

# Ursidae

West High

Literary

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Cover Art By: Connor McDonald



## **Crusty Carl: The Saga Begins**

By: Elsa Rogers

We all know about the galaxy named the Milky Way with its beautiful spiral and bright colors. But have you ever heard of the much lesser-known galaxy called the Starch System? A beautiful white splotch of star dust and flour against a backdrop of the deep void of space, the Starch System is home to a family of planets, lovingly dubbed the Cookie Crew. Their sun an oven, their moon a burnt doughnut hole, their god a baker. Yes, this is a story of a particular planet named Planet Pastry.

The planet itself was beautiful, with fields of golden wheat and rivers of cream. The air smelled of spun sugar, and every pastry that lived there, whether it be a doughnut or a cupcake, was happy. Well, almost every pastry. In the jelly center of Planet Pastry's town, there was a tower. A Rapunzel-esque tower that rose high above the rest of the grand estate it was attached to, ascending to heaven, holding what it contained away from hell. What was it keeping away from the happy society of the pastries below? I fear, Dear Reader, you already know the answer.

Chocolate Charles, a soft and chocolatey éclair, and his wife Raspberry Rhonda, a small macaron, plump and pink, had a problem. Their problem? There was not enough Febreze in the world to keep the moldy, crusty, closet-upstairs-where-nobody-goes smell away from the room in the tower. How did the two most delectable treats around (they got featured in the Ganache Gazette for being voted the sexiest treats alive) create such a disaster? A nightmare? The only plausible and obvious answer to Chocolate Charles's and Raspberry Rhonda's problem was to shun their very son from the paradise that was Planet Pastry. It was a valiant mission for the greater good. If their son were to ever enter society... well, let's just say the Great Baker Himself would be the only thing that could save them and their precious image.

Which is why we enter our story here, Treasured Reader, within the estate of one Mr. Chocolate Charles, into a scene of chaos. We see Chocolate Charles in one corner yelling at the glazed doughnut authorities and Raspberry Rhonda who sits upon the couch, egg-cited to the point of hysteria as her best friend (Yeasty Yue, a slice of sweet bread) tries in vain to soothe her. As we listen in on Chocolate Charles's panicked yelling, it would appear that, due to the tower being so secluded, the éclair and macaron did not check on their Costco chocolate-muffin son as often as they should have. And now the abomination was on the loose, who-knows-where doing who-knows-what. Spread the word, Cherished Reader. The day has come. The time is now. Prepare to meet your Baker.

Crusty Carl has escaped.

## **Cara Mia**

By: Caitlyn Unzaga

Oceans, dark and blue, deep and mysterious.  
Galaxies, beautiful and swirling, light years away.  
The core of the earth boils secrets.  
A chambered organ pumping blood inside.  
I believed it was all too impossible to reach.  
Yet,  
One beautiful mind altered one.  
Cara Mia.

Mi amor,  
Terrors, forbid them from the harm of yourself.  
Extract your lustrous,  
Elegant, all-seeing globes from their teary state.  
Don't shed rain,  
Cara Mia.

Meine Liebe,  
Lips that are gentle unleash into an elegant, glossy smile.  
Throb my bloody chamber ever so slightly.  
What once was dull, now is red. My cheeks, warm.  
Not once must you expel from I,  
Cara Mia.

## **Could**

By: Abbie Zalenski

Is this vibrancy what Icarus  
saw as he fell into the ocean? Are these also  
the colors that shot  
through the fire that  
burned Joan?

Could the stars I weep  
Beneath be the same that  
hide Andromeda  
and Leo? It's impossible to  
align the burning cold

of that one terrible night  
where God refused to peek out  
from behind the North Star  
to gorgeous supernovas that  
existed at the  
same time.





**Art By: Elden Stock**



## **Right Where You Left Me**

By: Amanda Fagan

It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is six years old when he meets Hanna Sledge. His parents have moved the family to an empty house on a lake in a town no one has ever heard of. Hanna is sitting down by the lake in a yellow dress, and Maguire thinks she looks beautiful. They play down by the lake, where Maguire was told not to go and Hanna has never been told to avoid, until her father arrives and drags her back inside.

(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is twelve years old when he meets Hanna Sledge. It's the first day of middle school and he's new in town. His parents have uprooted his life and dragged him to this tiny town nestled in the mountains, and he's never going to forgive them. But he meets Hanna, and she looks exhausted; but she smiles at him, and maybe it's all worth it. They kiss under the stars when they're thirteen, and Hanna falls pregnant when they're fifteen. Their parents kick them to the curb, and eleven months later Hanna leaves their daughter outside of a fire station.)

(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is nineteen years old when he meets Hanna Sledge. He comes to Devries for a vacation after his first year of college, and Hanna is sitting by the lake and looking like an angel. They're both smitten immediately, and it's a whirlwind summer romance. Maguire goes back to university in August, and despite his promises never texts Hanna again. She thinks it's for the best.)

(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is nineteen years old when he meets Hanna Sledge. He comes to Devries for a vacation after his first year of college, and Hanna is sitting by the lake and looking like an angel. They're both smitten immediately, and it's a whirlwind summer romance. They're married in six months and divorced in twelve.)

(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is nineteen years old when he meets Hanna Sledge. He comes to Devries for a vacation after his first year of college, and Hanna is sitting by the lake and looking like an angel. They're both smitten immediately, and it's a whirlwind summer romance. They date for four years before they get married, and they have two kids they don't want before Maguire mans up and gets the snip. Hanna hates him more than she hates the kids.)

(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is twenty-seven when he meets Hanna Sledge. They hook up after a chance meeting in a bar and part ways without ever having learned each other's names.)

(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is thirty-four when he meets Hanna Sledge. They meet by chance at a wedding neither of them are sure why they attended. Before long, they have a wedding of their own, and a son follows like Hanna's parents are always asking for. Maguire drinks, and Hanna contemplates abandoning their son every day.)

(cont.)



(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is forty-two when he meets Hanna Sledge. They meet at a scenic conference Maguire attends in Devries, and Maguire falls into bed with her despite his wife and three kids waiting on him. He never tells her about his marital status, but she saw the ring and never asked.)

(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is fifty-five when he meets Hanna Sledge. They are both coming off of rough divorces, and Maguire's ex-wife took the kids. His house is too big and too empty and he never liked the kids to begin with. Hanna moves in next door and is only happy on the weeks her kids aren't there. They aren't happy together either, but Maguire likes being able to rub his new girlfriend in his ex-wife's face.)

(It goes like this: Maguire Quinn is seventy-four when he meets Hanna Sledge. His eyesight has gone earlier than expected, so his kids put him up in a nursing home. His wife died years ago from liver cancer, and Hanna has a pretty voice which must mean she has a pretty face. They hold hands but not much else, because Hanna's husband is still alive and she has just a little too much integrity to betray him.)

It goes like this: Maguire meets Hanna in every lifetime, and they tear each other apart in every lifetime too.



## **If He Could, He Would**

By: Ashlyn Johnson

The morning sun rose above the horizon, filtering light through the window of the man's room. That was his cue to open his eyes and begin his day. The first step to his day was to turn over and look at his lovely wife. She was young with long golden-brown hair, and the deepest green eyes; and her smile was so bright he was blinded. But if being blind was part of loving her, he would glue his own eyes shut. He would then get out of bed, shoving his feet into some slippers. Once in the kitchen, he started up a pot of coffee, her favorite drink. She always added too much sugar to count, making her coffee overly sweet. But if a sugar rush was what it took to love her, he would rot his own teeth with candy. The next part of the day they would spend together, by going on a long walk. Hand in hand, the couple treaded every morning. In the rain, the snow, and blazing heat. But if sweating was the right way to love her, he would touch the sun.

Their walks ended in a park. The grass might be green, or damp, or buried under a white blanket. But it would always end in this very park. In the center of the park there was a building with a beautifully rounded roof. The vastness of the field was surrounded by a black metal fence. Scattered neatly around, the place was littered with stone mounds and sculptures, some tall and intricate, others short and simple. Gardens of flowers lined each monument, flowers of different colors and textures, glistening in the sun. This day was particularly sunny. The man was grateful as he sat in the grass beside a stone statue with the name "Dahlia Swan" engraved on its surface. The headstone was short with rounded edges, and stone flowers were lying at the base. He told her about his day, what he observed, what people he met, and what he ate. He ran his fingers through his gray hair, and touched the wrinkles on his face. His eyes watered and a sea of tears pooled from him.

Once upon a time when he was young, he had the most beautiful wife with a blinding smile. An amazing wife who liked her coffee way too sweet. And a wonderful wife that he could enjoy any season with. And if that was what it took to love her, he would move the mountains, swim the oceans, and touch the stars.





Late Summer Curls and  
Crumbles Like a Dry  
Leaf Into Early Autumn

Art By: Piper Stebbins



## **Walking**

By: Jada Terzich

Sunshine to sundown,  
you feel the wind of fall  
creeping upon us.  
Leaves start falling.  
And fields still full of flowers,  
comfort of Fall beginning.

## **Running**

By: Caleb Conver

Caught between consciousness and mind  
The soul runs  
Dependence of our singular identities  
The soul runs  
What it means to be human  
The soul runs throughout our bodies,  
    Through time and space, we are  
        Undeniably in existence and will  
            Forever be and were  
                All possible because  
                    The soul runs.



## **An Homage to Crows**

By: Khi Overton

Oh to be a crow in the next life.  
Able to fly through the crisp fall air,  
cares and worries disappear.  
Life, simply "eat bug,"  
and "find shiny object."

Maybe to some,  
they're an omen of bad luck.  
Their shiny black feathers,  
a warning of murder.

Yet no one sees  
the silly way they hop,  
or watch them eat bug,  
and find shiny object.

Watching the passersby,  
they saw a sign showing they care,  
and they mean no harm.  
Like children, treat them kind,  
and they will bring gifts.

Simple,  
yet a token of their appreciation.

You may never notice, these  
winged omens of death, but  
rest assured they will never  
cause you harm,  
just let them simply eat bug,  
and find shiny object.



**Art By: Kassandra Anton**



## From the Prologue of *Blood Lily*

By: Annie Condon

What was it that set a king so far above his fellow men?

Riches. It had to be the riches. There was no other answer that made sense, though even this one was, admittedly, bizarre. How strange was it that some men were so much wealthier than others, purely as a result of the others pooling bits of their own fortunes to offer up to the some? A rich man could not, after all, be a rich man, if not for those who made him so. Why did the poor complain?

It was an odd thought, Augustus Clara mused, but one that in his mind held a great deal of merit. It must be the riches that set a king above, for, certainly, it was not any advantage of life. Not long life, not immortality. That much had been proved tonight.

Augustus grimaced at the sight of the scarlet bloodstains on his tunic. Scarlet staining white, what a horrible combination... But it was his fault, he supposed, for wearing the color. The stains would never come out all the way; he would have to burn the whole garment, to be safe. It wouldn't do to have people asking questions about the gory new decor on his tunic. That might very well lead to some... awkward conversations.

Augustus eyed the motionless, regally clad corpse lying on its side before him. Then his eyes turned to the blade in his hand, the silver dagger now coated in the man's vital fluid. As he watched, a bead of blood formed at the tip, dropping off and splattering onto the rocks. Funny, how it didn't really look like blood when it hit; all it did was turn the surface a little bit darker. To anyone else, it could have been a raindrop, or a bit of spray from the sea, or the product of a bird urinating mid-flight.

Right now, granted, there wasn't anyone else to look. And Augustus's own observation was tainted by his knowledge of the truth.

Augustus knelt down in the larger volume of blood, the pool of it that had formed around the body of the king. There had been more of it than he had expected, or wanted. Claudius, apparently, had retained a good deal of skill from his younger years. The man had not stood in the arena since before the birth of his child, a daughter who had celebrated her twenty-first year of life only two months ago. And yet... he had fought well. Or perhaps Augustus had fought poorly; the ways of the warrior were not, by any means, his specialty. He had never been taught such things. He could not wield a gladius, nor could he throw an axe, nor could he stand his ground against a lion or a bear.

But a knife to the back took no particular skill, no essential training. Augustus had bested the king for no reason other than that the king had been weakened by the blade buried to the hilt between his shoulder blades. Even still, it had not been an easy fight.

Thank the gods he wouldn't be representing himself in the arena. He shuddered at the very prospect; were that the case, he would of course be killed immediately. A warrior, certainly not, but fortunately Augustus was a strategist. A master of the game. Everything already planned, and if all went as expected, he would not need to soil his hands again.

## **The Real Monsters**

By: Samantha Healy

He had been only six when he first learned the lesson that would shape the rest of his life.

It had been one in the morning on a Saturday, and he had just woken from a brutal nightmare. Afraid and alone in his room, he called out tentatively for his father. There had been no answer, just the distant sound of rain against the roof. For several minutes he anxiously waited with the covers up to his nose, until finally, he accepted his father wasn't coming.

Steeling himself, he slipped out of bed and tiptoed from his room, checking his father's bedroom, the living room, and last the kitchen. His father was not anywhere in the house.

Out of options, he reached for the home phone on the counter left for emergencies, then started dialing. Halfway through, however, a voice sounded behind him.

"What are you doing up, kiddo?"

He jumped, then whirled around and hugged his father tightly. "Dad!" he cried. "I had a bad dream and the monsters were coming and then they got me and then you weren't here and Dad, I got scared!"

Gently, his father pried him off and wiped his sudden tears. "Now, why would you be afraid of some imaginary monsters?"

"B-because they're scary!"

"Ah, but they're not real." His father knelt down and grasped his hands firmly. "The real monsters, the ones you should be afraid of, are almost always in front of your face."

He felt a chill, even then, even despite not fully understanding. "What do you mean, Dad?"

His father smiled cryptically, kissed him on the forehead, and sent him off to bed.

The next morning, he sat on the couch and watched a news report of a missing woman, one whom he recognized as the lady who once yelled at him in the park, startling him, causing him to fall out of a tree. And while the news report played, his father had been in the kitchen, hiding a pair of silver earrings, spotted red, in the cupboard, alongside several other pieces of jewelry.

The woman was found the next morning in that very same park, shot through the head and missing a pair of earrings.





**Art By: Ming Chen**

## **What To Do When You Find Something Haunted**

By: Macy Krumdieck

*Every neighborhood has that one house. Dilapidated, falling apart, torn to shreds, and boarded up. Crows circle around it. Storm clouds spew from the chimney. Things move in the attic. Yet, the house will be lifeless. It draws onlookers with its eerie energy, pulling them compulsively to the front gate. If you find yourself dragged to that place by the irresistible hand of curiosity, you have stepped into the shoes of many others before you. And if you follow their footsteps, you will find yourself at the center of another creepy tale that feeds the evil within the belly of the house.*

*What do you do when you find something haunted?*

You step slowly onto the grass. Jeers behind you make the fear you feel irrelevant, even though the house looms before you like an ethereal beast. For now, the beast appears to be sleeping. The wood creaks under your sneakers as you creep up the steps. You grasp the doorknob. Chills make you shiver in the hot summer air. Something is warning you not to go further. The beast is ready to pounce.

*You have full right to step into the house. The dead respect the living.*

You've heard the story time and time again. The husband lost his wife and kids on the way to this town. He was murdered in his bed at the age of fifty. Part of you wonders if the murderer had also been eaten by the house. . . If you're about to be eaten by the house. . . Nevertheless, you turn the knob and step inside. You can sense that the beast is now awake.

*You must take something from the house.*

You know you've been sent inside on a mission: to find something valuable. The place has practically disintegrated to dust. The floorboards splinter under your weight. The icy hand rakes down your back, making your teeth chatter. The first thing you see, glinting in the faint light, is a small treasure box. It seems perfect. As you bend down to pick it up, the beast roars.

*You must not leave until the sun goes down. The spirits will be able to bless your departure then.*

You take the box, cradling it softly. It seems to be as stable as a stale gingerbread house. You feel the unmistakable urge to run out the door, but the sun is still high in the sky, casting eerie shadows that fall through the windows. Curiosity pushes you toward the staircase. You begin to ascend, the beast screaming in rage.

(cont.)

*You must come.*

You pause, or at least, try to. Something pushes you up the stairs until you're standing on the landing. Icy fingers rake down your back. A dark oak door faces you menacingly, the doorknob gleaming at the end of the abyssal hall. The beast of a house has gone quiet.

*You **must** come.*

Your deafness is loud. Everything is perfectly quiet and still. All you can hear is that voice that's been in your head since the beginning. You begin to realize what has happened, but you know you're too late. Your hand closes on the doorknob, the coldness freezing the nervous sweat on your fingers. Your breath clouds the air, hiding the truth of what's behind the door as it slowly opens. The beast inside smiles.

*You must listen.*

You have been. You've believed every lie they've told you to lure you into this room. You're not about to stop now. The pull to obey the commands numbered in your head is palpable.

*You must stay still.*

The beast didn't need to worry. You're frozen in the doorway. Teeth, as bright as the room is dark, appear slowly as the beast smiles. Then they part. They come closer and closer as the thing lunges at you from the dark. A deafening screech echoes in the chambers of your mind. You can't disobey the order. You stay still, in awe of the silence that cloaks everything.

*Nothing is ever haunted unless you believe it to be.*

And you have caused your own demise.





Art By: Emory Larson

**her.**

by: alyssa pohle

**His**

By Eliza Seifert

*she was like a match in a midnight drought.  
burning so bright, burning so quick.  
paying her price, she observes her last  
flame dwindling down to dust,  
her last tear evaporates upon her cheek.  
soon, she will succumb to the burn of the  
heat.  
a look around the room includes nothing but  
a barren soul.  
The cold, stripped mattress is unwelcoming  
and rid of rest.  
grey, unfinished walls forbid any portrait to  
hand upon the harsh stone cage.  
dry newspapers layer the floor.  
she notices her hand grab a sheet, eyes  
shifting to the last bit of fire on her stick.  
a wave of relief washes her skin as she  
appreciates the transfer of warmth.  
the thirst of the sun becomes greedy,  
and the woman becomes determined.  
using the last of her energy she crawls to  
the bed,  
desperate for the sensation ahead.  
the words of the page burn into the fabric of  
the cushion.  
on her back, looking at the ceiling, with a  
smile.  
as the blaze kisses her skin,  
it is death by arson.*

His lips, deep purple  
Like the color at beginning of the end  
Of the day.  
The way  
They shriveled like rotting fruit.  
His lips, deep purple  
His fingers, ice cold  
Cold like his frozen heart  
Or so he said.  
“Why I will never wed”  
Cold like the fear of his true self.  
His fingers, ice cold  
His eyes, glazed over  
Like week old donuts at the bakery,  
Swarming with flies.  
The endless lies  
He fulfilled, he hoped they never would but,  
His eyes, glazed over  
His body, forever frozen  
Beneath the elderly pines, unmarked,  
Never to be found.  
Hopelessly bound  
Alone for endless eternity.  
His body, forever frozen

## **Winter**

By: Cloey Feeley

The announcement of winter arrives when the trees are black, barren poles and the birds are nowhere to be found. When humanity's breath billows out as smoke and the cold transforms one's knuckles pink. But mostly, when a thin blanket of snow begins to overlap the streets.

As a child, snow was magical. It was the tingling feeling in my cold palms, the tiny intricate snowflakes, and the decorated snowman placed neatly in the yard. I remember tilting my head back to catch the snow fall.

I was the type of child who admired the mountains upon mountains of white and the radiant ground reflecting throughout the neighborhood. I liked the way the embers in the fireplace, charred and red like the sun, lit up inside my house.

Sometimes I want to pull on my snow pants and go play in December, like I used to. But I never do. I stay inside and complain about the bitter cold, the ice I slipped on at the bus stop, the frosted windows of the car, and how unmotivated I become during the frigid season.

Winter has become a period of waiting for spring to arrive. To stare out the window and wait for the snow to melt and the flowers to bloom. For the green grass and breeze that whispers my name.

## **Last Breath of a Dying Rose**

By: Anonymous

Eternity; an endless purgatory existing only  
Within the abysmal realm of ourselves  
And remains in utter oblivion, even in death  
For death, while lasting eternally, results in  
The untimely demise of yourself  
Whether tormented or spoiled, eventually  
You find yourself by insanity  
The agony unbearable with no signs of relenting

A rose, in its futile attempts to survive  
In a wasteland, barren and empty  
Much like the void it may or may not endure  
And in its dying beauty, the deafening screams  
Drowned out by complete silence  
It is left to rot for eternity  
While it fades in complete isolation  
And has no afterlife, only merely a flower





Art By: Victor Webb

## **On a Hymnsong: An Excerpt**

By: Sienna Langeliers

She glided across the stage like it was made of ice.

Though she was young, she had the grace of a professional dancer. Leaps well defined, feet pointed precisely, spins wild yet calculated; everything was done to perfection.

Lowell Mason.

The crowd was mesmerized by her, the girl with the talent of the dancer in the queen's court. She couldn't see that though. Lowell was engulfed in her dance.

The theater had always felt like a more true home than anything she had ever had. The music called to her; the stage welcomed her. The velvety feel of the curtains had always felt more like motherly love than anything her mother had actually given her, the creaks in the floorboards sounding more fatherly than her father ever could. Her parents had always pushed her to be a better dancer; she could see why now. For this. The thrill of the theater, the beautiful rush of dance. She had a gift.

Her sister, Camille, had always been jealous of her. Though they had both gone through the same classes, Lowell had been the only one to excel. And soon, she'd be known as the best seven-year-old ballerina the likes of 1859's France had ever seen.

Lowell Mason.

Her name would look so good on a playbook, her father had thought once, so much prettier than Camille's.

I knew that those ballet lessons would pay off, her mother thought. Maybe she could even get us an in with the queen!

All the times her parents had told her, "No, you can not go out and play" or "No, you can not skip your lesson", it all made sense now. It made her better. No. It made her best.

She leaped across the stage, landing perfectly and planting herself for a spin. It was a joyous feeling, flying across the stage. Lowell loved that feeling. She felt free, like a bird learning to fly. Fly away from all her troubles: all the scraped knees in practice, all the times her parents yelled when she fumbled, all of everything. She could leave it all behind, become someone new. Something grand. But now that grandness was not limited to her fleeting daydreams; it had been brought out to the waking world. Everyone could see her beauty, the shimmering spectacle on stage and her newfound freedom of flight.

The piano beside the stage, though only being one instrument, felt like a whole orchestra, grand and enchanting as it played the obscure hymnsong. Of course, it didn't feel obscure to Lowell; it felt like an old friend, calling her to come and play.

She knew right then and there, she never wanted it to end. No, she knew it was never going to end. Dancing was her life now, her whole world. And she was going to be a star.

## **pretty girl**

By: Eliza Seifert

pretty girl on my phone  
how is she so perfect?  
i want to know  
the way she does her hair  
so that she can hold my wandering stare  
but i scroll right by and soon forget  
only am left with the sense of regret  
that i could never look like her

pretty girl walking by  
her mirror-like eyes  
a constant cornflower sky  
she doesn't know her beauty  
the mirror scrutinizes her purity  
tells her she's not good enough  
but she holds it in, pretends to be tough  
and only hurts within her mind

pretty girl behind her phone  
she cried five times today  
but you'd never know  
filters on to hide her face  
the mask she wears to replace  
the aching hole inside her chest  
the fact she's always second best  
so she plugs in and soon forgets.





**Art By: Abby Thayer**



## **Sonnet #...**

By: Mia Titensor

When I contemplate how I spend my day  
I don't know how I finish everything.  
I have to picture a different way,  
If I want to assume I am thriving.

I choose to use my phone and stay up late  
And I choose to bear life's heavy burden.  
I cannot accept my selected fate  
And allow my future to be taken.

I find a comfort that lets me unwind;  
It puts me to sleep like a lullaby.  
And while I am lost in my own lost mind,  
All of my mental health to quantify.

I want to try to finish all my work;  
I want to fight for some sense of control;  
I want to possess all possible perks;  
I do not wish to suffer the large toll.

I will never choose to procrastinate  
And I will learn to win and celebrate.

## **The Taiga Man**

By: Jackson Clark

Come here by my fire  
And sit down for your test.  
So that in all that you aspire  
You prove you are the best.

The questions have no answers  
And the paper has no lines.  
In fact, the test is banter, here  
Between the Earth and Pines.

Here I shall not tell you  
What score you win or gain.  
For so long as scores do haunt you  
Your test is done in vain.

I know that in your worry  
You will search all far and near.  
Over mountains you shall scurry  
To cure your ailing fear.

Of failure heart a-darting  
Over lines all written well.  
Smudging all and smarting  
At all you did excel.

I tell you do not worry  
For I am no great, grand jury.  
As fear is for the wanting man  
And judgment for the fool.





**Art By: Ariana Dagel Arancibia**

## Embers

By: Sophia Beltran

I destroy myself so others can't, it's a destiny I simply cannot grant/ I plant roots just to rip them from the ground because I refuse to be found/ I refuse to be found yet I always choose the people who resemble bloodhounds/ They sniff me out but I detest being bound. Even if I'm just caught in a tender hug, I treat those arms like chains/ When it comes down to just me and the memories of my pain, my heart wins every time, stifling my brain/ I know it doesn't make sense, honestly I do/ But any counter-efforts are just made in vain/ It's insane because still I complain even though I know it's my choice; I'm the one who silences my voice; I'm the one who allows not a minute to rejoice.

I stay busy, busier than I can handle. It's like standing in a snowstorm, demanding warmth from a mere candle, but I don't move. I just stare. Icy flakes continue to fall. Stalling, I'm stalling because I know the sting of snow isn't my real problem. It's that I am lost, so utterly lost, standing among these towering trees. They are endless rows of columns, all secured in my raging permafrost. I can't ignore it much longer, but I also can't bear to face it, this augmentation. I swear I care, but I will never admit this truth out loud. It's easier to just pretend, to lie to myself. So I stand in the breeze, until the wind picks up and pulls me far away. That sounds like an excuse, one that prevents the cold from freezing me in place. I could have stayed right where I was, but no. Off I go without delay. Family, friends, they all deserve more. I deserve more. But instead, I keep wandering, looking for the very thing that has been my traveling companion.

I remember them all. Everyone. Everything/ What made my being better, what made it worse/ But I don't really differentiate between the two anymore, whether it was good or bad/ I treat it all like a curse/ My life is a dejected poem and each one of them contributed a verse, but I never let any of them end my rambling/ It just goes on and on. My relentless con/ I materialize then disappear and respawn/ I don't want to hurt them but what if they hurt me? More, I mean/ So I rip off the band-aid. I hurt us all/ How small of me to make everyone fall/ I build up my walls but they're just a trick; they give me time to slip away nice and quick/ And all along I keep watching as that flame devours the candle wick/ I drift with the wind like leaves flowing, never slowing/ Always adrift/ But if I never call someone home do I really exist?/ Yet despite that looming question, I forever roam. I continue to drone/ Never choosing a place to call my own.

When you starve long enough, you stop feeling hunger; you become numb. I don't acknowledge how it's killing me, Death so close I can practically taste it. I ignore the frost. The bitter bite of cold. The throbbing feeling like sticks falling upon a drum. The rhythm is so...discordant. God, what have I become? What monster grows in me now? What drove me askance, like sliding on the frozen surface of a highway?

I remember there was a path, it was so clear beneath the summer sun. But now the forest floor has been washed in a thick white bath/ Summer turned to Autumn and Autumn to Winter/ The only thing left behind was my wrath so I'm done/ I'm done!/ I have nothing left to give, absolutely none/ Please do not judge me as I continue to run/ I've lost enough. Given all I have/ I'm tired of sacrificing/ I don't want to bear anymore of this agonizing game of tug-a-war; I need everything to go back to the way it was before/ That girl I once was, I adore her. I abhor her/

(cont.)

I miss that girl. She was so naive/ But ignorance is bliss/ And yes, I know that bliss isn't anything real. It holds no weight; it was built on false perception/ But I can't dismiss the way I reminisce about who I was/ That life is too sweet to resist/ It's better than what I have now, this deafeningly quiet abyss.

Too many mistakes have been made stumbling around in the dark. Now I have prices I am not ready to pay. Can I chisel out of these icy chambers? What I long for is a bit of warmth, just a slice because then I would not be lonely just alone. I suppose I have no right to make that statement, though, not when I caged myself. It is the future that chills me, seeping into my bones like the aged. What a wretch, fate. But I'm so sick of this waffling, cutting deeper, digging in like a knife, tearing straight through my defenses. The feelings start in the heart, slow as hypothermia. I'll watch my fingers turn blue, the blood leave my skin, and finally I will collapse. What waits? Will there be anyone to join me? Will it be the end...

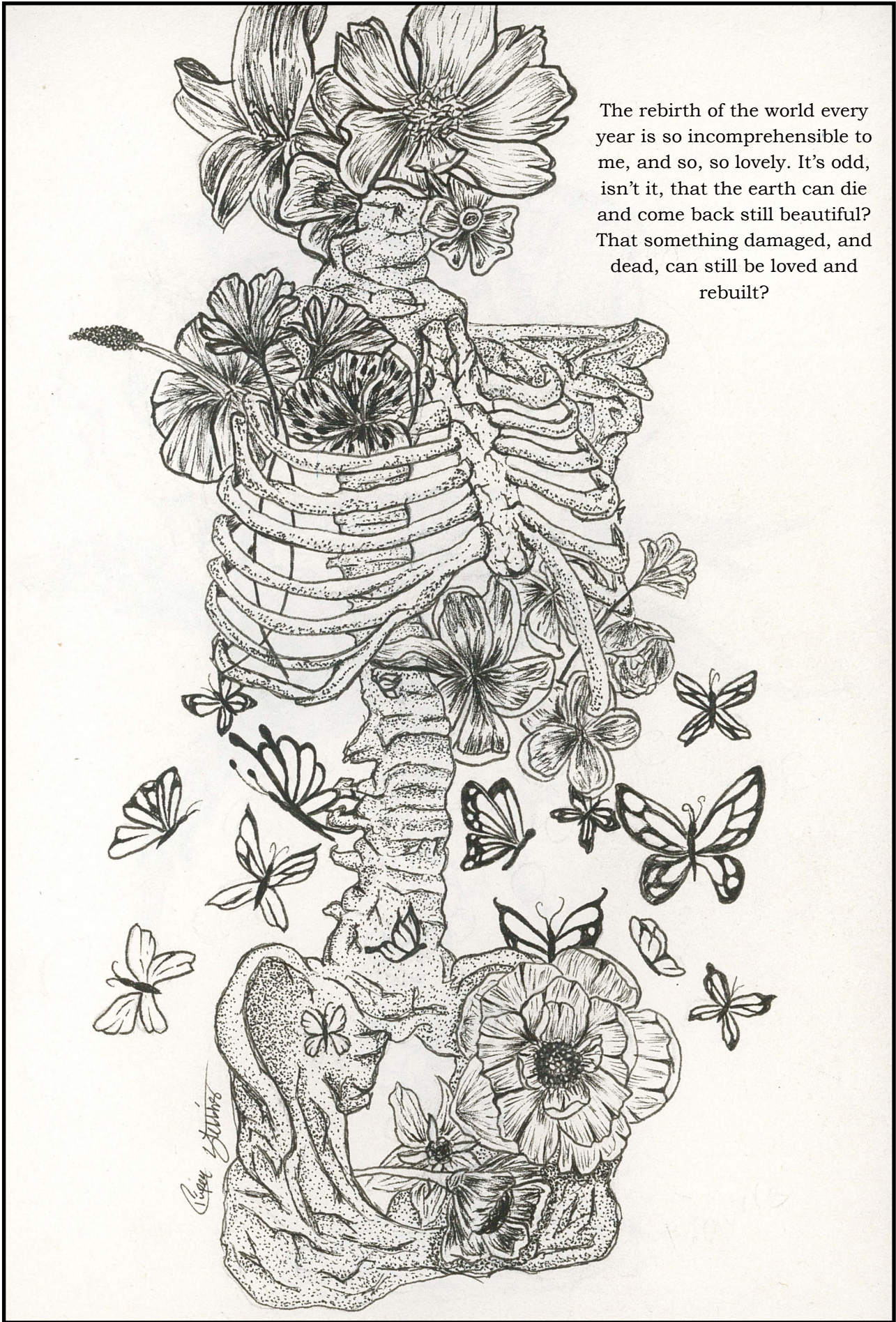
Or rather *an* end...

Because in ends are beginnings. Yes, the seasons will always change/ It's just frightening, this grand exchange/ It's so strange how we can't become someone new unless we abandon who we are/ I can't find my old path, I've traveled too far/ Ended up somewhere new, a place so bizarre/ I can't get back the people I've lost. But they've each left a scar/ And let's be honest here, they're the ones that prepared the car. They stuffed the trunk to its brim with all the necessary supplies. At first I protested but eventually I suppressed my cries/ I started off so strong but they got me to comply/ I'm still to blame for cutting ties but it's true that they opened the door first. An invitation to leave/ I was pushed long enough that finally I just burst. That's the real reason why I always disperse/ But it's besides the point how I came to my worst. The simple fact is that I did. But it wasn't downhill that I slid/ Sure a part of me died. But from my decay came a new way/ A different day.

In the beginning, I wanted to stay hidden, resisted being found, but it was a hide-and-seek game gone too long. I longed to stay grey, half seen, in uneven lighting. But that life comes with a cost. Turmoil has nothing to do with luck, or lack thereof, neither does success. It does not matter is one is surrounded by precious four or ordinary three leaf clovers. Life is just a balance between optics. I simply had to fail to start over. Is that cold I feel, the frigid air of failure or triumph? Now, trees bloom and bees buzz. Moss shows itself once more, like peach fuzz on the forest floor. The sun kisses my cheeks and finally the world doesn't seem so bleak. And only now will I admit that rare beauty in Winter's rage. In fact, it was that rare beauty that provides the unexpected key sitting in my palm, a key made of truth. A person never understands their worth until the see, clearly, the peaks and valleys inherent to the world. So watch winter give way to new soil, new sky, new sun, and earth.

A rebirth.





The rebirth of the world every year is so incomprehensible to me, and so, so lovely. It's odd, isn't it, that the earth can die and come back still beautiful? That something damaged, and dead, can still be loved and rebuilt?

Art By : Piper Stebbins

## **Camouflage**

By Ciara Ballard

There once was a Chameleon,  
who would always hear,  
“you’re wrong, you’re different, unnatural,”  
they’d jeer.

Looking around,  
the Chameleon found,  
that difference in nature was plain and sound.

Like plants and their stems,  
while all may be green,  
still shapes and sizes of each to be seen.

Or differences in flowers,  
and the way that they grow.

Some bloom quicker,  
while others are slower.

Or butterflies,  
that transform and change,  
one day to the next,  
never the same.

Difference is part,  
of what makes life great.

Never a reason,  
to spread mindless hate,  
that scares the Chameleon,  
into camouflaging into something they’re not.

Remember if you just don’t fit,  
others like you,  
are just natural pieces of a puzzle life meant.

## **A Gift From Nature**

By: Avery Okragly

Within the tranquility of my hush surroundings,  
So still it could be a photograph,  
My perception of tensity lays to rest as my  
brain empties into the vastness.

The crisp, mountainous air accompanied  
By the snowy white tips and rocky divides,  
Piercing into the pale blue sky like nature's skyscraper,

The tortuous dirt road  
Endlessly winding about the deep green rolling hills,  
The observation of life through an ombre tinted lens  
Painted by the dying sun.

What lingers within the background  
Paints a bigger picture,  
Perspectives, perceptions, and illusions,  
All a gift from the maze of nature.



## **The Burden of Life**

By: Madilynn Kidd

The rose petals dulled and broke away. The seasons were changing, the grass grayed, and the trees bore no leaves. Beauty only lasts for a moment.

A blue bird perched in a fiery orange tree sang of gladness when the tips of the sun showed. Daylight passed, and the sun's rays grew weary. As she slipped from view, the song faded.

Winter came, and winter left, leaving in its wake, for a moment, death—until the world was reborn again.

A rather cheery sun rose on a particular day. And on this day, a curious little critter went to the trees with a question, "Why does your kind leave during the chilly months?"

The forest chattered and laughed with the breeze, "Silly one, when have we left? Our branches have always swayed in the wind, and our roots have still reached farther, even on the coldest nights."

The critter looked down sadly, conveying his disappointment in their reply, and inquired again, "Yes, but when I called out, no voice echoed a response. You are barren and offer no shield against the freeze of weather. Mothers, fathers, and children have wept for your protection, yet they received no reply."

The woods reverently bowed down, and a doleful gloom settled. The wisest and eldest birch gave voice and answered the little one, "Yes, that is true. We must pass on our duty to the evergreen during the feeble winter. Even then, we mourn and bear regret for our weakness. We were not made to embrace only warmth; darkness must be a part of our lives. Only then can we fully embrace the joy of life."

The old birch paused, then continued on, "We do not have the strength to protect everyone constantly. A sad thing, but still true. We must all bear the burden and forgive those who can't."





**Art By: Andrea Molero**



## **Tattoos**

By: Chloe Tschetter

I've never wanted tattoos

People around me are creeping into adulthood and quickly falling into line

To etch songs

Family members

And flowers

Across their bodies

They ponder long about when and where

And some ponder little at all

I always thought maybe I didn't love or care about something enough to get it permanently across my skin

Now I think I care too much and have too little skin

You know what? I've been lying to you

I'm covered in tattoos

They stretch beyond my fingertips

Linger along my hairline

They are only visible to those who matter most

They are my deepest regrets and my greatest triumphs

Close friendships that ended loudly or quiet compliments from strangers

They are my mother's smile

My father's tears

As if to all of the world I'm a blank canvas



## **Life**

By: Eva Ormbrek

Wherever my feet step,  
Pines sprout.  
Wherever my fingers brush,  
Vines leap into existence.  
Wherever my imagination touches,  
Ferns begin their life.  
My being is full of verdant flora.  
My name means life,  
And my soul is flooded with it.

## **An Imagined World of Life and Reality**

By: Ella Richardson

I close my eyes and see a mountain, a sculpture of rock and trees. I start to hike, to take one step, then the next, breathing in the air, letting my senses become enveloped in the scent of petrichor and fresh wild flowers.

Suddenly, I stand at the top, my gaze taking in the scene before me. A bird calls out and I see it swoop down towards the ground. Only a fraction of the world's majesty blooms with the wonder of the land. Hills move under the skin of the Earth, hairs of grass growing in abundance, and I think to myself, "Oh, if I could touch the rolling hills and soar through the baby blue sky like the bird." I lift my arms, no my wings, and leap into the air. With the wind in my hair and the bird song in my ears, I feel the heart of the Earth. As close as one can get when they are only near in their mind's eye. I dive towards terra firma, and just as the ground looms before me, I open my eyes.

Back in reality once again, I sink into the inescapable quicksand of existence.

Another Cycle of Seasons I Thought Would be Different, but Still Spent Laughing With  
Pain and Crying With Joy.



**Art By: Eliza Walker**

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