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**Peach Pit** by Katie Doyle

*1st Place Winner, Art Competition*

*Cover Art*

“I love playing with colors and different brushes, so I wanted contrasting colors but still a warm and cozy vibe.”

**A Letter to Dr. Mogelle** by Will Alan  
*1st Place Winner, Nonfiction Competition*

William Alan  
Dr. Mogelle  
Critical Writing  
15 October 2019

A Letter to Dr. Mogelle

Dear Dr. Mogelle,

Before entering your class, I had a trace of self-esteem attached to my writing. My optimistic attitude towards “writing a thesis” drove me to receive good grades, around A’s and B’s. Then I entered your class and turned into a *whimsical clown* with no ability to comprehend text or express my thoughts, for my thoughts were just *lackadaisically* meshed together, like a flooding stream of consciousness. Before entering your class, I avoided every taboo in the list of 50 taboos—things to avoid when writing “good” essays. However, I got bored by writing hackneyed *thesis format*... “The Existential Patriot” (blah blah blah, who cares?); continue to the introductory paragraph consisting of a thesis statement, with three topics of support which will be explained in the next three paragraphs; three paragraphs beginning with the topic statement and support of the statement and support of the support of the statement using the text... I would rather write my suicide note. You read the first essay I wrote in your class, and I assume you were snarling, for you have nothing else to care about: “This essay goes against protocol! I’m going to insult Will viciously, even though I’m a teacher that is supposed to support Will and teach him how to write a proper thesis (which is what I’m getting paid for). That part’s boring! I’m gonna tell Will that he is a *clown* and that I see why he got moved down from Writing in the Disciplines. In fact, I’m going to tell him that he should be in ENG 100! Ha! Yeah, sure he has feelings, but I’m going to ignore those.”

After reading these comments, I started to question my own intentions—my reasons for trying to go against the tide and create my own writing which you call “silly.” I looked at myself in the mirror and wondered: “Is Dr. Mogelle right? Am I a terrible writer? He tells me I am, and he is older and smarter than me. He must be right. Maybe I should just write normally, like everyone else. Maybe I should start writing topic sentences, so my essays don’t need to be one complete run-on stream of thought. (Like this one.)” Then I came to the realization that, essentially, what you teach us is “good” writing is

pure and utter donkey shit. Straight from the ass. You may be reading this right now and thinking: “Will, this is the worst piece of writing I’ve ever received from a student. What kind of imbecile would dare do such a thing? I’m going to write a comment on that, which is all I’m good for... ‘Straight from the ass’ is not a complete sentence, Will.” To that, I say, with pure disrespect—for I treat others the way they treat me—I. Do. Not. Care... Notice the punctuation errors?

Clearly, you are not a fan of my style. You think I am a pretentious teenager trying to outsmart the system, like I think I am better than others. Like I think I have figured out the world and all others are just rats who don’t realize what rats they are... living their rat life through the illusion of free will. A will that they trap themselves into believing holds freedom. A will to search meaninglessly for cheese amongst the trap. Only to find themselves stuck in perpetual discomfort. Suffering. (Will, this metaphor makes no sense.) And you think that *I think* I am smarter than other students by adding philosophical questions to my essays. To this I say: What is life? Is my perception of reality stained by the concepts I am told to believe in from my parents? What is perception: brain waves creating images of color and depth? Oh my God. Reality is an illusion. (Will, this has nothing to do with your assignment.)

It intrigues me that you bring up death many times during class, as if we students are too naïve to think for ourselves about the finite lives we live. Your perspective of us rascals is that we are too dumb to think about such a haunting concept so we hide away from it because we fear it. Now, I shall rebut your vicious comments towards me by commenting on you... I think *you think* you are smart. I think *you think* you’ve figured out the world and this makes you better than other people; putting us down or bringing up “death.” Guess what? We are too busy having fun to think of death. In fact, spending all your time thinking of death is like spending all your time thinking of the grey hairs you will one day have. It is going to happen no matter what, so why don’t you just go to the Bahamas and just enjoy life while it lasts? Enjoy the color on your hair before it gets old and dies along with you and everything you’ve ever feared, loved, and hated (like my essays).

Now, I must admit that I respect your teaching even though I disagree with your approach. And I am not saying this to gain anything for myself or suck up to you, because, trust me, I would never do that. I admire your honesty on top of teaching students what you believe in. I know you couldn’t

possibly care, but I have more respect for you than I do for most teachers. Now, I'm going to take this time to respond to some of your harsh comments towards me... I'm going to have minimal change in my essays, mainly because I see no value in it. On some essays I may actually try to get a good grade, but most essays I am going to write to what interests me the most. And if you think I am not interested in reading or writing, you are wrong. My optimism towards literature leads me to see more potential in myself than you may see, and more possibilities—ones I do not see in writing an “academic thesis paper.” I may agree with you that what I am doing is whimsical, self-centered, and pretentious. However, I would rather be that than your definition of good. I am looking forward to your comments about how terrible I am and your comments on things I can change for the better, but I probably won't so just keep telling me I suck. Before I fail this essay, I want to tell you one last thing... I give your teaching a D-.

Love,

Will

**Disclaimer: The name of the author and subject of this piece have been changed and are not a reflection of the education at Pace University.**



## **Down in a Hole**

By K.T.

They don't want to see you win...

In fact,

They want to see you fail.

Feel the misery they feel,

Fake the happiness they fake,

Fold in the way that they fold.

Forget all the ambition and drive you possess.

Burying it so deep, it's in a bottomless pit you can no longer reach

And once you can't reach anymore, that's when they preach

Conform. Co-exist. Coincide.

But don't crumble.

Just crumble enough

That those feelings of creativity and drive are no longer recognizable,

And they no longer rumble,

Just an echo at the bottom of the bottomless pit.

Leaving you a little more anxious,

And a lot more humble.



## **Existential**

By Taylor Williams

“Our Minds are as expansive as space. There are no limits to where it can take us and therefore, Souls are more than bodies.

We are existential. Embrace your galaxy.”

## **Dead Person**

By Irach'e Teague

Waking up at six in the morning is the worst part of my day, especially on Mondays. But I knew I had to wake up and get my ass to work. I felt a drop of water fall on my forehead. I knew I shouldn't have rented this damn apartment from Lorenzo for 500 bucks; the pipes are always leaking. From my grandma's ugly torn up couch to the broken stove, the pipes were just one more thing for me to fix. I slowly opened my eyes in an attempt to search for my alarm only to see Aunt Jackie standing over me. What the hell? I hadn't seen Aunt Jackie in years and here she was in my shabby apartment crying. She was wearing a black dress, four-inch black heels that looked two sizes too small, and makeup that clearly didn't match her complexion, but no one would ever tell her that.

"What are you doing here, Aunt Jackie?"

"I remember the time you and your brothers tried to jump the fence and chase the neighbor's dog, Rufus, because he growled at you," she tearfully chuckled.

"Yeah, I was twelve when that happened, but that still doesn't explain what you're doing in my apartment."

She eventually wiped her tears, kissed my forehead, and walked away. I sat up on my bed, confused, and looked around my apartment to see if any other family members were breaking and entering. My apartment was packed with at least one hundred people, everyone dressed in black and sobbing. Was I dreaming?

I saw my mother standing in the doorway to the kitchenette and I ran over to figure out why there was a family reunion in my bedroom. As I went to give her a hug, my arms crossed through her body. I couldn't touch her, let alone hug her. Confused, I tried shaking her to gain her attention, but nothing I did was effective. I looked back towards my bed and there I was. It was me, lying there on velvet in a cherry-red gold trimmed casket.

My heart was pounding out of my chest. This sick joke my family tried to pull on me was outrageous. How could they?! When did they have time to break into my apartment, pick me up, and put me into a casket? How'd they get everyone here so fast? I must be a heavy sleeper. I walked towards the

casket and pecked in to see my lifeless body lying there. My hair looked amazing and the Royal Red matte lipstick was an excellent choice, but I couldn't stop thinking, "Am I dead?"

And I was.

**Safe Park Zone** by Taylor Williams  
*1st Place Winner, Poetry Competition*

## Safe Park Zone

By Taylor Williams

You finally found me.

Where the sun is on this side of the fence

Where the laughter is not one-sided

based on the forgetfulness of your existence because you like the way it falls

being congruent to the lack of sunlight. trembling off my lips

Where your hands do not find peace You can't cross the gate

under the overalls Not today.

you had me wear to keep other men away. Because "Warning:

Where my child likeness does not stem the zone is safe.

from your late night whiskered whispers Unlike the pink room with

or my mother's pastel pleats, stuffed animals

for you to realize that this is not where and hollowed walls whose

scraped knees existence have known nothing

and bruised skin should come from. but the cries of a dying butterfly.

Where my smile is protected, not terrified I'm safe here.

that a bubble will be popped on my scalp And despite my inviting stare

hard enough for me to remember slapped on to me by years I

that I still have to call you daddy. didn't ask for,

Not because you are my father, but you are not welcome here.



## **Untitled**

By Max Vuolle

“We awake with a world at stake and a race we run.”

## Detachment

By Akua Abboah-Owusu

It was mine. My pretty pink Barbie bicycle with the chalky white wheels. And I would be the first to ride it at the park. Not my little sister, who got teary-eyed and unruly despite being too small to actually ride it. Not my older brother, who was already content with his navy-blue bicycle with flaming orange Hot Wheels stickers. How filled with pride I was! The park was filled with people picnicking, running, walking dogs, and playing all kinds of sports. There were even others there to ride their bikes, like me! It was the perfect day!

A girl my age complimented my bike and asked to ride it for a bit. I thought that if she didn't go too far into the park and the clusters of people, it would be fine. She rode away as soon as I got off. She rode farther and farther down the park's worn pathway. She was getting smaller and smaller and I couldn't move.

My brother, witnessing the act, somehow knew exactly what happened between us and rushed towards my bike. Shortly after, my parents came from behind and seemed to bombard me with questions concerning the bike. But I couldn't hear what they said. Even after my brother had retrieved the bike, I was too scared to open my mouth and face what I had done. I panicked. I waited too long. I trusted too easily. And then I paid the price.

•

The fear of ridicule and humiliation can be so debilitating that it causes self-induced isolation.

•

As loud and obnoxious as I was, I didn't mean to ruin anyone's experience. I was just excited to tell everyone in class about the movie I watched at home. The same movie we were in the middle of watching in class. The bright blue hair of the main character appeared from the corner of the screen. She looked out at the vast green forest that she called her home. Suddenly, a heavy, ominous mechanical sound came from behind her.

"Oh, and this is the part when—"

"SHHHH," one of my classmates admonished.



That happened several times before I finally fell silent. I fell into my thoughts and they consumed me, like the treacherous vehicles that would soon destroy the protagonist's home in the movie. *They probably won't like me very much after this. I shouldn't have been so loud. They've never seen it before. I shouldn't have said anything to begin with...*

•

"If you can't do it, then DON'T," my brother yelled from beside me.

We were playing Super Mario Galaxy 2 on the Wii. I was his best (only) player 2 because my sister was too young to take up the huge responsibility of helping my brother clear the fantastical stages. He got fed up that I was going off alone and collecting items that we might need later. I was only trying to help, but he didn't see it that way. Mario didn't need Luma anymore. Mario, like in most of his other games, could handle it alone.

•

Rain is likely to mean that you stay in more and socialize less. Socializing is one of the most powerful antidepressants of all. If you are staying indoors you often start to feel tired, low in terms of your mood, and arouse feelings of 'cabin fever' and frustration.

•

It was a mandatory group project, but I ended up in a group of one. It was either that or join a group of three that probably didn't need my help. If I messed up, I was the only one that would fail. No one else had to. Not because of me, at least.

•

Loneliness, living alone, and poor social connections are as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

•

It is possible to feel lonely while surrounded by others.

•

I went to the library to avoid interacting with my school friends during lunch. It's not that I didn't like them. I just didn't like the feeling of having to act a certain way around them. To say and do certain things that made me feel constricted, drained... normal. My idiosyncrasies would be too strange for

someone I didn't live with to comprehend. And it was basically too late to make any more friends. Those who were close were drifting away and middle school was almost over. So, I bury my head in a book, drawing, doing homework, doing anything to get my mind off of the erratic, lonesome thoughts. Just enough to forget for a while.

•

They never asked, so I never said anything about it.

•

Solitude creates positive effects such as increases in empathy, creativity, and productivity.

•

More than 60% of lonely people are married. When married couples no longer share their deepest feelings, thoughts, and experiences with one another it can leave them feeling disconnected and alone.

•

I remember my mother going to bed early so she could work the night shift. She would wake up, groggy but conscious, put on her scrubs and make-up, and take the 30-minute commute into the city. My dad would call her to make sure she arrived safely. Then he would go to bed. One day, I asked if he missed my mother after she goes to work.

"Not really. If she was here, she'd stare at her phone and I'd talk to a brick wall. I just want her safe."

•

The love of rain is called Pluviophile.

•

Despite the popular opinion that rain is quite bothersome, I love rain. It's one of my favorite kinds of weather besides cloudy weather. I love rain because my dad loves rain and I love my dad. One summer, I was helping my dad spread grass seeds on our front yard because he heard that there would be a rainstorm later in the day to water them. Right in the middle of the task the clouds merged together, blocking out the sun that had been there moments before. Then the first few drops fell on my face. My excitement grew and I asked my dad if I could run around in the backyard for a bit. He agreed.

As if on cue, the rain started coming down like the drops fused together before hitting the ground. The air was filled with the hard, wet pitter-patter of rain on dirt. The sound filled the yard with a melody only I could hear. I don't know when my shoes came off, but they did. I darted across the yard as if in dance and slowed to a stop. I let the rain soak into my clothes and hair until the ground below me turned into a small puddle. My feet sunk into the soft earth, my toes squeezed until they ached, my face turned to the boundless sky shower, and I raised my hands above my head. I pretended to be one with the Earth, like a tree. There was no distinction between the muddy pond at my feet and me; we truly were one.

Even though mud is dirty and rain is bothersome, together they can create such beautiful things like grass, flowers, and trees. Rain and dirt create life. "Love is a great beautifier." I remained there and marveled at the artistry of Mother Earth.

•

Being picked last to join one of the frisbee teams during gym class used to bother me a lot. Over time, I just expected to be reluctantly picked by a team that didn't really want or need me. No one questioned me when I wandered off to the "bathroom," not even the teachers. It was my norm.

•

After school, I come home to a partially messy house, my mother getting ready for bed. I ask how her day was. She asks how my grades are.

"All A's," I would lie.

"That's my girl," she would reply with a smile. I wince internally. "Good night, baby. I love you."

She would go into her room and shut the door. She'll find out sooner or later. No need to ruin her night. Delaying my inevitable death is all I want now. Ignorance is bliss, after all.

•

They never asked. They never seemed like they cared. So I never said anything.

**Blood is Thicker Than Jäger** by Michael Flynn

*1st Place Winner, Fiction Competition*

## Blood is Thicker Than Jäger

By Michael Flynn

The whispers of the wind appraise summer's surrender. The front yard is consumed by carcasses of lifeless leaves. Oh, how I envy a leaf which can so freely detach from its source. I long for liberation while I linger in liminality. The bodies keep piling up in the yard's September cemetery. This house is a wooden skeleton—its floors are so feeble that my feet frequently fall into holes of its hollowness. I'm convinced this house is carpeted with quicksand. Freedom is a far-fetched fantasy.

The pictures that line the halls are tributes to tenderer times. Yet, the termites have gnawed away the memories that were woven into the woodwork. The faces in the frames deride our destruction. A once happy family, now hopeless fools. This house is a coffin, and if it burned down, I would not return to amass the ashes.

But that's unlikely, because the only thing that's alive is the rain. It's always raining here in Pittsburgh. I hear the rain, shattering like the shards of Dad's beer bottles. Pitter-pattering, like the clatter of mom's pills. Overdosed yet again. Her lifeless limbs lay on a crumbing couch. I wish I could kiss her lips till they turned innocent again. As I caress her cold face, my eyes glue to her gaping mouth. I fear she will inhale me. I would let her suck the life out of me if it gave her some soul. But I have none left to lend.

Must I stop my creators from becoming their destroyers? I remember the rasp in my mother's mumble, "Blood is thicker than Jäger."

I sulk in my selfishness. Tears flood my face for the sake of those I can no longer love. My fountain of youth is not filled with ambrosia. It is filled with deep despondency that will drown my destiny. I fear I must forsake my flesh.

The drafts oxygenate my fiery fantasies. My fingers prowl through a pile of old papers, looking for fuel for the fireplace. My eyes fixate on some loose leaf that lacks the usual yellowing of age. It is polluted with a peculiar penmanship:

*I dreamed that Saoirse would mold me into a mother. When I carried her home from the orphanage, I somehow felt younger than the baby between my arms. I felt that she would give me and Seamus a second chance at life—that raising her would birth our betterments. But*

*the only thing we can raise is liquor to our lips. We could only fake the facade of a family for so long. I yearn for her forgiveness. But to earn that I must admit a truth that my selfishness won't surrender. Shame is less painful than guilt.*

*God, forgive me,*

*Sinéad*

The ink was as wet as my face. I cry until all the remnants of the past 18 years lay twisted in tissues. I throw the papers in the fireplace, along with a match and some gasoline from the kitchen. I tiptoe past two sleeping strangers, snickering while I sneer, "Blood is thicker than Jäger." As I shut the door behind me, the last leaf left on the front yard tree finally falls. I follow it as it rolls remorselessly down the street. That house is a coffin, and if it burns down, I will not return to amass the ashes.

## Bargaining

By Brent Cameron

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” —*Proverbs 20:1*

Adam and I were as drunk as the Hatter was mad. We were out-of-breath laughing, tossing full bottles of stolen beer up into the rainy night sky, and watching as they dove down, then exploded all over the A&P parking lot. It was about 11:30 on a Friday night. We had started stealing single bottles of beer about two hours earlier and had been successful, to an over-abundant degree. By this point, we were uninhibited enough to steal a bit more than singles. On each trip into the supermarket, we were filling our waist-lines with as many bottles as we could manage—competing to see who could cram in the most.

At first, we were taking our beer to the back of the building, by the loading docks, and surreptitiously sucking them down in the shadows, constantly peeking over our shoulders for any hint of headlight-glare. But now, we had stumbled our way out into the center of the parking lot, under the full light of the street lamps.

“Dude, I am so fucked up,” Adam said, smiling at me, his light blue eyes now a shimmering glassy-black.

Adam was 15 years old—a year older than me—but he could easily pass for 18. He had a boxer’s chin, square shoulders and a respectable 5 o’clock shadow.

“The cops are definitely gonna be here soon,” I said, laughing, throwing an unopened beer way up into the air.

We both eyed the bottle—mesmerized—as it briefly glistened in the street light, before it came smashing down with a tight *pop!* The sound and sight of the glass breaking had us both bent over *bocking* like chickens.

“Definitely, bro,” Adam said, swinging back a full bottle, in preparation for a heaving underhand-toss.

“Just what in the world do you think you are doing?” Adam and I both turned like spooked meerkats at the sound of an approaching, phantom-male-voice.

“Don’t you dare throw another!” The heavy-set, middle-aged man huffed as he waddled faster towards us.

He was wearing the red vest of an A&P employee. Adam and I quickly looked at each other, then back at the “Waddler,” then back at each other in tacit agreement. Adam wasted no time in reanimating his cocked arm and letting the bottle fly. Before the bottle reached its apex, we were halfway to the wood-line behind the back of the building. By the time it hit the ground—shattering—we were safely within the wood-lines cover.

“I’m going to call... the cops!” The out-of-breath man cried out from about 50 yards away.

“You should call yourself an ambulance,” Adam yelled.

“Yeah it doesn’t sound like you’re gonna make it,” I pitched in.

The man didn’t respond. We could see him doubled-over, with puffs of steam beating out of his face.

We shared a beer, passing it back and forth, as we made our way through the familiar woods to the jungle gym at the nearby elementary school. When we got there, we took shelter above the slide, in the little plastic hut that encircled the top of it. It was just big enough to fit us both and acted as a nice cover from the rain. We perched ourselves at opposite ends of the hut, so that our legs were shuffled together, and then popped open a fresh beer with Adam’s lighter.

“That was fucking hilarious,” Adam said, taking a long sip—wincing as he finished.

“Dude don’t you puke in here,” I said, watching his face screw into itself.

“I won’t...I won’t...I’m good...” he said, chasing the beer’s bitter taste with a few puffs of his Newport. “Why can’t beer taste like something you would actually want to drink?”

“I have no idea,” I said, pounding a good quarter of my Budweiser in one gulp. “There is no way that people can actually, really like the taste of this shit!”

“I know, right,” Adam agreed, sniffing his beer distrustfully.

“But I can’t say I don’t get why my dad chose this over my mom or us!



It just makes life so much more fun, you know,” I said, downing another good quarter of my beer.

“Your dad chose beer over your mom?” Adam asked, laughing.

“Yeah, I guess... something like that. My brother said that before they got divorced, he heard my mother tell my dad it was either her or drinking, and he said he wasn’t going to stop drinking, so...”

“That’s some shit, huh,” Adam said, taking another drag off his Newport, his face glowing orange-red in its embers.

“I know right! What a dick! But whatever...” I said, chugging back the rest of my beer and then tossing the empty bottle down the round-and-around slide.

“At least your Dad’s not in jail...” Adam said, looking down at his Heineken.

“Yeah, that sucks...” I said, patting his knee and adding, “I love you, man.”

“I love you too,” Adam replied.

We both sat there in silence, listening to the sound of the light rain brush the top of the small plastic hut like static, feeling something like we imagined a family might.

## **The Misuse of Greek**

By Constance Labat

Did you open up that bottle because you wanted to,  
or was the top twisted by the pressure of a peer?  
Was the swig sipped for a flood of fun,  
or was it chugged for the cheers from the Chads and Brads of Sigma Chi?  
Were those eighteen beers for the beautiful buzz,  
or were they shoved in your face for the history of hazing?

Did you find peace putting the same punishments unto others?  
Seeing boy after boy stuck in the cycle.  
Not doing anything but repeating repulsive behaviors.  
Would your mom be proud that you pledged your allegiance  
to a club of destructive culture and corruption,  
or would she shun you for shoving Shawn down the staircase?  
Would the fifteen stitches lined down his face leave a scar,  
or would the memory of your malicious behavior leave that mark?

Ten years later would any of your brothers still be talking,  
or would you all be quietly carrying the trauma of each other?  
Would Socrates approve of the misuse of his letters,  
or to you, does the Greek alphabet know no better?

**Disclaimer: This piece does not reflect the opinion of the Alinéa Editorial Staff and/or the Pace University community.**



## **Untitled**

By Kaitlyn Angela Talenti

“Through adversity, you become stronger. Never give up!”

## **New Sana'a**

By Nicholas Neuner

Stale bitter breeze  
Slicing through bags of sand  
Seeping through woven kevlar  
Breaking through plates of steel  
Under a Dust Screened  
Dull Sun

Dirt packed with blood  
Tamped by children's feet  
Funneled down lonely school streets  
Under a Dust Screened  
Dull Sun

Stars and Drones  
Peer down on a city  
Bursting colors of Liberation  
Crackling sounds of Oppression  
Under a Dust Screened  
Dull Sun

## Here Boy!

By Brent Cameron

Your light cry,  
calls out the wolves,  
and they burst forth from the cave of me,  
to charge  
to consume you.

Are you more innocent than me?

Oh blood be love—  
Let not these drives be denied,  
as the spotted trail that follows you,  
has now become a river.

Up and quick you move,  
turn belly to ground  
and run like hell,  
from my flaring growl.

Beside the better—  
Inside the ravenous blind,  
I dismiss the holy spirit,  
limping in your stride.

Are you more innocent than me?

With your taste upon my tongue,  
and my sights set on your throat,  
I hold—

What makes this so absurd,  
is that you beg me to bite you  
when I am satisfied  
being nestled close enough  
to feel your heart beating.

Are you more innocent than me?

## **My Crypto Dreams**

By Kristin McInerney

Have I told you about my friends in my dreams?  
Every night a new adventure,  
they evolve in front of my shut eyes.

He becomes less understandable,  
but more authentic,  
with coarse fur  
and piercing eyes.  
He hunches and he hides,  
but he's not afraid of you.  
He could take you down  
with one swipe of his ape-like paw.  
Fear of exposure,  
fear of hype,  
fear of human ignorance,  
keeps him lurking in the shadows.  
You call him Bigfoot,  
he calls you idiots.

She is different.

She flutters gracefully,  
twirling through the night,  
like a Broadway bound dancer.  
She could fit in the palm of your hand,  
but her amount of allure  
could fill a stadium.  
Disappearing in and out of light,  
this fairy becomes more of a mystery,  
enticing you at every turn.

But this angers the mermaid,  
for she is the symbol of beauty.

Her hair flows,  
like a silk robe,  
as she glides through the water.  
Turquoise fin flirting,  
she invites you in.  
Her grace seduces you,  
making you feel safer than you ever have.

Each of them unfold every night.  
People tell me they're fake so often...

I almost think they're real.



**Under the Sea**  
By Jamiann Ziliani



## **The Onyx Siren**

By Taylor Williams

Living in the trench of Mariana  
Sea floor embedded with black pearls  
From clams poisoned in leisure.  
Her tail licked the sand and shimmered onyx  
After moonlight slipped off rocks  
Far below sea level.  
Eyes hazel flecked with sun  
Hair thick and twisted like willow roots  
Tapered before her breast.  
Her spine kissed skin  
Bronzed like fine gold.  
Hips curved and fused into her midnight tail.  
She was the most beautiful  
And the most deadly.  
A whistled tune  
Spun around her cochlea long enough  
For her to dislodge pearls and erupt sand.  
She sang in harmony with his heartbeat,  
Calling him closer to where moonlight ended  
Before his body landed.  
He caught a glimpse of her  
Hiding in the depths of the Pacific.  
Her eyes were the last he saw  
Before his body became no longer.



## **Heather**

By Katie Doyle

“I used a video for reference instead of a still photo so it was pretty challenging at first but I think it really paid off.”

# **The Interaction Between Music and Fashion Throughout the Decades**

By Alexis Penn

It is undeniable that music and fashion trends interconnect. From the moment your favorite musician drops a new music video, or attends an award show wearing something innovative and new, it suddenly becomes a new trend. Think of music stars throughout the years: Madonna, Prince, Cher, Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, and many more. Today, musicians have even begun collaborating with fashion brands, or creating their own company. Rihanna took her talents to the runway and recently created her own company, Fenty, which quickly become the latest luxury, inclusive, lingerie fashion line Savage X Fenty. In 2015, music icon Kanye West partnered with Adidas to create what are now some of the most identifiable shoes and clothing. Through the decades music and fashion have been interconnected.

## **The 20s**

The 1920s was the era of rebellion. Women, or more specifically, Flappers, began abandoning societal standards set by men. Shorter dresses, looser clothes and bobbed hair were the norm. Women readily rejected anything deemed “unladylike.” With prohibition forcing people to sneak alcohol, leading to a rise of speakeasies, fashion followed the party trend with shorter, low-waisted dresses and revealing styles, as well as brighter colors and bold designs.

The major music trend during the 1920s was jazz. Jazz music was played mostly at nightclubs and speakeasies, and made people want to dance, thus the need for looser clothing. Jazz was shaped by African Americans in New Orleans and quickly moved north to Chicago and New York, becoming a form of music enjoyed by all races and cultures, followed with a fashion style that moved along to the beat with ease.

## **The 60s**

In the 1960s, youth ruled fashion. There was British influence on fashion thanks to the popularity of the Beatles, and there were trends based on breaking existing fashion norms such as the rise of trousers, pantsuits and bell bottoms. Hemlines become shorter and “babydoll” clothing, which included

short, shapeless shift dresses, exploded. As go-go dancing emerged in clubs, women would perform in nightclubs wearing miniskirts or printed mini-dresses, with knee-high, high-heeled boots—later termed “Go-go boots.”

The 1960s was also a time of political unrest. Due to the Vietnam War, music artists began to write songs inspired by their political views. Music became the voice of what the new generation wanted to change. As the music became more liberal, so did the fashion. “Hippies” began to emerge. The Woodstock Festival, which included half a million people, was the concert of the century. Artists such as Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin performed, and hippies were all about love, peace, and recreational drugs. This free spirit is prevalent in the clothing, which included loose fitting, colorful prints (tie-dye). Jeans flared out, round framed sunglasses were on, and the bohemian look was popularized.

## **The 70s**

The 1970s can be described in one word: punk. During the 70s, aggressive rock music became a symbol for one’s freedom and individuality. Not only was the music loud, but so was the style. Artists such as Elton John, Freddie Mercury, and David Bowie were known for their unique styles and statement pieces. Glitter, spikes, prints, puffy sleeves, one-pieces, and anything else exotic were part of these artist’s stage attire. Not ideal for an everyday look. Vivienne Westwood, a British fashion designer, was among those credited for bringing the Punk Movement mainstream. After meeting with Malcom McLaren, the force behind the band the “Sex Pistols,” Westwood designed clothing for his boutique, which became known as “SEX.” Her collection included bondage, spiked dog collars/chokers, bicycle chains, BDSM, and bold and unusual hair and makeup. Young adults quickly imitated this type of clothing, wearing old, torn clothing from thrift shops tied and held together using safety pins and chains. Chokers hit the mainstream, as well as dark, heavy makeup and nail polish.

Described as the “Goddess of Pop,” Cher embodied all things glam. Cher wore it all; from prints, to jewels, to perms, to flares. She was the ultimate female style icon of this decade. The decade ended with the ushering in of the disco era, thanks to the movie and music from “Saturday Night Fever.” Men wore three-piece suits that had wide lapels and flared pants, and popular colors were powder blue, beige, and white.

## The 80s

Thanks to Madonna's MTV presence, frilly skirts, fishnet tights, scrunchies, leather jackets, loose crop tops, and layered necklaces were rocking the 80s fashion trends. Most notably, Madonna's pairing of miniskirts and combat boots spawned a trend that continues today. And who could forget Michael Jackson and his famous red leather military jacket? Michael Jackson's "Thriller" era featured his most infamous looks, including his glitter gloves and socks, black wide-brimmed hat, and perfectly polished black shoes. Not long after that, the "Bad" era began. Black leather jackets, spiked belts, fingerless gloves, and buckle boots were just some of the pieces that were part of this signature look.

Prince, however, took advantage of the other huge trend in the 80s—bright, neon colors. His movie and album *Purple Rain* featured Prince in an all purple suit, complete with a white ruffled shirt and matching purple electric guitar, his most iconic look. Prince was known for his flamboyant and creative looks—the sequins, low cut shirts, flared sleeves, ruffles, etc. He was not afraid to show his true self and that came across not only in his music also outfits.

## The 90s

African American culture had a great influence on fashion of the 90s thanks to rap/hiphop music, with artists such as Snoop Dogg, Tupac, Biggie Smalls, and Ice Cube. Each of these artists had a common tie: baggy clothing. Oversized shirts, baggy, low-riding jeans, baseball caps, bandanas, and durags became the new trend for males. Chains were another factor of hip hop culture. Huge, yellow-gold chains made their way into the mainstream media, and still continue to thrive in hip hop today. Female artists also followed these fashion trends. Groups such as TLC were also known to wear baggy clothing. The singer Aaliyah sported oversized jackets matched with baggy jeans. Big, bright gold hoop earrings were another notable fashion accessory with black female artists at the time, just another symbol of their sass.

Another trend in the 1990s was belly shirts. Instead of the oversized look, artists such as Destiny's Child featured form-fitting clothing, almost always paired with crop tops. In the late 90s, Britney Spears hit the charts with "...Baby One More Time," which featured a sexy schoolgirl look, complete with pigtails, a plaid miniskirt, and—you guessed it—a blouse that was strategically rolled up into a crop top.

## **The 2000s**

If you need any proof of how influential the music industry has been in fashion, then all you need to do is remember one artist—Jennifer Lopez. Nobody can forget the iconic Versace silk chiffon dress she wore to the 2000s Grammy Awards. This dress was a show stopper, as its super low cut v-neck and high side splits were unforgettable. This dress is the dress that was so sought after that it actually is what created Google Images.

2000s fashion somewhat mocks that of the 90s, yet low riding jeans and cropped tops were still a big trend. Beyonce went solo with “Crazy in Love,” and she infamously wore her white tank and low waisted blue shorts. The early 2000s were also a huge hit for Juicy Couture, as almost all the huge stars at the time were seen stepping out in their sweat suits—Beyonce, Britney, J Lo, etc. Rihanna also made her debut with “Good Girl Gone Bad” where she added a new, sexier and more edgy image to R&B and Pop, by wearing tight fitting clothing, tons of spandex, and leather, all completed with her jet black bob haircut.

## **The 2010s**

The 2010s were marked by outrageous and memorable fashion. Lady Gaga’s extremely bold fashion choices, including her legendary meat dress at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2010, or the geometric origami dress at the Grammy Awards that year, were unforgettable. Nicki Minaj was another artist who took part in this shock-factor contest, as she was known for her bright, colorful looks, complete with matching colorful wigs. Katy Perry was no stranger to unconventional fashion looks either, as she also wore bright colored wigs, alongside candy-themed outfits for her “California Girls” era.

Rihanna also made a fashion impact. When her album *Loud* was released in 2010, she debuted a new look—bright, red hair. From her ruby red locks, many young girls at the time were inspired to also dye their hair in a similar color.

Throughout the later part of the 2010s, prints became huge—from animal prints to geometric patterns. Rap groups such as the Migos are no stranger to this trend, as they hit the red carpets in funky printed suits. Rich, bright neon colors are another huge trend, and artists such as Lizzo or Cardi B can be seen frequently on stage in costumes that support this. Thigh-high boots and super high, long ponytails have become the new street style, and for

this we can thank artists such as Ariana Grande, who has established this combination.

## **Conclusion**

Fashion and music will never cease to intertwine in society. Musicians have influenced fashion trends since the beginning, and will continue to do so. As a successful fashion designer herself, Jennifer Bischoff stated, “I think what’s most important to understand is that music and fashion are both creative endeavors... They are not mutually exclusive, they go hand in hand. The designs I worked on for the artists were an expression of their personality, just like their music. The artists were influential on pop culture by being themselves, cutting edge and provocative. This came through in both their music and personal style.”

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1. Reese, Riley Raul. “Music & Fashion: Intertwined Throughout the Ages.” Beat, 2016, <https://vocal.media/beat/music-and-fashion-intertwined-throughout-the-ages>
  2. Rotman, Asaf. “How Vivienne Westwood’s Punk Revolution Changed Fashion Forever.” Grailed, January 11, 2017, <https://www.grailed.com/drycleanonly/vivienne-westwood-sex-punk-fashion>

## **“Adventure”**

By Lana McLoughlin

### *Original Song Lyrics*

Why do I always cross that line?  
Why do I keep putting my expectations so high?  
Now that it's worth the case  
Time's running out to get you alone

My mind has breaks that broke a thousand miles ago  
Left in the dust, can't stop now  
Pull out that Ferrari, and race off into infinity

Now you keep invading my mind  
If you're a drug, I'm hooked  
You move and I stop everything  
Just to get a glimpse of you  
Every second with you is an adventure  
Every day with you is my adventure

We'll be livin' with smiles on our faces  
Picture me in a dress with multicolored laces  
Countin' stacks of cash in my mansion  
I'm high on satisfaction  
Pulling out of my Lexus, cruisin' down I-95  
We'll brag to everyone on Instagram Live  
Blast our favorite songs  
Your voice is angelic in stereo  
They all wish they could have this

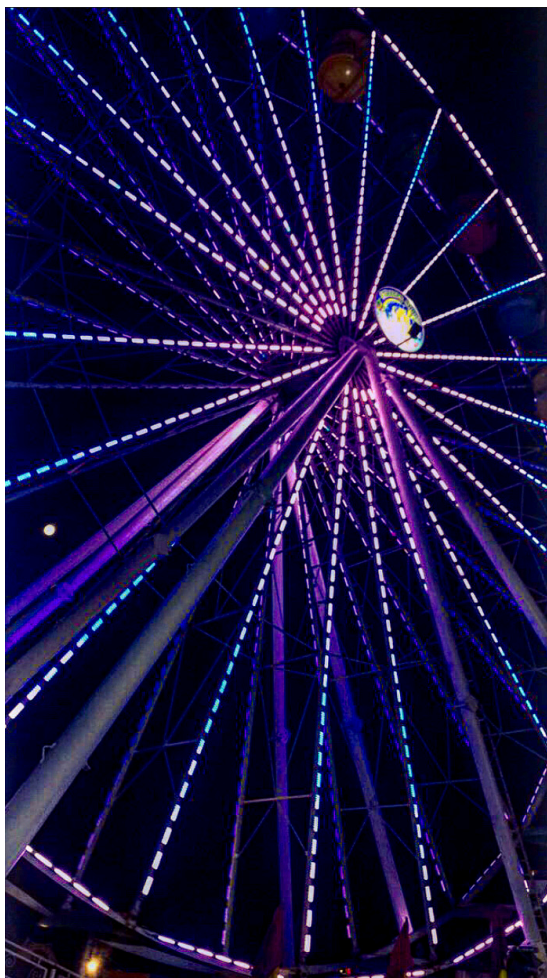
You move and I stop everything  
Just to get a glimpse of you  
Every second with you is an adventure  
Every day with you is my adventure

We could get lost, and look up at the starry night  
Look into our eyes till the sparks ignite  
Hold me tight



All my friends say we're the cutest sight  
Let's go prove them right

You move and I stop everything  
Just to get a glimpse of you  
Every second with you is an adventure  
Every day with you is my adventure  
As long as it's with you



## **The Colors of Life**

By Shanice Williams

“Life is filled with the unknown. So, enjoy the ride!”

## Hoax

By Jaycee Dia

“Why is sex the definition of being close to someone.”—Don Draper

There's so much power  
in the sense of touch.  
The ability to feel  
is so indescribably  
extraordinary.  
So unintentionally misunderstood,  
I can't even think about it  
without my stomach twisting  
and turning in rejection.  
I have this aftertaste,  
of an emotional roller coaster  
still faintly appearing  
whenever I ask you  
for one thing.  
Nude feelings.  
Clothed in frustration,  
I lay here flustered  
and covered in green.  
Why am I like this?  
So difficult and unyielding  
So angry and unforgiving  
So broken and inconsolable  
I seem to be spiraling.  
Tripping  
on a clip of myself  
begging for affection again.  
Begging to be loved,  
to be understood, and

I've exhausted every outlet  
of stress relief  
including raging and this  
insatiable desire  
to be touched.

I'm being tested.

I've checked off  
everything on my list.

No clues hidden in the  
lyrics of these sad songs.

I can't feel myself  
reaching for the

Devil's venom,

but I've reached  
and swallowed it whole.

I thought my requests were  
simple, crumbs drawing  
a direct line to satisfaction  
amidst a forest  
of decaying affection.

But clearly

love can't be illustrated.

Love can't be this confused  
with stupidity.

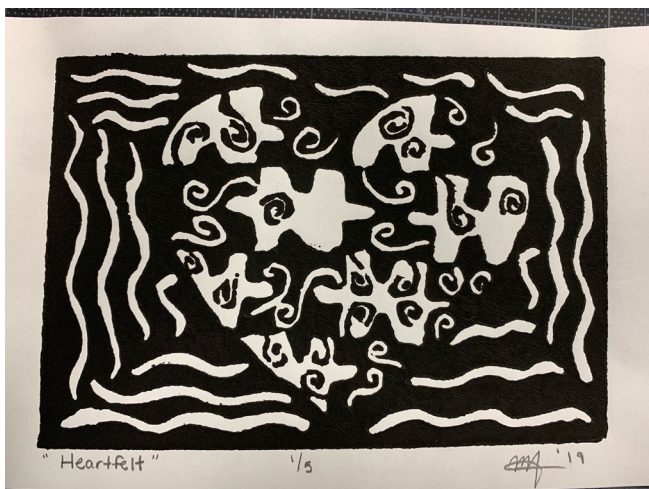
But, somehow,

It is.

## **Secrets Are No Fun**

By Constance Labat

The secret I'd traveled with began to take its toll.  
Chipped away like old paint and crumbling bricks at my soul.  
My stomach churning my insides into an acid butter.  
My belly always ached, always a kick or a flutter.  
Daily,  
I walked about with a heavy heart knowing,  
knowing things that world didn't, because I wasn't far enough along to show  
I could've told someone,  
anyone really.  
Yet,  
not a chip was sung,  
nor was a cry roared.  
I guess I was waiting until my mushy brain and maternal body got on board.  
My secret required that I really only had to tell one,  
because if I didn't then he would have never known his son.



**Heartless**  
By Mariah James

## Dead Leaves

By Brandon Muccitelli

### The Fall of Winter

All Marlon was hearing, as he walked around the squalid park, was the sound of the crunching of dead leaves underneath his feet. With his head down and jittering hands shoved into his coat pockets, he trudged on. Marlon kept his eyes to the ground and didn't dare lift his head to see the depressive park that was devoid of any life in this time of year. His surroundings were already clear to him. Park bench after park bench held the remnants of McDonald's lunches and the trees were wilted, stunted from the frigid change of season, while the overcast sky ominously lit the park with rays of white light.

Marlon counted all the cracks in the red cement bricks that he was walking on in the narrow walkway. It was relaxing to him, to count higher and higher, knowing that he was farther away from his apartment. However, the red, yellow, and orange leaves he stepped on seemed to give him the opposite effect, as his mind raced back to an hour before he started trekking through the park.

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He remembered how he stood on the yellow tiles of his apartment, removing his work attire after an interminable shift. Marlon kicked off his black shoes, reached into his pocket, and pulled out a fresh cigarette. Fishing into his other pocket, he tried to grab his lighter, but stopped once he heard shuffling slippers coming towards him.

Marlon's wife came from around the corner of the muddy, orange walls in the apartment, donning a flowery, blouse and black trousers. With a smirk, she looked at her husband and crossed her arms.

"Hi, honey," she said with little emotion. "Did you remember to buy eggs like I asked you to earlier today?"

"Come on, Marie. I just walked through the door, please don't bother me with this now."

"No, I'd just like to know, because I told you this morning to get them."

Seeing her eyebrows furrow and smirk droop into an angry frown, Marlon's own temper was going awry. "Do you see the eggs in my hands? Obviously I forgot them."

“Honestly, Marlon, I even told you a few days ago that my mom and sister were coming this weekend for dinner and that I need eggs to prepare for it!”

“And honestly, Marie, do you think I’m really thinking about the fucking dinner when I am busting my ass trying to support this home?”

“This home?” Marie said as she gestured her hand to the blackened, orange walls, ripped up sofa cushions, and chandelier with three out of five of the bulbs lit. “This home is a shithole, Marlon. You know it, I know it.”

“What do you want me to do?” Marlon asked. “Magically find us a big enough house to fit all your useless shoes?”

“No, I just want you to devote your life to me and our relationship, rather than your pride and stupid addictions,” Marie said as she pointed at the cigarette in his hand.

Looking at the redness in his wife’s eyes, Marlon tossed the cigarette and lighter on the ground, put his navy-blue coat and black shoes on and proceeded to leave.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Marie angrily asked.

“I’m done,” Marlon replied before walking out of the apartment.

•

Now in the park, Marlon sniffled and tried to hold back his sneezes as the cold wind found its way into his nostrils. Closing his eyes, Marlon scrunched his face as the wind grew stronger. The unrelenting wind made it difficult for him to hear as well, but Marlon did not seem to care. He knew the path he walked on was a straight line, never meandering. Still feeling the leaves crack underneath his feet; he focused on this feeling, unaware that a bicycle raged towards him.

With a harsh collision, Marlon flew backward with his coat flowing freely in the air. The wind blew through his wavy hair and all the folds of his coat and he opened his eyes to see who the assailant was. It was a woman, in her light green and black biking uniform who accidentally rammed into him. As Marlon was falling to the red, cement brick ground, he gazed at the woman’s wispy, blonde hair and light blue eyes, as she was suspended in the air. Her mouth was gasping and collecting strands of her own hair, as she fell to the left of Marlon. He found it to be rather cute and breathed in the scent of her



perfume that whipped his face lightly and opened up his nasal cavity. The bike bounced off to the right and was about to crash into a park bench. He then closed his eyes and waited for the ground to hit his back, knowing that the pain wouldn't bother him.

The woman, with scraped knees and elbows, got up from the ground, went over to Marlon, and said, "Are you alright? Oh my god, I'm so sorry!"

Marlon slowly stood up and looked at the woman with a subtle smile.

"Meanwhile, I thought this park was empty this time of year," he said with a chuckle.

The woman looked at him, worried and confused about the unexpected reaction to the accidental crash. He was uplifted, since he was not listening to the sound of crunching dead leaves anymore. Marlon then looked intently at the pure, blue eyes of the biker woman, realizing that spring was coming sooner than expected.

"Would you like to grab a cup of coffee?" Marlon asked, "It's awful freezing out here."

Dinner with Marie the next day was a Cold War over a hot supper. Marlon shared short, twitching glances with his wife, as his soup fell down his lips and dropped back into his bowl. Marie glared at his stuttered expressions, still ensuring every drop of soup made it into her mouth. The dining room table was small, perfectly lit underneath the soft light from their old chandelier. The white tablecloth was spotted with browns and pinks from years of messy meals and occasional detergent bleaching. At the table's center was a vase containing wilted dandelions and tulips whose stems were punctured by the uncouth thorns of a single, blood red rose.

"What's the matter, Marl?" Marie said behind the clangs of spoons and dripping soup.

"What?" Marlon said.

"I said, what's the matter? Thought you already cleared your head after you walked out yesterday."

"Oh, no, you're right, I did, and I said I was sorry," Marlon said holding onto his phone in his pocket, while making scarce eye contact.

"Then what's up?" Marie said as she leaned back into her chair and crossed her arms.

“I-I’m going to get contacted from work soon.”

“Contacted from work? Why? You’re off the clock, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, but we may be getting a big sale, so I have to be on-call.”

Suddenly, Marlon’s phone vibrated and he grabbed it from his pocket. He noticed Marie’s squinting eyes, the sound of her spoon being placed on the table and the way her slippers were shuffling underneath the table, like a small shovel grazing a sandy surface. He read the text from Mikaela, a bike emoji accompanied the words: *I’m ready*.

“On-call or on-text?” Marie said shifting her stare from Marlon’s face to his phone.

“I know, they’re a little unprofessional,” Marlon said standing up from his chair, “I’m sorry Marie, but I have to go. John Rifkin wants me to come in and—”

“It’s fine,” Marie said, “Go ahead, do what you got to do.”

Marlon proceeded to head down the stairs and grabbed his old bike. The bike was pristine, no longer blanketed by dust and cobwebs that once affixed to the chains and all the indentations within the wheels. Marie never withdrew her attention. Her eyes were unaffected even from the amalgamation of steam from the soup and the brisk wind after Marlon opened the front door. Marie scoffed to herself, as her husband walked out and the dusk from the New York skyline stepped in.

## **Springing into Summer**

It was that weird time where the heat of summer beckoned out to the dreary rainy expanse of spring. It rained constantly in Manhattan, leaving large splashes after every collision Marlon’s foot made with the pavement. He was wearing his winter overcoat, as it was the only option that allowed him to stay at least somewhat dry. The rain pelted Marlon, slid down into the folds of his coat, and occasionally waterfalled out after too much water would build up. He held flowers in his hands, roses that were wilting from oversaturation, but his meager smile echoed slight determination. It was a few short months after the time he spent with the bicyclist woman, Mikaela, but the events of their relationship still pounded through his head, like an unruly game of wiffle ball under the hot sun.

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He recalled their coffee date, how they exchanged numbers, smiling into each other's faces as if there was a rhythmic connection between them. Mikaela would fix her blonde hair, never losing eye contact with Marlon, as he fixated on her blue eyes. Marlon couldn't stop thinking of her, as he returned home that same night of their fateful encounter. Marie shouted disgruntled comments, but Marlon simply walked into the living room, pondering lucidly about the whole interaction.

A week later, it happened. Marlon decidedly dusted off the cobwebs and dirt from his bike and rode off with Mikaela in Central Park. He thought of the light wind that flew through his lined face and in between all the cracks in his knuckles from the chilly seasons prior. People were abundant, trotting around the park under the intensity of the sun's luster. The smell of sap imbued into the heavy air, enveloping within Marlon's nose. Kids stomped atop park benches, while birds fluttered above singing in unison. Mikaela took point on their biking journey, looking back every so often to see Marlon attempting to keep up with her youthful, powerful pedaling. It was exhilarating. Marlon's stiffened body became progressively looser, as if he were a machine given a healthy dose of lubricating oil. His pedaling grew faster and faster until the two were side by side.

"You're getting pretty good!" Mikaela said, chuckling through the breeze.

"Thanks!" Marlon said. "You make me feel a lot younger!"

"Yeah, you're such an old geezer!" Mikaela said jokingly. "Come on, Marl, you're young enough for me!"

"I guess so. That's probably why you rode into me, to test my frail old man bones. Wasn't it?"

"Shut up!" Mikaela said laughingly.

"Yeah, I knew it. You—" Marlon stopped instantly when he made eye contact with Marie, uncharacteristically walking through the park with her old sun hat.

"Who's this?" Marie said with eyebrows furrowed.

Marlon tried to speak, but only stuttered nervous utterances in front of his wife.

“Marlon, who. The. Fuck. Is. This?”

Mikaela chimed in, “I’m Mikaela and I-I’m sorry, is there some history here, I’m unaware of?”

Marie looked at Mikaela, disengaging the fighting anger for a moment to say, “Hon, there’s a lot here you don’t know and honestly I feel bad for you. I feel bad that you were swayed by Marlon, not knowing that his cheating ass has a wife.”

Mikaela’s mouth widened as she slowly turned to Marlon, while anxiously fixing her hair. “You’ve got to be shitting me. You’ve GOT to be shitting me...” she said.

Marlon stared at the ground, noticing the small bundles of dirt in between the rocky, brick tiles of the walkway. He cleared his throat, feeling the bubbling warmth behind his eyes and said weakly, “I’m sorry.”

“You’re sorry? *You’re sorry?*!” Marie said. “I was your wife. I was the woman you decided to devote your life to. I was the one who was willing to put up with the fact that YOU had a dead end job! We were going to make it work!”

Marlon stayed silent.

“I wanted kids, Marlon. I wanted to have kids with you, but apparently that thought never crossed your mind. It never was something you wanted. Now I know that it was just me...it was just ME you didn’t want kids with!” Marie said as her face grew crimson and tears lined across her face. “I was stupid to believe, Marlon. I was stupid to think you would ever come around...how...how...you would grow up and hold the responsibility of a family...I...I...fuck!” Marie covered her face, her throat burning from the incessant weeps and from the sprinkles of moisture leaving her eyes and mouth.

“No, Marie please, I just—”

“No, I don’t want to hear it. Just please, if you want to go, just go...” Marie said as she trudged away back toward the direction of the apartment.

Marlon heard the sound of a fleeting bicycle and saw Mikaela ride away. He heard faint sniffing and caught a final glimpse of her blonde hair floating on the wind before she disappeared. Rows of half-dead trees obstructed Marlon’s vision as Mikaela retreated. He felt his phone vibrate, before picking it up and reading the text from Mikaela: *We’re done*

*BANG!* Thunder erupted in the sky, blasting Marlon back into reality. He now stood at the steps of Marie's new apartment. As the rain pelted his back, Marlon's heart punched at his chest. Making his way to her door, the drumming began to go out of sync as he stood beneath her small awning. Safe from the rain, he took off his hood, but his heart continued to thrash at his confidence. The flowers he held had lost too many petals. His feet soaked from the build up of water. His fears amplified by the sound of wind chimes from the adjacent apartment.

Marlon raised his free, trembling hand and curled it to a fist, before committing it to his first three knocks on the door. Nothing. The second time, his fist vigorously shook before knocking another three times. Nothing. Marlon's heart began assaulting his entire body. His veins overflowed with adrenaline, rattling his limbs and making it difficult to perform another set of knocks.

"Come on, come on," Marlon said, "You gotta make things right, you got to—"

*Click*

The sound of the door unlocking tunneled into Marlon's ears, even well after the door was finally opened.

"Hi Marlon," Marie said, standing at the doorway.

Her blonde hair was straightened, lying on her shoulders in near perfect symmetry. The flowery blouse and black trousers she wore were replaced with a light blue t-shirt and black capris, and her feet were covered with simple white socks instead of her token slippers. Her face was expressionless, a pensive stare devoid of emotive wrinkles or the striations of age.

"Hi...Marie," Marlon said. "How've you been? You look great."

"Marlon, why are you here?" Marie said with a sigh, before Marlon looked to the ground.

The sky thundered in tandem with Marlon's heart, as he tried to find the right words. He listened to the rain stomp on the ground and the chimes sing in his ears. He smelled the aroma of pungent mud around the small patches of greenery next to all the apartment complexes. He felt something within bubbling up and almost boiling over. He squeezed the flowers in his hands, feeling the stems snap between his curled fingers.

“Hello?” Marie said, prompting Marlon to look back up to Marie’s brown eyes, noticing a hint of green within them for the first time.

His heart was relaxing, his breaths normalizing, and he cleared his throat.

“I’m sorry, Marie,” Marlon said. “I’m sorry that I wasn’t honest with you. I’m sorry, that I couldn’t be a decent man who could admit when he’s fucked up... The truth is, I was afraid of growing up... I was afraid that my life was flying by and I just wasn’t living it... So, when you wanted to have kids... It scared me.”

Marlon’s voice began to tremble. “My job could never support you and kids... It just wasn’t possible, Marie...”

“Marlon, I get it,” Marie finally spoke, “But what I don’t get is... why the fuck you cheated?”

Marlon, sniffled and wiped a brewing wetness in his eyes before continuing, “I forgot who I was, Marie... She made me feel young again; made me feel like I didn’t have a shitty job and a rundown home... I... I felt... I’m sorry...”

Marlon’s vision of Marie was blurred from the tears that wrapped and splashed around his lids. “I’m sorry that I was a piece of shit.”

“Marlon,” Marie said, “I can’t forgive you, but I will thank you for finally being upfront with me. I’d be lying if I said I was the perfect wife. But what you did to me AND that woman was terrible.”

“I know,” Marlon said wiping off the mixture of tears and rain on his cheeks.

“I hope you find what you’re looking for in your life, Marl. I really do,” Marie said. “Please take care of yourself.”

“Thanks, Marie.”

The rain was beginning to subside as Marlon walked a couple of feet away from Marie’s apartment. The sun’s crepuscular rays darted out like daggers of light, dancing across the windows of skyscrapers and illuminating the remaining dark pillows of clouds. Marlon looked down at the damp, wilted flowers he was supposed to give Marie. He wound his arm and threw them in the air, watching as the assortment of bundled flowers glided in the distance

before connecting with the ground. He continued his walk on the pavement, affixing his eyes on the scraps of leaves from last fall that were now submerged in globs of mud and buried beneath the growth of pavement-splitting weeds.

Marlon unzipped his coat, letting the wind funnel around his core. He began stepping over the muddy, leafy scraps, only hearing his shoes collide with solid earth. As he approached the bundle of flowers, he hopped over them. He bounded across the sidewalk, carefully meandering past people and turning corners, while avoiding dispersed seeds. Finally, his ears didn't echo with the sound of crunching underneath his feet. Marlon perked up a wide smile.



## **Seeing Through the Darkness**

By Taylor Williams

“You can’t see her eyes but you can feel her energy. Depression doesn’t have a face but its darkness entraps anyone that crosses its path. The lack of eyes in this piece is to show how sometimes the windows to the soul don’t always have to express the whole story.”



## **Thanks for Contacting Your Inner Emotional Surveillance Team**

By Jessica Henderson

You hold things in and let them fester inside you until it bursts. Emotions flooding from your eyes. I'll make sure to press the malfunction button the next time the dam bursts. I'll let it slide this time, but don't let it last too long. Don't even think about letting anyone else see. You are not weak. You are not emotional. But so help me if you even let one single drop of water leak, that is how you will forever be known.

*But I feel lonely this way.*

Forget it. You are not meant to express your emotions with anyone else. You are not meant to share your darkest thoughts. They won't understand. They won't get you. But I will be here, safe inside your head. I will allow you to think, and think, and rethink, and second guess, and think even more about any fears you may have. They won't tell you what I know. They won't help you like I will. They just don't understand you like I do.

*But my friends and family are always there for me.*

Those are lies, don't you see? They don't care about your problems. They won't understand them. Don't you understand what I do for us? We can't see pain. You push past it because I block it. I save you from feeling anything but happiness.

*It doesn't always feel that way.*

Well, your thoughts overwhelm me and there's only so much I can handle. It's a malfunction. Nothing that will last more than a few minutes. I always press the reset button. I won't let it last any longer. You don't need anyone else. Can't you see I have it under control?

So, stop overreacting. Put on a smile. I have more important things to be thinking about.

## Dear Self

By Krishna Persaud

Dear Self,

I just want to let you know how ridiculous it is for you to feel the way that you do. I'm not here to have sympathy for you, but to help you get through what you're going through. You need to realize that what you're going through right now is only a phase. I only say this is ridiculous based on my experience.

I'm not saying that your feelings aren't valid, because they are. I went through a long-term depression, and as you know, it feels like your heart is on fire. You're in internal pain 24/7 and there's no way out of it. I get that. But what you need to realize is that no matter how intense your feelings seem to be, it doesn't matter—cutting is never the answer. It's simply not. I can tell you that you'll instantly regret giving up on life from such an early age because of a few minor issues you had going on. Like come on, think for a second. You're very smart; I know you are. You have to be! Is it really worth it? All the minor problems you're going through right now, is it worth giving up on life because of all the family issues you've had to deal with?

What I realized about myself was that I was pretty strong. I had the whole package of issues to deal with: family problems, school, being self-conscious about my weight, sexuality, my “birth defects.” I hated myself for a long period of time. The thing about depression is that over time, there are other factors that add to you feeling upset. Feeling as if you have no way of stopping it. After a while, you just let everything sink in, and continue to let it happen over and over again because it's the only way you know how to feel, having all potential signs of life drained out of you. After all, you've been used to this feeling your whole life. All the emptiness and bitterness is just downright depressing! It's messed up, but it's true.

I can assure you that I haven't thought about punching a knife through my soul as many times as you would've wanted me to because I have control. A small weight—that happens to have enough force—to keep my feet on the ground instead of floating me up mid-air. If that's even where I'm going after all these “sins” I've committed. I really want to see the light. Who wouldn't want to? I want to be freed from this trap of a body, but every time I think of leaving this Earth, I get so scared because I know that I'm not ready yet, even

though my heart keeps telling me otherwise. It's my control that forces me to hold on to whatever I can in this confusing life, and yet it's important to remember that there is a way out of all of this. Look, somehow, there is a way out. I just gotta keep holding on 'cause I'm here for you, and I'll be here for you every single step of the way.

I would really hate to see such a beautiful, unique, intelligent, genuine, loving, and extraordinary little girl get torn apart by the horrors of life. You're a beautiful girl, yet I can see the imperfections that lie all over your face: painted scars and lines of masculinity. All stemming from a lack of expression. It's not your fault. You hear me?! Come on, stay with me. Please! They'll never understand us. I don't want anything to happen to you, which is why I'm your protective shield from here on out. I won't let God take you away. Not yet. His love for you is too strong. No matter what others say, remember what I say: wipe those tears away, keep on walking, and tell your heart to beat again...



## **Brushing through the Wind**

By Erika Barrera

“I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.” —Jimmy Dean

## **In the Spirit**

By Brent Cameron

A shimmering darkness saturates the coast of Akureyri, Iceland. The moon's reflection off of the calmly rippling sea lends its silver aura to the surrounding mountain range. In this light, the mountains look like they have coalesced in awe to take in the picturesque city scape. All throughout the fjord, the aspen trees whisper in creaks, as if emitting the little guttural sounds that accompany contented sleep.

The Akureyrarkirkja church sits perched on the hill above the little city like a watchful owl. Slim talons of color undulate through its slender stained glass windows—shedding a speculative light on the Bjornhild residence below. There is a steady strip of smoke meandering out of its chimney top, and two obscured shadows murmuring by a ground floor window.

Gullveig and Fjorgynn spill in through the open window trying to keep quiet but they just can't stop their giggling. They may have sampled a few too many spirits from the previous homes they hit tonight. The cold sky is clear and littered with stars. The miasma of their breath mingles with the moonlight. One after the other, they pull themselves through the window and disappear into the warm house with a clatter. Just then, a night-light comes on at the top of the stairs.

“Shut the ffff—up!” The fat bearded one sharply whispers to his much smaller cohort.

They both stand there frozen still. The only movement in the room is a flickering of shadows playing off of the lazy flames in the fireplace.

“Is somebody there?” A soft phantom voice breathes out from the top of the stairs.

The sound of Gullveig's labored breathing is like ruckus against the docile sound-space of the otherwise benumbed house.

“I really have to get in shape!” Gullveig thinks to himself as he takes a slow deep breath trying to dampen—what he refers to as—his ‘fat-man’s panting.’

“Sshhhh...” Fjorgynn intones.

He bites down on his knuckle in an attempt to fight back his inappropriately timed case of the sillies. They hear a faint creak followed by the emergence of what looks to be, the shadow of a small head poking out from under the banister at the top of the stairs.

"I told you we should have circled back to this one later!" Fjorgynn whispers, shaking his head and motioning to the fireplace.

"Calm down Fjor..." Gullveig's reply is cut short while trying to stifle an itch in the back of his throat that is threatening to erupt into a full blown cough.

"Steady Gullv..." Fjorgynn quickly covers Gullveig's mouth with his small white-gloved hand.

He can see Gullveig's big belly shaking like a bowl full of jelly. He can't help but start giggling. Gullveig quickly puts his big white-gloved hand over Fjorgynn's mouth—trying to shut him up as well. But in his rush to cap-off the momentum, he covers his mouth too tightly, which causes all the buoyant pressure to purge as a blossoming of snot—all over his starched white glove. At this point they both just lose it. The tension of the moment coupled with the spirit of the night—along with the many spirits imbibed earlier—have reached a prompt criticality. They both lose their fight to the impish merriement swirling within and without them.

Falling to the floor between the window and the Christmas tree, they give in to fits of laughter and coughing. But their joviality is cut short when all of the sudden the colorful lights of the Christmas tree twinkle to life. This causes them to cover up their own mouths. Suddenly Gullveig feels a light tugging on the bottom of his big red jacket.

"Santa?" a dulcet voice warms through the anxious silence.

Gullveig and Fjorgynn look over to see a little girl's face—who Gullveig full well knows is little Aasgerd Bjornhild—peering at them in absolute wonder.

"Is that really you?" she says blinking in disbelief.

Gullveig clears his throat and delicately offers Aasgerd his one clean hand. "That's the official title!" He replies with a welcoming grin.

"This here fella's my top elf!" Gullveig says, as he makes his way to his feet.

“The pleasure is all mine,” Fyjornynnn says with a bow.

“I didn’t mean to wake up, it’s just you were being so noisy!” Aasgerd says trying to explain herself.

“Calm down, my dear, you haven’t done anything wrong. We are the ones who should be apologizing to you. For waking you up and all, and on such a special night,” Gullveig says patting her on the head.

“I hope you didn’t wake up my parents!” Aasgerd says with worried eyes.

“Not possible my love,” Fyjornynnn assures her. “Only children can hear or see us.”

“But your parents can hear you!” Gullveig adds, “Since we have such a busy night ahead of us and not much night left, you best be getting back to bed, and we best be getting back to work.”

“I told my father to put out the fire,” Aasgerd chirps as she timidly motions to the lively fireplace.

“Well that was very kind of you Aasgerd. I’m sure your daddy wasn’t being unkind. It’s just adults tend to lose their faith in the magic of the Christmas-fireplace somewhere along the years,” Gullveig says, walking Aasgerd to the foot of the stairs.

He pulls a little brown teddy bear from his big black sack and hands it to her.

“Now you be a good girl and go on back up to sleep.”

She takes the teddy bear, pulls it to her chest and gives Gullveig a great big hug.

“Merry Christmas!” Aasgerd says, smiling from ear to ear. She turns to Fyjornynnn and hugs him just the same.

“Merry Christmas, Aasgerd,” they both say as she turns and waddles up the stairs, dizzied with joy.

## The Stink Bug and The Spider

By Emily Teixeira

After enjoying a lovely afternoon of procrastination, I sat on the stoop of my backyard patio with the intention of actually being productive. I had all the necessary pens and papers and the copy of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that my English teacher gave me. The air was warm, with wisps of cool breezes that tousled the new leaves on the trees that flanked my backyard, keeping it in shadow as the sun dipped lower in the sky. It was a wonderful evening and I was going to get work done...

At least, that was my plan...nature had other ideas.

As I bent to pick up my pen, a strange shape caught my eye. I looked up at the back windshield of my dad's car, which would sit alone in the driveway until he returned home from work in his truck. A funny little blob was perched on the glass, moving slightly every now and then. From my spot on the stoop, it looked like a goofy looking caterpillar.

I really should be doing this assignment...I thought to myself.

But...oh it'll only take two seconds. I just want to see what it is.

And so, I left my stoop, papers, pens, and book. Little did I know, I wouldn't be returning to them any time soon.

By the time I reached the car, I could see the shape for what it really was: not one bug, but two—a fuzzy spider, the size of a dime, with the rear end of a stink bug in its mouth. And so began my dilemma.

To save the bug, or not to save the bug? Which was the more ethical choice? They might have been bugs, but they were still alive, and I believed this meant they felt pain and fear. The stink bug was obviously in pain, and it was understandably afraid. It was going to die. If I wanted to, I could have freed it from the spider's grasp. But the spider was alive too. And to free the stink bug meant depriving the spider of food, food it needed to live. And if I saved this bug, then the spider would only go after another. No matter what I did, a bug would die at the hands of this spider (or the spider would starve, but it seemed unlikely that the spider would be incapable of catching another meal).

If I flick them with a stick, maybe the spider will let go and the stink bug will be able to get away, I thought—knowing full well that it was foolish. I was



sixteen years old, almost seventeen. Most kids my age—or anyone, any age—wouldn't give this a second thought. They'd see it and either shrug or cringe, then walk away. But not me. I'm the girl who catches bugs from her room in cups rather than squashing them and rushes to save drowning beetles and flies from the pool, even if that means using her bare hands. And even though I knew it was silly, I felt an obligation to do something in this case. I'd considered staying on the stoop, but I ended up getting up anyway. Did that mean that I was meant to find this scene and do something to change it? Was this some sort of test of my belief in fate and destiny?

I stared at the little pair. The spider was kind of creepy, big enough to discern its many beady eyes from the rest of its face and the pincers that it used to grip the stink bug. It was black and fuzzy with lighter markings on its backside. It looked like the kind that jumped. The stink bug had a dull greenish-brown back, and if I looked closely, I could make out miniscule, intricate patterns. In a way, it was pretty, like an old tapestry or carpet, or a monochromatic kaleidoscope. Was it dead? It wasn't moving...neither was the spider... but then the stink bug writhed and kicked at the spider with its back legs, and the spider bit down harder. Then they stopped.

I knew the spider wasn't evil. The Circle of Life was at play. Nature was taking its course. The spider was only doing what its instincts told it to do to survive. It was killing out of absolute necessity, but the stink bug wasn't dying, and the spider wasn't finishing the job. Why were they just sitting there like that? Why didn't the stink bug fight more? Was it giving up? Had the fight gone out of it? Why didn't the spider just fight harder, kill the bug, and enjoy its meal? Was it venomous and just waiting for the bug to die from the bite? The bug was suffering. It was dying a slow, painful death. Should I intervene?

I pictured a spinner in my hand and flick it. Help. Don't help. Help. Don't help. Around and around. Stop! The needle landed on help.

I scoured the ground for a stick small enough to flick at the bugs, without hurting them, and one that wouldn't scratch my dad's car. There were no such sticks around, but I did manage to find a petrified shell of a long bean that fell from our catalpa tree last fall. Perfect, I thought. But when it came time to flick at the bugs, I hesitated. I was still unsure...Should I do this? And what if I flick them the wrong way and they come flying at me, land in my hair or on my face or go down my shirt?

Three, Two, One...No...Three, Two, One...No! Maybe if I just poked them, I could get the spider to let go...I'll distract it, give the stink bug some leverage...Bad idea. When I did that, I only angered the spider. It bit down harder on the stink bug, which writhed in pain. I was making it worse. I heard my phone ring, so I turned away from the insects and race back to the stoop to answer it.

"Hey, Dad," I said after I hit the "talk" button.

"Hey, sweetie. How's it going?"

"Pretty good." My voice was completely normal in tone and volume, as though I hadn't just spent the past ten to twenty minutes of my life having a fierce mental debate about the fate of two bugs. "How are you?"

"Good. I'm on my way home from work now. We're probably having chicken for dinner tonight."

"Sounds good."

Should I mention the bugs? I asked myself. You know what? What the heck. He's my dad. He already knows I'm weird.

"Hey, listen, there's a spider on the back of your car with a stink bug in its mouth, and I can't decide if I should save the stink bug or not. What should I do?"

I heard him sigh, then he said, "They're just bugs. You know that right? There's over a million like them."

"Yeah, I know," I mumbled.

"It's sweet of you to want to save it, but that's just part of nature."

"I know...but...the spider's not killing it quickly. It's just... sitting there with it."

He sighed again. "If you really want, you can take a small stick and swat it to try and get it free, but don't worry too much about it, alright?"

"Alright."

"Okay. I'll be home in about half an hour. I love you."

"Love you too."

I hung up with my father and returned to the bugs. They were exactly as I'd left them. I knew what I had to do...I just had to do it. I reached out to

them once more, and with a flick of my wrist, the two bugs went flying...But when they landed, the stink bug was still trapped in the spider's jaws.

Dang it! Come on! How?

I didn't know what to do then, and I didn't get a chance to think of anything, because at that moment, my dog barked to be let outside. I spent the next half hour frolicking around the farthest reaches of my backyard with him, and when I returned, the bugs were nowhere to be found.

And that was the last I ever saw of the stink bug and the spider.

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