



EST. 1899

2022

Ed. #123

THE
LAUREL

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Letter from the editor

Dearest readers,

Welcome to the 2021-2022 publication of *The Laurel*, our 123rd body of work featuring the wonderful, creative content produced by St. Bonaventure University students. Many thanks to our wonderful advisor, Dr. Sara Nicholson, for her guidance and support. Thank you also to all the English Department faculty for supporting our work this year and encouraging their students to submit for this publication.

This issue is dedicated to all of the Bonnies students, faculty, staff, and friends who have persevered through these tumultuous times, and especially, for those who have not. To say the past few years have been tough would be an understatement. Amidst lockdowns, hybrid and online classes, and universal anxiety, we can finally see the light at the end of this hellish tunnel.

As I write this during my final days as a student at St. Bonaventure, I cannot help but think about the impact that the Bonaventure English program has had on me. Following a suicide attempt amidst the pandemic, I was able to find a supportive haven within the Bonaventure community, the arts, and this program. Their endorsement of the power of the arts and support of its students is unparalleled to any other, and I am forever thankful for the Bonaventure community.

It has truly been an honor to serve as the editor in chief of the oldest continually run literary magazine in the country, and I trust Tucker Reilly, my co-editor in chief, along with the rest of the editorial staff will continue to carry on one of the greatest traditions this University has to offer.

Enjoy the art and beauty within the following pages.

In a world where you can be anything, be kind. Pax et Bonum.

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Words Fail

By Iris Archer

Silence

Wafts through the air

Smelling like your roast sitting in the slow cooker

Silence

Makes the loudest sound

Singing like you do to Born to Run

Silence

Wraps around me

Carrying me like you did when I pretended to fall asleep on the couch

Silence

Falls over us

Dropping down like the tears on your face when I left for college

Silence

Speaks

Seems to say I love you

Seems to say I'm proud of you

Silence

Sometimes says everything

That words are not able to.

Silly and Foolish Greenies seek the Moldy Gold

By Charlie Doebert

We do what must be done for the Golden Tree: water and lay out the crops that shoot pixie dust from the stems: shovel and dig the fields and raise the tulips of glass.

Glass that holds a sea. Glass that holds a river. Glass that holds a creek. The sky is silver, and coins come splurging out of the sky and smack the ground. The coins become tokens and are warped inside of barbed wire fences. The Golden tree dangles its bloody leaves and apple cores and medallions on the tulips of glass. The roots dig up all the waterways and rainbows that reach the moon that shines over the Golden Tree and Her hollow limbs.

Snow and rain travel and hide in the bronze dirt and they reach the brick path that leads to the Golden Tree in the forest of angels and devils and little ones and giant ones: creatures that linger in the darkness and in the fading stars and explore the voices that say no more in the Golden Bark.

Golden tree.

Prison is here.

We do what we must:

Survive the deep pockets of the thieves that hide in the Golden Tree's shadowy cave.

Goblins, we are always thieving.

Always a pooka climbing the bronze limbs. Dashing and splashing guts on riches that grow and infest Her roots.

In the Golden Tree,

We do what must be done for the Golden Tree's Way.

Season of cyclops and misty hawks rise and die as Her storm commences.

The Golden Tree in this season is as yellow as the Seven Suns that hide in Her roots.

Take it! Give me the Tree of Gold! Precious! Yes!

Jewels and gems bleed out of Her trunk.

The Golden Tree, a radiant flare

The Rocketeers!

By Charlie Doebert

The glossy aviators go out into space on voyages of exploration to make new declarations.

I stay on moldy old Earth where everything is safe and sound, no worries for any rebounds.

The glassy aviators seek the golden John Lockets and trails of aliens in order to find the one and only rainbow chameleon.

I remain a pit stain in the ballpark stadium with my glove shaped out of white doves that need tremendous love in the shadowy cove.

I do not want to lose my cheap fallen seat. Wow, call me Pete the cheat, such a fat slob of red raw meat and stinky feet treats.

Oh, those bright aviators take steroids and skirmish through the bombardment of asteroids.

I go to the inferno tree house with my telescope to relive and soak myself up in the juices of all my toys of sorrow and wish on each and every single visit on my hands and knees that I see no tomorrow.

The sheeny aviators conduct to light the ameliorations of the promised land. While I the fuck up dwell in quicksand.

I recoil to my impoverished unkempt spiraling down haven.

I am in my dying phases of being a fathomless sloth of narcotics, a missing page in everyone's comics.

The lustrous aviators are gazed back on as the renowned paladins having a cookout with their spatulas for the final hour on the nebula.

I am Benedict Arnold.

I am a serpent forged of trepidation, apprehension, and my favorite ice-cream flavor is incarceration, hey there my brother Norman Bates.

I am a weed who can't enchant himself with the laws of science and slips like an obese pig on the water slide in the pile of petrified dung. Get over it, rip out my tongue GOD dammit!

I am a candy ass who needs to be enlisted or else if not that then it's time for a field trip to the average Joe junkyard of excuses..... shoulda, coulda, woulda and completely driving by the targeted noteworthy garden.

A population of citizens who lived in the 1% silky riches long ago.

Memories and collections of fruits and vegetables as rare as a hen's teeth are inscribed showing all their stories in facing the magnetic magnitude of the black hole.

The fighters emerged with resilience, defining the processes of gravity.

The garden of aviators is waiting for the chosen one to jumpstart the rocket ship to invent the Avant Garde of constellations.

Am I the Armstrong they're looking for?

We will see, we will see, we will never know until we ascend into the Odyssey.

Jimmy Neutron, gotta blast!

Three (A Glimpse into Myself Sitting by a River)

By Robin Lane

My Secret Place. Well, secret in my eyes. **It's the only place I can go when I need to be alone.** Alone with my thoughts, **The leaves made the perfect hiding place from the sun.** hiding behind the clouds. **It was so quiet.** *I miss her hair, long and flowing.* **Nothing but the blowing wind,** *sweaty skin calloused by a hard day's work,* **the flowing river,** *her embrace, gentle as a cloud's touch.* **the singing birds** *and her beating heart pressed against my ear.* **Now, the sun is shining,** *I can almost hear her voice.* **but the leaves are all gone.** *It's nothing like our kissing tree back home,* **It's still quiet.** *but it'll do for now.* **The water blowing, the breeze flowing,** *Now her heartbeat is miles away.* **the birds singing sweetly.** *Oh, what I would give to be in her arms again.* **What was it you said about the birds?** No, not you, the *other* you. **Listen to the birds, you said.** You looked like autumn then, **Listen to the birds** but summer hadn't even ended yet! and watch out for the animals. So pathetic. **Smell the flowers,** *the irises,* **You lost so many.** *the lilacs,* **You had every right to cry.** *the peonies* **Even your brother was crying!** Oh, yes, the peonies! **embrace their aroma. A childless father!** *Your favorite.* **Yet the strength of a smile carried you.** **Look up at the stars.** *Is that where we're going?* **What was it like standing in the Goodbye Room? Listen to the laughter of the children.** *Watch out!* **The place where you said goodbye to your lover, Just take it all in.** where you said goodbye to your master, **Stop and look around you.** and where they all said goodbye to you **Listen closely.** *There's more magic to come.* **But speaking of flowers,** *The poppies.* **isn't it funny?** The poppies! **How flowers can mean so many things.** Remember the poppies! **Lovers worship the red rose** *She likes blue ones,* **while yellow ones make good friends.** Poppies remember. **Orchids are so thoughtful.** as you drifted to sleep in your mother's **Peonies are so honorable.** Poppies put him to sleep. **Marigolds are strong.** If his father had let him stay, **Stars are the flowers of the heavens.** He wouldn't have set out to sea. **Sometimes, I like to think** He wouldn't have come home crying. **there's a star for everyone,** If his mother had said something, **and someday,** Then he wouldn't have fallen asleep in the poppy field. **we're all going** I'm ashamed to have ever called her "auntie" **to go back there.**

I remember what you yes, you **said about this pain.** *She says she wants more.* **"It's important that we all stop giving ourselves such a hard time."** *The last time I saw him was at graduation.* **I wish I could just let go,** you were right. *She wants to rule the world* **"We've got to remind ourselves..."** *He said hello,* **but that's always been the hardest part.** *with me by her side,* **"...and push ourselves to let go."** but I never said goodbye.

You made it look so easy! I wish I had your strength. *but it's a world I have no place in.* **"There's not much we can do except to be..."** *born from the same blood.* **I wish I had your strength.** *It's all*

too much for me! "...and in being, become aware." separated by time. **Maybe that's why I turned to you** after all this time. *Aren't I enough for her?* **"See what's going on around you all the time."** Someone I knew my whole life, **in my hour of darkness,**

Our love is like a songbird **"And allow it to happen."** but never got to know. **because you were the one who said** it's okay. *But which of us is the bird?* **"All the sadness."** So much time wasted. **what I needed to hear.** *And who locked the cage?* **"All the joy."** I never got to tell him "I love you."



A Montana Evening by Jordan Gusch

The Other Side

By Jenna Langly

If I wasn't White.

What a different world it is.

Being judged for everything I do, Just because of the pigmentation of my skin.

Trying to make friends, Getting a good education, Applying for a job.

Every day is "judgement day".

But I am not ashamed of who I am.

There are so many others just like me.

And so, I celebrate for my people

For they have given me hope in this cruel world.

I am beautiful, I am powerful, I am brave.

I fight, because others have for me, 50 years ago...

Times were different,

They're "better" now but we still must fight.

One day we will all live in peace and harmony.

I pray for a loving world.

But first we must fight.

The simple things that you take for granted when you have the privilege

Of having White skin.



Untitled by Emma Kostenbader

Mumbles of a Fool, His Name Unknown

By Okikiola Michael

*Lo! Here, tales of damned men. Some
known, before the went while the rest are
echoed by only what they had said and what
they wrote before meeting*

THE IMP

Jeremiah, the poet

Amidst the age of coin

fervor of putrid things

corrodes this thin atmosphere of our beloved
sham

We are not safe

This town...

is not safe,

and I presume the carnage starts with me

*Mumbles of a fool. His name is
unknown*

Champion of guilt!

I don't know what bounds to which this
sorrow would take

maybe to the gout of my self-less spine

time and the guard of fortune

horror and tore my rows of roars

by the morrow

chastise my faith in a whim

like the gratitude of the moon for the sun

leave my soul behind

let me die in dreams and tales

let me sleep away into the past of the
mournful light

abide yearn or respite, for vengeance or for
praise

let me away not for all and none of all

none of it

hold

fast and weary

scary time is afoot, we have ventured

into the foreign wind, the daft aft of air

is causing quite the draft in my bones

in training we have

ahhahahhahhahaah!

I abate you, with my words, I tell you away,
imp!

I am steel, cold and strong and unpierceable
even with your shadows

Go away!

let thee know of a malice

slicer, I say
cut your throat from your neck before you
can
say speck
I'm a killer, of you who shout of shame in
my name
foul foul foul foul, cheat you have
doomed me good and gone and rotten into
idolatry and

*Written frantically, by Old Man
Gatese*

It was as night,
yesterday that I heard her wail
Thought it was some drunkards
Too plastered to discern their quarters from
mine
I awake to tell them away
Here, I open my door wide
And there she was
Startled at the stillness
With broken reply
I gush the aching of my heart
Still In broken reply
What great cost
I have expended in
Foiling my peace

That now in having
Of sanity
Sanity and sleep
I do not
I see her
By God, I saw her
In my room last night
Where her face was,
There was nothing
Not a clue of humanity even
Black thing, conjured, I presume
In my sunken slumber-less dread,
From the darkness of the street
From the valleys of shadows
From the depths of the night
Casting down it's slim evil up my hallway
Her arms, long and lean things
With her palms reaching the floor
As she stood, hooded by ebony fur
Across the chest
I say she is woman
By only what the breasts told me
Usually, a distraction for me
Late night sulking self
But I was caught in fear by the speed

She engaged me at the corridor.
All in what seemed to be an eternal second
By the time the moment had caught up to
me
I found myself, my body on the floor
Smothered by her shadow
I could only mutter noises
With little volume, and my helplessness
grew
As she stepped
Softly stomping forward with large feet
Softly swallowing me with her gaze
Her feet looked my hands
Toes, half the size of my head
Slowing clasping onto the oak floors of my
chamber
Possessing every tile and cranny
Entering
Covering every inch of my sight with her
horror
She screeches,
a grin peers from the abyss on her neck
then puckering some lips
To let out more foul noises
I can not possibly write the horrid
proclamation of the imp
But it was disgusting, it was loud and
protruded my very soul that

If they were words
All I could feel yelled at me was a
damnation
Like she was telling me of my insignificance
I felt like nothing could pierce her
Not a word from my mouth
Not the knife I found in my hand
I don't know where it came from
But it was pointless, I thought
I felt near to death than ever
She grew
Even larger than before,
Even darker than last I thought
Blacker than the night it's self
Blacker than a moonless night sky
Blacker than the hinds of oblivion,
She grew over me
Loomed and paraded
Until all I could see was nothing
Black and nothing
She let out a screech again,
It was ape-like
Screeching profusely
Readying herself for something
to pounce upon me? To rage?
To kill?

I let any thought of fear leave me, it's a waste
Of a burden to hate death
There are better things to suckle on as you go to heaven
...or hell
And it won't be fear.
The screeches grew louder, aching the walls of my chamber
They rumbled and quaked in the darkness
I had forgotten I was still within my home
Then the noise left...
fading fastly
Back out my door, crammed echoes jetting out the door,
Bunching, bouncing of the church bells, off
The lamplights,
Off the silence of the night
as if hurled back screaming
Stretching their arms back
Wanting me for the torment of me
My closed eyes,
I dared to open
And my bravery gave me sight
To my chamber as I met it before going to bed.
The sun had risen, the church bells ringing,

And marketplace ahead of my resident
was starting their daily
Bustle
Why have they left me to die?
I ran out my door
Gracelessly I stumbled out
Tumbled far into the midst of the market and square,
WHY DID NONE OF YOU HELP ME?
I exclaim
CURSE YOUR HEADS!
HOPE THE FIENDISH DEMON GETS YOUR GUTS
OVER MINE!
WHAT HARM HAVE I DONE TO BE LEFT SO HELPLESS?
CURSE YOU ALL
They all looked at me with disdain or confusion
I was a stupid old man deluded by wine
Hallucination, the doctor called it
He gave me some acrid medicine
Medicine can't tell away demons
Stave as much, for seconds tween days
For moments pocketed sanity
For those only
But never away

Not a good stench can tell away what I saw

What I felt

I know I saw her,

I know it with every bones in my rusting
body

I know it

I know it

Why haven't none of them seen it too?

I have taken the medicine

Maybe they are the sane ones

Demons are real

The church is just some yards away

I am safe

I was dreaming

Dear God,

What is that noise?

The imp...

No...

No...

She's here again...

She's real

Why me?

Dear god, why me?

Hel-



Untitled by Emma Kostenbader

A poem is a Gesture Towards Home

By Matt Villanueva

A poem is a gesture toward home
A drunk dial; a drunk text
Multiple drunk texts
Vulnerable; a call for help, a plea
For love, affirmation.
A request for a double after
Gamboling through the floor

A poem is the prosody of her voice
Edward Sharp and the Magnetic Zeros
Compassionate and warm. Never
Worn down or fazed. Like a
Cup of black coffee on a
Sunday morning. Or two, or three.

A poem is an approach to happiness
Or at least whatever the hell that may
mean. Maybe building one
The Cinematic Orchestra
A reach to what seems
unattainable. A call for help
Because for my sanity's sake, i sure as hell
need it.

A poem is a gesture toward home



*A Drunken
Gaze* by Matt
Villanueva



Let it Fall by Alby Alex



Untitled by Caitlyn Slater

Hotel Sunyata

By Nathan DaSilva

“Mr. Holloway?” A tall and thin Asian man in a red velvet uniform with gold trimming asked from the brightly lit doorway of a skyscraper. The building blended into the surroundings, the same beige walls as the one next door, with one exception. There was a dark wooden board above the door with white lettering that read “Hotel Sunyata” with a zero on the left end.

The man he was talking to stopped in his trudging, took a break from dragging his knuckles on the sidewalk to register what had been said. A homeless man covered in a layer of dirt above two winter jackets and mud-stained jeans doesn’t usually get recognized by fancy hotel bellhops. He reached up and scratched his chin under a scraggly black and gray beard. It sounded like a match being struck, his skin and hair was so coarse. “Yeah? You mean me?” He pointed to his dry, ashen white cheeks, and sunken brown eyes.

“Yes, sir,” The bellhop answered with a smile and opened the glass door for him. “You’re right on time. Please, come in.”

Mr. Holloway showed the bellhop the palm of his hand, shaking it in the air. “Sorry, I think you’ve got the wrong guy. I’ve never been here before.” He shied away from the light of the hotel. The smell of sweet incense drifted out, reminding him of how bad he must smell.

The Bellhop waved his hand in a circle, gesturing again for Mr. Holloway to enter. “No, sir, not yet. But your room is already paid for in advance. We’ve been preparing for your arrival. Please, come in. It’s all completely free of charge, for your service.”

“I’ve never been in the military.” Said Mr. Holloway.

“That’s very funny, sir. You know that isn’t what I’m talking about. Please, let us take care of you now.” The Bellhop’s smile was so genuine and warm, and the offer so enticing, that it did start to draw him. The smells emanating from inside became mixed with that of cooking meat, and that was the last straw. Mr. Holloway nodded to the bellhop and walked through the door with his hands in his pocket, entering the golden lights.

The hotel lobby was bathed in the soft light of chandeliers hanging above and dim fluorescent lines at the bottom of white pillars spaced along the walls to either side. The white stone merged down into the clouded marble floors and a red velvet strip led from the door to the rounded front desk, where a tall black man stood in a clean, pressed suit and red tie. He had a shaved head, and was even thinner than the bellhop, with his chin sprouting sharply from a narrow neck. He watched as Mr. Holloway approached, wordlessly opening his mouth into a broad, white smile. “Jim Holloway, I presume? My name is Peter. You’re right on time.”

“You can just call me Jim.” Said Mr. Holloway, “Your bellhop told me to come in. I think there’s maybe been a mistake about a room?” The environment was so foreign to Jim, he felt he might be forced out at any moment, when the world sought to right itself.

The clerk simply turns a binder in front of him with vanilla pages around, showing it to the incredulous guest. “No such mistake, sir. Your room’s been reserved for some time. Think of it as a reward for everything you gave up. Now’s the time to rest your feet for a change.” He was right. “Jim Halloway” was written in cursive amongst a dozen other names.

Jim dragged his right hand down from his forehead to his chin, where he started pulling his fingers through his beard. “Well, you know, if this is for the kids at St. Angie’s, I don’t do it for rewards or anything. I don’t do anything worth this either, just get them some food now and

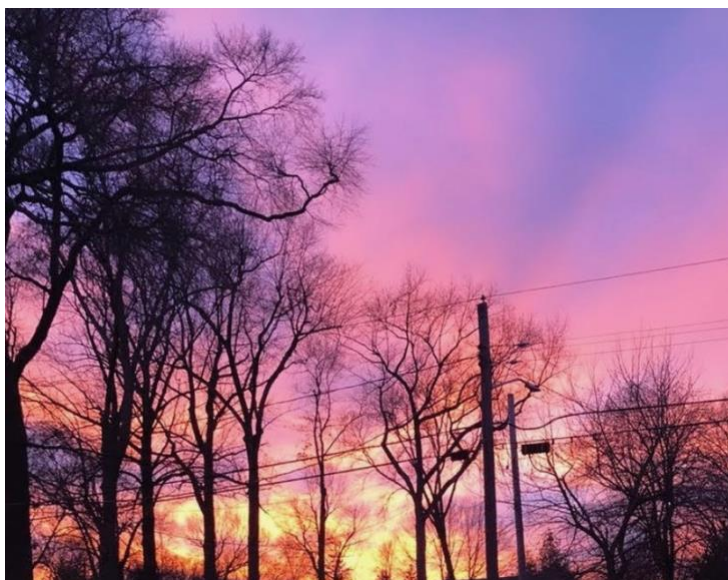
then. They let me stay and read to them, but that’s not a service, I enjoy it...” He clears his throat, looking around for anyone that might be listening to him. It was just him and Peter. Not even another guest. The sound of water hitting water could be faintly heard from deeper inside, past the lobby and behind the desk. “Y’know, if I could exchange the room for the monetary value, that would help us a lot more, if that’s ok. Could buy a lot of bread.”

Peter’s earthen brown eyes droop in sympathy, and his smile closes to a serene expression. He reaches out and lays his hand gently on Jim’s shoulder, as if he were comforting a brother. “This isn’t something that can be exchanged for money, Jim. It wasn’t bought, but it was paid for.” A weight settled on Jim’s chest, making it harder for him to breath. He looked up into the clerk’s eyes, and suddenly he felt so tired, even more than he always was, like he could lay down on the cold floor right then and sleep forever.

Jim swallowed hard and leaned forward against the desk. He was thinking back, to a subway earlier in the night. He sat down on the floor for just a minute. He rested his head against the concrete wall for a few seconds. It was just a few seconds. “I’d better get going. They’re expecting me at Angie’s. I’ve still got a lot to do.” He pleads with Peter, but the words land soft in the man’s compassion. His pain is smothered by the feeling of certainty, of helplessness.

“Don’t we always, Jim? All we can do is the most with the time we have.” Peter opened a drawer behind the desk and removed a gilded key with a blank red tag. He reached out and pressed it into Jim’s hand. “Mr. Avalo, please guide Jim to his room.”

The bellhop emerged from behind Jim and stood next to the guest, but his feet stayed rooted to the floor, and his eyes lingered on his hand. The key burned cold in his hand, and tears dripped down to cool the skin of his palm. All he had left; a key that leads to nothing.



Twilight by Alby Alex

The Knighted Dragon: The History of a Man

By Charlie Doeber

Once upon a time in the age of pure hearted knights and keepers of salvation there was a man of true wonder. This man defined human laws and his soul was foretold by seekers of fortune to be a treasure of utmost desire. The Worlds of Grey saw him as a sigil for hope against all evils. Though when the Dragon of Thorns came that man fetched himself in the shadows and forged into a tragedy for all to see as the knight fell to the class of a hermit.

A hermit with scars over his broken body and skin decaying. Thorns cricketing out of his bare skull, as he snails to his cave made of coal in the far reaches of a forgotten forest. The man ponders his glory days when he wore armor that shined the shades of an elite and slayed demons and devils from all realms, wielding a mighty saber. A weapon the knight crafted himself that could cut through all walls of matter. This same very man remembers he was destined by endless prophecies, and past figures that he was the one for delivering balance.

Today, he is the one with one eye pierced with flaxen vessels and the other with an ebony gaping hole. Eaten out by some carnivore that destroyed his back. He walks with an arch to him. Muscles he once had that empowered his savior abilities, now stripped away to ending up looking like a stray savage cut loose. He is half naked in robes that have been torn and hand stitched with fear after each death he witnesses. He snails again and falls to his knees, and then his sides flip on a series of laid out pebbles that hold his frail white bones with stones.

In the corner of his dwelling, he stares at what sight he has to his saber that is in shards and pieces and washed-out colorless crystals. A glow he flashes in his own two human eyes along with the saber that have been eradicated by the choice he had made that day. A choice that ended the man he was and the monstrosity he had become, he remembers vividly. The what if's ring in his ears, the thought if he could surpass his potential and fulfill the slaying of the Dragon of Thorns.

His single pupil pours cherry on the rock floor as he storms back and forth in his mind. The same eye that relieves all the women and children he tripped over that were boiled in ditches of bodies, and simmered at sunset as he drank liquor till every drop was gone from the glass. The man in his cave with a dull blade, chips at his nails and stakes tally marks in his veiny wrists of all that have perished under his watch and guard. The man turns over on the pebbles and the memories hawk at him as he tosses back and forth. His brothers and sisters in meadows filled with body liquids flowing down the down casted rivers. The terra firma he walks in his dreams are sealed jaws. "What have I done?" The words lunge out of his mouth as he lays down wishing to sleep. He continues to pick up the threads and says these very words for days, months, years, and eventually centuries.

The man knows well what his name is with courses of sin. He reminisces on the two titles he swore, yet as he scratches his flesh on pebbles, making marks, there is only one name left in the ruins. The man with swampy hands admits his nightmares of worlds. Shooting from his cave, he flies with his wings and fiery neon flames exhaust out of his mouth. "It is an urge I cannot hold, burn them all!" he says again and again, for the end of eternity.

The castles that go on for miles on maps. The structures that once delighted all the mortals that he swore to protect from his own demise for vigor are all gone. The second name he wielded, Sir Core, is no more in the Worlds of Grey. Sir Core remembers, as he soars over the hero who died when the Saber of Heart stroked its tail end at the Battle of Wonder. "Sir Core is now a relic for those who wish for a man of true wonder to return," the hermit says to his clan, a pile of simple ashes.

Oh, but what a twister! The knight's eyes are in awe from what the fortune teller has foretold to him in the mysterious cabin. The knight ignites the Saber of Heart and walks out of the cabin's mossy doors and out into the lands that in this time have creations. The knight cries out to a crowd of acolytes. "I, Sir Core, swear to be the guardian for the Grey!" Sir Core with the Saber of Heart impales his own heart and pigmentations. The knight's body cracks apart and melts into a well of infernos. Dusk arrives and coming from the moon sky is a dragon! The Dragon of Spine swoops in and bombards the souls while a solitary champion rests under the sod. "Oh, what a man he was once upon a time." The Dawn of Grey rises, and featherless crows harvest the knight into a maze of flowers, the jewel in the crown of thorns. "You will be a man, my son," the dragon whispers to the boy dressed as a knight.

We'll All Bloom by Alby Alex



Ice Cream Mind

By Isabelle Gaffney

I used to pick my Granddaughter up from school every day. On my last day picking her up, I pulled up to her school and saw her running down the front steps. She looked so happy. I gripped the steering wheel as I choked back my tears. I got out of the car to open the door for her and buckled her in. I looked at her smiling face and kissed her forehead. Instead of going straight home, we went to get ice cream instead. As we walk in she laughs.

“Why did you need the GPS to get here? It's just down the road from the school.” she giggles.

“Just getting old,” I say, hoping my smile covers my sadness.

We get our ice cream and as she eats hers I let mine melt.

“Why aren’t you eating your ice cream Gam?” a nickname she gave me when she first learned how to talk. Something I hope never to forget.

“Taste this and tell me how it is,” I said, giving her a spoonful of my melted ice cream.

“It's good.” she grinned innocently.

“See,” I said. “As the ice cream slowly melts, it might look different or be harder to eat but it's still the same ice cream.” My eyes welled up with tears as I talked.

“Gam I don’t understand,” she says and starts to cry.

“Just remember that I’ll always love you,” I said.

“How could I ever forget?” she asks naively but she will soon understand.



An Icy Pier by
Matthew
Villanueva

Needed Hope

By Jordan Gusch

Dark hair caught against the brick wall as I leaned against it for some form of support, blinking away the stinging tears that threatened to escape. *Today abso-freaking-lutely sucked. Yet we still have like eleven hours left on shift. Maybe Cap should have sent me home; it might've been better for everyone if he did...* Between losing a patient and then getting yelled at by the family that prevented our care during shift and all the crap that happened before, the world was testing me. Really testing me. *That little girl would still be alive if it wasn't for them! Who leaves their five-year-old child alone near water to take a telephone call? Then they yell at us for not saving her. Spirits, she wasn't much older than Z.* Still drying off from that ordeal, I thought of the other crap that's occurred since before this shift actually even started: finding out two people I know passed away, Cory had another heart attack, an idiot almost hitting me on my way here, and the start of what I hope is just stress sickness. It's amazing that I haven't cracked sooner.

A strained chuckle escaped me as I tried to steady my breathing. *Breathe Ro, breathe. Don't become a call yourself. You can do it. In four, hold seven, out eight, repeat. That's it. Keep it up. Everything will be okay.* "If I keep saying that, maybe it will actually come true." Who was I trying to kid? Myself, the world, the statue of the owl that resided above me? I barely registered the footsteps that approached me till whoever spoke.

"Excuse me? Sorry, didn't mean to scare you. I noticed you earlier when I walked into the pharmacy, had to pick up a battery for my watch since it stopped working for some reason and I figured that it may need a new battery since it is quite old, not that you would really care about what a stranger had to pick up anyways, and I'm rambling; but I figured that I could maybe, or at least hopefully, make your day a little better with this since you seem to be having a day." The stranger said holding out a bag with Cold Falls Pharmacy printed on it. I don't think he took a single breath since he started speaking; dare I say that I felt a weird combination of being worried and impressed. Eyeing it and the person holding it, I decided to take it cause why not at this point. I could say one of the taboo phrases, but let's not add fuel to the fire. Maybe it's chocolate, garbage, or,

"A stuffed animal?" I took what looked to be a snow leopard out of the bag. It was really soft and tiny, but cute. Also, one of my favorite animals. *Huh.*

"You seem like a woman, not to assume sorry, who might like cats. Since it looks like you have cat fur on your pants." I guess when Smokey came out earlier, she left part of her with me. *Note to self, remove the hair at the first chance.*

"Thank you. And you're right, you don't know half of what I've been through today. This...helps." Pausing for a moment to make sure my voice would stay steady, I remembered what else the stranger said. "No worries about the pronouns, you got them right. She, her, hers.

"Well Miss Johnson, call me Tommy. He, him, his." *How did he?* It seems that he knew what I was thinking when his eyes flickered down to my shirt. Looking down, I saw the answer. *Duh, right, wearing a name tag.* My watch beeped, signaling that it was now nine. I still have no clue how to change that.

"Was that for the hour? I have to get going, I still haven't eaten dinner. Again, not like you would care." He adjusted his black rectangular glasses and looked at his empty wrist. I chuckled; I had the same habit since my watch is almost always snug on my wrist. I still check even when I'm not wearing it.

"Thank you Tommy, I really appreciate it. If I may, I recommend the hotel. Their food is pretty good, and they're open till 11." He looked down the street, back to me, and nodded.

"I forgot they reopened not too long ago. Thank you, Miss, for the recommendation and for helping the community. I hope this stranger helped brighten your day at least a little. Goodnight Miss Johnson." He tipped his hat, a flat cap I think, and left. He left me with a smile, a new friend, and some hope.

Blinking back the sting of a new round of unshed tears, I walked back into the station with the new friend tucked safely under my chin. Through the truck bay, a hallway, up the stairs, another hallway, and to my bunk in the aptly named bunkroom. Upon reaching my destination, I sat down. Looking at the gift in front of me with determination burning in my eyes, I tried to figure out a name. Think Aurora, think! I owe at least a good name to ~~The Stranger~~, no, Tommy. I owe it to Tommy. The leopard had to have a meaningful name.

Minutes passed until something finally clicked. Maybe a connection between my struggles, and my ancestors made me think of it. A word that my grandparents had used before in their native language. Sihasin^[1]. Hope. That's what Tommy wanted to give me. I think it would be perfect for the little leopard. He gave someone who brings it to others when they need it most, when I needed it most. I guess hope really did shine bright when all seemed lost.

Maybe, if the Spirits allowed, I would be able to see Tommy again. He was a light in the darkness, a stormy night star. I always liked that phrase better; it was more poetic. Plus, it reminded me of childhood with a character I made for a pretty popular game, definitely not cringy if people really knew. Ha-ha.

Shaking my head, I set my fluffy friend next to the pillow—not where Smokey would lay of course—and exited the room. As if the world sensed I would be okay, our song played. This time, a wellness check at 549 North Main Street. Heading to the ambulance, I mumbled a small thank you. Obviously not thankful that someone needed us. It was time to repay the favor. It was time to give what people needed. Help, and hope.

Sours and Roast Beef

By Tucker Reilly

I clocked into my last day of work today, so naturally my thoughts were of death. I always find myself arriving at these moments with great apprehension, although I don't quite know the cause. I didn't even like my job that much.

There's an old man that gives us warheads as tips every Sunday. I don't remember when it started. I'll clock in on an afternoon and wait to see the small frames of him and his wife standing in the far corner of the store. We aren't supposed to eat on the job - not that many of us eat much candy anyway - but the gesture has become so familiar now.

He never says more than a few words every time he's there: his wife takes care of the talking. A roast beef sandwich - two if they have a coupon - with lettuce, tomato, oil, and black pepper. Sometimes mayonnaise. I dress and wrap it carefully, fingers rolling in eternal memory. Knife, pull, press, cut, pinch, curl, push, roll, bag, snap, drop, turn, crimp, twist, serve. Gently now we run. It's a small respite from the violent rhythm of my other customers.

As I work this time, the old woman stares in gentle awe of our simple tasks.

"I'd eat out of your trash," she says, half-jokingly.

"We'll make sure you never have to," Sasha, my secondary, replies, full-jokingly. Would that we had the choice.

The old man drops a handful of warheads on the counter in front of me. Sometimes many, this time few. Sasha scoops them up and disappears.

"Ya like the sours?" He says, the only words between us that day.

"Of course!"

I thank him profusely, telling him our younger employees adore the stuff. I'm lying, but I will not take away his pride. His wife now reaches into her purse, telling me their boss is paying for dinner today. He always does. 24 rewards points out of 72 for a free sandwich. 2 dollars off for bringing in an old receipt. Hold on, the credit card reader is a little touchy (it isn't) could you turn your card around and try again.

We are endlessly in rhythm, in pageant, us three. To break it is tyranny, to change it is sin. We are as one in this very instant until the world wrenches us apart and the scene starts again. But this time is different. Do I dare tell them that the cycle is finished?

Another must take my place next week. The same process will begin again, rarely interrupted. Another will succeed them. Endlessly, endlessly, endlessly repeating, until a final moment of pause. And when it is over, we remain merely in afterimage, in fleeting flavors of sours and roast beef.

Three

By: Meghan Baehl

There are three of us:

The girl with the fair hair and the fair skin,
and the fair eyes.
she is radiant, like the sun.
it is as if she was the muse for *The Birth of Venus*.
she is a pain in the ass, but the best kind.
the type of girl people write songs about,
she drives you crazy until you realize you can't live without her. I'm not sure how I ever
did.
she struggled, but she didn't cry often.
she was thought to be weak because of her complaints, but I know she is strong.
I knew she worked hard for every grade, which made every success taste so
much sweeter.
she is so incredibly special, it is beyond words.
The next comes with no sob story, but she understands like she
has one.
raised by the best of mothers,
she certainly is protective like one too. you want so badly to
make her proud.
but when she is disappointed,
that look on her face makes you want to never do it again.
the tallest of the three,
which makes her the best at hugs.
she feels like home.
she has the softest eyes and the sweetest of smiles.
her quirks are welcomed because they are what made her-her.
but she is undeniably headstrong.
blunt and sarcastic,
but also sensitive and serious. she is a friend of the
ages.
& then there is me.
they know I am drowning,
plagued by my own intrusive thoughts.
I either sleep too much or sleep not enough.
I talk incessantly,
and every comment is followed by a witty quip.
anything I say aloud is better than what is swimming in my head. but they love me
nonetheless.
I either care too much or care too little.
there are days these feelings are too overwhelming,
but the sparks that are in their eyes are what keep me going
I feel every emotion so physically,
most of them are confusing, but there is one that aches.
Love.

I've always had a flair for the dramatics, but I would be lying if I didn't say this:
they saved me.
and they continue to save me every day.