





A Ballad for Ukraine

The air is silent. Now, at least. Maybe something is coming. There is always the calm before the storm, even if the storm is already happening elsewhere. How long does it take for the storm to escalate into a hurricane? How do we deal with the aftershocks? Do we even have any ideas on where to start?

That is what is truly frightening.

It is always the unknown that causes fear. We know what they have done. We know what they can do. But what will they do?

We know not.

But until then, we can only know what we know.

We know of the fear. The faceless shadow entity that paralyzes us all with uncertainty. It comes and goes, but does it ever really go? It's a wisp of obsidian that seeps into the soul and lingers there forever. It resembles the angel of death, but instead of claiming the body, it claims the mind.

We know of the capabilities. There are too many possibilities, so it seems. There are too many deaths already. Too many delicate spirits plucked from their mortal bodies. The radiant light of the sun is quickly consumed by the flames of war. Too many glistening garnets of blood are spilled.

And we know of the pain. The forsaken families. They are separated, whether it be of realms of existence or the living boundaries that society has created. And oh, there is pain, pain beyond words, a hopeless kind of pain that you can only know when you feel it. What would you do to make that pain end? Do you keep fighting? How do you keep fighting when it feels like all is lost? How do you even try to fight when you know not when to start?

There is no light without shadows. There is no good without evil. There is no hope without despair. The onyx darkness only makes our lives more special. We realize what goodness and beauty truly are. Such a shame, though, that this is what shows us the glimmering light. How much it really means to us, and how easy it is to lose.

But there are also no shadows without light. There is no evil without good. There is no despair without hope. So keep going on. There is light. There is good. There is hope. Keep fighting for it. We are with you.

Be well, my dears.

by Olivia Burdash

The Robot

From the pits of metal and backwash of fire,
There he came.
Gangly and lustrous but thrown with conflicted disdain,
He refused life's offer and chose to run away.
Until the foot fell,
Then he had to stay.

Through time it was seen that there was more to gain from within than without
And so on his way he was forced.
He bore it with pride and then shame with his journey,
Falling farther from his goal.
So upon how return he came to confess
But found the schoolyard burned.

Far behind the world of the seen, as of the seen he was attempting to be without,
There came a crash from the world of present.
Rock fell and metal shrieked, but not of a wound to be beared.
It was for those who found him as he was twisted from the path again.
Still, he joined them in their quest: to seek nothing.
Among them, he was nothing again, which was quite pleasing.

Far beyond any world, far beyond their times,
They were sentenced to the spite of the fates.
Twisted from theirs,
It seemed only fitting that he join.
But he had no care for it.

Farther beyond the world they knew,
They crashed on ground so infirm it fell at their touch.
For years they were gone
While the danger they had brought with them slept.
He was with them until they woke up.

How appropriate was it that some evil awoke them?
It does little matter and he dealt with it as he saw.
Only what he saw became so insignificant.
So he fell into disrepair until something returned from forgotten times.
A key of a cure of a danger of a frightful magnificence.

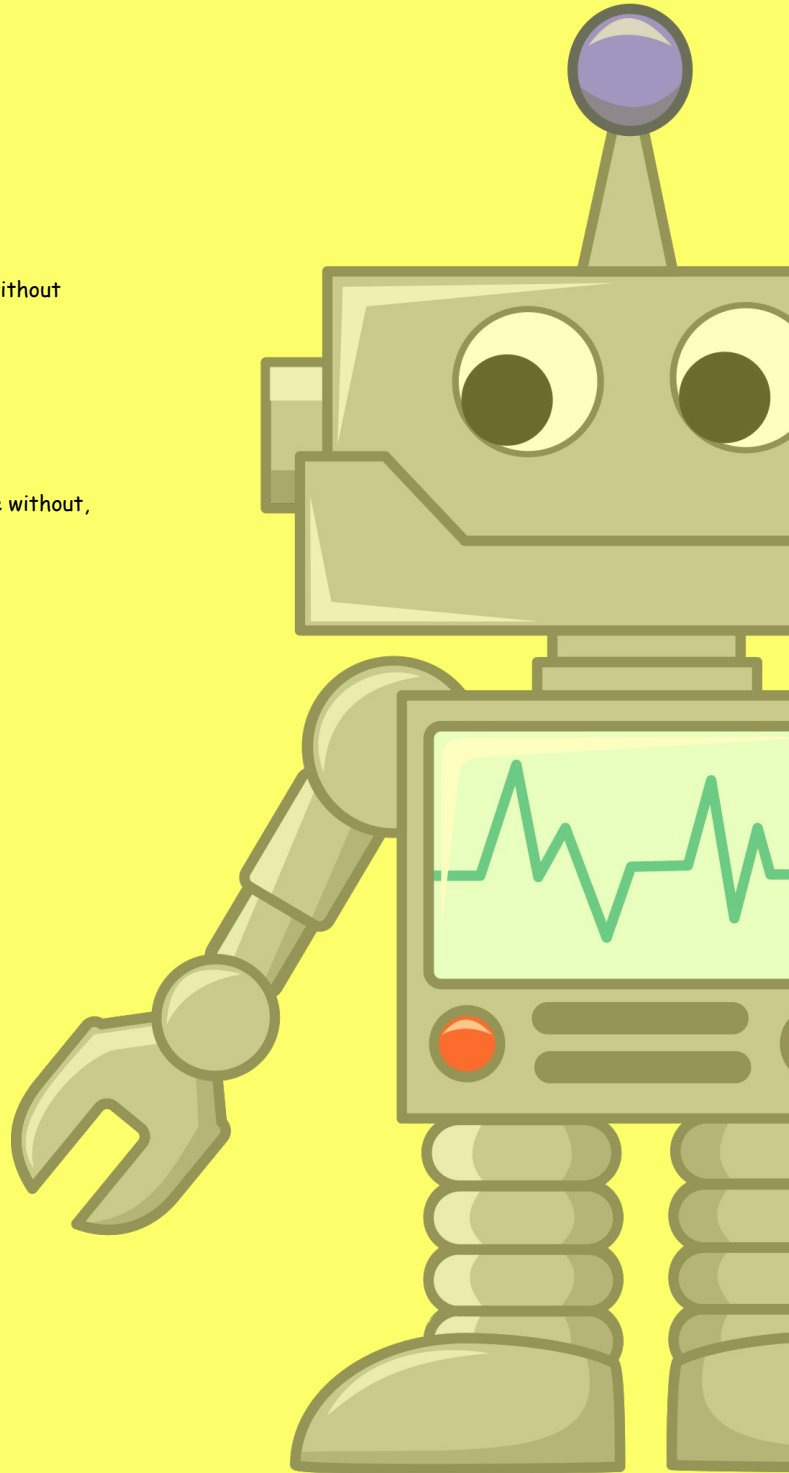
So he went on, them as a constant.
If care was a factor, it showed so well.
Until an awakening occurred for a revenge,
And what a revenge it was.

A key of a cure of a dagger of a frightful magnificence
How little it became for something so big.
He recognized it well,
As did the one who would have his revenge.

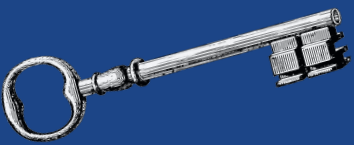
So it fell out of favor,
It was done until he remembered.
A forceful remembrance but one he chose.

To choose was demise and demise was choice,
Nothing to be taken by him as everything was given.

So go on and cheer your neighbor, go on and cheer your friend.
In the end, the one met Fate - met fate by a dead robot's hand.



by Bridget McGuire



The Silver Toy Box

By Jaiden Rodgers



Thomas just sat there, perfectly quiet and motionless, for what must have been two hours. No one wanted to break the silence, and apart from Officer Hoffman briefly mumbling something to his radio, no one did. What else could they say to him? There comes a point where the words “I’m so sorry” go from comforting support to white noise, in the same way that a “bless you” after a sneeze comes out as more of a reflex than a thoughtful statement. Anything that Thomas had the desire to say or do had gone up in flames alongside everything he ever knew. There was nothing to say *about* him either, at least nothing that would not have left the room bawling uncontrollably. Life had played a cruel joke on Thomas, who still sat wearing the red party hat from earlier that day. Seven little candles on their own were not enough to cause trouble, but a poorly placed cake, a wobbly table, and a very itchy dog spelled disaster.

Fearing that the silence would kill him before the weather did, Dr. Adams adjusted his brown bifocals and raised from his curled up position in the back corner of the room. He was the poorly dressed outlier in a room of winter coats and scarves. Adams owned one of the three practices in Ellouis, and Hoffman had caught him just before he closed for the night, dragging him along so quickly that his keys were still left in the door. For eight seconds, all the attention in the room was on Adams. Even Thomas, who had been stationary up until that point, turned his head to listen to what Adams had to say.

Before he even had a chance to articulate anything meaningful, Officer Cameron interrupted with both the best and worst news Thomas would hear for a very long time. She confirmed that the flames had consumed almost everything, with the exception of the gift Thomas’ grandfather had sent him. It was a massive silver toy box with an equally massive lock guarding its contents. It was clear that there was something heavy inside, but there was no key found anywhere. It was now approaching midnight, so with approval from all parties, it was decided that both the toy box and Thomas were to be entrusted to Dr. Adams for the night. As Thomas watched Dr. Adams’ intense struggle to get out of the station with both himself and the box in tow, he realized that this would be a very long night for everyone.





Emptiness around
Hollow bark cries all alone
Gone what there once was

~ Matthew Emig

*Touched by no reason.
They are my hope and my joy
I love them dearly.*

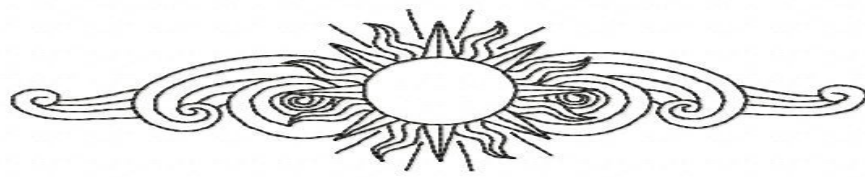
~Bridget McGuire

the roots reach downward
straining to hold
as the trunk stands solidly
with gratitude - firm
so its leaves can dance
mindlessly, joyful in the wind
~anonymous

Branches reaching up
kissing the cloudless blue sky
time now to rejoice
~anonymous

*Thorny snowflakes sting
They have cut into my cheeks
Surgeons numbing me*

~Rosa Gould



Sun, you Mustn't Set

Obscure abstractions, minuscule details—
Encapsulations of a memory.
How gaps of sunlight melt—
Golden light shrouds the leaves,
encasing them in a warm clasp.

How pools of honey delicately drip from nature's eyelids,

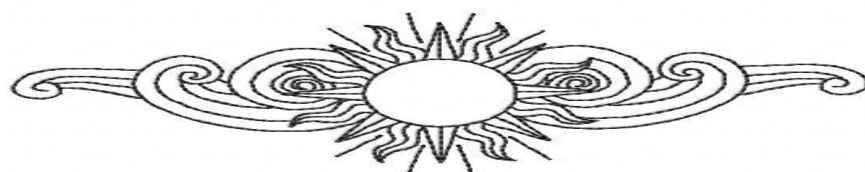
Leaves tracing through the wind;
Ambiance abstracted in pure surrealism.
The darkest eyes reflect these moments in pure tranquility;
In reflections, their gaze holds a plea—
One so deft and so certain:

An honest factuality that eternity, contrivance—

It is all beautifully focused,
Brilliantly forged in the human eye.
Holding the center of times unraveling vortex;
The eyes' admiration is filled with a cry for life's introspection.
Blinking tears, glossing over a safe universe;
Undefined like the everlasting changes of clouds in the sky.

The veins on a leaf, a face of grief—
Solely, solely created for the eyes to see.
The sun doesn't set for the eyes of life;
Shining in its brilliance,
Holding humanity in a delicate embrace.
Its beauty begged to be noticed;
Jocund, dexterous, and sure of oneself—
Sun, you mustn't set.

by Ava Biamonte



Caged and Gone

A paper marked with a 100 drops down on my desk
This bird inside my chest is flying
If a failing grade stains my report card
This bird inside my chest will be dying

This beating, biting bird
Can pound with fear and bound with joy
Freedom is what I wish, but the bars around this bird
Are stronger than any chain, stronger than any pain

Its wings have been clipped, its beak bound
The sound of its chirping has dulled down
It used to scream, shriek, sing something for someone
Now its voice is destroyed and done

A time ago, it flew above to the heavens
A time ago, it dove below to the underworld

That time is lost, that time is spent
~Josie Cruser



Kintsugi

I am scattered pottery on a wooden floor,
Carelessly dropped by someone that came before.
For days I lay motionless on the ground.

One day,
You came into the room,
Maybe you walked into the wrong one,
still you stumbled upon me,
Almost cutting yourself on my shards.

For a second I couldn't fathom a reason why you
would take interest in me,
But still you ran your fingers against my edges,
And tilted your rosed lips into a smile.

It was then when you took me home,
Back to your work table where you reattached my
pieces,
Gluing them back together with seams of the
brightest gold,
And whispers of sweet little nothings.
The gold slips around me,
Like spools of yarn wrapping around my frame so
elegantly.

You were the first person to tell me I was
beautiful,
And truly mean it.

I think I'm starting to believe it too.

-Samantha Pantaleo

HOWL

Once upon an eerie night there was suddenly a great fright.
Darkness across the land brought screaming, shrieking
throughout the night.

The trees danced as the wind howled and swept the skies
When suddenly there was a thunderous thunderous cry.

The wail was like a nail scratching and scratching a
chalkboard,
And came from a ghastly, gloomy cottage.
Twas such a sinister sight, on such a supernatural night
When the black wolf emerged from the cottage in the
moonlight.


The full moon awakens this mysterious beast
With fangs and fur.
When the howling decreased, and the yelping ceased
There was nothing but this mysterious stalking beast.

Its eyes filled with fright
Showed horror as a work of art.
The ears ringing, ringing with the screams
Of the souls trapped in its heart.

The full moon breaks beyond the fog -
Causes an outcry in the mist.
How can a creature -beautiful-
Terrifying - and enchanting - possibly exist.

Kevin Jacobs





Birds, birds, singing their strings of words
The sunlight so bright, telling me, it's alright
Stepping outside to the brisk, breezy air
Walking through the glistening, green, grassy morning dew
Trumpet's firm tone breaks the morning stillness

Birds, birds, tweeting at each other midair
The boat's motor hums me back to sleep
But I re-awake as I'm engulfed by the lake's still waters,
The morning mountains meet me with their mystical fog
Now I listen to the meaty, motor's mighty roar

Birds, birds,
The children's chatter comes
The sun's warmth kisses our skin and
Birds, birds, their eccentric manner slow
and their voices cease
The lights turn off
and all that's left is the cerulean shine of the moon,
The black azure opens up and unveil the starry sky
The eyes of the day come to a close
And the wavy waters wait for tomorrow...

~ Atticus Eglinski

Happiness

The harmonious hallway
No strings or things attached
Leap over the grand school building
All the potential of a match.

The harmonious hallway
Going to great lengths, the highest ranks
Waving like happy travelers
Shining bright, all my strengths

The harmonious hallway
No hesitation or limitation
Pushing through the immense, heaving crowd
Levitation sensation

The harmonious hallway
Fast, athletic leopard, stopping never
Moving at lighting, brightening speed
Into the light forever

The harmonious hallway
Joyous like a child
Squeezing the slow, unceasing sorrow,
Nothing is mild, the merriness piled

~Owen Barrett

Life



Life is like a butterfly

A green caterpillar crawls and cries

Her cheeks rosy and eyes wide

Innocent and full of vigor, yet she can't wait to get bigger

Growing, growing

~Olivia Cassieri

Dust



Dust has no plan
Little speck goes unnoticed
Quietly it stands
The little, lonely, speck longing for love
Blowing around town
Grasping for attention like a child
Trying its best, only to be put to the test
Pitter-pattering, dying for appreciation
The world's a stage
Dust is begging to be the star
Trying its best, only to be put to the test
It wants to be the best,
But dust is one of millions
Tossed around in the muddle
If only to be noticed,
One day, one day soon
One day, one day soon

by Abigail Anderson

ON EDGE

Tall, dark figures are all around as I question the sky where to go,
This dreadful darkness fosters my fear.
Spinning and spinning I cannot find my way as shadows surround me,
Croaking frogs, and chirping crickets on damp logs mock my ignorance.
Darkness encompasses everything,
not letting me know when these shadows will come or go.

The darkness and I are not enemies,
It is comforting in sleep.
However, it changes form and I am not warned;
The constant confusion and mystery gives but a moment to prepare.
Deadly danger could be lurking, stalking and stalking like a lion,
I wouldn't know when it would come or go.

As I enter the classroom it evokes the same feeling as before;
Pop quiz written on the board next to the door.
The dreary darkness comes back and it is like I am in the forest again,
My thoughts start spinning and spinning
With me not knowing what to do.
It sprang upon me, a panther with emerald green eyes
Shining in the darkness,
I did not know when it would come or go.

This fear is strange the way it morphs and of course changes again,
It is a shapeless shadow following, following everyone around.
Many thoughts amplify this terrifying state,
And as these shadows arise like mist from a lake,
I do not know when this feeling will come or go.

It is a worthy opponent to face,
Controlling the mind and trying to find weakness is its main weapon.
Attacking and attacking, I fend it off by praying and never backing away;
I do not know when this frightful feeling will come or go
but I know how to overcome it.

~Eileen Connolly



Alone

On a colorless December night, I hear the whistling of the wind
Standing so still, watching the heavy blanket of snow fall outside my window sill
The snow looks back at me
No footprints can be seen
Only the whistling of the wind is heard
Everything is empty--empty

Trapped inside this vacant, dull house with no one around but a little mouse
I hope someone would come and break this silence with sound
The snow still falling outside this vacant, dull house.
Everything is empty--empty

Looking out at the cloudy, grey sky,
Nothing but millions of small snowflakes fall upon the giant tree
I wish I could be free with someone and dance around the tree
When will this end?
When will this end?

A tapping on my door I hear
Could it be a visitor coming to see me?
I run so fast to the door, I almost fall on the floor
I open the door hoping to see a person standing, smiling at me
Only to see nothing but the snow
Nothing but the snow

~MaryJayne Cipriano



Bliss

Heavens of amber
shed a celestial light
cloaking carnations in gleaming yellow
bloom adorn grassland
in a empyrean of lush and gold

wisps of cloud
sprinkled with hint of blue
a halo of calm
a celestial light
a faint hum of the bees
in a symphony a heavenly song

a dove acesends atop the pasture
afloat the celestial light
flight in the heaven of amber
a flurry of white in the light of gold
fluttering
it sings
it dances
soaring back to its home

in the care of a cradle of maple leaf
blanketed under petals of the bloom
doze two a pair both white of plume
the cradle a color of amber
a color of celestial light
perched aloft the birch tree
that watched the pair
approaching the brink of night

although eve shadowed
and stars dust the sky illuminating the verdure
The dove gaze upon her nest
doze two a pair in a paen of the breeze
they illuminated light
beauty of amber
a celestial light

~Graysen

Delsignore



FLAMES

Cozy in calm contentedness I was abruptly awoken
The smell of a stiff stifling smoke
And a creak of a crack, crack, crackling
I rose from my bed not knowing where I would be lead
Though not a fear in my bones while I was seeing red

The red shadow plastered on each wall
But from what I recall, there was no fire at all
What a strange sight to see
What a strange stench to smell
With the companies of fire plastered everywhere
When in the house, there was no fire anywhere
Though still the sound of a creak of a crack, crack, crackling

I hold my chest to muffle my sensation at best
And with streak of light I realize my plight, oh my plight
The fire was of me
Engulfing everything around me
The satiating sensation- which had been so startling
Tampered with all my senses
Twisted all my sentences

It was a burning desire
A desire that most say should have expired
And with its renewal, comes much a disapproval
Because the feeling of fire
Leaves a desire, a desire so dire
To tear away the orange stricken walls
And yell freely through the newly damaged halls

Still some would call me a liar
But truly I felt like the fire
An enraged excitement
Doing a dangerous dance
And to this day I am always abruptly awoken
By the smell of a stifling smoke
With a creak of a crack,
 crack, crackling
And a remaining plight- that I do not know how to fight
 ~Ava D'Angelico



A Reflection

People often describe the meaning of their life as some big goal that they have. If they achieve that goal, then they'll have completed their purpose. I have always thought that my one purpose was to become a famous actress, and if I did that, then I would be happy. The truth is, if one chases a goal that they have, they can never be content. So much time is spent chasing happiness that some people lose themselves. They chase a fictional "happiness" and eventually cannot continue, since, well, they are human. That is why so much of the world is unhappy, which is the irony of life. Happiness is not something that one finds at the end of a checkpoint, or something that gets achieved after becoming successful; it is something that every person has inside of them. I think true happiness is when someone comes to terms with the fact that they'll never be completely happy! Happiness is not something solid and consistent; it comes and goes, ebbs and flows with life. It is not definable and "gaining" it shouldn't be the goal of someone's life. I think the real meaning of life is to give the world the good that one has. Saving one's part of the world should be everyone's goal, even if that part is just one person, and even if that part is themselves. Let the meaning of your life start within yourself.

~Josie Cruser

Captives

So. Peculiar that we've met here.
I should have expected it.

Perhaps we've met before. But, more likely than not, we haven't. Two strangers, simply floating through the realm of living that we call existence. It seems unlikely that one could ever meet someone of meaning, but at the same time, the smallest interaction can mean everything. It is impossible to know when someone will walk into your life one day and change everything forever. They could be your best friend. Your worst enemy. They could be your love, or the one who hurts you with a pain you could never imagine. Maybe they are simultaneously everything. Or maybe they are nothing, just as so many of the lost souls are in this realm.

But, for now, I can assume we are strangers, and nothing more than that. I'm sure you can agree.

The world already knows your story, but they only know what is widely broadcasted to them. They tremble in fear of what you have caused because you have given them a reason to. Or, more accurately, *they* gave you a reason to commit such acts.

Your life is an enigma, Cain Turner. You know as much as the rest of us do. So, tell me: what is it you know?

You are the queen's obedient servant. You follow her every beck and call without a speck of hesitation. If she tells you to do something, you comply. She likes it when you help her pick out one of her many lush gowns. She likes it even more when you devise one of your special "plans" for anyone who dares oppose her. The meaning of your life is to serve and love her for the rest of your days.

And what else do you know?

Is there anything else you know?

Perhaps the gears that make up that mechanical mind of yours are already setting into motion. You are realizing that yes, I am in this prison for a reason. I am no friend to the queen, and neither is Jasper Zalge, the man that you arrested. He is a persona I created for myself to resist the norm of what your precious queen deems to be correct.

Yes, Cain Turner. My name is James Wakabayashi. Jasper Zalge is a pseudonym. He does not exist. In reality, he really seems to be quite the bothersome individual. I cringe every time I must take on his personality, but he is how I can stay safe.

Have you considered that your entire life is a pseudonym? That you are a product, the form of what she gave you? Are you who you believe you are?

Such a powerful question, I know.

In that sense, we are kindred spirits. My story was abruptly disrupted by the queen's decrees. I have not seen my wife in years. I can only make brief eye contact with my daughter, who has grown into a young woman, and I was not there to watch her- to guide her. I have been in hiding because your people want to destroy me. I have a brain that ceases to stop. I am always thinking. I am more than my human body; I am my brain. I am an observer to life, meant to witness what happens while wanting to change it all from behind the scenes. I go against the norm, and here, that is dangerous.

You are meant to put a stop to someone like me.

Captives - continued

We are here right now, alone. What is stopping you from ridding the world of me? You could easily receive permission. You obviously have the means to do it, however you like.

Your curiosity stops you.

You know that, deep down, you had a story. But where did it go? Where is that gap in your memory?

And you also know that no one else has caused you to think like this before. Most are too preoccupied trembling and pleading for their lives.

I am not pleading for my life. I do not have fear. And I do not fear you.

Here is what I am proposing.

Your precious queen would undoubtedly be displeased if she learned that you freed me, and, if she learned that you did, it would most likely end brutally for me. I will not sugarcoat that. This is the way she operates, and you are in no position to argue. So, freeing me is not an option. That is a given. While it is a less than desirable situation, it is what must be done at the moment.

But what if I told you that I could help you?

I am here because I think. I question the world. I advocate for scientific progression. And, to your benefit, I aim to seek every area of knowledge that I can.

I am convinced that there is more to the dehumanized royal guard. There is a man behind the machine. There was someone who had a life underneath the layers of pristine metal, and I am offering to see what I can find. I am willing to do my own research to help you get your life back. In exchange, you are to keep me out of the queen's eye. She is not to... claim me.

I can assure you that I will stay under the radar. We can't afford careless mistakes in such a situation. I will find every bit of information I can about your life and will enlighten you accordingly.

Because I pity you, Cain Turner. Your entire existence is a mystery, and you have every right to closure that the rest of us do. One should not have the right to steal and manipulate another's memories, and should my hypothesis be proven correct, there is a lot of information waiting for you. You have my word that I will put effort into effectively finding the information you seek. Perhaps I am a prisoner and you are the one holding me captive, but we know we are both trapped in this palace.

So... Do we have a deal?

by Olivia Burdash

The Omens of Akkad

I have passed this spot
Barren,
Once it was not
Grains grew, they used to reap
Tigris' bends here used to sweep
Now alone three hills do lie
Unseen land now passed by
I have left it dead and dry
It's majesty seen alone by my eye

When I was not much younger
When the grass here would not hunger
Here stood on high
Three brick stars lit with a lie
That by Ishtar's might
They might take flight
Facing forever, that I may carry their light

"King of the Universe"
T'is what they'd boast
In resounding poetic verse
Spears cleansed
In coast and coast
The lives they made to end
To only themselves would rend
Covered now by my hand
And eons of sand

Now alone three hills do lie
None now to stop and stare
Stop to ponder what is there
For I have left it dead and bare
Three teeth from my maw
Tower above desert, sky, and all
Not desire, path, or choice,
No awe,
I do not rejoice
Slowly closing, 'till night's fall

Bones, ash grime
Still where they burned
Bones, ash, grime,
Still yet unturned
Tis' not my crime

That all things pass with time.

~Owen Barrett





Quiet Nights

When quiet nights come around
The sky turns dark and it rains
And its silent outside
While dreams invade brains
No one moves an inch, not one inch, worldwide

When quiet nights come around
Silence slowly coats the air,
Yet, it is blaring
Nothing can quite compare
To the bright moon glaring.

Madison Tegeler

The Sunrise

Tall peaks with deep dark streaks
Moon sinks behind the majestic mountains
No light anywhere in sight
Each second an eternity, longing for light

A spark, a flick of a switch
A glimmer of hope shines from the shadows
A new dawning, a sense of belonging
Darkness is disappearing, no longer prolonging
Darkness - shattered like glass
A great blazing sphere rises in the distance
Providing light and life to all in existence

Mary Igoo

An Alienated Welcome

Everywhere else in the world it was the early first season. Their bristled grass would be poking up from their muddied, bug-infested soil and delicate trees and vines, or whatever was supposed to grow would begin to hatch from the long, cold months of a moon hidden from its star. But in Cónsoom, the world was packed with ice and stifled with frozen rain that dripped into blurred vision while mercilessly tearing through the heaviest temperature shield you could buy off the rack.

The implants in my back whined so loudly the gip I had the displeasure of riding nearly bucked us both into the snow, but I was not in the mood to play games with it. The frost on my eyes was nearly so thick they were freezing in place, so once the bilfing beast was back under control, I turned to the uncomfortable duty of taking a red, scared finger out of the temperature shield. It only took a few moments to heat itself up to the point where touching it to the frost started to melt it. I was actually making decent progress with being able to see again when a scratching call came through that probably said, "Crystal-Pyre, scouting's over for the day. Get back to base."

I grumbled a response and yanked to gip by its harness, still trying to thaw my eyes as I slowly plodded to the barely noticeable line of lit domes that made up the town of Cónsoom.

I loathed this town as the place of my nativity. It was a small, backwater of a place that reeked with the minds of the people who I had grown up with. I'm not normal, you see. Normal itself is a myth, but even by that standard, I am high on the scale. Cónsoom was a junction between two provinces, so naturally there were travelers passing through from Arnix to North Arnix somewhat regularly. Two travelers, or two people from town, or one of each decided they were bored of the constant snow and decided to make the most of the night. I don't know if I would qualify as "the most" but they were kind enough to never see me again in exchange for letting me exist. The one problem with that was there wasn't anyone completely open to accepting this thing of a child into their care.

An Alienated Welcome - Continued

Oh, of course, you can't see me so I'll have to explain.

This moon was a colony for nearly every known species at the time of its creation. Two of those species came from the appropriately named Elemental System and evolved to be capable of mastering fire and mastering ice. By some sick science, one of each figured out how to make me by accident, so I'm somewhat similar to an angular, humanoid popsicle covered in fleshy orange-red skin. Not exactly frightening to someone who isn't familiar with what species even exist, but let me assure you, I look like a freak. Like a snowflake that fell in lava then was left to harden into a confusing and too unique lump.

But since no one else has had the torture of caring about me before, let's get back to what I was trying to ramble about earlier.

Cónsoom wasn't large enough to amass any army to fight in the War, but it was decently-sized for a small town and centrally located, making for a great command center. I was sent to act as a scout of the surrounding plains for the people with actual jobs to do since I was "experienced with the terrain." It would have been appreciated if they had asked why I had never been interested in returning.

The base was eerily lit so any snow on the ground that had trickled in looked too much like a childish joke that I'd gotten overly tired with after cycles of hearing it. I tried to slip through to make my report quickly, but one of the scouts going out to take my place picked up his head from across the room and shouted, "Hey, Crystal-Pyre!"

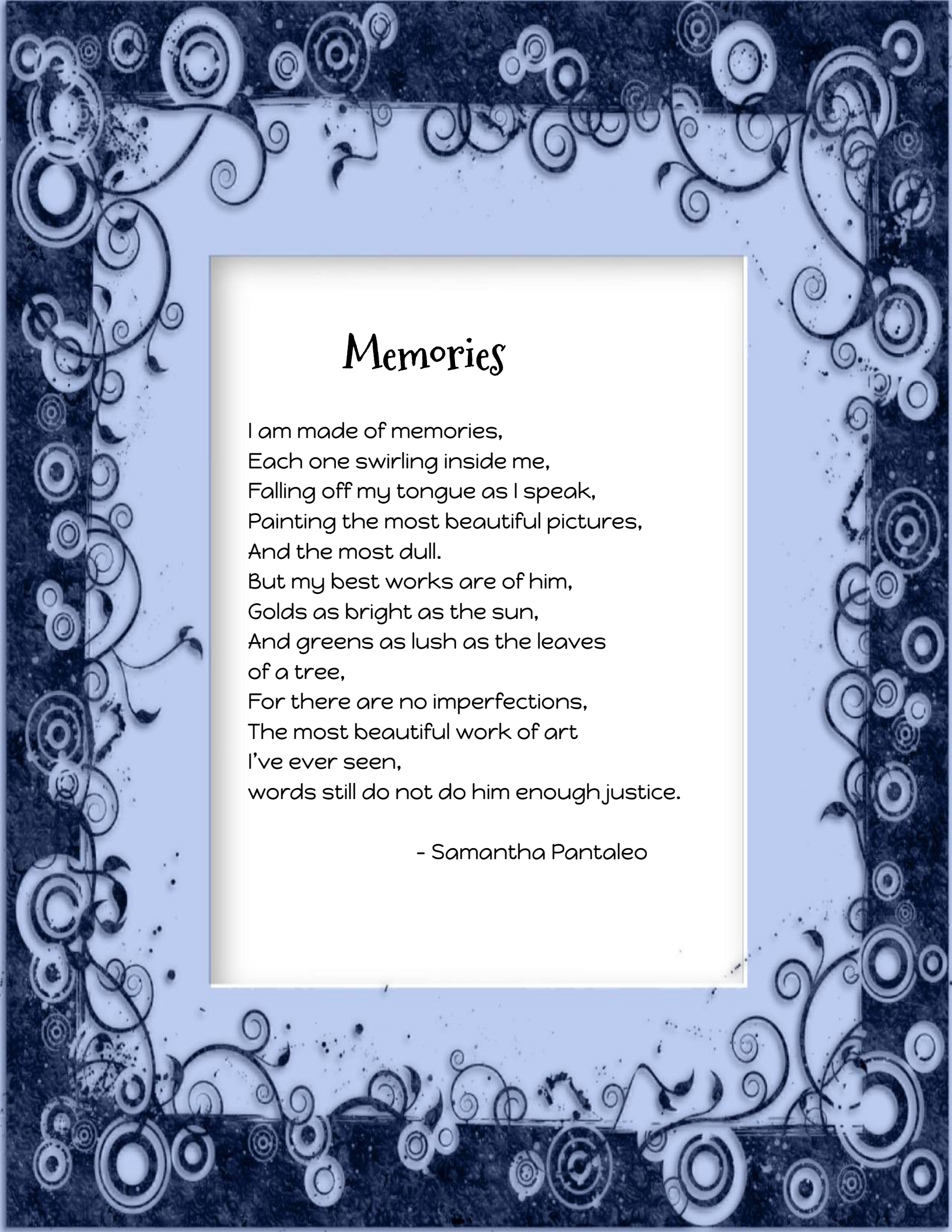
I stopped in my tracks and forced myself to look his way.

"Have you been crying?!"

A drip of melting frost rolled out of my eyes while I glared at him indignantly and started to walk away as tastefully as possible in the heavy clothes.

Ah, yes, welcome home indeed.

by Bridget McGuire



Memories

I am made of memories,
Each one swirling inside me,
Falling off my tongue as I speak,
Painting the most beautiful pictures,
And the most dull.
But my best works are of him,
Golds as bright as the sun,
And greens as lush as the leaves
of a tree,
For there are no imperfections,
The most beautiful work of art
I've ever seen,
words still do not do him enough justice.

- Samantha Pantaleo




There is such a love

There is such a love
There is such a love like a storm
Where lullabies sound of crashes all around
And the winds so rough smell sweet with serenity
Where though the trees are bent and broken
And the dangerous skies roar with anger
There is such a love like a storm

There is such a love like an ocean
Where endorsed on the shore are the tides constant push and pull
And the swift sweeping under of the current
Where though when drowned you do not frown
And in the plight you still do not fight
There is such a love like an ocean

There is such a love that is blind
Where you are swept but never meant to be kept
Where it desired that sweet slow burn fire
And though never reciprocated you are dedicated
Where though you are drowned are crashes sound all around
Where refusal to flee leaves damage to be
There is such a love that is blind

Ava D'Angelico



ESCAPE FROM THE MOON

The ship froze and I suddenly lost all control of the systems. The ship started shaking and it was being pulled towards something. What it was being pulled towards, I had no idea, but I would soon find out...

An hour earlier, I thought that my adventure was over, that I'd be going home. I had just escaped from Kepler 22b, and said my goodbyes to the friends that I had made. I was getting ready to think of the things I would do once I got back to Earth, back to life, what'd I do. I started to think about what would happen to the Spitfire (my ship). First of all, I do not think that a teenager would be allowed to keep a classified and possibly stolen spaceship. My life, most likely, will not go back to normal. I imagine I'd also be more in the spotlight than I would have wanted. I thought that the best course of action would be to go to New York at night. So I decided to hang out on one of Mars' moons until then.

Back in the present, I was being pulled into a large hanger, similar to the one under Fukushima. ONAIS, my on board computer, started projecting warnings, before glitching out and completely shutting down. I was completely locked out of my system, and not to mention trapped in a mysterious place. The Spitfire would stop moving and my O2 sensor started dropping, everything started to get blurry, then things went dark. I believe I was out for a while, when I came to, I was in a silver room, with only a bed, with nothing on it and a toilet. I was stuck in another cell, and was being kept from home once again. I was right there, I was so close, but at the same time, so far.

Guards would open my cell, and cover my head, and would bring me into a conference room, where my father would be sitting. At this point it had been months since I had left, and I had no idea of what had transpired while I was gone. My father would greet me "Isaiah, I thought you died, you don't understand how happy I was to learn that you were alive." Though I was relieved to be safe, I still felt uneasy. The way that I was handled here makes me think that something else is going on. I sat down to catch up with dad, I said, "What are you doing here?, I didn't know if you had survived the blast." My father responded, "That day was very chaotic, Japan suffered a lot of damage from the blast. I nearly died, I was in a coma for three weeks or so." My father continued, "As you now know, there was a spacecraft kept beneath the facility, that was the reason for our trip that day." I thought that it was an odd coincidence that we went to a facility, with a spaceship beneath it. While I was processing this, sorta zoning out, I just heard my father say, "and you stole it."



ESCAPE FROM THE MOON - CONTINUED

I was terrified, the uneasiness I had felt was justified, I do believe that this is not my father. He would yell, "Thanks for the catch-up, take him away guards!" I'd be thrown back into my cell, and at the moment, I couldn't stop to process this, I needed to escape. I would break off a piece of my bed, and break off the vent near the ceiling of my cell. I would climb in and begin to crawl, I would find a guard by his lonesome. My best chance to get out of here is to find the hanger, so I jumped on top of him from the vent and I knocked him out. He had a wrist strap with a map of his security route. I was able to find where the hanger was through it. I managed my way through the halls, once I got to the hangar, and the Spitfire, I climbed in and booted up ONAIS, and she started rambling warning me. ONAIS said, "Don't be fooled, these are not humans, they are krillotaps!"

The reason that I was detained on Kepler 22b, was because I looked like a krillotap, an invasive species in the galaxy that, by a sheer stroke of luck, looked like humans. I was shocked to find out that the one who looked like my father was a krillotap. The truth that I didn't want to hear was that my father had actually died in the nuclear reactor meltdown. I realized that the krillotaps were preparing to invade Earth, knowing that I have to destroy this base now. If I were just to leave, the humans of Earth won't have the technology to fight off these guys. I need to stop them before they can get there. "It doesn't seem that they have launched an attack yet," said ONAIS. It is going to be crucial for me to do this quickly, I should overload the reactor, I could do this by sabotaging the cooling systems.

What I decided to do was, to take some of the charges that were stored in the Spitfire since the prison break. I used the guards map to locate the generator room, and ONAIS helped me locate the cooling system. Then, I jumped up into a vent and started crawling. I'd make my way in the reactor and be forced to take out guards. After that, I set the charges and made a break for the hanger. As soon as I was on my way to the hangar, the alarms started ringing, "A PRISONER HAS ESCAPE, LOCKDOWN PROCEDURE 6 NOW IN EFFECT," echoed throughout the base. The hall doors began to close and luckily I was in the vents and they had no security in place for the vents. I made my way back to the hangar, but there was a new problem.

McCormack

The Spitfire was surrounded by dozens of guards, luckily I was able to communicate to ONAIS through my wrist map that I had stolen off of a guard, so I told ONAIS to send out an EMP stun charge. It successfully incapacitated the guards. I proceeded to jump down the vent and get into the Spitfire and begin to launch.

Once I exited the hangar, I blew the charges, at first nothing seemed to have happened. BOOM! The moon base had gone up in flames, but right right before it did, ONAIS picked up a transmission being sent into deep space. The message only said one thing, "SOS." I had come to the realization that the Krillotaps will not give up so easily and that Earth will now be their primary target, especially now that their plans had been sabotaged once already. I now know that I am what stands between Earth and a full scale invasion, there is no going back to my normal life. The battle that I had just won, may have just started a war. I now must be the one to help Earth Escape From The War Between Worlds.

~ anonymous

Tired

Distant is daybreak, alarm starts its song,
BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP!

Frigid rooms, quiet house, changing with eyes still closed,
Last minute car study, mind still asleep and muddy.

Constant are classes, waiting for bell to sound, RING!

Eyes heavy, stomach talking, moving through the halls,
Last period is daunting, the test is long and exhausting.

Painful is practice, coach blows whistle,
TOOT TOOT TOOT!

Cold water, aching muscles, wishing time would speed up.
Last set of the day, pushing the hurt and fatigue away.

Procrastination is my perfection, phone announces new message,
BZZZZZZZZT BZZZZZZZZT!

Mindless scrolling, crunchy snacks, distracting me from work,
Last assignment of the night, sleep and drowsiness I fight.
At last, rest is my refuge, but not long does it last -

Wake up and start over, last day repeating
A sea never ending, in every direction extending
Small waves, large waves, tsunami
Waves of tiredness crashing down

-- Magdalena Regenauer

A pair of hands, palms up, holding a large, teardrop-shaped object. The object has a vibrant rainbow gradient, transitioning from green at the top to yellow at the bottom, with shades of blue and purple in between. The hands are positioned on either side of the object, with fingers slightly curled. The background is a solid light blue.

This Is Tense

**Now, now, my dear, I invite you to listen close.
For whatever you ask is something it knows.**

**The past, the present, and the future, too.
Aren't all of them appealing to you~?**

**The past is in the past. There is nothing you can change.
What's happened has happened, and it'll all be the same.**

**Now, the present, it's peculiar, you think you know all.
Yet it remains constant, and attempts to change cause you to fall.**

**The future's the most complicated. It's only your doom.
Your input is futile, but it'll make you consumed.**

**Now, what do you say? Are you sold?
Yes, yes. Your soul for my reading. It never gets old.**

by Olivia Burdash



Olivia Burdosh

The root of life is like a tree.
It starts from the bottom where no one
can see.
The root of life is like a tree
When the sun shines, you shall see.
When the water falls, you shall grow.

Not only me and my roots.
But you and your roots, too.

Each day is a new roll.
Each day is a new goal.
Each day is a new day
To understand the gold.

Josiah Wright



My Paradox

It calls to me constantly.
It doesn't sleep, it doesn't stop.
It can hurt like a knife.
It bullies.
It shames.
It pushes me.
It surrounds me.
It is like an anchor.
It is all consuming.

It can bring excitement.
It makes me laugh.
It teaches.
It informs.
It expands my horizons.
It pushes me.
It is all consuming.

No other generation knows the impact.
No other generation can truly understand the feeling.
It is a first-world problem, but also, a solution.

Reagan Sorbello



Symphony of the Seas

My name is Jenna. I spent months preparing in excitement for the big cruise vacation my mother had planned for us. My brother Jamie, however, wasn't as excited. He didn't like the thought of being out on the water for so long. Regardless, the trip was supposed to be perfectly luxurious.

Monday morning we packed our bags and boarded the Symphony of the Seas. That was the name of the ship. When we got on the ship I was in awe of all the amazing things that were on it. Can you believe they could fit a whole water park on a cruise ship? It was insane. Hundreds of rooms, a bunch of restaurants, pools, casinos, and more. All on one ship. I thought to myself, this week is going to be great.

Jamie and I spent all of Monday exploring the ship. We couldn't wait to see it all. The water park was so cool. It had slides that twisted and turned in every direction. Later on we went out to dinner at one of the restaurants. The food was amazing. Everything was perfect. As we walked home from dinner, I began to hear a soft song playing. I looked at Jamie.

"Did you hear that," I asked.

"Yeah, what is that," he replied.

"It sounds," I paused. "It sounds almost like a siren."

"What's a siren," he asked.

"It's a call from a mermaid. They sing sirens to lure in sailors," I said.

"C'mon Jenna. Mermaids? You know those aren't real. Let's go back to the room now, I'm tired."

Of course mermaids aren't real, what was I thinking? I definitely just need sleep. As we continued walking to the room, the sound grew louder and louder. It was as if something was making its way closer. I then noticed myself getting dizzy. I looked over at Jamie and I could tell he was too. We became delirious and started laughing like crazy. Everything was spinning. After that, my memory was cut off. That's all I remember from that night.

I woke up the next morning extremely confused. What had happened? Why can't I remember? What was that song? Could the song have something to do with the loss of my memory? Nothing was adding up. All of the sudden I began to feel a pain in my leg. I looked down and saw massive scratches. However, these scratches were strange. They were almost... scale-like.

I ran into Jamies room, "Jamie! Jamie! Jamie! Wake up!"

Opening his eyes he said, "Jeez Jenna! What do you want?"

"Do you remember anything from last night? Anything at all?"

"I remember walking back to the room with you and hearing music. Wait- what was happening to us? Now that I think about it I remember going crazy and laughing at everything."

"Yeah exactly," I replied, "but after that I have no memory of anything else. And I woke up with these strange scratches on my leg." I lifted up my leg and showed Jamie the scratches. He then looked at his own leg. He had the same exact scratches.

Jamie and I couldn't ignore what happened. We had to take action. We had to devise a plan to figure out the truth. And so we did. The plan was to set up a series of cameras around the ship. Luckily for us, Jamie was obsessed with spy tech and he brought it everywhere he went. We took his tiny cameras and placed them in different locations. Our plan was genius. Now all we had to do was wait.

Symphony of the Seas - continued

The night came and we were ready. Jamie and I sat out by the pool waiting for the song to start. All of the sudden we heard it. The siren had begun. Before we knew it, we became delirious yet again, laughing crazily. Then our memory was cut off.

The next morning we woke up, but this time was different. Our bed sheets were soaked with water. I could taste the water. It was saltwater. We looked at our legs and there were even more scratches than before. More questions arose in my mind. Why are there more scratches? Where did they come from? Why is my bed soaked in saltwater? It was time to unlock all the answers.

Jamie and I went to look at the footage we got of last night and what we saw left us in complete shock. At the beginning of the clip all was normal. We waited for the song and soon enough it came, as we know. Then we started laughing and hallucinating. Nothing out of the ordinary. We already knew this. Then, everything changed.

All of the sudden in the footage, Jamie and I stop laughing. We both turn around and face towards the front of the ship and start walking. We see two hands appear as though they are climbing onto the ship. As the creature makes its way up, we finally realize. It was a mermaid. I had been right from the beginning.

Not only one, but hundreds of mermaids made their way over the ledge. They continued to sing their siren as they crawled toward us. It was as if they had us under some kind of spell or hypnosis. Then, the mermaids lifted up their claws and started carving scales into our legs. They were trying to make us like them. Once they were finished carving the scales, they poured saltwater into our scars to transform them into real scales.

This is how they reproduce. This is how they grow. This is how they repopulate. By using the victims of their symphony. The Symphony of the Seas.

by Deirdre Connolly



Overheard Voices

by Bridget McGuire

Spring:

After start but so close the place between beginning and meeting is often disregarded as misfortune.

There is something of a beginning here as the spirit of Earth's maternity shines through that unfortunate time's fruit.

She will stand there adorned in budding red,

Vibrancy, similarity contorted to a clothing's comfort, so obscure from understanding in pattern there is nothing but beauty in the creation of its ways.

Of the desirable, she welcomes herself and so purges the cold from a land of pain, and with interest of doing so that might of warmth and temptation arises.

One so great to console the beholder with a need to press their words upon her with a delicacy that hardly compares to her tenacity and courage, and by so doing exclaim the interests held by cold disinterest until she accepts the hand reaching to her and free it from a world of the Frozen.

Summer:

Of extreme warmth, a heat of heat impassioned by frenzy, as is characteristic. Clouds break from a tumult of clashing winds and from, striking indecency upon naked plains and forests, though, naturally it claims normalcy and is ignored; day after day at the eve of the end of the day, Summer begs.

If there was a day during which there was no extreme to behold, there would be a withdrawal berated by anyone who deems this hiding away of bad health, and by saying so, once again throw an Unwilling into the tumult until an hour so inappropriate there must be an objection lest there be fun.

Questioning this is a crime by all as all claim the desire for such a "respite" and "denial of hardy interest" for which they slave.

The poor dears who misunderstand the prospect they plead.

They forgot the heat and the bugs that sting until swollen.

Overheard Voices- continued

Autumn:

A predictor of what it knows to be the hardships to come yet a reflection of that *thing* that proceeds him.

And that is all he would care to be said about. The world he lives in is one where the death of is known in replacement of and the addition of the dead.

They could burn or be fed to those that strip the fading, fervent world of past, but he takes their scythes and harvests their untouched labor to his own destruction if he deems it a necessity.

He courts what is to some with a gaze of the one in the middle, otherwise known as the one accustomed to the need of both.

How a hero wishes to be of more flare than he. He grows to die and be remembered for only what came before and aid those of us who he wants to stay after.

Winter:

And here I am. Long I live. Long I will. I'm sorry.



Actuality in Embers

When life becomes too big
Like skin that has outgrown its clothing
I find myself standing in a grassy field
Hair unkempt
Eyes dampened with sorrow
Only the ebony sky could be seen.
For the world to tell me to live
I needed to tell myself that I existed.
Why do we have eyes?
What am I to perceive in this picture?
A lake has gone dry
A flower has wilted
But I am here,
I exist;
For I adore the earth
I exist as the embers spark,
shouting my words at the heart of the soil.
I exist as a fire engulfs the earth and kisses the ground.
I exist as the world crumbles beneath my feet
Falling, falling
I will not succumb to the hands of reality.
I exist.
I live in the same way that a fire consumes the land and scorches the
dirt:
The closer it gets, the more it hurts.
The brightest eyes hold the most burning fire.
I exist.
One misses nothing when they see.
I see the picture
I do have eyes
I exist.

~Ava Biamonte

DESOLATE EXISTENCE

Hiding alone up in space, the darkness shrouds your shining face.
You gleam brightly in the infinitely dark aether of the night sky, but hide away at day.
So no one will ever know if you cry, while the sun shines it's rays.
When the dark, deary sins of the world come to bring me down.

I just look up at you great moon to give me a smile from my frown.
To look at you far, far, far away from Earth or Sun however makes me sad.
It reminds me how alone you are, even surrounded by an infinite pool of stars.
You are the only moon in the sky, and so it makes me wonder why,
wonder why in a sea of seemingly similar people I cannot find someone to be an ally.

And so that is why no one can relate with your loneliness as deeply as can I.
The loneliness is caused by differences that every person has.
To be unique is great, but it makes me think about the life that I await.
Is being a one and only worth others seeing me as a weird withdrawn wanderer.

Then I see you stand alone, stand alone among the bright sea of stars,
and that is why I can look at you shimmering demilune when I am on my own.
Because I know you understand how it feels to truly be alone.
To be cast out alone makes me frantic. It causes me to wonder why I'm pedantic.

Because that is where we differ, you are a beautiful breathtaking sight.
Meanwhile I thirst for the affection of others, waiting to become part of the delight.
I wish to have the love of just one, but you have the affection of many.
Sadly the affection of many that you can never see or touch,
and so you too are alone among your vast blanket of starry neighbors.

Then when I think of that, the sadness becomes unbearable and a bit too much.
Sometimes when I'm really sad I look at you pale crescent orb of night.
Then you remind me, remind me that others look to you too at twilight.
So in those minute moments of misery I count on your quick delivery.
The prompt, that others see you too is what helps me push through.
So if you're ever feeling lonely just look up at the moon,
and remember someone somewhere out there is looking at it too.

~Paige DiMino

KABOOM!

The garage sliding door was open and my parents sat on foldable chairs just hanging out. I probably interrupted quiet time for them, but I was scared not only about the thunder, but also because I thought my parents went “poof.” They spotted me and beckoned me to join them.

“What’s wrong?” I was asked.

To which I answered, “The lighting and thunder scared me.”


My mom told me it was just a bowling match that was happening up in the dark clouds. I didn’t believe her. I’m pretty sure my parents laughed at me, which they had every right to because I’m laughing at myself now. They pulled a stool for me to sit on and as I sat down I was told that they were outside to watch the thunder storm. I was horrified, thinking my parents were crazy for being so “close” to the dangerous storm. They laughed again.

We sat smelling that garage smell every garage has and the musty but fresh rain - the gutters making a lovely gurgling sound. After a while, my father had taken me to the edge of that garage and made me watch a giant bolt flash in the sky, and just a few moments later, a thunderous boom echoed through the trees. We watched the storm like this for several minutes with the rain as background noise and little chirping of crickets. I would jump or flinch when the thunder roared, but eventually I stopped. Not from anticipation, but from comfort.

I went back to my mom and sat down with her and I told her I wasn’t afraid anymore. I stayed like that for a moment, but eventually they sent me back upstairs to my room since it was very late and certainly well past my bedtime. My feet pitter-pattered quietly but excitedly back up the stairs, and for the first time I slept soundly to the rain, the lighting, and the thunder.

To this day I love the rain, and I love the rain more when it brings thunder. It’s so calming and familiar that I have no trouble falling asleep soundly like a baby. When I’m nestled under fluffy blankets, thunder and I are best of friends.

~Abigail Mitchell



The Our Lady of Lourdes Literary Magazine
Spring 2022 Edition is brought to you by:

Our Lady of Lourdes Writing Club The Rough Draft Society

Sharing thoughts
Opening minds
Creating friendships
That last through time

Cover Art by Auden Kinahan

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Moderator: Ms. Graham

To the graduating members of the Rough Draft Society -
Olivia Burdash, Matthew Emig, and Bridget McGuire:

God bless you always; you will be missed.
Don't forget to write!

The Rough Draft Society
and
Ms. Graham

Never stop believing. Life is too precious to waste it only on what we absolutely, positively, guaranteed, 100 percent know is real in these lives. It doesn't matter if the truth can be proven, only that it's true.

~Bridget McGuire

Maybe it's time to let go, but we never really do, in the end.
I smile in the face of time, and welcome the past as my close friend.

~ Olivia Burdash

What were you thinking when you saw the
beans in my car?

~Matthew Emig