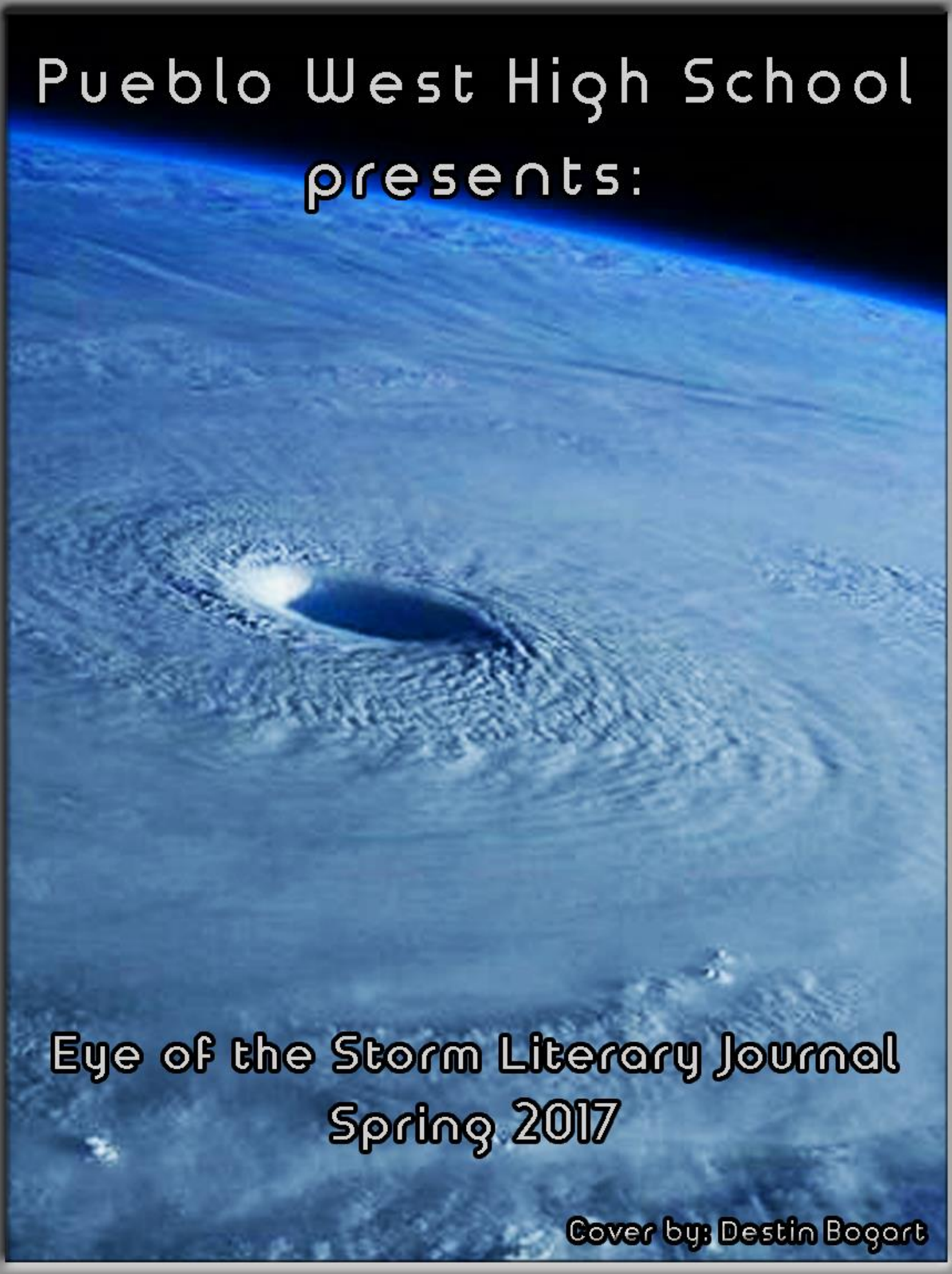
Pueblo West High School
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The Eye of the Storm

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Table of Contents

Image by Madison Bradfield

Kaitlin Betty
I Would

Please don't leave
I don't know what to do
I love you so much
If only you knew

I would swim over the steepest mountain
And climb through the deepest sea
All in an infinite hope
That you would never leave me

I would sail across the rolling grass hills
And run on top of the vast blue lake
All in an infinite hope
That when you go, my heart, you do not take

I would float on the gravity bound earth
And walk through the never-ending space
All in an infinite hope
That no one else will take my place

I would fly through the tallest buildings
And build the bluest sky
All in an infinite hope
That you would stay and try

I would fall to the highest ceilings
And jump to touch the ground
All in an infinite hope
That you will come back around

Please don't go
For I hope that you stay
Because I still love you so
And nothing could get in my way

Image by Kaitlin Betty

It's Time
Marie Moore

"It's time to get out of the desert and into the sun... Even if it's ALONE."

It's time. I've held on when I needed to, wanted to, should have, and shouldn't have. I was hanging on when you weren't. I was hanging on even when everyone in my life who cared about me told me to **let go**. I've finally come to the time where I'm aligned and ready to release control and surrender you and the relationship to God.

It's time. All the laughs, tears, memories, moments that have clung to my heart are only taking up space. Do I regret any of them? Not for a second, actually thank you for them. I'll never forget them and more importantly they are part of my story for God to use. To teach me. To teach others. I have to clear my heart and hand it over to the One who truly loves me. Everything you've ever given or done to me does not even compare to what Jesus has done ***for me***. All I find with you is false hope and empty promises, when my Jesus brings a fulfilled and confident hope. He has made and shown me promises that only He can and will deliver. I have to stop letting my feelings for you stop His promises for my life.

It's time. You've told me everyone always leaves, so who am I? Will I always be your back-up? Second choice? Fall back? Someone who can't tell you no? Problem solver? Not since I've met you have you ever said a simple thank you. Maybe if you paid a little more attention you would know the best way to show me love is through WORDS. I would not be where I am at if you simply said something, actually speak your feelings instead of playing games. Maybe just once tell me I look beautiful. Say thank you for being there, Explain why you are upset. Or even speak the truth about what was going on between us. WORDS. I cannot keep going without words and not words about yourself but me or us... not you.

It's time. The looks, tension, touches, chemistry are all I think about but it's time for me to think and focus on something other than you. Myself.

It's time. I have to start listening to my friends. They see how much this affects me. They see what I'm blind to. You are my blindspot. They are protecting me and it's time to start letting them. I have been blind in this situation, but because of them I can start to see clearly.

It's time. I have dreams, passions, wants, desires and I need to pursue without being attached to you. You no longer have power over me. I do not submit to you but I submit to my heavenly father who wants to give me what I want.

It's time. I thought being with you was like being in the sun when I was actually in the desert. All I would see were mirages. I let you go after them and I would follow to only get there and the water had disappeared. There might be sun in the desert, but no life can thrive there. I am done merely surviving. For the longest time I prayed to get out of the desert with you by my side, but I know I won't come out alive if I wait for you. I have to leave behind this wasteland because God has bigger and better plans. There's *more* than just this desert.

It's time. It's time to let go of you. It's time to leave the desert. It's time to surrender. It's time to step into freedom. It's time to take my leap of faith that there's so much more. It's time to put myself first. It's time to surrender. It's time to jump. It's time.

The Hollow

Anonymous

The excruciating pain
The hollowness that follows
That is the effect of the cause
The cause I tried to evade
I read our interaction
Every night, morning
And everywhere in between
I smile instead of cry....
Why is that?
I cried my self to sleep the first night
Cried before sleep the second
The third, I just stared at the ceiling
The fourth I didn't sleep at all
But the fifth night
I read the messages
We ended appeased
But not at the same time
I remember the promise you made me
Way back in the summer
Did you keep that promise?
I wish I knew..
I felt the sorrow
The longing to talk to you
My friends suggested using their phones
But I couldn't
I'm afraid of how you would react
I'm scared you've already moved on
I love you
But do you still love me?
I don't want to lose you
I'm holding on until graduation
Then I'm coming to find you
A small sliver of hope in my heart
I feel an emptiness in my life
But I refuse to fill it
They try to make me
But I'm not letting you go

Can it Be Worse?

Joseph Schwartze

"It'll be okay, you know," the voices repeat into eternity.

"Everything works out one way or another," they say without end.

"It can always be worse than this," those fools state like they think they know something.

As the cold gunmetal pushed against his temple, the young man had to disagree. He took deep breaths in and out as slowly as he could to calm his nerves, but that ever-present threat of death looming over him stopped him at every turn.

"Alright, listen, asshole," the woman spoke down the barrel of the gun. She was the only one in a position to make any demands. "Everything you got. Your food. Your weapons. Your water."

"It'll be okay, you know," he murmurs without thinking.

"Huh? What was that, asshole? You got something to say?"

He shakes your head almost imperceptibly, and he rolls his shoulders to slide his pack off of his body. The heavy thing thuds to the ground, the cans and bottles inside hitting together loudly.

"Good, good. Now you just stay still. Forget all about this. It's for both of our best interests, asshole." The kneeling man feels the barrel pull away from his head, and he takes that moment to strike.

In one motion, the young man stands up and twists, sending one hand out wide to knock the gun away and the other in a swift uppercut to where he believed the attacker's throat should be. One wheezing sound in front of him and clattering sound away from him later he knew he'd succeeded, but that didn't make it over.

Stumbling away, the woman groped at her neck and gasped, trying to regain her lost breath. She was stunned, definitely, but it wouldn't last long. Moving quickly, the man dove for the gun and came up with it aimed for his attacker, a victoriously smug grin on his lips until—

A shot blasted through his hand and knocked the gun away from him.

A new voice sounded from maybe a dozen yards away, "We don't wanna kill you, man. Just let us take your stuff and we'll be gone. A'ight?"

The young man wasn't listening. One hand clutched at the other, trying to stem the bleeding from the gaping hole even as his mind raced for any possibility of survival here. To give up what he had was death, almost as certain as a shot to the head from these people was. In this lawless wasteland of a world, being without supplies made you a dead man with a pulse.

Still reeling from the pain in his hand, the young man jumped up onto his feet and barreled toward the woman, as much stumbling as charging and, with her continuing inability to draw breath, she could not resist the force of his weight. The two went hard to the ground, and the young man threw his body to place the woman between himself and the armed man at a distance.

Sheltered behind the woman, the young man put his boot-knife up to the base of her skull. The threat was clear, even to the woman attempting to recover her breath yet again.

"Wait! Don't hurt her, a'ight?" the burly man yelled while coming out from his hidden spot some distance away. "You can take your stuff, we'll even give you that pistol, just let her go."

The young man sneered, standing and hauling the woman up in front of him in two quick motions. His voice oozed with malice, "Drop your gun."

The sheer hatred evident from the simple command's tone set the other man aback for a moment. His wide eyes seemed to ask if these were to be his final moments on earth, but no answer was forthcoming from the young man.

The light thud of the gun set on the ground prompted the next demand: "Kick it over here."

"Listen, man, that's all we got—"

The knife pressed into the woman's throat, and she squirmed as a thin line of blood appeared on her delicate neck. There was no hesitation after that, and the rifle stopped just short of the young man's heavy boot.

"A'ight, now let her go," the other man spoke smoothly, evenly, cautiously.

The young man didn't care. One flex of his wrist and a hot flow of blood started over his hand, painting it and the ground below it a striking shade of crimson. He kicked the woman to the ground, letting her clutch at her irreparable wound in the last desperate moments of her life.

Instantly, the other man was upon him. The young man reacted quickly enough to get his knife into play, and he sliced a thick gash over his attacker's right shoulder. Still, the two barreled into the ground as a result of the charge.

"You… bastard! You li'l fuck! I'll kill you! I'll fuckin' kill you!" the muscled man yelled, trying in vain to land blows with his now injured arm. The first blow met with a devastating end: a knife sticking out between his ring and middle finger knuckles. He fell back, holding his hand and grimacing with the pain. The young man rolled over him.

And he gave no quarter. An unmerciful, unforgiving, and punishing assault rained down on the muscle man's face. One. Two. Three. The punches landed in quick succession, one after the other, while the other man tried weakly to resist. The young man's hands started to hurt when the other's face stopped resembling anything human. When he finished, a pulpy mass of bone and gore remained where once a loving husband had been.

"Everything works out one way or another," the young man spoke coolly, wiping his blood-splattered hands on the other's jacket. A final gasp for air slipped from the woman's lips.

"It worked out for me this time, a--------."

They Say

Darby Hodge

The bright screen beckons
Filling little minds with society's perceptions
The image of perfection is distorted
They say only the petite will make it
They say show more skin and you are superior
They say you are just an object, not a treasure
Forget what you are taught to be important
Because they say followers and views trump all else
Naive minds become eddies made of others' opinions
Your thought of yourself will no longer suffice

This corruption and deception must stop
She uses makeup to cloud her imperfections
While he uses immaturity to aid the insecurity
We are told image shouldn't matter
We are told not to listen
But they denounce while wanting to evolve
You have spunk but they are cowards
You have heart where they have holes
You are unique but they are uniform
They still say you are not enough

Ignoring them seems impossible
They are everywhere, always in control
Our internal perception is governed by them
Our confidence depends on them
Our opinions are dictated by them
They tear us down until we are stumps,
Stepped over and forgotten

This torture must come to an abrupt end
One more day and we will collapse
Our glass spirits will shatter
The now visible pain will be open to the masses
To ridicule, to deter, to judge
They would ruin what little we have left
They make us doubt our own significance
Forcing us to ask ourselves everyday:
Shall we just indefinitely disappear?
Should we become permanently invisible?

January 16, 2017:
Megan Price

I thought we were infinite. I thought our changes to fall in love surpassed the amount of stars that there were in the sky. I thought we were infinite because we always came back to each other. I thought the way we orbited each other and sometimes met up and created an eclipse were the times that proved our infinity. I thought we were infinite because the smiles we shared were long and everlasting.

I thought we were infinite until one day I decided infinite was too long for me.

Infinity to you meant the amount of times you denied your love for me. Infinity became a constant game of keep up. We were infinite in the fact that out fights could outnumber the stars.

I decided infinity was going to be too long when you decided infinity wasn't with me.

We were infinite in the amount of times we hurt each other. Our infinity lay in the silence that stretched between us. Infinite became too long for me when you stopped trying. I thought we were infinite until we started to number the days we spent together. We weren't infinite because of the times when we stopped smiling. That every time the sun eclipsed the moon I thought of us didn't make us infinite, not that made us human.

Infinity wasn't the fights we got in or the everlasting smiles we gave each other; no that only proved our humanity. Our time together wasn't infinity, our time together was humanity.

Infinite to us meant the number of times God had told us no. Infinite was the amount of times I had asked God why. Infinite is the number of times we fought with God and the number of times He will tell us He loves us.

That should have been our infinity.

We could have been infinitely in love, couldn't we?

But we weren't infinitely in love with Him, were we?

Rolling Green Hills
Jonathan Fox

Moving on open ground
Swinging iron as you go
The rolling green hills seems endless
While observing the open blue sky
Trying to get the ball into the hole
With a flag sticking out of the hole flagging you down
Sometimes you are alone; sometimes you have friends
But the rolling green hills welcomes you
Moving on open ground
Observing the green rolling hills
Sometimes you are alone
But the rolling green hills welcomes you

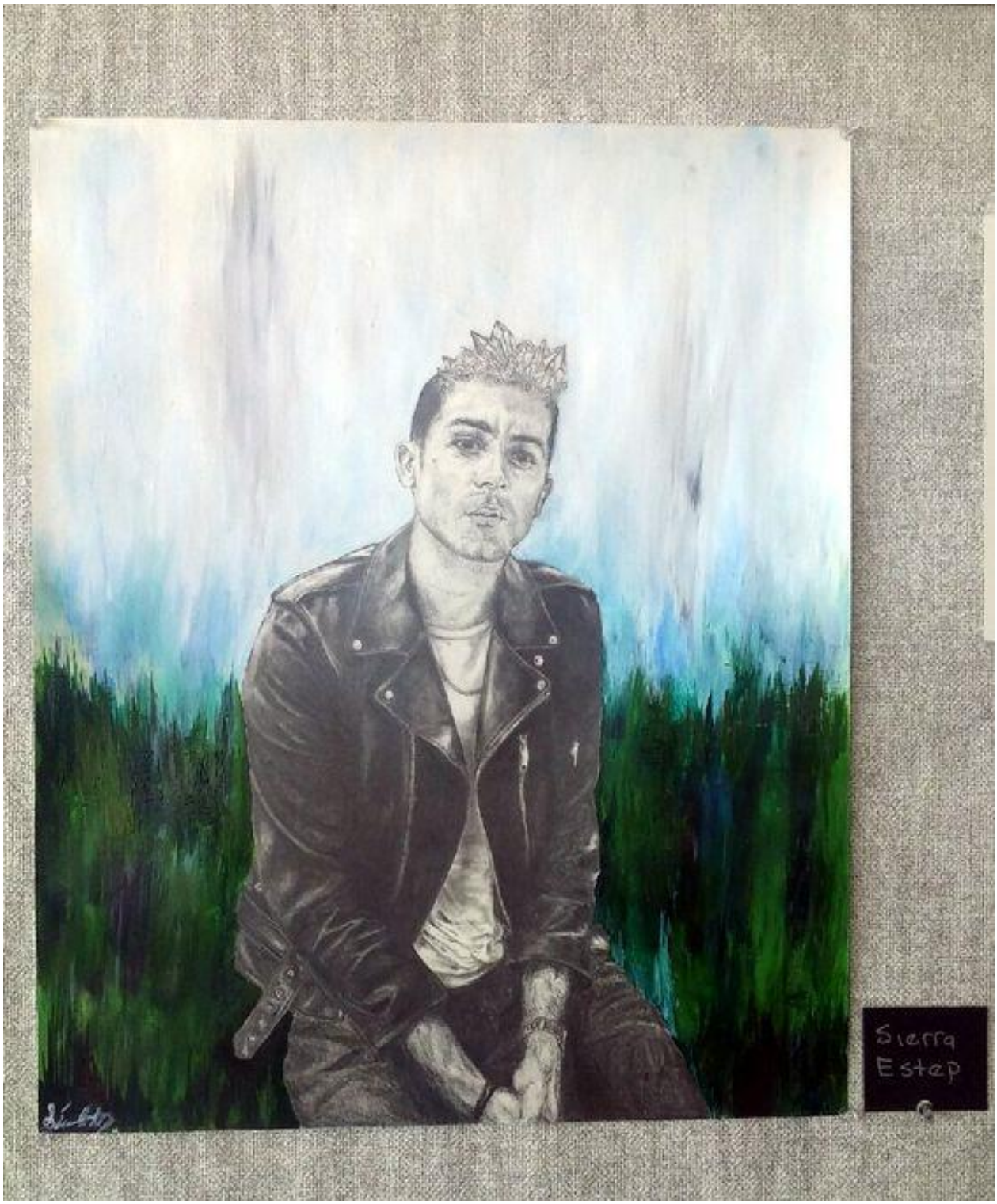

Image by Sierra Estep

World Predetermined

Tallen Smith

Tuesday, May 23rd:

Dave stood there, hunched over on the counter next to the cash register. His eyes glazed over as he listened to the ticking of the clock on the wall. Dave was pale with dark brown hair and eyes to match; standing about 5' 7", he had a medium build. Working as a cashier in a small gas station near the middle of San Francisco, he'd spend most of his days watching the clock waiting to go home. It wasn't exactly a high octane job, but it was the only job that would accept his application. That wasn't to say that Dave wasn't exactly skilled; he was intelligent, charismatic, kind hearted, and had quite a fondness for engineering with test scores that reflect it.

Despite these qualities, Dave's path was predetermined. The day he entered high school, his teachers decided that they wouldn't put as much effort into teaching Dave as other kids. This wasn't exactly the fault of the teacher, but reflected the opinion of the Mirror.

The Mirror was a revolutionary device. It connected to a state of the art computer with perfect physical and psychological simulations that it ran day and night. These simulations would determine the outcome of every event that would happen from the second it started up to the heat-death of the universe, though it could only calculate about a week ahead of time. Simulating the entire planet's movements was quite a demanding task for any computer.

People could buy a Mirror, mount it to their wall, and learn anything and everything about their immediate future that they could possibly want to know. Most people took to the Mirror like moths to a flame, but Dave never liked moths.

"Hey," Dave's friend Keith walked out from behind an aisle, hands behind his back. "Have you bought a Mirror yet?"

Keith was a tall, slim man; he had thin blonde hair and light blue eyes to match. He was about 28, two years older than Dave, but often acted younger.

"Haven't really thought about it," Dave replied. They had gone through this conversation many times before.

"For real, man, I can buy you one for your birthday if you want," Keith offered.

"If the Mirror can tell you so much then you should know that I don't want one."

"Fine, but you'd be surprised what you'd be able to check out," Keith swung his hands from behind his back revealing a plunger with a small keychain wrung onto it, "Head's up."

Keith threw the plunger and key combo to Dave who just barely caught it as Keith ran into the back room. Just then a large man walked into the gas station and walked up to Dave.

"Uh, do you guys have a bathroom?" The man gurgled.

Dave let out an exasperated sigh, "Yeah, it's to the left of the drink machine," he handed the man the keys.

After work Dave went straight home, and despite it only being 8 o'clock, the streets were relatively empty. Most people hurried straight home to get to their Mirror as quickly as possible. *What do I have for dinner? Where do I go tomorrow? When will he call back?* They'd question and question every little thing for the rest of the night as if they'd die if they didn't know every last detail of their life before it happened. Dave ignored tried his hardest to ignore those people.

He slouched down into his couch behind a microwave dinner and put in one of his favorite movies. He enjoyed what little control over his life that he had. *"They don't make movies like this one anymore,"* Dave would think. Unfortunately, the thought was truer than Dave would like to admit. The movie he was watching, called *The Spectacular Frog*, ended with a large twist that astonished Dave the first time he watched it, but it failed to impress the national audience as most had already known about the twist before the movie released, so it drew a very small crowd and lost a large portion of money.

With the fall of movies also came the fall of professional sports, the lottery, and books. There was little need when everyone can know everything. Dave still tried to watch the odd movie or book to be released whenever he could as he loved the stories that they told.

After the movie, Dave went down to the lobby of his apartment to get the mail. Most of it was the norm, bills, bills, and more bills, followed up with random adverts; but one letter stood out. It was a thick orange envelope with the only markings being his name and the logo of his insurance company.

He went back up to his apartment and sat at his dining room table. He slowly opened the envelope. Inside he found a small check with his name on it and the amount written as $50,000; his heart froze. He slowly took out the letter that followed it.

Dear Mr Heineman,

We regret to inform you that you die on Saturday, May 26th 2029 at 11:24 pm. You'll find enclosed the legal documents that we have including your last will and testament and your Life Insurance of $50,000. If you see any issues with the documents provided, please contact your representative immediately.

Our Deepest Condolences,

The SF Life Corporation

Wednesday, May 24th:

Dave sat in his bed staring at the ceiling all night. He couldn't believe it. They were mistaken. They had to be, right? There was no way he was *actually* going to die. It took him almost an hour before he realized that his alarm clock had been going off. He rolled over and slowly dragged himself out of bed, got cleaned up, and went to work.

"Wassup?" Keith said, perky and ready for the morning.

"Uh… n-nothing," David said, ignoring the predicament that he found himself in. Keith saw through his guise though.

"Is everything ok?" Keith asked, eyes piercing through Dave's soul.

"Yeah, it's nothing…" Dave shrugged. Keith knew something was up, but he respected Dave's space and backed off.

"Sure, but know if something is wrong, you can tell me. Right?"

"Course," Dave nodded in agreement. Keith stood for a second maintaining eye contact with Dave. After a few moments he continued.

"Whatever it is, I bet this'll cheer you up, tada!" Keith pulled a rather large box from under the counter.

"What is it?" Dave asked suspiciously.

"C'mon! It's a present," Keith outstretched the present towards Dave, "Go on! Open it!"

Keith smiled with a childlike grin on his face. Dave slowly reached out and grabbed the gift. When he opened it, what he found was a small OLED panel in an oval shape. He knew what it was immediately.

"Wow, a Mirror" Dave said trying his best to sound excited.

"Aw c'mon," Keith exclaimed, "Don't judge it so quickly, just go home and try it."

Dave looked at his long-time friend, "Thanks," he smiled a somewhat lopsided smile.

He was going to die.

"Now, moving forward," Keith leaned against the counter, "I know you're single and there's this girl I want you to meet. Her name's Jess. She's super hot. If you're interested I can set you up with a date tomorrow. She seems interested, so."

"Uh, yeah, sure," Dave said, trying not to think about the letter.

"Great! I'll let her know tonight!" Keith leaped in the air.

The rest of work went quietly. Keith gave Dave some space and Dave couldn't get his mind off the letter. It had to be a mistake. He just knew it had to be.

He went home and threw in another movie, throwing the Mirror into a corner. It was just background noise. He couldn't focus no matter how hard he tried. He cooked a quick dinner but he found himself lacking an appetite. He went to bed early, able to fall asleep out of sheer exhaustion, but only nightmares awaited him.

Thursday, May 25th:

Dave woke to his alarm, no more rested than he was when he went to sleep. He decided not to go to work that day. *Keith can handle himself*, he thought. He took a stroll through the city. The day seemed to reflect his mood as it was dark and cloudy. He sat at a local park bench, deciding to call his mom.

His phone rang for a second before someone picked up.

"Hey mom?" Dave asked.

"Yes, dear?" an older woman asked on the other line.

"I just wanted to call to say I love you," Dave said, feeling the tears well up in his eyes.

"Uh… I love you too. Is everythin' ok?" The woman asked, sounding moderately concerned.

"Y-yeah. Everything's fine, mom. It's just I don't get to talk to you very often."

"That's true, I do wish you'd call more. Hey, did you see? My surgery next week goes well."

Dave smiled a bit, "I'm super glad to hear that. How's sis?"

"She's doin' fine. She going to get accepted into that college she's always yammerin' about."

"That's great. I'm glad she's getting somewhere in life."

"How's that job treatin' you at that gas station?"[Text Wrapping Break]"It's been good… Keith started working there about a month ago so we hang out a lot," Dave reminisced.

"That's great to hear. You've been friends for what? Ten years now? Whoops. Someone just entered the salon. Got to go. Love you."

"Love you too," Dave said before the she hung up. Dave sat there as it began to lightly rain. It was about an hour before he went back to his apartment.

He took off his jacket before his phone started to vibrate. He pulled it out and check who was calling. It was Keith. Dave hesitated, but answered.

"Hello?"

"Hey, man, you ok?" Keith asked in his slightly digitized voice.

"Yeah, I just didn't feel like going to work today," Dave responded.

"Ok… Well is that thing still on with Jess? She wants to know if she can come over your place for dinner."

"Uh… I don't know," Dave responded.

"C'mon man! Give her a chance. She's smokin'!"

"F-fine. I guess I can cook something nice," he eyed the check that was still sitting on the dining table.

"Great! She says she'll be there by 6 o'clock," Keith said triumphantly.

"Wait, you've already spoken to her?"

"Yeah, man. I knew you'd ditch work and I also knew you'd say yes to her invite," Keith replied.

"Oh…" Dave said, annoyed that his friend had already planned out his date before he had even consulted Dave about it. He hung up in protest. Everyone and their mirror had really begun to get on his nerves. He remembered when he went to apply for his job, as soon as he walked in, his manager, Jon, immediately shouted "You're hired," without giving Dave so much a chance as to utter his own name. His path in life had already been determined.

He sat down and opened up a book he liked so he could calm down. After a few hours had past, he realized that he still had to make dinner. He put down his book and made a trip to the store to buy some pasta noodles, knowing it was his specialty. He returned home and began cooking. After a few minutes, there was a knock at the door.

When he opened it he was greeted by a beautiful brunette with green eyes and casual clothes.

"Jess, I presume," Dave asked politely.

"Hey," the woman responded.

"Please come in," Dave stepped aside, showing off his abode.

"Yeah about that…" Jess said timidly.

"Is something wrong?" Dave asked.

"Yeah, this date doesn't go well. So, I'm just going to leave. Sorry," She said faking sincerity.

"Yeah… that's fine," Dave said, staking a more casual stance.

"Well… see ya," Jess said, waving and walking down the hallway.

"Bye," Dave said, closing the door quickly. He sat down at the dining table and looked at the pasta he made. It was too much for one person to eat, but Dave didn't touch any of it anyway.

He went to the tv and began to pick out a movie before stopping.

He was going to die.

He couldn't shake that thought from his mind. It had all seemed so unfair. Why did it have to be him? What did he ever do? Even in high school the Mirror had decided what his future would be. He wanted to go to college, but he got a letter saying his application wasn't accepted. Why wasn't he accepted? Because the college was told they didn't accept him. It had all seemed so unfair and it angered Dave. He grabbed the DVD player and ripped it from the wall socket and threw it across the room, cursing profusely as he did it. It felt good, so good in fact that he grabbed the vase on the coffee table and threw it at the TV. Seeing the vase shatter as the LCD cracked was cathartic. He grabbed the coffee table itself and

prepared to slam it on the ground before realizing what he'd been doing. A flood of grief took him over and he dropped the table onto the ground. He slunk to his knees as tears began to flow freely.

There had to be something he could do. This can't happen. The Mirror can't be perfect, right?

He went to the corner of the room and grabbed the Mirror Keith had gifted him. He plugged it in and waited for the OLED panel to light up. *Mirror Online. Your Glimpse into the future is waiting* the screen lit up.

"When… when do I die?" Dave asked slowly.

Almost immediately the screen warped and contorted it's letters as a male voice echoed through the room, "Dave Heineman dies on Friday, May 20th, 2029, from severe head trauma at 11:24 pm."

Dave looked down, *I guess it's true,* he thought, *I do die*….

Friday, May 26th:

Dave spent the rest of the night asking the Mirror an onslaught of questions. He didn't sleep but he was too stressed to even know he was tired. By the time the day rolled over, he heard his alarm clock going off.

He walked into the gas station so pale he was almost white, almost like a zombie. He mouthed something to himself.

Keith ran from around the aisle, "Hey man, are you ok? You look terrible. Did everything go alright?" Dave only mouthed something to himself and continued to the register.

"Dude talk to me," Keith said grabbing Dave's shoulders.

"Everything's ok. Don't worry," Dave said, his words sounding hollow, then he mouthed something. Keith looked concerned.

"C'mon man, if something's wrong you have to tell me," Keith said, getting louder.

Dave put his hand on Keith's shoulder strong and firm, "I'm more ok than I've ever been."

"Uh… Ok man… But… tonight you and I are hanging out. Your place. Ok?"

"Already have everything planned," Dave said. Keith smiled slightly,

"Finally use the Mirror?" Keith asked.

"Yup. Best decision I've ever made."

"Awesome. Don't forget, your place, 10 o'clock. Got it?" Keith asked.

"Got it," Dave replied.

The day went by quickly. Dave stood unmoving at the cash register, always speaking to himself quietly before someone walked in. But eventually the day ended and Dave headed home.

At 8 o'clock, Keith knocked on Dave's door. No one answered. After a few minutes, Keith moved the doormat and grabbed the key hidden there.

"Hey man, I'm coming in," he said as he slowly opened the door. The room was empty. The TV was broken with the vase shards on the ground.

"Oh my god," he shouted as he ran into the room. He saw Dave standing on the balcony looking at the cityscape. "Dave, what the heck happened?! Are you alright?"

Dave turned at him, and he said something silently to himself.

"Dave… Dave are you ok?" Keith said, slowly moving forward. Dave merely stared at Keith and said something else too quiet to hear.

"What are you saying? I can't hear you." Keith said, slowly moving forward.

"I… I don't und-" Dave said only slightly audibly so Keith couldn't make out the last few words.

"I… I don't understand what you're saying!" Keith said.

"Every choice I've ever made… none of it was my own, was it?" Dave asked.

"What are you talking about? I don't understand," Keith asked confused.

"Free will is a lie," Dave shouted. Keith began to understand.

"Is this abo-"

"About the Mirror? Yes. It's always been about the Mirror. It showed me," Dave interrupted Keith. He worded something silently to himself.

"What?" Keith asked.

"It showed me that nothing I've ever done has ever mattered," He stepped off a chair on the balcony. Keith stopped moving forward.

"Dave stop! Whatever's going on, we can talk through this!" Keith shouted.

"It's already been decided, Keith. I don't have a choice," Dave opened his arms and let the wind blow past him.

"Dave… please… Hey… remember-" Keith started before Dave whispered something to himself again, "What do you keep whispering!?"

"EVERYTHING!" Dave shouted.

"What is that s-"

"Suppose to mean? It means I know everything, Keith. What you say, how you move, where you'll go."

"Oh my god, the M-" Keith looked in the corner of the room before Dave interrupted.

"The Mirror. Yes. It showed me. It showed me the truth. We have no free will. Nothing I've ever done was of my own volition. It was all meaningless." Dave.

"No it hasn't! Please, Dave! Come down from there!" Keith said in unison with Dave.

"I know what I'm doing," Dave started, "For the first time in my life, I know what I'm doing. Don't worry, Keith. I know you do just fine without me."

Then he leapt.

Keith cried there on the floor of Dave's old apartment for a long time. Eventually, he walked over to the Mirror and covered it with a blanket that was lying on the couch. The ambulance arrived shortly after, for they already knew where to find Dave. They took his body away, and pronounced him dead. The official time of death read May 20th, 2029, 10:24 pm.

* * *

Image by Madison Montoya

Image by Madison Bradfield

The End of the Road

Shae Wheeler

The road is dark and gloomy
As it ends, finally it ends
Seeing the road, it comes to a bend
Making that choice, but there is no enjoy-
Ment, unable to finish like I am paralyzed, it is so far away
There is no reason to attend
Anymore, for the trends
Must continue, yet people will not betray.
I continue forward
Away from the bend and to the light
Sound is fading
I am not one to go with a sword
In hand, but rather in flight.
Speeding towards the edge; finally I am done, and no more shall my image
continue degrading

We Are Hurt to Help Others

Anonymous

Drowning, why are you drowning me? I thought you loved me! And you know of my fear of water! Why are you doing this?

My mind races as I am losing my breath and breathing in the chemical-filled water and it burns. I welcome it though; the water has been an old friend in which I have long forgotten, until now. Finally, he lets go, but I do not know if it was because of the water, or my insanity that controls me to stay under in the peaceful, clear world under in the dark surface it gives to society. Why has God done this to me?

But it is just the wakening from my dreams, my wonderland. I am a crying as I wake up from the life I am living because I have lost everything. My dad threw me out of my house, but my mom accepts my faults. My boyfriend kept me; however, his dad told everyone and placed me in a shadow of shame among my peers. I made a mistake–we made a mistake, but they never knew until after.

I was pregnant and school had stressed me out and about a couple of months into this new life, a torrent of emotions hit me as I lay on my bathroom floor crying from the pain. I live to help and I hurt the most innocent creature that never even had a chance to live or do wrong. I scream and I give up.

“It isn’t fair!” I scream until my voice is gone and my eyes are burning from the tears. I clean up the mess and walk over to the yellow landline in my room and call him.

The phone rings 4 times until he picks up and answers, “Hey sexy, how is the baby in that beautiful body?”

I sit quietly while he begins to worry. I finally gain my breath to say, “Cold.” All he can do is question what has happened until it hits him. I can hear him grabbing all the bags he could get in his arms to come and get me. He comes to my house and says it will be okay and gathers my stuff so I could stay with him and regain my liveliness in peace. He was about to go to college soon and he tells his father what is going on. Both of them try to comfort me, all I do is scream and cry and sleep. A few days after losing the baby, he tries to lift my spirits and all I can do is lie there motionless in the bed.

I had given up.

A handful of days later, he shouts at me, “Do something, please? Give me a sign!”

I cannot speak, my mouth and body won’t move. In my mind is scream back, *Don’t leave me! I need you!* But nothing comes out besides sobs.

“I am done; I am not going to take care of you. I never wanted a child, but you were too stupid to get an abortion like I told you! Not only is the child gone, but so am I!” He slams the door and can hear him outside with his dad, “I can’t do it anymore, I am glad the baby is gone.” The sobs tear through me and I finally gather the energy to sit up and walk to him. He ignores me.

In a quiet voice that I forgot I had, I mutter, “I’m sorry, please don’t leave.”

With a look of disgust, he walks away and I sit down and I stay there for a while. It is late at night when he comes back and he walks right past and kept bringing out boxes. He places them in the trunk of his SUV. He is readying to leave; his dad helps me inside and says I can live there instead.

It was over, us–

I got up and asked him, “How are you?”

“How am I? You shut me out and refused my help, yet you listened to my dad! Did you not think I was hurt to?”

“You wanted me to get an abortion as soon as I could. Did you think I could harm a baby when I can’t even kill a wasp or anything else?”

“I knew you couldn’t do it. I love you, if I unpack my bags and boxes, will you want to talk?”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

We sat up all night and talked; when the sun started to rise, I got dressed and grabbed some breakfast. I got my stuff together to return to school. As I walk in the school, people start to gaze and watch my every move. It had been a month since the incident in the dark bathroom and the last time I was in the school. It felt good. I walk to my classes and the day is filled with hateful glares and cheerful, loving hugs.

I thought I had reached an end to my life; it was just the beginning.

Fast-forward a lot of years later, I end with my doctors in therapy and I am offered a position at a school to help other people. I travel to houses to help students in bad place in their life; I help them. I have a family, a husband and two little kids, Emma and Ethan, and I teach from my mistakes.

Please, never give up because what you see and go through, it is only temporary. The world is a beautiful and hurtful place, but it will always be okay. YOU will always be okay because we may be hurt only to help others.

"Caged" Image by Luke Mayes

NOBODY SAID YOU HAD TO BE OKAY

Megan Price

Nobody said you had to be ok.
It's ok that you're not. We're here.
Nobody said you always had to be strong.
We're strong enough. We'll be here.
Nobody said you had to carry us.
Your burdens aren't just yours anymore. We have you.
Nobody wants you to be hurting.
We hurt when you hurt because you're a part of us.
Nobody blames you for feeling this way.
We will remind you the best is yet to come.
Nobody said you had to be perfect.
We still love you with every fiber of our being.
Nobody said you had to be alone in this…
because you aren't, you never were, you never will be.
We love you.
We have you.
We're here.

Honoring the Fallen

David Lichliter and Shae Wheeler

I am Gallus Lucilius Verullus. I am, was, a priest of Ceres. She grants my people good harvest and fertile fields. I was a chief member of my village, in the land of the Gauls. I showed the conquered people the ways of the true gods and goddesses. I had a small temple, more of a house furnished with a few statues, from which I taught the ways of the Roman. I helped to quiet some of the rebellions back in my younger days, when I served under the aquila. I now seek an old friend, now head of a legion stationed in a nearby town. I trudge through these mountains thinking these thoughts. How could it get this way? My people tossed me out into this snowy night with no supplies. Praise be to Jupiter I even live. That will be their downfall, those traitorous barbarians. I start to think of how it all began. How my people turned their backs upon our pantheon and commenced to believe in the “all-knowing” and “only” God. Now my neighbors have turned against the word of the Gods of our people as they turned the temple. How could one god rule over all the aspects of our daily lives? Can a god guide a man into forging a well-crafted blade and also worry about the farmer tilling the grain fields? I know it is a religion based on lies. Do they not say turn the other cheek, yet burn down my temple? I can barely feel my fingers in the cold. White specks of cold and wet engulf me in their embrace as I plow onwards. My friend will show them the might of the true gods; he owes me a debt anyhow. He will gladly help those poor sods bear their own cross like the one they call Jesus. Titus will be proud of their display. I have many steps ahead of me, but already many behind. I can feel the frost gripping my soul; I need heat. I think of the flames licking up the timbers of my home. I feel the gods giving me power as I surge forward, bigger steps than I have taken before. I tread across the mountains, onward to my goal. I find myself travelling through the night, arriving to my haven before I even realize it.

By dawn, I finally reached the remains of the smoldering city. As I wander through the town looking for the outpost, I see a handful of bodies upon the lightly-dusted streets. I start heading towards the west end of the city where the flames are licking high and the outpost is– and my friend, Arruns Helvius Martialis. Since the city is under martial law, I find a legionary that directs me towards where I may find Arruns. As I head in that direction, I start to notice that the snow is flecked with blood and shoeprints. A guard waiting outside their leader’s tent and stops me as soon as I arrive. I simply give my name and wish to speak with Arruns. He walks inside the small tent to confer with my old friend in hushed voices; he walks out and leaves the tent open indicating that I can enter. After greeting my friend, I inquire about the latest news of their city.

“Those damn people of that womanly religion revolted and claimed that they know the one and only true God; that they are the only ones to be saved from the force of his power. Since they claimed nothing could harm them, we tested that theory and sent them to the “wonderful” and “peaceful” God.”

“The people should be killed and crucified like their leader that they praise, yet they burned the temple in my village for *that* God–”

I hear screams break the quiet morning and we look out. Men were being chopped down like the wheat that they harvest.

We continue, “I have stopped the riots late in the night and my men still have anger and the thirst for justice running through them. I will escort some of my men to your village as the others will honor our fallen brethren.”

Immediately following our conversation, he gives his first cohort orders to prepare to march, and I take the time to rest. Late in the afternoon, he personally leads eight hundred men out towards the village I called home. He leaves his other nine cohorts to maintain ruling in the city. To prevent uprising, a demonstration needs to be made, according to Arruns. I cannot agree more. There is a strategy behind our late departure, and we arrive in the late hours of the night. The people are asleep, making the work easy. They attempt to run from their burning hovels to the swords of the waiting soldiers. Only one tries to fight back, and is quickly silenced. The rest are made to fall nearby trees. The slaves construct crosses, and line them up along the road out of the village. After this, the men, women, and children are each tied to their own cross. The slaves are forced to raise their friends to their own miserable fate. The last ones are raised by some of the legionnaires. We camp for the night, to be sure no one escapes their fate. I walk over to one of the crosses. The man there is barely alive, and begs me for mercy. As I walk away, I tell him, “My people killed your god, just like I now kill you. Your weak religion will get you people nowhere but death.” When we leave, the gazes of the dead watch us upon our road back.

“They Say”

Dalton Rudolph

They say we need to be creative and express ourselves
But don’t upset others

They say we should love one another despite our flaws
But not those brothers

They say we need to stand up to injustice and prejudice
While they flee under the covers

They say be innovative and lead to the future
But remember to stay under

They say we are all created equal under God
Except one color

They say you have the power to be anything in the world
But don’t stray far from your mother

They meant nothing
Just to suffer.

Destiny Awaits
Shania Roberts

Here I stand at the gates of hell
Or Heaven
I am not sure which.
And I am, wondering
What all of this has meant.
Along the broken pieces,
Shattered shone anew
Lit with the fire of emptiness
And despair.
Away from all the pain,
I sighted something,
Or nothing.
I cannot tell.
Standing up, I chose to inspect,
The fractured pieces there,
And only reflection shown
Was that of my regret
Or I think it is regret.
That I also cannot tell.
Cold and distant, I turned
Towards the something or nothing
The pull from within my chest.
I thought there was something there
A fleeting thought of something.
And as I continue down the way,
This feeling continued to fleet.
I continued to will, to want to will
To want at all, that is it.
And once I reached the end of ways,
There exists a simple mirror.
Whole and new and perfect.
Within myself I felt nothing,
So when I finally looked in the mirror,
The shock of red surprised me.
I bled as humans do,

But no pain to let me know.
I cried as people do
But sadness did not plague me so.
I look just like I should
So why did I feel nothing?
Within my eyes I wanted,
And deep down, sparked the coals.
But no light shone in me,
Is this my only destiny?
Am I to be trapped within me?
Absolutely human but absolutely not.
Is there escape from my madness?
Is there hope for me to call forth?

Hope
Do I hope?
Am I not human if I cannot hope?
I hope my destiny is this:
To overcome my immortality,
To become who I want
To want to be something, anything
To be human.
I want pain. I want sadness.
I want.

Tell Me Again

Inspired by The Song of Achilles written by Madeline Miller

Brianne Hasui

Running feet,
Crowning a head that could
Out-shine gold.
I meet him.
Fleeting glances,
Laughter I have
No part in.
I see him.
Juggling figs,
A lyre has never sung
So sweetly.
I learn him.
Always honesty,
A mother of the sea, polar to
His warmth.
I know him.
He vanishes,
To a centaur wise and
Nature unparalleled.
I follow him.
Desires realized,
Hearts beat rapidly within
Rose quartz walls.
I kiss him.
Fearing war,
Mother hides him and he is
Forcefully wed.
I forgive him.
Identity found,
Agreeing to go to war
For the glory.
I accompany him.
Love exposed,
His honor near to
Being darkened.

I keep him.
Armies gather,
His grace steals the stage
From the sun.
I admire him.
Battles fought,
His movements unlike those
Of any other.
I watch him.
Honor hurt,
Like a bolder: stubborn, impossible
To sway.
I dread him.
Action finally,
The men will be led
Into saviorhood.
I convince him.
Rushing destruction,
Blood spilt and my own
Cannot be stopped.
I leave him.
Tears and screams,
Thirsting for vengefully
Taken life.
He misses me.
Ashes mixed,
But mine remain
Unnamed.
I miss him.
A kindness,
The only his mother
Ever gave.
I hold him.
Lives gone.
No prophecies nor people
Nor gods to part us.
I love him.
At last,
We are free.
He says he loves me too.
"Tell me again."

A Foolish Man's Dream

Shae Wheeler

The room is increasing with heat and the fireplace collects the ashes of burning apple wood, which leaves the abode with a calming scent. I finally start to relax. As I burrow into the couch, I can see outside, where there was snow falling and swirling in intricate patterns, and I knew I was glad to have this day off.

Falling half asleep, someone brings me a warm cup of coffee, black, as usual. Knowing that today it would thaw me out and pull back to the world, he insists that I drink it.

"Hmmmmm, fresh coffee."

"Just how you like it!"

I was ready to spend the rest of the day there, but plans can change. He may also get bored, so I don't tell him of my wish, the wish of staying within that moment for a thousand more years. I also don't tell him to leave; in the hopes he shares my dreams as he once had.

I wish it had been as simple now as we thought it would be because when we were childish and young and thoughtless, we promised each other 80 years, he wanted 800, we were aiming for our infinity. We wanted it to be larger than our minds could imagine, it was. We went through college, him being two years older, he finished his ahead of mine, and we both became all that we could hope with our Master's in hand. It seemed different now; I seemed different. I had seen the world and so had he, yet we still had clung to one another, our first love, for comfort.

It did not feel like that now. I didn't feel distant, nor did he. It was as if we were still closed-minded children, planning our future, like our ever so short weekends from long ago, before we ever had a grasp on it. I felt aliv-

"How can I make your day better?" the voice, that sheltered me so often, said while pulling me out of my thought. I just stared at him, his blue-green eyes glowing and his quirky smile.

After many centuries passing by, I realize the question and blurt out, "For you to stay here and hold me all day."

The clock ticks incessantly as he starts texting someone. I began to become worried, as if I had said something wrong. It is always my fault; I've done things without a thought in my head and what if he is upset or cannot even look at me. What if I disgraced him? Eventually after a reply or two, he looked me in the eyes, kissed my forehead. "Of course! And sorry for the delay, I was making sure I could have someone covering me today."

The day passed slowly as we sat there in the other's arms; the day was like any average day that we spent outside of school. The day was everlasting and all that we had hoped for in our past.

As dusk was becoming more apparent, with the last dying light of the sun creating brilliant streaks of oranges, yellows, reds, and pinks that faded into deep purples and blues, he drew me to my feet. Once my bare feet hit the freezing floors, I

realize that there has been music softly playing in the background. We moved to it. We danced under the many colors cast upon the sky, I did not know where the day would lead to, but I did not want it to end. However, like all things, it did.

I woke up, a sixteen-year-old sophomore in high school, alone as I do every morning. As the darkness that clouds my vision, it tries to comfort me back to sleep, but I resist the urge. I grab the first piece of paper and pencil I can find in the darkness as I attempt to sketch this dream. I had to have it, this one dream, in all hopes to remember it and wonder if one day it could be a reality or whether it was only just a foolish man's dream.

* * *

Curtain's Call
David Lichliter

The curtains open at the front of the stage,
The crowd ready to be amazed.
The man sits, tall in his chair,
A grey mask, hiding his hair.
The play begins, the audience entranced.
The man leaves, as the actors danced.
His tall stature will not be missed,
As he sneaks out, the actors kissed.
Down the alley, his silhouette creeps,
To the house, where his victim sleeps.
Inside the window the virtuoso climbs
Surveying the scene, of the room's confines.
The blank walls, and outside's slight breeze
To the white bed, where the victim sleeps.
A young girl, the age of ten,
After tonight, will never rise again.
The hero steps forward, with quiet hum,
Approaching the youth, whose body lies numb.
He draws his dagger, and raises it high,
The reason he kills, he knows not why.
The fall of the dagger, pierces her heart,
He says goodbye, her life: depart.
He covers the crimson void, with holy book,
And as he leaves, he dare not look.
As he leaves, he does chime,
I've outdone myself, this pleasant time.
Back he to the theater, towards the safe,
Confines of the crowd, who know his face.
Away from the constable, he does evade,
At the hall, he ditches the blade.
The perfect crime, never caught,
Many more deaths in his plot.
The performers bow, the crowd chants hooray;
The curtains fall ending the play.

SWINGING, SWINGING
Joseph Schwartze

Groaning. Swaying.

He sat down for the lecture. A presentation. It was some poetry by some poet long gone and never remembered outside of academics, hardly interesting to the student. He was more interested in the real, the today. He didn't want to waste time analyzing words that fell from the mouth of a man a century before. The information, at best, was a whole world apart.

Swaying. Creaking.

The teacher began, her mouth running off a series of words that students hurriedly tried to write down. They knew the vocabulary would be on the test, and even if they cared not for the ideas, they cared for their grades.

Creaking. Dangling.

Onto poetic devices, and the class lamented. Descriptive language and symbolism from which readers are intended to derive meaning. A vivid explanation of the leaves changing color provides a picture, yet it only goes so far. He rolled his eyes; he hated this depth of analysis when an author might have meant something much simpler. To the student, there was no reason to believe these details suggested anything more than the author's attempt to be popular and thus make money.

Dangling. Hanging.

The teacher called on him, asking about the underlying meaning of the imagery. After a despondent sigh he answered, answering eloquently and elaborately, yet saying nothing edifying at all. Then the teacher congratulated him, and he sighed again at the ridiculousness of it all.

Hanging. Drooping.

The lecture ends, the bell rings, and the students book it. All of them are out of the room in moments, leaving behind an empty classroom and a lonely teacher. They didn't care, they only wanted to be home, to find happiness away from the perpetual work of their education. He moved even faster than the rest; he arrived at his truck in moments, slipping the key into the ignition and turning the engine over even as he clambered into the driver's seat.

Drooping. Swinging.

He pulled into the driveway quickly. He opened the garage and stepped into his kitchen. He called out a single name, waiting for the characteristic bell as his dog ran to him.

It didn't come.

He stepped forward, a perplexed expression on his face. He called the name out again, and then saw his puppy on the gate.

Swinging. Swinging. The lifeless body hanged on the gate, stomach distended and limbs stretched in a silent plea for help.

A mocking voice played in the back of his mind: Is this real enough? Is this worth your time? Is this vivid enough? What does this mean? What is this symbolic of?

Yet he could not comprehend this new and horrible reality. He only cradled the corpse in his arms: “Oh… Li’l Man…”

* * *

Terrified Eyes
Brianne Hasui

Once upon a time, I saw a young man
    With frightened eyes and lips pressed in a line.
Never once did he speak a sing word,
    But his eyes told a story of terror.
“Have fear,” they said to my curious mind;
    “Do not follow my path, for it is dark.”
I wished to ease his pain and calm his nerves,
    But he was far too gone to re-learn peace.

Image by Jonathan Fox

Flower and Cakes

Orianna Proctor

"So that's one cake with roses and lilies covering the sides," Billie said, jotting down the order on a notepad, "You can pick it up this Thursday." She smiled tearing the page out and placing it on the order tray. The woman nodded, and asked, "When can I pay for the cake?" automatically pulling out her wallet out of her purse to pay.

"You can pay once you receive it," Billie waved her hands at the woman for reassurance. The woman nodded, closing her wallet and putting it back in her purse. The woman gave Billie one last smile and thank you before heading out. Billie smiled to herself and went on with her day, constantly wondering how she was going to pull off this cake. *Maybe I should stop by Rose's after work,* Billie thought to herself. She looked at the watch on her left wrist, noting that she had only 3 more hours of her shift left.

Billie walked out, locking the door behind her. The bakery closed at 5 p.m. every day to allow the bakers more work time for the orders that were already placed, instead of taking on new ones. Halfway down the street Billie stopped in her tracks with a wide-eyed expression. *I almost forgot to go to Rose's for the references for the bakers!* Billie turned on her heel and headed back in he direction of the bakery. *It's a good thing I remembered before I got to far,* she put her hand in her hair and shook her head. A little walk past her bakery and sooner or later she stood in front of a building with a large sign that read "Rose's Flower Shoppe". Rose's was the place to go for flowers in this town everybody adored it, Billie especially. Billie walked into the store, triggering a bell above her head alarming the inhabitants aware of her presence. But she forgot everything when her eyes landed on the florist that was watering some flowers in the aisle directly in front of the door. "Can I help you find anything," the florist asked turning her head to Billie with a smile on her face. She set the watering can on the floor next to her feet. The florist was the most beautiful woman Billie ever had the fortune of laying her eyes on. She had the curliest short chocolate brown hair and blue eyes that could put any sunny day to shame. Billie felt her heart skip a beat, she didn't even notice when the door started to slowly close back on her. The florist giggled, "Well now your just letting in the flies," she walked towards Billie with a smile on her face, "please come in! Is there anything I can help you with?" Billie quickly did a two-step forward, almost tripping on her feet in the process, only being able to open and close her mouth repeatedly instead of actually giving the beautiful florist an answer.

"I-I-Uhh." Billie stuttered her face beet red. "Cat got your tongue?" The florist asked with an amused smirk on her face. Billie shook her head trying to get her head on straight. "I… uh need some." Billie paused to think, *what did I come for again? Something for the bakery I'm pretty sure*. "Well I hope it has at least something to do with flowers, I don't think we sell much of anything else." The florist said looking around the store as if to confirm that they indeed only sold flowers. Billie laughed into her hand, "Oh um I need roses and lilies, the bakers need them as reference for a cake." The florist's face lit up, " You're the cute baker from next door! I thought I

recognized you! Of course, follow me." The florist motioned for Billie to follow her, and together they made they're way down the aisles'.

Billie took in her surroundings; the store was honestly very beautiful, it took her breath away just looking at it. "Your store is cool." Billie blurted out, then mentally face-palmed because *that was such a lame thing to say.* "Um I don't think I caught your name?" Billie saying trying to take her mind off of her previous comment. The florist looked at her nametag and tapped on it a few times, "Well here is says my name is Rose." The florist said tilting her head back to Billie, only turning to face forward again when they needed to turn left down an aisle. "Oh that'd make sense," Billie laughed nervously scratching the back of her neck. "I'm only joking with you, but my name actually is Rose,." The florist said stopping abruptly, which made Billie almost ram into her. "Does that mean you're the store's owner? Because it's Rose's Flower Shoppe and all." Billie shrugged her shoulders up, and rolled her hand in a "ya know?" kind of motion. Rose smiled, "Yup, I do indeed own this store." Rose took a thing of plastic off of a rack, it look like a larger version of an icing bag, and filled it halfway full of roses and motioned for Billie to follow her again and they set off down the aisle.

"That's really cool that you own your own shop. Why'd you decide on flowers?" Billie asked speeding up to walk next to Rose instead of behind her. "It was always a dream of mine, flowers have been my specialty for as long as I can remember." Rose said giving her a side-glance and half of a smile. "What about you? Why'd you choose to go into the wonderful world of culinary arts?"

Billie hummed in thought; she never really considered why she went to work at a bakery. "I just kind of did, I don't think I truly thought about it, it just felt right." Billie shrugged; occasionally she'd let her hand graze a flower as they passed by. Once again Rose stopped very abruptly, but since Billie was walking to the side of her there was no concern about hitting her. Rose took the mega icing bag that was already half full of roses, and filled the rest of it with the lilies that were on their right. "Okay all done, let's head to the cash register yeah?" Rose said holding the flowers up then walking off to the register; Billie followed only a few steps behind.

"That'll be $12." Rose said as she punched some numbers into the register and then proceeded to write something down on a sticker. Billie fished her wallet out of her back pocket, and took out a ten-dollar bill along with a five, she place both on the counter in front of her. "And you can keep the change." Billie added as Rose put the bouquet inside of a similar bag that the flowers were already in, but this one was slightly bigger and tinted red. "Thank you so much!" Rose smiled up at Billie, and then looked down at the flowers again putting the sticker on the outside red plastic. She picked up the fifteen dollars, punched in more numbers, the register made a loud bang then she added all of it to the tray that was a part of the register. "Have a nice day," Rose said smiling wide and waving at Billie, who was also waving at her as she turned to exit the building, "I hope to see you again!" Rose gave Billie a little wink before she had fully turned around which caused Billie's cheek to burn a bright red.

Once Billie finally got out of the store's door she leaned against the building for support, putting her free hand to her face trying fruitlessly to calm the burning in her cheeks. *I actually cannot believe that just happened* Billie thought to herself, she

turned the flowers around in her hands for a little bit before the sticker attached to the plastic caught her eye. She carefully brought the flowers up to her face to read the sticker. *6 Roses/6 Lilies… Hey there lovely baker, would you be up for some coffee cake maybe ;) (XXX) XXX-XXX ~Yours truly Rose.* Billie stared dumbfounded at the sticker, slowly lowering herself against the wall till she was sitting down, she ran her fingers over it every now and then. She was brought out of her stupor when her phone's text notification sounded.

Do you have the flowers?! It was a text from one of the bakers at the bakery. Billie shot up right away, she quickly punched Rose's number into her phone and ripping off the sicker sticking it to the back of her phone, and ran a few doors down to the bakery. She entered through the side door, out of breath, "I really got to work out more, anyways sorry for the wait guys, the store was busy." Billie said giving them a lie that clearly said she was lying. "Well you're here now, that's what matters." One of the chief bakers said taking the flowers from her, "You did good Billie, get going now." He said shooing her out of the entrance she came in through. Once Billie was outside, she immediately took her phone out and pulled up Rose's number.

Heyyy :) Billie wrote in a new message box, before erasing it, *Hi Rose coffee cake sounds great,* Billie shook her head and erased it, too formal. *Hey Rose, it's me the baker next door, coffee cake sounds amazing :),* Billie decided to just send it, because if she didn't now then she might never. No less than two seconds later she got a text message, *Yes! I'll come by and get you at 6pm tomorrow!* Billie stared at her phone for the longest time with the feeling that this was the start of something beautiful and new.

* * *

The Bell's Toll

David Lichliter

The frantic clanging of the church bell startles me, waking me from a deep slumber. I groggily roll over, not wanting to get up to go to prayers. Wait, it's not The Lord's Day, it's only Tuesday. In the dim light of the hearth I hastily dress, grabbing my eel spear on the way out of the door. I am a fisherman, my father a farmer before me, but he ran me off the farm after I became old enough to fend for myself. I found a quiet village in East Anglia, and made my way as an apprentice to a fisherman. Some boys dream of becoming a warrior or a wealthy landowner, I ask, what's the point? I am content with my life. Besides, the thought of fighting in the midst of clashing armies terrifies me. All it would take is one slip in the blood, one wrong foot planted forward, one mistimed swing of an axe leaving your arm exposed, one… I run towards the church. Halfway there, I find out the reason. I can barely see her through the dense fog. Gliding across the waves, almost seeming to fly over them rather than actually touch the water, a dragon's gaze meets me. Her sleek movements usher her closer to our establishment. The raiders have come. I sprint the rest of the way to the church. The elder of our village is there suggesting flight, allowing us to live. However, the other men disagree with him. They do not wish to see everything they own, everything they clawed for to obtain in this world, go up in smoke or sail away on a ship. Or ships. Two sister ships have revealed themselves now, as majestic as the first. I can see the glint of a mail coat on one of the men aboard. I stare, gaping at the silvery metal worth more than what I would make in a lifetime. I close my mouth and tune back into the frantic discussion of the townsmen. The decision was made for the men to take a last stand in front of the church, with the women and children inside. The priest is praying and calling God to spare from us the raiders. Secretly I envy the women's position, safe inside the church. We form two lines of men, armed mostly with tools like reaping hooks. One man however, possesses a fine sword and a leather coat. He is an older man, in his late forties and he had done well for himself in the war game. I have hardly ever seen the man before; he lives on the edge of the village and was somewhat of a recluse. He took command over our men, shouting to hold our ground, and made the men with shields overlap them. I hold my spear, trembling, in the second line of men. I do not want to die… I realize the veteran is giving some kind of speech, calling the sailors pagan scum and that we will crush them as God is on our side. At this time, the Norsemen are landing their ships, jumping overboard

whooping and shouting excitedly in their strange language. They are excited for this! I want to run, but I am too frightened to bring flight to my legs. The enemy advances slowly, burning houses along the way. A mother bearing a small child runs out of a burning hut, only to be met with a spear, piercing both the infant and herself. I do not have time to try and remember whose wife and child they were. Needless to say, the smoke had flushed her out, to the horde of Norse spears and swords. I do not want to die. The voice of the veteran warrior calls me back to reality. He orders us to hold our ground; God will… He is cut off mid sentence, as a throwing spear sinks into his neck. Blood gushes out of the wound, spraying sparkling red against the white fog background. Other men had fallen from the volley of spears the Norsemen had thrown. They are charging. I do not want to die! I do what any sane man would do against such an enemy; I turn and dash away. The roar of the Norse line drowns out all other sounds, consuming my thought. I can hear the clash of sword on reaping hook, of spear in flesh, the screams of the dying. Fear's icy hand latches onto my brain, controlling my feet. I want to find safety as far away from here as possible. But no, first I must grab it. *It* is worth more than anything I own. I run back to my hut, and throw open my chest. I throw aside dirty shirts, frantically searching. There! I grab it, thrusting the ring onto my hand. The ring is a family heirloom, made by my grandfather. He had been a famed blacksmith, and had died in an accident while working at the forge. He had given the ring to my father only days before his death. The ring is made of silver, with a small garnet set in the middle. I cannot just sit here gawking; I run back outside and steal a last view of the village I know so fondly. Houses are being searched for valuables, then burnt. Screams are being emitted from people unseen. The men who had futilely attempted to defend the church lie unmoving in the dirt. More screams and pleading is coming from inside the church, as those who sought refuge in the church are being sorted into two groups. Those being put into the first group are met with a sword. Those put in the second group are the young and healthy. Their fate is slavery. I slip past a group of Norsemen razing a house, their beards shining in the morning sun. I'm going to live! Suddenly, a shiver goes down my spine as I hear a shout from behind me.

* * *

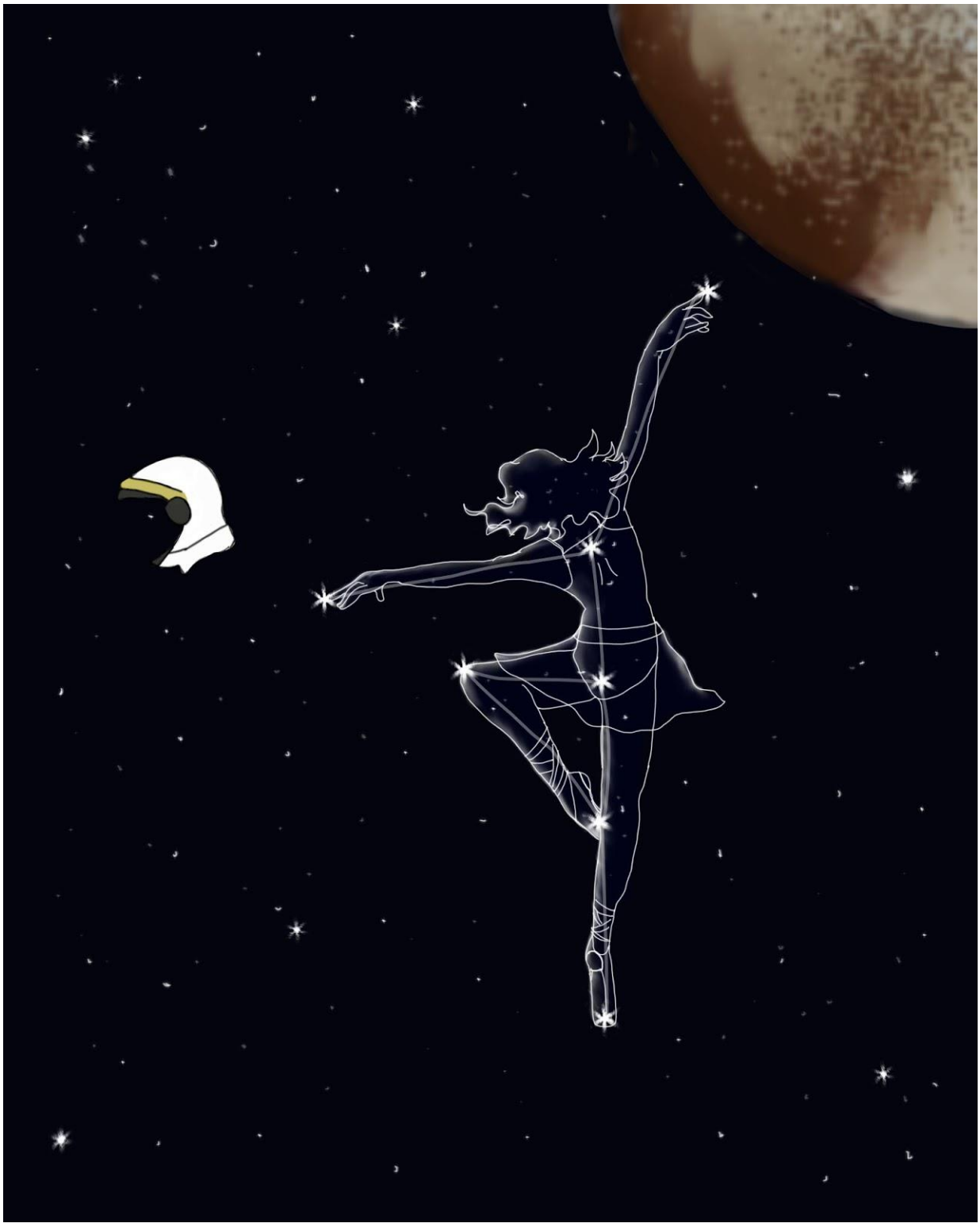

Image by Madison Bradfield

Here's What I'm Trying to Say…

Megan Price

I've never understood why we're in each other's lives.
I suppose to an extent I knew why you were in mine.
You pushed me to want better for myself.
That's what I went out and fought for.
You pushed me to want better.
Because I never wanted to feel as small as I did when we were together.
I wanted better because I was worth more than the better that you offered.
You were in my life to make my Godly relationship grow.
I spent nights in constant prayer, praying that God would make you my soul mate.
His quietness strengthened my trust in Him.
His no broke my spirit and made me new.
My relationship with Him became important the second
He showed me that ours was irrelevant.
You were in my life to show me the difference between a Godly man and a Godly life partner.
Your wants, your desires for a relationship with God, made you a great friend,
but it didn't always make you a great end game.
I could list all the reasons why you were bad for me,
but it all boils down to the fact that God didn't see it in His immediate plan.
I wish that it was but who am I to question God?
I guess what I'm trying to say is that I forgive you.
Even if you don't think you need
forgiveness, (because really I don't share
my problems with you anyways), I
forgive you.
The hurt isn't gone but it's getting there.
What I'm trying to say is that I don't know what is going to happen from here.
I don't know who my end game will be.
Who knows, maybe it is you.

I don't know in what ways I will continue to grow in Christ.
But I'm excited for the journey ahead.
I don't know what I'll mean to you in the future or what I even mean to you now.
All I know is that I'm ok with where this is going.
I'm ok because from now on I'm doing to trust God.
And when I don't trust Him, I will still trust Him.
What I'm saying is thank you.
You've been a part of my life for a long time and, I don't see the future changing that.
I don't see you disappearing in some move or a disconnection of our friendship,
because…
If I've learned anything from these past 6 years,
it's that we have been and always will be friends.
What I'm saying is that I'm done.
I'm done pursuing a need to need you.
I'm done putting hope in something that might not happen.
I'm done hurting over you and
I'm done focusing on all the worldly things that make you so alluring.
I'm finished.
This is my peace; that I'm finally on the road to recovery.
This isn't for you; I hope I never get to show you this.
No, this is for me.
This is for me, to God.
I guess what I'm trying to say is, I surrender.
I surrender you to our Father; ***I know He'll treat you well.***
I know that He'll take this situation and spin it into gold.
So here I am following that path.
Here I am finally giving you up.
Here I am trusting God.
Here I am letting go.
I surrender you.
I surrender my problems.
I surrender me,
I surrender everything.

SOLAR SYSTEM
Megan Price

They revolved around each other,
as if they had their own little galaxy.
He was the Earth,
Feeling as though she was his sun he revolved around.
And she was Saturn,
Existing in the same solar system but never quite touching him.
And their lives connected in so many ways it seemed unbelievably impossible that they hadn't met.
*
She went to the art museum on Thursdays.
Where he worked for a little extra cash.
She admired replicas of Monet,
While he admired the way she popped her gum.
He waited in the shadows hoping he'd find something meaningful to say.
She could feel his stare most days,
His eyes always seeming warmer than they should have been for a janitor.
She popped her gum to distract herself from the janitor that looked at her.
He swept at nonexistent lint to distract himself from confessing his admiration.
*
They existed, she still being the light of his world, and her moving closer to Earth.
Perhaps now she was Jupiter.
Existentially closer yet still far enough away so her storms could not harm his beautiful atmosphere.

Image by Darby Hodge

"Colorful" Image by Luke Mayes

Warm...
Joseph Schwartze

Warm, like a stagnant pool of water,
To avoid the sensation I would commit manslaughter.

Spending time with you is like sitting for an exam,
I would rather be hit with a battering ram.
Your smell, like a middle school locker room,
The odor of you brings considerable gloom.
Your hair like a wave of amber grain,
Cut by a farmer in need of a brain.
Your words, sickly sweet, could cause infertility
Similar to the waste flow of a nuclear facility.
Your intellect, filling this world with idiotic pollution
Rivaled in wonder only by a politician's locution.
Your kiss like the remembrance of a ship,
Doomed to sink by a kraken's whip.
Your touch like a rub against rough sandpaper,
You break down my sharp edges, you make them tapered.
Your voice is shrill like a damned harpy,
I would prefer nails on a chalkboard close by me.
For it is true, you really are my one devil,
Despite this, in your love I revel.

Untitled
Jada Swailes

Entry 1

A black hole consumes the light around me. Like a vacuum it is sucking my soul from my body. I am a corpse. The smell of death is beginning to accumulate. As I am no longer living, just surviving. The tectonic plates of my mind constantly slip and grind. It all shakes. Anticipation and fear crowd, creating more pressure around the plates. They slip more. I crumble. Thinking is impossible. Emotion is wiped. The black hole feeds off of that which falls through the earthquakes. The emptiness spreads. There are no permanent solutions to these atrocities. Only temporary fillers, which then fall through the cracks themselves. Thrill and adrenaline are all that have the power to trump the emptiness, even if only temporary.

They say comfort is found in religion, but what comfort is there to have when belief is a mental state, and my state is of doubt. To believe I will be saved by another that only exists in the mind is absurd. I don't want to be saved. I want to save myself. I don't want to find comfort. I want to find truth.

That is why the hole grows. Truth is said to be abundant, but where do I find truth when even that is a lie. As the only truth I know is no truth to fill voids, but create them. Nature is beautiful, until we realize that this is natural. Pain is not found in beauty, but beauty is found in pain. Not the beauty that brings attraction, but beauty in words. Eloquence. The words that slide off the tongue are the words we wish we didn't need to say. To say "melancholy itself fell through the cracks into the black hole" sounds poetic. We write of darkness as if it is light. As if beauty radiates straight from the idea of it. That is the beauty of this gruesome life. Balance. Even as the void consumes all that is possible, matter can neither be created nor destroyed. This sun is not dying, it is solely covered by a storm. No storm is never ending. This lighting that fries my brain will cease, as will the rain that floods my thoughts with panic.

While it is not necessarily true that anything is possible, very few things are impossible. The ability to prevail is very much possible.

I will prevail. I will shrink the void. Light will shine like never before.

* * *

Entry 2

I'm stuck in a whirlpool and further and further I'm dragged until I can't breathe. My lungs are filling with water and of my two escape routes, neither lead to safety. Even as I plummet, I know I have no choice but to continue to drown myself for the sake of others.

Mother nature is having a crisis as she is entrapped in a storm of emotion. The abuse, verbal and physical, of the few she loves leaves her without liberation. She feels to spin out of control is the only option. Intoxicating liquids fall with her tears in rain. As it all becomes too much to handle, lightening strikes to release negative energy, but the thunder brings regret. The dark clouds distort her thoughts as all that is felt is dim and frigid. One person controls her with great force. As she revolts, the storm worsens. The profligate continuously demeans her. All sense of self-worth, dignity, purpose, and love are ripped away with every comment. She feels she has no purpose; she is a degenerate, her kids don't love her, she doesn't matter. She is always alone. Even company brings no fulfillment. I can see she's burning out. I must convince her it is worth it to

live; that I need her. That she is loved, wanted, needed. How do you bring someone back from the dead while they're still alive?
My options of escape: mother nature or father time.

Father time has always been stable. He is reliable, selfless, and more providing. With him I escape the whirlpool, even if for just a moment. I find stability. Safety.

However, Mother nature needs me. Despite it being her whirlpool in which I am suffocating, I am her only stability. Without appreciation of mother nature comes a storm worse than before. With such belittlement from the profligate, recognition is necessary.

There's a trap. With my happiness comes a possible end to mother nature. I cannot leave her. The whirlpool wants me to drown. There will be no me because I am drowning from the inside out. My mind has begun to spin with the eddy. These medications can no longer stabilize a mind as misshapen as mine. With nowhere to go but down, I will drown. I will drown until I save her from her abuser. I will drown until she is happy. I will drown until there is no emotional storm. I will drown until there is nothing left for me to drown in

Entry 3

Have you ever wondered why it is that hurricanes are named after people?

Yes, I'm sure there's some concrete explanation, and weather men are not poets, but where's the fun in that? Wait. There is no fun in natural disaster. No matter how it's worded, disaster is disaster.

Maybe hurricanes are named after people for the reason that some humans are hurricanes in their own sense. The majority of us are purely raindrops falling into a larger body of water, but some of us... Some of us destroy lives purely by giving them a taste of the poison that is our enthralling personality, or through the purest of all emotions- love. Hurricanes are attractive because they are ill understood, and there is always a risk with them. But that is why many fall victim to love of disaster. They don't understand disaster is annihilation, not attractive. Those unfortunate many who come across their own personal hurricane only feel the winds of destruct ripping out their soul to add to their own.

Disasters are not named because of what they do, but because of what they are. Disasters are annihilators of every sense, whether it be love or thrill or fear. Disasters are appealing because of the lack of understanding behind them, their spontaneity, their danger.

Even the purest of water can turn to acid rain under the right conditions. There is no purity on this planet.

The connotation behind natural disaster has come to refer to giant storms, but what does that make me? I am no storm. I am no horrific weather occurrence. I am nature, and I am a disaster.

TO MARIE AND HER BEAUTIFUL HEART,

Megan Price

Here's to new normal.
Here's to the love letters that were too late
and lunch dates we won't be attending.
Here's to us looking after one another.
Here's to realizing our friendship moves mountains.
Here's to new normal.
Here's to forgiving the hurt.
Here's to not letting them hurt us again.
Here's to accountability and love.
Here's to new normal.
Or the new normal we created.
Here's to the letdowns and mistakes.
Here's to the journey ahead.
Here's to the laughing and crying.
Here's to the ranting.
Here's to finding peace.
Here's to finding God.
Here's to finding His love.
Here's to our new normal.
Here's to us.

Image by Meridyth Moose

Seas
Shania Roberts

It is at this moment
This very moment
Surrounded by the silence of the world
And thundering sea
That I realize the real insignificance of our actions
We are nothing alone
In the grand scheme of things
And I mean nothing
That crashing existentialism
Brings me a bittersweet feeling
Something akin to the taste of the ocean
It means that there is no pressure
To be great
No “shoes to fill”
It is just
Me
And my existence
And this is the briny taste of freedom
But it is also the realization that
The ocean is of tears
Cried by those who realize that we die twice
Our physical death
And when those around us forget who we are
And so we must live a collective
Channeled among others
Fueled by similar desires
Funneled into the shores of immortality
Because each wave is not remembered
For its individual beauty
But rather preserved amongst
Others for its infinite view

An Open Letter to All Those I Knew
Katie Storey

In order to grow,
You have to find the good in things,
And sometimes
I did neither.
Where I should have been blossoming,
There was only stale dust instead of stems,
Cobwebs in place of flowers. And I was afraid
That my spring would never come
Or be frosted over with winter's breath
(and how sad that would have been!)
because my garden would never grow,
and my sun would never shine.

So this is a token of my thanks,
Albeit a small one, because I don't think
I could repay you for such things –
Leading the bees to the blooms,
Parting clouds to see the sunshine,
Letting the grass and the flowers and the trees grow so lush
That you couldn't see the soil anymore.

Sure, there are days
When the breeze turns to gale
And the good things you showed me are drowned
In torrents of frustrations and fights and fears.
But that's all part of nature,
Isn't it?
And nature is about balance.
You brought that in with small doses of smiles,
Of understanding,
Of the little compliments or ways of conversation
That made me feel less alone,
Even if our busy paths had yet to cross before.

I hope I did the same for someone,
Because just an inkling of the love I've been shown
Would be enough to grow a thousand gardens.
Thank you.
I'll miss the sunshine you've all brought into my world,
Piece by piece,
A little at a time.

I wish you many flowers in life. Maybe someday
Our busy paths will cross again
And we can compare bouquets.

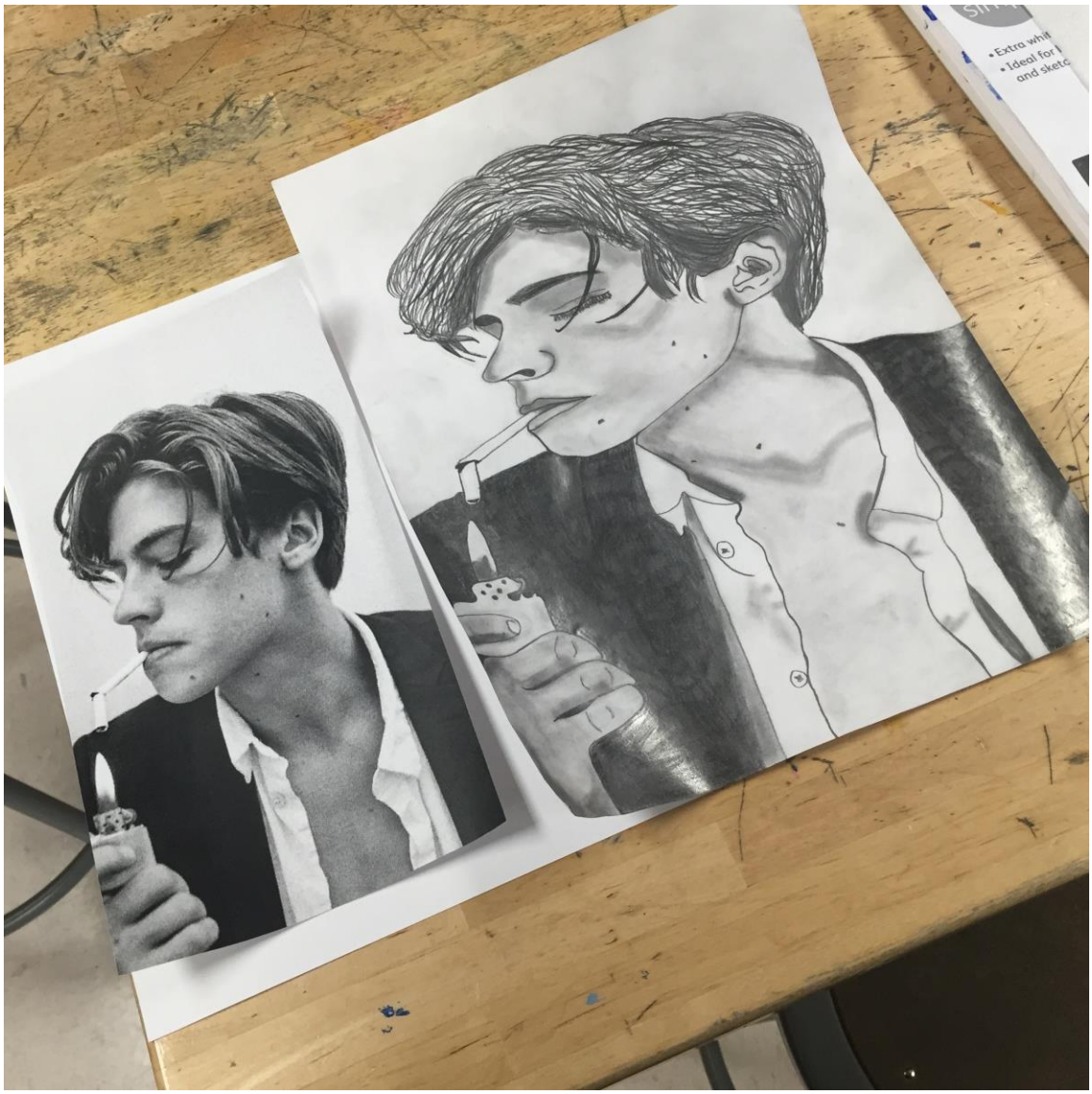

Image by Chrissy Aragon Editor's Note: Smoking Causes Cancer and Lung Disease – ***Please do not smoke!***

Skeletons

Shania Roberts

The first time I saw a skeleton,
I cried.
For once I saw the structure of another person.
The whole of their being.
In that moment
Those ivory bones
Told tales that no novel would.
It told the tales of brutal pain
Suffering.
It was empty.
Blank space between beating hearts,
Simple and deceptive.
The whole of their life,
Reduced to uncomplicated white
An understatement of their being.
And at that time, I understood not what that felt like
But now I am older
And I grow weak.
Even still I feel
Under my skin
My bones are brittle and frail
And yet
Full of life.
Coursing through my veins
Are the words of my tale,
Still being written with each flutter of my heart.
Unlike skeletons,
My suffering is being rewritten.
Evolving and everchanging.
For now,
My story doesn’t end.

For questions regarding entries for next year's issue contact Ms. Woelfel via:

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The Eye of the Storm

Pueblo West High School

Literary Journal

Spring 2017