

# *The Rubicon*

*Troy University's Literary Journal*

## **The Rubicon**

© 2017 Troy University Department of English

Many thanks to the students of Troy university for their support and interest. We are a small, student-run publication, and your contribution makes a great difference to our work. Please help us in our efforts to bring fresh new writers into your hands twice a year.

Submissions may include short stories, poems, literary essays, short plays, and non-fiction. Electronic submissions and queries are accepted at [litjournal@troy.edu](mailto:litjournal@troy.edu). Manuscripts of original student work are accepted throughout the academic year, although response time will be delayed during the summer months.

**The Rubicon** is published twice annually by Troy University.

*Front Cover design by Kayle Weeks and Alaina Hornberger.  
Interior layout and design by Alaina Hornberger.*

# The Rubicon

## Fall 2016

### Poetry

Autoreligion.....	4
Blood Money.....	4
Confession of a Sinner .....	5
From Here and There.....	5
My Lungs .....	6
the last summer .....	6
Moonlit Symphony.....	7
Untitled.....	8
Sheets.....	9
Juicy Fruit.....	10
Really From.....	11
Seasons.....	12
The Spaces in Between.....	12
The Creature.....	13

### Prose

She Laughed in Another Language.....	14
Dearly Beloved.....	16
Birthday.....	16
EMILY.....	18
The Moth.....	19
The Piano.....	20
The God of the Sea.....	21
Thou Shalt Not.....	23

## **Autoreligion**

by Katie Currington

my body is  
a sanctuary.  
i am a place of worship,  
i am my own god.

i sit in the back pew,  
looking up to the body  
i have become,  
my hips that resemble  
mountains that

can never be moved,  
my hands open wide,  
refusing to hold onto  
any of the self hate  
that ever spread

onto my body.  
i am beautiful  
in the most raw form.  
hymns of my power and strength

fill into the sanctuary.  
i close my eyes and  
raise my head high.  
there is no one above me,  
and no one can touch me.

## **Blood Money**

by Hannah Edwards

I cannot afford to feel  
I cannot afford to love.  
My heart empties from hands reaching deeper into the bi-fold of its skin

The blood from the very arms that hold him falls out like loose change  
From outturned pockets

The water in my eyes removes itself and is given to him in payments  
Made in sleepless nights.

But there is no more when it is all gone.  
This love is not a loan

It is blood money

## Confession of a Sinner

by Abdullah Mohammad-Sadiq

Forgive me for I have sinned

Eyes that thou hath bestowed me with I have used to lust over women

I have used my mouth to intoxicate myself to be numb to my sorrow

My tongue to curse my own mother.

I have used my hands to satisfy my lust by touching a female

My fingers to twirl her uncovered hair, though I'm not her husband

Forgive me for I seek refuge between a woman's thighs and not verses  
from thy holy book.

Forgive me for when the agony becomes overwhelming

I flee to the evils of the world

And not the man that hath brought me to it.

## From Here and There

by Kalen Busby

I am from dust//

Descendant of first parents

Adam's rib//Eve's defiance

Her spirit within me

I am from cosmos//

Existing in mind, body and spirit

I am from stardust//

Constellations bursting in song

Carbon images swirling in motion

I am from all the places I am//

Restless in one place

Running from oblivion

I am from all the places I have been//

A conglomeration of eccentric ideas

Mosaic of those who move through my life

I am from all the places I will be//

Mountains and Sea

Dust and Wind

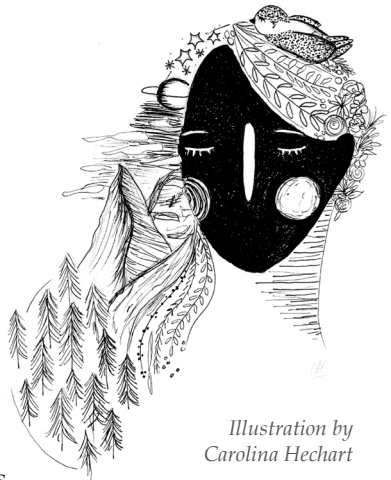


Illustration by  
Carolina Hechart

**My Lungs**  
by Alyssa Enrile

My lungs are trees  
Lit in a forest fire  
Sparked by your smile  
I'm filled with smoke  
From burning teeth  
Branded  
In my mind  
And I can't breathe

**the last summer**  
by Katie Currington

your happiness  
is sitting in a restaurant  
with your friends and  
making stupid jokes,  
cursing and laughing just  
a little too loud.

your happiness  
is playing video games  
in your friends' living room.

your happiness is car ride  
conversations,  
feeling the wind in your hair  
and being completely honest.

happiness is admitting that  
you are fucking scared  
and worried and stressed,  
happiness is not letting those  
things stop you from leaving the house.

the feeling of the sun on your face,  
the heat seeming to touch every  
part of it,  
your happiness is being able  
to enjoy it.

## Moonlit Symphony by Jazmin Garret

The first night I heard your voice in my ear,  
I relaxed & said to myself "He reminds me of forever."  
Forever – where every fantasy begins,  
Especially for the hopeless romantics like myself.  
The grandeur of forever is never lost,  
Not even in the storms of ex lovers & potential endings.  
After a few nights, after finding myself unable to sleep,  
After being soaked in thoughts of me wishing I could feel the way you do—  
Thoughts of your body laid over me  
Like a blanket trying to keep the secrets of many beds,  
Your hands saying to my skin, "You are not perfect, but you belong to me.  
Even now, I am making you mine & you will forever belong to me."  
You want all of me to belong to you—  
This untouched soul, this undefiled being,  
This woman whose body has not yet been discovered...  
And I sat repeating this phrase,  
Being reminded of the night I lay awake watching you sleep.  
Your arms wrapped around me as if I were the only mountain left standing  
In a turbulent sea.  
Your soul eases awake.  
And regardless of how many times I've asked you not to,  
You stare at me as if my name is "urgency."  
That look... The look that makes me want to enter your deluge,  
Overwhelmed with its flirtatious signs & sensual vigor.  
I want to let your gaze drown me in this yearning that I am yet  
Too young to resist and too old to let slip – let it find me weak with  
Lust, and guilt, and feelings that just don't seem to be going away.  
Your voice reminds me so much of this.  
I mean forever is a place where even the slightest of feelings  
Dwell and the lowest of fires burn, and the beauty of eternity is saved  
In every kiss and every hug.  
If that doesn't make you think of waking up next to the same woman  
You fell asleep next to, and not wanting her to leave,  
Then I don't know what does.  
At times, I could wrap my arms around the whole of you,



*Illustration by Nguyen Nguyen*



But I can never oblige myself to stay.  
Because I am clearly too late to be your first.  
And I am not sure if I am ready to be your last.  
So my lips need not long for you, although my soul refuses to forget you,  
But trust me, I am remembering to forget you as best as I can but B...  
It feels like you belong to me.  
I will forget you and miserably search for you in every proceeding suitor,  
Only to find fragments.  
The mere absence of you is larceny to my heart  
Where all things fall silent when you do not speak.  
You are that one voice that makes the world seem to go dead silent.  
You are beauty with depth.  
You are more than just decoration.  
And your name pops up in my head every time I pick up a pencil,  
Or pull up a blank screen.  
I hear about how forever is so romantic.  
Even in all of its abstract being, it still has a voice.  
I hear it ask me, "Why isn't B here and why isn't his  
embrace warming up to you?"  
My heart explodes into an almost tearful arrangement of dreadful melody,  
And I say to myself, "Because I cannot allow myself to feel the same."  
It said to me. "You fool. Do you not remember? Love belongs to you.  
You are imagining Forever while thoughts of B linger...  
And right now... He has the best part of you."

**Untitled**  
by Victoria Hunt

The leaves changed colors again, turning from a rich green to a brittle reddish-brown.  
The cold crept in again, my breath becomes a white cloud when I speak.  
The cold wind burns my face.  
I see neighbors running from the chill, escaping behind thick insulated doors.  
Finding comfort in their cozy homes.  
The snow finds the ground again, greeting her with a frigid kiss.  
Once again, the season keeps me at bay.  
Remaining indoors for a while, waiting for the slightest bit of color.  
Awaiting the familiar green and all her friends.



## Sheets

by Alyssa Enrile

Your sheets are just a memory  
A thought in my brain  
That won't go away  
Deep red like  
bruised lips and strawberry jam  
Soft meltingly soft  
Like the universe took  
The definition of the word  
Comfort  
And made the perfect  
Pallet to sleep on  
Out of clouds  
Because in those sheets  
It was like I was sky high  
It was in those sheets  
You first told me you loved me  
On your birthday  
Drunk from rum  
And stricken with desire  
To know everything about me  
Every inch of me  
In those sheets  
I found the scars on your chest  
Indented truthfully  
Like memories of your past  
In those sheets  
You grasped my bare body  
For the first time  
And you held on so tight  
You left me hickeys  
Like I had something in my skin  
That you needed  
that you had to taste  
Drawing it out with your lips  
Satisfying a thirst unknown  
It was in these sheets  
I got to know you

**Juicy Fruit**  
by Corina Weiser-Cox

I called you four times last night,  
too drunk on vodka and nicotine  
to remember  
I hate your face.

I made sure to tell you  
I fucked guys hotter than you  
and I made sure to tell you  
I love you  
even though I don't.

So, when he put his tongue down my throat and it tasted like Juicy Fruit,  
I made sure to tell you that  
it was better than anything you've ever given me,  
because there were always drawbacks to your gifts,  
-bruises from your fists,  
blood pouring from your bites-  
and he only gave me pleasure.

I don't know his name.  
That doesn't matter.  
He never made me feel like a stain  
of mold on the wall.

He just fucked me and left.  
And I hate you for what you stole,  
my innocence, my love, my health.  
And I hate you for what you gave me.  
Pretending the scars were only presents,  
a sign of your love.

If I could I'd give you everything in return  
instead I've run a thousand miles away  
to get drunk and fuck  
people I don't know.

That's what you did to me  
made me afraid and fearless.

**Really From**  
by Corina Weiser-Cox

The first time you asked if I was Asian  
I tried not to cry  
because you didn't see  
my grandmother cross a river of flowing immigrant blood  
for the American dream.

The second time you told me I had to be Asian  
You said there had to be some  
other  
ancestry that explains my  
almond eyes and pale skin  
as if I couldn't be my heritage  
as if I couldn't be what my grandmother and mother gave me  
as if I couldn't be Mexican without the  
brown skin and curly hair.

You asked where I was *really* from  
and why my skin wasn't  
as brown as you expected.

I said my grandmother didn't carry  
thirteen brothers and sisters  
on her broken back  
crawling  
under fences of barbed wire  
in dirt filled with insects that bite  
in clothes that hadn't been washed in two months  
with tears that hadn't been dried in four years  
for you to ask me  
where I'm *really* from.

I told you once  
I told you twice  
I told you three times.  
I didn't get mad  
we all make mistakes  
but please know I am I who I am  
because the women in my family  
sacrificed their worlds  
so you could ask me  
where I'm *really* from.

## Seasons

by Elizabeth Hollis

At times the river rushed in torrents, the way years flew by in a fast-paced life.

Sometimes the creek ran slowly, reminding me of the years I spent with you.

The way time seemed to stand still; like that time at the frozen lake. The time our breaths came in short, airy puffs. Proving that they were as real as that moment. The moment I realized I loved you.

The frozen lake will always remind me of that moment.

The same way the rushing river will remind me of flying time.

In all seasons, I'd love you still.

## The Spaces in Between

by Alyssa Enrile

I found you in small places.  
In the reading nook of my mind,  
in the sun spots behind my eyelids.  
I found you in deep blue shutters, and mint houses.  
I found you in canvases, in graphic prints of the city.  
And I found you  
in the spaces between my favorite book,  
Because you were always there.  
In between the lines.  
In between my dreams.

If you gave me an inch  
I would live in that inch  
Until  
You gave me a mile  
Of smiles  
Then I could be okay  
For a while

My lungs are trees  
Lit in a forest fire  
Sparked by your smile  
I'm filled with smoke  
From burning teeth  
Branded  
In my mind  
And I can't breathe



Illustration by  
Carolina Hechart

**The Creature**  
by Rebecca Feagin

The quiet creature sat  
Alone upon her perch  
Eyes open with knowing;  
As silent as a church.

Though many others spoke  
She only listened loud  
Her head cocked to the side;  
A solemn word be found.

When one turned to another  
And questioned her deep still  
The creature simply smiled  
And softly said, "I will."

How curious this sound  
From small lips to their ears.  
When they turned to wonder  
Her eyes were brimmed with tears.

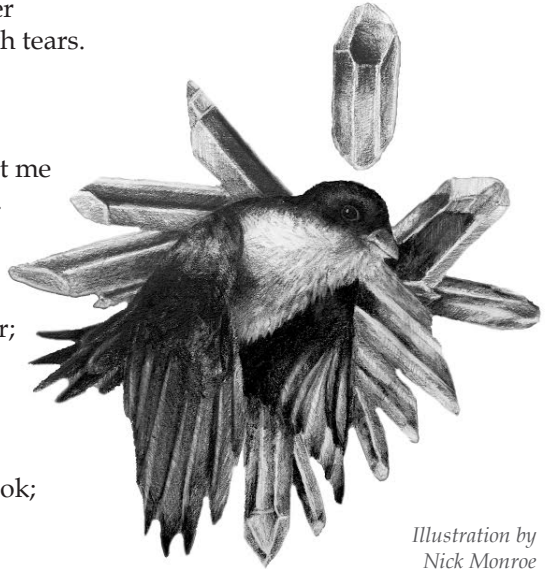
"I fear that I am fearful,  
Afraid of words to say.  
The world would soon reject me  
And so my voice does stray.

So day to day I sit here  
Alone upon my perch,  
Ruled by overwhelming fear;  
Silent as a church."

The others were astounded  
For ne'er had she spoke  
Yet here her small voice shook;  
Her silence finally broke.

The creature then withdrew  
With a whimper not quite shrill.  
She would not be forgotten

Nor those two, queer words, "I will."



*Illustration by  
Nick Monroe*

## She Laughed in Another Language

by Hannah Edwards

She laughed in another language. That is to say, her smile said something I couldn't understand. There was fire where there should have been silence, color where you didn't need it, a grin when all you needed was an answer. And there was no answer in her smile nor in her laugh, ice cold and radiating.

She laughed in another language, which is to say my perplexed ears knew not what she said in her happiness. She looked from one man to another and said little I knew, only words like "thank you" and "careless."

I grinned because my body forgot what else to do when you don't know what to do.

She handed me the bag draped over her open palm like it was a lifeless body she was so proud to have created. I looked at the men around me and wondered what they saw in this. I took the bag and walked away, peeking at her reflection in the shop window to my left. I didn't dare look back so obviously, but I did look back, oh how I looked back and saw her golden hair and silver eyes.

I wondered what had gone into the making of those eyes. What stars had been sacrificed to be poured into her gaze? And she was, just like a star across my sky, so unseen and distant.

I could see her and feel her but I could not know her shape or her color. I did know, however, just how much space she took up, how her volume was her value and how it was all I could think of.

It was 39 days until I saw her again, this time her smile was translated into a shape I could better understand. There were limericks I could fathom, poems I could digest, silences I could interpret.

Her eyes were still that luminescent youth that I had remembered. She handed me a bag in her upturned hand and as I took it from her, I could feel more of the warmth within her skin.

I could see how she could live within that body. I was crawling closer to the stars and was orbiting her happiness, desperate to fall into it.

The next time we spoke was only for a moment and to hear her speak was to feel sunlight again.

I heard the words "*Il est devenue pire*" and I nodded as she smiled through pressed lips. It was poetry, what she said. Poetry I wished I understood, poetry from an author you never wish to meet so as not to disturb the sleeping fantasy of perfection.

I did not see her for many days, how many I do not remember. The days that have gone by since are increasingly shorter with each breath. I remember as a child hearing “we are all dying, from the moment we are born” and I remember believing that on the last day I saw her.

I heard her footsteps on the staircase and I rose to greet her. I fooled myself with ideas of a ballroom growing to surround us as a garden of peace. I ignored the voices downstairs as I welcomed her into the room. I kicked aside my book of definitions and sketches of her words.

I spent my many hours in solitude wishing I were someone different while I decoded and translated her tongue into my own.

She looked at me through swollen eyes as I looked to her upturned hands, empty and bare as a newborn baby, their heart barely present. Where my life had been was now wrinkled skin and bone. Where my sustenance and ability to live had been was now disappointment and despair.

She held no bag and offered me no food or water.

This time when she smiled, I knew exactly what she said.

She said again what I had translated many nights before, “it has become worse.”

And I nodded and she smiled at me through waterfalls in her silver eyes.

I didn’t know what to say to her or how to say it to her.

I took her hands and I turned them down, facing the attic floor that had become my sketch book and home for many months now. I had aged a year or two in this attic but she, she had lived so many lives outside of these walls.

She had seen too much for one to see in a life and so she shed and regrew, shed and regrew until she became someone I could understand, someone I could know.

She lost all of her intricacies and delicate words and just became “too late.”

She became “the end.”

I, in my safe haven so far above the world in its fire and anguish had forgotten what it was like to see the sunlight for so many days that I wondered if it existed at all. I wondered what it would be like to feel the chill of the moon again and when I did see the moon again, in her eyes and in the sky, I remembered what it was like to live, if only for a moment. And I walked into that moonlight, to my own execution underneath her gaze. And I thought, what a tragic thing it is to love someone you can’t even understand.





## Dearly Beloved

by Rhett Coker

The aisle leading to the altar was cleared as the service began. I stared straight down the aisle, anxious for the moment I could see my love. The pews on either sides of the aisle were full of both mine and her families, all of them staring down the aisle waiting for her father. After a few tense seconds, he entered, tears streaming down his face, ready to see her off and give me a few polite words. As he reached the end of the aisle he shook my hand and pulled me into an embrace, whispering through his stifled voice,

“I’m so sorry.”

I pulled away from him, the tears beginning to well in my own eyes, and I nodded acceptingly. We both turned to the coffin, preparing to give our eulogies.

## Birthday

by Austin MacCraw

*Five days until my birthday.*

That’s what I tell myself as I sit in the grass alongside County Road 255, watching the cars go by. Not much to look forward to these days. Ever since I started living here – ha! If you can even call it living – I’ve been struggling to find a purpose. A will to keep going.

I never had to deal with depression before now. I mean, sure I had some rough weeks in the past, but never like this. The darkness I feel now, this mental torment I’ve battled ever since I got here, it never ends. I can’t break free of it. I sit here and wonder, what’s the point of it all? What’s it all leading to? I’ve kept asking myself these questions, and no matter how much I contemplate it, the truth is I don’t know. I’m not sure if I even have a purpose. It’s not like I did anything meaningful when I was younger, and now – well, what on earth could I possibly do now?

*Two days until my birthday.*

I don’t get visitors anymore. At least, not like I used to anyways. When I first got here several years ago, crowds of people stopped by. Family, friends, my fiancée – heck, even some acquaintances I seldom talked to – they all came. More people than I thought would care enough to see me off, that’s for sure. All that love and company, and like an idiot I disparaged it. I was too busy being angry to care.

What infuriated me though? Who did I blame for my situation? Was it God? The world? Myself? Maybe a mixture of all three? Now they’ve all but forgotten me; and here I am, alone. A mere shadow of who I used to be. So why not leave this lonesome life? Why not go towards the light at the end of the tunnel and end this torture? The thought goes through my mind every day, yet I can never bring myself to do it. I’m too much of a chicken; a coward. Fear always outranks freedom; so here I’ll stay, either until I change my mind or until the very end.

*Today is my birthday.*

There's always been a sacred feeling in the air whenever my birthday rolls around. Nothing can ruin that day for me. Even after I ended up here, my birthday has been the calm within the eye of the storm. I can feel the gloom and despair surrounding me; but for a day, it can't touch me. For a day, I have something to look forward to. For a day, I am happy.

My love only visited me three times here. When she first came, it was with everyone else. She brought a deep red rose for me which I scorned, taking it as a slap in the face. I was never the romantic type, but it felt wrong to receive such a flower when I hadn't ever done the same for her. What was even worse was being forced to watch the rose shrivel up and die, powerless to do anything about it.

The second time she came by was our anniversary, a year after I proposed and many more since we first met. It was then that I watched her, with tears running down her face, remove the ring from her finger. The ring I'd bent down on one knee to give her. At that time, I'd grown more detached, no longer spiteful yet nowhere near placid. I'd come to terms with the fact that this was how it had to be, no matter how unjust I thought it was.

The third and final visit was on my birthday. By then I thought I'd never get to see her again. I was so grateful for the chance to have one last goodbye even though I still couldn't tell her how I felt. In the end, I loved her and wanted her to be happy, and for that to happen she needed to move on.

The past few years, only my parents have come by on my birthday. They're now the only company I get, and only once a year at that. My brother, well he's probably been busy with college or some theater production. Can't be ditching those rehearsals to visit a stiff like me I suppose. That's why my birthday is so important to me. At least then, for once in this entire year, I won't be alone.

*Yesterday was my birthday.*

Yesterday was my birthday, and nobody showed up. Here I sit in the grass alongside County Road 255 watching the cars go by, and I want to know why nobody showed up. I'm resting my back against the same telephone pole I've leaned against every day since I got here. My feet are propped up on the crossbar of the small wooden cross planted in the ground and facing the road. The sun is at high noon and I know - I know that nobody will ever show up.

Perhaps this is a sign that it's time to move on. I can't keep going like this day after day. At this point, there's nothing worth sticking around here for. Maybe there never was. All I can do now is pray that a better existence awaits me in the realm beyond. Sure this is a rash decision; but hell, if I don't make it now, I don't know if I ever will. What I do know is that this isn't living. No, I've been dead for a long time.



**EMILY**  
by Hayden Freese

“You’d be prettier if you smiled more,” you tell her.

You move her red hair away from her face, hoping to be endearing, but she doesn’t move into your touch. Unfortunately, she’s frozen, her blue eyes glassy as if she’s imagining herself somewhere else. It is not the first time you’ve seen that expression, and it is definitely not the first time she’s used her imagination to escape from you.

She feels your eyes on her during every lecture. Instead of blushing under your gaze, she locks eyes with you. Emily smirks. Rather than thinking of your lingering glances, her thoughts are filled by the satisfaction of impressing you.

Two days later, you paw away at her clothes. She kisses you back, but the affection is hollow and meaningless. The framed photograph of your wife is face-down on the desk, as if you’re afraid she might see.

Emily pretends not to think of your wife and young daughter. It’s difficult, as the signs of their existence in your life are scattered across the room; your daughter’s pink raincoat remains on the back of a chair, and your wedding ring is permanently squeezed on your finger. You, too, will not think of them, and you most certainly will not tell your wife the truth when she questions you later that evening.

You do not know, but she is thinking of someone else. Her thoughts are not consumed with your words or your hands, calloused and beautiful, no; she is thinking of a boy who ceases to think of her in return. You try to convince yourself that she is merely distracted, and that she will eventually forget whatever is replacing you in her mind, but her gorgeous eyes have that distant look you recognize too well. She wants to be somewhere else. And so do you.

Instead of forgetting her, like she wishes, you pursue her.

When you ask her to meet you for dinner off-campus, she agrees, still relishing the attention you give her. You compliment the red dress she carefully picked out. She is polite, kind even, yet her stomach churns at the possibility of you touching her again.

But she is alone, and if she has to fill that emptiness with a man whose hands wander too much, a man who is twice her age, she will. It does not matter that you interrupt her, or that you clearly don’t pay attention to the words she says, only that you are there.

Soon, you begin to loathe the boy who gives her the attention she deserves and the words you failed to give her. Your beautiful words turn sour in her ear, and your hands suddenly grip her a bit too tightly. Emily desperately tries to convince herself that she is in control, and that you are what she wants. Despite the panic that rises in her chest when she’s near you, she can’t seem to detach herself from you. I don’t know what she sees in you, if anything, but you are not worthy of her. Not her attention, not her time. Emily is not a fantasy that you can revisit whenever you please; she is a teenage girl in desperate need of something better. You had the power to give that to her, and you chose to corrupt her instead.

Therefore, the next time you see Emily, you will not speak to her. You will not acknowledge her. *You will forget her.*

I place this note, along with a notice, on your desk. She is dropping your class.

Sincerely,

A Former Student

## The Moth

by Jamie Leverette

I sat on the porch, drink in hand. I liked the outside, especially at night when the cicadas and crickets were singing. The mid-April air felt warm against my skin, and the wine felt warm in my chest. Above me, a moth circled the porch light, its gray wings illuminated by the glow. The moth moved closer and further from the light, never quite touching it, never quite leaving it.

I took a sip of my drink. My family left about thirty minutes before, and it would be a couple of hours before they would come back. Mom asked me if I wanted to go, and I gave her my usual answer—a shake of the head and “I had a long day at school, with classes and the commute and all. I’m just not really up for it tonight.” She looked at me and gave me her usual response. “Well, if you change your mind you know which pew we’ll be sitting at.”

The moth flitted about, darting back and forth before finally kissing the porch light. In the moment directly after, it flew back, and the cycle started once more. It sat, it waited, it flew, it touched, and finally, it retreated. In a way, I couldn’t help but admire its persistence in its journey towards the light. After a while, the moth finally stopped flying and rested on the house’s exterior, remaining still aside from the occasional twitch of its wings.

I put my drink down and thought of that book on my shelf, with its thick bind and its thin, gilded pages. I used to read it so vigilantly, and now it sat in my room veiled in dust. It wasn’t that I did believe or didn’t believe—I wanted something to hold onto, I wanted my own light. But unlike the moth, I didn’t reach out in fear of something not being there. I couldn’t go tonight in fear that I would leave unchanged.

I got up and headed inside, realizing that the sun-bleached bench I was sitting on didn’t comfort me any more than church pews, and the cheap wine in my cup didn’t comfort me any more than communion. As I went to turn off the light I paused. I lifted my hand from the light switch and went back outside where the moth was still resting against the house. Carefully, I cupped my hands over it, its wings fluttering against my palm. I stepped off the porch and onto the grass, making sure to be gentle with each step.

As I walked further from the house the cicadas’ song grew around me. The ground was scattered in starlight, and though I could barely see, I knew it was beautiful. I caught glimpses of the sky above me through curved tree branches. A few stars flickered against the dark country sky, and I wondered why I had never noticed how bright they were before.

I looked down at my hands, and the moth was still beating desperately against them. I looked back up and then down again before finally letting it go. It flew off, and its silhouette faded into the leafy overhang of the trees. I couldn’t see where it was going, but that didn’t matter. I knew what it was looking for, and I hoped that one day it would find it.



## The Piano by Leah Lancaster

It didn't hit me until the piano was gone.

When the call came in that Tuesday afternoon that my grandmother had finally passed, I remember sitting in my dad's recliner and staring at the clock on the wall because there was nothing better to look at. I don't remember being surprised. After all, we all knew it was coming – lungs can only fill with fluid for so long, and Alzheimer's can only destroy so much brain activity before a person gives up the ghost. In my mind, the frail old woman who had died in that little hospital bed wasn't *my* grandmother; that woman had died years before when she stopped remembering my face, my voice, my name. We called the funeral home and made the arrangements and I can remember thinking *this isn't her this doesn't even look like her* when I saw her lying still in that silver-grey casket. I touched her hand because death wasn't tangible to me yet. Her skin was hard and thin and cold beneath my own.

When my former Highway Patrolman uncle took my grandmother's casket home to Raleigh in the back of his minivan, I laughed because my family was laughing and never realized they were laughing to keep away tears. We followed that sad procession north for twelve hours and my cousin threw up four times in the backseat, and I hated God more for the puking than the funeral, at the time. Reality was a blur of streetlights and hotel rooms and hugs from strangers I'd never met. When they closed the casket and we trailed back through the rows of headstones and sun-bleached silk flowers, I wasn't crying. I didn't feel anything. I didn't know how.

For the next few months, we carted boxes of dusty knick-knacks and crumbling books and tarnished golfing trophies out of my grandmother's home. I spent most of my time going through the sheet music we found, plunking out notes on Grandma's century-old piano. I scraped my fingers on the chipped and yellowed ivory keys and wondered how she could have ever played songs like "The Entertainer" when the instrument was so badly out of tune. Box after box of her life went out the door, and I sat at that piano for hours, trying to figure out what she saw in it that I could not.

And then they took the piano.

My aunt fancied herself a collector of vintage items since the creaky house she owned was in the historical registry. She asked my parents for the piano and put it in one of her three living rooms. I never saw them take it. I never knew it was gone until I walked into Grandma's dusty old house alone and realized there was a gaping hole where that piano used to be.

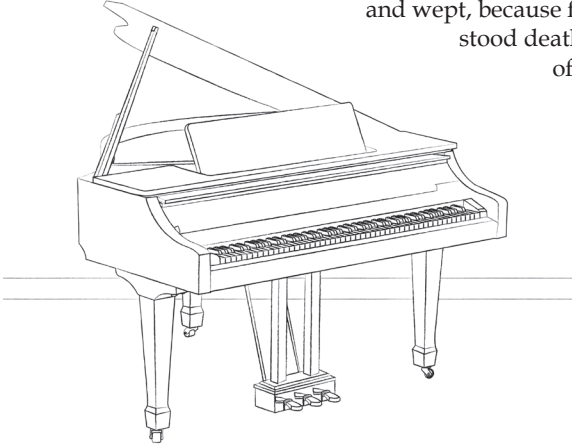
It hit me like an anvil from Saturday morning cartoons then, standing on that musty green carpet, staring at the blank wall where age-blackened wood and old ivory should have been. Her thin, brittle fingers were dancing over mine as she taught me to make the keys sing, taught me to ignore the ones that stick, taught me to recognize the beauty in something long past its time. She wore red

lipstick and sang every song from *Mary Poppins* with me, and I laughed because her name was Mary and she promised to be *my* Mary Poppins and we never had so much fun as when we watched that old movie together. She read me stories from a fairy tale book older than the both of us put together, careful of the bits of pages that broke away in her hands, and when she tucked me in and went back to her own bed the pillow smelled like cucumber and melon and *her*. And right there, in that gap where her piano had been, my vision blurred and my throat tightened and the knowledge that there would never be more Mary Poppins adventures, never be more stories or piano lessons or cucumber melon-scented pillowcases tore itself free from the hollow space buried deep beneath my ribs,

and I slid down the wall and sat where the piano stood and wept, because for the first time, I understood death, understood the finality

of it all, understood what it meant to remember and forget.

It didn't hit me until they took the piano. By then, it was far too late.



*Illustration by  
Leanna Cobbs*

## **The God of the Sea** by Marissa Dennis

They called him Poseidon for the way he rode the waves. Even when the ocean had barely risen for previous contestants, as soon as he hit the water, it responded to his board, granting him longer and smoother rides. The whitecaps formed for him, around him, and he surfed as if he owned the sea.

Someone once asked him what he did outside of winning every surf competition up and down the West Coast. "Marine biology," had been the answer, and certainly saving various sea species didn't detract from his reputation. For his part, he leaned into the name, taking it upon himself to paint a golden trident down his board.

He pissed Odi off.

It didn't matter how good she was — better than the rest surely — her grasp over the water only ever won her second. Not even a close second at that. She'd been told countless times, in interviews, by fans, by fellow surfers, by her own mentor: she was an impressive surfer, top tier, ranked first in the women's league and above the rest of the men overall, but Poseidon was godly and she couldn't compete. His control of the waves was on a level that she could never match.

She had a picture of him, ripped from a magazine, signed and pinned to the wall of her room. She liked to swear at it after they'd shared the beach, throwing all of her anger and jealousy into a rant against the photograph. She'd be back at it again today, she knew, despite only coming down to the water to relax.

Poseidon had just finished riding out a swell. He emerged from the waves, long, pitch hair dripping sea water, droplets glistening on his dark olive chest. He wore the same tight board shorts as always, decorated with small green seahorses, and, from across the beach, the trident on his board glinted as he lifted it. Even at this distance, Odi knew that his eyes matched the deep-green of today's sea and as he walked back to his belongings on the sand, she saw that she was right.

The water had gone flat as soon as he'd stepped out of it, but she was overcome with the urge to throw her board in the sea.

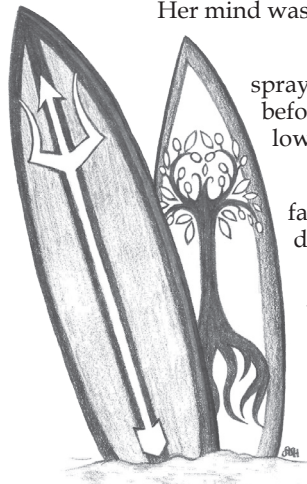
"Good luck, wahine," his voice rumbled as he passed her, and Odi snatched up her wax and threw her surfboard over her knees, rubbing down the olive tree that branched across it. It took but a moment for her to climb to her feet and take off for the sea, showering her abandoned towel with sand.

She waded into the water and felt it pull back, receding to the deep in preparation. The ocean was on her side. Odi let her board splash down and she paddled out, focused on the current and the distant building of the wave. When she reached the lineup, she turned and sat straight on the board, closing her eyes and taking long breaths. Odi rode the movement of the sea with ease, thoughts on the deep, crafting the perfect swell.

It was coming. She could feel it.

Odi lay down and struck for the beach, waiting for the rise. The wave pulled her up and everything else ceased as she took the drop. She climbed to her feet, wavering at the edge of the surf, malachite seawater wrapping up and over her head. The wave was longer, larger, and cleaner than any she'd ever managed, but Odi carved across it with practiced effortlessness.

Her mind was clear, washed with exhilaration.



She rode the wave to its eventual end, the white spray misting her shoulders, and kicked out over the lip before finishing the perfect surf with a dive into the shallows, forsaking her board to the tide.

Odi pushed herself from the water, breath falling heavy and slow. "Holy shit." She had, without a doubt, just taken the best ride of her career.

"Ah, see," Poseidon stood at the edge of the beach, her board in his hands and a grin on his lips. "My luck is worth something."

"Holy shit." Odi repeated, this time accompanied by a laugh. She rotated to survey the sea, which had gone flat once again, back to lapping gently against the sand.

*Illustration by Alaina Hornberger*



Poseidon cleared his throat behind her. "You know," he waited a moment for Odi to look at him, but she kept her gaze on the ocean horizon. "I can hear you when you yell at me." Odi flinched, thinking again of his picture on her wall; she refused to turn away from the water—the same color as his eyes. "And I'd like to take you up on that offer."



**Thou Shalt Not**  
by Leah Lancaster

The water looks like it's burning.

Crimson and gold lick across the lake surface in tongues of early morning light. It is still, dead calm in the quiet of dawn, a pane of smooth glass framed by murky corners. The surrounding canvas is splattered with rich earth and green grass beneath a blanket of dew; to the left, a willow weeps into the water's edge, bent under the weight of its own shadow. Somewhere in the distance a mockingbird's cry wanders through the thick air, and as the last traces of twilight are banished, more raucous voices join the hymn. Atonal harmonies catch in the wind and fall like scattered stones. *Thou shalt not lie*, they whisper. The rest of the world is silent.

She watches cattails sway in the breeze until the sun softens from orange to honey and the dew has long since burned away. Sweat crawls between her shoulder blades and her brow is marred with salt. It is still, too still. She sucks in lungfuls of air but the humidity is heavy and she rises, stiff and unsteady, bare feet trampling virgin grass as she stumbles toward the water. *Thou shalt not lie thou shalt not steal thou shalt not commit adultery* hisses in her ears with each step. She sinks to her knees beside the willow tree, trunk scarred with two sets of initials and mottled with moss like bruises, rustling branches lamenting *thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image* as they hang suspended above the water. She forces herself to look down into the mirror-smooth surface and is thankful when she cannot see her own reflection. She reaches out, dips her fingers in the clear water, watches as little brown flecks fall from her skin to the sand beneath. It is cool to the touch and she scrubs at the last clinging remnants, imagining that she can see the stain spreading out from her hands and fading away.

*and Moses smote the waters and all the waters that were in the river Nile were turned to blood and thou shalt not lie thou shalt not steal **thou shalt not -***

It would be so easy to take that first step, and the next, and the next. The water would lap at her knees, caress her thighs, climb her torso like a lover, invade her mouth and swallow her, a baptism of water and fire. She would no longer taste the coppery rust that clings to her lips, her skin, would smell catkins and pond grass and the earthy musk of algae instead of the metallic tang that has overwhelmed her senses. She would die to herself and rise again as God intended when John the Baptist plunged Jesus beneath the waves.

*Thou shalt not. Thou shalt not. Thou shalt not, but what's one more?*

The mockingbird wails high and mournful beyond the hills. She raises her face to feel the sun and steps peacefully into the water.





*Illustration by Kayle Weeks*



# *The Rubicon*

## *Spring 2017*

### *Poetry*

Arson.....	28
Death is Faithful to Faithful Men.....	29
Lonely People.....	29
The Boy with the Golden Wings.....	30
Anchor.....	31
On Sun and Stars.....	31
Ten Thousand Miles of Black Linen.....	32
Other Meanings.....	32

### *Prose*

A Fat Cat and Hemingway.....	33
Diversions.....	34
English is Hard.....	36
Aeaea.....	38
My Place.....	41
See You Tomorrow.....	44
False Advertising.....	47
Love You to the Moon and Back.....	48

 *Professor's Pick* 

**Arson**

by Draven Jackson

I watch the flames move  
Like they are dancing  
A routine all their own  
They float and flit with the wind  
Bend their form to look like fabric  
Smoke twisting above  
Moving separately, but in union  
Wisps of red flicker and fall out  
Crackle forward and away  
The colors waltzing in the darkness  
Backlit by an observing crescent moon

I watch their ballet  
Each flame delicate  
Almost breakable  
Elongating its arms towards the sky  
Reaching to go higher  
To climb  
It stands on the tips of its toes  
Its red soles bare to the world

Sometimes I forget fire is destructive

How can something so beautiful  
Be so chaotic?

When I light them, I forget  
That with birth comes death

The building crumbles to ash

## **Death is Faithful to Faithful Men**

**by Katelyn Smith**

Scattered on the beachhead springing from the  
Bloody sand, Bibles clutched in dead and dying  
soldiers' broken hands. Death is also faithful.  
The waves have come to wash away the sin,  
That in his rage and pride Cain did begin.  
Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?  
Surely it cannot be found in France. No—  
No. Not in France or in the Russian snow.  
On this beach where bullets and bombs have been,  
Death is always faithful to faithful men.

Piles of items abandoned on the shore,  
Where only babes and castles had been before.  
Now there is blood and suffering and death,  
And men who cry for vengeance in their last  
Breath: how precious and pure to those who lie,  
Face-down in the swell that they were drowned by.  
Some unsure if their soul would live again,  
Death is always faithful to faithful men.

In time the war will cease and men will pretend,  
That they are as faithful as death is to fighting men.

## **Lonely People**

**by Katelyn Smith**

The orange glow of tired street lights,  
The numbing winter air,  
Strangers stand on their balconies,  
Watching the lonely people come and go.

No one speaks.  
Cold statues holding their posts,  
Gazing into a happier land on a happier day:  
A day when the dark is lighter

Sirens and cars make ambiance.  
The requiem for the grey days,  
A tired song of insomnia  
For the weak of soul.

Oh, when the days were warm!  
When the air was filled with possibilities  
Brighter and more tangible than a summer sunset.



When the sun painted the green hills gold  
And we were held in the embrace of a lover.

Now we stand on a damp grey floor,  
Looking over damp grey parking lots  
At lonely, grey people,  
Damp with the weariness of the world.

### **The Boy with the Golden Wings** by Draven Jackson

When I met you  
You had wings  
So long they covered the horizon  
Blocking out the sun

They used to scare me  
I was afraid one day you'd fly away  
To a world where I couldn't find you

So I pulled off your feathers  
Gently, so it was love  
One at a time, I tore them from you  
And I let them float away on the breeze

Until you were nothing  
But an empty husk  
Covered in bare bones and broken dreams

As I watched you weep  
Stuck to the ground below your feet  
I understood  
What loving you meant

I searched the world over  
And found each feather  
And gently again secured them back into place

And I waited for you to leave  
Waited for you to touch your beloved horizon  
Waited to watch your figure take the sky

But as your wings rustled in the wind  
You stayed  
With your feet planted in the dirt  
And understood what loving me meant

**Anchor**  
by Hope Rangel

I walked across a vast beach on white sand,  
The ropes of an anchor held tightly in hand.  
I don't know the place from which this anchor came,  
Nor why I had thought it was calling my name.  
That anchor was mine, for it had followed me.  
Never once did I think to throw it into sea,  
But one day the waves grew higher and higher,  
And covered my anchor, my only desire.  
So tiring, walking through water so tall,  
That my anchor felt not like desire at all,  
And the sea guaranteed a safe place for its hiding,  
So I rid myself of it in naive confiding.  
And though I walk on now with two empty hands,  
The ghost of an anchor still trails in the sands.

**On Suns and Stars**

by Lydia Gilmer

i know a girl who stares  
at the stars that surround her  
and asks "why are they so bright  
and I so dull?"  
i can never answer  
a question so unkind,  
for how could simple stars compare to her,  
when she is the sun itself?  
she is not a small point in the sky,  
but the center of the universe  
that all planets orbit to bask  
in the light of her smile  
so i tell her instead  
"never doubt your brightness  
for you are blinding."

# Ten Thousand Miles of Black Linen

by Kalen Busby

Stopping,  
All of the sudden,  
There was this tremendous ripping sound,  
    Illuminating the night air  
        A firework show slovenly painting the night sky  
Two giant hands  
Descending rapidly from the heavens,  
    A riptide overtaking earth  
Ripping ten thousand miles of black linen,  
Right down the seam.  
Whole being shattered into a million glistening pieces.  
A severing, a splitting, and then silence.  
Deafening silence. Blinding Darkness.

## *Editors' Pick*

### Other Meanings

by E.W. Brooks

\*While this may not be theoretically correct  
And many arguments may be made  
    against this manner of thinking  
It exists undeniably as an unchosen reality.

There exist certain words  
    given immense power  
    allowed such grandiose meaning  
That they have birthed the ability  
    to break the meaning of others  
To disseminate and destroy  
    both word and person.

Example: Queer breaks daughter  
    shatters love  
    exiles faith

New Meanings: Daughter becomes estranged  
    Love becomes to fix  
    Faith becomes sinful

## A Fat Cat and Hemingway by Draven Jackson

Sunlight streams in through the window and a warm wind blows into the room, ruffling the pages of my book. Cecil, or “the fattest cat in the world” as we refer to him, climbs down from his perch on the armchair and stretches his short, chubby legs under the bright rays.

I look up from my book. Zack sits above me reading, his legs pulled up onto the couch in a position that seems uncomfortable to me, yet he seems completely relaxed. I study him from my place on the floor, watching the way his chestnut hair flutters in the wind and how his finger gently taps the page. That’s how I can tell it’s a good book. He always stays in constant motion when he is interested. Zack glances over and sees me staring at him. He grins.

“What are you looking at?” he asks. I roll over onto my back so I don’t have to twist my neck to see him.

“Nooothing,” I draw out. He shakes his head and goes back to his book. I use mine as a pillow.

“Whatcha reading?” I ask.

“Hemingway,” he replies, his eyes still glued to the page.

I make a gagging sound. Zack sits his book down beside him and takes off his glasses to look at me. He wears a pair of tan, square glasses when he reads. They make him look like he’s an old man, which always makes me laugh because he’s only 22.

“What?” he asks. “You got a problem with Hemingway?”

“No,” I say. “Just his boorish, awful books. He’s the most pretentious author possibly ever. Okay, maybe that’d be Steinbeck. But he’s still boring.”

Zack chuckles. “Boorish. Nice use of an SAT word, Rae.”

I grab the blanket on the floor beside me and throw it at him. It doesn’t quite reach. “Shut up! You’re the loser that reads Hemingway.”

He reaches down from the couch and flicks me in the forehead. I twist on my back so that my legs are on the cushion beside him and poke his side with my toe. Then I leave my feet propped up there.

“Don’t insult Hemingway,” Zack says. “He was a brilliant and highly influential writer of his time. And this is definitely better than whatever shit you’re reading.”

I shake my head. “Nuh uh.”

Zack swings his legs off the couch and sits on the edge, right beside my foot. I can see from his face that he is going to try and tickle me, so I quickly pull them back and sit up. This puts us face to face. Well, face to stomach.

“What ARE you reading then?” he asks.

I crane my neck back. “Harry Potter.” I answer.

"Which one?"

"The Half-Blood Prince."

"Haven't you already read that one at least four times?"

"Oh, sweetie," I sigh. "I've read all of them at least four times."

Cecil picks himself up from his warm spot under the window and crawls into my lap. I stroke his soft fur, listening to his peaceful purrs. Zack shakes his head. He does that a lot. I'm afraid one day it'll get stuck in some halfway gesture of disappointment.

"Rae, that cat is really too fat. You feed it too much," he says.

I shrug. "I want him to be full and happy," I reply, gazing down at my beautifully plump cat.

Zack pushes the hair back from my face and gently kisses my forehead. "Darling," he says, swinging himself back up into his reading position. "He's well past full and happy."

As if hearing the insult, Cecil climbs off my lap and waddles out of the room to find a more suitable sleeping place. Were he human, I'd imagine him slamming the door. I lie back, stretching out into the sunlight like my chubby cat. Then I pick my book back up and find my place.

"Hey," I start, not looking up.

"Hmm?"

I glance over. "Hemingway still sucks."

## **Diversions**

**by Madina Seytmuradova**

*"You do not get to choose if you get hurt in this world, old man, but you do have some say in who hurts you."*

*The Fault in Our Stars, John Green*

For some time now, I've been in the business of pain-relocation. It is a way of diverting energy to a lesser pain or a better cause when my current ambitions prove fruitless.

My first lesson in diversion occurred when I was five. I was missing a chunk of flesh in my right shoulder one evening after I tried to feed my cousins' "chain hound." Chain hounds are not used to being held. They are called that because they are chained for the entirety of their lives and become vicious. The dog was very hungry and must have assumed my services included the steak shoulder, which I so kindly provided.

I do not remember the bite itself as much as I remember the consequence – disinfection. The dim room was already shimmering behind the tears as I sat on my mother's knees, bawling with my teeth clenched. But when she pressed a whole ball of cotton, brown with iodine, onto the raw tissues of my shoulder, the

room positively blurred along with my mother's strict face. Her high cheekbones were at the moment streaked with tears. Although she witnessed pain and death of children every day at the hospital, she only cried when she had to treat us to a taste of that medicine.

That is the moment I think of as the start of my education in pain-relocation. As the iodine burned the mark that I bear to this day into my shoulder, I impulsively bit my hand to stop myself from screaming and found that it also hurt. I concentrated on the pain in my hand and bit harder until it overpowered the pain in my shoulder, and further until that too was too strong. Then I switched back to the shoulder and vice versa. It was a game I could easily win.

It is a useful technique. From that day, whenever I was confronted with a scraped knee, I would bite my hand, letting the water run over the wound and using my dad's cologne to sanitize it. When I got bruised, I would strike the bruise to make the pain spike, so it would flatline after.

Later, I discovered that heart wounds can be also pacified by exacerbating them momentarily. While the heart is considered to be the seat of feelings, it is also a muscle. One only needs to increase its rate - which can be done by any form of cardiac exercises - to shock it out of the present annoyance and lull it into post-workout numbness. Last semester I worked out every day of the week when I couldn't see Insert Boyname.

One Friday night, needed an antiseptic after I had to watch him sitting shoulder to shoulder on a couch with That Girl, looking at her face and smiling. So, I got spectacularly drunk at a frat party. I threw myself into a back stand, then whipped back to my feet, headed down to the basement and danced my heart out. Insert Boyname was probably back in his warm dorm by then, in comfy PJ's and watching dorky YouTube videos.

The thought of that made me feel like I scraped my heart pretty badly, like someone dragged a plastic fork across my heartstrings. Moments like those, I needed both kinds of pain - the strenuous one for heart and stinging kind for skin. That is when I would go roller-skating. The rush of a sharp turn, the tearing through the air at a head-spinning speed send the heart racing to the edge of a near-life experience like a defibrillator. And if I crash, the pain would be a welcome distraction.

At night in the darkness of my dorm room, the only physical distraction available is tossing around the sheets. But this new pain I have been dealing with is of particularly virulent nature as it seems to cling to mind as much as heart, preventing "movement cure." The only antidote that have proved successful so far is reading. Last month, I gobbled down *Eleanor and Park*, *Mrs. Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, *Fight Club*, *The Fault in Our Stars* and wanted more, more, more... Like most drugs, reading has to be renewed endlessly and has side effects. Since it must be applied until welcome oblivion, my sleep schedule has been reduced to three to four hours per night. On the bright side, it is more socially acceptable than self-mutilation.

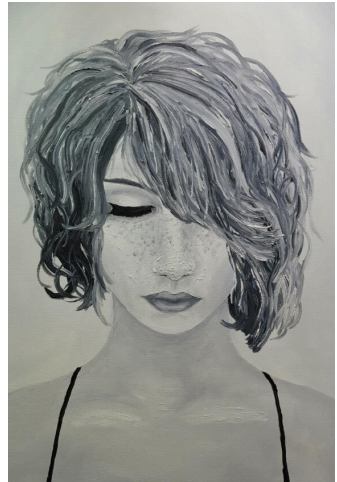


Illustration by Natalie "Katie" Winters

And while I do not enjoy pain, I welcome its variety and our ability to focus on one to forget another. Similarly with passion, when we cannot pursue one ambition, we can make the choice to divert our attention to other causes, whether social, artistic, or domestic. And really, what is this stuff of life if not the lesser pain, the continuous diversion from the crushing inevitability of the final pain and futility of existence itself?



## **English is hard – get over it.**

**by Madina Seytmuradova**

Before I was an international student at Troy, I was an exchange student in Indiana and one night, I went out on a date.

As we rounded some fast food joint, it struck me that it was getting late and my American host parents hadn't called me at all. "That's odd," I thought and looked at my phone.

My juvenile heart sank. Naturally, I forgot to turn the phone back on when we left the movies. Naturally, they must have called a million times. I braced myself for at least five missed calls, and – nothing. The phone screen was blank. So I was like, "Huh. All right then," and we kept on walking to the store where my date's mom was supposed to pick us up.

And then, I got not just an angry call from my hosts, no. I got an ultimatum to get home by eleven, which was in twenty minutes, or they would be calling the police to start looking for my friend here to charge him with kidnapping.

You see, I kind of sort of took advantage of the ambiguous English word "friend" and might have made it seem like I was going out with a friend who was a girl, and not with my prom date Rob.

So he and I started racing down this dark creepy road to get as close to the store as possible. My mind seemed to be tuned into some radio station with a hit song "I'll make it. I'll make it. Please, don't call the police, I'll make it!" Rob, who was fitter and taller than me, jogged along, dialing on the go so his mother could set out to our rescue ASAP.

Finally, after an actual eternity passed, a small rover emerged out of the night. It pulled over to the side of the road and we jumped in. Another eternity passed before we reached the front of the familiar house with a Wisconsin Wolfs plaque on the door. I squeaked something like a "thank you" and jumped out.

"Wait," I heard and turned. Rob's head showed out of the car. "I'll walk you to the door."

At that point, I really wanted to leap into the house and be done with this, but I didn't. You see, we actually had fun together and I liked the guy, so I said, Okay.

We reached the door and he stopped. Now what? He looked at me. I looked at him. He didn't say anything. And at that moment it dawned on me what this was about. So I said, "I'm sorry it turned out like this... I had a really good time!" and started to turn away before he could say anything. But he beat me to it and said, "You know, I haven't had my first kiss yet... and I want it to be with you."

Well.

I didn't know what to think. I didn't know what to do. I just stood there and blinked. It got very quiet, surreally quiet, like we were in an eye of some awesome invisible American storm, like a Jessica or a Leslie, but I swear the time slowed down.

He was a great guy. We both played on the tennis team that season and cheered for each other, and learned to dance awkwardly to the slow songs, but I couldn't do this. It was not right. And not just because his mom was in the car five feet away. No, mostly it was because I actually had never kissed anyone before either. I probably should've just said that right there, but I was so stupefied by his confession, I just mumbled: "Sorry, I gotta go" and took off like a jet into the safety of the house.

In the entryway, as I stepped on the heels of my shoes and slipped them off, I tried to shift the gears in my mind from being a girl ruining her first date to a remorseful kid disobeying her curfew. I prepared to see my fearsome host mom Patricia shoot thunderbolts at me with her eyes. I prepared to see my joyous host dad Randy, shake his head in disappointment. But I was not prepared for what I saw.

Pat was crying. She flung herself at me and started soaking my T-shirt in tears, half-whispering and half-whimpering: "I didn't know where you were, I didn't know if you were even alive! You were out there in the middle of the night with some guy we didn't even know!" I didn't interrupt her. I was actually so struck by this side of her, I started welling up myself. I managed to apologize in between her sobs, and turned to Randy. He stretched out his hand and demanded my phone, which I readily put into his hand. He said, "You're grounded until the day you leave America," and sent me to my room, which sounds dramatic, but isn't really because I actually just had two more weeks until my flight back to my obscure third-world country.

By that point, I was so tired of all the curve balls the night had thrown at me I just wanted to collapse on my bed, but there was one more in store. There was a knock on the door and Randy came in with my phone. He didn't say anything for a moment, and then looked at me with disbelief written all over his face and said: "A kiss?"

I blinked. I didn't know how or what he knew. My mind went so blank and it got so quiet, I thought I started hearing that radio tune about police again. I just stood there and blinked. Again. He crooked this nasty smile full of contempt and read of my phone screen: "I am sorry I got you into trouble. And I am sorry for the kiss." I looked him in the eye and very seriously said the one phrase I thought I'd never say in my life: "It's not what you think..."



I respected my host dad. He was very Zen, practiced martial arts but believed in nonviolence and was not above occasionally taking Patricia down in Mario Carts. And I'd never seen until then this contemptuous smile he had as he started to walk away. It really hurt to know that he thought badly of me, so I started following him and pathetically and childishly trying to defend myself.

"It's not what you think! I swear I didn't kiss him!  
He's saying it wrong!"

I didn't even know what I was saying anymore or why was it so bad even if I did kiss someone. I think I just wanted to prove myself not guilty of at least this one thing. My English vocabulary was failing me, and I was searching my mind for phrases that sounded most American, most worthy of sympathy.

And I said, "It was just a one-night stand!"

\*\*\*

Many uncomfortable silences later, my hosts cleared my confusion. I learned that a "one night stand" is not the same as "one date," "a fling" is not another word for "a crush," and "limping" is very different from "humping," although they sound similar. But honestly, English is confusing, so I am not apologizing next time I accidentally call a group of three girls sitting at one desk a "threesome." It's casual. All that mattered was that I stayed friends with my Randy and Pat. They told me that just because I made a mistake did not mean they'd stop loving me, that love should not get lost in translation.



## *Editors' Pick*



**Aeaea**  
by **Austin MacCraw**

The room was dark and elegant with a jazz club ambience. Women young and old were seated around semicircle tables, each wearing a dress fit for the red carpet. Aeaea was very strict about what was and wasn't allowed in terms of fashion. Anything less than semi-formal wear was looked down upon and prohibited in most instances.

In terms of its exclusivity, the club was only known to those who'd received the invitation-only membership. The owners were very picky about which women could receive such an honor. They needed to be. You can't trust just anyone with a secret like this.

Most of the light came from the far wall which each seating area opened towards. That way everyone could have a good view. The wall itself was made of glass and a thin layer of aluminum, specially made for the club.

In the middle of the room, close-up to the glass wall, three middle-aged women were being seated by a young waitress. The waitress then handed each of them a menu filled with high class dishes, cocktails, and wines, though there

weren't any prices to be seen.

"Anything I can get you to start? Valerie, the usual?"

"Actually Roxy, today calls for something special."

"Oh? What's the occasion, if I may ask?"

"Why, Katherine here!" Valerie motioned towards her friend seated in the middle. "It's her first time!"

"A first timer! How exciting! Did you have anything in mind?"

The third woman now spoke up. "Perhaps the Red Lagoon?"

"Ooh, Eliza. That's perfect!" Valerie agreed. "Three Red Lagoons then."

"Alright, if there's anything else you need, just press this button here. Otherwise, I'll be back with your drinks soon. Enjoy your night." The waitress then left, leaving the women a clear view of the glass wall in front of them.

On the other side of the wall was what looked like a forest clearing, and that's exactly what Katherine thought it to be until she remembered that the club was ten stories underground. Of course, her focus wasn't on the setting so much as everything else.

Populating the clearing and surrounding areas were seventeen youthful looking men in nothing but their boxers. While diverse in heights and backgrounds, there was an underlying sameness in their overall appearances. Their physiques were that of featherweight boxers, athletic and muscular, yet nimble and agile. Each had his hair just long enough to be tousled and played with, but not an inch more. They were also all clean-shaven, which helped enhance their boyishness.

Gladys, an elderly woman known for her perpetual optimism and unexpected off-color humor, once remarked that the boys were like a handful of M&M's; all different, but all the same. While many in Aeaia have debated the accuracy of the claim, it became a sort of inside joke among the more well-established members. They'd even begun calling those on the other side of the glass "the M&M boys," and the nickname stuck soon enough. Part of its success came from how it could be used outside the club. Talking about Aeaia in public was forbidden, but a woman saying that she was going to go see "the M&M boys" later was just enough to circumvent that rule. Even the newcomers who weren't quite aware of where the nickname came from had become accustomed to calling them that.

As was the purpose of the seating arrangements, many eyes rested on the men in the clearing, watching and admiring their immaculate figures. First timers like Katherine, however, usually found themselves entranced by one area in particular.

"Their faces, they look so—" Katherine paused, unsure of how to describe them.

"Oh yes, they do look a bit peculiar, don't they?" Valerie let out a short chuckle. "After a while you get used to it I suppose. Doesn't bother me at all."

One of the men then began to approach the glass, gaining the attention of the three women.

"I think it's actually an improvement," Eliza commented, winning a cackle from Katherine. "Seriously though! If I could find a man that acted like that, with a body like that, ooh! Wouldn't find me out and about after work; no siree!"

The man stopped a few feet short of the glass, staring almost directly at the three women's table. His ears were pointed and coated with hair, perking up in a way that gave off the impression of a wolf on the hunt. He flared the nostrils of his flattened nose, making an unflattering snorting sound, though the women couldn't hear it through the soundproof walls. Roxy then came around with the drinks, positioning herself carefully as to not block the women's view.

"He's not - watching us, is he?" Katherine inquired, intrigued by his behavior.

"Oh no, the glass is one-sided," Roxy assured, turning her head to see the man. "Looks like the poor fella's picking a fight with himself. It happens sometimes."

The man bared his teeth, snarling as he revealed the pointed and overgrown canines that brushed his bottom lip. Despite his overbite, Katherine could see the matching bottom canines, also sharp and lengthened.

"If you need anything else, let me know," Roxy said before heading to another table. The women then each took a sip of their drinks.

"It's too bad they never fight," Eliza lamented after the man lost interest and walked back to the middle of the clearing. "Why, I sure wouldn't mind seeing them getting rough with each other in there."

"Eliza!" Valerie chided, more joking than serious.

"Do they really never fight?" Katherine asked, setting her drink down. "I mean, even with all of them in there?"

"Not that I've seen," Valerie stated. "It's incredible really; they're as domesticated as dogs. What I wouldn't give to get my husband to behave like that. Dave's got quite the temper you know." The other women agreed, nodding their heads. "Oh, but he means well. Men are just born like that. They can't help being stubborn." There was a silence following this remark, causing the women to become very interested in their drinks.

Eliza, after downing a good portion, swirled her half-empty glass around, watching the dark red liquid spin like a whirlpool. "You know what? I've had a long day." Eliza set the glass down, the vortex still rotating. "I think I deserve a trip to the backrooms." A smirk escaped her lips which Valerie was quick to notice. "Katherine! You should try it out!"

"Some other time though. Not on her first visit," Valerie countered, causing a brief staring contest between the two before they turned their attention to Katherine.

"I don't know. It's so strange, I mean--"

"Oh come on, don't be shy. You'll love it! And if you get one of them

with the real furry ears and give the ears a good scratch – trust me, you’ll never see a man get excited quicker. He’ll be yours like that!” Eliza said, snapping her fingers.

“Still, I think I’ll pass, for tonight at least.”

Eliza shrugged in response. She then lifted her glass in front of her. “How about a toast? To the three of us finally sitting here together, as it should be.”

The other two then raised their glasses.

“To new experiences,” Katherine said with a grin.

“To a safer world,” Valerie proclaimed, and the three clinked their glasses together.

\* \* \* \* \*

In a secret facility ten stories beneath the earth, a young woman watched creatures and beasts roam through a manmade forest. The forest was similar to the one in Aeaëa, though much larger in size. It was also far more populated and housed a diverse assortment of inhabitants. Some stood on four legs and looked like mishmash combinations of lions, wolves, and boars. Others looked similar to the m&m boys, though not quite as human. As for the rest, well, they were everything in-between.

The woman let out a sigh, turning around to see a man lying in a hospital bed. His wrists were handcuffed to the sides and his feet were tied down as well despite the fact that he was highly sedated. The precaution was necessary at this point. The men always went berserk otherwise.

She could hardly believe that he was the same guy she’d found a couple days before in a bar. The thirty-something-year-old, beer-bellied man had been mistaken in thinking that she wouldn’t notice when he spiked her drink. Now, after two days, he had already slimmed down and the faint outline of his abs were beginning to show. His face also looked much younger. In fact, he could pass for a college freshman if he shaved, though that would be done later. He wasn’t finished yet.

The woman picked up a syringe filled with a moly-based counteractant. Its composition was slightly altered from the previous trial which the woman hoped would be for the better. “Almost perfect,” she muttered, approaching the man in the hospital bed. “Almost.”



## My Place

by Alaina Hornberger

I still remember the first time I saw her. She had a little gap between her front teeth and her almond hair curled around her chubby face. We became friends instantly. Thirteen years have passed since then and much has changed. Braces have straightened her teeth into a perfect, radiant smile, age and products have straightened her hair and it’s longer now, and I love to touch it. I love her more than ever, and recently, she and I moved into a house of our own.

We are very different, but I don't think those differences matter at all. Maybe it's true that opposites attract. I don't like big crowds and prefer quiet nights at home, cuddling together on the couch. She loves to have parties and invite all of her friends over. I try to stick around for her and socialize with her friends, especially since she doesn't have these parties often for my sake, but sometimes I can't bear it. At those times I slip away and spend some time with my own friends. She doesn't mind when I do leave; she knows how much large, boisterous crowds bother me.

But lately I've been careful not to leave her side during parties. I don't mind her having male friends, really I don't, and she has quite a few. But there's been one guy friend of hers that is starting to worry me. His name is Brandon. She's been spending a lot of time with him recently and I know there aren't always other people around. Actually, she has even invited him to our house to eat dinner several times, just the three of us. Sometimes the conversation makes my spine stiffen and my hair stand on end. I'm afraid she may be starting to like him more than she likes me. She knows I don't really like him and assures me he's just a friend, but this doesn't reassure me at all, it just makes me more worried.

She invited him here again tonight. I give him my finest glare and keep a stony silence, but they seem so interested in each other they don't even notice. That hurts more than I want to admit. But what can I do? I can yell at him, fight him, try to throw him out of my house, but I know she wouldn't like that. I can't bear to hurt her, no matter how much I hate him. Instead, I quietly get up and leave. They don't even notice.

For a while I just stand outside the door and sulk. I'm jealous, and hurt, and hungry. And she doesn't even care that I left, didn't even notice. But the cool night air is calling me. The moon is bright and I can hear crickets. Maybe I should go find Thomasina. She's propositioned me many times but I always refuse. I want to stay true to the woman I love. But maybe it wouldn't hurt to make her jealous. Although maybe she wouldn't get jealous at all. Ah, I don't know what to do. I won't accept Thomasina's offer though, not yet. Maybe later. For now, I'll just go find the gang in the regular alley outside the bar. That bar honestly has the best food, which is perfect since I'm hungry.

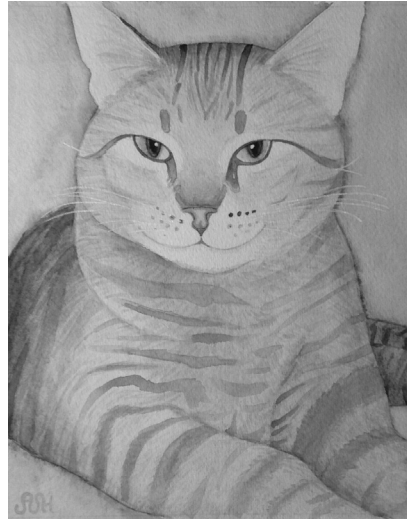
I step into the street, absorbed in my thoughts as I head towards my normal haunt. The screech of tires and two bright lights snap me from my thoughts. I should run, flatten myself, something, but all I can do is stare in horror. For a split second I feel pain. The world flips. I hear a crunching sound. Then everything vanishes.

When I open my eyes again she's there. For a moment I'm disoriented. I don't know what exactly happened, then I remember. I was hit by a car. I'm still on the street. It's dark, but the car's lights illuminate her face. She looks like an angel. Surprisingly I don't feel any pain. Or anything really, now that I think of it. I can't even feel the road underneath me. I can see she's running her hand down my body, but I can't feel her soothing touch, except for on my head. Brandon's here too. Somehow I don't mind so much right now. Darkness edges around my vision and I close my eyes.

The next time I open my eyes I'm in a very different place. The walls are stark and clean. The surface I am on is shiny, stainless steel maybe. Standing above me is a person wearing a white coat and looking very grim. I don't have to wonder. I know I'm dying. I can just tell. On my other side is my love and Brandon. I shouldn't hate him. When I'm dead, he's all she will have. Besides, I was fooling myself all along. There's no way she and I could ever really be together. After all, she's a beautiful, intelligent human being, and I am only a cat.

A superior specimen of course, but a cat none the less. She can never feel for me what I feel for her. I should have just accepted Brandon all along, allowed him to be part of our family. If I had, maybe I wouldn't be lying in a vet's office, dying.

I still can't feel anything, but I see the vet insert a needle into my flesh. Years of memories flow through my mind, memories filled with her; her touch, her laugh, her everything. Brandon wraps his arm around her shoulder but she keeps her eyes on me. She's crying, and I can see she is petting me. I'm glad she will miss me. I wish I could tell her how much I love her, how much she meant to me, how wonderful she made my life. But I can't speak her language. Instead I do the only thing I can. I purr softly, watching her until my eyes close for the final time. I wish I could have more time with her.



*Illustration by Alaina Hornberger*

\*\*\*\*\*

I watch as another of my siblings leaves, happily playing with her new owner's hair. There's only two of us left now. I can't wait to see what my new family is like! But I need to make the best of what time I have left with my mom, so I put more vigor than ever into pouncing on her tail. She flicks it away and I give chase. I am so busy with my game I don't notice another family walk in.

Suddenly two hands wrap around my squishy belly and lift me. I'm not afraid. I've been picked up many times by now. But these aren't the normal hands at all. They're younger, softer, and the fingers are longer. I look up into the face of a woman. Something seems familiar about her. She has straight, almond colored hair, and a beautiful smile. Behind her stands a man holding a small human. But I don't spend much time looking at them. The pretty woman's hair catches my eye and I can't help but swipe at it.

I play with her hair while she talks to the woman I live with. They seem to talk for a long time, and I am pretty tired by the time they stop. I'm momentarily caught off guard as she heads not back towards my mom, but towards the door.

"Goodbye my sweet child!" my mom calls. I'll miss my mom, but looking at the lady carrying me now, I feel like things are supposed to be this way.

"You remind me of a cat I used to have," she said, smiling down at me. "Your fur is the exact same color."

I settle into her arms, lying on my back as she walks and talks to what seems to be her mate, Brandon. The more I look at her face, the more familiar it feels. Like I've seen it before. I don't think there is a better human face out there. There's something right about being with her, something perfect. I yawn and close my eyes. I'll be safe here, I know. I'll spend the rest of my life right here in her arms. This is my place; the only place I ever want to be.

# Professor's Pick

*Having to select a top story from among my students' stories and essays is like asking a father to choose his favorite child. I love them all equally – although on some days I love one more than I love the others. Today is one of those days. Of the seven selections that the Rubicon board asked me to read and judge, I chose the bittersweet love story between a water nymph and a firebird, "See You Tomorrow." I have always liked the classic myths since my twelfth-grade mythology class, and most people can relate to a "bad romance." That being said, there are elements in all seven pieces that I admire.*

## **See You Tomorrow** by Alaina Hornberger

"What are they doing?" Agni wondered, watching a pair of humans across the river. They were clinging to each other and their mouths were touching, and they seemed to really be enjoying it.

"I don't know, but I've seen it before," Lazuli replied, her brows furrowing. Agni was a bit disappointed she didn't know, but not particularly surprised. Unlike his people, the nymphs lived very close to humans, sometimes right next to them, but most still chose not to mix with the 'inferior race.'

"We should ask them!" Lazuli said excitedly.

"I don't really think we should..."

Lazuli ignored Agni and stood, walking to the river, her long blue hair shimmering in the sun as she went. She stepped into the water and seemed to melt, vanishing completely into the calm surface. For Agni, whose very nature made it impossible to be in water, seeing the powers of a water-being's body in action was amazing. Three seconds later she emerged on the side of the river. Instead of taking her human appearance again she simply rose from the river in her true form. Her body, made of water and nothing more, sparkled in the sun as she leaned over the land and the cowering human couple.

Lazuli hovered there for several minutes, apparently listening to the humans stutter and jerk and try to explain. Finally they repeated the gesture in question, though this time it was much more brief and very stiff. Lazuli nodded then slid back, vanishing into the river and leaving only a small ripple.

Moments later she was at Agni's side in her human form once more. Again he was reminded of how ironic their friendship was. She was a nymph, a cool, beautiful woman made of water, and he was a phoenix, a creature of burning and fire. To be in close proximity they were forced to be in their human forms. And yet there they sat, opposites in nearly every way, suppressing their powers as much as possible and sitting together next to a river. Though he had to sit on a rock, just in case he momentarily forgot to keep his power to its absolute minimum. He'd hate to set the grass on fire, or worse, the entire forest.



"They said it's called a kiss," Lazuli reported, watching as the human couple stared at the two not-quite-humans sitting across the river for a while before nervously scurrying off. Agni ignored the moment of guilt he felt at causing them fear and disrupting their time together.

"Why were they doing it? It seems to be an odd ritual to me."

"It is a little strange, but they explained it to me. They said that it's done between pairs of humans, usually between those in a romantic relationship, and it shows affection."

"Romantic relationship? What is that?" Agni asked.

"You don't know what a romantic relationship is?" Lazuli questioned incredulously.

Agni felt slightly embarrassed but brushed it off, instead latching hungrily on to the chance to learn. "What is it?"

"It's... Hm, how should I explain? It's a special relationship between a male and a female, mates I mean, but not always mates. But usually. They love each other very much and think about each other a lot, and they live together and breed."

"Oh. So, basically like what we are? Aside from the breeding part of course, since there is no need for that with our species."

"No, not like us really. Our relationship is what humans call close friendship. And we can breed you know."

Agni looked at her sideways. "No we can't. It's impossible."

For the first time possibly ever, Agni saw Lazuli blush. "Well, we can't actually reproduce, but we can do the act that causes it if we're in human form you know."

"Oh? How does that work?"

Lazuli shook her head and her blush grew, making Agni wonder what exactly it was if she was too embarrassed to speak about it. "I think you should just focus on the kiss."

"You didn't explain what exactly a kiss is."

"That's true. Hm," Lazuli looked at him then smiled slyly. "I think it'd be better to just show you."

"No, I don't... I don't think..." Agni stuttered, his stomach recoiling at the thought of touching her. He'd not touched many other phoenixes, it really wasn't done often, one of the only people he'd ever touched was his brother, and the idea of touching a nymph horrified him. But apparently nymphs loved to touch. The only reason she kept herself from touching him more was because of their opposing natures.

Lazuli ignored Agni's weak protest and leaned over him. Before he could object she had grabbed his face and pushed her lips onto his. In a moment of great discomfort, he froze, trying to focus on keeping his fire down and not accidentally harming her, despite the sensation of terror rising in him. But with



the terror was an uncomfortable feeling he'd never experienced before, a feeling he'd be happy never to experience again. It was like someone was throwing cold water on his roiling fire and he felt slightly sick for a moment.

After a while she withdrew, a puzzled and disappointed look on her face. "That wasn't what I expected it to be," she mused quietly, eyeing him. "I've heard other nymphs talk about doing such things with humans and they said..." she stopped and eyed him again, starting at his rusty-purple hair, trailing down over his olive skin and ending on his fiery red eyes. "You aren't exactly human."

He bit his lip. Her lips were cool, and the unpleasant sensation lingered. Judging by the way she kept touching her own lips, she hadn't liked the heat of his body either. "I think it's because I am a phoenix and you are a nymph. We aren't meant for such things."

"I suppose not," she said, her face dropping in disappointment for a moment before she smiled at him again, though he didn't think it was quite genuine. "I think we should leave now, before we're missed. You know how much trouble we'll be in if they know about us."

He nodded as she stood and walked into the river, pausing as it reached her waist. "I'll meet you here again tomorrow?" he asked.

"Yes, but how about tomorrow we visit the village? I think it would be fun to learn more about humans." She smiled at him, the bottom half of her body already vanishing into the river, already back to her true form.

Agni's eyes lit up. There was nothing that excited him more than learning, and humans had always been a particular point of interest for him. "That sounds wonderful!" he cried, standing up. He spread his arms, his human bonds breaking as he released his fire, transforming into the mighty fire bird he really was. "See you tomorrow!" With one great leap he was gone, leaving the human world behind as he blazed across the sky.

Lazuli watched him go with sad eyes and a heavy heart, her smile vanishing. Phoenixes, she had heard, not only didn't require reproduction, but were also not cursed with romantic love and attraction like humans were. Like nymphs were. Though they didn't need to reproduce either, nymphs were prone to falling deeply in love, unlike the phoenix, and Lazuli knew she had. True, his lips were hot and at first touch unpleasant, but she had begun to enjoy the sensation, even the pain and discomfort of it. But he had not. He never would.

"Yes," she whispered, sinking into the river. "See you tomorrow."



*Illustration by Alaina Hornberger*

## False Advertising

by Ethan Ensor-Gibson

"Hey! Which one of you wrote this?" The sudden yelling over the rest of the classroom brought Simon out of his thoughts before looking over at the door. Brad was standing there, with a crumpled piece of paper and his face red as a tomato. His glance flickered at everyone in the room, waiting for someone to speak up. Everyone was silent, nobody wanting to bring upon the bully's wrath. Simon just wanted to crawl in a hole and die.

*I can't believe I put that letter in Brad's locker! That was for Jenny, not him!* Keeping his eyes down at his desk, Simon prayed that nobody knew about the letter. However, one student near the front of class began mumbling about "a letter sticking out of Simon's backpack at the drop-off area." Brad's entire body shifted toward Simon before storming over to him. Simon tried to run away before meeting his untimely demise, but Brad was shoving desks out of the way instead of trying to slide through the aisles. Next thing he knew, Brad had him by the shirt, their faces just inches apart.

"You. Me. After school. Parking lot." Simon was trying his best not to start bawling in front of everyone. After a few seconds of intent staring, Brad let go of his victim before storming off and shoving the letter into his pocket. Simon shifted slowly over to his desk before spending the rest of the day worrying about his face becoming best friend with the asphalt. Once the final bell rang, Simon crept over to his locker to retrieve his book bag, checking to see if any of Brad's crew was stalking him.

*Maybe if I run fast enough, I can get to my Mom's car before Brad catches me.* Seeing no other way to survive, Simon began his mad dash. However, when he got outside, a few of Brad's friends were waiting for him.

"Change of plans, nerd. Head to the back of the gym. Don't keep him waiting."

Seeing no way out of this, Simon started what felt like a march of doom, dragging his feet as much as possible to stay alive longer. The gym, however, was relatively close, so after ten minutes of slow walking, Simon was already there. *All right, Simon. Just get it over with already. You already had one of your friends deliver your will to Mom. I know she'll be sad, but hopefully she can move on.* After that, Simon turned the corner, only for Brad to push him right into the wall. Simon was now trapped between Brad's meaty arms, either looking like they could crush his skull if he dared to move. Behind Simon on the wall was a large mural of children all playing together that could be seen for miles down the road, if not for the "Alexander Shunnarah" billboard blocking the painting.

"Alright, dweeb. I hope you're ready."

"Please don't kill me, Brad!"

"Shut up and close your eyes! Don't want you giving me any funny looks..." Brad's face went red like earlier, but Simon was too worried about his life to question it before shutting his eyes. With every muscle in his body tensed and ready for pain, Simon waited for what felt like an eternity for any contact. Instead of a fist, all he felt was a wet sensation on his cheek. Simon opened his eyes, shedding a few tears as a wave of relief washed over him.

*I'm alive...*

Brad wasn't looking at Simon now, and his arms weren't on the wall, but deep in his pockets. Some mumbling came from Brad, but Simon was unsure if he heard correctly.

"You better not tell anyone..."

"What?"

"I said! You had better not tell anyone! Got it, shrimp?" Simon shook his head up and down violently, hoping Brad would stop yelling before he made Simon start tearing up again.

"Good. Also. We'll be meeting up like this after school every day from now on. Understood?"

"W..why?" Simon wasn't too sure what Brad was up to, but the idea of spending a lot of alone time with the bully didn't seem like a good idea. Brad's face was even redder than before as he looked back at Simon to respond.

"Because...I like you, too."

## **Love You to the Moon and Back** by Georgia Blanchard

I watched him as he left. To the rest of the world, it would look like he was leaving slowly, carefully, with no damage to anyone or anything. But I knew better. He was speeding away from me, faster than I would ever be able to run to catch him and bring him back. Those who stood by me through all of it thought I was calm, but I was dying inside.

Why did he have to do this? He said it would be good for him, good for me and the kids, good for everybody. So why did I get the feeling I'd never see him again? Others had done the same sort of thing, and it was no big deal. I guess it's just that it finally happened to me and I was trying to deny it. No one had ever gone as far as he did, though. Why did it have to be him? Of all the people in the world, and he was the one to do it. That must just be life.

We have two kids, ages six and twelve. Mark is the younger one, so he doesn't really grasp the big picture of all of this. He just thinks his daddy is going on a fun trip for a few weeks. At twelve, Eric is still young enough to think it's just a business trip, but he's starting to see the implications of this. Still, he's only somewhat worried about his father never coming back to him. It's hard to be strong, but I do it for the kids. I have to put on a happy face so they don't see my anguish inside because of this. We had a daughter, too, who would have been ten this year; sadly, she died of a brain tumor when she was only three years old. My one and only consolation for that is that she'll never have to worry about a man doing this to her.

When he first brought it up, I thought he was kidding. Surely, something so ridiculous would never happen, especially not to us. There had been talk of similar things happening to other women like me, but I never thought it would happen to us. It just isn't normal. Things like that make a family the talk of the town. I'm just

trying to live a quiet life, not be talked about because of what my husband did.

Even though I saw it coming, the reality of it didn't fully hit me until today. He gave me a date for when he said he'd leave, but I never thought he'd have everything ready to go by then. Yet, here we are. He got everything packed up and ready to go right on time with the date he gave me, and he was gone. I told him I loved him and gave him a kiss, just like I did every morning before he left for work. I even rode with him over to where he would leave me, since I would need the car after he was gone. We packed up the kids, too, just as if we were a normal family going on a fun daytrip. We both knew it was more than that, though.

As I kissed him for the last time, he held me tightly and whispered in my ear that everything was going to be okay and that he would be back for me. I didn't know whether to believe him or not, as it didn't seem likely that he'd ever come back. I hoped against hope that he would, but something inside whispered that he wouldn't. The last thing he told me was that he loved me, and it took all of my willpower to keep from breaking down and crying right then and there. The kids waved happily to him, and he left. I wanted to run after him and persuade him to stay, to never leave. But I couldn't let the kids see me like that, and I knew he had to do what was best for all of us.

So here we are, back where I started. The kids and I are watching him leave, and I'm being stronger than I ever thought possible. Finally, he's out of sight. As I pack the kids into the car and head home, he's the only thing on my mind. I fear for his safety, but trust that he knows what he's doing and that he'll do what's best for everyone. For the next three weeks, I attempt to adjust to life without him. Even though we're beginning the fourth week without a man in the house, we're still struggling to get along in his absence.

Twenty-five days later, on August tenth, Neil finally comes back. I have never been more happy to see someone in my entire life. The kids are ecstatic, and they climb all over him. He enthusiastically accepts their hugs, but looks over Eric's shoulder at me even as he does.

"Welcome back, Mr. Armstrong," I say as he good-naturedly disentangles himself from the kids and comes over to me. I feel a wave of relief and joy rush over me all at once as I see his wonderful smile, the smile he reserves just for me. I know he loves me and has missed me just as much as I've missed him these past few weeks. The expectation of his touch sends a shiver down my spine, and all the doubt melts away.

"Why, thank you, Mrs. Armstrong," he says. "I've missed you. And you know what?" As he wraps me in his arms, he whispers in my ear the phrase that has been at the forefront of my thoughts for the past three and a half weeks, the phrase that has kept me strong without him. "I love you, to the moon and back."





Co-Editors-in-Chief: Draven Jackson and Melanie McGilberry  
Vice President: Madina Seytmuradova  
Secretary: Lydia Gilmer  
Treasurer: Mariah Cantrell  
Art Director: Alaina Hornberger

Editor-in-Chief (2016): Hannah Edwards  
Vice President (2016): Leanna Cobbs  
Poetry Head (2016): Leah Lancaster

Poetry Committee:

Head: Leanna Cobbs and Kalen Busby  
Rhett Coker  
Sydney Coker  
Michael Haden Culpepper  
Kalen Elise  
Breanna Felts  
Sana Rizwan Gondal  
Cheyenne Strickland

Prose Committee:

Head: Ani Hughes  
Georgia Blanchard  
Maraih Cantrell  
Leanna Cobbs  
Rhett Coker  
Sydney Coker  
Hayden Freese  
Lydia Gilmer  
Alaina Hornberger  
Julia Owens

Advising Faculty: Dr. Ben Robertson

Special thanks to Dr. Bill Thompson and Dr. Michael Orlofsky for choosing the Professor's Pick in poetry and prose respectively. We would also like to thank professor Beverly West Leach for critiquing the layout design of this semester's *Rubicon*.





Letter from the Editors:

To begin, we would like to thank you, the reader, for taking the time out of your busy day to pick up *The Rubicon*. By reading our literary journal, you are showing your support for the countless students at Troy University who worked tirelessly to create and choose the content that makes up this publication. So much talent and dedication was put into creating this edition of *The Rubicon*, both during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters of this school year.

We would first like to thank the student writers, editors, and artists who put in the time and effort to help us make this publication. We also want to thank the numerous members of the faculty at the university for their efforts to make this year's *Rubicon* better than ever, especially Dr. Ben Robertson, our faculty advisor, who has mentored and guided us this semester, allowing us to grow and improve as a publication.

All of our published pieces are chosen based purely on their content and structure, and we pride ourselves in being completely anonymous and honest when going over the works submitted.

We hope you enjoy reading our publication as much as we enjoyed putting it together, and we hope to continue to grow as a literary journal and to be able to publish even more wonderful pieces written by the students at Troy University in the future.

