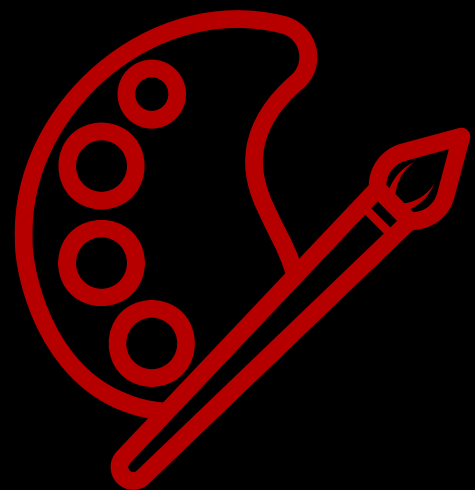
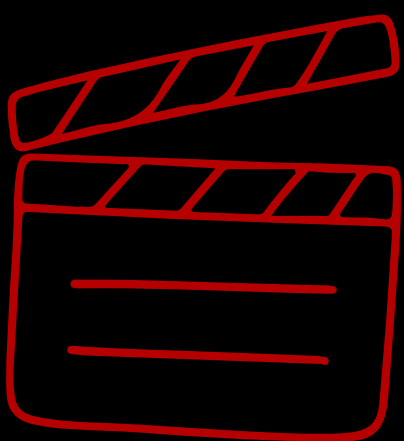


TIGER STRIPES



Literary Magazine



2025 - 2026

Acknowledgement

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Head Editor: Kimberly Pineda Montes

Marketing: Zach Barraclough, Taylee Parker

Layout/Formatting: Jon Raddatz, Lillian Huntsman, Yenitza Galavitz

Submissions: Olivia Reimers, Ethan Mills

Editors: Corban Richards, Trey Martinez, Chanden Wilcock, Elizabeth Argomaniz, Joshua Stout

4th Period Creative Writing Team

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Editors: Trinity Black, Cooper Campbell, Victor Flores, Kaidence Erickson, Jeffrey Reber

Honorable Mentions

Ms. Rachel Douglas

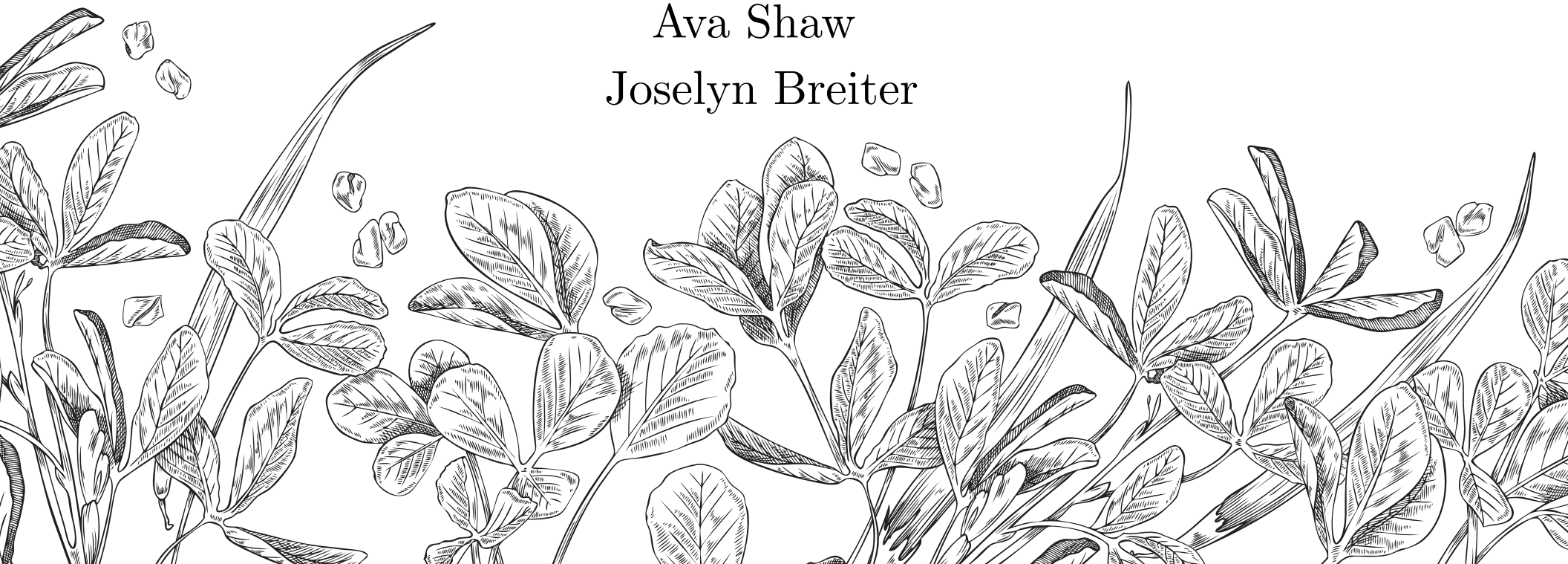
Mr. Stephen Jones

Emily Langston

Emily Thomas

Ava Shaw

Joselyn Breiter



INTRODUCTION

Music Section

Music is a form of communication, literature, and auditory beauty that mingles with the soul, mind, and experiences. I am pleased with this portion of our magazine because it encompasses the beauty of inspiration. It exposed how art, through words, can be inspired by anything.

Songs invoke memories, emotions, and wonder that create a world no one can live without. I hope you enjoy our love for music in the form of poems, stories, and simple sentences that express the gratitude we feel in our everyday lives.

“Music knows that it is and always will be one of the things that life just won't quit,” Stevie Wonder

Art Section

Art is one of the beauties of life showing us images personalized to whoever is willing to interpret them. Art has no limits, no rules, making it perfect for self expression. Being able to draw what you feel in order to get the feelings out there is a privilege we should all embark on and should continue to pursue.

In the art section of this magazine, we highlight the talent of our students at Hurricane High School. Four artists from Mr.

Stephen Jones studio art class are spotlighted in the magazine. Their artwork was used as inspiration by our authors to write a poem or story. We thank Emily Langston, Emily Thomas, Joslyn Breiter, and Ava Shaw for their contributions to this magazine.



Tiger Stripes

The Roar of the Century

Hurricane High School

Literary Magazine

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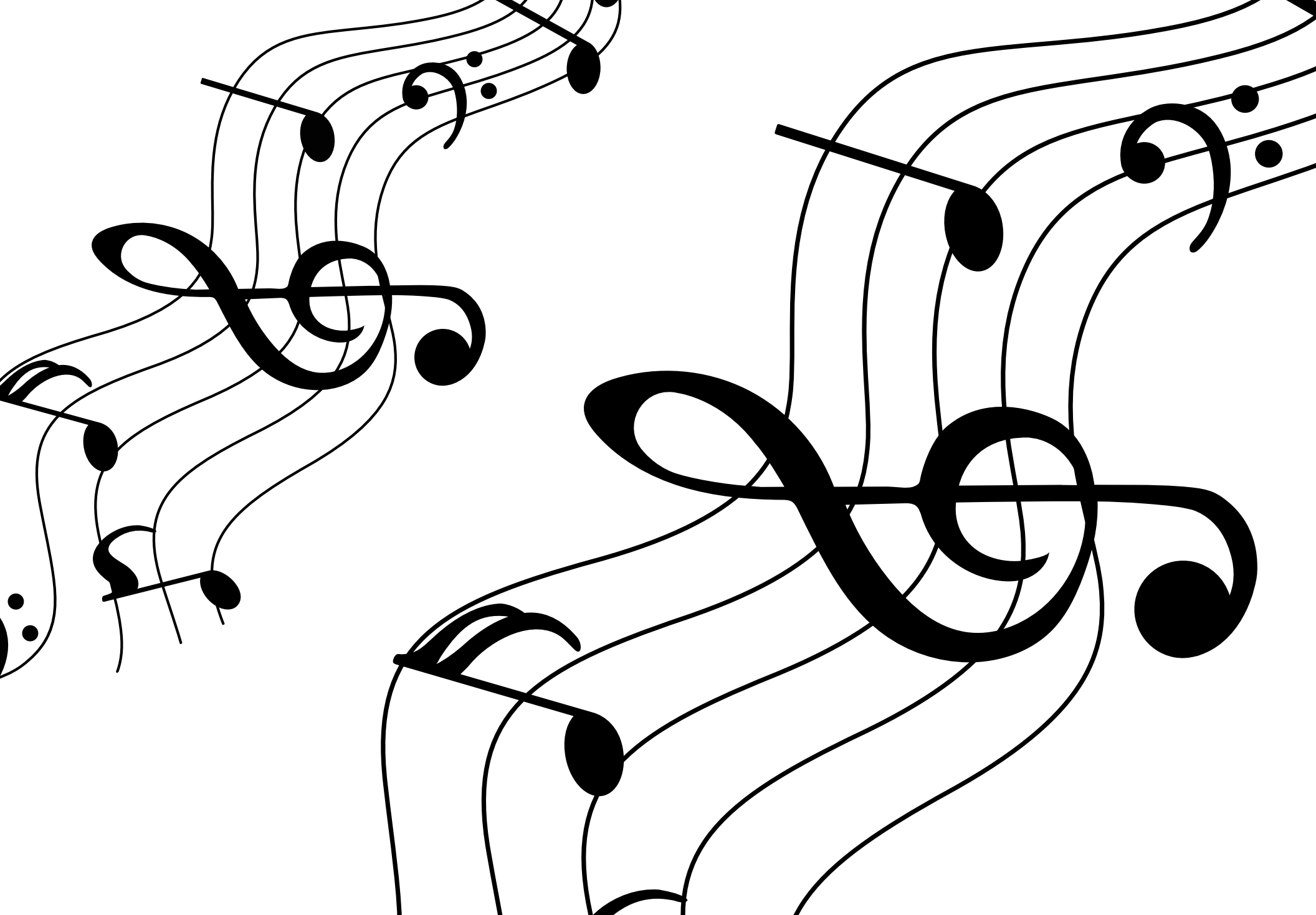


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MUSIC



Inspired by *Experience* by Ludovico Einaudi

Experience

Slow, gentle piano - the genesis in a song of living.

A haunting melody continually repeating upon itself.

I may have experienced more in the past six months

Then I have the entire rest of my life combined.

Often I feel lonely, more so when I'm surrounded

People around remind me that I barely know anyone

I'd rather have one friend than thirty acquaintances,

But the anguish reminds me: at least I'm alive.

Violin joins the music, gentle - like a consideration.

It builds, slow but implacable as an aspen forest

Growing with roots bound together under the stars

I walk through them, reveling in their unified purpose.

The song shows a map of a place only I can see

A hidden world etched on the back of my eyelids

Trying to describe it would defeat the purpose;

The point is for us all to see in our own way.

It ends the way it begun; that same melody;

Only this time, its sound feels utterly different.

The somber conclusion has optimism in its voice.

Life goes both directions - and that's the whole point.

Inspired by *Loud* by Olivia Dean

LOUD

I watched them play the piano.

Exchange glances and smiles,
She let him in, never asked for much.

But one day he let go,
Left everything unsaid, unspoken.

The silence is so loud.

I watched her play the piano,
Two hands, where their once was four.

Pulled her all in,

Just to push her back out.

If he changed his mind all he had to do was say.

The silence is so loud.

Inspired by *Call Your Mom* by Noah Kahan

Please Don't Leave

Late nights listening to you cry,
Never knowing quite what to say.

Just please stay.

Please, for the love of everything,
Don't leave me,
Just please stay with me.

Learn, love, live,
You're so young,

So please,
Ignore the ache,

Just please don't go away.

Inspired by *Call Your Mom* by Noah Kahan

Call Your Mom

Tell me when you're struggling, so I can help you in the
darkness.

I'll turn on the light for you, show you how pretty it really is.

You deserve to live, so I'll find a way.

Even if I have to call your mom, hopefully you won't be so
hopeless.

Don't go down without a fight.

Swear to me you see the light.

I'll find a way for you to want to stay.

Even if I have to call your mom, I'll hold onto you tight.

I know what it's like to feel like this.

Not knowing what you miss.

You might feel weak.

Even if I have to call your mom, and have a little distance.

I'll help you feel better,

Or lighter,

Or stronger,

Just let me call your mom.

Inspired by *Better Together* by Jack Johnson

Better Together

They didn't plan the day. It just unfolded that way like most of the good ones do.

The surf was lazy that morning, small waves rolling in without much ambition. Maya sat cross-legged on the sand, tracing shapes she wouldn't remember later, while Ben fumbled with a beat-up guitar that had seen too much sun and not enough tuning. He wasn't trying to play a song exactly, just a feeling.

Somewhere between the ocean's hush and the soft strum of strings, the world felt simple. Not empty, just uncluttered.

Maya leaned back on her hands and squinted at the sky. Clouds drifted by like they had nowhere better to be. "You ever notice," she said, "how everything feels slower near the water?"

Ben smiled without looking at her. "That's because the ocean doesn't rush anyone."

They'd been together long enough to know each other's quiet moods. The kind where conversation wasn't necessary, where presence did all the talking. Alone, they were fine, good, even. She liked her independence. He liked his space. But together, something clicked into place, like harmony finding a melody.

A breeze picked up, carrying salt and warmth. Ben finally found a chord he liked and let it ring out. Maya closed her eyes.

It wasn't about big promises or dramatic moments. It

was about shared mornings, sandy feet, and music that sounded better when someone else was listening.

About knowing that life could be messy and unpredictable, but still sweeter when experienced side by side.

When the sun climbed higher, Maya reached over and rested her head against Ben's shoulder.

"Hey," she said softly.

"Yeah?"

She smiled. "I think some things just work better this way."

Ben didn't answer. He didn't need to. He just kept playing, the ocean keeping time, the day stretching out ahead of them, easy, warm, and undeniably better together.

WHAT MUSIC INSPIRES YOU?

2026

Wondering

music
with gina

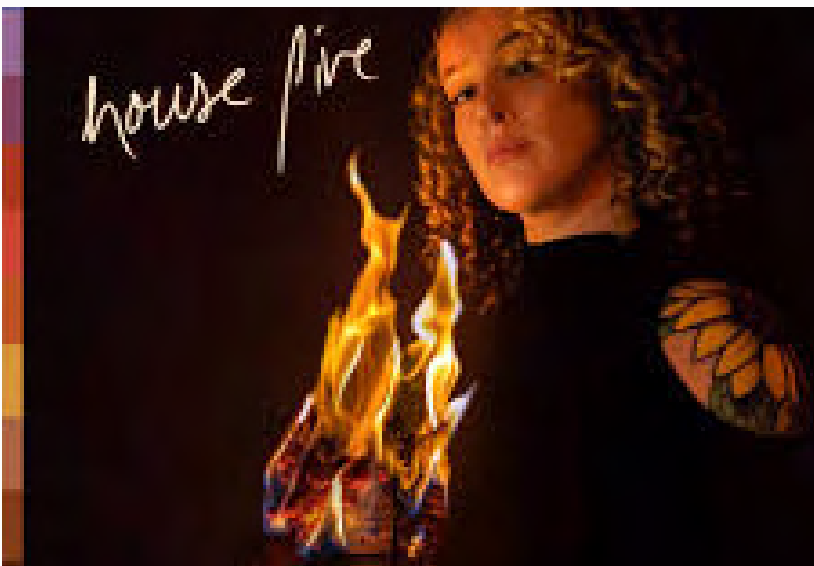


Love Power-Luther Vandross

It inspires me to know anything is possible through
the power of love.
-Jody Rich.

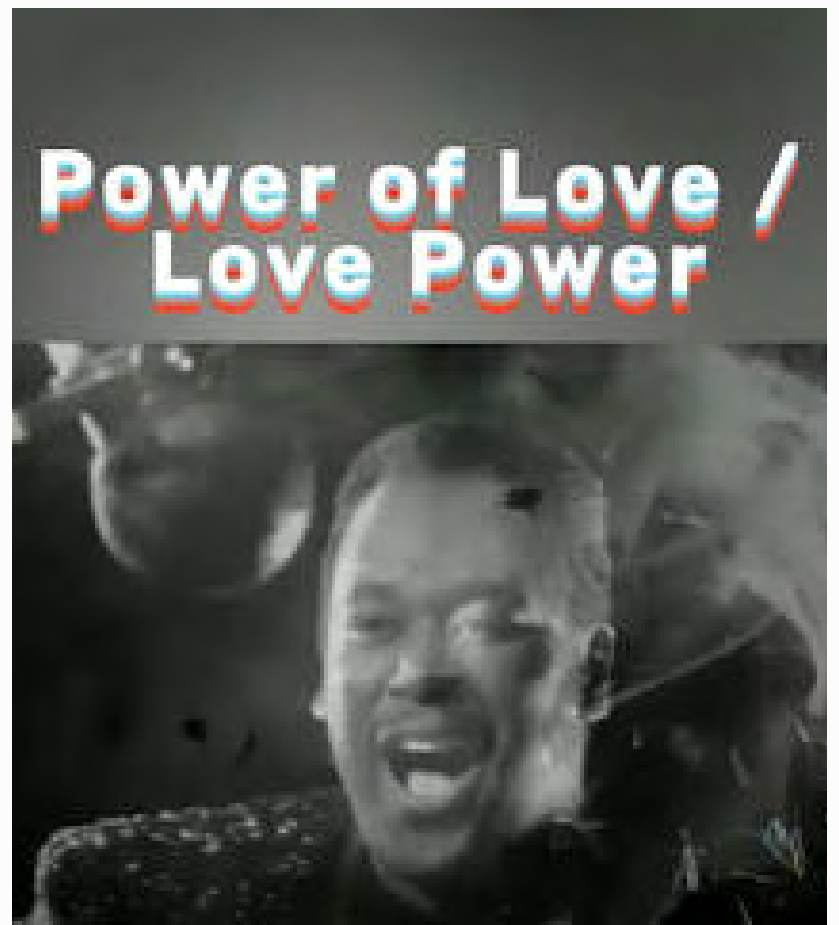
Wondering-Gina Ferragame

It's my comforter, and it talks about the past
-Ann Metcalf



Opalite-Taylor Swift

Music is something that communicates
emotion, changes the atmosphere and is a
great source of entertainment and joy
-Kiley Stephenson



*No Worries-
Paycheck*

It makes me get my mind off of stuff, and it
uplifts me.
-Taft Hill

Literary
Magazine

2026-2027

Dedicated to Coach Clay at Ravens Self Defense Academy
May you rest in peace

Untitled

The bell has rung, but not for you,
And not in the way we once knew.
Your voice, once sharp like gloves on mitts,
Now lingers softly in each echo's hits.

You taught us more than jabs and feints,
More than footwork, slips, and combinations,
You built us up with hands of steel,
But carved our hearts with fight and feel.

“Are you tough enough?” are the words that keep repeating
within my heart,
But not just within my heart or jabs, but in our lives,
You showed us how the strong survive.

Now the corner stands so bare,
No hopeful or watchful eyes, no knowing stare,
But in each punch, in every fight,
Your spirit moves - our guiding light within the fight.

So though you've left the ring today,
Your lessons and guidance will never fade.
For every boxer finds there their test,
And you have trained us well for the rest.

Inspired by *Landslide* by Fleetwood Mac

Time Tells

The hallway echoes with our last footsteps,
lockers closing like chapters we didn't know were ending.
We laugh too loudly, because silence would mean goodbye.

Time moved without asking us,
turning scraped knees into memories,
turning "someday" into right now.

We learned that growing up isn't leaving everything behind,
It's carrying pieces of who we were
into places we've never been.

The future feels like a steep hill after the rain,
beautiful, a little scary,
And somehow, we're brave enough to climb it.

Inspired by *Call Your Mom* by Noah Kahan

Call Your Mom

The song sounds like a late night kitchen,
Lights buzzing, phone face down on the table.
It knows the weight of almost reaching out,
How pride can feel heavier than pain.

It sings to the part of you that's barely holding,
The part that jokes so no one looks too close.
A voice saying you don't have to be brave right now,
You can just be someone's kid again.

It's a reminder wrapped in a melody,
That love is still there, even when you forget.
And sometimes survival is as small
and as holy as making that call.

Inspired by *Time* by Hans Zimmer

Something About Time

I looked at my homework assignment on the floor. It was threatening me somehow. A paper was taking all of my freedoms away just by sitting there on the floor in my room. Good thing my friends and I decided to go out today, because I couldn't look at that paper anymore.

I grabbed my keys off of my bedside table and ran out the door, saying goodbye to my parents as I left. I walked out to my car and drove to the restaurant, taking the whole town in as I did so. It was a beautiful, sunny day outside, yet there was no one in sight somehow. It was like they were all scared of the blue sky, like beauty meant something bad would happen next.

I pulled into the parking lot, excited to see all of my friends, but I couldn't see any of them yet. I walked into the restaurant, hoping to see them around the corner, but they weren't there. It made sense I guess, because I had gotten there about a half an hour before we agreed to meet. I decided to walk around a little, watching the cars pass me and the small fluffy clouds float past above me. Eventually I made it back to the restaurant, finally seeing my friends out in front.

One of them, by the name of John, was the first to speak to me, "Hi, Trask. Did you walk here?"

I chuckled a little, "No, that would've been a 40 minute walk. I actually got here half an hour early."

Another of my friends turned around, placing her phone in her pocket.

"Why would you do that?" She asked, slight concern passing through her features.

“I didn’t want to do my homework,” I replied, unable to meet her concerned expression for some reason. She laughed, “That’s a terrible reason.”

“I know.”

We went inside the restaurant and ordered our food. I just went with the classic burger like I always do. John went with his usual mozzarella fries, and the girl, Analeah only ordered a side of fries. We sat at the table and waited for our food.

We talked for a minute about school things, not really caring about anything else at the moment. As soon as our food came, we began eating, but that’s when the wind started blowing. Yes, in the restaurant, wind was blowing. I tried to look for the source, but it was kind of coming from everywhere. No one seemed to notice it but me and my friends. I stood up, looking for a hole in the wall or an open door, but neither one existed.

That’s when I began to not exist either, or did I exist? I was moving fast, unable to see or hear anything. After a while, I think I stopped somewhere, but I couldn’t understand if I truly did or not. Eventually I dropped onto the ground, my friends right behind me.

In an overwhelmed daze, I stood up. I looked around at my surroundings, utterly confused. All I could see was everything. I looked at my friends, the same expression of wonder splattered across their faces as well. Was the top down, or could I see through it? I knew the future, the past, and the present as I walked forward, my friends following right behind me.

As I talked with my friends, I saw ancient civilizations. I saw the Egyptian pyramids and the pharaohs that ruled them. I saw ancient China. I saw the first men that civilized

America, and the second group that settled Jamestown. I saw where I was now. I saw where everyone would be in the future, and I saw the destruction that followed.

I got up and walked out of the restaurant, got in my car, and drove home. I couldn't stop. As soon as I got home, that homework assignment was done.

Everything happened in that restaurant as we had a very rare conversation. My friends and I looked over the top. It was so clear. Reality was what it was, and we truly knew that. I wasn't going to waste a second of my time anymore.

I was going to see what I saw in that restaurant sometime in the future. I knew it. I wouldn't stop until everyone else could see it too.

Inspired by the concept of music

Floating Above Water and Land

Long drawn words soar on a string through my ears like a
floating swan,
One squeezing their heart with air that draws closer the next
breath,
Eye to eye- shoulder to should, lip to lip- they sing me the
song of us,
One long hymn to keep our hands held,

As slumber runs off, my eyes open with soaking rivers,
My lips are dried seams that are sewn together,
My heart throbs with the infinite echo of their humming,
Stilled; seam to dry seam, distant eye to distant eye, a glassy
reflection manipulates the broken string,

Dirt covers up their drawn words and hymns,
An engraven stone of their song- forever humming my breath
away,
Pink rose to moss-covered ground, dry tissue to wet eyes,
deafened ears listening to the singing of the sinking coffin,
Soon, dreams of breaths awakening squeeze their heart one
more time that express their prayer- the swan drifting
farther away.

Inspired by *Careless Whisper (Saxophone Version)*

Love is a Saxophone

Love is a saxophone,
With a sultry tone.
There are many varying,
From deep and resounding,
To bright and warm.

The music will pour,
Filling my heart with desire.
Passionate as a roaring fire.
It breaks through the silence of night,
To find me and draw me tight.

Inspired by Imagine by John Lennon

What If There Was No Hate

Imagine if everyone could love.
Show the deepest of a human heart
Or to stay tied together like we're all in love.
If everyone could be accepted in unity, be just a part.
What if there was no hate, just love from the sky above.
Could we all hold hand and hand and chant?
Work together and have the strength of ants.
We are all capable of love, don't say you can't.
Imagine if there was nothing to kill or die for,
Show love to those who are different.
What if we could all say no to war
Can we all not have so much distance,
Look at those who are different,
And just open the door,
To all, even if they're rich or poor.

WHAT MUSIC INSPIRES YOU? 2026



Monster- Jorge Rivera- Herrans

It's about changing your ways to become who you really are.
-Emma Werner

Disciple of Christ- Nik Day

It reminds me that I am a disciple of Christ and that He is there for you.
-June Willets



Life Must Go On-Michigan

It sounds like a soundtrack for life's moments. Even through challenges, you can keep going.
-Arya Armstrong



Landslide-Fleetwood Mac

It's a way to express emotions. and its just about changing and growing up.
-Ruby Phipps

Literary Magazine

2026-2027

Inspired by *Better Together* by Jack Johnson

Better Together

Everything is better when we're together,
It always seems to be better weather.
The stars shine bright, just as your heart,
dark and sad, on the days we're apart.
Everything seems to shine when you start to rhyme.

Inspired by *Fires in Heaven* by S4LEM

Life

The flames shine so bright in the Sky,
Memories burnt like a brand on my mind,

I almost missed you when you flew by.

All these things coming to light,

All these things coming tonight.

Visions of love, Visions of hope,

Never shed a tear cause I'm loving my life,

The best thing they ever said was nope.

Inspired by *That Thing You Do* by Cody Fry

The Tap Shoes

The tap shoes loved the floor.

In a quiet, obvious way, they never said out loud.
Every time they touched, sparks jumped through sound,
Metal kissing wood like it meant something.

They spoke in rhythms like Morse code,
saying things no one else in the room noticed.
The floor remembered every step, every mistake,
holding the echoes long after the music stopped.
The shoes danced harder just to be understood,
and the floor answered by never letting them fall.

Inspired by *Better Together* by Jack Johnson

Better Together

Two separate skies,
two different ways of watching the day
you count the clouds,
I count the reasons not to hurry.

The ocean hums like it knows us,
waves stitching moments into one long afternoon.

Your laughter leans into mine,
unplanned, unpolished, right on time.

Alone, we are enough
steady feet, steady hearts.
But side by side,
the world softens its edges.

Coffee tastes warmer,
silence learns a new language,
and even the sun seems to linger
when it finds us sitting close.

Nothing grand.
Nothing promised forever.

Just this quiet truth
the breeze keeps repeating:
some things don't need fixing
they just sound better together.



ART

Grim Reaper

By: Emily Langston



This beautiful symbolism for a being of utter destruction and death trying to find the light and hope in the darkness is the story behind this masterpiece. Emily Langston's love for drawing began at home from following tutorials on how to draw Disney princess videos eventually leading Emily to take art classes. This piece took Emily up to 3 weeks in art class to make.

Reaping Warrior

The whole field was flooded with the sounds of swords clashing. Rodger was in a rapid battle with his opponent. They were by far the fastest out of everyone on that field. Rodger could tell he was winning. His opponent was growing heavily exhausted, and his movements were slowing. Rodger landed a few deep cuts on his opponent's left arm.

"You've got to be quicker than that!" Rodger exclaimed.

They continued to attack at each other, Rodger being the only one to land any hits. Rodger blocked another strike and threw his opponent's arm upward, leaving a large opening to his chest. Rodger took the opportunity and thrust his sword into the man's heart. The man's body clenched, and his eyes widened. For a short moment, Rodger saw his face turn as white as a skull, taking the shape of one as well.

Rodger retrieved his sword from the man's chest and turned to fight a new opponent who had also won his fight. With each opponent Rodger fought, he left another body in his wake. Once, Rodger lost his footing and dropped his sword, but he managed to take down his opponent by throwing a concealed knife at him before his opponent could take advantage of Rodger's mistake.

Rodger was one of the last alive on the field. He was in battle with his final opponent. They traded blows with such speed. This opponent may have been the best he has fought against so far. Rodger couldn't help but smile. The sounds of their swords clashing echoed through the empty wheat fields. Rodger was sure the battle would be over soon. He could tell that, even though his opponent was skilled, he was better.

They continued to battle with Rodger making more and more showy moves as they went on. Rodger went for a jab, but his opponent blocked by knocking Rodger's sword out of his hand.

Rodger's face emptied of all its color. He had gotten too careless. He dived out of the way to avoid a strike from his opponent. He slammed on the ground, briefly dazed from the impact. His opponent raised his sword, ready to take the final strike. Rodger searched desperately, looking for something— anything to help him. He felt a long wooden handle lying beside him. He grabbed it and swung it like a club toward his opponent. The sickle pierced his opponent through the skull, which was now nothing more than such. All the flesh was gone from his face, leaving only the skeletal structure behind.

The bodies Rodger had left behind began to rise. All without flesh. He removed the sickle from the skull of the newly defeated, only to find he was still moving. Rodger tried to run but was stopped by a sabre to the chest. One of the skeletons had taken a weapon and thrust it through Rodger's torso. Instead of blood, Rodger's own skin began to fade from the wound spot. One by one, each skeleton took its own respective weapon and pierced Rodger.

Rodger tried to scream, but his throat had no air, no life. He looked into his own, bony hands still clutching the sickle. No matter how many times he was stabbed, he would not fall. He snapped back from his shock and swung his sickle to release himself from the grasp of the skeletons. He frantically threw his sickle around him, attempting to create distance between himself and the horrors. Each time the sickle touched a skeleton, it collapsed and dissolved.

Rodger fell. He had defeated all the skeletons but one. Himself. He turned the sickle on himself, but there was no heart to pierce. He was forced to live with the pain he had inflicted. He looked to his palms once more, his right filled with an orb of light. He possessed the souls of those he had defeated. After a moment, the orb disintegrated, and a portion of his pain faded.

Rodger walked from the field, hand still shaking. Only one task was on his mind now, and he had all the time in the world to complete it.

The Walk to Paradise

I look at the bright lights coming towards me. The two lights quickly merged as they became one with my soft tissue. The blare grows louder until it all goes silent. My body feels lighter than usual. My body feels drained of all warmth, but maybe that's because it's winter. There's an older man standing by his truck on the side of the road, so I decide to go make sure everything is okay. As I get closer, the snow turns pink then red. Then I see what happened. There I am. I hardly recognize myself since my body is mangled. The snow stained a deep rich red.

“What happened?” I mutter anxiously.

“You died,” a voice answers from the shadows of the treeline.

“Who's there!” I panic. “What's going on?” I ask.

Without an answer I look back at the scene before me. I should be cold, but I feel nothing. I reach down and touch my lifeless body, my hands find my bracelet and I grab it. I hold it close to my heart as a memory flashes into my mind.

I was back at the hospital, sitting next to my mom as she lay on the bed. I was asleep with my head laying on her pillow when I felt her reach over and gently run her hands through my hair. Her hand was cold as ice, but I wasn't going to complain. I remember early mornings before school when she would put her cold hands on my neck to wake me up, and we'd laugh about it because I'd try to hide under my blanket to warm back up. Feeling the coldness of her frail hands now caused a shiver to spread across my body, but I also began to cry into the bed. I did my best to stay silent so as to not worry her, but I think she knew. She died a few

hours later after I had fallen asleep next to her.

“The time of death is 23:34,” the doctor announced.

Before they took her away, I removed the bracelet off of her arm. It was the bracelet I made for mothers day when I was 8, though now it was stained and worn from 9 years of wear. I slipped it onto my wrist and started to feel the warmth of my home once more before I snapped back as I felt a glare upon my back. The glare was so sharp it impaled me and leaves me paralyzed.

“Your time is almost up,” the voice echoed from the shadows in the trees.

Without a word I stared at the ground. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder, but it was surprisingly comforting. I glanced over my shoulder to see its fleshless hand.

“Are you ready to move on?” it asked.

“Just one more minute, please?” I pleaded.

“Alright, one minute,” it replied. “That is all we have time for,” it added in a way that was eerily comforting.

I close my eyes and say my goodbyes to everyone I can think of. *Mom, Dad, Brother, Sister, My Friends, I'm sorry I couldn't push through it this time. I just couldn't do it anymore... I hope you all can forgive me. I'm so sorry...*

“I'm ready to go,” I murmured.

“Alright then, look into the light,” it requested.

Its hand left my shoulder and a light began to glow out of the corner of my eyes. I take in as much air as I can before turning to the light. It was holding a ball of light in its bones, and I was unable to turn away. Slowly, it began to feel like a warm summer weekend. The gentle scent of waffles, my favorite, embraced me. Then, my mom wrapped her arms around me and tears began to fall from my face. I held with

the strength of all the hugs I wished I could have given her since she had passed on. *Is this it?* I thought. I began to shiver as I thought about everyone I had left behind, but what's done is done. I can't go back.

"C'mon dear, let's go home," my mom beckoned to me.

"Coming, Mom!" a childlike voice calls back. Wait, I'm small again? I wonder, but with the attention span of a kid I stop worrying and run after my mom. I reach out and grab her hand as we begin to walk deeper into the light.

"I love you, mom," I grin.

"I love you, too, my dear," She says softly.

I take the bracelet off my arm, which looked new again and I slide it onto her wrist. Although, as I do the light swells around us once again. When I am able to see again I notice I'm back to my older self.

"Mom?" I called out.

"I'm over here, dear," she replied from behind me. She looked just like she did before she died but healthier. Her bracelet stayed pristine as well. We walk next to each other, but I no longer feel the need to hold her hand. Just her being there is enough for me.

My voice is shaky but stronger now, "I'm not afraid anymore."

"I'm so proud of you, dear," she pauses, "this is just the beginning."

"I'm ready now," I whisper.

We walk alongside each other, but not going anywhere specific. Just walking for no reason. We didn't need one. It was peaceful as we walked further, for there was no fear, no sadness, just love, and that was all I needed. I thought about

looking back once before I shook my head and kept walking. And as we walked, the light grew brighter, though it wasn't bright anymore. It was home and I knew wherever it led, I would be okay.

The Grim Reaper

I hold onto my light, he cannot leave yet.

How will I find my way during the night, when the shadows
are a threat?

How will I know how to fight, when the shadows are upset?

I hold onto my light, it is not his to take

How will he find his way to the garden, when there's no one
to guide him?

How will he know he is no longer hardened, hardened from
all the grim?

I hold onto his light, it is fading away.

It is fading, where is it going?

The Reaper

Ash opened his eyes. He stood still, alone in an unlit place. He looked around, trying to figure out where he was. His memory was fuzzy, as if part of his mind was waiting for the rest to catch up. He suddenly began to hear the sound of echoing footsteps. Ash turned to see a small light making its way towards him. He was unsure if he should be feeling scared or relieved, so instead he just stood there.

As the light grew closer, someone was revealed to be holding it. A skeletal figure came into view. It wore a long and dark cloak, a hood covering most of his boney face, “Your soul came back to me quicker than usual.” Ash blinked back at him, trying to understand what he meant by that. “Come on,” the reaper spoke. “Let’s go.”

Ash followed behind the reaper, the two walked slowly together towards their destination. He began to wonder how many times they’d done this before, how many times his soul had reached this place, and how many times he’d been reborn. His most recent life is the only one that he’s known, the only one that he has memories of.

Ash’s train of thought was interrupted when the reaper suddenly came to a stop. “We’re here,” the reaper pointed. At first Ash was unsure about what they were looking at, until he noticed a small flicker of light, slowly growing larger. “Once you enter that light you will be reborn.”

A bead of sweat ran down Ash’s forehead, his mouth began to feel dry. Just like that? This version of himself would be gone? The only version that he’s known? He took a step back.

“Are you nervous?” asked the reaper.

Ash tightened his jaw and turned away, "...How could I not be?!"

"I don't blame you, Ash. I know, it's hard."

"Hard is an understatement." Ash dug his nails into his palms. "How could I leave behind everything I've ever known, everyone I've ever known?! My friends, my family..."

"But you'll get to live again," responded the reaper.

"You'll meet again. Ash, it's okay. You can put your mind at ease."

Ash turned his attention back to the reaper. He stared at him with wide eyes. He finally unclenched his fists and instead let the reaper's words sink in. "I..." Ash muttered. He began to tremble, his eyes welled up with tears. "No...!" Ash shook his head. "I don't want to die...!"

As Ash began to cry, the reaper gazed downwards.

"You're the same as ever..."

Ash sniffed and gasped for air, "...What?"

"You always get like this before it's time for you to be reborn. You don't remember, but I do. And I wish I could erase the memory of all the hearts I've broken."

Ash stood stunned for a moment, nearly forgetting that he had just been crying. The reaper looked back up at him and placed a hand on his shoulder. "What I'm saying is, you don't have to be afraid. You will never lose yourself."

Ash could feel the tears about to spill out again, but instead, he wiped them away and tried to calm down. If he's done it before, he can do it again. Ash slowly began to walk past the reaper, stopping just short of the light. He gazed at it for a moment more.

"It's okay, whenever you're ready," the reaper told Ash.

Ash then took a deep breath, and finally stepped forward.

The Story of The Reaper

The Reaper never cried. Instead, he sighed, reaching slowly out and seizing a flickering black orb from the chest of a nearby man. The man fell to the ground, writhing in pain. The Reaper cared not. He frowned at the glinting ball of muted light. The texture (if he could have felt anything anymore) was wispy resistance, like a great ball of yarn. He stared at it, pressing firmly on the ball until it blinked out. The shadowy crowd, each containing a dull gray sphere, gathered around the now lifeless man's equally shadowy body. The Reaper scoffed. He believed he was doing the world a service by removing such scum as the man before him.

The Reaper retrieved a tattered piece of parchment from a pocket in his robe. On it was one name, now blurring and fading away: *Robert Eggert*. Before it was even gone, another name materialized. *Loren Mackenzie*. He had no idea who controlled the list. Like a magnet in his chest, a pull immediately turned him to the west. When he had first become a Reaper, he had found this pull disorienting. Now, he barely noticed it. It took him to his destination, and that was all he needed.

As he traveled, he watched the souls of the humans around him. They couldn't see him unless he wanted them to. He never did. He found them despicable, yet intriguing, like a bleeding beetle crawling around on the floor, always in their last seconds. Sooner or later, their name would appear on his list, and he would squeeze their soul out of this world. Time didn't flow the same for him as it did for them. He could not tell you how long he had taken lives.

He hadn't always been like that, but he couldn't remember what or who he was before.

Before long, he reached his destination: a cramped apartment like so many others in the dirty, unnamed city, likely filled with bland decorations and bland people. All were shades of black and grey to him.

Doors meant nothing to him as he floated into the building. The apartment was different from what he would have guessed. Minimalistic, yet many would find it homey. He barely spared the room a glance before turning towards the kitchen, which was blocked by a wall. On the other side, however, a light shone. He had never seen such a light; even the circle in the sky that humans called the sun did not shine so bright. He was curious, and the pull in his chest was stronger than ever. He drifted through the wall and gaped.

Loren Mackenzie's soul was impossibly white.

The Reaper stared. The ball in her chest was pure and shone with a nearly blinding radiance. Color exploded from her. Her back was to him as she sat on a brown wooden barstool at her mottled quartz countertop. Her hair was mahogany and tightly curled, and her skin was a rich, chocolate color. She laughed, holding a phone to her ear. The sound stirred something in him. Something he had never felt in all his time as a Reaper. The thought struck him suddenly that he did not want to extinguish the dazzling blaze that burned within this woman.

He frowned in alarm as he considered this. No sooner had this thought come that his spectral ears picked up her saying, "goodbye," in a musical tone. She turned and started, dropping her phone. She could see him. He wanted her to.

“Holy beans, you scared me! Who are you?”

He could not speak for a moment before uttering, “I am The Reaper.”

She smiled with genuine mirth. His brow furrowed. It was then that she fully realized he was floating several inches above the ground. His hands appeared skeletal. She hesitated, “I see.”

Then, to his great surprise, her smile returned, “Alrighty then. Can I make some tea first? If I’m gonna die, I might as well do it with a good cup of matcha.” Seeing his silence, she smirked. “I’ll promise to make you some, if you’d like.”

“Why do you not fear me?” He asked, aghast.

“I knew it would happen eventually. I’ve always been religious. It seems a little too early if you ask me.” She shrugged, putting a teapot on the stove. “I’m not the boss.”

“Nor am I...” He muttered, more to himself.

She cocked her head. “Who is then?”

“I do not know.”

“Then how do you know you’re supposed to kill me?”

“It is all I can do.”

She paused. “I could teach you how to do some stuff. Making tea is always a good start.” She grinned, pouring and handing him a cup. He felt the heat for the first time.

“Maybe it isn’t your calling in life, or death, I suppose, to kill people. Maybe you’re just a... skeleton guy, floating around... in a robe...” She shrugged sheepishly.

He thought about it, then shook his head. “It is my duty to kill you. I must do so.” He rose from the couch, levitating once more. She didn’t stand, instead just watching him as he reached into her and held her soul. It was warm to the touch.

She set down her tea, not having drunk any, and stared into his eyes as he began to press.

“I am sorry,” he said quietly. “I wish it were not this way.”

She waved his apology aside as her breath began to shorten. “No worries.” She gasped in pain, clutching her chest. “Come... find me... on the... other side... yeah?”

He said nothing. He knew it was not possible, but no part of him wanted to tell her that. The once vibrant star was the size of an apple. He slowly continued, trying not to cause her any excess pain.

“You... owe... me... tea...” She simpered faintly.

Her heart stopped. Her soul was gone. The colors vanished. He could feel nothing once more.

And The Reaper cried.

Grim Reaper (Gary)

Here I am, just standing in the middle of my living room, when the insatiable craving of the world's greatest frozen item overcomes my soul. I head to the freezer and get the ice cream cone I've been storing and commence the eating process. I'm about half way through when a piece of ice cream enters the wrong tube of the throat. I begin to fade into the light, when I see the grim reaper himself walk into the room with his cartoonishly large scythe and that dark mysterious void under the hood.

I'm just about ready to accept my fate when suddenly I realize I can just swallow the ice cream and avoid something that could become a tragedy. So I did just that and my life was saved.

"Phew! That was a close one, man!" Said the grim reaper to me.

"You can talk?!" I yell out in response, completely in shock.

"Yep," he says back to me as he lifts down his hood, "Name's Gary," he says as I'm greeted with someone whose looks really couldn't be described any better than just "some guy."

"So... you tryna go bowling?" Asks Gary

Now I'm really confused. I really wasn't expecting the grim reaper to be such a chill dude with all the death he's a part of n' whatnot.

We go bowling and he drives me back to my house with his magic car. He drops me off and says, "Same thing next week? Try not to die this time by the way. Just a little piece of advice, y'know. Anyways, gimme a call any time," Gary

tells me with a comedic undertone.

“Sure thing, Gary! Say hi to the wife for me.” I yell back at him.

He gives me a thumbs up and drives his magical car to the heavens on a magical stairway.

It’s Thursday again, and exactly one week from when Gary paid me a visit. I dial the word “GARY” in the number pad and in less than a second he picks up the phone.

“Alrighty I’m on my way, pal,” he tells me as I hang up the phone. I turn around, and sure enough there he is. We go bowling and get some food afterwards this time at the local Buffalo Wild Wings. He gets the spiciest ones and I get the Honey BBQ, and we watch the basketball game.

He drives me home once again and I get out of his magical car.

“Same thing next week?” Gary asks me in his same comedic undertone. This is actually kind of awesome, I think to myself, I’m literally friends with the grim reaper himself. I get to sleep and carry on with my life.

Next week rolls around, and we head down to the bowling alley like usual. I got 3 strikes in a row and I was pretty pleased with myself.

“Nice one, Bro!” Gary tells me.

Just down the alley, someone hits their 3rd gutterball in a row and Gary laughs at them. You could physically see how this guy felt, the pure fire in his eyes, the clenching of his non-dominant hand as his other one was still holding a bowling ball. He attempts to throw his bowling ball straight at Gary’s head in pure rage. Unfortunately, his aim isn’t exactly perfect, and he hits me instead.

“Well, this sucks,” Gary says as he takes my soul up to Heaven.

“I just died, didn’t I,” I prompted Gary.

“Yeah...” He replies in an awkward tone.

“Well dang it. I guess this means bowling nights will be easier at least,” I say to Gary as my spirit shrugs it off.

So here I am now in Heaven playing bowling every Thursday night with Gary with unlimited chicken wings miles better than anything BWW can offer.

“So I’ve been thinking... I’ve been at this ‘grim reaper’ thing for far too long, and I need someone to take my spot. Would you be interested? It’s the least I could do after that incident down at the bowling alley in the mortal world,” Gary offers me.

“Sure thing! Sounds like fun!” I reply back to him, happily accepting his offer. So this is my life now. Getting infinite power with a job that is really not nearly as dreadful as most might think, with access to as many wings as I want and an awesome scythe I get to hold at all times. I thank Gary for being by my side and getting me as far as I’ve gotten. I’m truly thankful for this opportunity I’ve been given.

Chance

Death never floats fair
It never comes light or kind
It appears unwelcome
Takes that which is small
It doesn't have a path
You can't stop or predict it
It just takes
Death never floats fair
It drags and demands
It creeps
It sneaks
At every moment
At any time
Death never floats fair

Death is for the Weary

The Doctor, The Soldier, The Murderer, The Martyr. He wasn't sure any of them had ever truly fit him. Legundo wasn't sure they ever could. Though now it didn't matter. Now he was no creature of the living. Now he was as dead as any corpse was.

He had expected there to be pain at the end, but there was none. The only thing he could do was stare even as he watched his own body crumple to the ground. Even as he watched his closest confidant and friend clutch at his corpse, tears soaking the shoulder of his ruined clothes. Even as he watched that body get covered in dirt and watched her place a beautiful statue of lies atop his burial. Even as he watched her leave.

He wasn't sure what was meant to happen next. He imagined chains melding together around his wrists to pull him down to the fiery depths, but no such thing came.

He hated it. Where was the pain he deserved! Where was the penance for all the horrible actions he had done? Where was the justice for all the pain he brought into this already terrible world?

He expected to see raging fires and smoldering brimstone, but all he got was the wind rustling the dried leaves on the hill where he died. He watched the sun as it set and the bloody moon as it rose. Just the nature around his grave as the earth kept spinning.

The first sign that anything had changed was the warmth that washed over his body, soothing the phantom aches of life. Then, from one blink to the next, the empty air next to him was replaced by a dark figure tracing one skeletal hand

across the inscription on his grave.

“Such a beautiful creation. She must really care for you,” the figure spoke, startling Legundo so badly he just about stumbled to the ground, only held up by his headstone at his back and the skeletal hand gripping him underneath his arm and imparting the warmth of holding his hands above a lit hearth into his body.

Legundo recovered quickly and bitterly mumbled, “Not that it ever did her any good.”

The figure wrapped an arm around his shoulders. Legundo couldn’t help but tense. “Oh, I’m sure you brought some relief and light to her life, as short as your time together was.”

Legungo chuckled, a low, cracked, broken thing, “She didn’t need someone like me staining her life; she suffered enough without me poisoning her slowly.”

The figure hummed lowly before replying, “She needed someone who knew what it was like to regret. She needed a friend, and you were able to be that for her.”

Legundo looked away, instead tracing each edge of the beautifully crafted headstone that belonged to him. “So what is this? I’m dead right? I already know where I’m going, we don’t need to do a whole song and dance, he questioned, finally taking a good look at the figure, noting the lack of visible face under the layers of dark fabric that seemed to flow around them like they were underwater. This was Death--he knew it almost instinctively.

Death chuckled, “Bitter, aren’t we?” Their voice softened, “No, I am not going to drag you to hell or whatever you believe yourself deserving of. Such a place of eternal punishment does not exist. Nor do I believe you would deserve it were it a place.”

Legundo leaned more heavily on his grave, “You have a weird sense of morality then, I have done so much harm,” he breathed, looking at his hands, clean of all the blood that he felt should be caked on and smeared in every crevice. “I don’t and have never deserved light at the end of the road. I have killed, lied, and failed everyone around me!”

Death let him talk until he was just shaking against the statue of an angelic presence that would never suit him. Death reached out their skeletal hand towards him before placing it on his shoulder, “Let me tell you something, child.” Legundo found himself leaning into it despite himself. “Death is not, and has never been a place of punishment. Good. Evil. Only concepts created by man to understand the ways of the world. Everything lives. During those lives, they take actions, and regardless of what those actions were, they still return to me all the same. And eventually, once they are ready, they return to life once more.”

“I don’t deserve that.”

“It’s not about what you believe you deserve.”

“Tell me how many,” he demanded, “How many lives have I taken!”

“6,313.” Death replied, “6,313 deaths are attributed to you both directly and indirectly.”

“6,313,” he repeated in shock before laughing bitterly, “ I killed 6,000 people and you still believe I deserve peace! What have I ever done to deserve that!”

“You lived Legando, and that’s all you need to do to deserve time to rest. You lived. You killed, and you regret, you saved to try and repent. I don’t see why any of what you did changes the fact that you lived.”

Legundo's legs crumpled underneath him. He was a puppet with his strings cut; the only thing he had the energy to do was cling to the cloak of the god in front of him, "I'm sorry," he mumbled.

Death bent down and carefully picked him up, carrying him as if he were just a mere child. "I told you, death is for the weary; it's okay. Now rest, child."

And ~~The Doctor, The Soldier, The Murderer, The Martyr~~ Legundo finally did.

Eyes In The Water

By: Emily Thomas



The inspiration for this piece came from EmilyThomas's love for cats especially for her two cats at home. This piece was created with a moriré creating completely new colors and designs. Emily's spark for art came from an art class she took in 3rd grade and she's been painting ever since.

Untitled

A young man sits on the ledge of the window, looking out at the city. He gazes longingly as he watches the children playing in the park. A sigh escapes his lips as the children kick a ragged soccer ball through the street. The sun sets in the distance, and the clouds set the stage for a beautiful sunset that people will miss as they eat dinner at tables, fight within the walls of their homes, or work in the offices they hide in every evening.

So many people miss the beauty of nature while looking for the jewels society promises to give them. As the young man watches the beauty of the world around him, he notices a little boy standing on the sidelines of the soccer game. The boy clutches a small stuffed tiger. There is a blue patch on his paw and a brown smudge on his tail from being played with in the dirt.

As he clutches the small tiger to his chest, the boy stares longingly up at the children playing soccer. They are so much bigger than him, so much scarier. Slowly, the boy turns away and walks towards his house. Before he enters the threshold of his warm, comforting home with his soft mother and baby brother, he turns, looks at the young man in the window, and waves.

The man in the window waves back reluctantly. He did not know the boy knew he was watching. However, after the boy enters the house, the young man can't take his eyes off the door. The reality that ostracized him from those other children, happily kicking a ball around, brought the young man back to the same story, years before.

He had been that young boy clutching a stuffed monkey, watching as the older children played games out in the field behind their house. And then for the third week that summer, he shuffled on home, waved to his grandfather in the window, and staggered inside.

When he entered his house from the darkening outside world, he smelled the chocolate cake his mother had been crafting earlier as it baked in the oven. His sister's music blared from her room upstairs, his father was nowhere to be found, and his grandfather sat in his rocking chair, staring out the window.

“How was playing games, Ollie?” His mother asked, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

“It was great!” he replied, untied his shoes, and set them on the rack. His voice, to his own knowledge, sounded strained and empty. Surely his mother noticed. Instead, she tilted her head in the direction of his grandfather, motioning to go spend time with him. Spending time with his grandfather was one of the worst pastimes Ollie could imagine. The man just sat in his chair and stared out the window, only getting up to eat solemnly at the dinner table, sleep, and use the restroom.

Ollie sat down next to his grandfather and sighed. Another hour spent staring longingly outside at the kids playing soccer. They sat in silence for a short while before his grandfather shifted in his chair. Ollie glanced at him and watched as the old man reached for the monkey in his arms and traced the faint smile on the stuffed animal's face.

Then, they stared at each other. They stayed like that for a while before his grandfather spoke. “I used to have a stuffed animal just like you.” His voice was coarse and rough

from lack of use.

Ollie just stared at him.

“When I was younger, I was also as small as you. The kids outside wouldn’t let me play either.” His grandfather had tilted his head to look out the window again. “One day, I was fed up with it and demanded they let me play and not discriminate against me for my small size, though I didn’t use quite big words.” He chuckles and folds his fingers in his lap.

“Then, they pushed me to the ground and told me to go home. So I did. I was ashamed by my outrage. When I told my mother about it, she sat me down to stare at all of the kids and told me a story. She told me the story of a lost tiger, who was small, weak, and young. He was swimming all around the rainforest where he lived, trying to find where he belonged, trying to make the other animals see him.

“When he came across sloths, they waved him away and swung slowly through the trees. When he came across a poisonous dart frog, he almost lost an eye! And when he came across a slithering snake, he was almost lured into the crushing folds of its body. He was so lost and didn’t know what to do. He did not belong in the rainforest with all these terrifying creatures. Eventually, he stopped looking and realized that while he was so busy looking for animals to belong with, he was missing the beauty of the rainforest.

“The trees and vines hung lower over his head, and sunlight streamed through partings in the branches. Flowers and moss hug the floor of the rainforest, and the humidity clings to the air. Birds chirp in the canopies and bugs crawl along the trunks of the trees.

“Then the tiger swam upon a lonely monkey sitting at the base of a tree trunk. The monkey was shaking and scared. When the tiger came upon the monkey, she ran away. But slowly, the tiger stayed next to her until she became comfortable. Eventually, they came to realize they were looking for a friend.

“It was an unexpected friendship. But in the end, it was perfect. The monkey and the tiger lasted till the end of time, even through the ups and downs.”

Ollie’s grandfather looks back out the window as the sun disappears beyond the horizon. The pinks, oranges, and purples dissipate into the blue-black of the night, the stars peeking through the darkness. Ollie sits across from his grandfather and watches him. He knew grandparents were wise, but never his grandfather.

Quietly, Ollie stands up to go to his room. He pictures a tiger in his mind, a tiger swimming through the water of a rainforest. He takes pens and pencils used for previous art projects when he had been rejected by the boys playing games outside.

He starts to draw eyes in the water.

Eyes in the Water

Ripples spread.
They look like eyes,
They look like stripes
On the water.

It isn't dead.
Looking for a prize,
Moving between the stipes,
It doesn't get calmer.

The water moves apart,
In the middle are the real stripes.
Great paws make the rocks start.
Every other animal bows and cripes,
Royal king of the jungle.

The eyes in the water.

Searching

There were eyes in the water,
Waiting,
Searching,
For what?
They couldn't be sure.

A meal,
Possibly.

They could see the hunger in its eyes.
The clawing,
Trembling,
Trapped in the serene.

A graceful beast,
Ready for a feast.

Yes.

That's what was in those eyes.
The hunger that lies
In all creatures
Animals,
And the human race.

Hunger and Grace.

They grabbed their brush.
They too, were searching for a meal.
A meal much different,

And all the same.
They dragged it through the green.

Yes.

This would be the place.
This dream.

Eyes in the Water

En el espejo azul del río callado
Ojos que en el agua han quedado
Como luceros que el alma ha tocado,
Secretos en el mundo silencio guardado
Los ojos combinando con el color de la agua
Brillando cerca de las olas en silencio
Agua que canta con voz tan clara
Los ojos vigilan la noche preparada
Un puente sutil que nunca separa
Ojos misteriosos en el agua sin fin.

Translated Version:

In the blue mirror of the silent river,
Eyes that have remained within the water—
Like stars touched by the soul,
Secrets kept in the world's silence.
The eyes blend with the water's hue,
Shimmering silently beside the waves—
Water that sings with a voice so clear.
The eyes keep watch over the waiting night—
A subtle bridge that never divides—
Mysterious eyes in the endless water.

The City Is My Church

By: Joslyn Breiter



Jocelyn Breiter is writing a TV show. Think of every book you've read about the rebellious girl who is misunderstood in her world. Think of those urges you had as a teenager, you wanted to run away to get away from your never-ending problems. That story, that feeling, that ostracism is the inspiration for *The City is my Church*. (And, of course, her TV show) The beauty of art is that anyone can interpret anything about a canvas with color, shades, and tints. The following pieces of writing have the same lonely theme. The feeling of not knowing where to belong, the feeling of being surrounded by people. but still feeling alone. *The City is my Church* is a recognition to anyone and everyone that it is never too late to find out where we belong.

Dreaming

Everyone crowded around me. I looked up and smiled at my friends and family, taking in the moment. They could tell, however, and started chanting, “Make a wish! Make a wish!” I rolled my eyes and blew. All seventeen candles instantly went out and a thin trail of smoke rose into the sky. Everyone cheered and clapped.

While mother cut the cake, my little nephew jumped onto my lap. “What did you wish for?” he asked.

“I wished that—” suddenly a gust of wind surrounded me. It jerked me out of my seat and pulled me up into the sky. My wings fumbled but then caught on the air, as I started to glide. As I flew away, I looked back and saw a seventeen year old girl tell her nephew her wish. A pang of jealousy rose in me, but I stamped it down and turned away.

I landed on the small balcony with a thud. Shakily, I stepped through the open window and limped towards my bed. As I crawled under the sheets, my wings folded back into my skin. My body ached and shook. But I did my best to tune out the pain and let the chirping of the machine lull me to sleep.

I slowly opened my eyes and peered out at the small white room, disoriented. Beside me, my mom was crocheting a scarf. She looked up and caught me staring. “There you are,” she whispered. Her hand snaked its way toward me and squeezed my arm.

I mustered up a small smile in response. She always said that, whenever I came back from my trips.

“Happy birthday,” she said, leaning over to kiss me on my forehead. She then quickly retreated and went back to crocheting. But I saw it. The guilt in her eyes. I was about to reassure her, tell her that she didn’t need to feel guilty about not celebrating my birthday. I was going to tell her about my party at the beautiful park and about the delicious looking carrot cake with the seventeen candles.

But the words caught in my throat.

She would never believe me. She never has.

I looked away, my eyes retracing the cracks in the ceiling for about the hundredth time.

The next few days were torture. I had been banned from the balcony. No matter how often I whined, my parents refused to let me go outside. I was confined to bed, stationary and unchanging while the world moved on around me. Even my parents moved, buzzing busily in and out or around and around the white room.

I was stuck in time.

I stared out the large window. I watched as the cream curtains rippled. I listened to the steady beats of the city, cars humming and honking, people laughing and shouting. The noise grew and grew, until the crescendo made my vision sway with pain.

My father walked over and closed the windows. The curtains slowly died, laying flat and stark against the wall. My father talked for a while, chirping nonsense that went in one ear and out the other. I nodded and hummed in the appropriate spots. Satisfied, my father left the room.

Time passed. The septic smell overpowered me. The room grew frigid. The empty walls loomed. Everything was out of proportion. I was cold, but I was hot. I was numb, but I felt pain. I tried to rise, but I stayed pinned to my mattress.

I screamed. And as I screamed, my wings burst from my back. I breathed a sigh of relief as I swooped from my bed, threw open the window, and burst into the blue sky.

I didn't try to find a new memory like I usually did, I just wanted to fly.

The world welcomed me with open arms, letting me twirl and soar through the fresh air. Nothing held me back as I dove, letting the tips of my wings dance across the windows of passing skyscrapers. I raced cars and weaved through crowds.

I flew until the city was specks of light in the distance. I flew over a dark ocean that mirrored the vibrant pinks, oranges, and purples. I slowed down and skimmed over the water, letting it run between my outstretched fingers.

But then, the horizon began to tilt. The beautiful canvas of colors bled together, creating a sickly, familiar white.

I was yanked backward toward the city. As I was reeled away, my wings began to disintegrate, leaving me with a pain beyond words. I didn't land on the balcony. I was pushed into through the window and tumbled onto the floor.

All I could do was lay in a broken heap of cords and body. A doll cut from its strings. I stared sightlessly at the clean tiled floor and listened to the weakening beep, beep, beep of the machine.

Some time later, my parents found me on the floor, reaching towards a closed window.

The change happened around midnight. I felt a new pressure in my shoulders, but my wings did not come. Instead, the pressure overtook my body, creating a sense of complete numbness. No, not numbness, weightlessness.

I began to rise. I floated right out of bed and up to the ceiling. Below me, the rhythmic chirp of the machine changed. It began to rapidly speed up its tempo.

“Amy,” my father said, panicked.

I paused, hovering just below the ceiling and looked back. My body was still on the bed, hair matted and wet with sweat, face pale and gaunt. Tangled and small in the white sheets. But for the first time in months, my face looked peaceful.

My mom dropped her scarf project and rushed over to my side. I watched as the yarn rolled across the room, leaving a trail of red. Unknown people rushed into the room, carrying carts and syringes. But they wouldn't work.

I turned away. I didn't need the window. I rose through the hospital's ceiling, up and up and up. I rose until the stars were the only thing left to see. They were shining like candles. Flickering gently in a sea of inky black. Everything was peaceful except for the shrill, unbroken note that had followed me into the sky.

But as the inky sea enveloped me, it cut off abruptly, the silence echoing in the dark.

The City

I overlook the city,
Seeing more than just beautiful houses.

I overlook the city,
Seeing families, singles and spouses.
Each with their own trials, struggles, and strife.

I overlook the city,
I see a man waiting to find his wife.

I overlook the city,
Seeing those who are longing for a friend.

I overlook the city,
Seeing some wishing their lives to end.
They weep, pray and try to cope.

I overlook the city,
I see a girl with no hope.

I overlook the city,
Seeing the sinners turning to their God.

I overlook the city,
Seeing Him accepting His flawed.
All are imperfect, that's what this world contrives.

I overlook the city,
I see their futures, their perfect afterlives.

The Sacred City

The city is my sanctuary,
It is much more than ordinary.
The wet pavement colored like stained glass,
Telling the story of all who pass.
The choir sings all sorts of things,
The evidence of all human beings.
Sermons are painted on the walls.
The horns ring out, calling all
To the altar, cold and gray,
Where the neon lights wash all our sins away.
The sky scrapers reach like hands in prayer,
In hopes to finally touch the heavens sweet air.
No matter the day, this man-made grace
Is more than just a city, it's my place.

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Implosion

By: Ava Shaw



It was unbeknownst to me that this magnificent portrayal of defeat was inspired by a Pinterest photo. Ava Shaw created this masterpiece of a girl in a bathtub surrounded by stress, pressure, and the collapse of her soul, while the rest of the world continues its descent into her sanity. Like vultures, this pressure rips away every ounce of life left within the poor girl's heart, until all that's left is the skeleton, dreaming in the tub. Some friends have told Ava this portrait looks quite like her friend. This begs the interpretations that art so often does. The following poem(s) and stories show how, in anyone's life, the mere expectations of the world around us can leave the charcoal outline of a girl in an ever-rising water of pressure.

Watching her Implode

I would rather she tell me that she didn't like me right off the bat. Even that she hated me. I would rather have had straight and effective communication rather than elongated flirtation that drew me into a hope that would eventually break me. She doesn't know what she does to a guy's brain. The possibility feels impossible that I could ever recover from what she did to mine.

This horror story began a year ago the moment I first saw her. I had just made the basketball team and everything felt right.

The basketball court was full of tall guys like me. I didn't feel freakishly tall anymore. I felt human.

Coach Baker practically screamed, "Alright everybody welcome to our first practice. We are so glad to have you all playing on our team and are excited for a great season,"

He kept rambling on and his voice faded in my mind as if rap music was playing in the background. He introduced us to a handful of coaches and assistants. None of which I cared about until he announced Abby.

"And this is Abby. She is another one of your team managers."

When I looked at her, I was stunned. She was beautiful. I thought *I need to know this girl.*

Oh how I wish I hadn't.

She was so much more than beautiful. From one look at her, I could see everything that she was. Her personality shone through her eyes, and her emotions showed in the way she shaped her lips. Every encounter after that revealed more about who she was, through her very presence. Her attitude

rang out in the tone of her voice, and her opinions were expressed through the movement of her arms. She was confident, bold and strong. I had never met anyone like her.

Still I wish I hadn't.

That summer, we shared the same friend group, so we would spend almost every day together. By then, it was clearer than water that she liked me too. Every text and hangout was initiated by her, and whenever we were together, she found every little way to flirt with me. She would face her body toward mine, making me feel like I was the only one who mattered. She would lean in when I spoke, and then let me know that I smelled *so good*, which sent silent butterflies through my stomach. She would play with her hair right in front of me, which played with something in my mind that made me want to reach out and touch her bright blonde hair. All I had to do was man up and admit that I had feelings for her too. Unfortunately, I didn't until December arrived.

It was just Abby and I outside, sitting by the pond, at our friend McKenzie's house. My eyes were locked on the water, unable to look at her. My hands were shaky so I tucked them underneath my legs, trying to prove to my nerves I had control.

“Hey I've been meaning to talk to you, Abby,” I calmly stated after finally peeling my stare off the pond and onto her face.

“Then talk.” She quickly responded with a smiley face. My mouth hung open while nothing came out of it. An *uuuhhh* sound possibly occurred but I can't remember.

She laughed at me before saying, “Charley why do you look so nervous? Are you about to tell me you have a crush on me or something?”

I raised my eyebrows, smiled and shrugged. She looked at me with her head tilted like she was a confused puppy dog. As the silence between us grew, so did my nauseousness. I quickly answered, “Yes. I am about to tell you, I like you.”

The posture of her neck straightened then leaned down as she swallowed.

I laughed in relief. I had finally said the words! “I like you a lot, Abby. I’ve liked you since I met you actually and I’ve always wanted to tell you that, so I’m sorry I didn’t sooner.”

She looked down at her shoes, and her whole body seemed to shrink in on itself.

Softly, she asked, “Charley, can we just stay friends?” I’ve never heard or seen her so quiet. Everything about her was always loud in the best way possible. She wore her feelings, her personality, her everything, on her sleeve. That same girl was now suddenly turned inward, like all the emotions I was always able to read had nowhere to go but down.

I watched something in her implode.

“What?” I asked.

“I just want to be your friend. I don’t...” she paused, trying to find her words.

The sickness in my stomach returned when I started to realize what was happening. “Don’t what?” I loudly questioned, as I imagined the bullets that would soon hit me.

“Know. I don’t know.” she said, locking her arms around herself like she might come apart otherwise.

“Yes you do, Abby! How do you feel about me? You have to feel something about me!”

She finally looked at me but when I saw her face, that was all I saw. There was no emotion, no nothing. Her eyes were cold and her silence was loud.

“I don’t *have* to feel anything.”

She unwrapped herself from her own grasp and stood up in what appeared to be a controlled manner. Then she left.

That was the last time that I saw her.

All our friends told me that she simply didn’t like me but I always wondered if it was more than that. I wondered if the guilt of leading me on for years had attacked her that night. I wondered if she would only let herself fantasize about a relationship, but never let herself be in one. I spent so much time wondering so many things.

Whatever caused that implosion that night is something I no longer care to find out.

Enmeshment

“Darling?” Mosi’s hair stands up as she hears The Madam call from down the hall. Water soaks into her dark fur as she hears the *click click click* of her heels. Madam steps into the washroom, her tight curls flowing down her neck, resting at her shoulders. The antennae that rises from the inner corners of her eyes must have sensed the running water of Mosi’s shower. The chitin wings that hang from the same corner twitch as she blinks. She wears a long, floor-length, off-the-shoulder black gown. The bright lights of the washroom hit her cool, deep brown skin sharply. Madam quickly grabs the basket with Mosi’s name on it and walks over to the bathtub.

“You know you’re supposed to wait for me, dear,” she pulls up a stool and sits next to the tub.

“I can bathe myself, Madam.” Mosi’s voice is light, almost small.

Madam smiles. “Yes, but my husband needs things done a certain way to keep your treatment going. As long as you are his patient, I am to make sure you are clean.” She grabs a bottle and pours the liquid into her hand. “Come closer, dear, back towards me.”

Mosi turns and faces the wall with her back towards The Madam, her hands are firm in her hair as she massages the soap into Mosi’s scalp. Her hands are gentle as always, mindful of her sharp claws, she hums a melody and tilts Mosi’s head back.

“Close your eyes,” Madam covers Mosi’s eyes and pours a pitcher of water on the patient’s head. The water runs down

Mosi's back, soaking her brown fur and tail. Her ears turn down to avoid the water.

“Darling,” The Madam starts, “you’ve tried bathing yourself three times this week. Though my assistance may feel unnecessary, I assure you it is not.” She rinses her hands and grabs a new bottle, lathering it on a sponge before scrubbing Mosi’s back and shoulders. “You are allowed to bathe whenever you desire, but The Doctor must know when. He needs to schedule your treatment for when you are dry,” she explains, “Turn around. I must wash your front.” Mosi turns around without protest and Madam resumes scrubbing.

“I just wanted to sit under the water, Madam.” Mosi’s voice is quiet and she didn’t meet The Madam’s eyes.

Mosi turns and faces the wall with her back towards The Madam, her hands are firm in her hair as she massages the soap into Mosi’s scalp. Her hands are gentle as always, mindful of her sharp claws, she hums a melody and tilts Mosi’s head back.

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“You were due for a bath regardless, dear,” Madam’s voice is level, clear, “You were quiet the mess yesterday after treatment.” Mosi tenses up at those words. Treatment was hard yesterday, The Doctor almost always had to use restraints with her, but yesterday Mosi had broken them and ripped out the IVs and needles. Madam had to step in and sedate Mosi before she broke The Doctor’s equipment.

“All that dried blood is bad for your fur, darling.” Madam pours another pitcher of water down Mosi’s front. “My husband needs to know what condition you’re in for treatment. That includes everything from injuries to how much your hair has grown,” she explains as she lays out the towels on the rack.

“I don't understand why the treatments have to hurt so much” Mosi’s voice grew firm. Unlike the quietness from moments before.

Madam stopped for barely a second before speaking again.

“Look at me,” she demands. Mosi meets her eyes. Madam’s yellow-green eyes meet her own dark ones. Madam dries her hands and drops the rag.

“You came to us for help. Because for reasons unknown, you have been stuck in half-cat, half-girl form, unable to shift back into a full cat or a full girl.

You agreed to let my husband do whatever he needs to fix you, to restore your magic. Do not pretend to be an unwilling subject.”

“But why is he so intense? Why must you bathe me like a child? Why- ow!” Mosi shouts as she feels a sharp sting in her shoulder and looks down, seeing blood from a shallow cut drop from her shoulder onto her skin. She looks back and sees the red on Madam’s claws. Stem rises from the water and Mosi thinks she sees herself for a moment. Her long dark hair, her warm brown skin and fur, her wide eyes, and sharp claws. She pants, feeling the room get smaller and smaller until Madam speaks again.

“You will not question my husband. He is your only hope at regaining your magic and once you are healed from whatever ill you, you will be free to return to your tribe” Madam’s voice was cold and final as she reached for the bandages. Mosi nods once and looks down. The Madam takes a breath and cleans the cut.

“My husband works so hard on you, darling. He will never do anything that isn't absolutely necessary” Mosi nods at Madam’s words. The woman finishes patching Mosi up and stands, “You may stay in the water as long as you please.

I’ll come back to help you dry when you’re finished” Madam doesn’t wait for a response. She closes the door to the washroom and walks into the hallway. She passes the laboratory where The Doctor works with the wingless harpy boy and enters the master bedroom where she waits for her husband to finish work. He’ll want to know of the cat’s outburst.

Risk

The virtues of others have torn my world apart.
I should have known this from the very beginning.
The expectations, the memories, the deeds that have been
done.

They have taken what is left of my heart.
They're running, they're chasing me, their souls over their
heads, grinning.

In the end, I have taken many chances.
All of them have been for other people.
I've gone through my life with so many awkward glances.
In the end, the results have never been equal.

Sitting here now, I should have recognized it from the start.
I should have heard the black crow singing.
Because crows never sing, not even when the deed is done.
I have been here, I have played the part.
I've tried to be the perfect girl, the perfect girlfriend, perfect
and smiling.

I could have lost everything for perfect chances.
Maybe I already have; the implosion is lethal.
But these emotions, these expectations with their butterfly
dances,
Have taken over my world to become as black as a beetle.

I have taken the role of household art.

A jewel and diamond people wear on their fingers, glittering
and shining.

But my beauty is dimming, my deed is done.

Darkness has taken over the affairs of my heart.

Now all that is left is the girl, in the darkness, drowning.

Masquerade

She sits there,
silent.

Eyes, foggy and dark,
her mind somewhere far from here.

Around, people laugh and jostle.

Drinks clink and spill, lights strobe and flash.

There are “how do you do’s” and “I’m quite fine, thank you’s”
Meaningless jabbering and connections.

In the corner, she sits.

She stares.

Darkness clings to her,
like a silk blanket.

But that miserable girl,
is the most joyous
of them all.

For the rest,

masquerade

and are only a shade

of who they really are.

A Helpless Thought

A spiral of thoughts can hurt a lot,
Like a lost love that walked.

A helpless sought lost in a broken part,
When they are so deeply connected to another heart.

Holding tears because you broke me apart,
I never let go until emotions was threw afar apart.
Separate people but understood each others heart,
A scent to complete another part.

Hating you cause you left me for someone's heart.



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