes to forget their faces or rarely imagine she once heard the sound of love in their voices. Lately, that doesn't matter to her. She has grown past that need.

Her older sister resents the forced, unpaid labor of watching the child, and lets her do as she pleases. They both prefer it that way, staying out of each other's way. It's much easier and serves a great purpose for the child. She can't have anyone hovering over her, preventing her from doing what she must accomplish.

A suburban subdivision butting against undeveloped forest—a forest that presents escape from the neglect. Today is important. Summer is in full swing. Nothing holds her back. She hunts obsessively. She knows it's hidden here. It won't be long before she finds it, and then she will be free. She will finally be vindicated. She's caught fleeting glances of it often throughout the summer, but so far it has successfully eluded her. Today will be different. She feels it deep in her bones. Anticipation seeps through her.

She started the hunt when she was four years and eight months old, precisely old enough to defeat the child locks that had caged her. She hunted almost daily for a year before public officials insisted she enroll in school. She tried to slip away often, but *these* adults were much more diligent than her own parents and sister. They were paid to keep her contained; she despised them. They hampered her freedom of movement she had relished.

As a result, there were only a few hours each afternoon when she could hunt. She used every second of it, but it was never enough time to get as close as she needed. Summer was different. Summer was special. Summer meant freedom, in more ways than one, for her. Summer meant fourteen hours of daylight, fourteen hours to hunt. She was ready.

Dawn breaks, glittering through the forest. She is so close now; she can smell it; she can even taste it. No, it won't be long now. There! Is that it? Her head turns sharply. Disappointment. A thrush, rustling for food. Its noise angers her. Surely her prey will hear and heed the warning that she was closing in. A squirrel chatters in the distance. She waits, frozen. The thrush nabs its prize and flies confidently away, unaware of its closeness to danger.

Satisfied that she was still undetected, she moves stealthily past the remnants of a lightning-struck giant. The massive oak's peeling bark foretelling her failure. Fear trembles in her heart. Maybe this will be another year marked with

defeat. Another year of being captive.

She can't fail. She is too tired. This is her last chance. She knows she will never get this close again. It has to be now. It has to be today. She glances at the sunlight filtering through the canopy overhead. Only a few hours left before night comes and destroys another opportunity, possibly her last. She can't afford to waste another second so she pushes onward. Confidently, yet anxiously.

She tracks it as it swam lazily across the meandering stream. She had often stopped here for a quick lunch that refreshed her spent body. She is close behind as it pauses to rob a taste of honey, stirring a horde of bees into a frenzied fury. She follows cautiously when it traverses the piles of rocks disturbed in times long past by shifts of earth. She is close enough now to hear its muffled forages through rotten logs downed during hurricanes many seasons ago.

She has to be careful. It will only take one false step for terror to grab it and carry it out of her reach again. She had learned that hard lesson the second year of her hunt. She is older and more determined this fourth year. One step. Wait. Listen. Two steps. She can see it. Barely. Still not close enough yet. Another step. It looks up! Has it heard her? Her heart pounds. If it hadn't heard her footstep, it will definitely hear her heart.

She is terrified of losing it again. But no, it snuffles and returns to its own hunt, oblivious to her. Its back is toward her. One leap and she will have it. So close. Her tiny palms sweat. She knows she will succeed this time. There is no escape. Her new fear is that this won't be the solution she seeks. What then? Where will she turn? What is the answer? How will she ever be free? She can't dwell on that. Not when she is so close. It isn't productive. It is damaging to her hunt. Calm down. One deep, slow breath. Another. She can do this. Her lithe muscles tense briefly. She closes her eyes and leaps.

Success! Now everyone will know; they will see. One child who stayed; one who escaped to freedom: her twin. He is wilder than she is. He had been gone for two years before she began her hunt. She remembers it. One day while unloading groceries, he slipped away unnoticed into the forest. Their parents didn't care enough to hunt him. Good riddance. More time for them.

In his escape, her loneliness had overwhelmed her, and she longed to join him. He was too wild by the time she started hunting him. The woods became him; he became the woods. Each year, she studied his ways, until she finally became what he was. She understood how he thought. She had to become animal, like him; yet, she had to keep her humanity as well.

Now, she has a decision to make: will she join him in the freedom and wildness, or will she expose the wrongs of her family only to be caged again in what she hates?

Through the Eyes of a Fighting Dog

by Jessica N. Pearson

There were rules here. In this dank, musky place that smelled like the inside of a buoy. All dogs must obey their masters. No harm was to come to them, they were to be respected at all times. I had to learn this the hard way. I had threatened my master plenty of times as a pup, but I bit him only once. For that, he had chained me outside on a cold winter night. That night had been one of my worst nights, the cold wind cutting right through my fur like a blade. I never hurt my master again.

We were not allowed to harm our allies. We could snap and bark and scratch, but never, ever break skin. We had to be at our best, our strongest. There was no room for weakness. The biggest dogs, the strongest dogs, were to be respected. They had earned their place at the top of the food chain. Dark red forever stained their teeth.

I am nothing but a number. This, I have accepted long ago. Some nights, I dream that I had a name once. I dream of a mother who is kind, and siblings that never hurt me. This was once my life, I think. I was not a number, an item to be owned, but a son and a brother. I was once a name. A name that has been long forgotten.

There are days when I am taken from this place. Days when my master will take me out of the dark, bad smelling place that I call my home. He brings me to a place so bright that I have to close my eyes in fear of going blind. When I open them again, the world is so different. There are no cages here. Just a big hole that is surrounded by humans. They cry out when they see me, just as they always have. They laugh and cheer, clapping their fat hands together. Master is happy when the humans are loud. It means that I am good, that I am worth keeping around.

On these days, I only see one other dog. They have a different master, who sits on the edge of the hole, shouting something that I cannot understand. My master sits next to his. He never says anything, just looks at me with his cold, mean eyes. I do not need to be told what I have to do, because there is one rule that is more important than all the rest. Never let the other dog win.

Church

by Alex Thomley

In the crisp fall air, Judd and Minnie needed a getaway. While driving they arrived at a dirt road, and upon immediate sight they wandered off the beaten path. Gravel slinging, red dirt roads, and country music—their simple life loves all in one. Down the dirt road appeared a beaten, stripped down church. What looked like a run-down building to most, they saw gold. There was a story with this church. It wasn't just some old run-down place. It had history and a feeling of the simple life, and that is what they loved the most.

As they unbuckled and stepped out, a collective thought emerged. *How long has this been here?* But as they walked up they saw the bumps and bruises of this tattered church and saw such handcrafted beauty. They felt in their hearts this place was special. Walking up to the door to test the lock, Judd grabbed a dented paint chipped handle, turned, and pushed to find it open.

Upon entry to the church they see two rows of pews. They travel down the aisle feeling each pew, all the nicks and indentions showed the age from these once new seats. They close their eyes to take in this moment and imagine through the years what this place has been through. But as the sun was setting they knew they must scamper off because dirt roads at night are dangerous.

Fleeing to the car, they raced down these dirt roads that are both new and unexplored. They took a left and right, one followed the other, looking for any sign of a paved road. As time slipped away, so did daylight, and Judd and Minnie were now lost in the dark without any service on their phones. They were in trouble now. Judd pulled to the side of the road to keep from any more wandering.

In an instant, a crack of thunder exploded through the sound barrier.

As Judd and Minnie sat there, they contemplated what to do, and rain came gushing down.

They had to make a decision.

After five minutes or so, Minnie announced, "Let's keep driving and see where we end up."

Pulling away, Judd reciprocated by saying, "How 'bout we flip a coin?"

Minnie whipped her head back. "What?!"

Judd explained, "Each turn we come to let's flip a coin to decide: left or right. Until we see something we know, we trust the coin."

Minnie shrugged in acceptance.

Approaching the first turn, Minnie pulled a coin from the console and let fate decide. Heads left, tails right. Slowly coming up to the first turn, Minnie flipped the coin. Heads. Judd made a left turn and continued down the gravel road, slinging rocks left and right. As fate would have it after three lefts and two rights, Judd realized the gas line was on E. Pulling up to what could be their last chance; Judd and Minnie saw a familiar sight.

The tattered church from earlier, with the lights on.

As the car lights shined on the church, the paint wasn't chipped or washed off; the windows were intact. *What happened to the church?* they thought.

Judd, struck with bewilderment, gave Minnie his hat protecting her from the rain. "Take this. We have to get out of the rain."

They counted in unison. *Three, Two, ONE!*

They jumped from the car, and in an instant they were under the awning of the church.

Opening the door, Judd didn't feel the same handle as before. It had changed to a knob, a perfectly chiseled crystal doorknob. The entire room changed. Candle light, an organ that wasn't there before, and people filling every row.

These people weren't from this time. The women were dressed in garments from bonnets to headbands and scrunchies. The men were in Civil War garments to jorts with boots.

As they entered, the masses turned and stared, as

they'd never seen such specimens as these. To stop the scene at hand, Judd grasped Minnie's hand and pulled her to the nearest seat, as service was to begin.

An older man stepped forward, covered in white cotton linens and a beard reaching the midst of his shirt, and announced, "Let's pray. Father, thank you for this great congregation and allowing all to make it on this hallowed night. Lord, open us up and allow your word to flow through me and touch each person here tonight. Amen."

Judd and Minnie sat there intrigued and pulled in by this man. His demeanor was fierce and demanding. However, at the same time he was soft and careful with words. This feeling gave them a sense of protection, just as they felt from ... well, God.

After the service, he approached Judd and Minnie. As he towered over both of them, he introduced himself with a warm smile and a handshake, "I'm Brother Earl."

Judd grasped his hand, "Nice to meet you! I'm Judd and this is Minnie."

Minnie followed as she reached for his hand, noticing what looked like scars on his palm, grasping his beaten and battered hands.

From there a conversation ensued between the trio. Brother Earl asked where they were from and how they found the church.

Minnie stayed perplexed by Brother Earl's hands as Judd answered, "Well I am from Coffee, AL, and Minnie is from Paisley, AL. We found the church a couple hours ago, but it didn't look like this. We left because the sun was setting and didn't want to get trapped in the dark. However, we were lost and a tremendous downpour came; so we came to a conclusion to let fate decide where we end up. It brought us back here. We saw the light and came to the conclusion it would be safer in here than out there."

Brother Earl focused in on Judd and replied, "Well, I am glad our Lord led you both to our safe haven."

Minnie's mind sat in a stand still over Brother Earl's hands, as the background noise from the two men continued. She focused in on the scars, realizing the scars were letters. Her eyes widened to the size of grapefruit as the realization of who Brother Earl really was frightened her to death.

Minnie then spoke up, "Excuse us for one moment."

Brother Earl, with squinting eyes from his warm smile, nodded in acceptance and circled to others of the congregation.

Stepping back, Minnie leaned over to Judd and whispered, "Judd, I don't think Brother Earl is who he says he is."

"What are you talking about?" he replied, brushing it off.

"THE SCARS ON HIS HANDS!! They aren't scars they're names! It's like God having our names on his hands."

The Paradox that is Religion

LyAnne Peacock



“Are you sure?”

“YES!”

Judd calls, “Brother Earl! Can you come here?”

Brother Earl strolls over, announcing, “What can I do for you my son?”

“Could I see your hands?”

Baffled by this strange request Brother Earl placed his hand in Judd’s.

Judd, focusing in on Brother Earl’s palms as if it were a book, noticed the scars trying to find the names Minnie mentioned and came across a name that struck an arrow through his soul as if he was flatlining. The name he came across was a cluster of names reading: WILLIAM THOMAS, CYDNEY THOMAS, JUDSON THOMAS. This cluster was Judd and his parents. He felt weak and reached for the pew as to catch himself from falling.

Minnie, watching the entire episode, reached for Judd’s arm. Grabbing it simultaneously as Judd grabbed the pew, she asked, “Are you ok?”

“Minnie, you’re right. He isn’t just a pastor.”

As this conundrum resounded through their minds, voices through what seemed like an intercom mixed with a megaphone rang through both of their minds.

“THERE IS A LOT OF BLOOD HERE! WE HAVE TO GET THEM OUT OF THIS CAR!”

Judd and Minnie looked at each other astonished, and looked around as no one else in the entire church had heard these words.

“I GOT A PULSE HERE!”

“SAME FOR THE GIRL!”

Judd stood tall again, seeing Brother Earl looking at them as though he can hear the words as they do. Judd asked, “Do you hear this?”

Brother Earl replied, “Yes, I can my son.”

Judd and Minnie spoke simultaneously, “What is it?!”

“It’s your lives.”

“What do you mean?” Minnie questioned intently.

“Well this church isn’t really here. You both are in heaven.”

Judd shouted, “HEAVEN?!?”

“Yes my son, right now both of you are in and out of this world.”

Again Judd fell.

“HE’S FLATLINING! I NEED A CRASH CART! SET TO 200! CLEAR! I GOT A PULSE! LET’S GET THEM OUT OF HERE!”

Judd, weary over his fall, felt a burning sensation on his chest, and asked Brother Earl, “What is happening on earth if we’re in heaven?”

“Both of you were in a car crash; y’all are being attended to now.”

Minnie asked, “Are we ok?”

Brother Earl lowered his head and replied, “Minnie you are fine, just some scrapes, cuts, and bruises. However, Judd has sustained some internal bleeding.”

“HIS BP IS CRASHING, WE HAVE TO GET HIM TO THE HOSPITAL!”

“Both of you are in an ambulance on your way to the nearest hospital.”

Judd, pale as a ghost, asked Brother Earl, “Am I going

to be ok?”

“My son ... that is up to you.”

Judd sat in a pew, seeing the church was now empty except the trio. His body grew paler by the minute.

Judd, feeling weak, used his last bit of strength to ask, “How do I stay alive? I want to live!”

Brother Earl informed them, “My child, you have to decide here and now: stay in paradise or return to the dark, cold world with no certainty if you shall live.”

Judd questioned him, “Just me? Not Minnie?”

“Correct.”

“WE’RE FIVE MINUTES OUT HAVE AN OPERATING ROOM OPEN! WE HAVE ONE STABLE! THE OTHER IS CRITICAL!”

Judd peered over to Minnie, and back to Brother Earl.

“I want to go back.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes sir—but—I have a question.”

“Yes, my child, what is it?”

“Who are you really?”

“As Revelation 22:13 states ‘I am the Alpha and Omega, The First and the Last, The Beginning and the End.’”

Minnie, frightened by how Judd may answer, asked directly, “So you are The Way, the Truth, and the Life?”

“Yes, my child. Now bow your heads.”

As Brother Earl placed his milled hands on their hands and prayed. He began to pray, and both felt this sensation of withering away. Judd and Minnie closed their eyes one last time, as Brother Earl was speaking. When they opened their eyes, strolling lights beamed from above as both are surrounded by doctors and nurses all around them.

Rushing hall-to-hall Judd and Minnie diverged as Minnie was taken to a room to rest and wait on Judd. Banging through doors they arrive at OR1.

“LIFT ON THREE, TWO, ONE!”

Grimacing in pain, the doctors announced to Judd, “Mr. Thomas, we have to stop the internal bleeding, we are about to perform surgery. We’re are putting you under now.”

As Judd lay there in pain he prayed, “Brother Earl, God, I’m not ready to leave.” One last deep breath and his eyes closed ...

Obscurity

Takeisha Jefferson



Small Bump

Haley Cole

It's 2:31 A.M. when the sound of his phone wakes him up. Blurry eyed, Rune reads, "9 missed calls." Then it lights up again: "Incoming Call: Tristan Moffatt."

Rune answers, "Hey mate, what's up?"

"Rune! I ca—... I don't know what to do." Tristan's voice rings piercingly.

Rune sits up on his bed and reaches for his glasses, knocking them on the floor, "Moff, what's wrong?"

"I- I had to save my ba- baby. I couldn't lose her."

"Her? How do you know it's a her?" Rune asks, scouring his room for some pants. Confusion clouds his mind. They were waiting to find out the gender at birth.

"I don't know what to—," Tristan's voice cracks and falls into a sobbing fit. His wails echo through the phone and consequently through Rune's very bones. He had never thought anything could break Tristan like this.

"Okay Moff...just try to calm down; I'm on my way."

Rune puts on his pants and jumps out his bedroom window. Tristan's house is just behind his. He lands, mud squishes between his toes, but he takes off running. As Rune gets to the tree-line, he sees a glow coming from Tristan's house.

"Is every light in the house on?" Rune says wondering.

He comes to the back door, and a sense of urgency boils in his blood, along with a feeling that turns his stomach. Out of breath, Rune reaches for the door handle, but finds it locked. A scream comes from inside the house. With a burst of adrenaline, he kicks the door in.

"Moff?!" Rune searches the house, finding nothing, until he arrives at the back-bedroom's bath. The door is cracked open, and he sees a blood drenched shower curtain. Taking a deep breath, he stretches out his hand and swings the door open. A leg is spilling from the tub.

Rune inches into the room, holding his breath. He goes to the curtain pulling it open, and finds Nora, Tristan's girlfriend, lifeless. She's laying there with a syringe in her arm, and her stomach is ripped open. Rune sways, the room spins, and he vomits on the floor. When he looks up he sees a spoon and lighter on the floor.

"Rune?"

He looks over and finds Tristan curled in the corner awkwardly holding something in his hands. A baby, or what looked like a baby, covered with scalded blotches.

"I had to save her. When I found Nora, she was— she was..." His hand, dripping in blood, lifts to point towards the shower, and a knife lays at his feet.

Rune steps closer to his friend, looking at the baby in his arms, "Of course you had to save her." All Tristan ever wanted to be was a father.

Rune leans in, looking closer at the child,

"Tristan...I—" He runs his fingers through his hair.

"We can save her!" He holds her to his chest. Tristan's

eyes are filled with hope, but there is something else hidden within his pupils, something Rune has never seen before.

"Tristan, she's gone."

But then there's a faint cry.



Eulogy to Nanny

by Caitlin Celka

Read at her funeral: April 8, 2017

To know Nanny was to love her. She was a funny person. And stubborn. And didn't give a crap about what anyone thought of her. She was the epitome of a bargainer. She could single-handedly tell you every sale Wal-Mart, Publix, or Kroger had to offer. She's the only person I've ever met that put Monopoly money in the offering plate at church and the only person who struggled remembering basic words, but could sing "Happy Birthday" to herself in Polish.

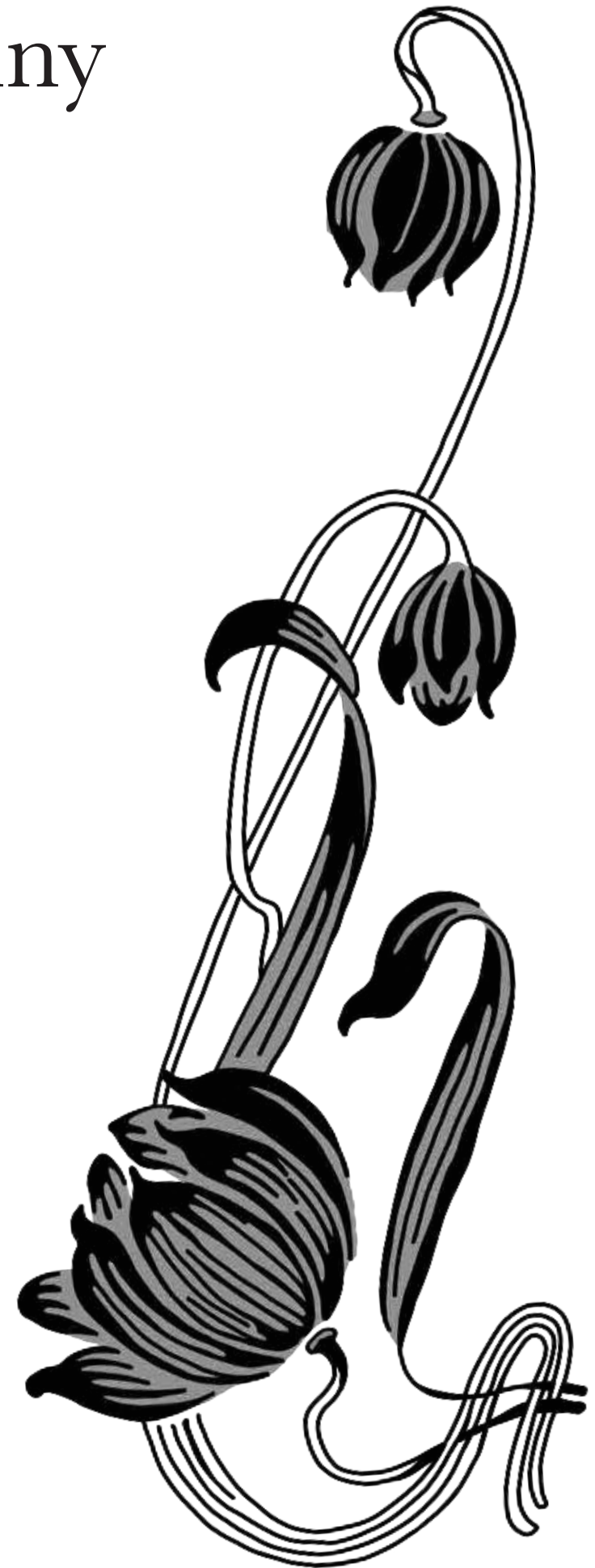
For some time, Nanny and I became roommates. She made up my bed every morning because she knew I was always in a tearing hurry to leave for class. And she never ceased to make me a sandwich made of spoiled mayonnaise and bread that had been frozen for at least two years. I took it with me every morning and threw it out the moment I got to campus. I never had the heart to tell her no.

She was my favorite "turn out the lights" and "close the door" because the air conditioner was running. She was the warmest hug and the unbeatable chocolate chip cookie baker of the tri-county area. She is the only person that has ever nagged me about not having babies. She wanted a great, great grandchild so badly and I hate that I was never able to fulfill that wish.

Nanny never had much to give. But the one thing she gave me the most of was inspiration. As a writer, I look for inspiration in everything and she provided it without trying. A majority of my poetry is about her and her character helped inspire the main character of the book I am currently writing. I wish I had told her that.

I know right now she is rejoicing. She's with her husband and her son and most importantly, our Heavenly Father. I know she's asking him why gas prices are so high, why in all the cosmos—including the plethora of moons, numerous planets, and the vast galaxies, did God choose for mosquitoes to inhabit Earth. And why, for the life of her, were 11 oz. of fresh blueberries 5 dollars and 50 cents. Those were the things that always irked her nerves.

More than anything, I hope she's watching the birdies.





PHOTOGRAPHY

Fruit Blossoms
Megan Lofgren



Right
Eastchase
Peyton Buchanan

Next page
Untitled
Cason McDermott







Above
Ohio Sky
Megan Lofgren

Right
Gab
Peyton Buchanan





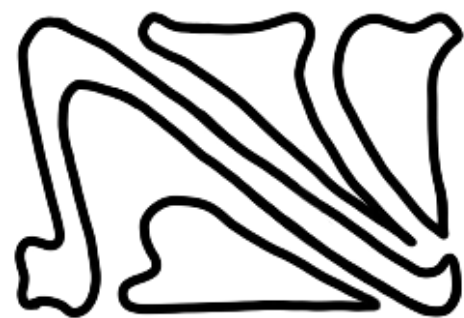
Above
Ape
Joel Ocana

Left
Green
Juanita Barrett



Above
Child with Grapes
Jonathan E. McNulty

Right
Tranquility
Juanita Barrett





Cait Celka Photography



Above
Serenity
Alyssa Har

Left
Nanny's Ring
Caitlin Celka



Cover art painted by Cason McDermott