

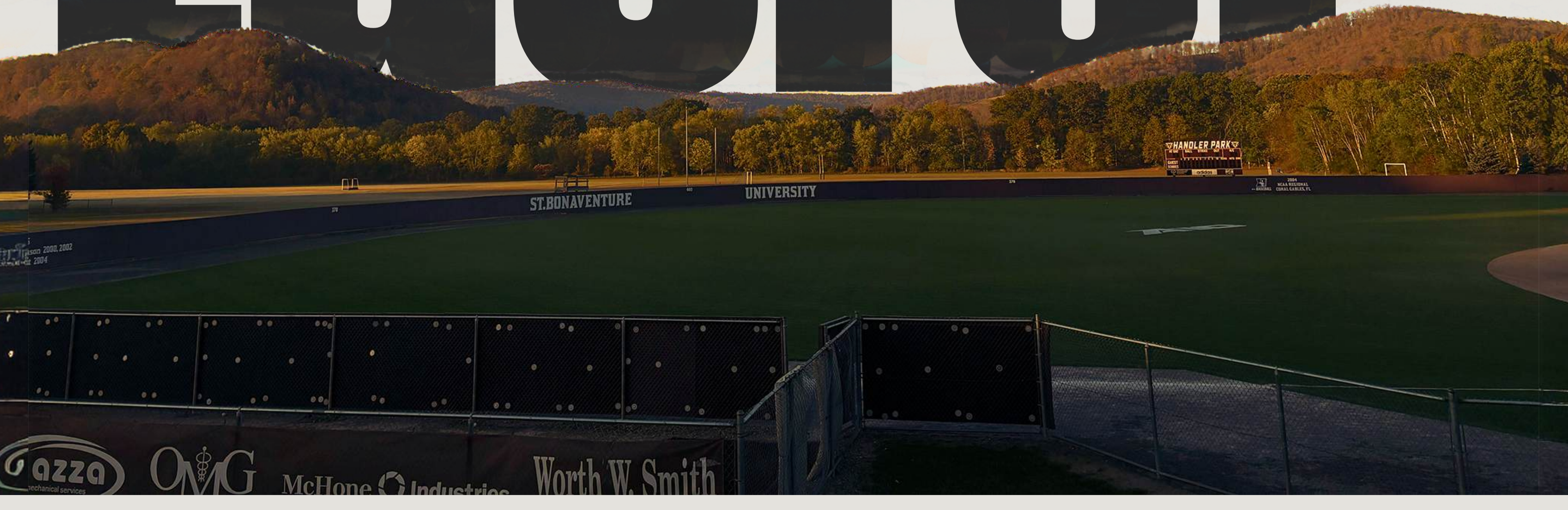


# The

St. Bonaventure  
University

Fall Edition  
October 2025

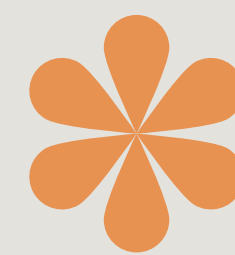
# Journal





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# Night of the Living Bonnie

By Casey Reed

Olean, NY- December 1982

--

Ice flurries wisp through the dimly lit darkness of St. Bonaventure University's sidewalks. Students are holed up in their rooms, chipping away at the end of the semester, tucked inside, hiding from the harshness of the storm. The buildings are barely visible through the white screen, and the snow is only set to become heavier.

The halls of De la Roche are bare—not even a mopping janitor occupies its halls. Curiously, as the stairs wind up to the third floor, crisp December air hisses through a cracked window. The draft enters through the back corner of the room. A single stool squeaks as it swings back and forth anxiously in the lab-converted classroom: the space is abandoned except for one.

The last light remaining is a small oil lamp beside the student's workspace. It's a young man—a freshman chemistry major—he's sat with both elbows pressed firmly into the desk beneath him, his two fists take hold of two bunches of red curly locks and his eyebrows furrow in frustration as he studies the scene below fervently.

In front of him sits four objects: his lab assignment, a beaker, and two chemicals in pipette bottles. The student mumbles under his breath—a language comprised of stutters and grunts. The boy's assignment was simple: mix a small amount of two safe classroom chemicals of your choosing, then observe the reaction through all five senses. The stakes of this lab, however, were not so simple, especially when it was the deciding factor between passing and failing your first semester of college.

After thoroughly reading (and re-reading) the provided steps, he proceeds with the reaction. With trembling fingers, he takes the dropper from one bottle and cautiously drops two drips into the glass beaker. Next, with the goal of repeating this action, he wraps his clammy, hot hand around the remaining vile. Just as he's about to remove the pipette, he is suddenly met with a large gust of wind from the cracked window pane beside him. Papers fly up and across the floor. The boy sucks in a sharp breath of air through his nose, jumps up out of his seat, and begins quickly collecting his work. He reaches down to the classroom floor with one arm, kneeling on the black and white checkered tile. He supports his body weight by perching his left arm on the edge of the desk with a bent elbow. As he manages to organize his pages, his elbow shifts on the surface of the desk, causing both the beaker and the second vile of chemicals to spill and create one big puddle, dripping down the side of the surface slowly to the ground.



The boy steps back in anticipation, but nothing happens. He inches back to his seat, slowly leaning over and turning his ear to the puddle to listen for a reaction.

Silence.

A few more seconds pass. A soft sizzle radiating off of the mixture. The liquid seems to curdle as it erupts in small bubbles. Its hue begins swirling in reds and purples—the goop seeming to expand by the second. A dark grey gas begins to flow off the top of the spill. It reeks of a penny-like odor that sharply invades the boy's sinuses. Before long, it's filling the whole room. The boy covers his nose with his sleeve, but it is no hope. Soon, he drops back down to the floor of the lab—coughs escape him harshly, they claw their way up his throat from deep inside the bottom of his lungs. Between hacks of agony, he looks down at both of his palms. His eyes widely discover that his skin is turning a sickly green hue. Suddenly, the loud coughs leaving the boy become stronger, reaching for his neck with both hands, he succumbs to the suffocation that's pulling the sides of his esophagus together. His ears ring with the sound of his rapidly beating heart: ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom. His body grows weaker by the second until it is no longer able to hold him up. His head bounces off the tile first, followed by his midsection, and finally, his legs kick out lifelessly. The thump of his heart begins to slow: ba-boom...ba-boom...ba-.

It stops.

His body lie there, still, unmoving—dead.

Above his body and against the wall, a single stream of the gas flows out the window and invades the sidewalks of St. Bonaventure's campus. The thick fog becomes darker, heavier. It begins to dominate even the heavy snow blowing through the air.

The flesh of the corpse shades an unnaturally dark olive green. A frustrated grunt roughly leaves the boy's lips. His hands and face begin to twitch gently as if a wave of electricity makes its way through his whole being. His eyes open, staring blankly at the ceiling, the small twitches in his limbs grow and become more violent. Without warning he sits straight up from the floor and a single word emerges from his lips...*Brains*.



# Summer Into Fall

By Mia Romanello

## Summer Into Fall

For the leaves begin crisping,  
the breeze carries hints of cold,  
a chill hugs the dusk.



## Historic Irvington, Indiana

By Morgan Kilger





# Roots

By Rose Pfeiffer

I wanted to take a simple walk, clear my mind from the bland everyday. The mystique and allure of the forest always enticed me; out here, my mind roams freely. One can hear lavish tales of things that go bump in the night, or mysterious things hidden in it. Especially in forests. Trails not travelled in your day-to-day, marked only by breaks in the sylvan growth. I think all this mystique and dread people have about the forest comes from this sense of never knowing what to expect...or what might be hidden among the brush and trees.

So, I found myself wandering the woods. It has many twisting paths and changing directions. I reached a new path, which led me to a pier. It seems like no one has been here for a very long time. *A perfect place to have to myself.* I thought. The chilling breeze rolling off the sea hunts me from the side. The waves bombard the decaying concrete and wood barriers to the sea. Leaves litter the worn-down pavement. I spot something glinting in the light trying to break through the slate sky. Blue gray, overcast. With nothing better to do...I approach. Maybe someone lost something precious here. A ring, an earring, or the charm of a necklace.



I always take an old camera with me on these walks, so I start snapping a picture now and then. This is a good opportunity for a photograph...the camera has been my closest companion on walks like this. I take pictures of whatever views I might find. A blooming flower amid all the groundcover of dead leaves, perhaps a squirrel wandering about, or a deer. Whatever might catch my attention.

*Cruuunch.* The leaves seem to echo into oblivion as I set foot upon them.

*Step, step.*

*Crunch, crunch.*

Wait a minute...these are glasses. Round lensed.

Did someone lose these? I pick them up, maybe I can find the owner. Even if this place is a desolate wasteland. I start walking.

*Step, step.*

*Crunch, crunch.*

*Crrrruunch crunch, rustle.*

That...wasn't me. I freeze in my tracks, like someone drove a spike of ice into my spine from behind. I swore I was alone out here, maybe it was a squirrel or a chipmunk or—



"Over here." I hear a soft voice from behind, still it gives me chills.

\*\*\*\*\*

They've been missing for a very long time. Such a long time...have I made a friend? They went through all the trouble finding them. She came all this way to be here! Ooh, how exciting.

\*\*\*\*\*

I pivot on my heel to face the source of the voice I heard, the sky full of gloom. I can feel my shoulders high and tense. My own throat is constricting itself. There's someone standing there, head tilted, hands tucked in the pockets of a black hoodie. "I can't see you well. Those are mine...thank you for finding them." They tilt their head, in this strange, jerky motion, like a marionette puppet. I feel goosebumps prickles my skin.

"Oh. They are?" I say, I take a step toward them. It's slow, like I'm pulling my legs in and out of wet cement. *They can't hurt me; they don't have their glasses. They won't be able to have a clean shot at anything.* So... I take a few more steps closer. I can see them clearer now, pale, dark hair, like the moon framed by the night sky. The wicked winds whisper in my ears.



So, I extend my hand to offer the glasses to them. They slip their hands out of their pockets-- That's-that's not a hand. "R-roots?!!" I somehow blurt amidst my fear-clogged throat. I shove the pair of glasses in their hands and turn tail. *You're dreaming, Camellia, it's daytime, but you're dreaming*—I tell myself as I turn and run.

\*\*\*\*\*

W-wait- why is she running? "Why are you running away-?" I try to call after her, but she's already becoming a distant shape. I can see it after I put my glasses on. I try to run, but it feels like my legs are stuck in the ground...like...roots. I lose balance, I fall, only catching myself with my arms. Slick pavement threatens my sleeves as they ride against the ground. But she can't leave me here...we made a connection. I can be her friend...right? She helped me with my glasses; she touched my hand. She cares? Right? I'll find her again.

\*\*\*\*\*

I just keep running, running, till my lungs start to burn and I have to lean against a tree. I'm back in the woods. My breath heaves as I grapple with the air around me. A cold wind strikes me.

"Hi...maybe we got off on the wrong foot..." Their voice sounds as if it's carried off by the wind.



No, that can't be—how would they even have caught up so fast? Still, I turn and that root—thing! Is there. I sharply gasp and decide *that's enough rest for now*. I take off again, running, running. How, how did it get here? I dare glance back—they're nowhere in sight. I don't trust it. So, I keep running.

\*\*\*\*\*

Oh...dear... she's running again. She's going to tire herself out—she's going to get lost. *Oh dear*. That would be bad. I've been lost in these woods before...it's not something I like to remember. No wonder she's so frightened. I can help her...she just needs to follow me. I can hear the echoes of that time in my mind.  
*"Don't...leave...here."*

\*\*\*\*\*

My frantic steps are complemented by a symphony of acorns falling after me. Hitting the ground loudly like they're chasing me.

*Plop, plop, plop, plop.*

The rustling of leaves and snapping of branches follow the raining acorns, some barely miss my head. Surely, I've lost them by now. What strange monstrosity have I awakened?! There's no thread of logic I can grasp to explain it away! I have no choice but to stop and catch my breath, my lungs sear with each inhale and exhale. Look left, look right, no one in sight. *Phew*.

I catch my breath in front of a tree. But my surroundings became more unfamiliar the more I look and stand here.

I hear the whoosh of wind against the trees....and once again that thing is there. "Who--what are you?"

They tilt their head. "I'm Adler."

Oh, shit, it can talk?!

"Why do you keep running? We're friends now." Adler speaks softly still.

"*Friends?!"* I blurt, almost letting a hysterical laugh escape.

"You helped me find my glasses.... I can help you out of these woods. And... there's something stopping me from leaving you behind."

That's...weird. "I don't know if I believe that."

\*\*\*\*\*

Every time she gets further away from me, something pulls me back to her. I don't know why... I wouldn't mind going back to sleep. But I can't. Maybe she can help me solve this mystery that's been bothering me for a while...I know this forest like the back of my hand... well, when I had them.



I don't know why I'm still here. Or why I carry on with some odd form of living, but... here I stay, so there is clearly something more to my story. "Still, I can get you out of here before you end up like me." I finally say. She freezes in place.

"Oh." She says.

"What is your name...?" I glance her over, as if that would give me a hint.

"Camellia." She admits, she...looked very reluctant to tell me. Am I that frightening?

\*\*\*\*\*

I cannot believe I'm standing here having a conversation with this thing. Can't believe I gave it my name ,too!

But....There isn't anything threatening about their presence. It's...gentle almost. "Come with me." Adler says, offering a twisted, wooden hand.

I can't believe I'm about to do this. But...there's no bad intent from them as far as I can tell. No prickling feeling on the back of my neck, an almost calmness, steady like a gentle rain. The denial shivers through me like a frightened squirrel running through the trees. Adler still offers a 'hand'.



I have to get out of these woods somehow—and wandering alone—in this fading light, will only lead me to getting further lost. Fully extinguishing any hope of getting out. So, I take a deep breath, in through my nose, out from my lips, closing my eyes. Then I take the knotted, rough tendrils in my hand and brace for my reluctant journey.



# Untitled

By Mary Quinn  
McNaughton



# Turning

By Rose Pfeiffer

Resonant hum of cicadas,  
shimmering light on the water  
current carries rouge diamonds.

Faint rustle of squirrels,  
sun breaks through sylvan cover.  
Mountain hides the light from some,  
leaves dried up and dead.

Less acorns fall,  
some cling to their leaves,  
grasping onto their green  
til their skin turns yellow.  
Water trembles like a swarm of gnats  
cricket plays a repeated recording.

I think I want to tell a scary story.  
Phantom music ringing above the trees,  
I feel my ideas are out of reach...

But then again...  
You can spin a tale from anything.  
Webs catch on exposed legs  
handiwork of a large spider  
skipping 'cross the trail.  
Crickets repeat like a broken alarm,  
voices steadily more frantic.



Squirrels always run from something.  
Ivy chokes out trees.  
And what would you find  
on mountains draped in flames?  
With no trail in sight.  
What happens when night falls  
and shadows are your lone companions?  
The mountains seem to shrug.  
No relief of songbirds,  
only frantic cries and squawks.  
You can spin a tale from anything.  
Many trees like legs of a towering beast  
All scaley and tops unseen,  
far above human sight.  
The butterfly must be headed somewhere.  
And what of the woods with no trail?  
Reverberating sounds of bugs,  
unseen by our eyes.  
Poison ivy, endless trees.  
Water of gray green,  
sea birds have hurried off,  
turning wings to where there's warmth.  
Acorns fall in waves, hitting with a crack.  
Have you ever heard a squirrel's scream?  
Wind chases the leaves off of their trees,  
Yet for once, my mind feels clear.



# The Wristband

By Brooke Johnpier

You can't stop staring at your wrist.

It's not that you have a scar there, or a tattoo (although you want a tattoo there as a private little reminder that you have high-functioning Autism, but it doesn't stop you), but a red and white wristband.

Ever since you were a little girl, you dreamed of working in the field of motorsports. You just didn't realize exactly what field until you were a teenager. But that time came and went, and you found out exactly what you wanted to do with your life.

And now, you're doing it.

Which is why you can't stop looking at the wristband on your wrist. It's red and white with the word "COMP" written on one side, and the World of Outlaws logo on the other. Only people associated with the media get these wristbands, and for the first time in your 19 years of life, you are officially considered part of the media.

It may be a wristband just like the kind you get at the county fair, where the person has to take the cover off the sticky part, wrap it around your wrist, and attach it themselves, but to you it feels like a Rolex watch.

You no longer have to stand in lines to get into the racetrack; you just walk right up to the people scanning tickets, flash your arm at them, and BAM!, you're in.

As you walk through the merchandise trailer area and see all the people, you feel special. You see people glancing at your wrist as you pan through the t-shirts and hoodies. Someone even comes up to you and asks, "COMP? What does that mean?"

With a smile on your face and joy in your heart, you tell them, truthfully, that you're unsure of what "COMP" means exactly, but that members of the press and media receive these bands.

The person raises an eyebrow and looks you up and down. You feel a little self-conscious as you're overweight, short, and look like you're from the hood and a farm at the same time, but then you realize that the person is just remembering who you are and what you look like, so that when you become famous, they can say they met you at Weedsport Speedway in the merchandise section.

The person smiles at you, extends their hands, and tells you their name. You do the same in turn, and as they walk away, you've never felt more appreciated than you do in that moment. Because all your life, people have judged you for what you look like, how you dress, and how you look. So, it feels good to finally be looked at in a completely different light.



After you pick up the merchandise you're going to buy, you find your father who is accompanying you on this excursion, and you head to find your seats.

Unfortunately, the wristband on your wrist doesn't grant you access to any seat in the house you want. However, it does grant you access to any of the unreserved seating in the house.

But, your father wanted you to sit by him, so he bought two tickets to make that happen. And so, once you find your seats in Turn 4, you sit down.

But while your father pulls out his phone and goes on Facebook, you pull out your notebook and start taking notes. You start writing about how the announcer just said that every ticket has been sold and that it's going to be the biggest crowd to ever be on hand. You start writing about how half the field of the sprint cars tonight is going to be local drivers who just want to have a chance to race with the big dogs.

You put a mark next to that to focus on that in your article when you write it. You resonate with that. You look at your wrist and remember that that's what you are right now.

Hours pass, and the racing action begins. As the cars go through qualifying, spitting dirt on the fans, and they whip out of Turn 4, you write down every little thing, covering everything that you deem important. The same goes for the actual feature races.

You don't miss a single beat and even write down stuff before the announcer says it. Like when #25 hit the front stretch wall and came down into #3, causing a major spin-out and bad carnage. You had written everything down about that before Johnny Gibson had started telling about it. You pat yourself on the back for that one, and remember why journalists are better than announcers.

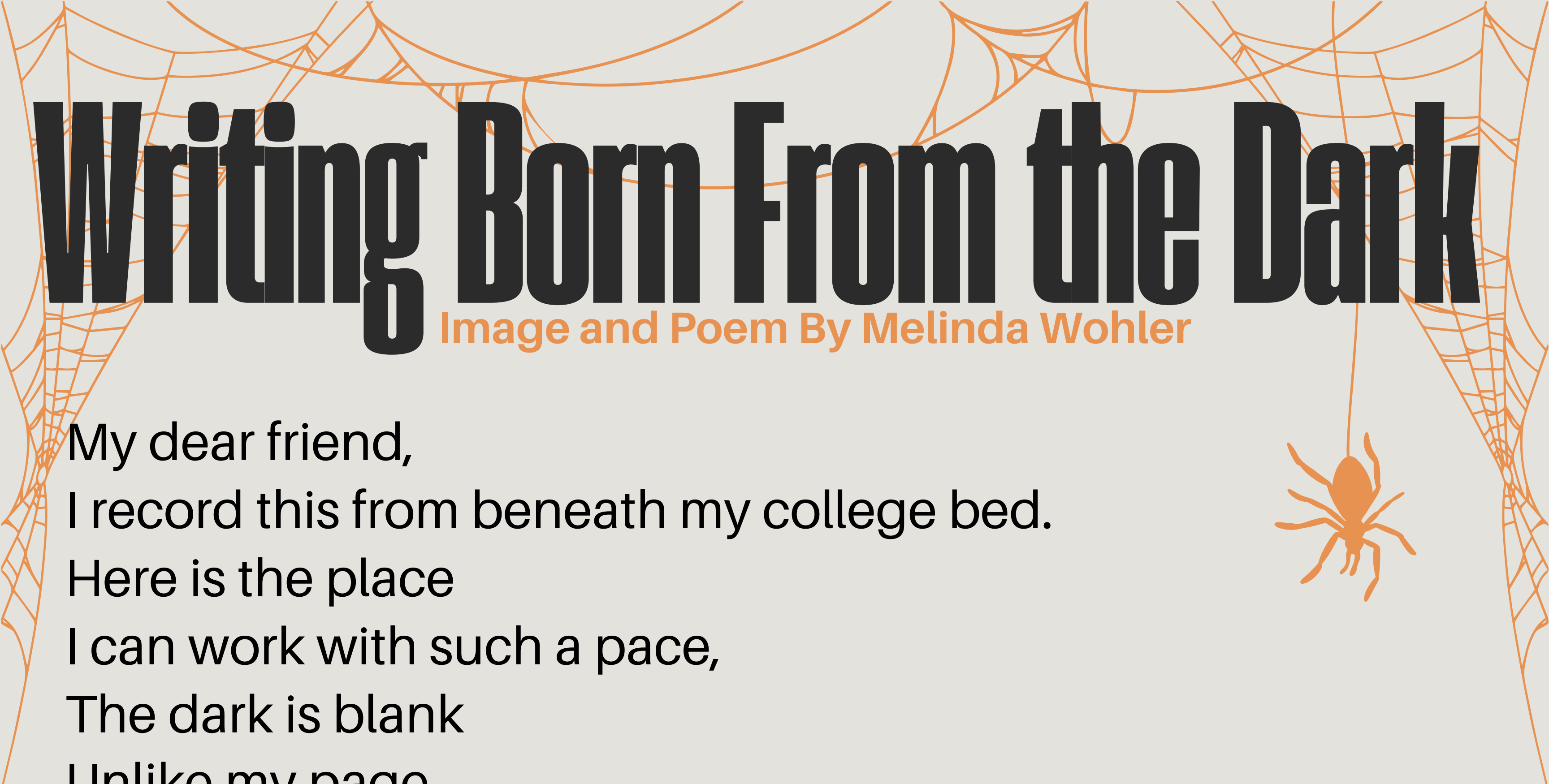
Once the races are over, you pack up your notebook and go with your dad to find your friend and go over to the pits. But while doing so, you glance down at the wristband and smile. Tonight was a great night, wasn't it?

But as soon as you find your friend and start to head over through the gates, you feel pressure on your shoulders. You shake yourself, thinking it's nothing, but then you see it. The World of Outlaws banner. How in the world did nobody take it yet? You don't know, but you know you want it.

You tell your father and friend that you want the banner, and together the three of you rip it down. You then happily drape it across your shoulders and walk over to the pits with a smile on your face.

You glance down at the wristband and smile wider. They say that magic doesn't exist, but Mr. Comp proves otherwise.

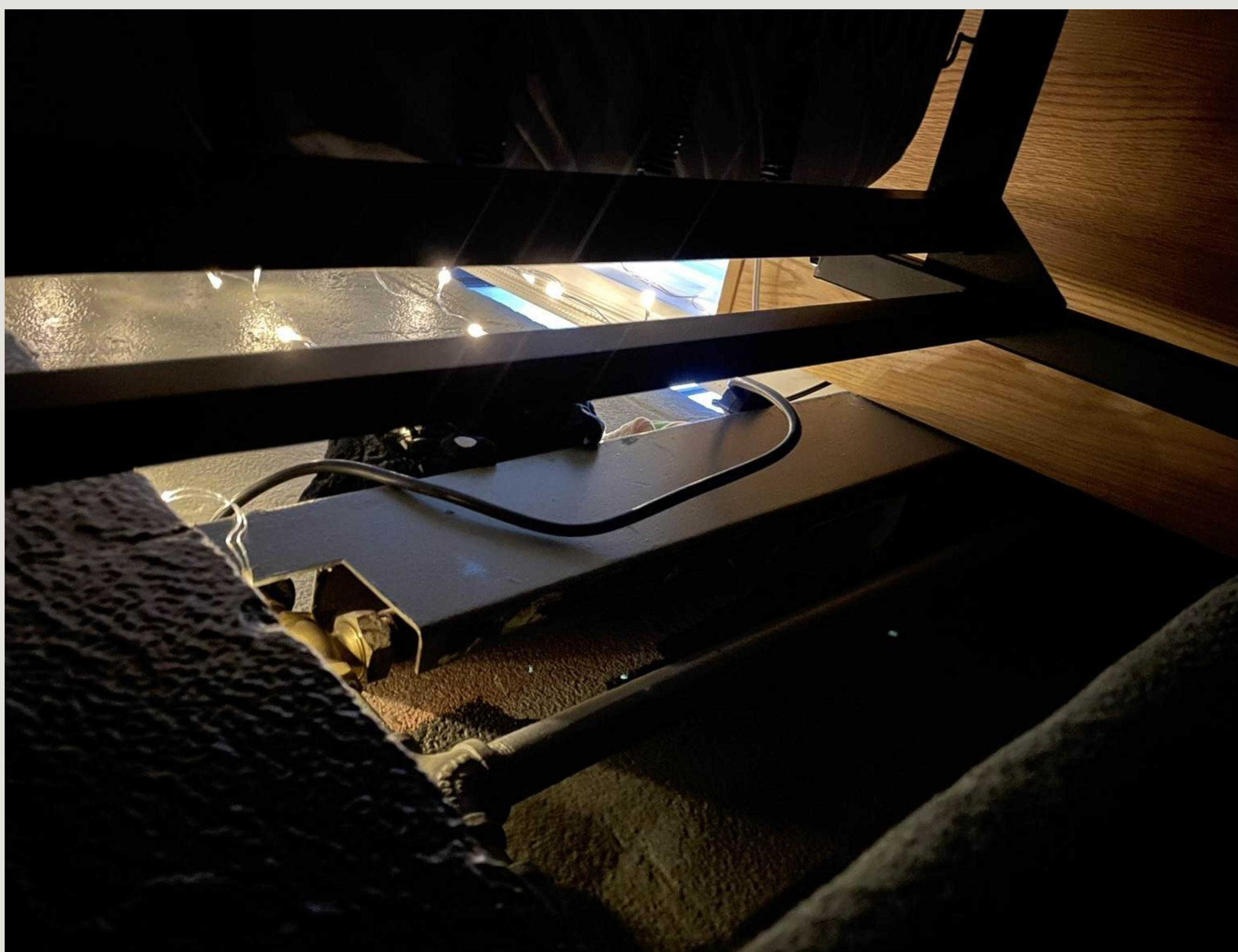




# Writing Born From the Dark

Image and Poem By Melinda Wohler

My dear friend,  
I record this from beneath my college bed.  
Here is the place  
I can work with such a pace,  
The dark is blank  
Unlike my page,  
Black is the color that feeds my pen  
To bring my essay to its end.



# Hands of a Doll

By Melinda Wohler

These are the hands  
From which I create,  
Care not for my face, but for the page  
Where my words are my brand,  
For my body is just a doll  
Which I have to take care of.



# Falling

By Abigail Taber

fall.  
to  
feels  
it  
how  
know  
I  
down least  
the At  
stairs.



# The Sound a Cloud Makes

By Lincoln Counihan

It was long now since the two strangers had first met. Something had moved within them both during this time elapsed. Something that the two saw as a glimmer of hope. The man had mentioned how hope was the one fleeting emotion he had left. Though not strong, this feeling was a sign, possibly of the return one day of something he only formerly knew. The two continued to walk onward into the night. Taking in all that the man communicated to him, the boy started to become a little more like he intended to be. The boy studied and learned from the words of this stranger.

Admiring him in a way that he so often could not admire himself. The boy viewed himself as deeply flawed in a way that could not be fixed. He was lost in search of an answer that he could never procure. To be lost within himself, he learned, was something to never lose sight of. He took from the man an appreciation for his search to quench his unquenchable fire. He took things like this from the words of the man as he spoke. The boy became obsessed with the eyes of his stranger. He became fixated on how they looked into his own. Without words to describe it, he noticed a similarity between his own and the stranger in front of him. The boy had spent a large part of his life looking into his own eyes in the mirror.

Looking back at him was something he never was able to grasp. He would attempt to rationalize with what possibilities lay in front of him as he gazed into the reflection. He had done this for as long as he could remember. Searching as he always does for something to make sense to him. His self-reflection was not always done through a mirror. With everything in his life, he opened his eyes to what it could mean to him and why it was this way to him. After all his years doing this, he was left with nothing for which he could truly rely. Sadly, he most often found a place to plant his tree.

In explanation, he admired trees for their ability to live according to their purpose. They grow until they no longer can; beautiful things from beginning to end, they leave without any second thoughts. This, though, was not the reason he found to plant his tree. This tree's purpose would be to serve him. The greatest honor he saw in the life of his tree was that it would help in the life of another. A branch thick enough and roots deep enough not to climb but to hang one's weight from. In his long-contemplated reflection, he would see the branches of his tree growing thicker each day. It was not until the walk with the man that he looked into his reflection and saw the goodness of a tree as a place to climb. He looked into the man's familiar eyes and saw his own in a way that he had spent so long previously trying to see them. For once, he had an answer to a question on why.



He understood all that the man spoke to him because he recognized the voice as one that he had spent so long listening to.

Soon after this, the man noticed what the boy was seeing and why he was seeing it. He was beginning to realize the reason why they walked together and the reason they would continue to walk. He understood what his mission was at this moment. He said to the boy, "Have you come to realize why it is that you know my eyes as you do?" To his surprise, the boy still responded confused. In that moment, he realized that the boy had not discovered the answer.

This was to be expected. He then said to the boy that it was time to stop walking. Although both knew no destination awaited them, the boy was convinced that something should keep them from stopping. He was afraid that stopping would deter them from their path home. The man knew, though, that their path home was not the one that they were walking. He knew they had to stop now or else they would never find the correct one to walk on. He spoke, "I have given you many things which I know are enough to satisfy. I understand now that your satisfaction would only be temporary so long as you do not come to realize the true reason behind it."

"But I do understand what it is you are saying to me, and I know now as I have never known before," said the boy.

“Yes, but you are not understanding the true reason behind it. Just as you are always certain of what you feel, you are never certain of why you feel it. You understand that it is valuable and understand that there is something in the way I speak to you that is only before you spoke to yourself. I asked you, though, why you saw this in me, and you had no answer. It is my purpose to make you understand why. Up until our conversation as of now, you have been lost in all the ways of your being. The most strongly misunderstood was the one that you could not grasp in your reflection. I did not know what it was that I saw in that reflection either. I do not fully understand what I see in that reflection now.

Both, though, only occurred in the moment. I did not understand then, and I do not understand now. I do, though, understand your then and your now. I understand in the way that makes my eyes so familiar to you. I understand because you saw something that you cannot see when you look at your own reflection in the mirror. You did not see this moment when you looked into my eyes, and I did not see this moment when I looked into yours. What I am expressing to you is that you should hear my words not because they make you feel, but because I understand what you feel and why you feel it. I am the answer to the questions that you say have none. You have seen in me what you will soon see in yourself if you do not truly understand me. I am the only person that you can ever understand deep in your soul.



The only thing able to quench what it is that burns inside of you. Your reflection will never be understood until you decide to take action in creating it. You must no longer fight with this idea of present understanding because it is a fight you cannot and will not win. The only opponent that you are destined to defeat is the one that you create. Take what it is that is of your desire and place it onto me. Place it onto who you will become. I am currently lost to an extent that has no return. I have reached a place like yours by being lost, but different in that you still have something to look up to. You have a reflection to create, and this is all that gives me hope. You decide not to focus on this, and I will be stuck forever. I will be stuck in the grey that lies between us until you decide to make it black and white."

"I understand what you are telling me, but how do I achieve this?" the boy responds. The man looked at the boy with a strong hope but an even stronger sense of fear and trembling because he knew that all his chances of life were in the boy's understanding. He continued at this moment to look at the boy deep in his eyes and attempt to communicate the language that needed no words. The language that they already knew and the language that only they could speak. This was his last attempt at speaking to the boy about what he already knew. He interrupted their silence one final time to tell him, "What you see in my eyes is the seed from which you must plant a tree to climb, the window you must open to see the light above the library, and the reflection you must seek to construct."

After this, a long stream of silence developed between the two for what seemed like an eternity. Both gazed deeply into each other's eyes and studied the reflection as they always did. The boy did not tell the man in that moment that he now understood what was being expressed to him. He did not tell him that he understood now what to do. He did not tell him that he should no longer be afraid of his fading hope. He didn't even tell him that he understood now why he recognized his eyes the way he did. The boy did this out of fear that he might ruin something. So, without mentioning anything, he bid the man farewell, withholding even an offering of thanks. He hoped the man understood in that moment, but either way, he knew that he would.

Both the man and the boy parted ways at once setting back toward different paths. The man eventually reached his home and was back in his bed where he would lie his head on the pillow that night. Soon after that, the night would pass, and he would wake up that morning to the sound of his alarm clock. Something, though, was different about the sound of the ringing that day. It was no longer the high-pitched ringing sound from beginning to end. It did not end this time too quickly to process or think. This alarm was different. He embraced the sound it made and lived in it while it rang. The notes rang of a soft piano and the sounds of nature. Most importantly, though, was the sound that clouds make as they move across the sky.



The beauty in the way they drifted along spoke to him in a way that he hadn't heard before. It was this specifically that he heard most clearly and in the most comforting way. He had once again felt beauty in his soul.



# Leaf Litter

By Melinda  
Wohler

# Heritage

By Brandon Torres

Growing up in a Hispanic household  
Is a roller coaster on its own  
Going forward but also retracting backwards  
You're having fun but also screaming in internal fear  
Do not mistake me, I love being Hispanic

But.

You are held to an expectation

You are given two options  
Either become a doctor or make lots of money

Still

It's all the same.

You have to save the family.  
You have to provide financial support because your parents did.  
You have to stay strong and not show weakness.  
Being mentally drained doesn't justify why we don't succeed.  
Thankfully  
I never let that man's words invalidate my struggles

I just feel for those who till this day wonder  
why they are such a failure.



# Mind on Idle

By Ross Linderman

In a grey town surrounded by lost souls walking down a road that looks as if there is no end. Fog is hiding the end, but as soon as they get close, it moves away to reveal that the road has yet to end. This is where I find myself, amongst the mass of nomads. Not a word spoken between any of them, the only reason why I even know any of this is because this entire place is a product of my dreaming.

My night was pretty ordinary for the most part: shower, brush teeth, listen to music, then sleep. However, the only difference was that the song I was listening to was pretty weird, not the usual stuff people hear on pop stations. It was a synth-sounding song with a killer drum line and random audio snippets from either old movies or radio dramas, I'm not entirely sure. That was the only thing that was different, but I'm not sure if that would've caused all of this nonsense. The dream started off like any other good lucid dream: everything I did was the coolest thing to anyone watching, every girl I found attractive couldn't keep themselves off me, and I had godlike control of the spaces I happened to put myself in. It started at a house party with loud talk, louder music, and everyone from my high school.

Everyone there regarded me warmly and desperately wanted my attention and to hear me share with them some of my wisdom, which, in all honesty, was about as deep as a fortune cookie, but they were in awe of me anyway. It got to the point where I felt like I had been dreaming for hours. It was funny when I was thinking about it right then, but I started to feel exhausted, even though everything was just a dream.

After talking to a few people about nonsense, it occurred to me that everyone looks a lot like one another, as though someone added every face in the world and applied the average to every single person at this party. It struck me right then that I don't know any of these people. I could point and name every single one of them, but I didn't know a thing about them outside of that they go to my school and that I've seen some of them in my classes, at lunch, or in the hallway.

This was when my mind began to slow down.

Looking around at the party, I realized that all the other rooms aside from the living room I'm in don't exist. There were doorways and a set of stairs, but they all led to a dense darkness, though I know that dark rooms don't really mean that they don't exist – I could just feel that they don't exist.



Suddenly, the people who were initially obsessed with me began to float away and discuss amongst themselves. They whispered and shot glances in my direction, and I stood alone, feeling every nerve in my body shiver.

With every ounce of will I had, I tried to imagine myself someplace else, and then I tried to banish everyone from my mind, but no luck. My amusement had morphed into a dreadful pit in my stomach, and it was scary how real that sensation felt, but I didn't let it get me too worked up. I thought that something had to give at some point. Then, a hand tugged at my shirt. I turned around to find a boy. A boy with no face. I stared into the void that masked his true visage.

Before I could even try to identify him, my thoughts had frozen, and everything started to disappear around me. The boy stared at me with eyes that weren't there, and my body was slowly pulled into his face.

So now I find myself here, in this dreary town with no mote of life in it. Afraid to look at anything but the ground and hoping that something will wake me up out of this.

Suddenly, someone next to me stumbles and falls, and I stop to look at them for a moment before helping them to their feet.

Taking a look at their face, I see only a blur, and their hand was made up of geometric polygons, and I realize that everyone around me has the same features, aside from differing in shape in their silhouettes.

Then a desperate and compulsive thought strikes my head. Maybe if I go around helping these people could be my key to getting out of here, as if for some reason I'm putting myself through some moral trial in order to wake up, or maybe I died and wound up in purgatory, and everything up to this point has been God's doing. Anything seems plausible at this point. So I make it my mission to seek out people in need of aid, but it wasn't immediately obvious to me what these people could need help with, and I figure the next best thing is to offer words of encouragement and make casual conversation to make this endless journey more bearable for them.

Amongst the crowd, I look back to see this guy who's about a few inches taller than me and looks to be around 20 years old, which wasn't much older than myself, but he was very strange. He wasn't strange because he was a blurry figure made up of stretched out triangles and hexagons, but he was strange because he wasn't. He has curly blonde hair and rosy red cheeks that are juxtaposed to his pale face, which was also laden with freckles.



The curly-headed guy doesn't look like he notices me making my way through the horde over to him, and when I finally got within an arm's reach of him, he spoke before I could say anything.

"Do you remember me?" he says with eyes not looking away from the road ahead.

"No, I don't think I do," I reply.

"Shame. Well, let me give you a word of advice, David. No one here wants to talk to you, and they definitely don't need your help. So just quit it."

This guy's words really struck me, like an icicle straight to the stomach that froze my legs and completely floored me. It's not as though I was trying to nuisance, I was just trying to help.

Why was I trying to help? It's not as though I was being kind – I was hoping that whatever I was trying to do would get me out of this.

Was I ever really kind to anyone? Just for the sake of being kind?

Was I not always hoping that something would come out of being nice?

Good luck?

Fortune?

Forgiveness?

Had I always had some sort of ulterior motive?

The questions that had been trickling soon flooded my brain, and I hadn't noticed that I was completely enveloped by the fog. It's so bad I can't even see the ground beneath or even my own hands. I fall to my knees.

Then I keep falling, and the clouds grow dark. I hear ringing in my ears, followed by total silence.

Then there was nothing but darkness.

My body finally stops falling as if something caught me mid-dive.

A faint light is emitted from my body, and I see that I'm upright and floating. The occasional electric surge that came from the walls revealed to me walls that are flesh-like and pulsating. An invisible force moved me in the direction it willed me to go; I have been condemned to only watch where it takes me.

Finally, it begins to slow me down to this dark corner, but instead of turning and moving me in the opposite direction of the corner, it takes me in the direction of it. An unnerving aura surrounds this corner, and it terrifies me. The closer I got, the electricity strobed at a blinding rate, and the walls contracted, tightening around the corner like it was guarding me from it.



By refocusing my mind on the things that didn't harken back to that moment, the one that made this dark corner, I was able to avoid that place. The electric pulse slows its rate, the walls relax, and relief from this small victory washes over me. Though it feels somewhat cowardly, I know that it's best not to go near that corner and keep wandering until I wake up.

Walking around the cavernous halls, it became clear that finding the exit was most likely going to be impossible. Every path eventually either turned out to be a dead end or a route that feels like I've taken at least 100 times over. As if by the will of some strange gravity, the dark corner kept reappearing before me. The more I try to avoid it, the more it tries to pull me in. Each time, I dart in the other direction, and the walls try to shelter me from that malevolent bend. My determination to run away from it eventually gives out on me, and I'm too tired to fight it. This labyrinth must have given up on protecting me from it, because it allows me to be swallowed whole by it.

Static noise erupts in my eardrums as the dark corner opens up, forcing my passage through it. The static ceases after I get spat out into a dark room, where the only light comes from my being.

Here, I see only abstract figures with eyes of varying shapes, much like jack-o'-lanterns. I did not know them, but I sensed a strange level of familiarity with them.

A cacophony of whispers erupts at the sight of me, and though I can't make out what they're saying, I can feel their words coil around my body like a snake restraining its prey before devouring it. They fill me with so much sadness and guilt, and I wanted to keel over in anguish, but I couldn't.

Out of the darkness, a little boy with curly blonde hair and rosy cheeks on a pale face that is covered in freckles approaches me.

"Do you remember who I am now?" he asks.

Memories flashed before my eyes of the boy I used to play with and his mother. She placed me in a car seat. I remember a half-empty bottle rolling in front of my car seat. There was a crash. I woke up to people pulling me out of a broken car window. I remember looking back and seeing that the boy was still sleeping and covered in red paint. I was covered in red paint, too. It smelled like pennies.

"Alex? Is that you?" I asked through strained breaths.

"I'm not mad that I died. I'm not mad that you are still alive. I'm mad that your life is wasted on you. You didn't deserve to survive."

The little light emanating from my body began to dim, and Alex, along with the monsters, started to fade from my vision.



Again, I am surrounded by darkness. I want to scream, but my mental exhaustion keeps me silent.

I wander around waving my arms like a blind man until I finally find what feels like a door. I locate and turn the knob and find a well-lit room. This room is well-furnished, featuring fancy furniture, beautiful woodwork, and a fireplace that was gently roaring. Ten feet from the fireplace was a chessboard that, for whatever reason, fascinated me. Compelled, approached it to find it configured in an incredibly odd way. Each space in every column was occupied by black rooks, except for the E column, which had a black king closest to my side of the board and a white king on the other end. All of the black rooks were stuck on the board, and each time I tried grabbing the white king, I would feel a twinge of pain on both sides of my neck. My attention then turned to the black king, who was able to be picked up.

I move the black king to E2, and in doing so, I hear something drop. Turning around, it sounded as though it came from the door I walked in from. Cautiously, I move the black king to E3. A slightly louder thud comes from beyond the door. I move the black king to E4, and an even louder crash comes from beyond the door.

I freeze. Realizing that each space the black king moves up. The noise gets louder. So, could this mean that I'm the white king? If the black king should capture the white king, what happens then? I nearly forgot that this was a dream, so whatever happens can't be that big of a deal.

Black King to E5. I hear something slam against the door. Every nerve in my body is screaming at me to stop, but there's no other way out of this. Whatever this thing is, I have to confront it. It could be my only means of escape. I will get through this as long as I keep my eyes on the chessboard.

Black King to E6. The door is thrown open, and I hear the sound of the hinges being ripped from the wall. The lights flicker twice, and the fireplace begins to die. Though it may have shaken my resolve, I cannot stop here – I've already let it in.

Black King to E7. The fireplace goes out, and the lights are flickering like crazy. It's right behind me now. I'm so goddamn scared – I can feel its presence behind me. A notch gets tied in my throat, and my chest has got itself in a chokehold. All of my regrets surface at once, regretting all of the time I wasted dozing off in school, eating lunch alone, being afraid of genuine relationships, and lying in bed the second I came home from school, even when I wasn't tired.

What if I die? What if this isn't a dream, and whatever this thing is eats me alive? Am I strong enough to get through this?

Do I have the right to live?

Before making my final move, I feel something deeper within me.



Beneath all of the muck of my own self-loathing, I feel a strange warmth that swaddles my heart. I look up and see a painted portrait hanging on the wall in front of me.

The portrait is of a boy with curly blonde hair, rosy red cheeks, and a face full of freckles. It looks as if he's looking at me, not with anger nor hatred, but with kindness, and his one-of-a-kind smile shines down on me, refueling my drive to press on. For a moment, I nearly forgot the giant unknown beast that's inches from my backside. I look back at the board, still shaking at the thought of what it might do to me after I allow the Black King to capture the White King.

I had to do this sooner or later. I have to face it, or I'll die regretting and never grow.

Black King to E8. White King confronts Black King.



**Escape**  
By Abigail Taber



# Ontario

By Sophia Daniel

Up in the elevator  
too high up to know  
through the glass  
twinkles the city below

White shirts, dark pants  
shiny lip gloss  
a fresh haircut  
coordinating; close to matching

Our meals arrived slow  
a steaming veal and  
beef with mashed potatoes  
the room spun without alcohol

Twinkling sky and city lights  
carried us past the hotel  
long after we finished our meal  
finding a place no one could tell





A beautiful garden  
a stage made of marble  
under the night sky  
our first trip the first fall

We were away from the people  
far off the street  
next to a fountain  
where you chose me

# The Billowing Smoke

By Sophia Daniel

The smoke billows away  
out the window and  
into the air while  
you tell me about your plans  
and how you'll drift away.

Drift away like the snow  
drifts into the roads we took  
when we drove the curves and bends  
of the roads that always lead  
us back to here.

Here where my closet  
hidden by a honeybee drape  
the drape that fluttered through the air  
when we pulled it back  
to play hide and seek.



We would play  
silly like children  
running and hiding through the halls  
through the woods as the leaves  
fell slowly from the sky.

The sky full of bright stars  
almost as bright as your start  
the stars revolving around us  
as the smoke clears out through the windows  
and you billowed out of my life.



**Untitled**  
By Gavin Hooten



# A Pit Crew Short Story

By Brooke Johnpier

## #323 - The Reveal

Bridget: I smiled at my phone.

My boyfriend, Jack, had texted me. He was going to the Letchworth Craft Show today, too. Him and our mutual best friend, James, were going to meet me at the food trucks at ten. Only three more hours until I saw the love of my life.

I looked up from my phone and watched the beautiful scenery of Letchworth State Park rush by. The colors of the trees and the winding caverns throughout the forest were all the more pretty because of the gift that was heading my way in due time.

Before I knew it, though, we had arrived at the craft show and parked in the closest lot. It may have been an hour away from opening, but this ensured we had a good spot. If not, we would've been walking miles and miles, and with the uncertainty of what you might buy at these things, that was something you did not want to happen.

Until the start time, my parents and I sat in Dad's truck and listened to music. It was going to be a great day.

**James:** My mouth dropped open at all the art that surrounded me. Every year Jack and I have gone to the craft show over Columbus Day weekend, and every year, I found something else I loved to add to my art collection.

This year was no exception. So far, Jack had bought me three paintings of nature that I held tightly to my chest while we walked around. Jack had bought some jewelry (he had a very feminine side and loved Bridget) and some popcorn. However, the popcorn was basically gone.

Jack was nervous about meeting Bridget. Not because he was afraid of his girlfriend or anything, but because today was the day that they were going to tell Mr. and Mrs. Jones about their relationship. Jack's father already knew, but Bridget's parents did not.

I've never seen Jack nervous before; it was scary. He powered down a five-pound bag of kettle corn like nothing and was now smoking his fifth cigarette in eight minutes.

"Jesus, Jack," I said. "You're gonna get lung cancer before you see Bridget again."

Jack glared at me.

"What else am I supposed to do? Pace back and forth?"

"Well--"



Jack's eyes widened as he saw something in the distance. I turned around and saw Bridget running toward us with her parents behind her, looking confused.

She got to us and immediately ran past me into Jack's arms. She kissed him passionately. I had to suppress a laugh as the look on Mr. Jones's face went from one of confusion to one of fury.

"Who *the fuck* are you?" He asked.

Bridget broke away from Jack, came over to me, and hugged me before turning to her dad.

"Dad," she said shakily. "This is Jack, my boyfriend. Jack, meet my dad."

Mr. Jones's mouth went into the thinnest line I've ever seen.

---

**Jack:** I extended my hand to Bridget's dad as I stepped forward.

"Hi," I said. "It's an honor to meet you."

He shook my hand.

"Nice name. Same as mine, actually."

I raised an eyebrow. "Your name is Jack Modified Racecar Chassis Johnson?"

Mr. Jones smiled. "No," he laughed. "But, my name is Jack Jones."

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh," I said. "Should've known."

The conversation dropped off weakly into an awkward silence. This was going about as good as could be expected...until it didn't.

"How long have you been together?" Mrs. Jones asked. I gulped. Here we go. The dirt comes to light.

"We've been together for--"

"Six months," Bridget said. "We've been together for six months."

I looked at Bridget. I had never seen such determination in her face before. I decided it would be best if I went along with whatever plan she had in mind. If she wanted to say six months instead of two years, so be it. It looked better on me anyway. Considering we had a pretty big age gap.

"Where'd you two meet?" Mrs. Jones asked.

"The racetrack."

"School."

Bridget and I looked at each other. I bit my lip.



It wasn't my fault I couldn't lie; I wasn't born with the gene. But with how Bridget was looking at me I was going to have to. Because let's face it, I sure as hell didn't go to school with her even though I did meet her there.

Mrs. Jones's eyebrows were arched in a way that made my nervousness skyrocket. She was smarter than her husband by far.

"What I meant to say was that I met her at racing school," I said. "This spring at Test, Tune, and Time, they had a program going on that I took part in. Afterwards, Bridget and Jack came over to the pits where we met. It was love at first sight."

That wasn't entirely a lie, but it wasn't the truth either. But I could manipulate the truth to suit my needs when I wanted to. This was one of those times.

"You love her?" Mrs. Jones said. "What, are you gonna propose to her next week!?"

"No!" Bridget yelled. "He's not. And to answer your next question, no. We haven't had sex yet!"

The people sitting at the picnic table next to us stopped with their food halfway to their mouths, and I had to snap my mouth up after it fell open. Because that was the biggest lie I had heard in a while.

Bridget and I had certainly had sex; I was her first.



I knew every inch of her body. But again, I decided to go with her plan. She knew best.

Mrs. Jones sighed.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's just I wasn't expecting Bridget to be in a relationship for quite some time."

She extended her hand to me.

"I'm Jane. Jane Jones. It's nice to meet you, Jack."

"Back atcha," I said with a smile.

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# Letchworth State Park

By Abigail Taber



# Hey mom

By Tanner Pasi

I hope you're doing good.



I'm good  
and so are my classes.

You said  
I should be  
a writer.

I'm not sure  
if what I'm doing is  
what you wanted  
but I'm trying

really really hard  
even though it's  
really really tough

so I can make you  
and dad  
proud.

I'm stressed.  
Yeah my homework is piling up  
But I'll figure it out!

I'm anxious.  
Yeah my breathing is kinda rough  
But the inhaler is helping!

I'm nervous.  
Yeah my blood pressure is up  
But it isn't too high!

I'm worried.  
But the hospital said my blood work was fine,  
remember!

I'm scared.  
Some nights  
my chest gets tight  
But it doesn't really hurt!

Like the day  
my heart exploded  
But not nearly as bad!

"What should we do?" "What should we do?"  
I didn't want to know; You didn't know.



I sat in that hospital bed  
Fighting our battles.

Your eyes were filled with tears  
I kept them in.

You asked God to help me  
I asked him to send you home  
So we could get better.

I'm hoping, praying  
When I mean if it explodes again  
You'll know.  
You'll be there.

I hope so.  
Can you  
make me a PB&J  
do my laundry  
fix my hair  
give me a ride  
pick out my clothes for church  
get me some chocolate milk  
please?

Or just love me as you do  
Because I love you and still need you  
But anyways What's happening at home?

Love and miss you!

# putting us together

By Andrew Fox

Dear,  
When I was young  
And you were too  
We met and loved  
And tried to do  
All the things  
We thought  
lovers do  
But it didn't work  
We had too much hate  
For ourselves and others  
We were confined in worlds  
that tore apart good  
loving lovers



Then again we kept in touch  
Talking here and there  
Never sharing much  
Until we thought  
To give it one more shot

Years ago it feels like now  
Ever since we've been learning to live  
You with my snoring, my questions, my  
farts  
Me with your messes, your trinkets,  
your stops and your starts

I tell too many jokes  
Take nothing seriously  
Avoid what scares me  
Of you, I'm terrified

I've interrogated you time and time again  
Ripping into your mind, frantically  
Searching for sense  
Coming up empty  
You patiently answer every question  
However barbed  
And invite me sweetly back to bed

Some words are especially important  
And you don't always seem to  
understand which  
Or why,  
But you say them anyway  
Clumsily at times, as though they're new  
to you  
And maybe they are I suppose  
But seeing you fail has never made me  
happier

I remember the first time you got upset  
With me for killing a spider  
It didn't mean much to me  
But the tears in your eyes  
Changed my mind

Listening while you mourn the loss  
of those who stung and spurned  
I may yet spend the rest of my life  
raising your bar  
Wiping the tears from your eyes  
Clearing the way for your smile

Standing there  
In front of your father



Shaking like a leaf  
Seething with rage  
Clutching your hand  
Too hard  
Cracking some knuckles  
Saying I'd never hurt you

You worry that I'll leave  
Find better  
Deserve better  
When you find a rainbow  
That's just for you  
A beam of radiant light  
That you can wake up next to  
A whirlwind of color  
In its purest form  
Painting the walls of  
Your drab and dismal dorm  
Until it feels like a place  
Where a life was lived  
The only "better" is to see it once more  
each and every morning

I'm not sure I've said anything  
Remotely coherent  
But I have never been more certain  
That you'll understand

Sincerely,

By A. Fox

For my lovely wife,

I look forward to spending the rest of my life

Writing you corny poems.

# Automobile

By Andrew Fox

Back when we replaced the horse

Back when we outpaced our old friend

We needed more power

We needed a beast that needed no rest

A beast that didn't mind being beaten to death

A beast of steel and fire

Bursting with life, forged by destruction

Bursting with force, hurtling forward

Unable to stop til the job's done

Unable to see what's hit til it's gone

Breaking apart little by little

Breaking apart alone and unchecked

Leaving bits of itself behind

Leaving bits from broken beasts in its wake

Swallowing the blood of the Earth, eating the bones of her children

Swallowing the stars from the sky, stealing the air from her lungs

The horse knows its way home

The horse knows when to stop



# Deadly Pull

By Mary Quinn  
McNaughton

To draw is  
to die  
Purple nails  
devil woman  
fate waits  
relents  
for no man.

Darkness not wholly expressed  
Like cupping  
a flashlight  
the darkness still remains  
Like tea-  
water too hot  
blue mug cracks  
under pressure  
\$9.99.



*A response to Maurizio  
Cattelan's "Untitled from the  
11th Commandment"*



Flinch at the touch  
Who first?  
Only he will know  
and his secret  
hangs in dead air

unspoken.  
dry

suspension in time  
irises drip water on tile-suit clean, starched  
slow erosion  
*breathe in*  
surrender ego  
release  
free

**breathe out**  
sinful

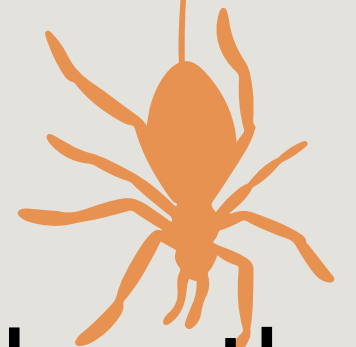
live in memory  
die with a smile,  
hanged man.



# The Story That Never Ends

By Holden Matteson

## From the Outside Looking In



The mountains bow in reverence and loudly quakes the earth. For in the moments since the fawn's birth, the world has been mired in a horrible curse.

Home, the land of the Author begins to recede thanks to mankind's vile deeds – they seek to ascend, oh, the rules they'd bend, to make themselves as gods.

But God had a plan for this wayward Man – he'd work the earth and borrow its birth, wresting what he needs from the toil of soil and meat to boil. The doe can hardly believe her eyes as fair Eden ascends to the skies.

Stationed at the gate, eyes burning irate is a beaten and battered cherub, the angel of God fuming with exasperation as he watches now the failed creation.

"Dear cherub," asked the doe, "what for does the world shake so?!" The fawn bleats at her feet, shaking and quaking as God's paradise retreats.

With a sigh and a great anger in his eye, the cherub turns his faces to the humble deer as he answers her inclined ear.

"Mankind was tempted, it was themselves they loved and God they resented. For when deceit came knocking by Satan's talking the conceit of man is what blighted the land.

"Now, up, up, goes Paradise, guarded by flaming blade and cherub knights! How I detest the humans who broke God's heart and live in sin, how could they let temptation win? They are a race of disgrace that spit in the face of their Author, their Maker, their Lover."

The doe takes pause and recalls the new laws of God. "Why then does Man get to rule the earth? Why not keep sharing its worth?"

The cherub answers grimly – "because somehow, despite their desolation, God seeks their salvation, even if it takes a hundred generations. But on this day, they must stand away from the God who made them – they must work to earn their keep, although the bounty of Earth is wide and deep. For Satan exposed their evil before their Master, and now thus is their disaster – but how redemption could ever be is unfortunately a thing beyond me."

The doe minds her child and gazes out into the wild – saying but eight words more to the angel who holds man at bay – "God is good; He will find a way."



# Man, Man, Man

"Surely I am no sinner!

"Surely if Jesus was always the winner,

"There would be no suffering or crime or hate. He claims he cometh, so why does he wait?"



The angel stationed over this creation listened to his fixation as he feared for his soul and watched grow the damnation.

"If I were God, I would not allow such things – there would only be peace and justice and perfection I'd bring!"

The angel could barely contain his rage as the man thought himself some great sage and raised himself above the God who brought about his age. This man believes himself to give perfect love, yet shows no patience for God above.

"I'd smite and right and fight against the wicked – or better yet I'd never allow a man to disavow what is right in my sight and everything would be alright."

Humble yourself, you pitiable man: for you were not there when God formed the land. Were you there when rust and crust of a sinner's nail pierced his wrist just for men to twist the meaning of the way, the truth, and the life?

Whenever pain is inflicted upon you, you endure for your own sake – but when Jesus Christ bled out his life – on that cross He prayed not a soul be lost and then He saw you. And despite your pitiless indifference, and evil thoughts,

He still bled out His love for you, up there on that cross. And though evil will come, oh, how it will one day succumb to the love of God, if only you don't deny it, don't call this love a fraud.

The angel swallows his anger and remembers his God in a manger. He loves these humans, it's true, and He prayed, forgive them Father, they know not what they do.

So the angel cannot look down on the man's lost and desperate frown. He invisibly kneels before his trembling host, knowing his Lord loves him so. And he plants a kiss on his forehead in the name of his God and the man blinks and takes pause at the invisible, intangible wish of goodwill. He remembers his God nailed up on that hill.

He sees that evil is a perversion primeval, not the design God had in mind. But to snap it all away, man would rue that day. He sees the truth, but still says, "Go. Go and come no more." Such are the lost Jesus died for.



# March 5, 2025 / October 7, 2025

By Anonymous



5 things you can see / 4 things you can touch / 3 things you can hear / 2 things you can smell / 1 thing you can taste

My roommate glaring  
My sister crying  
My arm bleeding  
me; alone

There's too much, I can't stop it, I need help, I can't call for help, I'll be done  
Call Alex

Grey Towel, Chevy Trax, Red ICEE, blue stress ball, text from Grace  
5 stiches

Cold ice pack, very long needle, nurse's hands, bathroom sink  
4 minutes

"Are you ok?", "it was an accident", "oh god"  
3 people

Sweat, blood  
2 days

Pain

Only 1 time, I promise, it won't happen again, I'm fine, I promise, I didn't mean it, please don't be mad

# ground search



By Ana Dobrot

We stare to the sky as the last  
drops of dusk evaporate.

I wonder if you made it through the brush,  
if you're all scratched up,  
if the thorns chipped away at your shell  
like acid rain on rock.

I imagine that you pictured  
your keys sticking in the lock  
and decided you'd rather not  
return home to the sorrow.

So the sorrow lives alone now,  
wagging its tail and ready to greet you  
in the evening, then curling up by the door  
at midnight when you still haven't returned.

I imagine that the rain washed you clean.  
You picked your head up and let  
the water pool in the cavities of your face,





then let it run off of you until it ran clear.  
Your scent became that of the woods,  
it stopped my hounds in their tracks.

So we'll never find you now,  
and I know that's what you wanted,  
but I was still disappointed when I  
saw them emerge from the sticks,  
with their tails between their legs.

# lunch break

By Ana Dobrot

train's breath touches your neck  
powder soft, almost a moth.  
i watch you lift off like a careless balloon,  
floating red against the sheep's wool sky.

the air is thick and gummy.  
it sticks to you like paste  
and static currents run across you  
childlike, you are all the way open like  
a field, or a spineless book.



as light bolts germinate inside you,  
you churn with the storm  
and wonder how these droplets return to their  
office jobs at the aqueducts.



**U Pick**  
By Abigail  
Taber



They say animals backed into a corner *bite*...

But they pulled my *teeth*,

So I wait.

They say we *claw*...

But they took those too,

So I wait.

They say we *hiss* and *yell*...

But they hold my mouth,

Until I can't *breathe* and I'm finally *silent*,

So I wait.

And I sit here... And I wait.

I play *nice*... And I wait.

And I *sit*...

And I wait...

And I wait...

And...

I wait...

And...

I...

Wait...

And...

I...

...

# Why Wait

By Anonymous



# Deep Waves

By Joseph McCormick

I don't need eyes to follow her serendipitous path  
She floats around my head  
She comes in deep waves,  
Dancing.

You are singing to me.

I suddenly wonder why I ever needed eyes

She touches me softly with her head

As she breezes by,  
So careful not to divert

My attention

Is on you

You have me caught,  
Hooked.

I can feel you,  
Moving through me,  
Delicately,

You weave yourself into my brain.

She promenades through the heavy wood

Alder,

Boasting her beautiful, blue, melodies

She drifts,

Slowly eating away at space,

But entirely too quickly.

I move through all 20,

Lowering as I move up.

You are encased.

You have bounds that need not be pushed.





She is brilliant in her galloping  
Moving solemnly,  
Through octaves.  
You tackle love,  
And hate,  
And jealousy.  
You move gracefully forward  
You are innovation  
You take care of the waves around you,  
And you are waving too, in a more dissonant way.



# Cotton Candy Sky

By Joseph  
McCormick

# Write A Lie / Write A Truth

By Abigail Taber



Write a Lie  
I know how I am  
I know who I am  
I know who I am becoming  
I know who I was.

A horn honks outside  
while I write a poem  
about not knowing who I am.  
My black gel pen doodles  
on my anxiety-worn finger  
nails as the  
climax  
of this poem evades me.

Write a Truth  
I have purple hair  
I like books  
I adore my friends  
I have qualities I like  
I have qualities I hate.



What does it even mean  
to know who you are?  
Don't people taunt "you're  
only twenty"?  
What does that mean?  
Does knowing who I am  
mean listing off  
all the small  
niche  
qualities about myself?

I have too many questions

I have very few answers

I am supposed to be following this prompt

Am I supposed to be following this prompt?

Sometimes I wonder if my  
professors can see this  
uncertainty  
of character in my work.

Dr. Hall, can you see  
how uncertain I am  
of how to end  
this poem?

# Thank you to all contributors!

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So far, my journey as Editor-in-Chief has been as good as I imagined it would be. Thank you to all who helped make it so.

For more info on The Laurel, visit: <https://thelaurelsbu.com>

# Cover Image by Mary Quinn McNaughton