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ART

POETRY

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FROM THE STAFF

Dear Reader,

Welcome to Volume 11, the start of a new decade for *Happy Captive Magazine*. For those of you who are familiar with the magazine, welcome back, and thank you for your continuous support in making Happy Captive possible. If you don't know us, some words our staff have used to describe our magazine are cozy, personal, captivating, introspective, intimate, nature-based, LGBTQIA+ friendly, and froggy! But most importantly, we are by students, for students.

We hope *Happy Captive Magazine* has been a creative outlet for our authors and artists to speak their minds and feel heard. The writing and art found within these pages were chosen because we believe they are thought-provoking and provide insight into the current state of our world. Since everyone's lives are always in flux, we aspire to be a constant source of inspiration and comfort for our contributors, for our readers, and for our staff.

This magazine wouldn't be possible without the work of so many people. Thank you to our faculty advisor, Jody Bates, our business advisor, Sacha Bellman, and our funder, COSMOs. When we create, a piece of our souls embeds itself into the work, and in our decision to share it with others, we choose to be vulnerable. Thank you to our contributors for having the courage to share a piece of your soul with us. We are utterly captivated by your talent.

As Co-Editor-in-Chiefs, we are incredibly proud of our staff and all the incredible work that's gone into the magazine you hold in your hands today. They've worked countless hours, from reading through submissions to putting together our manuscript and everything in between. It is their overwhelming passion for writing and publication and their commitment to the students at Miami that has made Volume 11 happen. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you. We couldn't have done it without them.

And to you, our reader, thank you for choosing us and carrying on the legacy of *Happy Captive Magazine*. We are here to publish the stories of our students, but we are also here to share them with you. May you find what you seek amongst these pages.

Sincerely,
Kai & Sydney

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Summer Fruit

Savannah Slater

POETRY

CW: mild, metaphorical descriptions of gore

A fruit lies in the grass, desperately clinging to edibility, its pink-red skin swollen with juice. It's perfect.

The grubs and worms have ceased to bother me. A paring knife carves away the rotten flesh well enough.

The juice drips from my mouth all the way down my neck, red and sweet and thick like blood. The bitterness of the peel sticks in my mouth like an ancient regret I'm not entirely sure belongs to me.

Summer is violence and consumption. Heat and cloying sweetness and overripe fruit split with rot and bugs eating each other alive. Summer is the season of wanting.

To want is human, but to want is disgusting and bloody and animal. To want is to be stripped bare and turned inside out with wanting. To be flayed with it.

To want is human, but to want is base and primitive. To want is eating ravenously with your hands. There's no way to keep anything clean.

Summer brings want. Summer brings fruit that takes you back to the very first sin of humanity.

Summer Fruit

Savannah Slater

Ever since Eve first sank her teeth into the sweetest, most delicious fruit in the garden, its juice flowing down her chin and dripping down to the sun-baked earth at the height of summer, that sin has always been to want—

to be

hungry.

Time Traveling to Unravel the Sunbeam Effect

Anastasija
Mladenovska

SHORT STORY

Absorption

Is a sense of essence

Of the land beneath

My feet

As I sink into the foreign soil

And

W(o)(a)nder:

Have my ancestors ever

Tiptoed the path

To the abyss

Expanding into the (n e w) home

Of these landscapes,

Of the aptness of fear in abandoning
the corps to foster the mind?

yet

I am the only one

to be absorbed.

To absorb

the mirrors of self(ishness) as

They unlock: like entries,

portals to my great-grandfather's

Medieval cottage,

Where he sits in his hammock

And I tell him

How good it feels that I am the first

yet

Indubitably; gloomy;

to walk the alley by (my)self.

Time Traveling to Unravel the Sunbeam Effect

Anastasija Mladenovska

Absorption

Is a sense of essence

Of my rootedness,

вкоренетост - Пиреј.

Under my sundress,

Го слушам жуборењето на реката што ја нарекувам „д о м а."

It peaks, it vanishes, it reconstructs.

Is it time

to build

a new self

or dig a new root?

It's 6 pm. I see the clock ticking - in and out. Tic tac.

I fixate my eyes on the wall and observe the arrow within my vintage horologe, making delicate yet firm movements between now and then, like a brush weaving strokes of imagery.

Suddenly, upon my observation, I remember that it is time to feed my cat. I lower my head and notice Matilda (my charcoal Burmilla princess) dancing with her tail around my feet to signal it's time for feeding. As I begin tiptoeing towards the cat food in the kitchen corner, I notice a little sunshine that has woven itself through my half-closed curtains. Its luminosity refracts from the glass and creates colorful patterns and rainbows.

Time Traveling to Unravel the Sunbeam Effect

Anastasija Mladenovska

“Ah, the sunbeam effect,” I think to myself. The apartment is quiet, its only occupants being my watch coexisting within the rituals of everyday life, Matilda, and myself.
Tic tac.

I work as an accountant and the pay is sufficient to allow for sunbeam effects and great views of Chicago through my colossal windows. Too bad I don’t have the time to enjoy it all.

“Sometimes a girl’s gotta choose,” is what my friend Katie would say, if she was still my friend after that horrible accident when I broke down in front of her and spit out all of my thoughts about a deeper life filled with meaning. I was rambling, going on tangents, and almost bought a one-way ticket to the Alps of Switzerland, to the small village of Albinen. Katie shook her head, saying she understood, but that life only has meaning if you grow where you are planted. She then disappeared and never picked up my calls.

“I will eat cheese, drink wine, and live a wealthy emotional life,” I told my mother over the phone the other day. It was great when we joked about the insufferable distractions of everyday life, but she hated it when I spoke like Socrates. Like the unyielding strength of a Slavic fortress, my mother’s endurance weathers every storm with unwavering simplicity.

“Stop questioning yourself, дпара, and just do it. You chose this life and it chose you,” she would often say in reconciliation with her thick Macedonian accent.

Time Traveling to Unravel the Sunbeam Effect

Anastasija Mladenovska

I often would hang up the phone, hold it in my hand for a very long time after our conversation finished, and stare at the ceiling. I never told her I hated when she spoke English to me. She surely was more Macedonian than I am and I wanted her to stay that way.

I know for a fact that by the time 6 pm hits, all she wants to do is speak her native language. It is always around that time that her accent becomes thicker and she lets people see that she, too, falls prey to homesickness. We never talk about it however; none of us dare to say it’s difficult to live in multiple time zones and how alienated I am from my Macedonian heritage. Profoundly, I knew it didn’t matter because I was already labeled as the Americanized harlequin daughter, cousin, and coworker. That’s the price you pay for the opportunity to enjoy pretty sunbeams in your enormous apartment. I read on the internet that our Macedonian faculty this year had only four students enrolled to study the Macedonian language and disseminate that knowledge to the generations to come.

It’s almost 8 pm. I see the clock ticking - in and out. Tic tac. “Will our language ever be the topic of stories?” I think as I lay down on my cozy couch and change the channels of my fancy television.

I laugh and tell my friends I come from the ghetto of Europe when they ask me where I am from. They probably cannot point to Macedonia on a map, so why bother?

Time Traveling to Unravel the Sunbeam Effect

Anastasija Mladenovska

I speak Russian and Chinese at work, study English, and tutor French to fulfill the volunteering requirements of my company. I strictly read Lana Bastacic and Aco Sopov in English and whenever I have the time to devote myself to philosophy, I see a little phrase here and there in Latin, Greek, and French. D'une grande élégance, indeed.

I spent my whole life searching for the truth in all the languages, except my own. Is Macedonian my language just because it's my native one? Perhaps yet, but maybe even not. My language is languageless because the words of the soul are intergenerational. My language lies under the tongue of my mother, but I dare not call it my mother tongue.

My language is formed day by day, transformed by the ever-changing whirlwinds that take upon my country. I think about how I was the first post-Yugoslav generation who couldn't witness Tito's pictures on the walls but witnessed his presence more than anyone else. It was in this ache of nostalgia that I became a soft-spoken manipulator who won prizes at writing contests focused on keeping the young at home and then packed her bags and left herself.

"We have to stop this brain drain!" Protesters would march down the streets of Skopje as I sat in my chair and observed their unapologetic steps on the news. As they were fighting for a dissolving homeland, newborns were already singing the English alphabet before the Macedonian one and saying "hello" instead of "здраво".

Time Traveling to Unravel the Sunbeam Effect

Anastasija Mladenovska

It's 10 pm. I see the clock ticking - in and out. Tic tac.

I wonder if I will experience the sunbeam effect tomorrow again. If not, I will have to time travel and try to catch it and freeze that moment in time.

Language is the epitome of the sunbeam effect. It's a phenomenon that makes us think...that:

The tide of culture cannot be fled from.

It swirls,

Churns,

Pounds,

Crashes.

I fight my battle for identity on the grounds of intersubjectivity. Nothing is absolute, no truth, no words.

It's time to feed Matilda. I call her in Macedonian - she doesn't answer.

I crawl into the kitchen corner and start crying.

Defiant screams.

Thunderous words.

In all the languages I know. But mostly in Macedonian - the least elegant one of all.

Welcome Home

Savannah Slater

POETRY

The deepest and most natural imperative of all life is to love.
That very first and most forceful instinct of life is to feel, to en-
twine, to *connect*.

What are moss and mold and lichen if not the result of love?
To love something enough to grow on it is to become one with
that object—without the moss growing in between their con-
crete slabs, the aged front steps of houses and churches and
lecture halls would crumble.

Life recognizes everything as its own.

Tendrils of house plants entangle with power cords, ivy creeps
up telephone poles, buildings left to sit too long are filled with
all kinds of stalks and leaves.

Earth is a garden, and it has loved and claimed every one of its
children so far. Flesh or metal, born or built, the garden em-
braces all. Nothing and no one is beyond its reach.

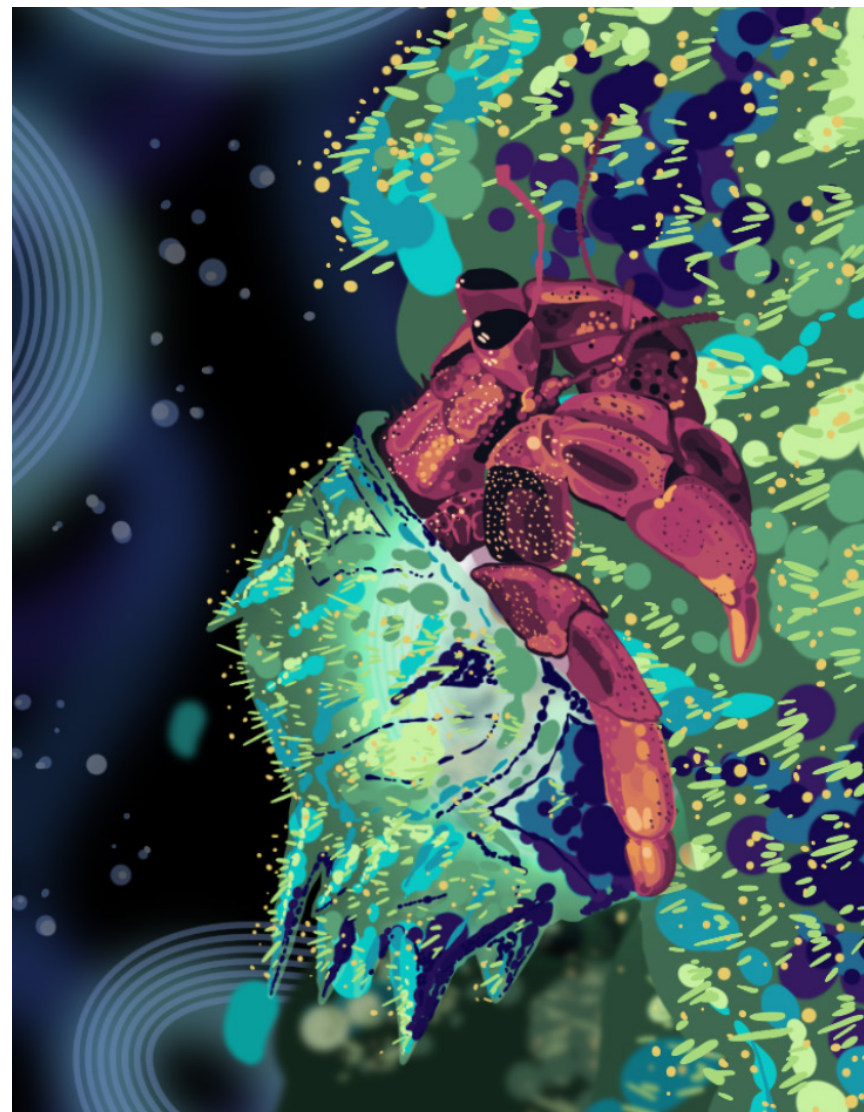
As all living things have been, you and I too will be returned to
Earth's gentle arms.

"Welcome home," it whispers. "I've missed you."

Searching

Stella Kinoshita

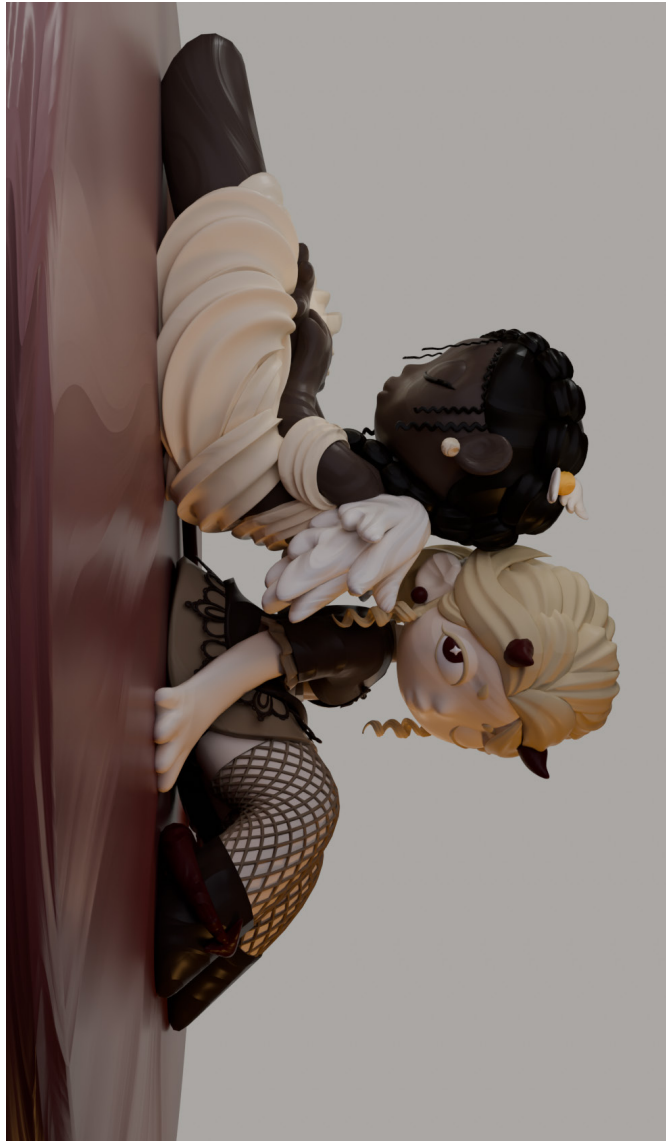
DIGITAL ART



Twins

Stella Kinoshita

DIGITAL ART



Seat of Awareness

Sophia Bick

POETRY

Inspired by *Spinozalith*, Don Lawler, 1994

One in shadow
sun at your back
too big to fill,
lonely

One in light
bleached to white
tall walls encompass you,
wholly

Both with ribs
pressed in the back
Both with moss
spread on the sides

One cold
One north
One south
One warm

tête-à-tête
back-to-back

smooth
surface
unfinished

The Lost One

Elizabeth
Tankersley

POETRY

Walking through the frost,
I begin slipping in the blizzard.
I always seem to find myself here,
Blinded by the bright white snow.
My voice is drowned out.

Was there a warning sign?
Did I ignore it?
Or was it bombarded on me?
Probably the prior.
I tend to do this to myself,
Or that's what people say...

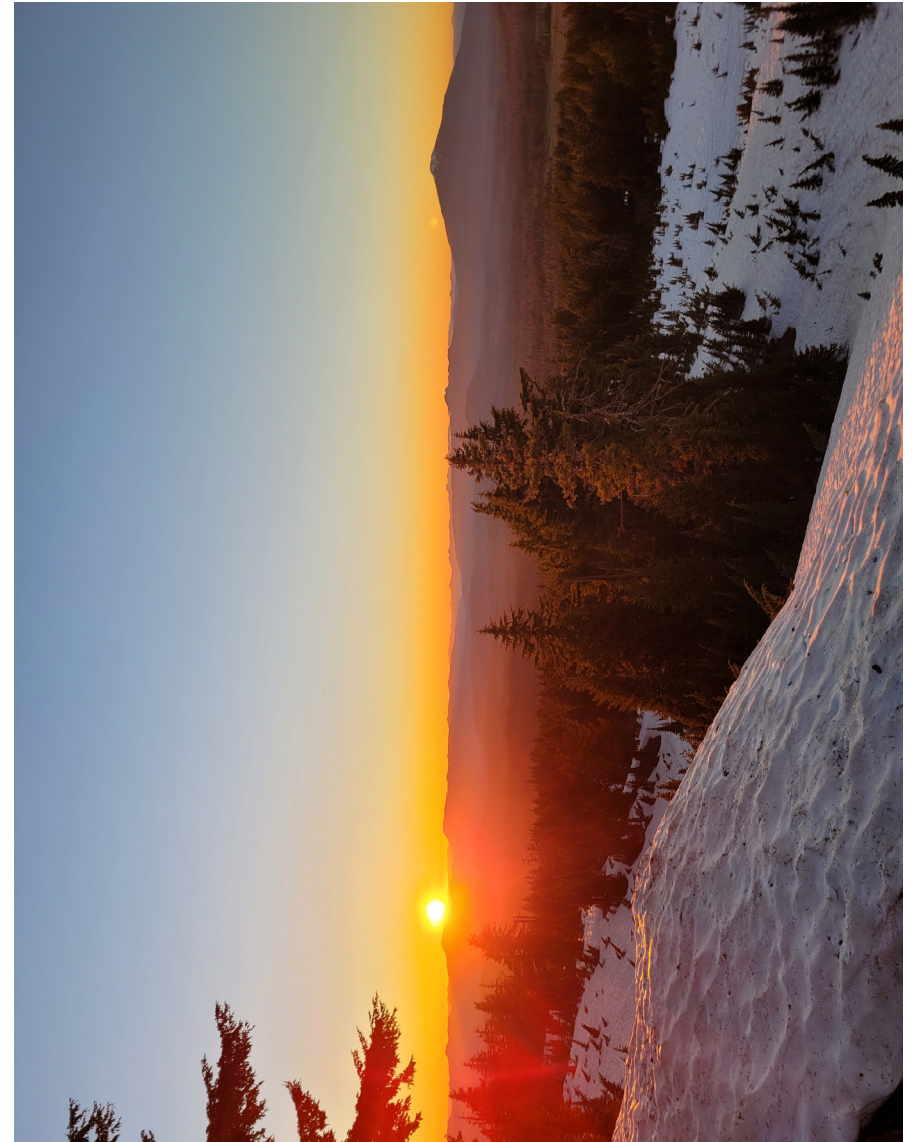
But all I gotta do is reach the bus stop.
The snow falls harder and harder,
It slowly passes my knees, my hips, my arms, shoulders.
I can hardly see, can hardly move.
Am I stagnant or am I floating?
What was I doing?
Where do I need to go?

The snow has entirely enveloped me.
Losing my breath, closing my eyes,
I start to mumble, but I can hardly tell what I say.
Suddenly, I lose all feeling in my body,
And I feel myself fade into the bright light.

Snow at Crater Lake

Maeve Vulcan

PHOTOGRAPHY



Watching

Stella Kinoshita

DIGITAL ART



Growing old together in a jazz club

Riley Courtney

POETRY

The melody of my mind has become
Undercut by the soft life-worn
Sound of your voice, dripping
Down my throat like tart
Aged wine; running through my hair
Like wrinkled hands who can't
Help but adore my gray; tugging
At my heart like an old piano,
Out of tune, playing songs we've
Danced to a dozen times over.
I hope we never stop till our bodies
Become old—collapsing, together,
Head on heart, heart on head.
Bass becomes the melody of
One another in our old age.

To the flowers you picked that will eventually die—

Jess Miller

POETRY

If you only last one day,
let that day be warm
and filled with sunset-colored laughter.

Let us bathe in champagne-flavored lips and
un-empty arms.

My eyes may soon tell you,
they know the flowers you picked will, in time,
w i l t—
tiny tulips bowing their heads in grief.

They know their lavender color will drain
until the water is brown and ugly,
until I cannot stand them there.

But, if you only last one day,
let that day be swimming in warmth—
in smiles that turn cheeks the brightest of pink and
hugs that hang on our skin.

Let me soak in the sun that is you.
Let me forget about the dying days to come.

Last Week Blues

Anna Blasinski

POETRY

getting used to it. waking up
to phone-light doom. not much of it.
little by little. a trickle. to go
with the mist hanging over everything. fog
crawls up from the grass. enter the frost. i
want to crawl into the corn. go home. go
back behind the counter.
work a shift for minimum wage, for i am
minimum. minimal
passion, maximum regret.
and yet. the snow, like fairy dust.
damn, it's cold out here. i wish i were done,
or doing it differently.

In the Eyes of Another

Mandy Holliday

POETRY

I saw a blonde little girl at the pumpkin patch this weekend
and started crying, thinking about you:

You, in your purple pajama dress, gripping the ear of your stuffed
dog, Dobie,
thumb in mouth, perched on the stairs late into the evening,
hoping to catch a glimpse of the TV from the story above.

You, sitting beside your father as he read you *Treasure Island*,
each new voice sending laughter tumbling through you,
enthralled by the universe you found yourself washed up in.

You, diving down the towering, yellow slide at the amusement
park,
the smell of fried dough thick in the air,
powdered sugar coating your lungs.

You, sketching butterflies with your little sister in the craft room,
the same album on repeat for hours,
delicate wings fluttering to life off the page.

You, bouncing on the hayride to the pumpkin patch,
searching for the plumpest, most lopsided gourd to take home—
unaware of what mercilessness may await.

I saw a blonde little girl at the pumpkin patch this weekend
and cried for what I was never granted,
and now can never have:

In the Eyes of Another

Mandy Holliday

A childhood free of worry,
an adolescence absent of hatred,
a hope that adulthood might offer a reason to exist.

I'm sorry you grasped so soon that you weren't enough,
the word *burden* etched into your stomach
before you could learn how to digest it.

I saw a blonde little girl at the pumpkin patch this weekend
and cried for her:
Hoping she knew her worth.
Hoping she had two parents who loved her,
who would take her home, feed her, shower her,
and tuck her in, bathing her in warmth.
I hoped, on that hayride, the baby in her mother's stomach
would know the same love,
would grow up not needing to unlearn the shackles of liability,
but instead, be born free of them.

I saw a blonde little girl at the pumpkin patch this weekend
and saw myself in her.
I hoped she would be okay—
and that, somehow, so will I.

John Doe Beach

Jack Depictus

POETRY

Anonymous Statues
Lie with sanded plaques
Lives remembered only by label

John Doe
Victim of
Fickle fate
Dictating death
Never to know

Last breath:
Exhaled meaning
Swept by swirling wind

Last step:
Imprinted existence
Taken by tide

~~~~~  
~~~~~

Seagulls squawk clues
Waves whisper suspects

Sand knows

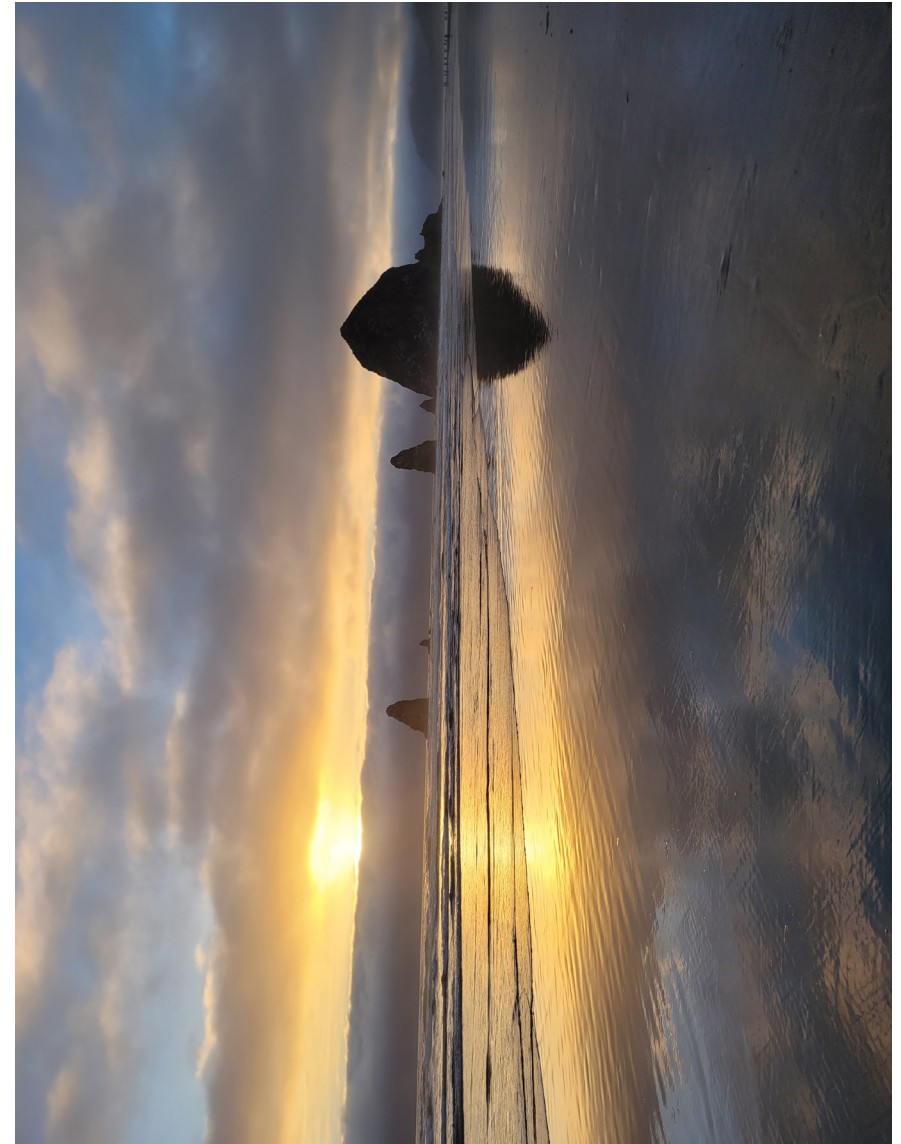
and keeps

and buries

The Haystack

Maeve Vulcan

PHOTOGRAPHY



Suffocate Me

Grace Witt

PAINTING



Two Cans and a String in the Summertime

Riley Courtney

POETRY

Wild thistle, milkweed, and Queen Anne's lace pinched
between my palms like I'm praying. I am.
I've not stopped these days. You ask how I've grown and
I tell you I've become an open-eared maple tree;
roots planted, I've learned to hear
the sound of God's voice in everything:

You say my name like I'm the last sip of tea,
honey left unstirred. A bumble bee passes my ear.
I sit still and smile. One little flower wraps
its tail around another, tuck beneath
the bloomed bud until I've made a crown.

Summer's last breaths bring the sound of laughter
loud enough for you to hear through the phone. Soon,
things will slow. These hills will empty; cabins fill with
coyotes, raccoons rampage this patch of
wildflowers for food, little children's laughter contained.
And we return to our books like rebellious bears
resisting hibernation. I'll roll the wild white
between my fingertips. Hope the pollen stains.
Smile when I hear you smile. If I could,

I'd bring these back to you, dried but
they'd crumble in your embrace. Instead,
I'll promise you fresh, forever. God's voice
sings in little wings and the golden green
the setting summer's sun has painted the treeline.

Two Cans and a String in the Summertime

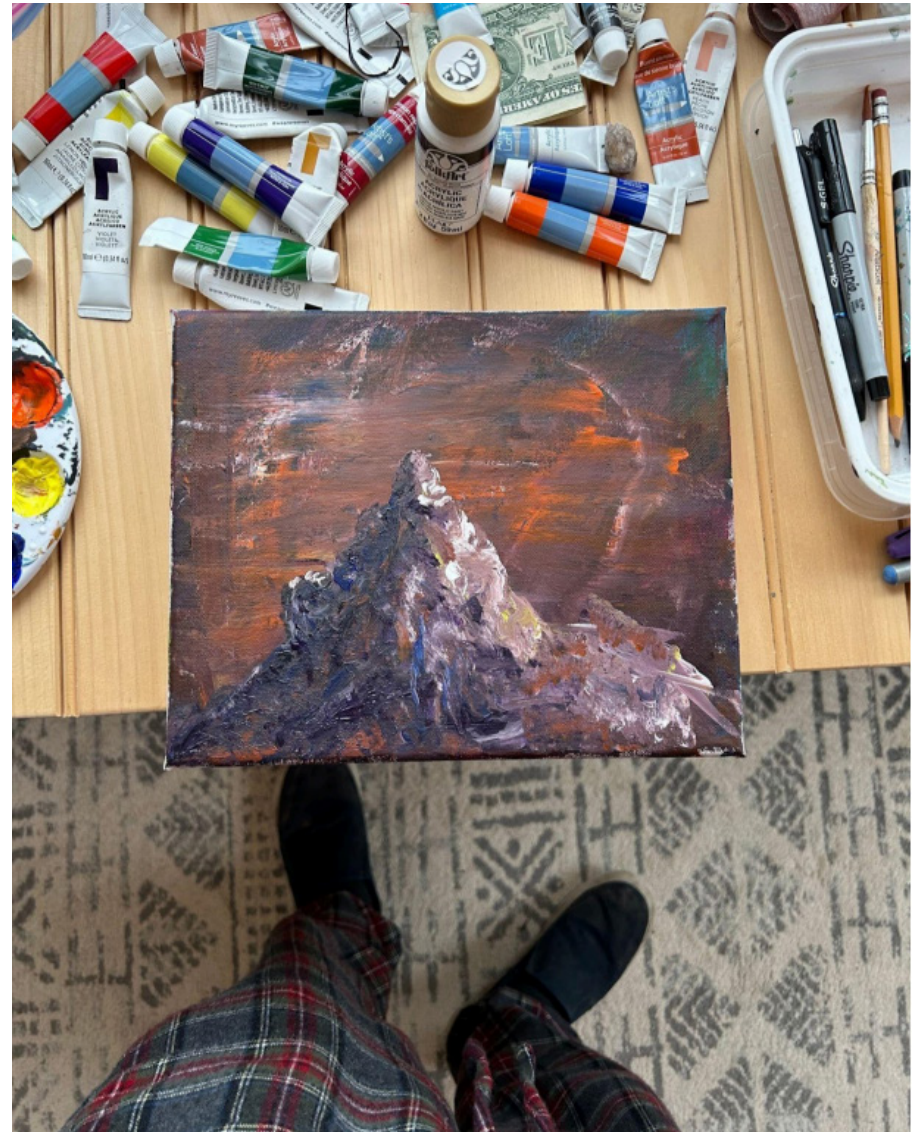
Riley Courtney

This summer, I answer,
I've learned to hear his voice
in the intricacies of the creek bed frog's back,
iridescent oil rings in the manmade swamp,
and the sound of your voice on the other line.

Next Day Out

Mike Makee

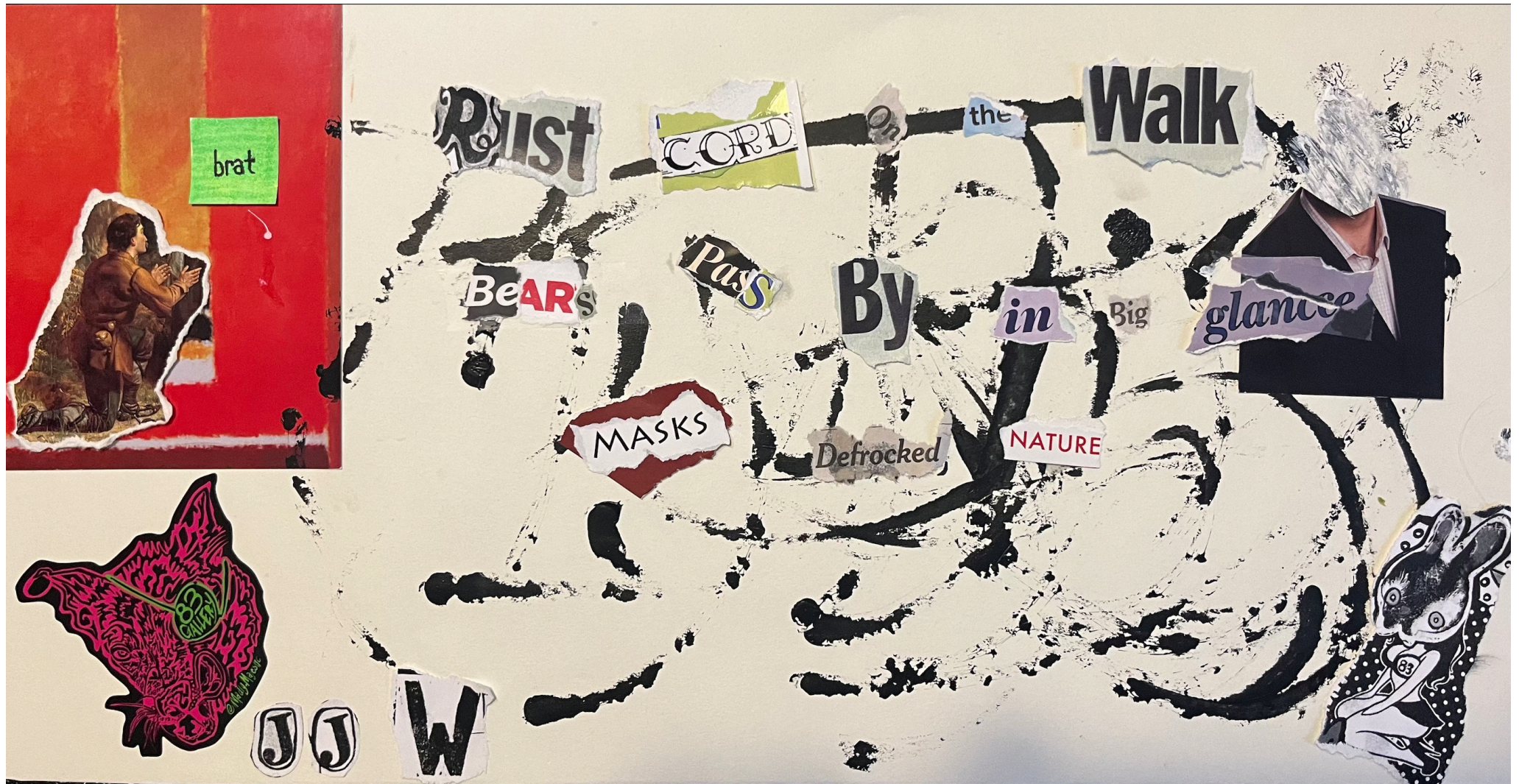
ACRYLIC
PAINTING



Mama I'm Chasing a Ghost

JJ Wiparina

MULTIMEDIA



Moonlit

Stella Kinoshita | DIGITAL ART



Envy of a Lady

Nick Schoster | CREATIVE
NON-FICTION

The thought often surfaces during my most tranquil moments. It lingers in the warm water of the shower and is woven into the stars I admire late at night. That's when the lady emerges. She brings along her envy—her envy, and the thought—the most agonizing thought. She carries a longing, a wish, to become one of them.

I yearn to dress like them, to dance like them, to laugh like them. They told me I was almost *like* one of them. I believed it, and yet the more I watched, the more I realized I wasn't. Sometimes, I felt like I could be *with* them—that I could dress with them, dance with them, and laugh with them. I could never truly be like them. There were just some things I couldn't be a part of, conversations I just couldn't hear. A man wouldn't understand what they had to say. A man wouldn't enjoy the things they did. A man wouldn't, but I would. It's not their fault; all I let them see was the man.

But as the warm water stops falling and the stars fade with the break of day, the lady becomes a bit quieter. I try to forget her thoughts, her desires, and her envy, but her envy always follows. I see it in the mirror, hear it in my voice, and feel it with my friends. I envy the lady inside me. The lady would understand them. The lady could be with them more often. Why can't I just be like the lady?

Toy Tires

Jack Depictus

POETRY

Toy tires, plastic wheels
Driven by dreams, fueled by fun

Metal rims, rubber tires
Driven by direction, fueled by gas: \$3.21 per gallon

Small hands wrapped around the body
Guided by Imagination
Around the couch
Down the hallway
Bump onto the rug

Long fingers wrapped around the steering wheel
Guided by median and edge lines
Around the cul-de-sac
Down the street
Right at the stop sign

Evening Sun beams golden
Launch off the lip of the rug onto the hardwood floor
Plastic wheels scratch along linoleum to the dismay of Mom making dinner
Race around dog bowls
Through legs of dining room chairs

Toy Tires

Jack Depictus

Streetlights beam yellow
The Engine roars, clawing at the asphalt, Tires screech
Roll the windows down, feel the breeze
Race around the roundabout
Through towering trees

Turn toward the stairs
Step-by-step, reach the finish line
Mom and Gravity defied
Carpeted in comfort
Traversed in trust
Move the cars aside, Dad's coming down

Turn toward the freeway
Exit-by-exit, reach the next
Navigate by maps beyond
Driven by deficient, childish chemicals:
Hope, patience, love, comfort, trust
Cars better move aside, I'm coming down

A few cars pull away from the pack
The Storm Twins: Thunder and Lightning & The Wolf
Rumble and strike, toys tumble down
Leading the pack, The Wolf waits

Toy Tires

Jack Depictus

Freedom found in speed
Movement's metrics: MPH and RPM
Mind drifts, emotions skid, tumble down
Leading my life, against the rails

- - - - -

Rumble and strike, Thunder and Lightning collide
Dark clouds pass
The Wolf races along railings and wins
The pack prevails, power in patience

Drift and skid, Car and Guardrail collide
Lights flash past
The Mind races along momentum and loses
Consciousness, power, patients...

- - - - -

Hear the Call for Dinner
Love wafts
Gold percolates through veiled blinds
Look out the window:
Clouds shape possibility
Trees tease opportunity
Set the silver
Serenity

Hear the Sirens
Blood rushes
Gold percolates through veiled eyelids
Look out the window:

Toy Tires

Jack Depictus

Blurred buildings, beeping machines
Breeze deceives
Let me live
Jolt

- - - - -

Dad fills the bathtub
Bubbles rise
Warm washcloths wash the dirt of the day's play away
Cozy under quilts, rest vibrant eyes

Family fills the room
Balloons rise
Warm feelings wash the pain of the day's gray away
Cozy under sheets, rest dead eyes
Storms subside in time

I saw a piece of pizza on the ground

Julia Mothersole

POETRY

burning scarlet,
orange from green,
sheen of grease,
shimmer of the leaves.
the day's misty mask
missing the new
breed of fruit now
reclining underneath a tree.
a passerby gives a glance,
a shrug of their shoulders,
not shaking them from their trance.

drops drip from trees,
grease slides down from cheese.
little eyes, a little nose,
the abrupt chill of the air motive
to lift anything with a pleasant
aroma, to stow from other toes.

who knows what this winter may hold?
one day it's warm and the next day it's cold.
it's both way too hot and way too cold.
roots clinging to the life they had long ago.
i hope when i return, nothing has had to fold,
but at the end of the day, who knows?

A Horse Walks into a Bar

Nick Schoster

POETRY

It all started in a bar one late afternoon.
I had my guitar and I was playin' a tune.
I straightened my hat and continued to play,
Not ready for the chat that I'd have that day.
In comes a horse, lookin' all smug.
He slammed through the door, tore up the rug.
That's when I spoke while keeping my composure,
"Stop horsing around; playtime is over."
Then he pulled out a fiddle, from where I don't know.
But I had to see where this one would go.
"With no fingers, just hooves, how do you play?"
With a sly smirk, all I got was a "neigh."
Then he went off, playing his tune,
The most glorious sound in that saloon.
"Good golly you're amazing!" I said.
Then an idea popped into my head.
"Let's form a band, what do you say?"
This time he gave an approving "neigh."
We went off to play for crowd after crowd.
We played all our songs, and we played them loud.
Off to Egypt, China, Britain, and France.
No one asked why this horse could dance.
Then one night, we were performing on stage
And the horse went into a blinding rage.
He ran right off, into the sunset.
He was shouting, "Have fun with my crippling horse debt."
I couldn't believe it, tears formed in my eyes.
Then I remembered, no cowboy cries.

A Horse Walks into a Bar

Nick Schoster

I walked back to the bar where it all started.
My hat over my eyes, I must've looked guarded.
The bartender took a look and that's when he said,
"Why the long face? It was all in your head."

Love At First Sight, Literally

Madelyn Mahle

POETRY

It started with a hardcover,
a matte finish.
Smooth to the touch,
thick, glossy pages.

Photographs,
faces I knew,
and some I didn't.
Flipping through pages,
until—
You.

A stranger,
a high school boy.
His soft, shy grin
stopped me.
Who was he?
A name beneath,
one I hadn't heard.

...

Weeks passed,
a long and warm summer.
It reached August,
along with it
came you.

At my front door,
the picture I saw.
But real—

Love At First Sight, Literally

Madelyn Mahle

A park,
a vibrant golden sunset,
a cool breeze.
The sun's reflection
glistened on the soft waves.
It was perfect;
you were *perfect*.

...

Four years,
I find myself thinking
the cliché.
It really was love
at first sight.

How strange
that it all started,
with a hardcover,
a matte finish,
and a photograph.

I met you in a yearbook,
and it all just worked out.

A Sunny Day in Palazzo Ducale

Annabel
Dechant

| PHOTOGRAPHY



Rays

Stella Kinoshita

DIGITAL ART



Through the Mosh

Madelyn Mahle

POETRY

The fog hanging

in
the
air.

The haze that hangs heavy, a thick mist,
Levitating across the pond. The trees,
Their branches twisting and turning.
One shaped like a hand, fingers curling in,
Reaching, pulling her closer.
Intrigued, navigating a way through the mosh.

A boat, the cleat tied to the dock from afar,
Dipping up and down in the dark water.
A hardcover with pages, resting on the seat,
Alone, it sits. Dipping up and down.

It is red. Indenting the cover,
A golden spiral outline.
As though it holds truth,
Between the pages;
Written to be found or forgotten.

Approaching, the reflection mirrors,
Small stones peeking through the murk.
Tiny tadpoles scurry as rain boots invade.
Amidst their fear, a smirk.

Shallow halfway,
Till water fills the boots.

Through the Mosh

Madelyn Mahle

Knee deep, hip deep.
Too deep to reach the boat.

Desperately wants to take a look,
Yet the water's getting just too deep.
The boat bobbles up and down,
Isn't worth drowning.
Dragging through the murk,
Shallow water returns,
Drenched in the what-could've-been.
She pours her boots,
Rings out her bottoms.
Walking away,
Her boots slosh.

Star-Crossed

Sophia Bick

POETRY

Inspired by *Star-Crossed*, Nancy
Holt, 1979

I found the heart
of star-crossed lovers
in a grassy field

It was enormous,
a bulbous hill,
vessels tunneled within

One vein so wide
I walked right through.
The pulse of their love beating
to the rhythm of their joy

One artery so narrow
it collapsed to the Earth.
The drops of their sorrow bleeding
into the chamber of their despair

Their heart is still
Their love was strong
These lovers gone

Not fit for life together,
they found somewhere better
where they would not be apart
forever

So here lies their heart
at the swell of the Earth.

It will never move
It will never rot

An everlasting love
that time forgot

Cruci(fix)

Becca Blanco

POETRY
Burning Haibun

were i a bird, they would not let me fly. i think that they would not bother to clip my wings. they would not pin me down or cage me in. i have thought that they would terrify me, embalm me in my own fear of living, of flying, of birth, and of death. i would likely hatch from my egg and immediately regret it. i would beg to be caged and i would look out the window in disdain at those diseased, feathered, flying beasts. i would not want to fly, i would be safe inside and when the front door opened, i would not slip out. i would sit and all would be good and i would be safe in my knowledge that nothing and everything out there was made to kill me.

they would not let me think they would clip my wings they would pin me down in thought embalm me in fear i would hatch and be caged and look in disdain at those flying i would want to fly, and when the front door opened i would sit and be good and safe in my nothing everything was made to kill me.

they embalm in fear i hatch and in disdain i sit good safe to kill

Fury

Grace Witt

PAINTING



Hours Were The Birds

JJ Wiparina

DIGITAL ART



Sabes

Becca Blanco

POETRY

Early this morning, I made war with one of those horrible medical-grade plastic chairs while
its little daggers hooked into my spine and heart.
I read my mother some Mary Oliver and Ada Limon
after she corrected my pronunciation with a smile
(*I think it's Limón, amor*). She was right, of course.

With the trademark flush of a literary *no sabo*, I pressed on, read through as much of "The Raincoat" as I could until filial tears threatened to fall. She comforted me from across the room in her gown of baby blue.
I'd never seen her more beautiful. Maybe that's what happens when you feel your grip on something start to loosen.

What I didn't say back was here, Mom, here is my heart, one of the little pieces that I keep stowed away from you, at least.
What I didn't say was I'm sorry, and thank you for everything in spite of it all.
What I didn't say was I love you. I really do. Do you know?
What I did say was not quite so profound, unless you'd count
Fuck, mom. Raincoat.

I knew she'd hand over that baby blue had I asked for a blanket or a pillow or a tissue.
Right off her own
shivering back.

Posture

Riley Courtney

POETRY

i tried to make my shoulders touch
like tree branches reaching from
one end of a valley to the other
on opposing sides of their mountains
reaching like hands of lovers denied
one another, blind to the way that
the other is still looking, still reaching,
still bending their back posture like
a young girl trying her best to hide
her new-breasted chest. i ache
my body till it breaks and try
to straighten back out when i decide
my back has become unbearing but
i'm a dandelion in early april trying
to hold on to my heavy yellow head
till i straighten into my softness and
the wind carries away my weight;
my garden weed posture sticks straight
but the backache remains. i will never
be the yellow young flower i was
before i forced myself to bend, for you;
i have become a hundred wishes
in your name.

No Recess

Elsa Emling

POETRY

I miss when my mom made me breakfast before school
I didn't notice when she did it for the last time
I didn't even think about it
She woke up early every day
She always packed my lunch box
A sandwich and fruit and something sweet

I traded juice boxes for black coffee and Celsius
I don't have time to go to the grocery store
And when I do I hardly know what to buy

I don't sit with my friends at a lunch table
And there is no recess
I sit alone in my apartment
My friends are in class
O-chem and physics and I'm not sure what else
I have a twenty-page chapter to read
Something about the 2024 election I think

When did I take the school bus for the last time?
I was so excited when I got my license
But now I'm tired of driving
And good God gas prices are so high

I miss the elementary school level of gossip
It seemed so complicated back then
But who had a crush on who
Turned into who cheated on who
And the nasty names people call each other are not the same
As they were on the playground

No Recess

Elsa Emling

I think it was fifth-grade
When I watched *The Polar Express* for the last time
I wore my pajamas to school
They were pink and had little dogs on them
And we all drank hot chocolate
December comes around
I'm on the second floor of the library

Hammering away at a ten-page report about international politics
No movies or music or hot chocolate
Just Russia and the Middle East
And a lot of black coffee

And half of the time I'm pretending to know what's going on.

Parking Lot

JJ Wiparina

MULTIMEDIA



A Hidden Venetian Courtyard

Annabel Dechant | PHOTOGRAPHY



Soldier's Fall

M. M. McGowan | SHORT STORY

"Your Honor—"

"No, Mr. Saito. Miss Gabriella's advocate may recommend, but that is all she may do. My job is to render final judgment, yours is to represent your client. Is that perfectly clear, sir?"

"Yes, Your Honor. However, precedent indicates that—"

"That is enough, Mr. Saito. Sit down or be removed."

The adrenaline calm of combat iced through retired Sergeant Jack Romero's veins. He watched in slow motion as his lawyer, Mr. Abraham Saito, sat stiffly, face flushed and jaw clenched.

"Now." The Honorable Judge Helen Walker tapped a stack of paperwork firmly into order on the sole bench of the Washington County Court of Domestic Relations, then turned her steely gaze on Caroline Seder, the state-appointed advocate for Gabriella, Jack's three-and-a-half-year-old sister and only remaining relative.

The custody of whom was the purpose of today's hearing.

"Ms. Seder, I understand that you believe Miss Gabriella is best placed with Mr. Romero. However, as you are new to this court, I will—just this once—explain my reasoning by way of demonstration."

Jack stilled as Judge Walker's head rotated on an eerie swivel, the weight of her implacable expression settling almost perceptibly onto his shoulders.

"Mr. Romero."

"Yes, Your Honor." He was pleased that his voice sounded smooth and confident.

"Stand, if you please."

Soldier's Fall

M. M. McGowan | SHORT STORY

The wording was technically polite, but her tone made clear that it was an order. Jack's heart sank into his stomach.

"Yes, Your Honor."

Bracing his hands on the table in front of him, Jack levered himself upright, carefully controlling the speed of his ascent to match the hydraulic hinges in his prosthetic knees. As he reached his full height, he took a small moment to settle into his balance—he'd only had prosthetic legs for a little over eighteen months. To someone not paying attention, nothing about his movements would betray his disability.

Unfortunately, that characterization did not in any way describe Judge Walker. Her lashes fluttered slightly as her eyes narrowed and quickly reset.

"Step over here, Mr. Romero." She indicated the area in front of the jury box, currently empty as this was a custody hearing, not a jury trial.

Jack traveled the ten or so steps with grace but found himself unable to take pride in the accomplishment. Because with every step, his prosthetics made a faint click as one metal piece settled against another, each and every one ringing out like a shot in the silence of the courtroom.

When he stood before the jury box, he turned so his back was to it. Judge Walker looked down at him from the bench on his right, and the counsel tables stood to his left, the gallery behind them. Jack spared a moment to glance at Mr. Saito and Ms. Seder—he appeared resigned, while she looked uncomfortable to be the intended audience to whatever was about to occur—before meeting Judge Walker's eyes.

"Mr. Romero, Miss Gabriella has just toddled into the street in pursuit of a butterfly. A vehicle approaches at speed—you must sprint to save her. Go."

Soldier's Fall

M. M. McGowan | SHORT STORY

Jack hesitated. "Your Honor?"

Judge Walker nodded toward the bailiff standing at ease on the far wall across the room from him, to her right. "Sprint toward Deputy Hawker, Mr. Romero. Like your sister's life depends on it."

Jack's mouth dried in an instant as his palms went clammy. He clenched his hands to hide their sudden tremble as his breath quickened and his heart thundered in his ears.

He hadn't learned how to run again yet. His physical therapist had explicitly told him he wasn't ready and not to attempt it alone, as he would likely injure his stumps badly enough to preclude him from wearing his prosthetics for a few weeks, setting his recovery back severely.

But his parents were dead. He was all Gabriella had. She'd go into foster care if he failed. So he crouched down into a runner's stance and prepared to sprint across the room, forgetting in his urgency that crouching was no longer a possibility, not with above-the-knee prosthetics on both legs.

He lost his balance and began to tip forward as his vision blurred in panic. He stepped forward in a frantic attempt to catch himself, and his right stump twisted in its socket. A flare of white-hot nerve pain stabbed up his thigh and buttock into his spine, an ice pick and a brand joined in agonizing matrimony.

He passed the point of no return, where nothing could catch him now but the floor, and had the dubious privilege of an endless instant to rage in the depths of his soul at the impending loss of his little sister, his last family—and, shameful though it was that it mattered, his dignity.

Jack landed as he had been taught in physical therapy, a modified version of the fall-breaking roll that he'd learned as a

Soldier's Fall

M. M. McGowan | SHORT STORY

child in martial arts. A quick assessment of his body revealed that nothing was broken, though the shooting nerve pain had made its way to the base of his skull, triggering the beginnings of a hellish migraine.

"As I thought."

The contempt in those three words brought it all crashing down on him, aborting his recovery. The ice of combat and the shaky numbness of panic fled as heat flushed through him. His armpits and back soaked through his shirt in an instant, his face and neck brightening to a brilliant, splotchy ruby.

He was denied even the dignity of an unaffected appearance as he proved himself incontrovertibly incompetent to care for his family.

The quiet rustle of fabric accompanied the soft squeak of leather as someone crouched beside him on the floor. They murmured, "Pause, son. Breathe, recalibrate, execute." The uniform pants Jack saw out of the corner of his eye matched those of the deputy he'd been sprinting toward.

The mantra that had been drilled into him every single day of his four years of service knocked him for a loop. Automatically, Jack's chest expanded and contracted as he breathed deep—fully in, hold, fully out, hold.

"That's it, son. What's next?" The deputy's voice remained low as he maintained position beside him. Finally centered enough over his legs, he engaged his lower back and pivoted upright at the hips.

He took a moment to adjust the fall of his suit, his gaze fixed to the ground in the vague vicinity of the deputy. He was unable to meet the man's gaze, but wanted him to know how grateful he was.

Soldier's Fall

M. M. McGowan | SHORT STORY

Jack's peripheral vision caught the deputy's quiet nod, the man having stood when Jack had. They turned simultaneously to return to their respective positions—the deputy to his wall and Jack to his table.

"I hope you take this lesson to heart, Ms. Seder," Judge Walker said as Jack passed behind his lawyer to reach his chair. "I always have my reasons." This last was pointed directly at Mr. Saito. Jack felt it pierce his heart regardless.

"The court hereby grants custody of Gabriella Maria Romero to the Washington County Department of Child Services, with placement in the Parsons family. John Michael Romero shall have supervised visitation. Court will now break for recess." The crack of the gavel shattered what remained of his self-worth.

THE END