

*The
Inferno
2018-2019*



*Allen Community College
Online Literary Magazine*

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Front Cover Artwork

1st Place Art Contest Winner: *Mea DeLaTorre*
Piece: “Untitled” (paint on canvas)

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1st Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest

Lone Figure by Sierra Wilson

I see a lone figure,
Blurred by the snow.
I shudder with fear
As the man seems to glow

Brighter and brighter,
Black against white,
Contrary to the fact
That it's day, and not night.

The black of his cloak,
To shield from the cold,
Contrasts from the item
Grasped in his hold.

Red against silver,
A dagger in hand,
The blood on the blade
Drops toward land.

Behind the lone figure,
A body, bright red,
Slumped on the ground
And clearly slain dead.

As I walk toward the figure,
His appearance grows clearer.
It's then I recognize
That it's only a mirror.

2nd Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest

Eyes

By Mea DeLaTorre

Eyes are like keyholes to the soul
Holding within, stories untold.
Brown, hazel, blue, and green
And every color in between.
They cannot tell a lie, this is true,
And sometimes the corners fill with dew.
Tears run down rosy cheeks,
Oh yes, how the eye speaks.
Light bounces off the iris,
Signaling the end of a crisis.
Sometimes eyes fill with fire,
Showing off passionate desire.
Other times with anger,
Which can turn you into a stranger.
Not everyone is as they seem,
Sometimes they are too much like a dream.
So look in their eyes and then you'll see,
Who they really are and want to be.
Because eyes are like keyholes to the soul,
And hold within stories left untold.

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest

Beyond by Seth Duncan

Striking, yet battered,
Listening for change. Wondrous,
Melancholy heart.

Omniscient lovely,
Remember time together,
Not reputation.

The Earth lost a soul,
Soon to be sent for greatness,
Have tranquility.

Angels by heaven,
Purest creations divine,
Shine brighter than stars.

Watch over my friend,
Cold touch of hatred no more,
Forever relieved.

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Art Contest

Tiger Stippling
By Cali Doudna



1st Place Creative Writing Club Open Form Contest

Threshold by Christina Rich

Inhale. Exhale. In—out. In—out. Rapid. Shallow. I nearly hyperventilate as I try to keep up with his pace. Finally, a nurse administers more morphine. He calms. Our breaths slow. Deepen. A normal, healthy adult takes twelve to twenty breaths a minute. His are doubled, maybe tripled. I'm told the cause is anxiety, or maybe even pain. I'm told morphine will help.

Help what? Comfort him? Kill him? I shake my head and don't ask. I don't want to know. He's dying anyway, right? Why make him suffer? Why draw this moment out any longer than necessary?

Inhale. Exhale. In—out. In—out. Rapid. Shallow.

Cold. Steel. Mustard tan. My shoulder presses harder into the frame as I bring my breathing back to normal. This threshold keeps me rooted without commitment. The front half of me is dipped in gray sorrow. The back half is in the hall. Carefully decorated in muted blues and pinks by a meticulous interior designer, it somehow lends hope for tomorrow.

I want to grasp at that thin thread offered by the décor. I want to sink into one of the paintings, to be captured in one single space of time. A happy time. A joyous time. A time without tears. A time where breaths are free and unencumbered by disease. A time where there is only one threshold. The crossing from an enclosed womb filled with amniotic fluid to a vast world filled with oxygen, love, and endless possibilities.

I want to dance with the vibrant life the mahogany baby grand promises as my daughters sit hip-to-hip playing a duet. The melodic sound confuses me. It momentarily breaks the sadness, and yet it adds a heavier layer of sorrow on my shoulders. It's one of their father's favorites. I want to brand the name in my mind, but I know it will fade. I realize there are unimportant things to remember during the final hours of a life well lived, like the name of a damn song, or whether I packed clean socks and underwear for my husband. I laugh at the train of my thought. It's not like he's going anywhere. Is he?

He's still there. *Inhale. Exhale. In—out. In—.* Rapid. Shallow. Mouth wide open. Cheeks sunken. Cold.

Jaundiced.

A stark comparison to the vibrant, forty-something man he'd been only weeks before. What the hell happened? How did we get here? Wasn't it only yesterday that he carried me across the threshold to our honeymoon suite? God, he looked so good in that black tuxedo. Twenty-four years and four kids. Figures he'd find a way out of taking me to Ireland for our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. I smile. It's not like he did this on purpose. Still, what happened to fifty years, to seventy-five? Why only twenty-four? We were just finally finding our stride.

Inhale. Exhale. The nurse slips in and out like a mouse snatching cheese from a trap. Quick and efficient. She carries the rich aroma of coffee. I can nearly taste it. I don't like the taste. I never have, but the smell reminds me of early mornings when my husband would get up

and sit by the front door and watch the world around us wake as he read his bible. It makes me sad. It makes me nostalgic. Will he ever drink another cup?

Normal breaths resume. The doses are coming quicker now. Having just done this with his step-dad, I know the routine.

I know it all too well.

Cold. Steel. Shock. My breath seizes in my lungs until I can't stand it. I don't want this. I don't want to do this. I can't.

I must.

I shift my size nine shoes to spread equally over the gray carpeted sill. One breath. Two. I can do this. Behind me a nurse dressed in bright scrubs speaks into a receiver. Her words swirl into the hazy vortex whirling in my mind. I didn't need my suspicions confirmed. I sink against the steel frame and gaze across the room.

My daughter-in-law rocks my first grandchild. Thirteen days old. He just crossed his own threshold. I can't help but think how blessed he is to not know the sorrow in the room. How cursed he is to never know the great man his grandpa is. I swallow my tears and shift my gaze.

My girls have quit their musical performance and have entered the room. One slips her hand into her father's. The other two make space for themselves on the bed. My son-in-law's hand cups his wife's shoulder. My young adult son is curled next to his dad. He's crooning words of love into his father's ear. My white-haired mother-in-law strokes her son's hair. My father-in-law paces. My mother hums. My father holds vigil against the wall, along with family and friends. So many people. Faces blurred. Tears. Sobs. My bonus mother-in-law stands on the outskirts. Like me she feels out of place. Hesitant and uncertain of her role.

Inhale. Exhale. In—out. In—out.

A young man kneels next to the bed and prays. He beseeches us to grasp hold of hope. He beseeches the man on the bed to ignore the threshold in front of him.

"You've got to get up, brother," he begs him to stay. "You're an overcomer."

In this realm! Not the afterlife.

"We're all blessed to be a part of your life."

Listen to him! Get up and comfort us, damnit. I'm selfish like that.

I look at the man on the bed. *Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.* Faster than before. He seems to be fighting. *Fight, baby! Fight!*

If only that fight was to stay. Here. With. Me. But it's not, he's fighting to leave. He's fighting to let go. Fighting to cross the threshold.

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. I motion for the nurse in the hall. She slips in. She slips out.

The entire room waits. Watching. His breathing slows.

I abandon my post and stroll the hallway. Floor to ceiling windows looking out to an open wooded area beckon me. It's dark. I know the trees are there. I want to run to them. To hide.

I can't.

I find myself back at my comfort spot, the threshold. The room seems emptier. The friends and extended family have left. Still I can't find the gumption to cross over. I can't commit. I watch. I breathe with him. Further apart. It's harder this time. The rapid breaths were

easier. Darkness takes over my vision. *Gasp*. I suck in air. One foot across. *Gasp*. Two. I find myself standing near the bed. I grab his foot. *Gasp*. It's warm. It's strange. His feet are always cold. Not now. *Gasp*. Not today. Not this minute. This second. Maybe he will get up. I hold my breath with him.

Inhale.

The nurse walks in. She counts his breaths. Chest rises and falls. The lifelessness is interrupted in gasps. Three, maybe five in one minute. I wait for the next.

It doesn't come.

2nd Place Creative Writing Club Open Form Contest

The Smoking Room

by Aaron Walker

Only the man was allowed to use the smoking room. No one else was allowed in. Ever. The man would enter the room no less than three times a day, once after every meal. Some days, although very rare, he could disappear into the room as many as six times. We knew that would always be a bad sign.

The man would never be in the smoking room for more than fifteen minutes. Not even on the “bad” days. After the fifteen minutes, he would walk out as calmly as he had walked in. We always heard the click of the lock as he entered or left.

One day, I took a deep breath, found a paper clip, and straightened it out. I then went to the door to the smoking room. Wondering where I found this sudden bout of courage, I tried to fit the paper clip into the keyhole, but my hand was shaking too bad. I managed to get the paper clip in just as I heard a voice behind me. I jumped and spun around, dropping the paper clip.

What are you doing? the man said calmly, eyeing me suspiciously. *You know you're not allowed in there, little one.*

I didn't look him in the eyes. *Yes, sir.* I mumbled. Then, keeping my head down, I quickly slipped away before the man could say anything more. I turned the corner and waited there, trying to calm my nerves. After a few moments, I heard the click of the door opening. A moment later, it clicked shut.

That was the only time I ever attempted to get into the smoking room. I did my best to avoid it ever since that day. There has been something eerie about that room. I try not to even think about it, and for a while, I somehow manage to keep my mind from wandering back to the smoking room.

Suddenly, the house was full of empty boxes. For what seemed like forever, family and friends were at our house, helping us pack our belongings into the boxes. We never packed much at a time, as though perhaps my mother didn't really want to move. She tries to keep a smile on her face, but I know it's fake. She looks sad all the time now. And the dark clothes she wears are completely different than the bright-colored dresses that she used to wear.

Only once did I see someone try to go into the smoking room. But the door was locked as always. They seemed a little surprised, but not completely shocked. I never saw anyone take a box in or out of that room, empty or otherwise.

Moving day is upon us now. The rest of the house is packed up in boxes that are taped up and waiting like a silent army. I sit on the floor and patiently watch the movers carry each box to the huge moving truck parked in the driveway. When all the boxes are packed, I take my mother's hand and we walk out the door.

Only the man was allowed to use the smoking room. But the man died eight months ago. So why, when I took one last look at the hallway behind me, did I see a whiff of smoke billowing underneath the door to the smoking room?

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Open Form Contest

Never Know by Sierra Wilson

I hope you never know
What it feels like to break
Or when your voice starts to crack
Or your body starts to shake

I hope you never know
What it feels like to cry
With a hand over your mouth
Because you just want to die

I hope you never know
What it feels like to bend
So far over backwards
'Cause you're lying to your friend

I hope you never know
What it's like to see scars
Littered on arms
A permanent memoir

I hope you never know
What it's like to feel pain
So deep and so dark
And you have nothing to gain

I hope you never know
What it feels like to be
Alone in the dark
Alone, just like me

Additional Art Submissions

Unfortunate Soul
By Zohreyha Masuch



Set of 3: Digital Art
By Bailey Sprague



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B



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Additional Written Submissions

I Looked Up Love in the Dictionary by Mea DeLaTorre

I looked up love in the dictionary,
Boy did it have many meanings.
But it doesn't talk about the way she laughs,
Or how her eyes sparkle in the sun.
It doesn't mention how soft and tiny her hands are,
Or how her face lights up when she sees me.
What about the way she wrinkles her nose,
Or flares her nostrils when she's angry?
It doesn't mention the way she cuddles up next to me
Just to feel me close,
Or how she loves to listen to my heart beat.
It doesn't mention how she always makes sure I'm okay,
Or the way my name escapes her lips.
It doesn't mention how her smile brightens my day,
Or how she doesn't like olives, ranch, and mayonnaise.
It doesn't mention how she's afraid to lose me,
Or how she makes sure I know that she loves me everyday.
It doesn't mention how much she adores my family,
Or gets excited about random things.
It doesn't mention how passionate she is about people, school, and church,
Or how she absolutely hates reading books.
It doesn't mention how good she looks in anything,
Or how beautiful everything about her really is.
I looked up love in the dictionary,
Boy, did it have many meanings.
But none of them come close to my definition of love:
Her.

Scars to Your Beautiful by Mea DeLaTorre

Beauty is something she has always sought
Understanding not the beauty within
Starving herself for a perfect physique
Not knowing where she's going or has been
The want of envy flowing through her blood
Covering up the pain she always feels

Holding back the tears that could cause a flood
Hardening her heart so it is like steel
Needing to be shown how pretty she is
She's perfect already but not to them
Cannot get out of her own dark abyss
To society her body is condemned
Tell her she's worth it and perfect because
Beauty cannot possibly have any flaws

Garden of the Mind **by Tatiana Barcikowski**

You're the type to suffer and scorn
Don't hesitate now, how boring

Keep to the right, else you'll trip
Don't hasten to take a whiff

When the tulips here open up,
All the world will hush

Those who follow this path
Seldom return to where they began

Indulge the humble daffodil
Come away and for once, live

Fingers in the knot-holes of the spine,
Or the salt under the nails when you cry
Here we move in slights

Love, like fruit, blossoms
You new and soft

But you'll deny yourself, that's plain
And writhe you will again, again, again

I tread carefully; my legs are frail
In these thorns there's but one seat

Let me near, I only want a peek
I shouldn't have to beg like a child

Who is she, resting in the shade?
Why do you keep her from my view?

Gazes that defile, inaction that flays
Her face, your armor, repays by burning

I'd sooner roast my own heart, feeling
Than have another beat love into me

Be Daddy's little girl,
Cheeks like Georgia peaches,

With a pit of gold.

Go where you can't get hurt,
Not again, again, again

It's all bitter juices,
Made sweeter with yew

Yet with heartstrings so bound,
No one will sleep soundly

But paint them up with a loving rot,
And they will clot

The moon, our own sanguine witness
Brings to life a union thusly written

Closer, come here
My dear, how I adore that stare

The trees whisper secrets
I exchange them for mine
It's as easy as kissing a liar

A princess now with hell-fire dresses
Tied up in lace, gagged with a joke

The faint smiles have taught me
The heart can only ache

It can't see, and if it could
I'd see it as a faux

The Mysterious Intruder **by Aaron Walker**

I woke up abruptly and looked around the pitch-black room. I laid back down as two thoughts continued to swirl around in my mind. What time is it? What woke me up?

I got the answer to one of those questions almost immediately. I could hear my dog's loud barking coming from the garage at the front of the house. I was hoping he would stop barking, so I remained in bed and tried to go back to sleep. When it became clear that he had no intentions to cease the barking, I got out of bed slowly, trying not to wake my girlfriend, who was somehow still asleep next to me.

Whenever I brought my dog with me to my girlfriend's house, we would keep him in the garage overnight and if he had to leave the house for a little while. It was still a fairly new place for him and she also had several cats that were not used to him being there yet. I also didn't want him to start having accidents in the middle of the night or to start chewing on things. I hated having him in the garage for long periods of time, but I didn't know what else to do.

I wanted to get as much sleep as I could, especially since I would have to get up around 5 so I could drop my dog off at my apartment and go to work. But with this constant loud barking, I knew there was no way that was going to happen.

I picked up my glasses and put them on as I carefully made my way through the dark house to the garage. As I walked into the kitchen, I glanced at the clock on the microwave and sighed. 3:30, it read. I turned back toward the garage door and opened it. My dog calmly

walked in and went straight to the water bowl, gulping down all that was left. When he was done with the water, I looked down at him and asked, "Do you need to go outside?"

He didn't get all excited like he usually did when he had to go out, so I led him back to the bedroom. I quietly told him to lay down, and he proceeded to walk over to my girlfriend's side of the bed and laid down. I just rolled my eyes and carefully got back into bed. Luckily, my girlfriend didn't wake up during all of this. I took my glasses back off and tried to go back to sleep.

Just like countless other times, I couldn't get back to sleep. I tried pulling the covers over my head and I also tried no covers. I even tried flipping the pillow, but I couldn't get comfortable. Finally, I just decided to lay there and hopefully fall asleep eventually. Of course, that didn't happen. Until, however, my alarm went off. I groaned, knowing just how close I was to finally be able to go back to sleep.

My girlfriend's alarm started blaring just as I shut mine off. I got back out of bed and started getting ready for work as she did the same. I got dressed for the day and then packed my bag to head home. My girlfriend was walking to the bathroom as I zipped the bag shut. My dog got up. I looked at him and asked, "Now do you need to go out?" He started to wag his tail and jump around, just like normal.

My girlfriend looked back at us, rubbed her eyes and asked, "When did you let him back in?"

"He was barking and I didn't want him to wake you up," I said as I started toward the hallway. "So I just let him in."

"Oh, I never even heard him," she said.

I let the dog outside and then took my bag and the bag of dog food that I had brought out to my car. I walked back in and let my dog back inside. I was about to put his harness on and tell my girlfriend that we were leaving and that I would be back next week when I realized that I didn't grab any of the drinks that I usually take to work.

I turned the handle on the door leading to the garage, trying to decide which drinks I would take today. I opened the door and started out when something rubbed up against my knee, scaring me so terribly that I cried out. I heard whimpering as whatever it was quickly made it past me and promptly sat down on the kitchen floor.

I could hear my girlfriend laughing around the corner by the bedroom. "Did one of the cats scare you again?" She came around the corner and stopped, her eyes wide.

Neither of us said anything for a minute. I'm not sure either of us could. There in front of us were two dogs, both looked exactly the same. Finally, I said, "If that's Aspen, then who the hell is..."

Before I could finish, the dog I had brought in a few hours ago began to growl. The lights began to flicker as the dog's eyes started glowing red. Then suddenly, it just disappeared in a wisp of smoke.

I looked at my girlfriend and she had the same terrified look on her face that I'm positive I had on mine.

What the hell did I let in last night?

Winner Biographies

Mea DeLaTorre: I am in my second semester at Allen Community College in Iola, Kansas. I am majoring in psychology and am planning to transfer to Pitt State University after I graduate. I lived in Iola for the first ten years of my life and then made the short trek to Gas where I live today. I live with my parents, two brothers, a sister, and a dog. I have written you once before when I entered the poetry contest, and ended up with second place! Not only am I a good writer and poet, I am also an artist. My passion for art began before I can really remember, but I definitely did not get my artistic abilities from my parents! While I try my hardest to make my artworks realistic, I always seem to fall a bit short. That being said, I have embraced my inner cartoonist and love using lots of color. I would like to thank you for creating contests like these for people who aren't always the most social or active on campus. These contests are something that bring me a lot of joy and I will continue to enter them until graduation next year!

Sierra Wilson: I am 20 years old, and I am a first-year student at Allen, majoring in Psychology. I enjoy listening to music, hanging out with my dog, and anything Harry Potter related. A lot of my writings are relatively dark in nature, and while "Lone Figure" is no different, I was attempting to think outside of the box in terms of a plot twist.

Seth Duncan: I am a senior at Emporia High School. I am involved in various activities such as volunteering clubs, tennis, and band related activities. Throughout school, I have been exposed to many types of literature, poetry being my favorite because of its versatility. Poetry has always been inspiring to me because poems allow me to express myself and write how I wish. Poetry, with the use of imagery and symbolism, creates a unique and interpretive experience.

Cali Doudna: I am currently a junior at Lebo High School, but I am taking full time classes at Allen County as well. I am very involved at my high school, specifically in Scholars' Bowl, FBLA, and National Honor Society. I enjoy both of these things tremendously and they allow me to develop leadership and teamwork skills. After high school, I am planning on attending college and going towards a major in History and a minor in Art History. I am interested in either being a museum curator or a history teacher. I love to learn and I think that history and art are great fields to always continue learning. At school and in my free time I enjoy creating art. I have been interested in art for as long as I can remember, so I thought that this contest was a fun opportunity. The piece I am submitting is a stippling done with fine line pens.

Christina Rich: is a mother of four children, a grandmother of two, a romance author with Harlequin's Love Inspired line, author with [Forget Me Not Romances](#), a photographer and an artist. She enjoys spending time with her family, long walks, and visiting new places even if it's only through a good book. Her latest travels have taken her to New York and the swamps of Louisiana. You can discover more about Christina at her website threefoldstrand.com.

Aaron Walker: likes to write horror short stories whenever he gets the chance. He has been writing stories since 5th grade and has over 25 ideas for full-length novels, which he hopes he gets a chance to write. Aaron works full-time as a kennel technician at a vet clinic in Topeka. He is finishing up a degree in Information Networking Technology.

Emily Gorman: I'm 27 years old and married with two young boys. I was born and raised in the state of Kansas. My husband and I moved to North Carolina in 2012 while he was in the United States Marine Corps. We lived there for about four years and moved back to Kansas about three years ago to be closer to our families. During the time we lived in North Carolina, I was a stay-at-home mom and stayed focused on my boys. Currently, I'm attending Allen Community College and Highland Community College to finish up my Associate's of Art degree. I'm on my final semester for my Associate's degree. I'm focusing on photography and using editing software to make the best photos I can. I decided to open my own business as a photographer and am currently in the works for opening my studio in Carbondale, Kansas. I'm very excited about where my career and future are headed as a photographer. The photo I'm including for the contest is one I took for my photography class and edited using Lightroom. This is a photo of my oldest son from a worm's eye view. I laid in the middle of the street just to capture this picture. I couldn't have asked for a better day to capture it or a better model for the photo. I hope, if nothing else, you enjoy viewing the photo.

Back Cover Artwork

2nd Place Art Contest Winner: *Emily Gorman*

Piece: "Untitled" (photography)



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