

The background is a painting of a hand in shades of blue and white, with several small, reddish-brown beetles scattered across it. The word "Boat" is written in a large, black, gothic-style font across the center of the image.

Boat

Crossed Sabres
2020

Table of Contents

Front Matter

front cover • **Connection** • Trinity McKnight

4 • **From the Editors** • Brianna Sledjeski & Serene Singh

Poetry

6 • **Water** • Thaddeus Sledd

8 • **Reality** • Jane Cassidy

10 • **A Poem about 1915** • Ava Bagdasarian

12 • **Glitch in the System** • Willa Hale

18 • **The Protector's Game** • Natalia Settapani

20 • **The Dance of the Orchestra** • Ava Bagdasarian

31 • **Gilded** • Amber Trinh

32 • **Peace, Freedom, and Cookies Sprayed with Honey** • Edith Roxana
Yanes Guevara

34 • **I Can't Go Back to Bed** • Sophia Macchiarolo

36 • **Hello Journal** • Isabelle Bruce

40 • **Echo** • Valerie Egger

44 • **Everybody Watches the Sunset** • Isabelle Bruce

46 • **Noche** • Edwin Salvador Hernandez Munoz

48 • **Odyssey in Candy Land** • Thaddeus Sledd

50 • **Christmas Queen** • Emily Banner

54 • **Different and Familiar...** • Lisa Levy

56 • **Bat Boxes** • Lisa Fiorilli

58 • **Letting Go** • Cali Carroll

Short fiction

14 • **Vivat Rex** • Mia Jimenez

22 • **Concealed** • Olivia DeWan

38 • **Pumpkin Seeds** • Polina Lowham

52 • **Rainbow Armageddon** • Anna Jungkeit

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- 5 • **Untitled** • Kyla Jenkins
- 6 • **Hallowe'en Vision** • Diann Landau
- 9 • **Chokehold** • Summer Orledge
- 11 • **Hallowed Man** • Julia Calvert
- 13 • **Broken** • Trinity McKnight
- 15 • **Spooky Szn Joe** • Bella Sierra
- 16 • **The Protector** • Natalia Settipani
- 21 • **Sulli** • Li Shi
- 23 • **A Curious Place** • Cassandra Melson
- 25 • **Man's Best Experiment** • Cassandra Melson
- 27 • **Cherries** • Li Shi
- 30 • **Hamlet** • Chris Pena
- 33 • **Street Dragon** • Alyssa Hughes
- 35 • **Spattered** • Amie Holstein
- 37 • **Orange Dino** • Katherine Burke
- 39 • **Hallowe'en Vision** • Diann Landau
- 41 • **Self Portrait** • Kyla Jenkins
- 42 • **Feral** • Jordan Beaupre
- 45 • **Sunset** • Kayla Urban
- 46 • **Symmetry of the Day and Night** • Isabella Sangiuliano
and Natalia Sangiuliano
- 49 • **Keep It to Yourself** • Amie Holstein
- 51 • **I Hope I Get Yarn for Christmas** • Caitlin Fikes
- 53 • **Popping Space** • Alyssa Hughes
- 54 • **Early Beginnings** • Alyssa Hughes
- 56 • **Mindless** • Bella Sierra
- 59 • **Conflicted** • Amie Holstein

Colophon & Policy

This book was created by the creative writing club at Loudoun County High School and features the work of students and staff. All work is subject to administrator approval prior to publication and reflects the thoughts and opinions of the creator(s), not the opinions of the staff or the school. The work was created using Adobe Creative Cloud and CS6 with Minion Pro font. The work appears online at issuu.com/lchscrossedsabres.

From the Editors

Serene Singh and Brianna Sledjeski

Even before we are born, we start creating bonds. Those bonds continue to grow: family, friends, pets, teachers. We're bonded to places, memories, ideas, and moments. Since we are constantly surrounded by our bonds, we become desensitized to their existence—a high five, a fist bump, a smile down the hallway. Similar to breathing, they're automatic, constant, and always in the background. This is often why we forget how precious these bonds are to us. We forget how important they are to our lives and how they have shaped us into who we are. Only when these bonds are taken away, ripped from our grasps, do we realize how much they mean to us.

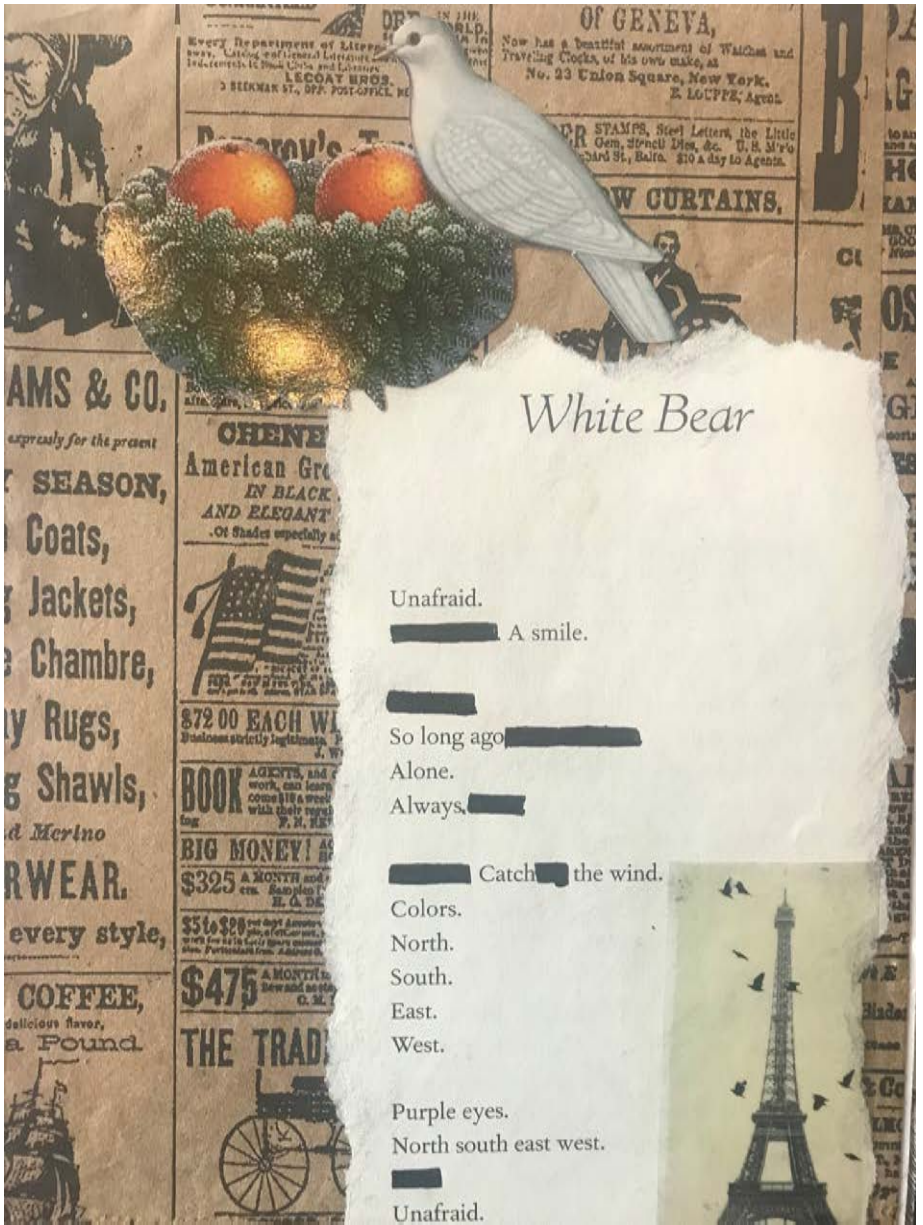
This year our literary magazine production was interrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak, and in the blink of an eye our team lost a great deal of bonds. Instead of discussing how to pair artwork and poetry in the friendly comfort of room 104, we are communicating via email. We are writing this letter using a shared Google doc, writing it between emails and online coursework and texts from friends.

Now, more than ever, we feel compelled to complete this magazine. It highlights our bonds, our friendships, and most importantly, the family we became while creating it. As we pass the draft of the issue from one person to the next through the electronic ether, we can only imagine the witty comments that our fellow staff would make if we were all together. We can only remember our discussions about our celebratory “magazine release breakfast,” during which we have to remember which ones of us love chocolate and which one of us absolutely cannot be in the same room with a donut. These nuances, minor and seemingly insignificant during past years, now mean so much. How much of our friendships and memories are built in person!

While we can do nothing about the required social distancing or school closures, we can renew our commitment to our shared bonds by seeing this magazine to completion. Our bonds as a club extend to encompass our shared experiences as a student body represented through the submissions we received.

We hope that, when our student body gets to view the PDF of our publication, they will find that during the outbreak we've found strength in our bonds and realize we can still hold each other close to our hearts.

And maybe, when things go back to normal, we will not take for granted all the bonds that make our lives so very special. •



White Bear

Unafraid.

██████████ A smile.

So long ago ██████████

Alone.

Always ██████████

██████████ Catch ██████████ the wind.

Colors.

North.

South.

East.

West.

Purple eyes.

North south east west.

██████████

Unafraid.



Untitled
Kyla Jenkins

Water

Thaddeus Sledd

Loose lips sink ships,
But my lips do more than that.
With words alone I have sunk cruiser and sailboat alike.
Like Tides within storms, my mouth creates whirlpools of expression.
So, send your ships,
Send every battleship, submarine, raft and skiff,
Send everything you can muster so that I may release parables of
 destruction in hyperbole
So I may leave absolute annihilation within wild waters called alliteration.
And for whatever survives this onslaught, drown in envy
Knowing my mouth moves freely as water downslopes
While your tongue moves only to send more shipwreck. •



 **Hallow'e'n Vision**
Diann Landau

Reality

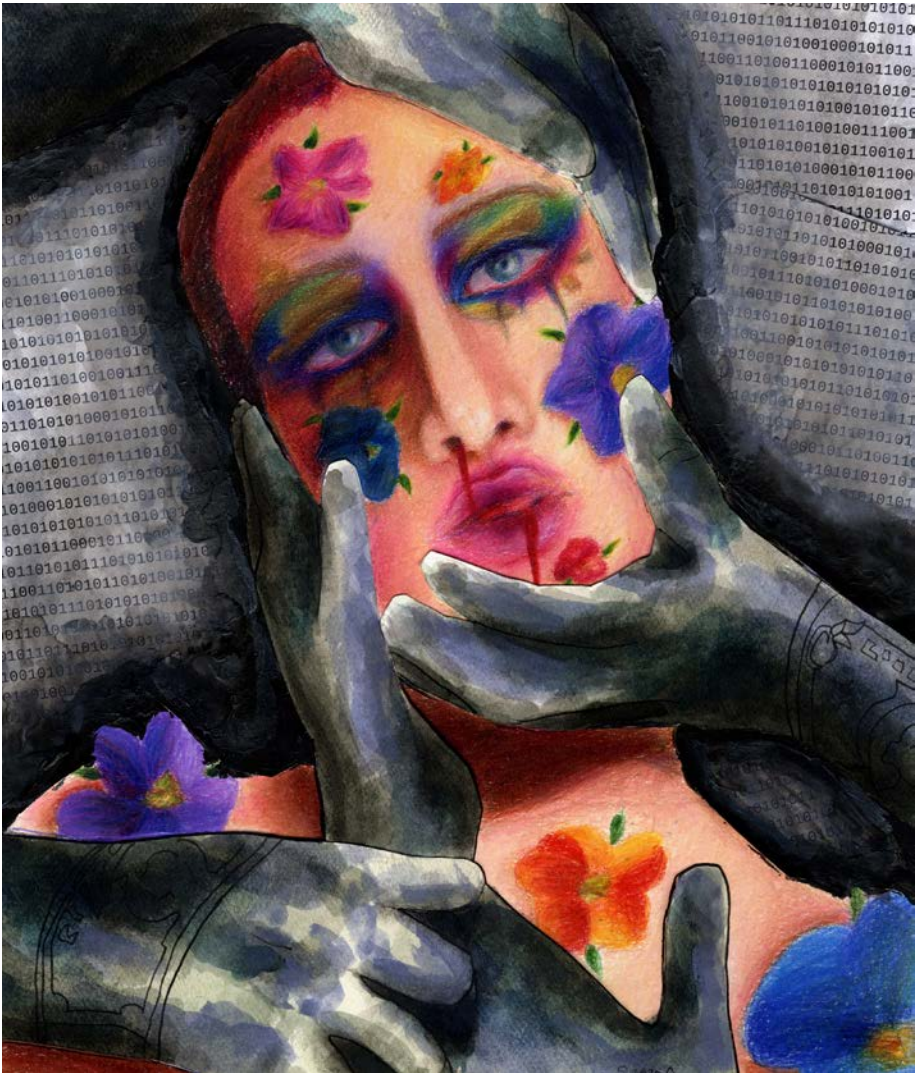
Jane Cassidy

A burning flame, a stolen kiss, confessions in the rain,
The set template forever engraved.
Magical dances, sparkling prom dresses, and salty kisses filled with pain;
Such a story eternally famed.

Reality cuts through fantasy like a cold shining knife,
A bumpy path instead of a smooth one.
The hole of emptiness sears with confusion and strife,
Yearning for a future that hasn't yet begun.

After all, the rose must come with thorns,
Though once the proper fingers meet, there is an undeniable glow
On which true happiness adorns
A bond stronger than anyone could know.

Nothing is what it is made out to be,
But everything will work out, just wait and see. •



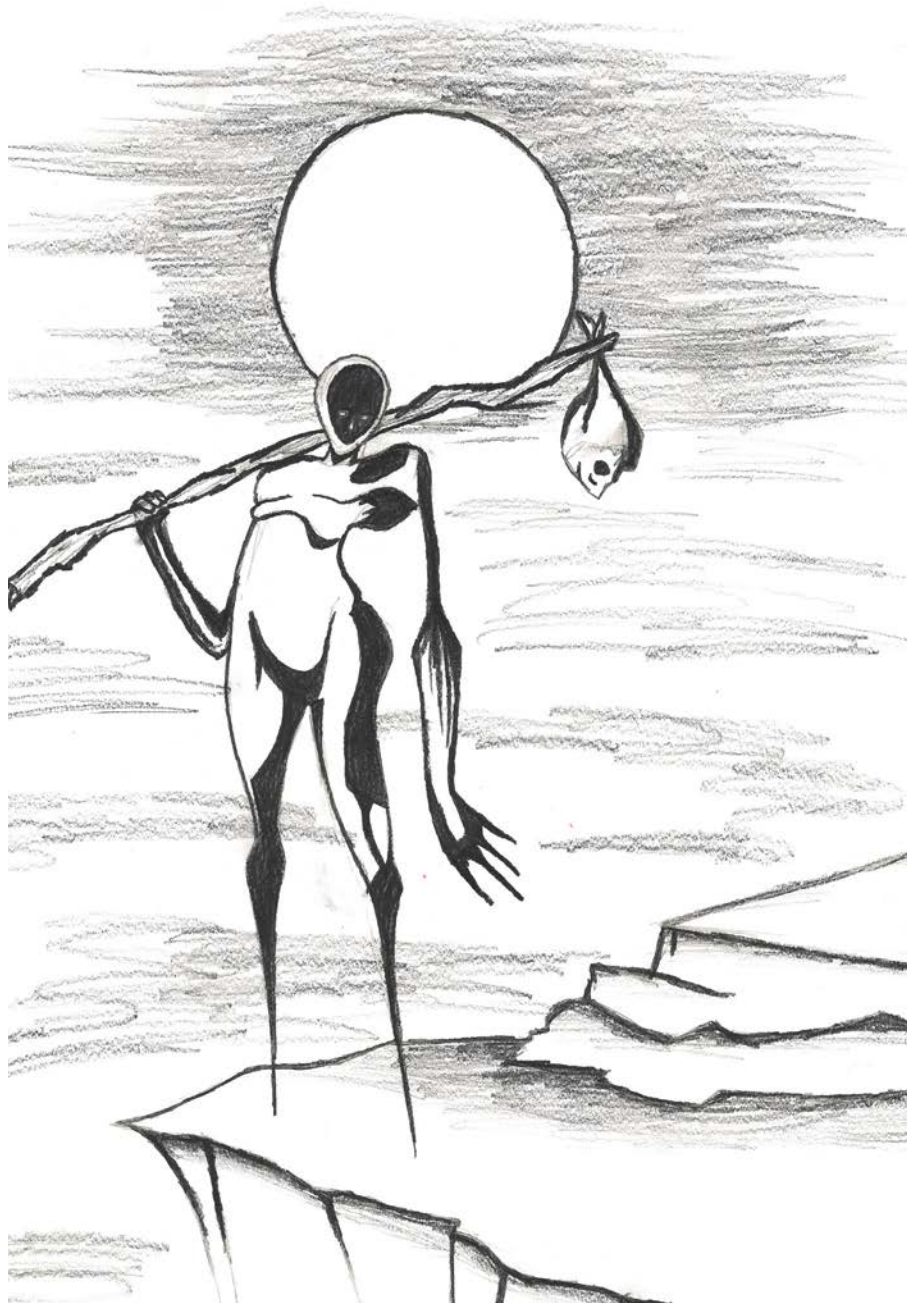
☞☞ Chokehold
Summer Orledge

A Poem About 1915

Ava Bagdasarian

For the 1.5 million Armenians and all those affected today

They left the country at night, they say,
Fleeing the ashes and blank spaces,
Places where they ate in community, broke bread,
And they ran to us, aliens from the mountains,
And begged for refuge.
Love thy neighbor as thyself, they were taught;
Love thy neighbor as thyself, they plead,
Mother holding child, brother holding sister,
Shadows of the unimaginable pressed onto their faces,
Shadows mixed with dust and mud.
They have hair black like the sea
And eyes the color of grape leaves and wine
As they whine and whimper of pain,
The bane of their lives,
This, they say, *is the greatest tragedy.*
This, is genocide. •



🔗 **Hallowed Man**
Julia Calvert

winner of the 2019 Crossed Sabres Halloween contest

Glitch in the System

Willa Hale

I saw you this morning.

Well, sort of.

This morning, I didn't *just* see you;

I felt you hit me like a gigabyte of sudden data.

I felt it when you peered into my eyes and pierced my living CPU.

Just looking at you made my mainframe mishap mid-sentence.

Just looking into your eyes sent a signal that suddenly stunted all sense.

I thought I had patched the glitch that was my illogical feelings for you,

But you must have hacked the system more than I thought possible.

You are the dire device, the distinguished defect to my database.

Now what am I supposed to do,

If everytime I see you I have to reboot?

If every glance sends me recalculating and reprogramming,

Just to repair this wreck you've wrecked on my mind?

Is there no way an engineer could eject your enigma out of my encephalon?

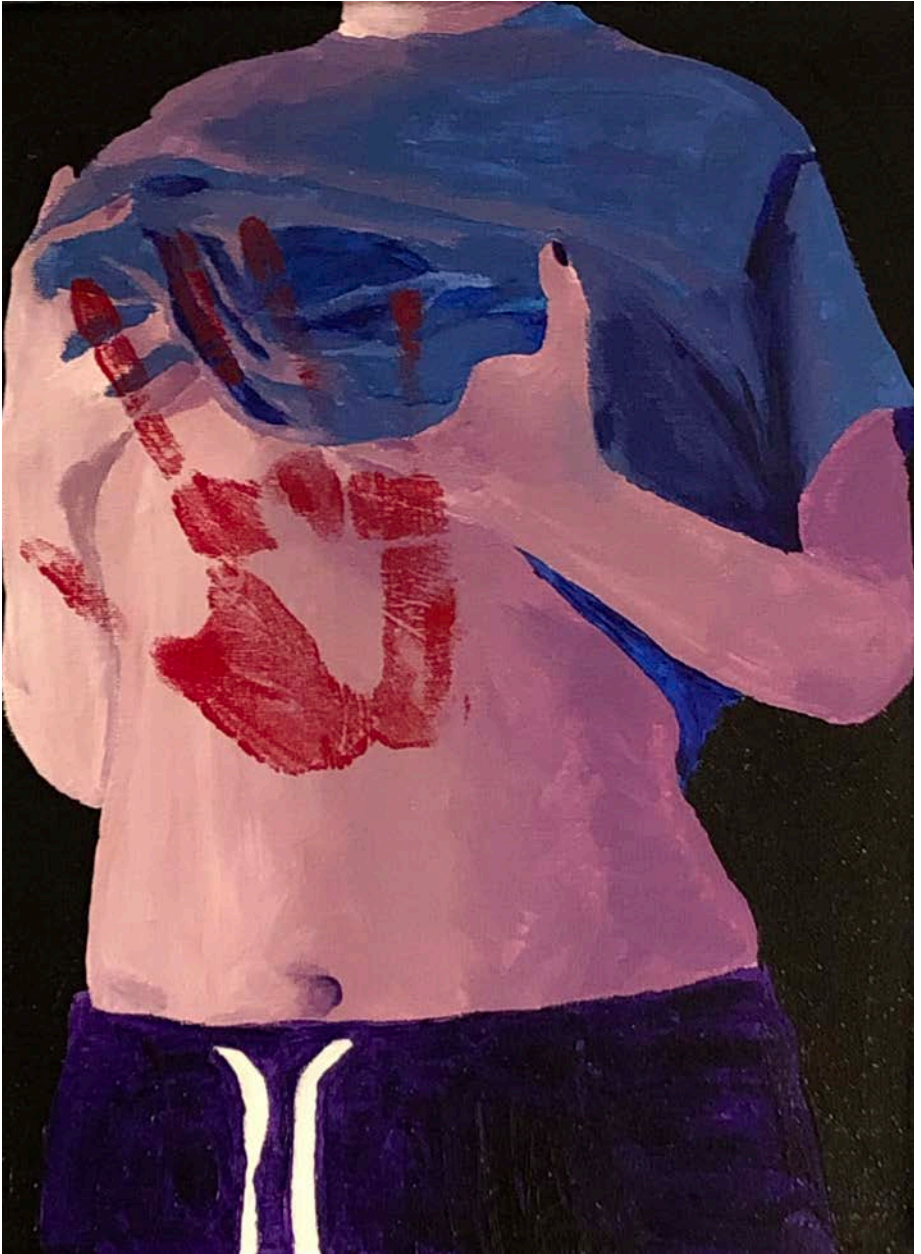
All I know now is that I need to rewire.

I need to rewrite this link that binds me to you.

You are not the proper coding.

All you are now is a defect.

If only I could get the central system to recognize the glitch. •



Broken
Trinity McKnight

Vivat Rex

Mia Jimenez

Winner of the 2019 Crossed Sabres Halloween fiction contest

Valentine took his hand, allowed himself to be raised from the cold floor. Could he trust him? The eyes were black as pitch, all-knowing, and sharp as a blade. Sandy blonde hair cut short and swept back classily, a suit made of purple silk, a vest of soft gray cotton. Lucretius was regal, he was dashing, and he was lethal. After all, he was the High Lord of the Wrath faction; it was his job to demand respect.

“Come now. We have much to discuss,” Lucretius ordered, allowing Valentine to walk freely by his side, which confused him much. He was armed, two twisted daggers still in his grip. Was that not a threat to him? The High Lord turned his head slightly, a smirk on his face, “If you were to attack, I would have no trouble putting you back into your place, my boy.”

Valentine eased the tension in his shoulders. If he had a pulse, he would have been scarlet in the face. “I... I see.”

The path leading up from the stocks was paved with bricks of smooth concrete, stretching in a perfectly straight line. Valentine had never seen such a thing before, accustomed to the humble dirt roadways and wooden platforms of the Gaelic. Lucretius chuckled, seeing the surprise in his new apprentice’s face, “We are expanding, my young friend. This road is only a glimpse into what will be our glorious empire. Think of it; Insulae, Villas, Forums, and my personal favorite, the Roman Circus...”

Valentine wore an expression that made it seem that Lucretius was speaking in tongues. “What are those things?”

His curiosity and sheer innocence made his superior laugh aloud, throwing his head back in glee. “Oh, my! How could you not know about the glory of the Romans? We conquered kings who had never been challenged before, seized more gold than you could possibly comprehend! The empire will live on, my boy, so long as I am High Lord of



Spooky Szn Joe

Bella Sierra

this place.”

A triumphal arch made of sturdy concrete graciously welcomed the pair to Wrath. Lucretius admired the detailed image of distressed angels carved into the stone. “Do you like it? Take it in, Valentine, for this is your new home.”

The young demon could not even fathom where to look; first, his black eyes hungrily devouring every sight they came across.

A crimson haze that resembled clouds loomed above their heads, creating the illusion of a sky inside a monstrous cavern. The low groan of seismic activity echoed thunder. Anyone else would have collapsed in terror, but to Valentine, it was a delightful symphony. His lips twitched. He gazed at Lucretius, wide-eyed. “What is this feeling..?”

The High Lord chuckled, draping an arm over his shoulder, gazing out at the unnerving scenery, pride radiating from his face. “You are smiling because you are beginning to understand your place beside me.”

The friendliness faded from Lucretius’s eyes. Something somber and

wise took its place. “Valentine,” his voice rumbled quietly. “You will be my lieutenant. Do you understand? You will take my place as heir when my time comes.”

There was a moment of silent confusion. “But—we’re demons! We can’t die!” Valentine stuttered, growing nervous about his own immortality. Was it all a facade? Could he perish at any moment and disappear for good?

“We are demons,” Lucretius confirmed, still facing forward, “But demons like me will not last forever.”

His apprentice’s limbs were rigid; his fists, clenched tightly. “What do you mean? You’re a High Lord! You’re powerful, aren’t you?” With a sharp upbringing of his hand, Lucretius silenced him, continuing with unnerving tranquility.

“I am a High Lord, but I was not elected or appointed into this



position. I fought and conquered my own superior when I was a young demon just like you. After the dust settled, I seized his throne. Others would do the same to me. This faction is ruled by an unshakeable determination. I am lucky enough to have survived long enough to appoint my own lieutenant. You must not forget why I have chosen you, Valentine. While I seized the throne forcefully, you are guaranteed it. You are the best demon Wrath has to offer.”

“I think I understand...” Valentine murmured, eyes downcast. “Nothing good ever lasts...”

Another chuckle interrupted his sobering moment. Lucretius was grinning once more. Graciously pushing Valentine down the path, they began to walk along once more. Lucretius wore a faint smile. “While what I say is true, you must understand that I won’t go down without a fight. Taking down an old man like me is not as easy as some may believe!”

“Right...” Valentine replied, lifting his head up a little higher. “Right!” Each step felt a little lighter, a little more confident. Lucretius welled up with pride, gently patted his shoulder. “I have many things to teach you, Valentine. You and I will be quite the sight in Wrath. Imagine our performances in the arena!” The High Lord beamed with childish excitement, envisioning the victories he and his lieutenant would share. There was something special about this clumsy, curious demon, something only Lucretius saw. It flickered when he walked, making his soul seem like a pit of malice and fury. Valentine would be a fantastic lord, Lucretius thought, studying him fondly, an excellent lord, indeed. •

The Protector's Game

Natalia Settipani

A little boy and girl skip happily through the street,
Laughing at the sound of crunching leaves under their feet.
They jump and they prance, filled with glee,
They hop and they dance as happy as can be.

Clutching their baggies filled with goodies,
They don't notice the three creatures in dark hoodies.
Heeding the creatures all too late,
They fear that the monsters bring a terrible fate.

"Oh look!" the creatures snarl. "Isn't this nice?
Two more little children to pay our price!
Give us your candy and we'll leave you be,
But if you don't, we'll show you no mercy!"

Frightened, the children quiver in fear,
They don't want to lose their candy this year.
Hugging each other close, they shut their eyes,
Little did they know, they were in for a surprise.

A figure appeared from a dark smoke;
It held a scythe, and wore a white cloak.
Standing behind the creatures, it showed no fright,
But just looked on with red eyes glowing bright.

The figure shook its head and gave an ominous grin,
A grin that would make goosebumps rise on anyone's skin.
Striking its scythe down onto the land,
Many things began happening at the figure's command.

The wind howled and the trees shook,
And the children opened their eyes to look.
Street lights flickered and leaves flew,
Everything happened at the figure's cue.

The creatures turned around and regarded the figure.
They puffed out their chests to show they were bigger.
But size doesn't matter in the figure's game,
No matter what, the creatures would be brought to shame.

The wind blew harder and the creatures fell,
They couldn't move under the figure's spell.
The creatures couldn't get up, though they tried and tried,
Then they looked up at the figure, all wet and teary-eyed.

The creatures cried to the figure, "Oh what shall we do?
Please tell us so we can get away from you!"
The figure looked at the creatures down on the ground,
And knew that they wouldn't want to stick around.

So the figure gave them a last little note.
The words tumbled out from its hoarse throat:
"Return all the candy you've stolen by midnight;
Do good to others and make everything right."

The creatures, not wanting to test the figure's words,
Stood up and divided the candy into thirds.
They set out with their bags of treats,
And quickly ran away throughout the streets.

The children smiled and got up on their feet,
They tried to calm down and slow their heartbeats.
To the figure they said, "We don't mean to make a fuss,
But who are you? Please tell us. Please tell us!"

For a while the figure spoke not one word,
And listening to the silence, the children stirred.
Eventually it said, "I am the Protector, of which you have seen,
I defend trick or treaters each Halloween."

The Protector took a deep breath and began to walk away,
Heading somewhere until the next Halloween day.
The children watched as a smoke was drawn.
Then just like that, the Protector was gone. •

The Dance of the Orchestra

Ava Bagdasarian

I close my eyes slowly,
Place my hand across my chest,
And listen, closely, preciously,
As the waltz begins.

When the bow graces the strings,
Wire and coiled, wrapped tight,
They vibrate faster than light,
Releasing the sounds of anger.

And of love, pure and blissful,
A violin waltzes in and reaches,
Out, out, for the hand of her harmony,
Singing harmonies and praises.

And of grief, the piano arrives,
Throwing the doors open, *fortissimo*,
Stomping and tapping on the floor,
Coming to confront his mistress.

His voice narrows to a whisper,
Rhythmic, staccato,
Come dance with me,
Come dance with me. •

Debut: LA chA TA (2009)

Debut studio album: Pinnocchio (2011)

Starred in many shows and films

Real (2017)

To The Beautiful You (2012)

Drama City (2007)

The Pirates (2014)

Fashion King (2014)

Ballad of Seodong (2005)

Love Needs A Miracle (2005)

Electric Shock (EP, 2012)

Hot Summer (2011, Pinnocchio rerelease)

f(x) earned 30 awards (62 nominations)

First K-pop act to perform at SXSW

Hot Summer (2011, Pinnocchio rerelease)

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Activities with f(x)

Nu.ABO (First EP, 2010)

First K-pop act to perform at SXSW

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f(x) earned 30 awards (62 nominations)

Debuted under SM Entertainment in the group f(x)

Nu.ABO (First EP, 2010)

First K-pop act to perform at SXSW

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Activities with f(x)

Nu.ABO (First EP, 2010)

First K-pop act to perform at SXSW

Hot Summer (2011, Pinnocchio rerelease)

f(x) earned 30 awards (62 nominations)

Four #1 Korean singles

f(x) - 33 music show wins

Goblin (Solo project, 2019)

Choi Jin-ri (March 29, 1994 - October 13/14, 2019)

Awards

Two

SBS

Drama

Sulli

🔗 Sulli
Li Shi

Concealed

Olivia DeWan

What if everyone had to wear a mask, a literal, decorative mask that hid what you really looked like? That's what the world had come to. Society had become so vain and judgmental that people wore masks to cover their faces. If your face couldn't be seen, you couldn't be deemed ugly; and if no one could see your reactions, no one could judge your opinion.

And so, the Concealeds were born. They cared about their popularity, their houses, their clothing, and how people saw them more than anything else. The Concealeds ruled our society with an iron fist. No matter who you were, you had to wear a mask: to look, think, and act the same.

Most people didn't complain. The masks were absolutely stunning and each person had their own unique set, colors of all sorts painted on them, with two eye holes. People decorated the masks for holidays, seasons, and events: masks for every occasion. The uniqueness of the masks was our one bit of individuality.

Unfortunately, it was the government's way of tricking us, keeping us from rebelling, into thinking we *weren't* being fully controlled. Most people just listened and did what they were told to do, but some people, like me, hated the rules that we were forced to live by.

They made me sick. We had lots of rules, but the biggest of all was to never take your mask off in public. It was seen as a sin. This world was so screwed up, and there was nothing I could do about it. Rage flooded through my veins. I couldn't stay still; I needed to move or my anger would make me do something I'd regret. I walked into town, with my mask on, as always. Today it was red with gold and orange swirls painted to look like fire. The fire was my own small sign of defiance to the Concealeds.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a loud horn blew three times, signaling that someone had taken their mask off and punishment would be served. I sighed. What idiot would do that? We all knew the rules. Even if you didn't agree with them, why break them when the consequence was so severe?

I followed the crowd to the town square. People murmured with excitement, and my lips curled in a snarl at their reactions. Good thing I was wearing my mask, or people would know what I really thought.



🔗 A Curious Place
Cassandra Melson

A person was tied to a post with a bag over their head, hiding their face from view. I shoved my way through the crowd. The announcer stepped up.

“You all know why you’re here! This Concealed has decided to take off his mask. All of us know the punishment for this despicable act, don’t we?”

“Death!” everyone roared back. Everyone except me. The bag was ripped off of the person’s head and I gasped.

“No,” I whispered. It was my brother, Ross. Ross was the only person I let see my face. He was the only person I trusted enough to. Without masks, I could tell he was mad by the snarl on his mouth. I could tell he was happy by the grin of his lips. His eyes would shine with humor or sadness or joy. His eyebrows would rise in confusion or disbelief. Without masks, I could see who Ross *really* was, and he could see me.

But if I let anyone else see my face, I was as good as dead. The Concealeds tried to hide who we *truly* were, to cover up our ideas that contested theirs. They wanted us to never question their authority and to be submissive to their rule. They wanted complete control. And *that* is what Ross and I couldn’t stand. We hated that our voices weren’t heard. We both thought rebelliously about telling them how we really felt about their ideas and psychotic rules. But I never thought that he would take action! I couldn’t lose Ross.

“Ross Stormhallo has decided to throw away our laws,” the announcer roared. “He has chosen to toss away his place in the Concealeds’ society. He is charged with breaking our number one rule: Never take your mask off. His punishment is death!” The crowd shouted back words of encouragement.

“No!” I screamed, fighting my way to the front of the stage, but people had moved in front of me, blocking my way. The announcer pulled a syringe from his bag. A blue liquid swirled inside of it. Lethal injection. Agony and pain. Ross would feel every second of his death. The announcer walked behind the post, and raised the syringe. *No!* I had to move! I had to save him! But I couldn’t shove my way through the crowd any more.

Emotionlessly, the announcer slammed the syringe into my brother’s neck. *No!* The injection worked immediately. Foam formed at Ross’s mouth. He jerked against the post, his eyes rolled back into his head and he let loose a blood-curdling scream. Then he stopped moving.

The announcer grabbed my brother’s mask from his bag and broke it in half. A sign of exile. Tears streamed down my face, hidden by my red mask.



☞ Man's Best Experiment Cassandra Melson

Red. The color of blood. Or rage.

“Let me remind you why we wear masks. We can't let our true selves be seen. We will never be accepted if we show who we are beneath them. The masks protect us. They save us!” the announcer called out.

“Protect us! Save us!” the crowd chanted. The Concealeds' slogan. People

resumed their lives. I forced myself to move toward my brother's body. I fell to my knees beside him, near the scattered pieces of his black mask. Black. Another act of rebellion, one that had played a part in his death. The Concealeds didn't let us wear black. I scooped up his broken mask. Rage flooded my veins, demanding revenge. Demanding justice. I didn't care what he had done or how stupid it was; I would avenge Ross. Or I would die trying.

I walked home in silence to find two cops standing with my parents. I was relieved that at least I didn't have to break the news.

"...The announcer dealt out his punishment," one of the cops was saying. My parents gasped. They didn't think Ross would take the final leap.

"Thank you for the information, Officers," my mom said. The police nodded solemnly, and then left. My parents turned to each other and started blathering.

"I can't believe he did that!" my dad said, although I doubt he cared. They thought Ross dragged dirt along our family name. My parents were the Concealeds' version of perfect. They never put up a fight, they never spoke out, and they never removed their masks.

"Ross was sick with ideas and individualism. It's better this way," my mom said.

I snapped. "Ross wasn't sick! How could you say that about your own son? You are both *psychotic!*" I grabbed a glass off the table and threw it at the wall. It shattered into pieces.

"Aria Rose Stormhallo! Go to your room right this minute!" my mother told me. I scoffed and stormed out of the house.

"Get back here right this minute!" my dad snapped, following me.

"Or what? Y'know maybe I'll take my mask off too!" I threatened, but I wouldn't do it. I needed to make a stand first, get justice for my brother.

I knew where I needed to go. Ross's friends hated the rules. I made my way to Lillith's house. Before he'd died, she was Ross's best friend. I knew she would help me, so I banged my fist on her door and it quickly flew open.

"Aria?" Lillith asked me, recognizing my favorite mask. Her voice was strained, like she had been crying, but her purple mask hid her face from me.

"I need your help," I said. Lillith nodded.

We climbed the staircase to her room. Three of Ross's friends sat on the floor. When Lillith shut the door, I ripped my mask from my face. They followed, and our masks littered the floor.

"I'm done," I started. "They killed my brother because he didn't agree with



🔗 **Cherries**
Li Shi

them. That's unacceptable!"

"Finally! What do you have in mind?" Aaron asked.

"I'm going to take my mask off. At the gala tomorrow night," I replied. The gala was a yearly event that celebrated the birth of the Concealeds. Everyone dressed in fancy clothes and drank expensive champagne to celebrate our subjection.

"You know what will happen when you do?" Aaron asked.

"I'm willing to die for this cause." I now understood what could make someone break the rules, even with such a costly punishment. "I understand if you won't follow me, and I would never ask you to. But I need your help to set it up."

"I don't see why I wouldn't take my mask off. If we live like this, there's nothing to live for," Lilith said, admiration shining in her eyes.

"Let's do it," Aaron added. Jane and Milo nodded in agreement.

“Great. Now that we are all on the same page, we need to start planning,” I said. “First things first. We’re gonna need new masks. Black ones.”

The next day I was numb. I was going to die, and I was ready. In a world where society refused to accept us for who we were, we had to use our voice. I spent the night at Lilith’s house, working on our masks and dresses. When it was time. Aaron drove us to the mayor’s house for the gala.

“I’m glad you’re all doing this with me,” I told everyone.

“For Ross. For the future,” Jane replied. We entered the gala without a problem, despite the guards. I led our group to the back of the stage in the ballroom. Because of course the mayor had a stage in the ballroom. Why wouldn’t he?

“Good evening, everyone! Welcome to the annual gala!” The mayor called out, starting a wave of clapping. “The Concealeds have lived in peace for centuries, never taking our masks off. We all know that the masks help us fit in. Help to protect us from individuality. Individuality is what causes unnecessary conflict between friends, family, and enemies. It is what leads to selfish impulses and horrible acts of crime. It’s what gives terrible ideas and separates us from each other.” The Mayor paused to let his words sink in.

“As you all know, the Concealeds would crumble without the masks. Having our own thoughts, feelings, and ideas would only reinforce the downfall of our society. We wear the masks because they help us survive and thrive as a community. Without them, we would be doomed to a life of chaos and disorder.”

“Alright, let’s do this before we have to listen to any more of his lies,” Milo hissed. We shoved our way onto the stage. The spotlight focused on us.

“What’s going on? Wait... is that... black?” the mayor cried out in horror. A grin spread across my face, though it was hidden by my mask.

“What are they doing?”

Comments flew, but none of us cared. This was our last stand. Our last moments on Earth, and we would make them something to remember. I stepped up to the microphone. “Some of you knew my brother, Ross Stormhallo,” I started, sealing my fate. “And those of you who had that honor know he was an amazing person. He was kind hearted, brilliant, and *unique*. But you didn’t like that. You didn’t like how he thought what he wanted to think and that his opinions didn’t match yours.” I took a moment to collect myself. The pain of Ross dying almost consumed me, but I wouldn’t have to live with it much longer.

“So what did you do when you got scared? You killed him. You thought that

killing Ross would quell the individuality that you saw in him. You were wrong.”

“In killing him you started something else,” Lilith snarled next to me. Her voice rang out across the ballroom, loud and powerful.

“We demand the right to be who we want to be. We demand the rights to say and think what we want to, and if you deny us those rights,” I said with a glance towards my friends, “then we’ll be forced to continue to rebel.” I tore my mask off and held it up. I snapped it in half and dropped it to the ground.

People screamed. Guards charged at us, flying like arrows shot from a bow.

“Uh oh,” I said, and we sprinted.

“Get ‘em!” the mayor shouted. Outside the house, our luck ran out. The police were waiting.

“It’s time to face the fire, guys,” I said to my friends. We stopped running and let ourselves be handcuffed. There was no reason to fight. We were dragged into the town square, people following us as we were tied to the posts. All five of us stood tall and proud, brave. Our masks were off and broken. The Concealeds’ version of us had been shattered. They couldn’t control us anymore.

The mayor stepped up to us with a case of syringes, playing the role of the executioner. I mentally prepared for what was to come. The Mayor delivered some speech that fell on my deaf ears. Then he injected my friends with the deadly liquid. It was horrible to watch, but I felt numb. My brain must not have been working properly. I don’t think I could truly recognize the amount of pain they were in. Then, the mayor stepped into my line of sight. He wagged the syringe in front of my face, taunting me. *It doesn’t matter what you do or say, society will always expect you to be someone you’re not*, I thought. I should have just accepted our society for what it was. But I couldn’t. No way would I leave others to suffer in submission like I had!

“Wait!” I shouted, yanking at my tied hands.

“You have forsaken our rules. Now you face the consequences,” the mayor said.

“Seriously? Every bit of individuality that a person has is a gift! It’s a blessing!”

“No, it’s a curse. One that destroys all things good.”

“Really?” I asked again, “What are you gonna do? Kill everyone who has even a little bit of individuality?” The mayor leaned in close to me. His next word was whispered, meant for my ears only.

“Yes.” •



Hamlet
Chris Pena

Gilded

Amber Trinh

Heavy sits the weight of a gilded crown
On a brow never once furrowed by
Labor,
Poverty,
Starvation.

Elegantly arched over cunning eyes
Curtained behind lashes
Innocently batting
With the grace and charm
Of the fairest, Aphrodite.

For her surveillant court,
She shines her cemented smile
With the sickening sweetness
Of honey.

For her infatuated king,
She caresses her incestuous lips
With the docile demeanor
Of a lamb.

For her beloved son,
She extends her motherly embrace
With the feigned fondness
Of Janus,

For a most seemingly virtuous queen
Only bows before gold
And cowers before crowns
To revel on her treasured throne in
Royalty,
Power,
Opulence. •

Peace, Freedom, and Cookies Sprayed with Honey

Edith Roxana Yanes Guevara

This July 20 we celebrate the independence day of Colombia.
Today marks 208 years
from the signing of the act of the revolution in 1810,
promising true peace to more than fifty million people.

Only now our beloved Colombia can enjoy with tranquility
a delicious coffee with chocolates,
cookies sprayed with honey in the morning.
Now we can say that *colombianos* every day feel ready to work,
ready to earn some money.

We Colombians are like the jockey,
we bstride our horse with a lot of love and passion,
not because we are a hungry body,
but because we are Colombian warriors.

Just as children ask for toys,
the prisoners also ask for freedom,
and I ask for peace to never leave us.
Peace is justice and justice is our love.
Love is everything I want,

That's why we have to add joy and subtract cruelty.
We have to multiply friends and not forget about peace.
Leave the war
and we are going to play in freedom.
Now we are a free Colombia, free to dream,
peace to never leave us. •

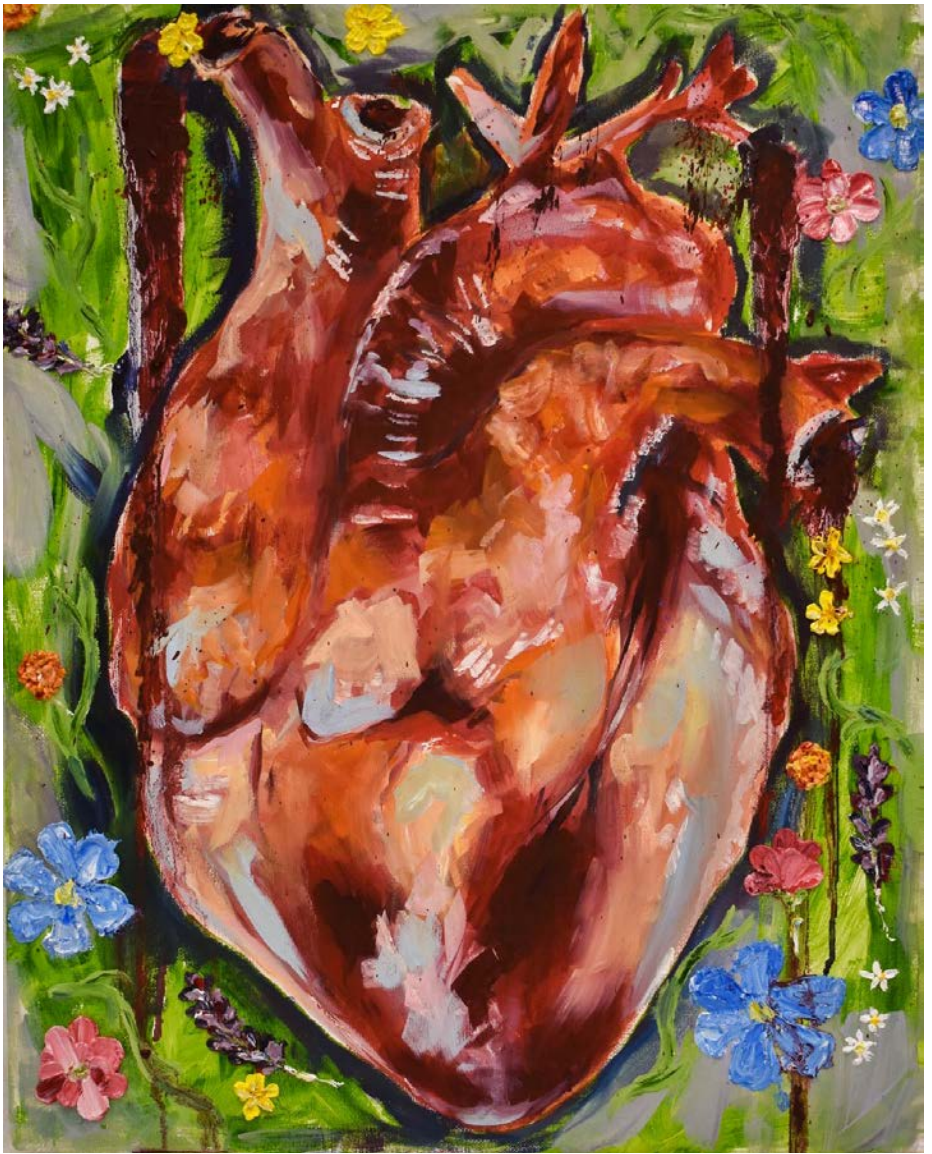


 **Street Dragon**
Alyssa Hughes

I Can't Go Back to Bed

Sophia Macchiarolo

I stare at my ceiling, white at night,
Memorizing the lines, crisscrossing my sight,
Sheltering me from the realities of life.
My brain is throbbing from the pressure of a drilling
Questioning, dissecting, barely fulfilling,
Riddling out why there are those
Unable to enter my place of fortune.
They seek to satisfy those needs and desires that plague us all
But kept back by an unbreachable wall.
I toss and turn, my blankets, colored with the stain of advantage,
Feel undeserved, twisting about me.
I sit up, the question on my lips
Asking why this has become an unwinnable scrimmage?
I realize the vintage villainy
Of a system in place before I was born.
I set my feet to my floor, the place we choose to put it,
Ignore it, sweep it under the rug.
But how can we let the system benefit only those it has decided deserve it?
Lifting my head I see my reflection in the mirror.
I have never known what it is like to be called a racial slur
or a derogatory name,
To be dragged through the dirt for who I was born to be.
I am privileged, and I don't know how to talk about it,
But that is not enough.
It is not something we or I can just snuff,
Yes, snuff like a candle, unhandled, dismantled,
because we have the light of fortune surging through our veins.
A drug that has desensitized us to the costs and banes
Of living life in this careless and ungrateful way.
I can no longer sit, I'm reaching for the door.
Get out! My feet slap through the corridor.
A million familiar faces pass me by,
I burst through the front with a battle cry.
I will not sit in silence, filled with compliance!
I can't go back to bed.
And while I don't know what lies ahead,
Let's start by acknowledging where we have been,
And realize the distance we still have to go. •



 Spattered
Amie Holstein

Hello Journal

Isabelle Bruce

Hello Journal.

It's been a while.

I'm sorry,

I'm sorry I didn't write to you.

I've been so busy with work and school

That I forgot I had to escape.

I forgot I had to run away from reality to keep my mind in check.

I know it's only been a few days,

But hello Journal,

I somehow forgot you.

You were under all the work, paper, and pens.

I forgot to let my mind free

And escape from reality.

I forgot to write—

Why must I fight to keep my head in place?

Hello Journal.

I've missed you,

And though I forgot you,

I knew you were calling me from the back of my head.

I've missed the Unicorns and Rainbows,

Willow Trees and Cyclones.

Lakes are without end and

Hearts that would not bend.

But no, I said:

“Work”

“Work”

“Work”

And forgot.

Hello Journal.

Take me to a place I cannot see

And let me escape from reality. •



 Orange Dino
Katherine Burke

Pumpkin Seeds

Polina Lowham

“Can I try carving the pumpkin too?” I jump up and down, my cowboy-like boots clicking onto the wooden floor that match my dirt brown knickered pants. I grab my worn-out handkerchief and fly it back and forth with pure excitement.

Silence.

My adopted family continues their Halloween decorating ceremony with light chatter and laughter consuming the warm cinnamon-scented air. My current family feels new, like a pair of oversized shoes, but I know I will eventually grow in them, like I did with my previous families. They're much better than the last place I lived... that I can't quite remember. I only remember the sharp coolness that would melt me into glacier and utter darkness that would become me. I didn't like it. Not one bit.

Spotches of neon orange plaster the crowded kitchen table. The essence of pumpkin spice lingers in the air as my current father further plows into his oversized pumpkin that is bigger than all of our heads combined.

Sophia, my new little sister, sits at the edge of the table, away from all the hazardous machinery. I stand right next to her small frame, admiring her delicate hand scribbling vigorously across her Halloween themed coloring book. She is coloring a jack-o-lantern with bright orange crayon that pours out of the lines, but somehow still makes the image look as beautiful and glorious as the Starry Night. Each detail of the bright hue sparks my memory of the fire-lit lantern we used to have at my old family's house. The orange, fiery flame used to dance in the crystal glass that would shield us from the creeping darkness. Sophia's drawing shines brighter than a million of my favorite lanterns. My last mother drew with dull, charcoal sticks that pierced sharply into my ear. The depressing colors matched her persona. With Sophia, the dancing colors marched right out of the page.

Mother sits right next to Father, with a glistening smile that match-



🕸️Hallowe'en Vision

Diann Landau

es the utmost happiness within her eyes. Mother's precise hands pull out the seeds from the pumpkin's guts and into a glass bowl, each seed making a *Clunk* as she tosses the oval bits. My mouth feels as if a waterfall can pour out at any moment, thinking of the honey roasted seeds she was about to make.

Out of pure excitement, I attempt to grab a handful of delicious, crunchy pumpkin seeds.

CRASH.

The golden seeds crash into the cold, dark floor as I stare in horror, watching the world's greatest treasure go to waste. I lean forward to capture every ounce of treasure I could scavenge, but each seed seeps through my hands. It is like trying to carry out a pound of rice that just keeps on escaping.

Mother's eyes are as wide as saucers, and her skin turns into a sickly white tone that matches the moonlight sky. Her mouth quivers in utter shock. I can almost feel the ice in her veins crystallize. "I—How?"

Sorry.

Sophia looks up from her half-completed drawing. "William says he's sorry," she says bluntly and goes back to coloring.

Father scrunches his bushy eyebrows, his wrinkled forehead deepens. "William... as in your imaginary friend, William?"

Not again, why can't they ever notice me?

"He's not invisible! He's right there!" Sophia pouts and stares right at me, pointing her twig-like finger at my already shattered soul.

This happens every single time, it's not fair. I don't want to be ignored.

"Sophia, you are eight years old," says Mother with a stern expression, clenching her jaw that outlines her Greek-like sculpted features. She kneels down to gather the remaining pumpkin seeds and places the delicious goods onto the round kitchen table. "Stop with this utter nonsense. I have no idea how you managed to knock the pumpkin seeds to the floor, but stop it at once."

Mother's face turns into a pungent red, almost as red as my face when I worked hours out in the field, from a day's worth of sunburn. I feel my face heat up as well, pure acid boiling in my veins as I see the tears building up in Sophia's puppy-like eyes.

"But, Mom, I didn't do it. William did!" Sophia exclaims and wiggles her stringy arms around in frustration, like a firehose spinning out of control.

"Sophia how dare you—"

Like drenching oil into fire, my anger smolders into flames. I find myself pushing all of the sunflowers off the table, allowing the rain of sunflower seeds to drizzle onto the cold, hard ground once more. The entire house sits still in eerie silence.

Sophia freezes and slowly looks up to see the ghostly-white expressions written on her parents' faces. She holds up a hand besides her face and leans forward to whisper, "Shh... he's just dead and doesn't know about it yet."

He's just dead.



Self Portrait
Kyla Jenkins

Like being hit in the head with a shovel and dragged across the arctic snow, I feel myself being heaved into the familiar, piercing glacial cool that will hold me for the rest of time. •

Echo

Valerie Egger

The moonlight wakes me,
It cuts the night,
Corporeal.

*What does it want? What does it know?
How many eons of time in its glow?*

I sit up in bed,
Bare feet on carpet,
Toes splayed on the mosaic
Of moonlight through trees.
The room is cold,
But I do not shiver.

I rise, silent. Déjà vu.
I have done this before.
A memory:

Once, at age eight,
I awoke in moonlight.
It called me to the mirror,
And I looked.
Half in dream, I peered and saw myself.
My mind transcended the glass:

Someone peering back at me,
Someone old.
Familiar but foreign,
Comforting but startling,
The eyes were the same:
Sadder, more tired, more intelligent,
But mine.

I saw myself seeing myself,
And I shivered.

Child-thin body staring at womanly curves,





Tangled locks echoing graying ones.
What etched those wrinkles in my face?
What lessons sculpted wisdom in my eyes?

I don't remember returning to bed,
But I must have.

I awoke the next morning
And I was still a little girl.

Now, the moonlight invites me.
It lights the night,
A friend.

*What does it want? What does it know?
How many eons of time in its glow?*

In the mirror, it bathes
My gray locks in misty aura.
My wrinkled brow
Speaks of hardship and victory,
Of disappointment and loss,
Of survival.

The gossamer light cuts through the mask.
I slip behind the glass to find, perplexed,
Entranced, a little girl of eight,
Staring back at me like maybe I'm a mother
Or a savior or a ghost.

Like somehow I have answers.

But instead I bring more questions.
How can I possibly have been that small,
That young, that naïve, that creative?

How could I ever have had
That much confidence and energy,
And why on Earth would any of us

Trade it all
For wisdom? •

 **Feral**
Jordan Beaupre

Everybody Watches The Sunset

Isabelle Bruce

Jealous of the sun am I.

Why? Are you the one to ask?

I could never mirror her unearthly ties

And saying “the same” is the most perfect lie.

The sun’s beauty, one cannot mask.

“Streaks of gold,” imposters words,

The sunnings impossible to explain.

One could call her “crimson,” “ruby,” all of absurd,

Colors of the sun, rarities not heard;

She smiles with lips of champagne.

Paint from the blush of a rose so fair

Shall brush her heart of gold,

Chains of pearls dance with her hair,

Her light shall caress with a warming stare;

Her enchantment she cannot withhold.

If words could explain my heart’s express

Only then would I describe her more.

To word her, even now, would call her less

Than the kiss she had left on my heart’s empress

So maybe some time off the distant lore. •



☺☺☺ **Sunset**
Kayla Urban

Noche

Edwin Salvador Hernandez Munoz

Noche tu que eres el tiempo
que abrume nuestros pensamientos
tu eres la que nos hace pensar en todo lo que tenemos

Noche misteriosa noche oscura
para unos eres alivio y
para otros eres dolor

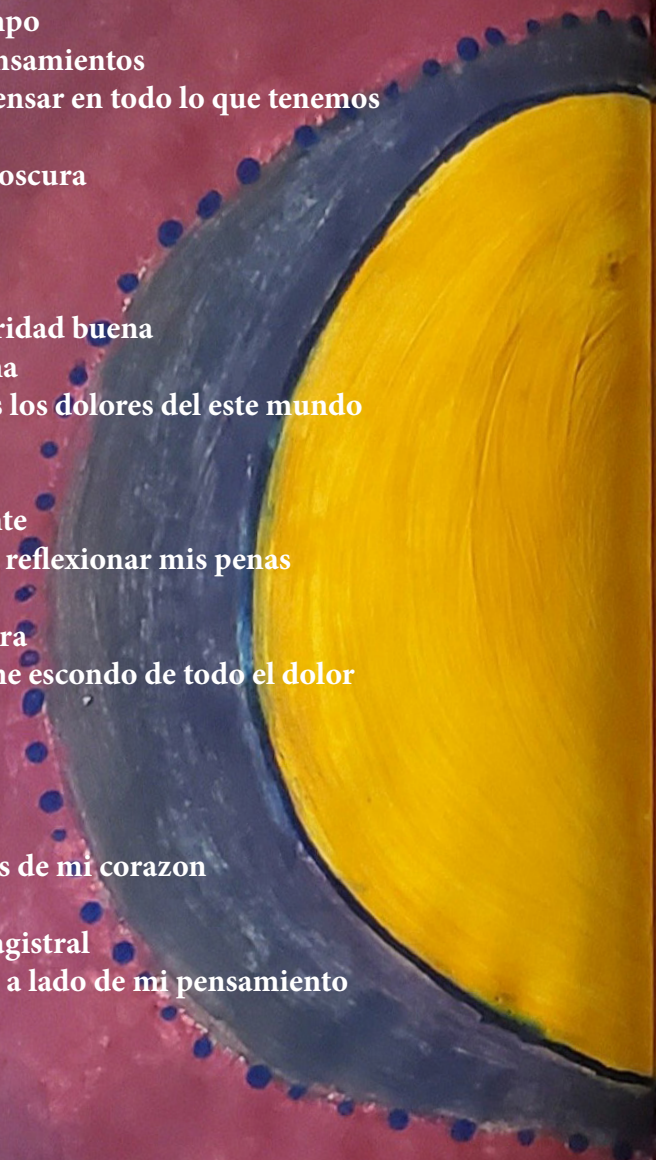
Noche tu que eres obscuridad buena
contienes la hermosa luna
la cual nos da luz a todos los dolores del este mundo

Yo amo la noche
como un amigo confidente
donde me arrodillo para reflexionar mis penas

Noche dulce, noche oscura
yo que en tu oscuridad me escondo de todo el dolor
que abrume todo mi ser

Noche majestuosa
con tus pocas luces
haces encender las llamas de mi corazon

Noche magica, noche magistral
me encanta tu oscuridad a lado de mi pensamiento
ver el anochecer venir •





☺☺☺ Night

Night, you are the time
that overwhelms our thoughts;
you make us think about everything we have.

Dark night, mysterious night,
for some you are relief and
for others you are pain.

Night, you are good darkness;
you hold the beautiful moon,
which gives light to all the pains of this world.

I love the night
as a confident friend,
with whom I kneel to reflect my sorrows.

Sweet night, dark night,
In your darkness I hide from all the pain
that overwhelms my whole being.

Majestic night,
with your few lights
do you light the flames of my heart.

Magic night, masterly night,
I love your darkness next to my thought:
watch the evening come. •

☺☺☺ Symmetry of the Day and Night
Isabella Sangiuliano and Natalia Sangiuliano

Odyssey in Candy Land

Thaddeus Sledd

I miss the days when the biggest thing we had to worry about was if our
crush liked us.

Or if our parents would find stowaway candy under our beds.

If sweeter things are yet to come, let them sail me away from here
because now our boats are belly up,
and our eyes see nothing but black.

Not the darkness of liquorice,
but the pounding of midnight waves on capsized ships.

I relish the smell of our grandmother's peppermint.

A swirl of pure white, and bold red, that coated your enamel,
but burned our gums.

Rotting our teeth.

A time for sugar coated lies.

Now, lies are thick and complicated, like syrup,
and I realize, sugar was sweeter when we were younger. •



🔗 Keep It to Yourself
Amie Holstein

Christmas Queen

Emily Banner

The tree towers above me,
Adorned with captured fireflies;
The many perches call to me
In the soft sunrise.

Pine needles poke my paws,
And drag along my spine,
As I pad along the branches
And carefully recline.

The humans swiftly gather,
Around the lights and me;
And sit to open boxes
Underneath my tree.

A ribbon moves along the ground,
I pounce
And land
And pause.
A piece of paper, blue and round,
I reach
And jump
And paw.

The sun rises up,
The day moves ahead.
There's a glisten of snow,
And the soft smell of bread.

The day is bright
And full of fun,
The children play,
I join them and run.

When dusk falls,
The fireflies shine,
Bright despite the lack of light
On my massive reaching pine.



🔗 **I Hope I Get Yarn for Christmas**
Caitlin Fikes

A perch to find,
To walk,
To hide,
In the towering mass of green.
Ribbons to chase,
To move,
Misplace,
For the humans, from me, the queen. •

Rainbow Armageddon

Anna Jungkeit

Why do you hate me when I say that you can trust me? Why are you scared of me when I say that you can love me? Why do I say I'm lost because you never found me?

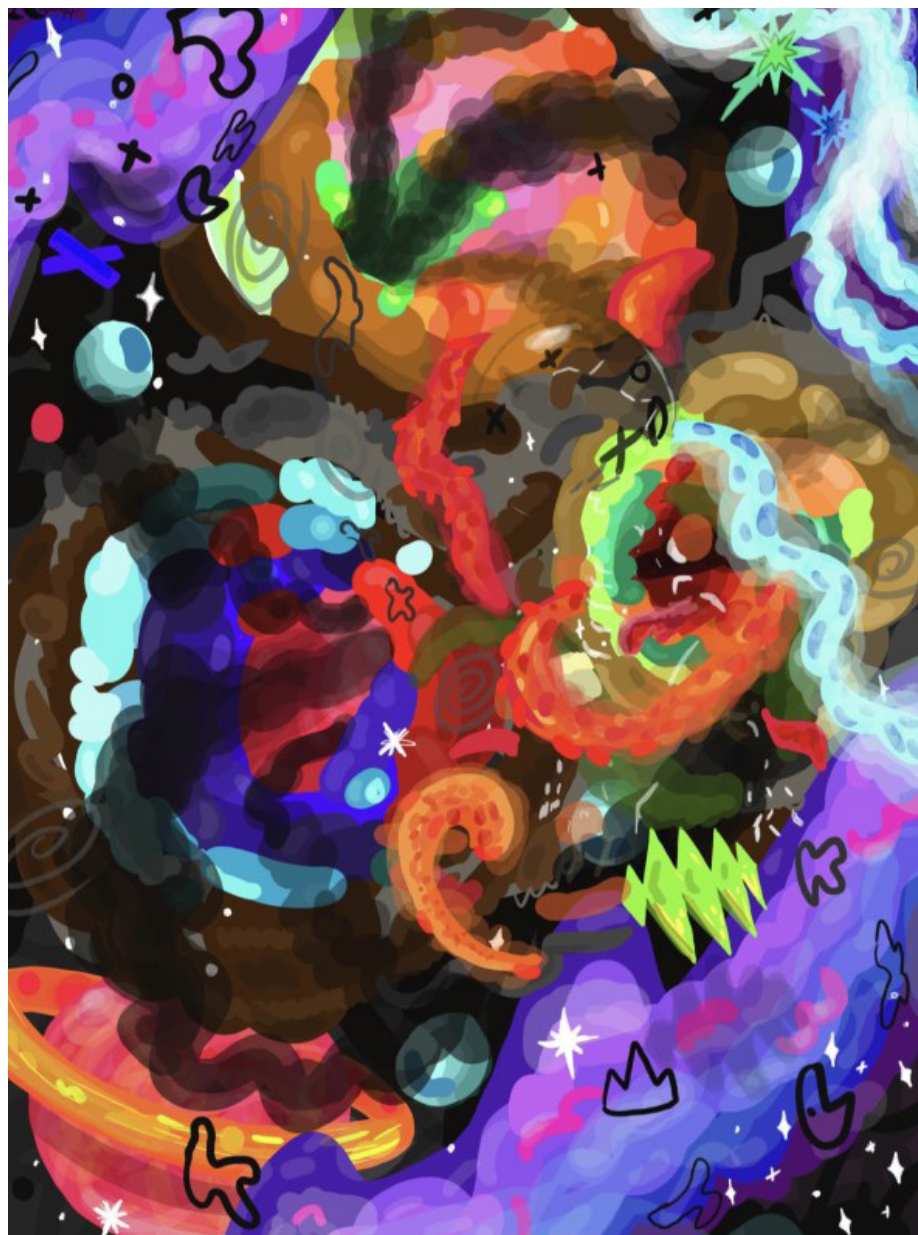
When we are lost and lonely, angry and afraid, we want to break things. We want to puncture. And pull apart. And fracture and cut and slit and lacerate and gouge and maim and sever and shatter and pierce and rupture and rip and tear and shred whatever we can find, into bits and pieces until they can't be broken anymore.

And we put all those fragments in a glass bottle with the cork screwed on tight, and we hurl the bottle into the river, hoping never to see it again, because it is a representation of ourselves. A sparse being lost at sea, too complex to comprehend, and no one bothers, no one makes an effort, no one cares to pick it up and try to put the pieces back together.

I thought I was that person. The person who would fish people out of the sea, the person who would cut their fingers on the broken shards, the person who tries desperately to put as much as they could back together. And what I couldn't salvage, I would make a new piece to mend the hole. It wouldn't fit exactly, and it would have a different color, but it was better than an empty space.

And the new pieces would make a kaleidoscope of different experiences, different ways for light to shine through a world of gray. But they wouldn't take the new, colorful pieces, and instead the broken ones would rather go back and search for the piece they'd lost, throwing my blood and tears to the glass-strewn ground.

They are too busy searching, too busy trying to find what could be right in front of them, too self-absorbed to see that what could have held them together, was disappearing. They don't appreciate or even recognize what I built. I am breaking. •



 Popping Space
Alyssa Hughes

Different and Familiar...

Lisa Levy

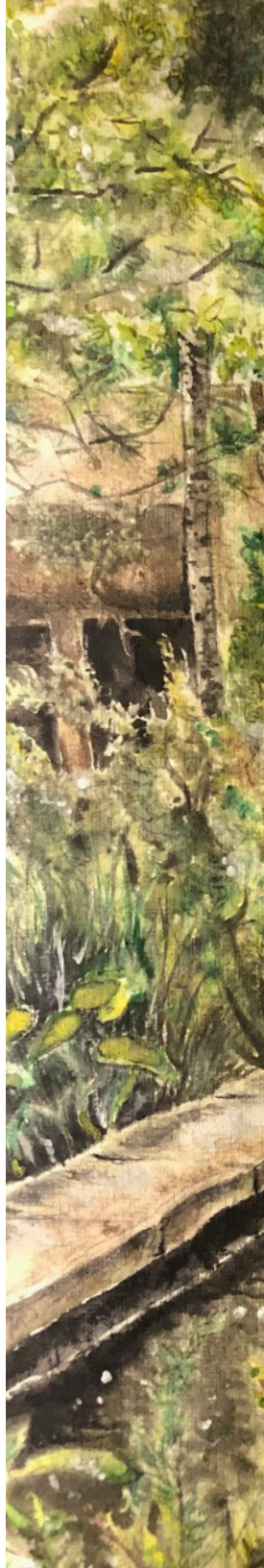
The tiled halls, the bathroom stalls,
The classroom doors, and
Freshly waxed floors.

Memories come flooding through
My brain as if they had been dormant
And waiting for this moment
To break the dam.

The sweet and sour
Scent of adolescent sweat;
The squeaky stench
Of rubber-soled sneakers;
The smell
Of stale sustenance;

The halls of high school
Hearken me back. •

 Early Beginnings
Alyssa Hughes





Bat Boxes

Lisa Fiorilli

Before the accident, I was normal like everybody else. (I was.)
Hear, then, how words—a rush of melismatic riffs—
skirred and scatted their way out in a score of symphonic proportions.
You would've put headphones on to amplify the dulcet tones.

After the accident, I am still normal like everybody else. (I am.)
But listen now to how words—a miasma of discordant chords—
spew and spit their way out in a mishmash of minute minuets.
Put your headphones on to block out the strident modulations.

(Let me begin again.)

While walking along my usual route—
a short neighborhood stroll
through a park with a paved path,
a few trees, and a mossy bench—
I heard an odd clicking sound. (I did.)
I circled the nearest bat box,
almost too flat to be inhabitable,
perched about twenty feet
above the ground.

Faint sounds, distinct
and discernible, echoed from
the roosts. Were they the squeaks
and squawks of a dam
and her pups? Perhaps a male
wooing a mate
with a soulful ballad?

You would've seen me that night,
circling the box, humming my own
sunset serenade, composing a chorus
for their verses. As I turned
toward another bat box, a hawk,
not much larger than my head,
swooped past, a tiny bat
clutched in its talons.



 **Mindless**
Bella Sierra

(You would've seen this, too.)

Not one to interfere
with predator and prey
(were those calls of distress?)
I continued along the path—
shaken and bothered, after all,
because I'd much rather the hawk
eat the squirrels.
(Why? I can't say.)

Beyond the tree line
the path met a footbridge
(not foreboding and troll-like but
rather inviting and faerie-like)
where several young people
were busy chatting (but not),
phones in hand,
music in ears,
laughter in cheeks.

I paid them no regard
as I passed by, but while crossing the creek
I slipped on some moss (or maybe some wet leaves)
smashing my head (against what I don't recall).

Before the accident, I was normal like everybody else. (I was.)
See, then, how words cascaded quickly and carelessly past my teeth,
synapses easily sparking letters into tinder for a wildfire of words.
You would've put glasses on to ward off the flames.

After the accident, I am still normal like everybody else. (Am I?)
But watch now as words stall, stale ideas no longer as keen and
convincing as before, yet still they burn and char blank pages.
Put your glasses on to magnify the surface and bear witness.

(I still have something to say.) •




Letting Go

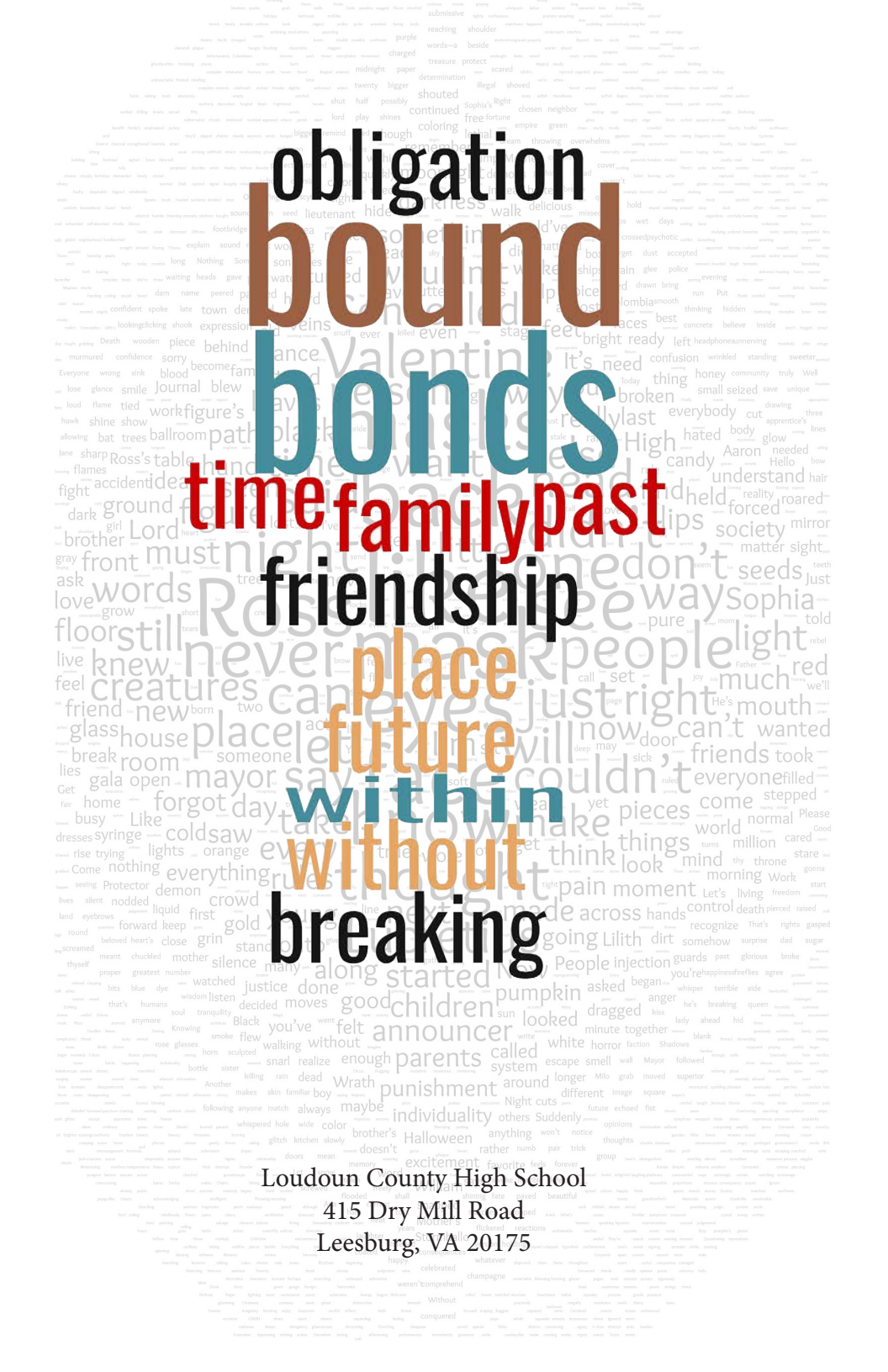
Cali Carroll

On some mornings,
I remind myself
To let go and grow.
As if a dance of autumn
Steals the hot heat of summer,
And the tree shivers.
But while the cold tree's
Dead leaves drop,
It still stands tall
With confidence,
Knowing the leaves
Will grow back.

I guess this is what letting go really means;
Reminding myself
That my leaves will grow back. •



 **Conflicted**
Amie Holstein



obligation
bound
bonds
time family past
friendship
place
future
within
without
breaking

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