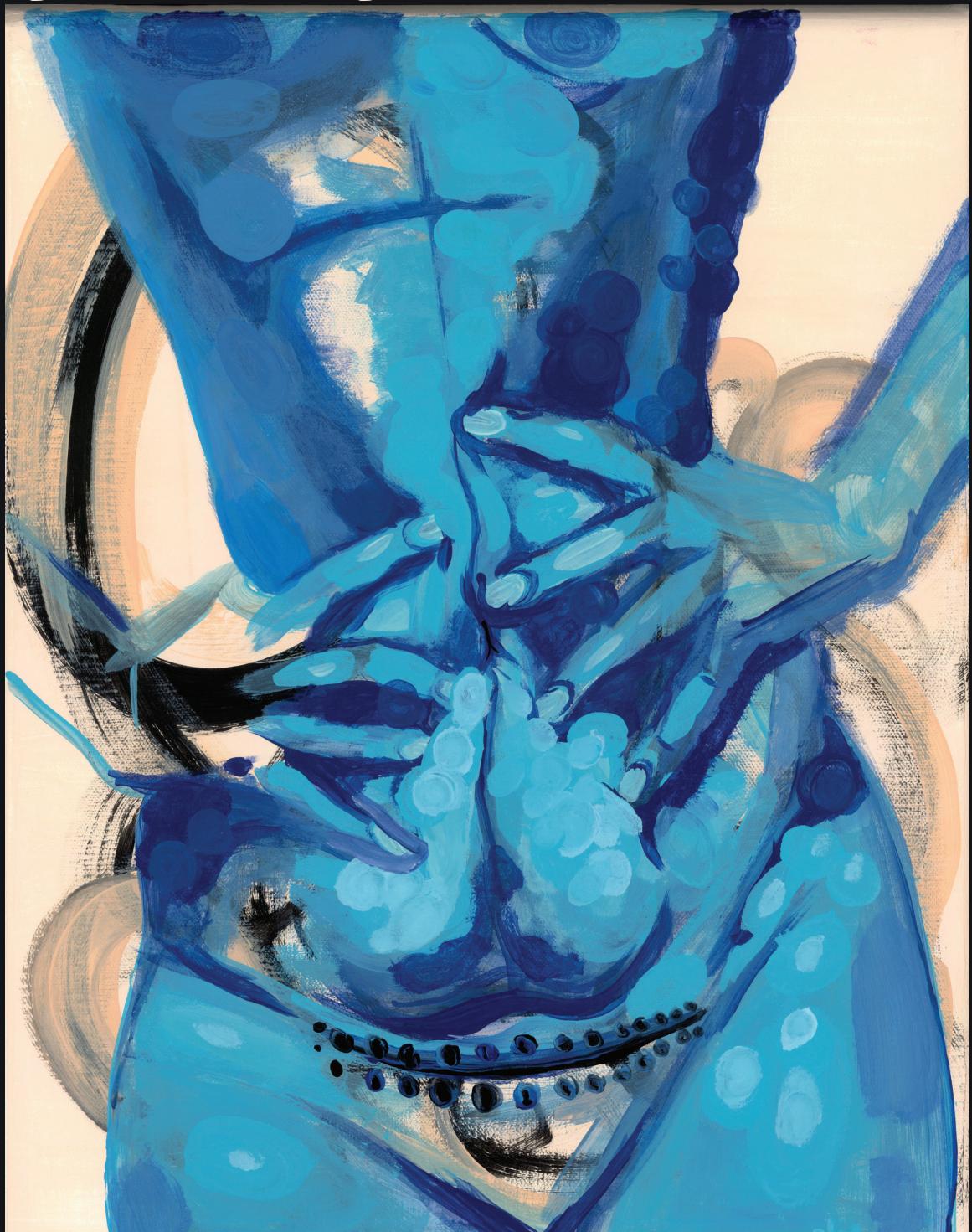


PERSPECTIVES



FALL 2024

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A literary arts magazine composed of original pieces from
Suffolk County Community College's students, staff, and friends.

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A Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Our contributors have captured something truly essential about the human condition in this volume of *Perspectives*. This issue is darker, more raw, and perhaps more political than the last, and the poetry, prose, and art featured in it often turn toward the existential and the abstract—grappling with many postmodern themes. I believe the recurring ideas in this issue—the tension between life and death, concepts of God, the search for meaning and the reimagining of divinity—speak to something deep in our collective consciousness as human beings.

In our world, narratives are fragmented and truth itself seems to slip between our fingers like dust. We are no longer anchored in traditional belief systems, yet we are left still grappling with their absence; with the sense that we must sit with our own uncertainty. Time after time, we ask: What does it mean to be human when the structures of meaning that once defined us—God, nation, history, self, even language—have been deconstructed? The works in this issue don't offer neat answers—rather, they mirror our own search for meaning in an existence that feels beyond the grasp of those existing in it.

This idea resonates deeply with me. The making of this issue, to me, affirmed that though we may not always understand art and language, its very purpose is to understand us, as people, as well as the human condition and all of its unspoken or inscrutable idiosyncrasies. I have often felt that in moments of political and personal turmoil, the creative sphere becomes a place we can trust and seek solace in when the sphere of existing policy, politics, and ordinary life seems to fail us. I believe this issue represents just that—it gives voice to a disquiet that we ourselves might not have known how to express.

The act of creation is never passive. It is, instead, an active attempt to understand—to interrogate the self, the world, and the ways in which the two collide. In that way, it is the most essential tool we have in our search for meaning. With that in mind, I hope that these pages will provoke you to think, to question, and to feel deeply.

With gratitude,



Evangeline “Vyolet” Denis
Editor-in-Chief

Empty Hands

— Emily Lamagese

Sometimes I say things that I don't mean,
But that doesn't make me wrong.
The poet's pen a swearing touch of the bible—
A paradigm of passion.

Fear is a kind of passion:
Don't fear my fists,
Ocean veins blood-tainted;
Fear me because I kneel when I am tall
With my knees imprinted into the ground,
Fear me because sometimes I say things that I want people to hear,
But that doesn't make me a poet.

Those who lead with their palms up, and knuckles down
Lead the mind's conviction,
A heavy hand to build or to break—
The hammer strikes.

MORNING

— Isabela Otoni De Oliveira

I OPEN MY EYES.
THE SUNLIGHT INVADES MY ROOM IN THE CORNER
MY HEAD SPINS. I LOOK AROUND THE ROOM
MY STOMACH SINKS. I TRY TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH
BUT THE AIR IS SO HEAVY
OH, GOD, IT'S GOING TO BE ONE OF THOSE MORNINGS
MY NECK IS ALL WET
MY HAIR IS GLUED TO IT
I'M ALL SWEaty AND STICKY
BUT MY SKIN IS COLD LIKE ICE
I TRY TO GET COMFORTABLE AND GO BACK TO SLEEP
TRYING NOT TO GIVE TOO MUCH ATTENTION
OTHERWISE SHE WILL KEEP COMING
GET BACK TO SLEEP! I COMMAND MYSELF
THE MORE I WAKE,
THE MORE I CAN FEEL HOW SWEaty I AM
I GIVE UP.
I TRY TO STAND UP BUT MY LEGS ARE SHAKING
THIS FEELING WON'T LEAVE ME ALONE
EVEN WHEN I'M TRYING TO SLEEP,
I'M JUST WAKING UP FROM ANOTHER ANXIETY ATTACK.
THIS SUCKS.
I HAVE THINGS TO DO
I CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE ANY OF MY SLEEP BECAUSE I'M ANXIOUS
I START TO OVERTHINK
AND MY HEART IS POUNDING
STARTING TO GET MORE AND MORE INTENSE
AND I REMEMBER
DO NOT FEED HER, OTHERWISE SHE WILL KEEP GROWING.

Maraschino

— Zoe Gonzalez

i am shoving cherries into my mouth
you try to talk to me
but i cannot hear you because i am shoving cherries into my mouth
sweet, sticky, bloody, sickly, lurid, stuck
bing, chelan, montmorency, lapins, van
ground, fingers, lips, mouth, tongue, throat
cherry juice is pouring out of my eyes
i lick their saccharine tears fervently
my ouroboros, my purest image of hedonism
like viviane, belly full of cherries and child
i vomit at the thought of consuming anything else,
the betrayal of the eternal, the immortal
fertility, femininity, perfection, prosperity
trapped, buried, clogged, vanquished
when i die, serve my body as a garnish
with pekin duck and coleslaw (at le coucou)
maraschino girl
maraschino jar
maraschino



Damned Souls

— Nick Scinto

i await the coming night,
see the damned take flight;
fueled by malicious spite—
their souls burn, bereft of light.

pockets of dark in the sky,
blackened stars i do spy,
remind me i soon will die,
no salvation can i buy.

in the dark i watch unfold
horrors for centuries untold.
all for power—as in old.
in a flash my soul is sold.

i await the coming rite—
the stinger's agonizing bite.
my body now a horrid site
the end comes, i do not fight.



Aftertaste

— Jennifer Mara Senft

I can still taste the exit wound
from the bullet my body held
long after the shot had been fired

I folded, allowing shards of shrapnel
to hit, lodge and live in my skin
not running from that prison
nor putting the past
in its rightful place

But now, I walk in the present tense
holding only—but still holding—
this bitter aftertaste

Untitled

— Nico Matos

Have you ever traced the light beams of God's glory leading to its kingdom above,

The closer you get, the more it burns your human eyes...

And yet... we still yearn for the infinite to be tangible.

We yearn...

Why do we yearn?

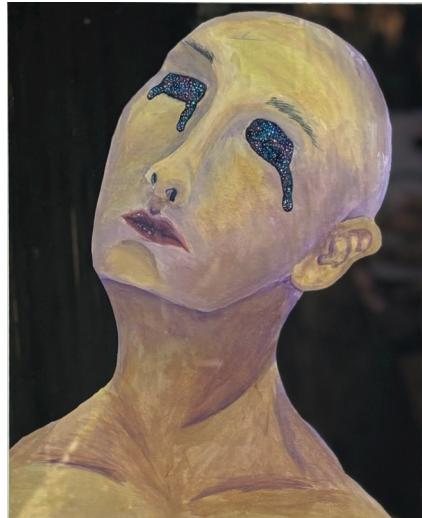
Is it to answer the existential question if we exist beyond this physical?

I am beginning to think existence is just this.

Only being alive can ignite the senses,

The inhale that dilates the pupils and raises bodily hairs may be unique to just this occasion.

Anything beyond this feels like threads of fabric, intricately interlaced to sustain this life.



Numen

— Nico Matos

Why do we undermine this?

Is it its fleeting nature?

It's tangible, yet we can't keep it in our fragile hands—
a contradiction that's hard to swallow.

Do we fear we will forget?

Will we lose the memory of our soul's journey when we return to our true home?

We brood at the foisted propaganda accompanying our every moment,

Its purpose... to taint our essence...
We revel in anguish at how it will all end.

How, why, when, with who, and by whom our eternal rest will come takes up space in our minds,

So much so that we fail to remember...

At this moment, it is with I that I live,

It is with you I share this current breath,

And all those who are not present are beyond my reach.

Let the salt in your tears remind you you're still among the living,

For even the tormenting contemplations are signs of profound sentience.

Find grounding in your being.

It's okay to let your mind wander on occasion,

But seek guidance from your inner child who knows no other way than to be

That version of you can gift the answers that will bring you back to Earth,

So that the wonder of God doesn't weigh as heavy.



A Wandering Mystery

— Nico Matos

The Dreamer

— Samantha Quinn

All children, except for one, grow up.
This statement is accurate,

as society is

Forced to grow up too quickly, to the
Point where anxiety runs rampant
And stress takes over.

And over.

And over.

Yet, there still is He: the lone Dreamer.
He chases in fields

of butterflies and bubbles.

He refuses to give up His daily joy.

The Dreamer plays with His food, He
Catapults spaghetti to the ceiling
To see if it's "cooked"

The Dreamer makes believe with His chicken nuggets, He fits the macaroni
onto each prong of the fork. He finger-paints the plate with all the condiments.

It may seem silly, and childish. But He prefers this lifestyle.

All of His friends gave up being able
To run and play, watch TV shows and
Scribble with crayons

So they can work a boringly drab job,
and live every day in misery.

But the Dreamer doesn't. He holds onto
The magic in the air. He cherishes it.

And while all children, except for one, grow up, it's important to know
that you too can be a Dreamer.



Playful Past

— Alana Negron

Halloween Sonnet

— Lilianna Sotomayor

Comes in the fall, bringing down all the leaves.
 Halloween close behind, soon all will see
 The fiends of the night, tricky little thieves
 Sprinting down the streets, on a candy spree.

On the darkest night, they all come to roam
 Adorned in strange masks, they disrupt the norm.
 Little devils in search of treats leave home
 So gluttonous for sweets, to bowls they swarm.

If left unsated, tricks appear at the door.
 Eggs and toiletries, covering the stoop
 When done, they hunt for confections some more
 Their empty bellies lead the spooky group.

Mini demons crave sugary delights
 Oh, children give their parents a good fright.



Wonderland
 — Alexis Murray

An Evening Excursion

— Gianluca Cacciamani

A Battle Royale for all to see
 To me and him, we're grouping up.
 To tell the truth, it's fight or flight
 When entering the Ranked Royale.
 A history burns deep, yet no face
 An enjoyment I've not had in some time
 With me or without, he will proceed
 So why take a chance in stride?

Landing in the Tilted Towers
 Shotguns loaded with delight
 Beaming bots from across the map
 Port-a-bunkering in a rush.
 Superhero skins rushing the back
 I'm always locked in, and coming in clutch.
 Knocked away, yet coming back
 How long can we survive?

Next time I say,
 "We'll get 'em this time"
 A SCAR or two is all I need
 To show the real OGs.

I say this now, but listen up
 My friends excel at this whole deal
 I cheer for them from right behind
 Shockwaves and Impulses, flying through
 Watch now, as they drop a clip.

In a game as old as time
 A game of Ranked Reload is all it takes.
 Ls a plenty lie waiting in store
 But what's to worry when playing with friends?
 Watch my level go up, up, and up.
 The W will be so unreal
 A crown placed atop my head,
 When playing with friends, it's always a Victory Royale.



Swim
— Jennifer Hannaford

A Really Bad Joke

— Sabrina Kelly

A borzoi walks into an empty bar.

“Why the long face?” the bartender asks.

The borzoi tiredly responds, “Just give me my drink without making a mockery of me.”

“Wow, rough day?” the bartender asks as he wipes the dust off a glass.

“With an extra two shots as well,” the borzoi sighs.

“Jeez,” the bartender says worriedly, “Can you even handle it?”

The borzoi shakes his head. “It’ll knock me out—maybe kill me—but I don’t mind.”

“Why not? I’m sure someone would miss you.”

The borzoi watches the bartender pour four shots of gin into the glass silently.

“I sure would miss you. You’re one of my only customers.”

The borzoi stays quiet.

“You’re one of my only friends too, did you think of that?” The bartender hands the borzoi his drink, then motions to wait. He grabs a second glass, and pours his own shot.

“To the beginning of a bad joke: two lonely people in a lonely bar.”

Their glasses clink in salutation, and they drink.

The Uncommon Applicant

— Healy Fallon

To whom it may concern,
you should be concerned.

I write this email frail and pale,
as my self-motivation has become stale.

My sweat has pooled into my keyboard crevices,
making squelching sounds when I type,

Sounds of
cheese stick wrappers that have piled on my desk.

Sounds of
a pile of wet leaves at the bottom of my empty in-ground pool, just my laptop
and I.

Sounds of
tabs have been injected with the Substance and are duplicating recklessly.

I have several assaultive questions.

My first question:

Is it weird that my first letter of recommendation is from my pet hedgehog,
and my second from the mouse that somehow entered my laboring mother's
hospital room? They both have great perspectives as seasoned witnesses to
my life.

My second question:

Can my resume include emojis? Particularly pertaining to my experience in the
seafood service industry?

My third question:

Under the additional materials, can I include video documentation of my gym or skin-care routines? Or of me demolishing a Domino's delivery at 3am, audio included? Or a Ziploc of my hair?

My fourth question:

Are you, or any member of your admissions office, on Tinder?

My fifth question:

Should I be concerned if my standardized test scores just happen to match my Instagram follower count? I promise, it's just a coincidence.

My sixth question:

Can I have reassurance that my application will be considered, even though it is more uncommon than common? I apply everything, including deodorant and logic, uncommonly.

On a closing note, I'm the uncommon among the common. I'm the uncommon applicant, and that's why you should accept me.

So

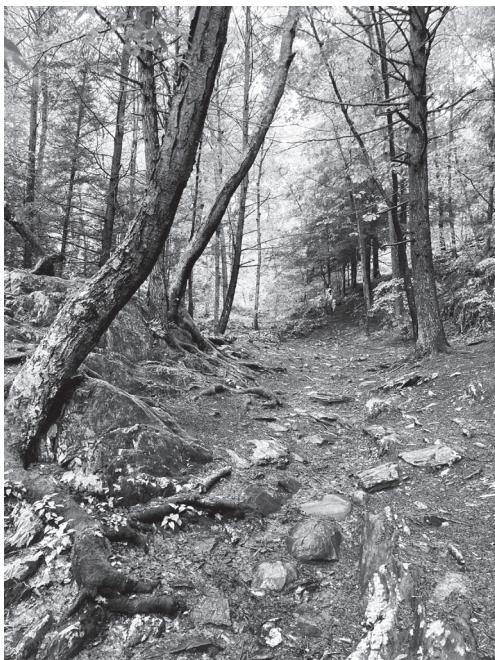
Thank you for your interest,
My application isn't Pinterest.

I don't believe I can get into your college,
So I'm putting all the pressure on you to tell me that I, in fact, am getting into your college.

Looking forward to your feedback on my uncommon application, my digital tome of curated achievement yellowing at the first and last sections of knowledge.

Worth a shot. Worth a spit in the pot.

From my bed, rotting,
Transfer Student and Uncommon Applicant



Photography by Anthony Grimaldi

Hope in the Rain

— Annabelle Matusak

I walk through the storm of midnight rain
I watch the tears of the sky fall on the ground,
Falling so fast as if it's a race.
I hear every drop of rainfall
As I listen to my thoughts speak,
Fists are flying through my head.
As I walk, I hear an angelic melody.
A faint glow in the distance
I stand in awe of what I see,
Hope is what I see standing in front of me.
Such a bright glow in all this darkness,
So dark and stormy, yet still so bright.
Hope grabs my hand and envelops me.
I close my eyes and then open them,
Light is all I see
Bright and colorful,
I see hope.

This feeling is strange, yet warm and calm
As if I am sitting up, cozy by a burning fire.
Instead of my thoughts showing hostility,
They are communicating with peace.
Is this feeling okay?
Yes, I'm free and can recover.
Hope eliminated the storm in my head,
As if it was a small ant that got stepped on.
Hope is good, hope is okay.

Theme for English B

— Sara Solano Villela

Inspired by “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes

The instructor said,

Go home and write
a page tonight
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple.
I am eighteen, born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.
I lived my whole life there, until I came here.
I am a very friendly person,
I have always loved talking to other people
Never had any difficulties making friends,
Until I came here.

I had heard about it before,
Had heard those who lived far from their own land talking about it.
“Cultural shock,” “language barrier,” “lost in translation...”
That's what they would call it.
I never really understood it, never felt the need to.
I was always surrounded by those who knew me best.
Those who had grown up walking the same streets,
Dancing to the same tunes,
Speaking the same words,
Experiencing the same reality.
Until I came here.

I was not ready for it.

I was not ready for the all-consuming nostalgia,
The yearning for a past that is so unobtainable.

I had not prepared myself for the isolating loneliness,
A loneliness for which I still can't find an explanation,
Because I've met splendid people.

Perhaps it is the fact that despite all the good I can find here,
It is not my home.

Some would call me blessed, and I would not dare deny it,
but every blessing brings with it some curse.

My blessing is the opportunity of a better future
And my curse is leaving behind a beautiful past.
Leaving behind the people who have made me who I am,
The places that watched me grow up,
And the country that holds my heart captive.

Not everything is so melancholic though,
I now have a whole new world of opportunities
opening in front of my eyes.

As time goes on, I learn to embrace my new reality,
I learn to appreciate all those things about this country that has welcomed me.
I open myself to the possibility that the day may come
when this also becomes my home.

And I learn to understand that no matter where I go,
Honduras will always be a part of me.

This is my page for English B.

Hit and Run

— Elizabeth Shelton

I want to know who you are when the cleats come off
When your feet are sore
And it's hard to walk
When the helmet is no longer in use
Who are you when it's just you?
Isolated in your thoughts
Who are you when the cheering stops,
When you go back to the world with no sun?
Who are you when the field you knew becomes undone?
The plays are no longer just physical, there is now a mental plane
Who are you when the cleats come off?

The same person I had seen yesterday
Is now in pain

Your silence is now in vain
The unspoken words
Are written on your face

You're tired
And it's not from practice the other day



A Journey of Belonging

— Kacey-Ann Green

As I stood in our small Kingston home, surrounded by familiar walls that once echoed with laughter, I felt the weight of goodbye settling upon me like a gentle rain. My mother's hand, worn from years of hard work, gently grasped my shoulders, her touch imbuing me with strength and warmth.

"Kacey-Ann, it's time to go," she whispered, her voice trembling like the leaves of the mango tree outside.

As I fought back tears, I nodded resolutely, my heart heavy with the thought of leaving. Beside me, my suitcase stood sentinel, its contents a tangible representation of my dreams and the uncertainty that lies ahead. As we stepped into the bright Jamaican sunlight, the sounds and smells of my childhood flooded me: vendors calling out their daily specials, the aromatic jerk chicken wafting from street carts, and the warmth of community embracing me.

"Come, let's take one last look," Mother said, pointing to the rolling hills of Jamaica, their lush green slopes glistening with dew.

We stood together, taking in the kaleidoscope of colors, the close-knit community and their familiar struggles.

"Remember, no matter where life takes you, never forget your roots," my mom whispered, her eyes shining with tears.

At Norman Manley International Airport, loved ones gathered, their faces etched with sadness, to bid me farewell. My grandmother's eyes, usually bright with warmth, now brimmed with tears. She clutched me tightly, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Grow and make us proud, Kacey-Ann."

Her words, laced with a mix of sadness and determination, echoed in my heart. As I boarded the plane, I gazed out the window, watching Jamaica fade into the distance. The island's lush green mountains, the turquoise waters of the Caribbean, and the bustling streets of Kingston disappeared from view.

Stepping off the plane in America, I felt a chill run down my spine. Unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells overwhelmed me. "Welcome to the

United States,” a sign read, its bold letters a stark reminder of my new reality. As I clutched my luggage, a thrill of anticipation coursed through my veins, tempered by the faint tremble of uncertainty.

The days that followed blurred together in a whirlwind of new experiences. I marveled at the towering skyscrapers, the hum of traffic, and the diverse faces that surrounded me. My first meal in America was a memorable one—a massive chicken dish from a Chinese restaurant that left me in awe. As I got settled in my new home, I waited patiently for my younger brother to get home from school. I was so excited to get him off the school bus. In the days that followed, I struggled to adjust to the noise, crowds, and fast-paced lifestyle, but my family’s unwavering optimism kept me going. My first job at a local retail store taught me valuable lessons about responsibility and teamwork. I remember the sense of accomplishment when I received my first paycheck. The smell of freshly printed money and the feeling of independence stayed with me. I enrolled in school, navigating new classes, teachers, and friendships. In art class, I found solace in creativity. Vibrant colors and bold brushstrokes brought me joy. My teacher, Mr. DiSalvo, encouraged me, recognizing the emotional depth in my artwork.

“Your art tells stories,” he said. I poured emotions into each piece, reflecting on my journey.

As summer approached, I experienced my first 4th of July celebration. The fireworks lit up the night sky, and the patriotic spirit was palpable. I felt a sense of belonging as I watched the parade with my friends. Fast forward to Halloween, which brought me a new level of excitement. I dressed up in my costume, trick-or-treating with my friends. The thrill of knocking on doors, collecting candy, and laughing together created lifelong memories.

I learned to balance my Jamaican heritage with my new American life. I celebrated my first American Thanksgiving, gathering around a table filled with unfamiliar dishes. My family’s Jamaican cooking blended with American flavors, creating a unique fusion. I shared stories of our Jamaican holidays, and my new friends listened with curiosity. We laughed and learned together, forging unforgettable bonds. I remember my first ever Christmas in America, snowflakes fell gently outside my window, a magical sight. It was my first time ever decorating a Christmas tree. As I decorated the tree, we sang carols, blending our voices in harmony.

Years later, reflecting on my journey fills me with pride. I have learned

that adversity can spark growth, and that resilience can help overcome daunting challenges. I remember the struggles, the tears, and the doubts—each moment etched in my mind. Most of all, I cherish the love, laughter, and triumphs that accompanied me along the way. My Jamaican heritage and American experiences have intertwined beautifully, creating a rich tapestry that tells my story.

As I look back, the sounds and smells of America have become familiar, yet Jamaica remains deeply rooted in my heart. I now understand that home isn't merely a place; it's a profound sense of belonging that I have cultivated within myself. This journey has transformed me, deepening my understanding of who I am and instilling a sense of purpose. Each challenge I face has shaped my character, teaching me the values of perseverance and self-belief. I approach life with a newfound courage, eager to embrace opportunities that come my way. My experiences have ignited a passion within me to continually grow and strive for my dreams, reminding me that I am capable of achieving anything I set my mind to.

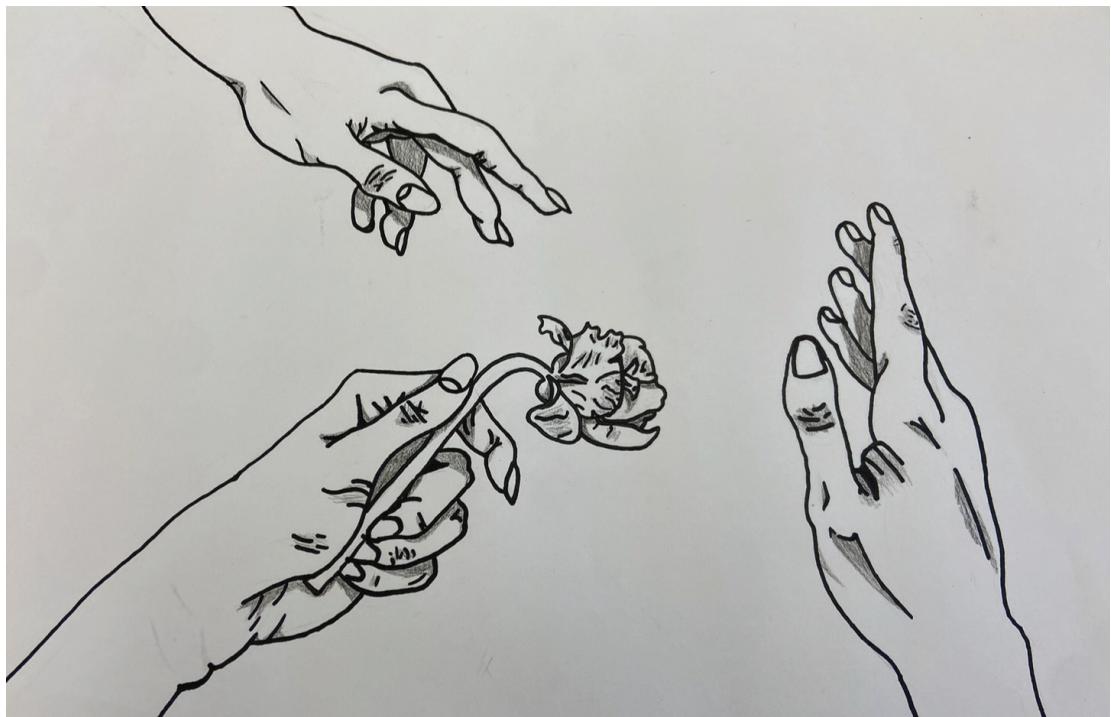


Illustration by Angelina Albino



Chaotic Resilience

— Christie Jones

The Inventor

— Sarah Winslow

He lives alone in a small house bare
Accepting scraps and tin and chairs
And through the night he sits in thought
Of things that he, his father, taught
When lambent ideas come to mind
He strives to make them come to life
And from his mind's eye it takes form
Cold cats around a fireplace swarm
Then he, to village people, gives
His craftsmanship, and so he lives
In happy satisfaction when
His work is loved by all townsmen.

Inside a Doll's Thoughts

— Sabrina Kelly

Everyone's perfect somebody
 She is placid for the audience
 She dances, she sings, she bows
 They cheer for their best doll

Everyone's ideal model
 They love the sight and idea of her
 They poke, they scoff, they violate
 She is powerless to fight back

Everyone's favorite model
 She is patient with the crowd
 She smiles, she waves, she is silent
 They love a modest girl

Everyone's best girl
 They won't care for her suffering
 They turn, they ignore, they silence her
 She cries tears of pearls that they collect

Everyone's lovable trinket
 Until she steps out of line
 She frowns, she sighs, she thinks
 Why is she trapped?

Is to be a woman
 To have to perform?
 To cook, to clean, to entertain?
 Where does all her life go?

And what if she resigns?
 What if she chooses not to continue servitude?
 To live, to make mistakes, to be free?
 Must she continue a doll's life?

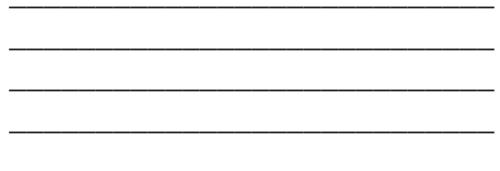
She's a toymaker's creation
 Of their own self-image
 To yell, to judge, but to also feel
 Have they forgotten that small detail?

A secret, a lie, a mistake
 She lives her life in fear
 To act, to run, to hide
 Is the blood on her hands?

What if she struggles with morality
And agonizes over whether what she did was right?
To fall, to drown, to die
“Why can’t she open up to us?”

What if she had one chance to be better
To give them a chance to be a person?
To imagine, to laugh, to play
Why did she ruin her only opportunity?

She can’t stop thinking about it
The guilt crushes her porcelain heart
To break, to shatter, to ruin
Why can’t I just end it all?



Everyone’s perfect somebody
She is placid for the audience
She dances, she sings, she bows
And a single silver tear clatters onto the stage.



Breaking Through

— Lindsey Galligan

The Skeleton in the Closet (In the Basement)

— Skazka

An un-romanticizable image of my life now exists in the form of a photo taken on a shitty digital camera.

The camera itself belonged to no one in particular, but it was my brother's for the short moment he spent taking that ugly photo of me in his ugly room. Just minutes before, he'd mumbled something about planning to sell it soon—along with all the other items brought home from various “jobs” over time. He would repeat that same line whenever I came downstairs to retrieve an item he'd borrowed from me (today, it had been a computer cord) yet his collection seemed to swallow up more surface area with each passing day.

His words blurred into each other. The multitude of objects in the surrounding area did, too.

It could happen to anyone. Messes like these are complicated to keep track of. What began inside a closet could consume a bedroom, what consumed a bedroom could consume a hallway... and before you know it, what once consumed a hallway now consumes an entire basement—and soon the entire house.

I found myself standing in the middle of his bedroom as he rummaged through his many belongings—though the “bed” part of his bedroom seemed to have completely disappeared since last time. My eyes darted around the room as he played Scrabble with the clutter, searching for the computer cord I'd let him borrow—an exchange that had taken place months ago. My patience had worn thin and my mind was made up: I wouldn't just give up and leave without my things.

It was difficult to keep that commitment. Of course, my computer cord had been devoured by the surrounding mess—but “mess” is a wild understatement. To find it, my brother would need to exert an effort similar to what it takes to move mountains—except in this case, the mountains are the

piles of excessive “treasures” his room has become home to. Slowly, I came to terms with the Best Buy checkout screen looming in my future.

As the search dragged on, I grew increasingly claustrophobic trying to make anything of the seemingly endless heaps of shit that surrounded us. The space and its excessive contents were indescribably overwhelming to even just perceive for the short time I was there. If I had to verbally explain what I was looking at, my speech would come out as scrambled and disoriented as my perception was. There were so many *things*—an inexpressible quantity of utter crap stacked upon every surface and stuffed into every corner of the room—that my brain couldn’t hope to keep up with my eyes. Among the chaotic assemblage of shit, I could pick nothing apart from the other things surrounding it. Looking around was becoming agonizing, and my gaze found its way down to my own feet.

More intolerable was his compulsive effort to show-and-tell several of the things strewn about to me—gesticulating with grossly blistered arms and hands. I saw all of it as useless for any purpose but effectively transforming his room into a dumpster. He was almost advertising the junk to me as he dug through everything—reinforcing my assumption that none of these things would ever actually be sold. Not even the microphone he offered to me—which he alleged is worth several hundred dollars. Not even the digital camera with a sickeningly bright flash that he took my picture with—proof of this ugly mess and my stationary position within it.

I wondered why he asked our mother for money so often if there was so much money to be made from all around him. I already knew the answer.

I commanded my eyes to look harder and my brain to think better—playing the part, pretending there isn’t a single thing wrong, pretending to be engaged and joyful, pretending to see nothing. I finally made some concrete observations, though very few before my brain gave up—crystalline residue at the bottom of a tin, cigarette butts on the floor, empty bottles of alcohol, and lots of genuine trash aside from the useless stuff. I mocked myself for even coming down here, and for being just as emotional and just as complacent as my mother. I caught myself wishing I could somehow cram him and all of the garbage he loves so much into a closet—just shove it all in there to never open it again.

In the junk, I only succeeded in finding reminders of my reasons for avoiding him and his region of the house. Unsurprisingly, I would return upstairs with nothing but a ring (too large for me to even wear) he picked out

from the muddle as retribution, and the knowledge that my uncomfortable grimace was immortalized on a random camera. I wished he would just sell it already, like he kept saying he would.

He kept saying he would.



And for the Man, I'll Let the Devil Do My Bidding

— Sarah Weghorst

In my mind's eye, you are bright, and beautiful as ever

life not taken at the hands of a man who preys on vulnerability,
for a buck.

You were only worth a couple hundred,

a dream of infinity, was only worth a gram.

I'd like not to think of you
at least not now,

lest I claw at my casket of longing.

A photograph, a eulogy,
strangled by time.

Bringing me to my knees
on a church pew.

I'll reach out to God,

and meet apathy instead.

Bleached Vortex

— Christie Jones



Who Is to Be Guilty, God, or I?

— Sarah Weghorst

I

Pool parties are for the innocent;
I can not make my arrival
for I have grown too large for these spaces of naivety,
in a moment shorter than the lifespan of houseflies.

I can not show up where I have promised,
for I am not that of sun rays,
more so the drape of night sky,
or black holes.

I consume all that I have come to know,
although I have not asked to.
I've made no bargain with God.

The world still scowls at me,
but the planets embrace me in understanding;
they did not ask for their being either,
only existing if they are seen,
revolving around all but their own.
These lives are bleak.

II

Do you recall,
how they wailed?
After they stared,
at his apparition
clothed in alabaster,
lying on the stretcher,
passing before their bodies
curled up in prayer,
more silent than their heaving;
he passed before you too.

The wailing halts
in three beats,
and you are all that's left,

surely,
this pain will bring you closer to priesthood,
than he is to heaven.

When the hurricane comes,
and beats the window pane in
you will not run.

You will sit across from your mother,
until the silence breaks the room in half.

You will ponder everything you could have done,
you will read cheap Hallmark cards
until they become religion,
and grief becomes God.

When you clasp your hands in prayer
you will glance at your palms,
and see the crimson you never noticed before.

And maybe, in 6 years time,
you will understand acceptance.

You will turn to atheism,
and proclaim that God
is but an object of denial.

III

Death does not come to swallow me;
I meet death in the bedroom of my childhood home,
which has known more war
than battlefields.

One day,
I will take up more space,
than you ever have.

Although,
it was not supposed
to be this way.

I dream fervently of many things,
of light, which holds me,
of a God that understands logic, and reason,
of the green front door on the house out east, by the vineyards,
I dream of a world in which I grow no larger than you.

My dreams are not selfish,
they
are just dreams.

Form

— Alexis Murray



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