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A Clear Vision by Eric Alonzo
1st Place Winner, Art Competition
Cover Art

“Always keep your mind open, you never know what you’ll discover”

Old Friends by Cory Kinchla
1st Place Winner, Prose Competition

I sat down right next to Todd on the usual bench. It's been a year since I'd last seen him. In fact, exactly a year. We only get together once a year to have this conversation. Once a year in the same exact spot and on the same exact day. We've started this tradition four years ago on October 23, 2014 and I've kept it alive since.

I'm not sure if Todd actually likes these conversations, but I find them necessary. Todd looked paler than he did last year, his blank expression as he faced the ground was depressing but it was also comforting for me.

"How have you been, Todd?"

Todd never looks me in the eyes anymore. I thought it was best to avoid eye contact as well, so we would always sit on opposite ends of the bench.

"Tough year?"

Nowadays, I do all of the talking as Todd sits there expressionless. I remember the first of these conversations four years ago on this bench; Todd didn't say a single word then either. I would express myself and he would sit there slumped in this usual position, motionless.

Todd and I have been friends for most of our lives. We grew up next to each other and pretty much spent every day together from age six to eighteen. Todd was a year older than me so when he left for college, I was alone. I didn't have any other friends like Todd. The days of our childhood are some of the best memories that I have. I still value my time with Todd, as I'm sure that he does too. It just saddens me that we only see each other once a year now and have the same exact conversation.

"You know, Todd, I wish you would talk to me."

I've always hated this part of the conversation. This is the part of the conversation where I would always expect Todd to at least look at me, but I knew he wouldn't. I knew he would never say anything, especially during this part of the talk. I say the same thing every single year, it was verbatim at this point.

"Whose fault do you really think it was?"

Todd remained silent, as usual. I knew deep down that it was my fault, but I never like to admit it. We both agreed when we were ten years old that neither one of us would keep a secret from each other, and for the

most part we didn't. We told each other everything, never hid a thing from each other. Now being twenty-seven, I feel as if I have broken our promise that we made seventeen years ago. Time seems to break promises.

Seventeen years. Has it really been that long? Of course it has. We're both adults now in our late twenties. Todd turns thirty in less than two years and I'm not too far behind him. I guess some things change, while others do not. We're always going to be friends, whether Todd wants to talk to me or not. Age is one thing that we can't control.

Time.

In a way, time has kept us apart. I wish Todd could live with me, but it's just not that easy. It's not that he's busy, he's just always in his own world away from society. This is just the way things are and it seems that all of his family and other friends have accepted it, but not me. We only get one day together each year, but it's better than nothing.

"I know you think it was my fault, and I know I say it every year, but I'm sorry."

No response from Todd.

"Do you ever think of me? Remember all the things we used to do back then? It seems, I think of a fond memory every day of you and me growing up together."

Todd's hands were placed on his lap. I wish he would just sit closer to me, put his arm around me and tell me all about how he also reminisces about our younger days. I knew he wouldn't do any of that though. This isn't the same Todd from seventeen years ago. He's a different man now.

"You know, Todd, it's been four years now" I said. "Time really flies. I miss you, man. I don't know if you're happier now, but I wish we could still hang with each other, like old times."

The October breeze blew right into both of our faces, I zipped up my jacket closer up to my chin. Todd's unbuttoned blazer flapped in the wind, and he still didn't move. I turned around as I heard the cemetery gate bang against the metal center pole behind us in the breeze. I felt bad for Todd. I know that he's lonely because this conversation is the most attention that he gets all year. The breeze blew a little harder and knocked over the shovel that was resting against the back of the bench.

I took a deep breath and said, “Todd, I’m sorry I took everything away from you. Your new job, your girlfriend, our friendship and basically your entire life.”

Todd sat there on the bench motionless not even reacting to the crisp wind that blew throughout the cemetery. I closed my eyes as the breeze blew harder with leaves brushing against our feet.

“I’m sure you remember that day as clearly as I do; when we were driving through Haynesville, Maine for our annual camping trip. We had some good times on those trips, didn’t we? I just wished you had gone onto the side of the road to take a leak, not in front of my car.”

Todd and I always went on a camping trip every October since I turned eighteen. It was only for the weekend, but it was always one of our favorite things to do in the fall. We haven’t gone for four years now and I truly miss it. Ever since the accident happened, I never went camping again.

“Todd, I was only messing around, you know. It was a complete accident.”

We decided to take my Jeep Wrangler that year because Todd’s pickup truck was in the shop getting new tires. My foot was on the brake and I inched towards him just to mess with him a little. My foot slipped. I don’t know what happened, but my foot slipped off the brake and hit the gas. He was standing about ten feet from the bumper until the Jeep was suddenly in front of him. The Jeep left Todd’s body lying face down behind it. I looked back in a panic only to see Todd’s lifeless body.

“I hope you know that my foot slipped. It was a complete accident.” My voice was always shaky for this part and I struggle with it every year.

Todd sat there on the opposite side of the bench still lifeless, just as he was four years ago in the dirt, behind my Jeep. I wiped my eyes, tears were about to stream down my face. I needed to end this conversation the same way that I do it every year.

“Todd, you’re my best friend and I miss you. It’s really time for me to get going and bring you back to your home.” I hated calling it his home, but it was the best word that I can think of. It was where he stayed and where he’ll be staying for the rest of time. It was time for me to bring him back to his coffin.

“Well Todd this is it.”

I stood up and walked over to Todd's lifeless, propped up body on the other end of the bench. I picked him up in a fireman's carry and grabbed the shovel off of the ground that the wind had blown over. I walked deeper into the cemetery carrying Todd back to his home. I put down the shovel and jumped down into the freshly dug hole in the ground and into the open coffin while Todd was still slumped over my shoulder. I placed him back into his home laying him gently on his back. I kissed his forehead and pulled myself out of the hole and back onto the ground. I used the shovel to reach down and close the coffin leaving Todd back into the darkness.

“Well, until next year, my old friend.”

I picked up the shovel and began to bury Todd once again.

Empty Bottle

By Taylor Gains

Life was good.
We were best friends.
You were my role model.
Why did it have to end?
You took one sip,
But you wanted more.
How did one sip turn to four?
You didn't think,
You just kept going.
I didn't understand why holding brandy was better than holding my hand.
You tried to hide it,
But people took notice.
We tried to stop you,
But you just kept going.
And now I am as empty as your bottle.

Vacant by Sarah Morge
1st Place Winner, Poetry Competition

Florescent vacancy
streaming through
cigarette stained glass
onto your daughter's car seat.
Your scuffed, imitation shoes
up against unturned gravel
each step reminding you
of your father's
sharp knuckles
hard against your jaw.

Hesitantly you climb
paint chipped stairs,
nerves smudging
inked coordinates
inside of polyester pockets
from your 9 to 5,
smearing your indentity.

Smell of smoke
and mildew escape
the thin crack in the door,
flooding already
stale hallway air.
You look into familiar soft,
sulking eyes
you've never met before
as the motel room
swallows you whole

There's no exchange
of words before
shaking fingers stumble
on hand me down leather,
rigid breath against
lips that kissed
your wife good morning

Desperation in the air
is nauseating
but you suppress
leftovers
and loneliness
weighing heavy
in your stomach,
as you tuck a
loose strand of hair
behind her ear
the same way you do
with your daughter.

Your callused hands on
beaten bones
created a false sense
of intimacy
only money
can buy.

Father Dearest

By Constance Labat

From the very start,
Until the day of his depart,
Father is the one whole holds your heart.

He keeps it locked up.
He keeps it tucked in.
He never lets anyone hurt it.
He lets it be where it's always been.

Your father is supposed to go to great lengths.
Praise you for both your weaknesses and your strengths.
But my Father pointed out my flaws.
He projected his sins as my faults.

My whole life ignored.
My unrest, his reward.
My fear, his pleasure.
My untouched tears, his treasure.
He was there but never present.
I only could be happy with his consent.
I never imagined he'd play the villain part.
I never knew he'd be the one to break my heart.

Father in the next life I ask you to do better.
Recognize me, my strong name, every damn letter.
Change the things you cannot accept.
For once, do your job with my heart and protect.
Don't ever shatter me again,
For in the next life, I shall avenge.

On Losing

By Liz Fontanilles

Competition is often found to be extremely oppressive.

My arm was a pendulum, swinging, swinging, swinging. Get too close and you'll get hit, but not before you hit me first.

Sometimes I'd get lucky, and I'd hit you first. But you'd catch up. They always catch up, and the swipes sting on body and soul.

I didn't want to fight; I wanted to lay on the strip and wait until five swipes went by and everything was over.

My mother lives in a castle where everything works out the way it's supposed to, and it always works out in a good way.

I live in a dark forest where instead of all the ways things can go right, I tend to focus on all the ways things can go wrong.

In the "Shrek" franchise, Puss in Boots is a capable fighter. His style of combat is practically dancing, and his skill with a sword is incomparable.

The referee likes to talk, especially after you lose a point. He'll explain to you why it's the other girl's, and you'll just nod along like you understand and you won't make that mistake again, of course.

It's so simple, just stab. Stab, stab, stab. Here's your blade, now use it. A lot went into providing you with it. Get that sea foam out of your ears and stab.

I just can't do it, and so I melt into white bubbles on the gymnasium floor, rusting every metal thing in sight.

But still I have to go again; it's my 300-year sentence.

I liked Missy, who dyed her hair in cherry red; she was sweet, even a little naïve. She was a better fencer than I could ever hope to be.

Competition can be playful, but soon those involved will be driven more by ego than "cooperative spirit" or "innocent curiosity".

Our coach loved Missy, because she was good.

He hovered around her, attending to her every whim, offering her constant and consistent advice on how to take her opponent down.
I'd wonder sometimes how life could've been different if it was I who had pulled the sword from the stone.

All hail Queen Missy, I guess.

If one person in a group switches into competitive mode, the others sense that if they don't act, they will be left behind. Thus, they are forced into the competition.

I knew I'd lose at that tournament. But Mom, screaming at the top of her lungs, tried to charge me with her hope that I was wrong, that this was the time when I'd run a girl into the ground.

My mother believes I am the fairest of them all, but did she really look for long in the magic mirror? Or was it only a brief glance as we were rushing to the car, and it was really someone else inside the glass?

I was the one who was last in the car, not her.

When the king takes a drive with his daughter, the cat advises his master to remove all his clothes and stand in the river naked.

The youngest son listens to the cat, who has not failed him yet, and stands exposed in the water.

You don't fence on a team, not really. When it all comes down to it, it's only you on the strip. Just silly little you in your silly little jumper with your silly little stick.

Ever watch "Naked and Afraid"?

That's fencing.

The cat cries for help, saying his master has been robbed of his clothes. The king, feeling for the poor boy, brings him out of the river and dressed spectacularly. The youngest son is even permitted to sit beside the king's daughter in the coach, who falls immediately in love with him.

All in a day's work for the cat.

I didn't want to be all by myself.

I wanted someone up there with me, guiding my hand, protecting me when things got too rough. I wanted someone to whisper,

“It’s going to be alright, Lizzie, we’re in this together. We can do this. We
can win!”

But there could never be a “we”, because the referee won’t begin a bout if
a third person has their feet on the strip.

“She’s a winner!”

My mother loves me, maybe

Questions of Pride

By Paige Marie

Is it wrong of me to find happiness in leaving? Is it wrong of me to hide from vicious words? Words that did not start out as my arrow but now sees me as the target.

With cold stares. Quiet lips. And ridged movement. I still wonder if I will be condemned for the smile that appears on my face at the thought of removing myself from conflict and obtain sanctuary miles and miles far from here. The thought sickens me but the harsh tone saddens me.

Looking out the window of the road ahead I hold back the tears of guilt and petty joy. So really. Is it wrong of me to find happiness in leaving?

Pride.

It is something that has destroyed nations, people and relationships. It is a normal emotion but one that crawled out from the box of Pandora to intervene with life. Despite human's efforts, they can not out run the glory and strength of pride. Though pride is also equally weakening. And I am but the same as the others.

There is a part of me that instructs me to push past it. To take the rode of higher respect. But with everything against me I feel it is a duty for me to do the complete opposite.

Five days of silence.

A silence of this magnitude I don't deserve. For that I will stand strong for myself. Let the pride consume me and resist to concede. Conceding is all I have ever know but now I will break away from that comfort and live selflessly. Take the advice insisted upon me for years.

Don't let anyone or anything walk over me.

This silence is that same. I won't let it walk over me. Not now and never again.

I want to stay strong. I want to defend the honor I have built for myself. I want so badly to rid the silence that grows in my existence. How is it my last want could break the other two?

I must smile. I must say the words expected of me. I must lie. For if I say what my mind is screaming I may never dig myself out of the hole I've built by speaking the truth. The truth of my mind. The truth of my heart. And the truth only so few have believed in or noticed.

Six days of silence.

And appreciation is what drives the speechless air. An appreciation, I too feel, but can not say at the sake of the one who has exploded and swallowed themselves into the pit of isolation. For now, I will read minds and act as they want me to. But know that there will be no true sincerity.

It made it worse. It made it worse. It made it worse.

And I do not know if we can ever find our way back. I do not know if I can ever find my way back. Back to who I was before. I feel weaker. I feel an overwhelming anguish in my heart. A pain I was sure would kill me. Would stop my heart completely.

In those moments leading up to my honesty. Partial honesty. My full honesty would have buried me in a pile I would surely die under. I know now though, that the same honesty I could not speak I will never be able to speak. Unless I were to wish for everlasting silence. Though at this moment that is all I can imagine.

This could go on for weeks. Maybe not for the silencer but for me I feel changed. And not for the best. Having my honesty hidden for what will be forever make me want to keep all my words to myself. Because I can not bare the pain that runs through my mind. My heart. Through my

tears. It made it worse and I know I will never be the same.

The relationship upon an unspoken love. Not one that grows but one forced on due to situation, has crumpled. Become as empty as a writer's blank page at which they thought a story must start. A beginning must be made.

As for me, my beginning is learning how. How to live with the pull of anger and regret for words never said. The silencer condemns themselves to the belief that they are and their words are truth. Are right with no ounce of wrongfulness to be. And that is why it will never be the same.

So here I begin. As a mess fallen to the floor searching through the rubble of burnt hearts and broken minds. Matching piece to piece to fix what will no longer remain and it is clear. So is pride a fault? Or is it a strength?

Fortress

By Brandon Muccitelli

You stood before me a champion in design.
A figure with a glow of the divine.
But now, as the moon turns away,
Its luster is all I can survey.

Light finds its way through
Your porous, wooden frame.
Once a fortress,
Now a shame.

The lunar desert where you reside
has no place for me to hide.
Instead, I take hold of the wind,
Light as a tumbleweed, yet thick-skinned,
And follow the escape of the moon.
I trudge through the celestial dark,
While never going out of tune.

Detached from orbit,
All I have known I forfeit.
And I think of the walls,
Your shanty arms that still held me tight
Even at the peak of the night.
Then a single tear falls.

For years, resent plagued my stringy fibers,
As I moved farther away from you.
Now, as I am swept up in a gust,
I still observe your colorless hue,
While you kick up plumes of space dust.

Under the false light,
Alone and turning to pebbles,
My fortress crumbles.
My fortress crumbles tonight.

Sinkhole

By Alexis Thieleke

Since I was a child, striving to be the best was the standard. But these standards got increasingly difficult as the years passed and life got much harder on me. I was a player in this gigantic game of tag. Running in the bright green grass with friends I'd thought I'd have forever was euphoric. But soon I realized that life works in a similar way, I run from things I'm scared of. It's a natural reaction. Thinking life was all about avoiding problems; fleeing from all of the hard parts.

Continuous erosion increases the depression.

On the other hand, I could be "it". But this always led to me chasing people that were wrong for me.

Trying to catch things is toxic.

Life is like a giant game of tag; either you're running from things that scare you or you're trying way too hard to catch all the wrong things. Catching things that gradually tore me apart; allowing the sediment within my soul to erode until a thin layer remains. Maybe this is why I don't like tag; it's how I found I was missing the other half of me.

Cracks on my surface become unobstructed allowing peaks of light to fall into the cavity; an abyss of layered emotion and grief. No one warns you about loss until the ground collapses.

An attempt to rescue must have been too dangerous. Some deemed the ground I resided within unstable, forcing me to be stuck; waiting in my own sick of isolation.

Natural disasters cannot be solved alone.

I sutured the broken pieces of my mind together with shaky precision. I tore down my bedrock, my origin depleted my sand, my love deteriorated my clay, but my biggest loss, my other half tore up my asphalt.

Roses

By Alexis Thieleke

You might have seen me
As one of your roses
Dripping silently with blood
Wilting in your beautiful hands
Freshly plucked from the fields of
Ordinary people
Because maybe
I was extraordinary
Forever despising your cruelty
Wondering how many other flowers are
Choking in your vases
Wishing they had fought to stay
In those lonely fields of grass
Instead of being imprisoned in
Glass castles;
Admired, yet unloved.

Some things are left unsaid
Like stories resting in vintage nightstands
Waiting to be held again.
But I will always remember
The way you folded me at
My corners
Like there was a part of me
You wanted to come back to.



Damaged

By: Brianna Parks

“Love can be extended to all living things”

Problem

By Infinity Bowie

I've got a problem.

I've got a serious problem.

At least, my psychiatrist think it's a serious problem. I just think she's overreacting. I mean when you think about it, a problem is something complex, complicated. Something you have to try really hard to fix. In other words, a problem is an issue, and I do not have issues. I told my psychiatrist this on Thursday afternoon during our second session for the week. Most people who go to therapy usually only go once a week, but my mother thinks I need all the extra help I can get. She too also thinks I have a serious problem.

Anyway, I was telling my psychiatrist, Dr. Allie Sherpa, that I did not have issues. That I was just a highly misunderstood individual with the desire to not do what I'm told sometimes. That I didn't really see the problem of doing what I want to do since I was my own person and all. At this point, Dr. Allie Sherpa heaved a big sigh, took off her glasses and rubbed her temples as if I was mentally killing her. Then she started telling me how I couldn't just march to the beat of my own drum or some other old-timey saying. And that I had to take into consideration other people's feelings and think about how my doing my own thing would be hurting them in the end.

I think I just rolled my eyes at this point. I mean seriously, how over-dramatic could this woman be?

I heard her heave another sigh, this time putting her glasses back on. Then she asked me the question I knew she was going to ask: What was my most recent "issue"? I gritted my teeth as soon as she started asking it.

God I hated when people asked me questions that they knew I wouldn't want to answer. It's like they purposely wanted to make me feel uncomfortable or something.

I folded my arms and stared hard at her. I didn't even know why she was asking me as if she didn't already know. Even though therapy is supposedly confidential, my mother and Dr. Allie Sherpa were pretty tight, and I knew that my mother told her all of my recent "issues" so that we could "discuss" them. I hated discussions. I hated being discussed. It was

all a waste of time really. Why bother discussing things we already knew about? It was like pretending to not know about a topic just so that every one could hear themselves talk and sound smart to each other. It was pathetic. That's probably why I failed most of my classes, particularly group discussions. There was just no point.

Anyway, the "issue" that Dr. Allie Sherpa was referring to was last Monday night. I was at the supermarket with my mother, buying some kosher foods for our annoying Jewish side of the family. Seriously, we weren't even Jewish, my mom and I, and my father wasn't really big into the religion either, but here they were every freaking Jewish holiday shoving their Challah breads down our throats. Speaking of Challah bread, that's exactly what we were searching endlessly for, until we saw one lone one sitting on the top shelf. It looked like someone tried to hide the last one amongst the regular sliced bread, only they were stupid enough to forget their own hiding place.

As we're walking towards the bread, some old fat guy, probably in his late forties or early fifties, snatched it off the shelf. Then he quickly averted his eyes from us, though I saw the corner of his mouth smirk before he turned away. I started to shout at him, but my mother, the nun she was, put her hand on my shoulder and told me it was okay. That we could just go to another store and that I better not try and get it back because she knew it would start a problem. I could see that she was tired, having shopped around all day for these intruders who would be invading our home at precisely 6:15 that night because Jewish people are oh-so punctual. She sighed and started pushing our cart in the other direction.

That killed me, you have no idea. Just hearing her sigh like that, witnessing her exhaustion. I may despise our extended family, but I loved my mother.

When she had turned the corner to the dairy aisle, I bolted in the direction I saw the fat guy go in. There he was in the snack aisle, snagging all of the chips he could gather in his Twinkie-like arms. His cart was behind him, the Challah bread sitting right on the kiddie seat. I grabbed it and ran to the registers, where my mother was already scanning at the self-checkout. When she saw me with the Challah bread, her eyes widened at me, then over my shoulder at the fat guy practically rolling towards us. I scanned the bread, paid, stuffed it in our cart, and grabbed my mother's hand, pushing us out the door.

We made it to our car as the fat guy was screaming obscenities at us from the exit, the people in the parking lot looking as if they'd never heard an F-Bomb in their lives. When we got in our car, my mother was in hysterics, saying that the fat guy could've called the cops on me and that I caused a scene and that she could never go back to that supermarket again. I told her that the worst the guy could've done was sat on me.

I said this to Dr. Allie Sherpa too. I didn't tell her the story of course since, like I said, she already knew. Then she told me how that wasn't the point and that I had embarrassed my mother and that this was how my marching to the beat of my own drum was negatively affecting those around me. I told her that I was doing that fat guy a favor because he could stand to lose a few pounds anyway and the Challah bread wouldn't be helping. Again, another sigh. The glasses remained on her face this time.

Then she started bringing up all my other past "problems", like the time I got fired from two jobs in the same month because I didn't listen to rules and regulations and whatever. The first job was at this department store. I was a salesperson or whatever and I was basically supposed to just answer stupid customer questions and arrange shelves and stuff. Anyway, it was only my fourth day on the job, and my supervisor was showing me how to arrange these stuffed snowmen. He kept telling me that I had to make sure the name tags on each of the snowmen were showing because of "presentation". It didn't even make a difference whether their names showed or not, since they were all named Frosty or Snowy or some other dumb wintery name.

Anyway, the genius who made these snowmen didn't make the bottom flat enough to stand on its own. So every time you moved it even a little, it would fall all over the place. When I told him this, he just shrugged and told me I'd have to just be careful. I didn't like that he said that, so needless to say, I fixed all the name tags alright, but I left all the snowmen in a dismantled heap. I got fired that afternoon. The second job was more intentional. I got a job as a cashier for this shoe boutique. They weren't real fancy or anything like that, and they were pretty new. Yet the manager treated it as if it was the shoe boutique to the stars or something, and like we were in Beverly Hills and not in the middle of Nowheresville.

Anyway, she wanted us to say this ridiculous greeting every time customers came in the store. Something about the customer being Cinderella

finding her perfect glass slipper, something real cheesy Disney-bit like that. It was so stupid I can't even remember. Even the lady I said it to looked like she was trying to stifle a laugh. So I stopped saying it to people when they came in, ignoring the steely gaze from my manager. And of course, I didn't last too long at the shoe boutique.

Out the corner of my eye, I saw Dr. Allie Sherpa scribbling furiously on her clipboard. That really killed me. It was like I was a freaking test-monkey, being observed and everything. Like I was in some test lab and she was a scientist taking notes of my various reactions to some dangerous chemical she infused into me. I hated that. When she was done scribbling, she pushed her glasses up on her nose and stared at me for a long time. I thought she was going to heave another sigh again, but she didn't.

Instead she said I had signs of some condition called Oppositional Defiant Disorder or ODD.

When she said that I nearly threw my chair at her. The whole time she was diagnosing me like I was some crazy person. Like I had some real problem. Like I had issues. I started screaming at her, telling her that she was the one with all these problems and issues and that the only person she should diagnose was herself. I told her I didn't have a problem and that I especially didn't have oppositional whatever either. She told me to keep my voice down so I screamed even louder. The next thing I knew, I was being lifted up by some smelly burly guy and out of the Dr. Allie Sherpa's office. He was probably Jewish.

Anyway, now here I am telling you about all of the problems and issues that I really don't have. At this point, my new psychiatrist, Dr. Thomas Kahn, heaved a big sigh, took his spectacles off, and rubbed his temples as if I was mentally killing him.

It was on a day where the sun was so
inforgiving that I found myself sitting
alone outside on a splintering wooden
bench behind my school's library. The
sweat forming at the base of my neck,
pooling down to my underarms found
its origins both in the vengeful hate
of summer days and in my prior run in
with someone on campus. "Run in" can
be taken literally in this sense, for I ran away
when our paths were close to aligning.
And "someone" was, in fact, someone. A
person with a face and two functioning
legs whose steps plagued my ears until
my comfort was found hidden openly behind
the library. I didn't know their name...
I don't wish to know their name. Just the
mere thought of me accidentally having to

to talk to them made me hasten my steps.
Days like this where the sun is inforgiving
when sands of life are equally as
cool as the aforementioned rays, it is on
those days where the wish to end my life
is so present and sharp that it frightens
me. The fear is not about my imagined
timely death. Rather it's knowing that
this feeling of perpetual dread and
anxiety towards my surroundings seems
that it will last forever. That my longing
to interact with others will forever be
hindered by my fear of doing so. I hate
feeling like this. I hate my life. And I hate
wishing to die when I don't have the guts
to do it. Sometimes I imagine how life would
be without me, and the pain in knowing that
it won't change, at least for the worse, hits so bad
that it - ironically - makes me want to live.

8/17/2017

A Forgotten Past; A Purposful Past

By: Giselle Cole

"This is a personal piece and was written at a very dark, and low time in my life. It has been about two years since then and me being alive is a testament to my faith"

White Heat

By Jaycee Dia

White Heat [Noun]

a state of intense mental or physical strain, emotion, or activity

Wednesday, March 6, 2019 2:35am

All I need is some meditation
Just a second to muster up
A little bit of inspiration
To bask in my body's shifting
Moods to
Fuel this sliver of motivation
That's been begging for expression
For
Too many fleeting moons
See, I've been sort of struggling
Each step much heavier than my last
Footprints that sink deeper than my past
And I want to surpass the average.
For my words to run rampant
And stampede on the dreams
That won't meet
Me half way
I can't and won't allow myself
To be stagnant.
I just simply refuse.
I want to be volcanic
Eruptive and organic
Natural and impactful
Without the disruption
To be something infinitely
Greater, other-worldly,
Audacious
With no deviation
And my soul accurately aligned.
This is my medication
The one thing that relieves that

Stream of tangled thoughts
And fosters elevation.
I want to be the ocean.
This consuming mass of
Wonder and unmarked tokens
Just waiting to be unveiled.
A leviathan within a pool of guppies
Submerging you in my words and
Having the waves and motions
Transport you to the moon
And push you to bite into the stars.
I want to be your mothership
Carefully gliding through the rings.
This journey
This internal form of war
This yearning to satisfy a need
To soak my words in this sea
Of inexplicable emotions.
This intensity
This creativity is merely a potion
Liquefying my being conjoining
With
A few words to enthrall
You
And paint this vivid picture in your
Mind and
Spellbind your encased
Abstraction. This
Myopic attraction and these
Thoughtful, beautifully written distractions,
Produced by detachment.
Let these golden words
Be your greatest caption.
Captivating and
Massaged in passion
And giving you a
Priceless strain of
The most elated satisfaction.

Hello World, I'm Ready

By Joshua Vega

I lay here in complete utter silence
As darkness fills my room and negative thoughts take control of my mind
At that moment the positivity philosophy that I'm living deteriorates
Like a black hole the goodness inside spaghettifies turning it into millions
of atoms unseen by the naked eye
As I reach the point of no return I stretch my arm out to the one thing
that contains my sanity
Stretching stretching stretching until my arm is out of my socket
And there it is, the key! The key to unlock the shackles that are pulling me
into this void
I pick it up and light it up
One puff, 2 puffs, 3 puffs, 4 puffs but it isn't enough to contain the hatred,
sadness and loneliness that I try so hard to conquer
After a while it fades away and I feel myself once again being consumed
by all the bad vibes
And then I find myself lighting another just to fight back
I'm at this constant tug of war with myself and nothing is balanced
It's like yin is winning over yang
This constant battle between dark and light and I'm the rope being torn
apart each day as one conquers another
And there it is the truth behind it all
The reason I put a front about how great life is
But don't get me wrong life has its ups and downs
I was put here on this earth to run this obstacle course we call life
To find the true meaning of happiness
Then it hit me, a realization like no other
I am the one that dictates my happiness
Not an event, a person, a thing, but ME!
I begin to live my life with a whole new outlook on the world
As I open the doors to a new beginning
Saying Hello World I'm Ready!

- Jace



Laughing Teddy

By Brandon Muctielli

“Everyone is capable of laughter regardless of who they are. There is a kindling need for laughter within us all and sometimes it’s just good to let it out. Deep down we are all Teddys that require companionship and camaraderie. It’s important to come together for the sake of oneness, happiness, and laughter, of course, you got to know how to laugh at yourself too, before life gets the chance to do it for you”



Views From Germany

By: Eric Alonzo

“Life is Sweet”

A picture taken from the Lindt Chocolate Factory where you can see the Cologne Church in German

Home is Where the Heart Is

By Briana Michas

My eyes blink. My long lashes brush my face like the leaves that rustle with the warm spring breeze on the old oak tree who sinks its sturdy roots into the edge of the forest. I blink again. My eyes slowly fixate on the sun that is setting in the horizon, painting the late evening sky different hues of purple and red. Eva is standing just past the front porch steps that are cracked with the many years of use and from the harsh salt that I sprinkle on a bitter January morning that has the remnants from the gentle snow from the night before. I see her now. She is walking towards me, her hair a type of wild I had almost completely forgotten. One blonde curl haphazardly coils out of her head, looking like it is reaching a hand towards the setting sky. I see her now. The grass crunches under her bare feet, her toenails painted electric blue. Her sweater goes past her knees and covers her lanky body, and I think back to when I touched her bare back, my fingers tracing where her spine jutted out just a little bit too much. I see her now. She is younger, the wrinkles and brown spots from the copious amounts of time she used to spend in the sun have reversed. She is here, standing in front of me with her arms reaching out to take my hand.

“Come with me”, Eva whispers. She smiles, revealing the slightly crooked canine that I used to love so much.

I relish at the thought. A warm feeling bubbles in my chest as I remember how we used to sit in the living room on the old brown faux-suede couch, the one with the cushions all sunken in from years of use. I slightly raise my left hand, but hesitate before placing my hand in hers. I place it back besides my body.

“Come with me now. Come home. I miss you.” Her voice is more urgent like a mother giving her child a second warning to turn off the lights and go to sleep. Her brow slightly furrows, but her lips smile the same crooked smile.

“Eva, I miss you too. It’s been so hard without you.” My voice sounds different, like it is garbled and far away. Like it is not mine; a stranger in his own body. I reach my hand to touch her face, but an invisible force stops me. The sun sinks farther into the horizon and turns the sky a deep blue mixed with orange.

“Sam, you need to come inside with me now. Look, the sun is almost finished setting.”

A low whine starts deep within my ears. What started off sounding like an aggressive flap of a bug’s wings, soon courses through every nerve ending of my body. My veins pulse with velocity in rhythm with every beat my heart stutters to take. I am certain they are going to rupture and paint the crunchy grass a coat of crimson red. I crumple to the ground, and I press my hands to my ears.

“Make it stop! Make it stop!” I scream, my voice sounding even more distant now.

“I could have helped if you just came home.” She shakes her head, and her unruly hair swishes back and forth in unison with her disdain. She turns her back on me and walks away. The sun slinks past the horizon, and the sky is black, dotted with tiny stars that seem so close I reach out to touch them.

“Code blue! He has a very weak pulse, and is in V-Fib! Push one of epi, stat! Clear!”

A jolt brings my body upwards. My back slams down on the hard, cold, metal table.

“Again!”

There is that same whining noise again. Where did Eva go?

“Starting chest compressions!”

“Eva”, I try to mumble, but my tongue rests too heavy on the floor of my mouth.

“Pulse is getting stronger! Continuing compressions.” Her heavy hands beat rhythmically on my chest. Up and down. Up and down.

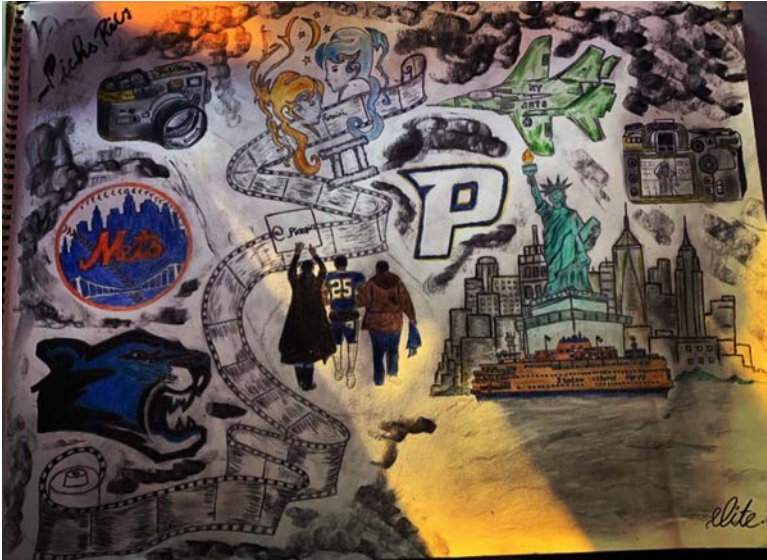
The machine begins to sing its song to the steady beat of my heart.

My eyes blink. My long lashes brush my face like the leaves that rustle with the warm spring breeze on the old oak tree who sinks its sturdy roots into the edge of the forest. I blink again. My eyes fixate on the harsh fluorescent light above me, and I squint.

“He’s awake!” says the nurse standing above me, her coffee breath wafting into my nostrils.

“You’re very lucky to be alive, sir. You badly electrocuted yourself and went into cardiac arrest.” As she places an oxygen mask on my face, the left side of her face rises, giving me more of a grimace than the smile she had intended for.

“I want to go home to see Eva”, I say as my eyes close like a sleepy toddler fighting a nap. All that is left is darkness.



Untitled

By: Amara Cisse

Chapter XXXIX

By Skyler Metviner

Extended Ending to The Awakening by Kate Choplin

Feeling tiny droplets upon her skin, Edna realized that it started to rain, but she stayed put leaning against the pigeon-house door. The drops of water trickling down her face reminded her of the swimming lessons Robert gave her daily that summer.

She remembered the still water where her and Robert stood looking at their reflections that made them look like porcelain dolls that were slowly drowning. She remembered the smell of the water that used to be dominated by the damp sea-weed aroma, but was now overpowered by the close field of white blossoms.

Edna was sitting on the beach looking at herself being taught to swim by Robert. She watched as Robert softly moved her arms to mimic the motions. She saw the smile that was stretched across her face as Robert playfully splashed her. The dread that used to linger around her when she was near the water no longer had any influence over her, all due to Robert. His caring eyes made sure that Edna was safe and that her body was staying afloat while also not getting too strained. His hands laid upon her shoulder to give Edna the support that she needed. His mouth moved rapidly as he spoke words of encouragement and motivation, which, to the Edna sitting upon the beach, were words of love.

Edna smiled as she watched herself being so close to and so happy with Robert. But as she worked on her arm strokes and leg kicking, Edna noticed that Robert began to move away. She called out to him and asked him to stay with her and to help her. She told him she was beginning to feel scared again and that she was slowly getting tired and sore. But her words bore no difference upon Roberts movements as he slinked away from her and disappeared into the sea foam. She was suddenly left alone.

Edna watched herself as she started to panic at how far out her and Robert had actually been and how far away the shore seemed to be. The fear in her eyes sparkled like diamonds against the dark and murky water of the ocean below. A vision of death turned the sky black and the depths of the water seemed to grow more every second.

The sea foam coiled around her neck and clouded her vision. The

Edna on the shore ran to the water's edge and trudged her way through the seaweed that was more abundant and more tangled than ever. But her efforts were to no avail.

The water began to move in small waves over her face and the pressure of the sky started to press down upon her. The terror seized her limbs and she forgot everything that Robert had taught her. She called out his name, but there was no answer. In fact, there was no sound at all. The distant music from the band at Klein's hotel and the jumbled voices from the people on the beach had vanished. As the water began to feed on her body, she looked towards the shore and saw Edna paddling towards her. But no one, not even herself, could save her.

As Edna reached the area she last spotted herself struggling near, she saw strands of hair that were beginning to sink. She grabbed the lifeless body they were attached to and pulled it back to the beach. Once they reached the sand, Edna looked at herself. She saw the swollen eyes from the tears that were shed and she saw the pieces of seaweed that were wrapped around her ankles. Edna hugged the body and began to weep for the lost soul. She looked once more at her corpse and noticed a thin trickle of blood flowing from beneath her breast: the consequence of suffering from a broken heart.

The blood soon began to spurt from the lifeless body and Edna sat there getting sprayed by the bodily fluid along with the crashing waves of the ocean. Her clothes were soaked and her head felt heavy. She laid upon the cold, wet ground and began to think about what it would've been like to have gotten lost in the field she explored as a child and what if she had never been found?

But she was found.

A hand laid upon her shoulder, shaking her gently.

"Robert?" Edna squeaked as she opened her eyes.

She was lying on the drenched ground in front of the door to the pigeon-house and it had begun to pour.

"Edna, are you okay?" Leonce helped her sit up and he looked to make sure she wasn't hurt.

"What are you doing out here? You could catch a deadly cold!" He helped stand Edna up and wiped the hair out of her eyes.

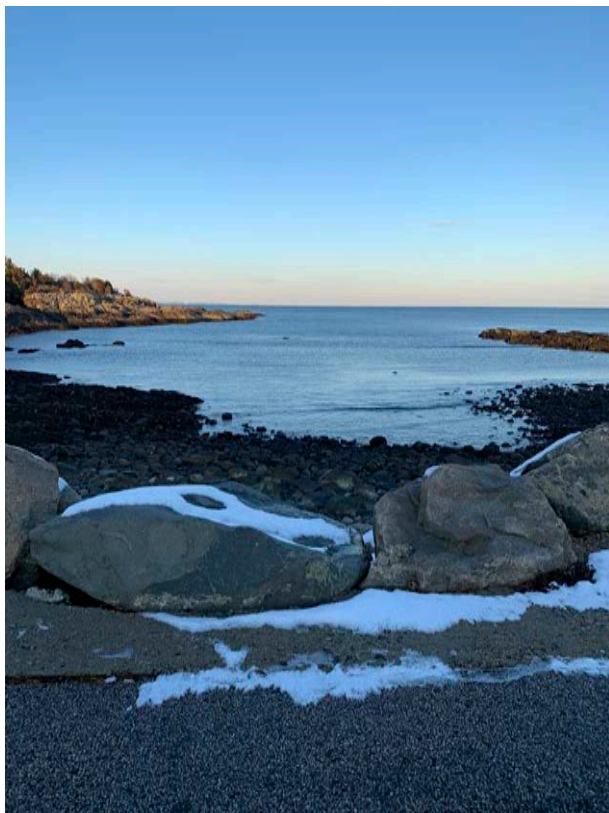
Raoul and Etienne ran past them into the pigeon-house tracking their muddy footprints throughout it.

“I thought I would surprise you by coming home early,” Leonce explained, “I picked up the kids because I thought it would be nice to spend some time together as a family.”

Edna looked passed him. She watched the water fall from the sky in an endless cycle that seemed as if it would continue forever.

“Let’s get you inside,” Leonce said as he led Edna into the house.

Leonce settled the kids onto the couch and told them a story about a bird who tried to fly over the ocean to reach another bird that was calling out for help. Edna left the room before he finished telling the story.



Pure Blue

By: Rebecca Newman

This photo was taken at “That Marginal Way” walk at Ogunquit, Maine

Be Like Water

By Brent Cameron

The rumble of water rushing through the drain-grate is picking my nerves. Something to do with the river of time and the illusive trickster at the helm of it? The morning is cold, rainy, and uninspiring. I am standing in my pajamas outside of my building in Danbury, CT, holding my computer while trying to find a connection—or force one—so I can go back to the amniotic warmth of my apartment.

The half-naked trees look forlorn and defeated. The sparse patchwork of wet leaves that are bearing down on their branches are giving off an over-lording impression of ubiquitous frowns. The light breeze fails to sway them. They are shush-less and silent. It's as if they are mourning the congregation of colorful-dead, scattered about the burl of their feet.

The sound-scape is a static of brief strokes of distant traffic, painted over the drain-grate's insatiable gurgling. Even the bright pink glow of the burning bushes fails to galvanize my torpidity. I look up and out with a hope of forging a break in this plaintive cogitation, only to fix on the tall-bones of a more recently deceased ash tree. It is looming above the tree-line with its big-bare branches arched up and outstretched, like a pastor about to deliver a churlish sermon.

The only trace of redemption I can detect is the thin blanket of almost-warmth emitting from the newly paved parking lot. The ionic scent reminds me of playing in the rain as a kid. I close my eyes and take a long slow breath of the positively charging air. I think about James Sullivan, William A. Patignelli, and Richard Gill. I think about riding bikes with these guys in muddy trails, on rainy autumn days with steam triumphantly poring off of us; as if antagonizing the impotent weather. I think about sitting warmly-soaked in hidden forts, trying to light a fire with damp matches; not out of need but out of novelty. I think of stomping in puddles and dramatically diving after falling leaves. I think of the tight suction of a muddy step, that inevitably gives way to the thick slurp of a swallowed shoe; I can hear the accompanying laughter. I think of adventure and possibility. I think of the fecundity of nature and the endurability of the human spirit. The sound of the run-off spilling into the drain is taking on a new shape. It now sounds more like a spilling forth. Like a filling up. It reminds me of Bruce Lee and his iconic wisdom: "Be like water."



Depth of Growth

By: Ashley DeSalvo

“This piece shows growth and resilience despite deep fractures. Some people see broken glass, rivers, roots, or tree branches, but no matter what, people feel the depth to the piece”

Heartbreak on a Full Moon

By Anonymous

Heart to Heart
Soul to Soul
Where did I go wrong?
Did I care about you too much?
Did I love you more than I loved myself?
Did I put my all into this?
Did you even try?
Why did you leave?
You say one thing but it's probably something else
Did I ever do you wrong before?
All I wanted to do was to love you
Instead the one time I messed up you decided we were done
Does that mean all the times you did me wrong, I could've broke it off?
Why don't you want to fix this?
We might not fight often but there is always a solution
Did you break up because you don't love me?
Did you do it because you don't care about me the way I thought you did?
All I need is a real reason
The reason you gave is bullshit
I deserve the nothing but the truth
All these years, I been honest with you even when it hurts
Hiding the reason just hurts even more then not saying it at all
Every night, I go to bed thinking how to fix this
Every night, I cry because I want you back
Every night my heart hurts because you are mad at me
Is this what you did when I was mad at you?
For all the things that you did by accident
I never did what I did on purpose
I truly forgot until I was in the moment
Just give us a next try
Is it worth throwing away all these years?
Is it worth throwing away the one who was there for you the most?
Is it worth throwing away the one who help you in your time of trouble?
Is it worth throwing away the one who made you smile for no reason?
Is it worth throwing away the one who believes in you?
Is it worth throwing away me?

What Do You Get When You Mix a Puffer-Fish and a Dog?

By Jessica Henderson

“Hey, I should get going. My mom wants me home.”

I was lying. It was midnight during the end of summer. I was sitting there in my best friend’s basement, and I just lied to her because my crush had texted me. She didn’t approve of him, but it was too late. I was already too tied up on the idea of seeing him and I was too embarrassed to admit it.

His name was Matt. He played baseball. I don’t remember what exactly he did, other than the fact that he liked baseball and wore a Central Valley High School hoodie or a Pittsburgh Pirates t-shirt. He always paired it with basketball shorts and long ankle socks with sneakers. It was your stereotypical outfit for any boy at my high school and not at all what I would have considered my type. I liked boys who wore jeans and wore button down shirts or graphic t-shirts. I liked boys who didn’t look like the rest of the boys at my school, who were more mature in the sense that they could dress themselves nicely. But he fed into my guilty pleasures like listening to Punk and Alternative Rock and I found myself magnetized to his presence. Honestly, I was drawn to the idea of someone who openly liked something I secretly indulged in, though my high school-self didn’t realize this yet. I was too blinded by the attention of someone having an interest in me.

I left her house and drove straight to the baseball fields at the community park. I had never been to those fields at night. It was oddly eerie. The silence from empty fields, no parents cheering on their toddlers playing t-ball, the clanking of bats hitting balls. It was fairly dark since most of the lights were illuminating the sidewalks and not the surrounding area of the field. I slowly got out of the car, contemplating whether I made a mistake coming there. I saw a silhouette in the distance. His body illuminated by a street lamp but his face hidden in the shadows. My heart raced and to this day I don’t know if my nervousness was from finally hanging out with my crush alone or my instincts telling me this wasn’t a great idea.

Matt stood there under the light. His eyes glazed over and his lips puffy. The hint of something red-dyed stained the tops of his lips. He mentioned he just came from a party, but he claimed he wasn’t drinking. We walked around the baseball field where the lights from the street lamps

no longer could reach. The dark was always a mystery that left me wondering what could be lurking inside its shadows. Sometimes it created paranoia and I would strategically avoid walking down an unlit area altogether. Yet, there I was with a boy who I began to have mixed judgements on, walking further into the depths of the night. I don't remember what the conversation was or if we even talked. All I could remember was my heart pounding and the urge to walk with a bit more distance between us. It didn't really make sense, since I willingly came, but the evening just felt off. He grabbed my hand, but I pulled away. It was clammy and I wasn't interested. He tried again, this time tighter so I couldn't slip away.

"Why do you always play so hard to get?," he laughed.

All I could think about was how sweaty our hands were getting. It grossed me out. We walked back to his big pick-up truck and sat on the back of it. He talked about his excitement to start college in two weeks, but I only half paid attention and stared down at my feet swinging off the edge of the truck.

"My birthday is coming soon. You're going to get me some vanilla cupcakes, right?"

"Yeah, I'll buy them, but I'll eat them all myself."

He scoffed and playfully shoved me. I go to shove him back but he grabbed my hand and embraced me, causing both of us to fall back. Shit. I could tell from the look in his eyes that he would be expecting something tonight. I quickly looked up at the sky. Millions of stars glistened above, but beyond my amazement, I could feel his gaze still on me and that made me feel guilty.

About a month prior, I met Adam in New York during a college visit. He was thoughtful and helped me navigate the Metro North to get to Manhattan and guided me to famous attractions. I was instantly invested in learning more about him despite our short and fairly awkward encounter. We exchanged numbers and texted every day after. I remember he told me once that he wished he owned a pick-up truck so we could go stargazing together in an open field. It was an interest we both bonded over. And yet, there I was with Matt.

"Look! Did you see that? A shooting star!"

"Uh huh, yeah. Sure."

“Whoa, two more just passed! I’ve never seen so many in one night before.”

“Uh huh.”

I felt his impatience boiling but I didn’t want to turn my head in fear that he would kiss me. I did anyways and the moment I did his swollen lips met mine.

I was stunned. My lips were motionless as he continued to suck on my face. It felt like I was kissing a hybrid of a puffer fish and dog. Tongue frantically licking my face everywhere. It felt like eons before he finally gave up. We continued to lay there, now both of us looking up at the sky in silence. The skin around my lips felt a brisk chill as the night breeze blew against it.

What the fuck was that?

He reached into his pocket and grabbed his phone.

“Hey, listen. I should get going.”

I’d disappointed him. But I didn’t really know why I cared. I was more disappointed in myself and what Adam would think if he knew about this.

We parted ways with a subtle “bye” and that was the last time we saw each other. I pulled out my phone to text my best friend.

“You’re going to think I’m an idiot.”

Mystery

By Leandra Phillips

Our first encounter was unexpected
But I couldn't get you out my head
And I wonder why
Why do I feel this way when I see you?
I hardly know you
But I feel like I do
You make me feel things I have never felt before
I wish I could tell you hi or bye
But when I see you the words get caught
It gets stuck and jumble
So when I do see you
I pretend to not notice
Notice the way you walk
Or the way you talk
I find it strange
That I feel like I see the real you
When we haven't even spoken yet
I see the you that the world doesn't
That why I feel like I know you
But in the end
You're just a mystery



Untitled

By: Amara Cisse

Got Meat?

By Brent Cameron

Without resolve,
We take of the sacrifice.
Without alter(s),
Or communal chant—
Without recognition,
Of any sacred transfer at hand.

Cramming in
The holy-host—
Until short of breath—
Leaving chunks of meat,
Clung to the unsightly bone.

Reaping the flavors—
Assuming the weight—
In our souls and adipose.

Dismissing the gift
And dashing the balance,
Because we can—
Because there's always so much more...



Consumerism

By: Sierra Metviner

"We buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't like" -Edward Norton

VOX publications exist for the purpose of publishing the original prose, poetry, artwork, and photography of the students at Pace University's Pleasantville campus. VOX, which is Latin for "voice" provides a medium through which students can creatively express themselves.

Submission Guidelines:

VOX: Arts and Literary Journal, the Pace University Westchester Campus, student-run literary journal accepts submissions of quality original prose, poetry, artwork, and photography. Works from any Pace University students, faculty, staff, and alumni are eligible for consideration.

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4. Email work to vox@pace.edu

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