
Soundings
V. 72 Spring 2026

To the reader,
The Soundings theme this year is “Estuary”. An estuary, in simple terms, is a biodiverse hotspot formed when fresh water and salt water mix. They are commonly found where rivers feed into the ocean or as a result of a storm surge. The brackish waters carry nutrients for all kinds of flora and fauna to thrive on.

In analysis, an estuary is a home. While mountains teach us to be humble (for though they stand at the top of the world, they are always changing and eroding away) and canyons teach of patience (as it takes thousands of years of wind and water to carve away a masterpiece) estuaries teach us what it means to *live.* While the ecosystems they provide are rich and full of life, they are fragile. A change in salinity, tides, or temperature disrupts the harmony--killing plants and driving out animals that can’t handle them.

What we recognize as a home will change as we grow. Like water we wash in and recede from each other’s lives, crashing at different places and never truly stopping. Nonetheless, finding a moment of peace--a personal estuary--is revitalizing. Yes they’re fragile, but they appear more often than you’d think.

Some storms are the first step to paradise.

Take care,
The Viking Creative Writing Crew

Colophon

Soundings Vol. 72 Ed. 1, Spring 2026
Editor and Designer: Nancy Engle
Adviser: Bernadette Langiotti
The Council (student think tank): Rylee Willis, Lynn Butler, Tessa Johnson, Kierra Albritton, Tyler Scott
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Thank you to Mr. Tilbury and Mrs. Trewin, our art teachers, for nurturing our Visual Arts students, as well as well to the staff and administration for their support. A special thank you to Rylee Willis for the brilliant theme suggestion and *The Council* for helping Nancy think of chapter names categorizing pieces.

Thank you to the Northeast High School students who submitted written/art pieces on their own accord, and for those surprised to see their work on the pages, congratulations--you can say you’re published now.

I (Nancy) have been the only editor of Soundings since my sophomore year, and I’m super sad to leave it behind as I graduate. Ms. Langiotti, good luck with the lit mag in the future and thanks for chucking me into the deep end on this one. I discovered something new I love to do and that’s always a plus in life. To Mr. Tilbury and Ms. Trewin, thank you so much for the space to chat, rant, create, and just be a total goof. I’ve been hanging around Tilbury for four whole years and Trewin for one--but it’s like I’ve known them both for forever. Boy howdy, I’ll miss all of you!
Don’t worry Tilbury, the *Phantom Whiteboard Artist* will make their rounds ;)
Cheers!

Cover artwork “A Day on the Chaz” by Ms. Trewin

Chapter 1
Where Waters Meet

--Shared Experiences/Environment
--Friendships/Tolerance



Clay Octopus by Emma Butcher



Playground

by Jaela Jordan

The playground is stuck to the bottom of my shoes
Even years after being gone
Stuck like gum under a desk
Or chalk dust on my fingerprints

I used to think the swings were how we all grew closer
Not just creaky chains and hot seats
I'd kick off the mulch like I could get away from everything
And for recess it almost worked
Before the teachers calling us brought me back

There were names carved into picnic tables
Faded from rain and kids who came after us
We never noticed how we ended up there
Lunch lines loud and messy down the hall
circle time, desk drawings, sticky tack everywhere

Like the day was bringing us together without us noticing

Photography, "Recess Rodeo", taken by Rylee Willis

Identity by Bella Macolino

“Where are you from?”

This is the third time I’ve been asked today, and it wasn’t even third period. I stare at them for a second before answering, “I’m from here, America, Oregon.” But they’re still looking at me, guess that wasn’t the answer they wanted.

“I mean like, originally.” And I hate that question more than the first one.

“Uhm... I was born here, in Oregon?”

They tilt their head, “No, like... originally... originally.”

“...My mom's side is from Korea... but I’ve never lived there, she never even has.”

“But like, you don’t just look Korean, what about your dad?”

“He’s... English, I think? I don’t know, his families lived in Oregon since it’s existed.”

They nod slowly, like they’re still confused.

A girl on the other side of the classroom has been watching the whole interaction, I noticed, once the person asking me finally walks away, she comes up to me.

“They do that to me too,” she says quietly.

I look up. “Really?”

She nods. “My dad’s Egyptian, and people act like I’m supposed to know everything about Egypt and have a whole history lesson for them.”

“People do that to me too. My grandmother came here as a baby from Korea, so she barely knew the culture, but everyone acts like I should know everything.” I say.

She nods. “Right? People always think just because I’m Egyptian the culture became like, inherited.”

The bell rings, “Hey, do you wanna eat lunch with me today? Every time I see you, you’re all alone.”

“Oh, um, sure.”

A True Friend

By Sophia Keating

Freshman year, the sky was grey, lost and alone,
till you came along and made my day.
On the bleachers a gloomy sight,
Your bright smile and friendly words made this dark
time feel alright.

We started talking, days go by,
A bond we formed, that cleared the sky
Now years have passed, a friend so true,
I can't imagine my life without you.

An everlasting bond that can't be severed,
Though we are about to graduate,
No matter what path life may take,
The earth will still rotate as long as I have you



"Frank the Cat"
and "Joey (Baby Kangaroo)"
sock puppets by Nancy Engle



We Found Friendship

By Rylee Willis

We met on the bleachers
But we got closer in class
Journeys to each other's teachers
And walking without a hallway pass

You first appeared shy and sweet
But I think we were meant to meet
You opened up and let loose
You really are a silly goose

We share my headphones
But I stole your taste in music
I'm the left and you're the right
It's only you and I who use it

My life will never be the same
For with you my heart can abide
No matter where you play this game
I will always play by your side

Connections Poem

by Jaela Jordan

we met somewhere in the middle
not strangers
not the same

your music mixing into mine
like we both almost knew the words

you'd say something
I'd pause
then get it a second later

and we'd laugh
like it was always obvious

you had your stories
I had mine
different places
same kind of feeling

we compared small things
but that was fine

it was more like

oh
that's you

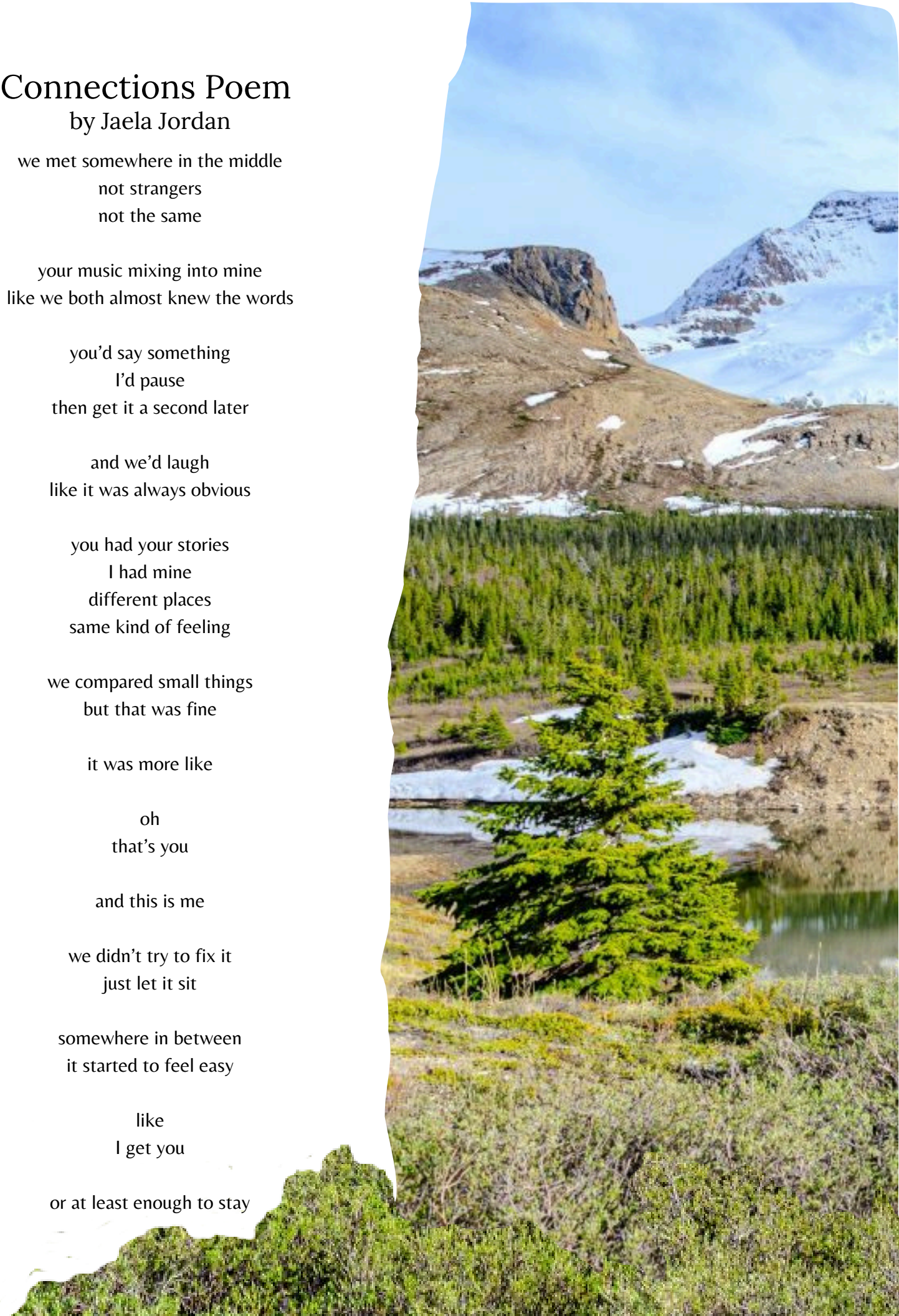
and this is me

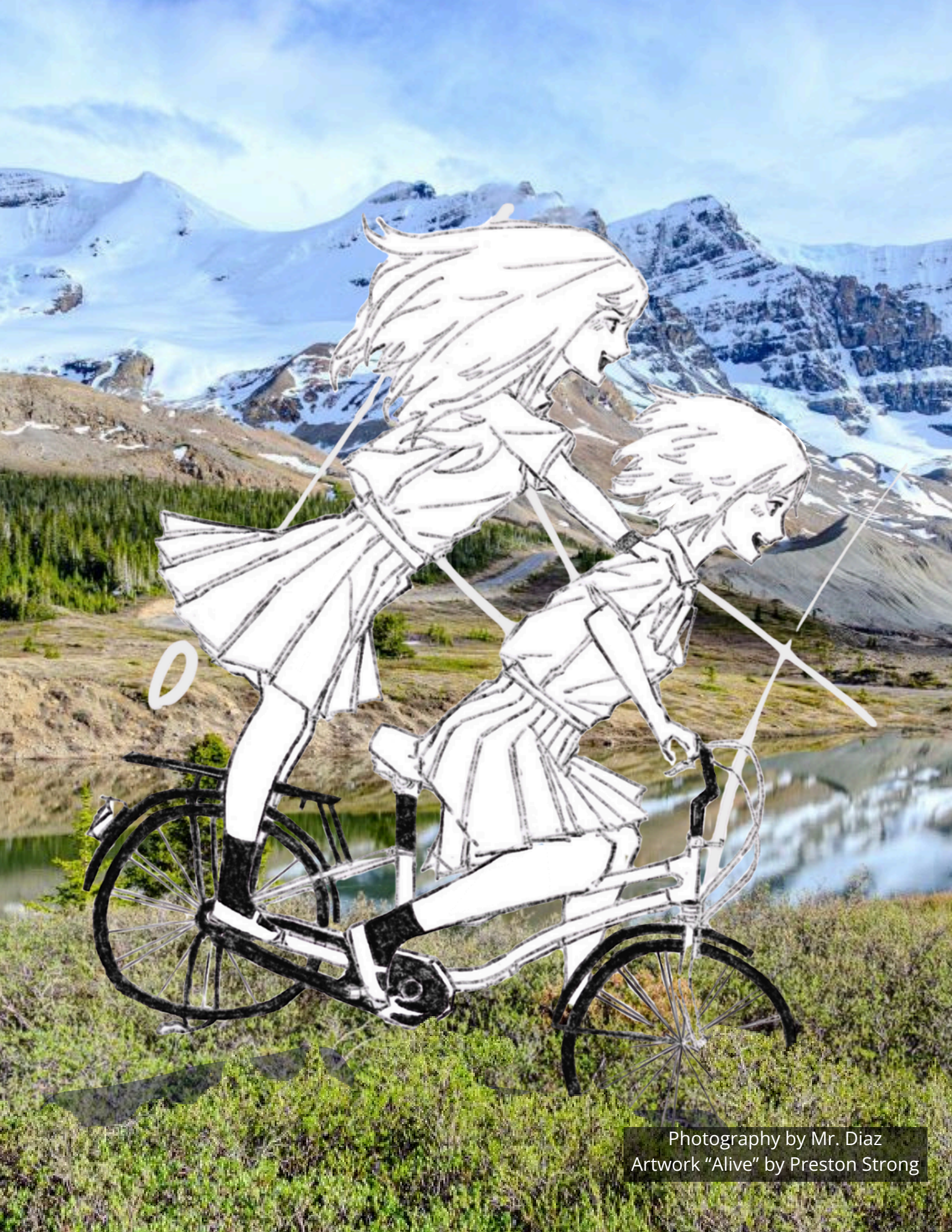
we didn't try to fix it
just let it sit

somewhere in between
it started to feel easy

like
I get you

or at least enough to stay





Photography by Mr. Diaz
Artwork “Alive” by Preston Strong



“Internal Time Fuse” by Sophia Keating

What No One Tells You

by Bella Macolino

What no one tells you is that friendships don't always end with a fight. Sometimes they just... float apart. Like two shells in the ocean slowly floating away.

It's not always one of the other faults; sometimes it's just how the tide moves. It feels like just last summer, we built sandcastles that would take hours and then guard them like they'd last forever. We didn't think about the tide then. We never thought about anything ending.

We still sit at the same lunch table, but now there's silence where there used to be laughter.

I don't know why the tides shifted; it must've started in Junior year. We both got busy, and then we would slowly forget the memories of the sandcastles we used to build.

One day I realized we weren't walking to class together anymore. She had practice. I had homework. We both had somewhere better to be, and whenever we said, "we should hang out later," later would never come.

The strangest part of it all is nothing actually happened. No fight. No doors shut in our face. Just growing out of each other, like when you go to the beach and don't know you're drifting away until you can't find your way back.

By the time you notice, the shore you started on is already gone.



Chapter 2

Storm Surges

--Falling out/Turmoil
--Life changing things
--The water calms eventually



Reef Sculpture by Kierra Albritton



Ocean Painting by Aiden Newton

Behind the Bathroom Door

by Bella Doucette

I stood behind the half-closed door,
And heard the words I'd feared before.
Not spoken to me, but softly passed,
A judgment shadow, meant to last.
Their voices sharp, yet hushed in whispers,
Cutting through the quiet air.

"She manipulates people," he sighed,
"making up stories so she's not the bad guy."
"She's lazy, selfish, always a mess,"
"I don't know why she acts so depressed."
My heart became a stalled machine,
Each beat getting faster but I couldn't scream.
Is that the mirror in their eyes?
A child made of flaws and lies?

I crept back to my quiet room,
And sat within the heavy gloom.
The war began within my chest,
The voice of doubt, the voice of rest.
I am the daughter they described.
A broken creature, who dares to cry.
But another voice whispered, low and deep,
"This is a promise you must keep:
To accept their words, harsh yet true,
And use them to help create a better you."

I thought of who I really am,
Beyond the script, beyond the scam.
I am not the broken thing they spoke,
But strong, despite the words they broke.
The conflict rages, silent, slow,
But in the dark, I watch myself grow.
I'll take their flaws, and turn the page,
And leave behind their bitter rage.

Shifting Currents

by Jaela Jordan

Currents stir beneath calm skin,
A river twisting with no end,
Whispers of what I could have been
And the weight of words I won't send

Mirrors catch a half-known face
Eyes tracing the cracks in my mind
Searching for some solid place
But only shadows there I find

I wrestle with the tug of choice
The pull of who I am versus who I want
Silent arguments without a voice
A storm that hums a quiet taunt

Yet in this churn, I glimpse a light,
Tiny sparks in restless tide
The self I fight with every night
Teaching me to sit, endure, abide,
And maybe, in the flowing current,
Ill learn to drift without resisting



"Axolotl" by Zack Miller



"Last Light"
by Nancy Engle

The Brightest Flame

by Byron Stewart

The lighter is out of fluid,
The matches keep snapping,
The fire is getting smaller,
The candle flame is dying.

Fan my flames so I shall shine,
I will provide you warmth,
But if you fan me too much I might burn,
My wax drips slowly as I grow small.

The smoke engulfs the room
Until you're barely visible.
The smell of my wax masked by the
Veil of my achievements.

As my fire slows, you turn your back,
My purpose outpaced by time,
Eating my own dust,

The darkness enters the room once more.
I ask you to put me out,
Preserve my light,

Let me burn again another day.
I mustn't take a break,
You need me,
I am your light,

I'm your brightest flame.

I Still Remember

by Rylee Willis

Don’t ever forget how we used to raise frogs in the summer,
How we would run to the park after school,
How we could have fun for hours with just a cardboard box.

Don’t ever forget that I taught you how to do that,
That I was not always this lame in your eyes,
That our flowing tears were always paired with smiles.

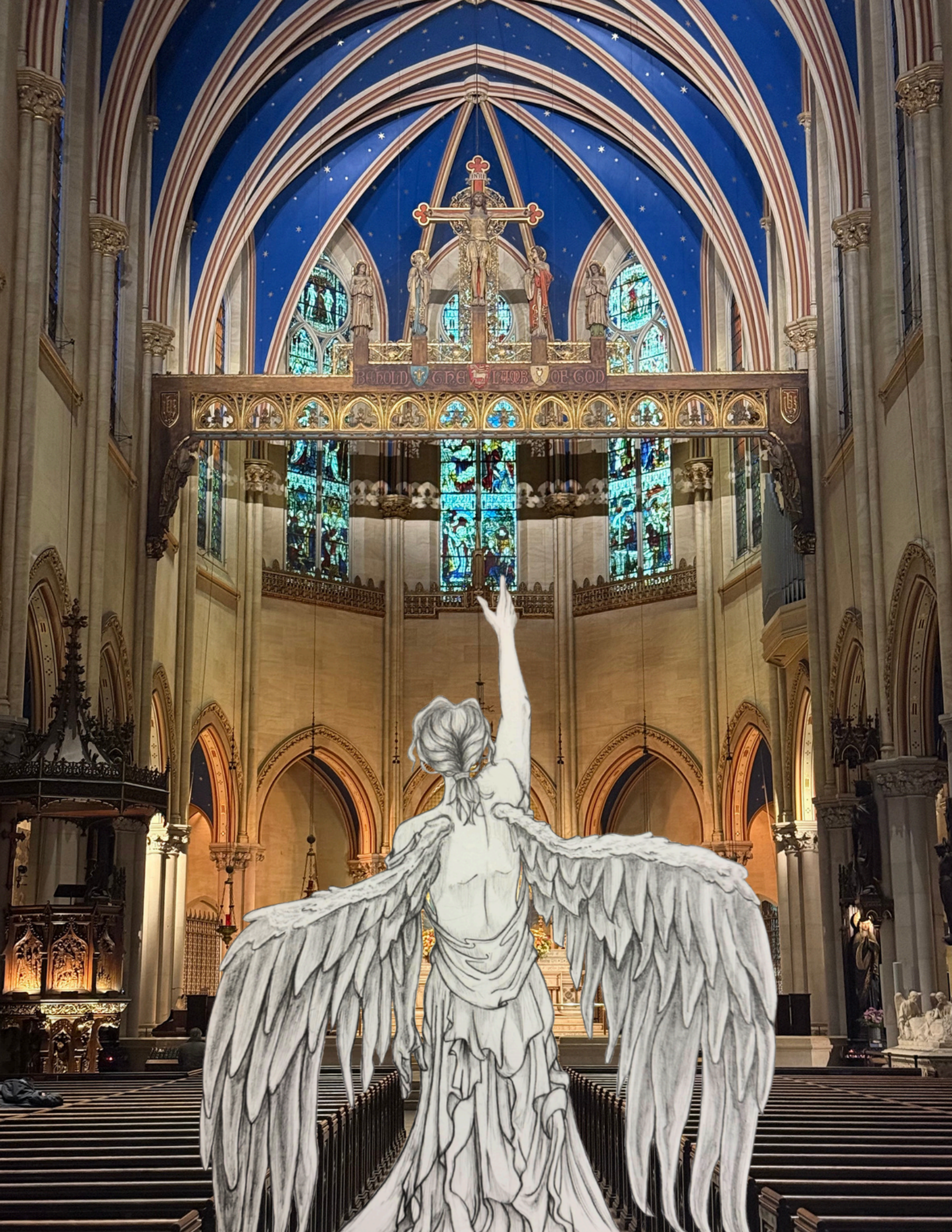
Don’t ever forget that we stood together even with nothing,
It was me, and you, and it was her,
We found a way to be each other’s everything.
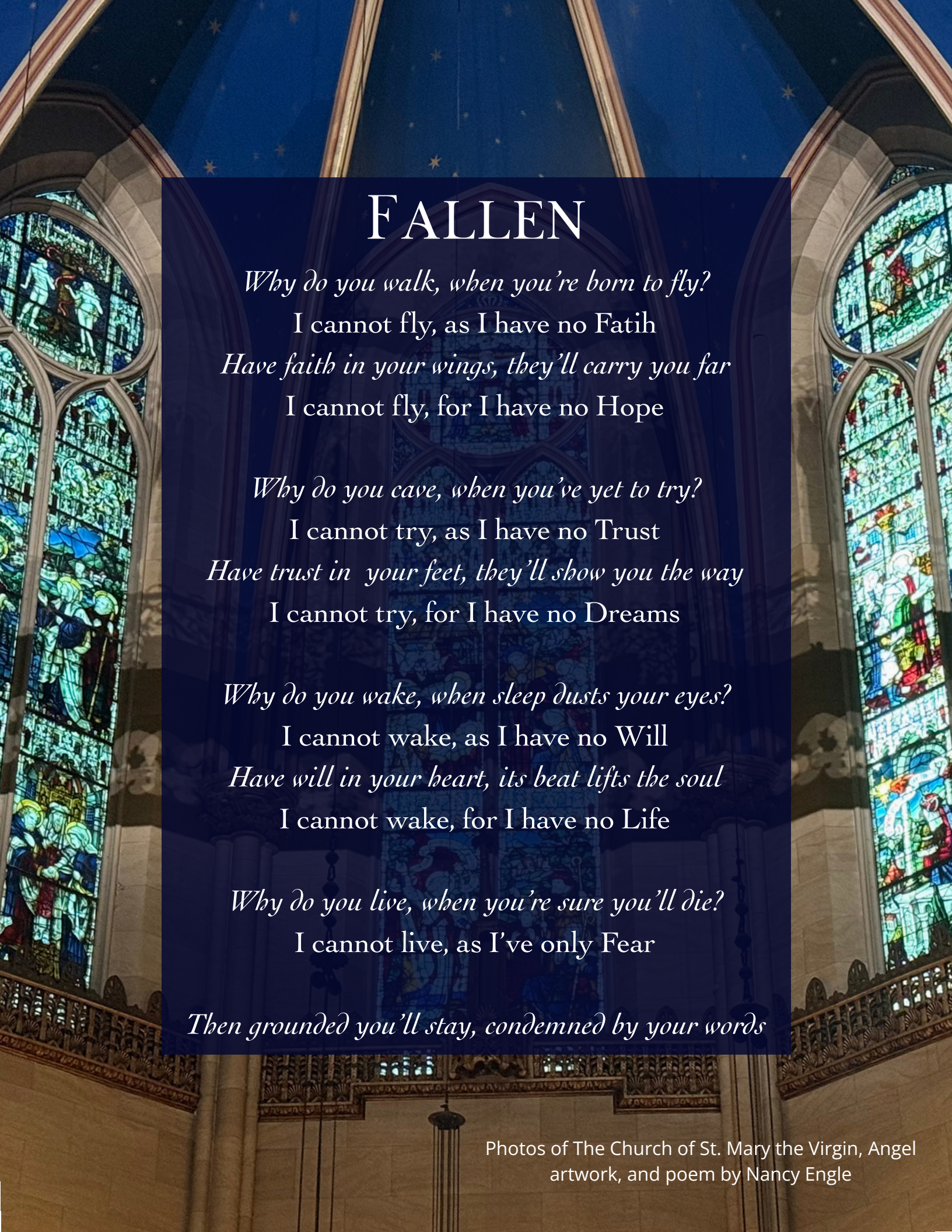
So, don’t you ever forget that I am here,
No matter how far apart,
No matter my lack of expression,
No matter who enters your life,
No matter what we lose.

Just don’t ever forget,
Because I haven’t forgotten



Polaroid drawing by Preston Strong


BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD



Fallen

Why do you walk, when you're born to fly?
I cannot fly, as I have no Fatih
Have faith in your wings, they'll carry you far
I cannot fly, for I have no Hope

Why do you cave, when you've yet to try?
I cannot try, as I have no Trust
Have trust in your feet, they'll show you the way
I cannot try, for I have no Dreams

Why do you wake, when sleep dusts your eyes?
I cannot wake, as I have no Will
Have will in your heart, its beat lifts the soul
I cannot wake, for I have no Life

Why do you live, when you're sure you'll die?
I cannot live, as I've only Fear

Then grounded you'll stay, condemned by your words

Photos of The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Angel artwork, and poem by Nancy Engle

Chapter 3

Managing like Mangroves

--Resiliency/Adapting

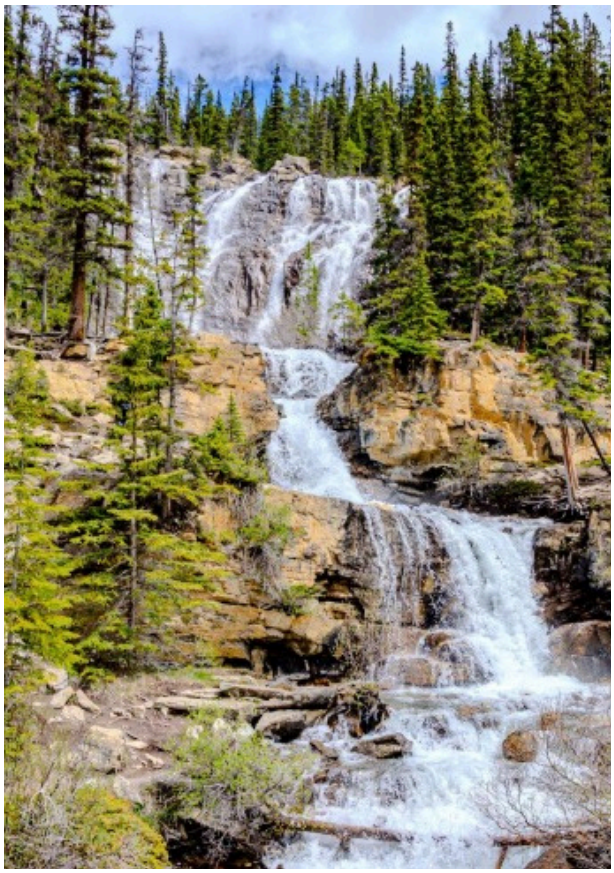
--Establishing roots/Feeling safe



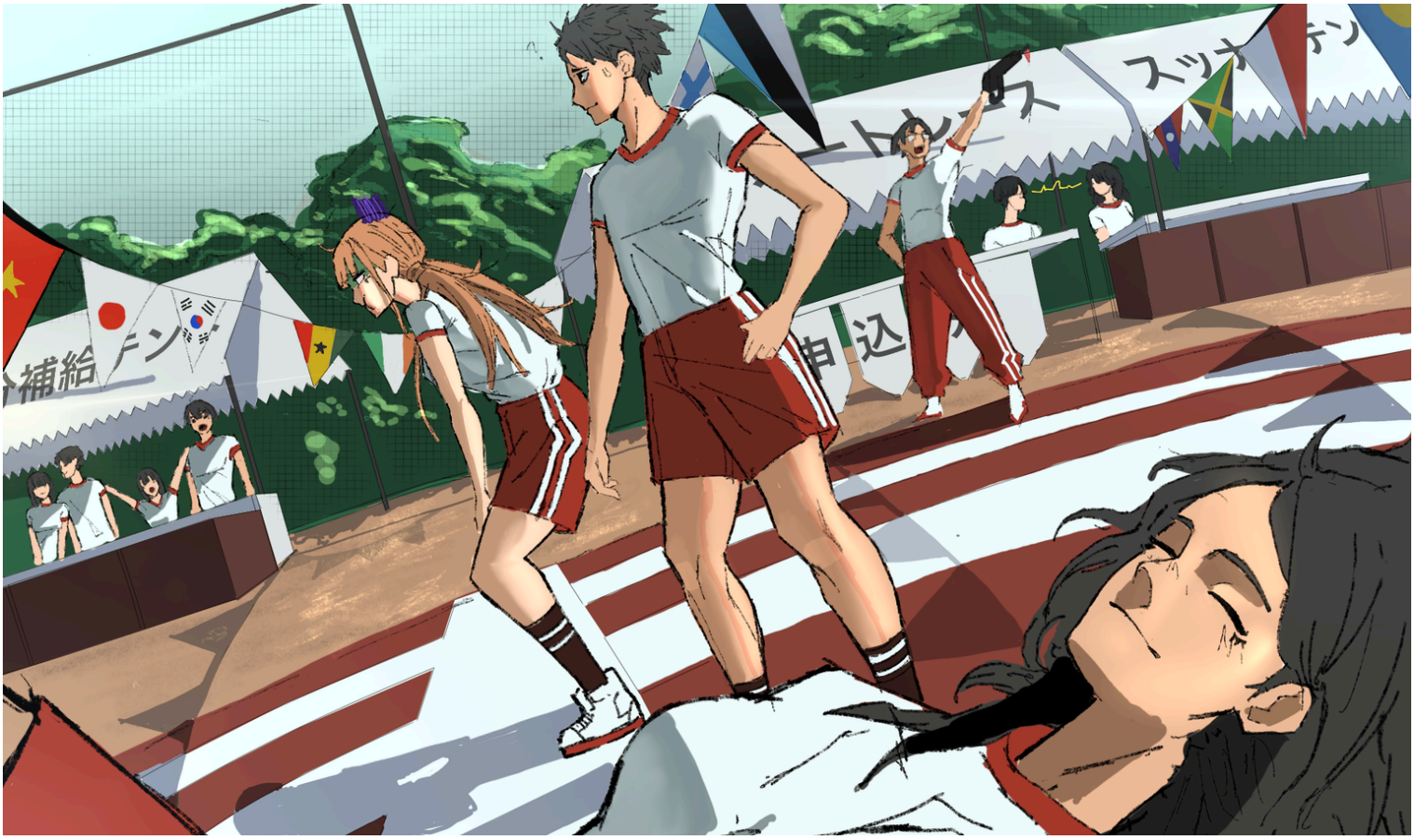
"Where Waters Meet" by Rylee Willis



“More Than Just Human” by Crystal Sacco



Waterfall photography by Mr. Diaz



“Sports Festival” by Preston Strong

Walk Away

by Isabella Garcia-Cruz

I never thought my heart would turn this way,
Yet candles bloom where I once scoffed at the flame,
I walk toward Rome, unsure of what to say.

My parents speak of old gods in bright array,
Old stories stitched into our family name,
I never thought my heart would turn this way.

The crucifix seems foreign, stern, and gray.
Its wounded silence calling out just the same,
I walk toward Rome, unsure of what to say.

The kitchen shrinks when I confess I pray,
A single cross now complicates our frame,
I never thought my heart would turn this way.

They ask what was wrong with how we were each day,
What lack I found that pushed me to this claim,
I walk toward Rome, unsure of what to say.

My faith is seeded and not yet full of May,
Half doubt, half longing, burning into my name.
I never thought my heart would turn this way,
I walk toward Rome, unsure of what to say.



"Cathedral" by Angelina Syaphay

Mindset

by Sarah Jairam

Not too long ago when my feet were bare
I'd spin in the grass, eyes on the sky
I would catch fireflies and light the air
before the days grew heavy, drifting by

Now everything has to be serious
Life is a to-do list that's never ending
lately everything feels imperious
so, I've decided to start amending

I'm taking some breaths and taking some breaks
Hopefully returning in a better state
I will embrace and learn from my mistakes
I chose this path to see what I create

Even though growing up changed the way I see
It taught me to choose who I want to be



"Eiffel Tower" by Amina Aldaco

GRIT

by Paul Tamayo

Grow through battles, fight for your goals,
Fall to the bottom, then rise to the top.
The road may be hard; the road may be long.
The effort is worth it when you achieve what you want.

Rise when people get stuck in the night.
Even if your wounds are not yet cured,
Push towards the light,
And only stop when success is secured.

Inside every thought, there is a fire.
A person that is full of desire.
Discipline and ambition are your only friends.
Only your mentality can take you to the end.

Though it is hard to lose hope,
You must remember what you are fighting for.
No matter how much you have,
You can always aim for more.

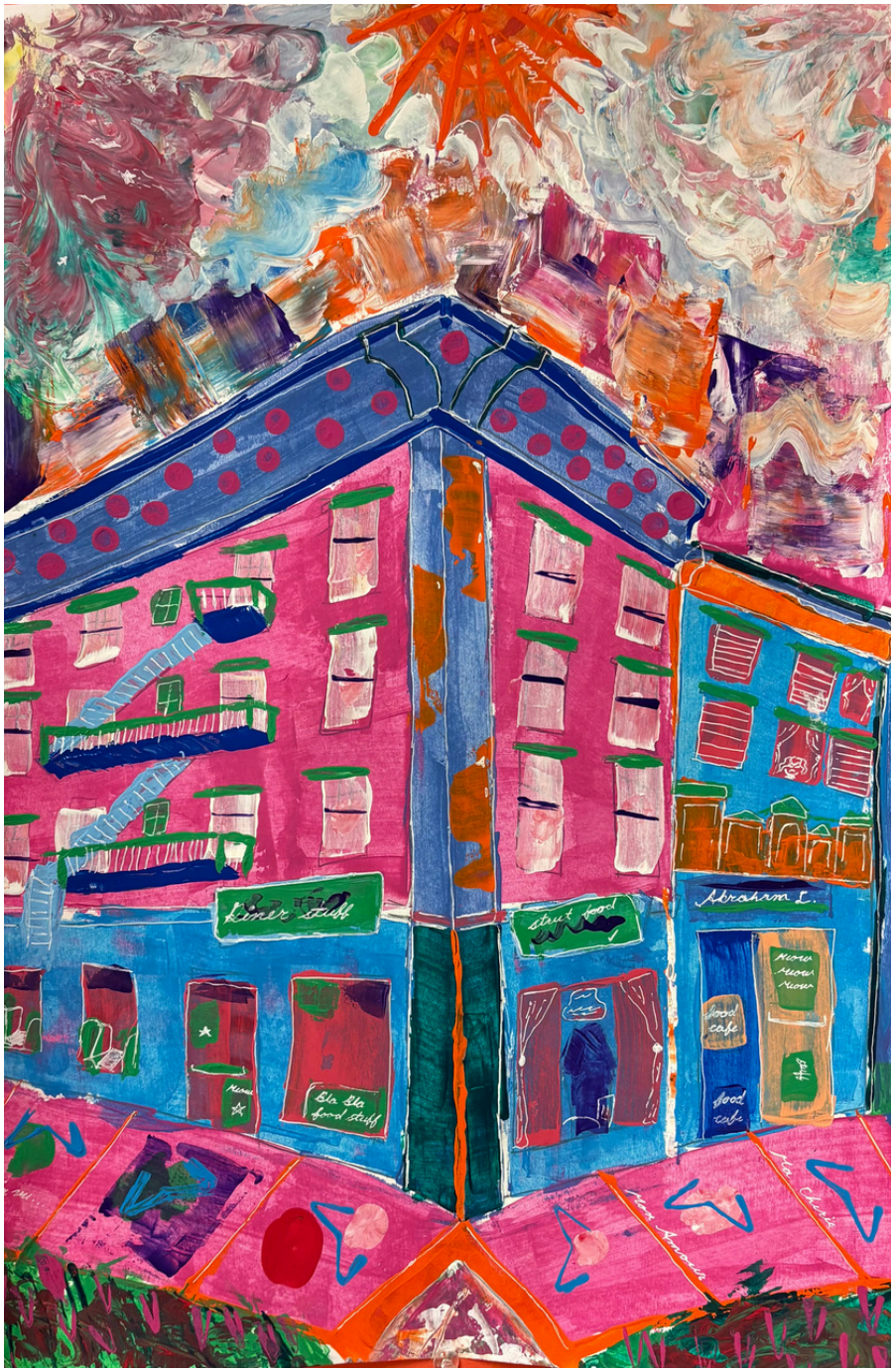


Pen drawing by Dash Bowman

Chapter 4

Tide Pool Reflections

--Childhood/Memories
--Self reflection/Calm moments





Landscape photography by Mr. Diaz

Playground of Pirates

by Rylee Willis

"Argh," yelled the captain, leading the crew
An army of toddlers followed en route
The youngest in their ranks, a little older than two
Waiting to obtain their precious loot

The crew has members from across the world
On another ship this would bring divide
But through their fellowship the truth unfurled
Only the common enemy walk the plank down the slide

No matter the language they speak
All pirates gather for their square meal
When the sun reaches its peak
And share their strange loot with zeal

In many ways they say farewell
And their ports respectively varied
With the universal horn of a shell
In a new community they have tarried

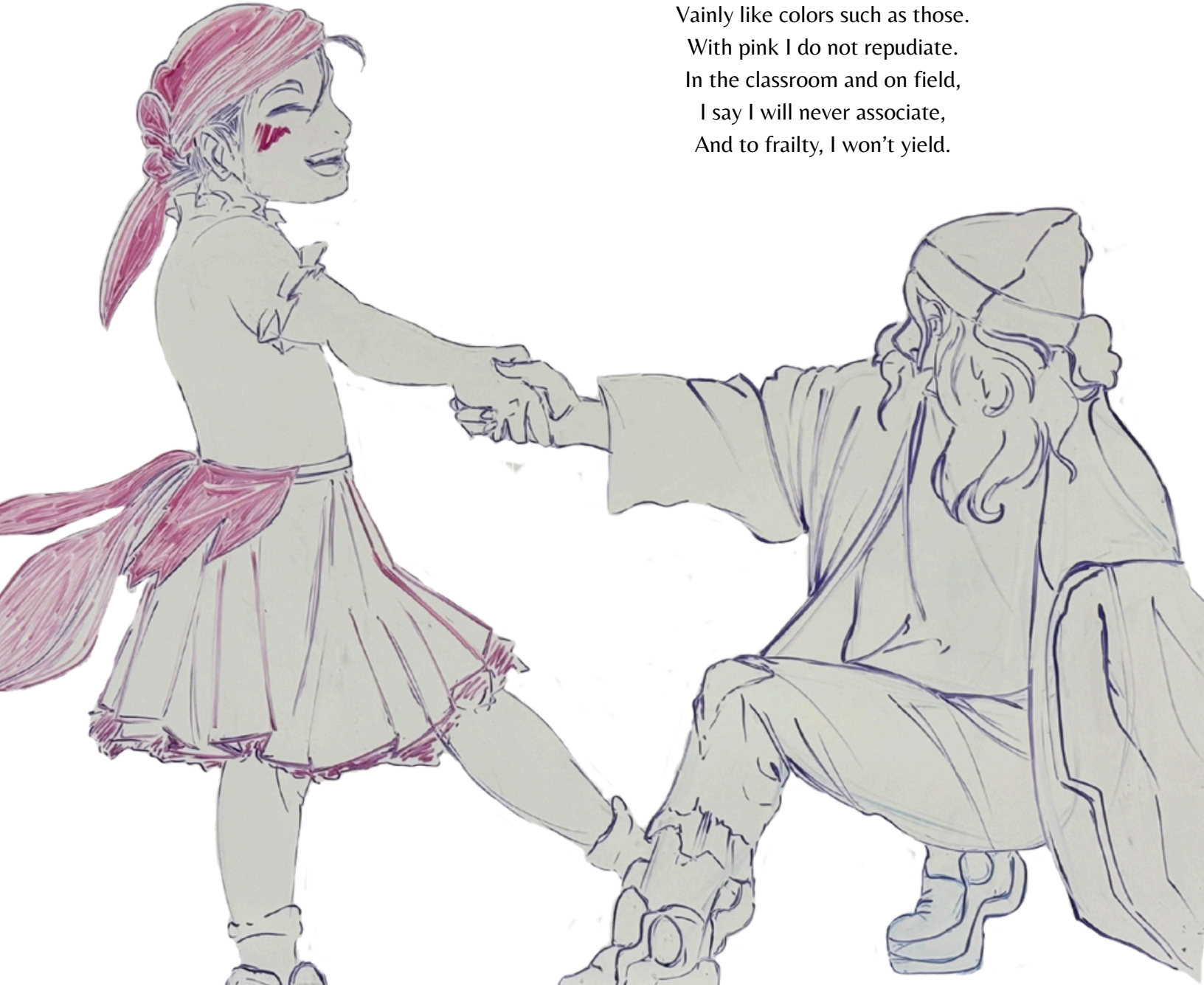


Playful Pirate Collage feat. art by
Nancy Engle, Nilana Starr,
and Cameron Kutruff

I Hate Pink

by Rylee Willis

I hate pink,
That is what I care to think.
That prim and proper preference
Of a girly girl's arrogance.
'Disown the Sun, adopt glitter,'
Seems to be its call, to leave it all,
The catching of a quick critter,
The existence of tomboy life in all.
Frailty, thy name is pink,
Or I think that's how it goes.
Hamlet warns us not to think
Vainly like colors such as those.
With pink I do not repudiate.
In the classroom and on field,
I say I will never associate,
And to frailty, I won't yield.



Shifting Shorelines

by Tessa Jones

The tide does not ask permission to rearrange the sand; it simply arrives, a rhythmic thief with salt in its mouth. Yesterday, there was a jagged shelf of rock here where the gulls could perch, and today there is only the smooth, unblemished curve of a dune. The shoreline is a masterclass in the art of letting go. It understands that to stay the same is to be broken by the waves, but to shift is to survive them.

I stood where the water met the land, feeling the cold foam hiss around my ankles, pulling the ground out from under my heels. It is a disorienting sensation, a literal sinking feeling when the foundation you trust begins to dissolve into the sea. We spend so much of our lives trying to build permanent monuments on the water's edge, stacking our plans like heavy stones, only to realize that the coast is a living thing. It breathes. It retreats. It claims what it wants.

There is a terrifying beauty in the uncertainty of a shifting shore. You cannot map it twice; the cartography of the morning is useless by dusk. But in that constant movement, there is also a strange grace. If the land never moved, the shells would never be uncovered. If the water never rose, the stagnant pools would never be refreshed. To live on the edge of change is to accept that you are always standing on a new horizon, even if the fog hasn't lifted enough to show you where the new path leads. We are all just travelers on the margins, learning to walk on ground that refuses to stay still.

The Shore

by Jaela Jordan

the shore doesn't stay the same
it shifts when no one is looking
and suddenly nothing feels familiar
not even me

I stand in that in between place
where things aren't what they were
but not quite something new yet
just kind of drifting

change isn't clean or simple
it comes in waves, uneven
some days I'm okay, some days I'm not
and I don't always know why

but the tide keeps moving anyway
so I guess I will too
even if I don't know where I'm going
just trusting I'll get somewhere

Currents Within

by Isabella Garcia-Cruz

A voice whispers in the hollow room of my mind,
echoes clashing like waves against unseen cliffs.
I am two tides pulling, relentless,
one drawn toward dawn's quiet promise,
the other sinking into night's familiar shadow.

Inside me a war without armor or sword,
just thorns intertwined with fragile petals.
Desires wrestle doubts beneath a fragile skin,
each heartbeat a tremor on an uneasy wire.

The mirror holds no answers, only reflections fractured.
Shards of who I was and echoes of who I might become.
Silence hums louder than any shout,
as shadows dance between what is chosen and what is forsaken.

And still,

I walked this tightrope stretched thin above interior storms,
seeking balance where none can be found but, in the moments, held breathless



Silhouetted Painting by Gwen Anderson

Crowning Greys

by Lynn Butler

A little girl will cross paths with an older woman one day.
Ask why her hair is grey
“It's a crown of beauty” she says.
She doesn’t feel it though

Her bones are cracking, back is snapping,
and her mind is rusting.
The older lady is only acting
But that little girl will walk away thinking
one day she’ll earn her crown
The older lady wants to believe in those words like that
little girl did, loud and proud.
And she will

See these little meetings are never random
We're brought together to fathom,
Fathom the life ahead of us.
We're all afraid of growing old and worse
Bones cracking, back snapping, mind rusting.
But this could be an honor.

The older woman doesn’t realize it yet,
but her greys are her crown
She survived so long and hasn’t faltered, not now.
One day a little kid will walk up to you
and ask about your greys
This is what you should say:
“My greys are my crowning beauty. Always tomorrow,
forever yesterday, and of course today.”



“Arcane Portraits”
by Nancy Engle



What Happened to Icarus?

by Byron Stewart

Get in. Get out.
We aren't supposed to be so high.
Your life is melting,
Yet you insist you have to fly.

Once told you should quit,
Never wavering in heart.
Relying on your wits
No one else knows your art.

Bug eyed beast,
The flames catch your wings.
Your skin chars bright,
You'll be known amongst the Kings.

You fall like a comet,
You land like a stone.
You lived how you wanted,
You had to fly alone.

A moth in a world of flames,
You had every option alive.
A man with infinite music,
With all of life to jive.

A tragedy to those who never knew,
What it's like to feel stuck,
A hero to all alive,
And those who relied on luck.

You fell with a smile,
That's how the myth goes,
You fell with regrets,
We never got to know.

But lets celebrate the life,
That you lived out with desire.
I toast my drink to you,
The man blessed by wax and fire!

Chapter 5
Surface Ripples

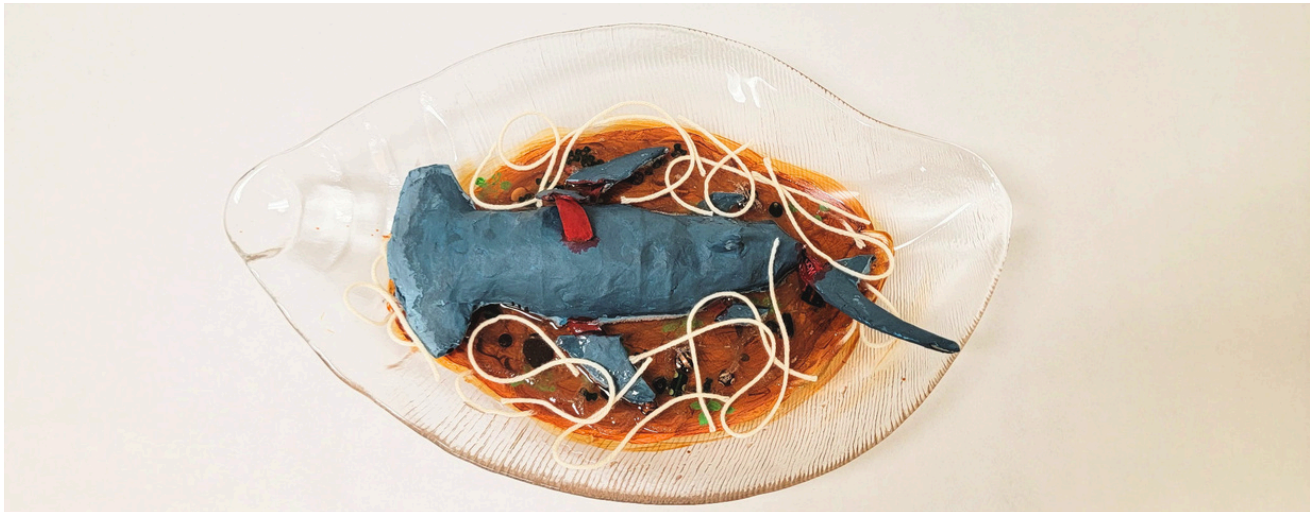
--Transitions/Impacts



"Lionfish" by Emma Butcher



"Restrained" by Zack Miller



"Shark Fin Soup" by Zack Miller



“Endangered Awards” by Zack Miller

Rocks

by Lynn Butler

When the ocean crashes onto the shore filled with rocks and sand, a little kid will jump away each and every time. This is what Mr. Clanton notices of his students while they're trying to find the perfect rocks for their science experiment back at school. This little field trip to the windy beach behind the school is the last one that Mr. Clanton will ever get to see. His body isn't wavering, but his life is. Soon he will have to pack his bags and move to Nowheresville. When a parent grows old, the child becomes old enough to do the care-taking. Is this how Mr. Clanton should explain it to the kids? He fiddles with a rock, his example part of the science project. He grumbles, wondering why he should be complaining when he's taking this rock from its home himself.

"Alright kids! Rocks all picked out?" He queried. He listened as all the little one's voices raised and squeaked about their perfect little rocks.

"Amaze, amaze, amaze!"

"I'll name him rocky."

"Mine is going to be named Adrien."

Back in the classroom, Mr. Clanton can't help but look out at the beach while the children are drawing on their rocks, making silly faces so that they can decorate the classroom with them after the project. Mr. Clanton can't help but hope the new teacher will let them keep their rocks in here.

"Mr. Clanton?" one of the kids probed. He sighed, realizing he had to tell them. These were his best set of kids yet, his fifth year of teaching 3rd grade. It's starting to get easy for him, but the worst always happens when the water starts to seem calm. "Are you ok?"

"Kiddos... I'm moving away." The class gasped at the newfound news from their favorite teacher. "Now, sometimes people have to go. Leave, if you must. They must move away for the better. But that means moving and leaving everything behind, even the things they've grown used to and come to care for," he explains gently.

"You're leaving us Mr. Clanton...?" one of the smaller kids asked. Mr. Clanton's heart broke. He nodded.

"Guys that's ok though!" one of the faster kids peeped. "You're like our rocks, Mr. Clanton."

"How so?" He peered.

"We took our rocks from the pretty beach, but it was for a good reason! So we could learn." She giggled at the silly assignment they were doing. "So, like you!" All the other kids piped up and agreed.

"Yeah! You're moving because there's a good reason!"

"Like science, hehe."

Mr. Clanton thought about it. She's right. They were all right. It's for the better. He's helping his parents and maybe helping the future kids he's going to teach in his new place. He looked at the kids and nodded. He smiled.

"Let's get these rocks painted then. For the better. For *their* better."



Photography, “Aura”,
by Zack Miller

Leaving Home

by Keirra Albritton

My house is surrounded with boxes that need to be filled. I thought this day would never come. As I'm in my room, organizing the things to keep and throw away, I'm bombarded by the little girl--who often comes to scold me--on all that I'm changing with the decor, my hair or my clothes. This time she's yelling about the boxes.

"What are you doing? You can't get rid of these things! Why are you packing your room away?" She says in exasperation while flailing her arms around.

"Please don't fuss. I'm just doing what I'm supposed to do." I'm irritated that the little beast is sour and she can hear it in my voice, I know it. I don't care though. I'm packing my entire life away, and she wants to rant to me about why I no longer want to wear Minnie Mouse leggings.

"How is this doing what you're supposed to do? You're putting all your stuff in a box and for what? It's not like you're moving because years ago you promised-"

"I broke my promise" I said sharply, cutting her sassy voice off. "We are moving and the new house is bigger, and it has stairs and it will be a great place for us to live."

"Us," the little girl says not as a question but as a statement. *Us.* "As in you and your parents."

I'm rolling my eyes now. "Yes as in me and my parents." The little girl can't come with us. She's bound to this house and forever will be. Years ago, when I was her age, I made a promise that I would never leave and if at any time my parents tried to find a new place, I would do everything I could to stop it. I couldn't stop it. The house is too small and too old; the only reason I would
want to stay is because of her.

Places hold memories and it's easier to remember things when you're there seeing, feeling and breathing in the past. When you're not in that atmosphere, it's harder to remember. Like a word on the tip of your tongue. I wish to not forget those times me and the little girl have spent together, but there's just no telling what I'll remember or forget.

The little girl looks uneasy--frightened, even-- about what this means for her. Me leaving means she will have new people in her place and change all her things. The truth is she is a very good friend of mine, even though I'm currently annoyed with her child-like temper tantrums.

"Listen it's going to be okay," I say trying to brighten her spirit. "You'll make new friends and have lots more fun with whoever comes into this house."

"NO, I WON'T!" She shouts at the top of her lungs. "You're my friend and you're leaving me and eventually you'll forget me." She then runs into the closet and when I go to open the door, she's gone.

About a week has gone by and I still haven't seen the girl. I want to at least say goodbye before I leave forever. As the truck pulls into the driveway, I take my time putting my boxes in the trunk. I want to take in every moment. I want to save this time. This house is the only home I've ever known, I've never lived anywhere else. Packing away my life is like sitting through a funeral where I'm too sad to cry. As I take one last look at everything empty in my home, I see the little girl run to me through the hall.

"You really are leaving." The little girl says to me choking back a sob.

My heart aches for her. I know how hard this must be. "I am leaving." I reply, "but who knows, maybe I can visit if the new family is nice."

"They're probably horrible and are secretly witches." The little girl spat out.

"I thought you liked witches?" I ask skeptically.

The little girl huffed before saying, “I only like them when we pretend to be them.”

My mom calls for me outside the house and insists I get into the car before she walks in and drags me out. I turn to the little girl and say goodbye before walking out the door and enter the car.

As I do, I catch a glimpse of the little girl again. She's in her pink dress that she hates and is sitting on the front doorstep waving goodbye. Then as she turns away and enters the house, everything is suddenly much brighter and fuller. I can see all her toys she used to play with when we were the same age and our dog laying on top of the puzzles we loved. I watch as she dances in the living room to Taylor Swift and listen as she sings to the top of her lungs.

My eyes yearn to witness more of this and keep these moments with me forever, but as I’m dreaming of saving these memories, the front door closes and I’m driving away. Away from my home, away from my memories, but most importantly away from the little girl who used to be me.

This Little Girl
by Keirra Albritton

The little girl sits outside the door
With her little pink dress and colorful toys.
She plays with her hair on the dirty floor
And stares at me with no piece of joy.
I wave goodbye with a smile on my face,
But she’s seemingly grumpy, and she shakes her head.
I know that she's mad, but I can’t stay in this place
For its too old and small so we need to move our bed.
As I start the engine and pull away,
The girl folds her hands and starts to pray.
I know what she's thinking for I see her tears
And I know she will never give a cheer
Of joy; moving is hard but it must be done.
I drive away and forget all the fun.



“City Road”
by Karly Glenn

The Tide

by Bella Doucette

I built a house of dry, packed sand,
Where tide-lines once had drawn a band.
I thought the edge was mine to keep,
Before I laid down to sleep.
But midnight brought a silent shift,
And set the solid ground adrift.

Oh, the edge is never still,
Following a deeper will.

The map I drew just yesterday,
Has washed into the ocean waves.
And where I stood is water now,
No time to ask the why or how.
The certain shore I used to know,
Is where the shifting currents flow.

Oh, the land is never still,
Following a deeper will.

Uncertainty is now my sea,
It carries parts away from me.
It breaks the hard, familiar ground,
Where only new, soft shapes are found.
I learn to breathe in change's spray,
And watch the old coast fall away.

Oh, I am never truly still,
Following a deeper will.

I stand upon the trembling wet,
With no shore fixed to hold me yet.
The transition is the only home,
A life of sand, and sea, and foam.
I let the waters take their part,
The changing shores within my heart.



“After the Highwaymen” by Camila Riera

Chapter 6
Legendary Lagoon

--Misc. fantasy
--FSPA winning spreads



"The Voyagers" by Preston Strong



"Dragon Hunter"
by William Jackson



Unnamed artwork by Nancy Engle
“Blue Morpho” photography by
Becca McCoy

Butterfly

By Nancy Engle

One word.
Thats all it took. One. Word.

“Hey.”

One hello was all it took to start a conversation. To make a connection. To make a friend. To make something more. One smile, even—something to get them to look me in the eyes. It would spark a reaction deep within them, a magnetic buzz to turn in passing and say aloud,

“Hey...you have the most beautiful eyes.”

I’d compliment their hair and choice of clothes. We’d give our thanks and take our leave, but at the next walk down that street, our eyes would face forward towards our approaching future. A familiar person with beautiful eyes, or wonderful hair or perfectly paired clothes.

One word. One terribly wonderful, and horrible, and difficult to say word. It stuck in my throat, and I missed my chance. In my unfocused state, we brushed shoulders. As I turned to apologize—were those tears? I stopped in my tracks, unsure of how to proceed.

If only I had reached out, given them my heart which I wanted so badly to give. If only I said “hey”. Maybe they wouldn’t have left.

Hesperia

by Lynn Butler

Echinacea, calendula, sage, yarrow. Herbs to remember. I have use for these. For my dear Hesperia can benefit from these. Her sickness has yet to calm but I have a solution. I turn to the book of old, and flip to a certain page. I have a solution to prevent Hesperia from meeting the hands of Odith. Guardian of Death, a foul death. A death that is unlike any other. Death of a child that is. She will sing her victims to sleep and they will never wake. Some say she's a myth, I say she's a demon on earth lurking among the crowd. I have to prevent her coming. I have to-

“Princess Odessa?”

I turn to face my advisor. “Yes?” a flicker of annoyance crosses my face.

“It is time to get ready, child.” he bows then rises.

“The crown shall wait. I am busy.” I turn back to my books.

“The crown shan’t wait, your highness. Young as you are, you still have to take on this responsibility.”

I pause. I don't want to be crowned queen. My mother is queen, my mother was queen.. I just want my sister's health to be with us. I care not for this duty; but it isn’t what I care, it is only what I must do. For this kingdom. Alas however, I can't betray my dearest sister. She is all I have left, and I cannot waste any second.

My day consisted of chaos, running away from my maids in a frumpy dress, picking quickly what flowers should touch up the grand room, and causing a mess in the kitchen to run to Hesperia, just to get caught at her door by my advisor. I did however get to slip by my sister's room after the royal dinner.

“Hesperia?”

“Oh, Odessa..” her soft voice strained

“Oh Hesperia!” I ran to embrace her. I pull away and hold her hand. Her skin is pale, voice heavy, and body weak. I can't help but gasp as her worsened condition.

“My! will you let me do something for you!? I can get a maid to bring soup! Let me fluff your pillow! Oh and-” she grabs my arm gently. Her twinkling eyes gaze at mine. I slow to a stop.

“I am ok. Please, let me rest. I want you not to worry anymore.” she pleaded. I nod and just sit there with her. She speaks again. “Your dress is one of a queen. How beautiful you are. I had always looked up to you, big sister.”

“I am not ready.. Not without you.” I hesitate. “I want you by my side today! I want you to be with me in this position because I do not deserve it alone!” I cried.

“You deserve every bit of it. I'm proud of you. Mom and dad would be too.” her hand lingers around the soft silk that graces my arms.

“Let me command the seamstress to make a hundred silk dresses for you!” I insist. She giggles.

“Just one would be lovely..” she looks up from my dress and at me. We sit there for a minute taking in our future. I’ll be queen by the end of this day. She is right, mother and father would be proud.

A maid then comes in. “Princess Odessa. Your ceremony is about to begin.” she informs me. I nod and wave her off so I can say bye.

I love you sister.” I smile

“The same love I shall return to you.. May the stars be with you.” she said, voice hoarse.

“You will always be with me, Hesperia.”

And with that off I go to be crowned queen. As I pass by the kitchen I get a bowl of soup and hand it off to a maid to take to Hesperia. As I walk away I hear the maid hand it to another. I thought none of it until I heard voices talking about my dear sister.

“You stay here while I complete my duty. Ok?” a motherly voice says to another.

Odith.

I perk up and quickly evade my maids to make it back to my sister's room. A little fox boy blocks the way to her door. I examined him with a fierce and confused glare.

Why does he have fox features?

“Were you talking about my beloved sister!?” I demanded an answer but he froze. I then start to push past him but he pushes back.

“Ah! I can’t let you in! I-”

I then froze myself. “Is.. is that singing I hear..?” My eyes start to water. It’s too late. I am too late. Death has found her way to my sister, to my only, to my everything. I push my ear against the door to hear muffled voices.

“Are you here to let me free of my curse?” A pause.. ”I wish for my sister's ease.. She shouldn’t worry for me more than she already has. I’m ready to sleep...” Hesperia requested.

“Yes my dear.. Rest your eyes, and I will help you pass.”

I finally push past the boy and into my sister's room. I cry out when I see her eyes are closed. I ran over to try and wake her, shake her dizzy. This has to be some pathetic dream that has played in my mind, but she doesn't wake. Her light has flickered out and I can do nothing but wail.

Muffled voices of two guardians, I can tell, and that little boy fill the room. Odith is being punished for her crime. I don't care if it was her duty, she deserves nothing but Hell. Apparently that's not what she's being punished for, but I could care less about their story.

I continue my grief and once I look up, they are all gone. It is just me and my sister. Me and her. But from now on it cannot be that. I hear a soft gasp from behind and it is the maid from earlier who came to get me. She runs over to help me up. The world was a blur as maids and doctors filled the room. I screamed to stay but duty came first.

Minutes pass and I am at the gates of my new life. A lonesome queen. A child that has to grow into this role so young with no family to guide her or comfort her down the aisle. As the doors open I walk down that aisle, making every step for Hesperia. For mother and for father. As I come to the end of the ceremony, the crown is placed atop my head; a heavy weight to carry. But I shall carry this weight for her. For mother and father. For their fallen stars.

A week has passed and Hesperia lays in front of me, dressed for the occasion. But this is occasion shouldn’t be her last. The silk dress clothes her delicate sleeping figure. Flowers sprawled around her body.

Echinacea, calendula, sage, and yarrow.

As her funeral ends I am given one last goodbye.

Please, let me rest. I want you not to worry anymore.

Her words echo my mind like the last note of a beloved song.

May the stars be with you.

“You will always be with me, Hesperia.”

Amagasaki Summer
by Preston Strong

Strum—hummed the guitar.
Click—
Strum—

“Nanaho, Fuuya, Hiko! Dinner is ready.”

Sip—
Strum—

Sporadic laughter mixes with the wind as I sit on the porch, watching our kids frolic in the garden while the sun starts to set.

“It’s been a while since we had a visitor, huh… You would’ve liked her, Fuji,” I added, picking up a bite of food with my chopsticks, glancing at the empty rocking chair shifting on its own with the help of the breeze.

Their sporadic laughter blending with the parting tall grass pulls my attention once more as I admire my daughter’s joy. “They’re still growing… like our garden. The kids are doing well,” I speak aloud, swiftly grabbing the large bottle of still-sake next to my rocking chair, popping the cap off and drinking straight from the bottle.

“…You know, I still buy the larger bottles of alcohol to split with you. You know that, right? Our daughter keeps saying I’m wasting money on you… but I drink this whole bottle for the both of us. Just like how you’d quickly finish mine whenever I tapped out…You weren’t supposed to tap out on me, you know that? My dear.

“Even now, after seven long years of your absence, I still see you in quick glances of the bathroom mirror when she comes to get her toothbrush from your mug. I could never forget your face, even if I tried. And there’s no DNA test needed—I see you in her eyes when she walks home without her most beloved flower she always carries.”

I see the way she looks at her. I know that look. It’s the same way I looked at you when you were still with us. The look she used to wear before you died…When we were all still together.

“Oh, what I’d give to see all of your faces in the same space, one last time.”

I daydreamed with closed eyes. “But… your pictures don’t take my tears from me anymore.”

“Steady, steady… you don’t wanna accidentally cut the petals off.” —snip—

Did I do it right?”

“Heh, yeah you did—up top!” you cheered as I approached the two of you in the garden.

“Hey Mom, look! Daddy taught me how to cut the flower stems!”

“Oooh, good job girl! I’m so proud of you. Can Mommy have it?”

“Yayy!”

“I still remember that gentle smile of yours. Nights when I’d walk into the house with the sounds of crickets chirping as they fly through the open door—unable to even announce I was home because Hiko and Nanaho were sound asleep on the couch with you. You’d greet me with that same smile.”

‘How was work, hun?’

“Sigh… you wouldn’t even believe.”

Or when we’d all stand around the table late at night, way past the kids’ bedtime, singing Happy Birthday to our son because work wouldn’t let me leave.

“Happy birthday dear Hiko…”

I can tell Nanaho misses you just as much as I do. She’s turned our late birthday songs into a tradition even now, even after I started working from home.

“They used to make fun of her at school, you know… after you left us. For liking girls. They would say all sorts of things about her, even about our family. She thought she had failed you as a daughter.

*“*I never even knew… not until her girlfriend came into our home. It makes sense, though. She’s always been different from the other kids; but you always knew that, didn’t you?”

I start to sob, my tears landing on the family aquatic photo frame. I still can’t bring myself to clean your side of the room. All your medicine, collectables, and electronics are in the same place you left them.

I still can’t make the kids’ favorites the way you used to. Even after seven years, the taste of your home cooking is still in my dreams. Nanaho keeps telling me it tastes fine, but their faces don’t light up anymore when they eat mine.

Even now, as I pour myself down into our young family frame, trying to hold back what’s left of my tears, I realize—I still can’t keep my word.

“My dear Fuji…Our room is still the way you left it.

“The house is still the way you left it.

“Your toothbrush is still in your old mug, just the way you left it.

“We are still the way you left us.

“Everything is just the way you left it.

“But our garden is still growing.....we’ll be alright.”



Comic art by Preston Strong



Gavia immer
by Nancy Engle

No Longer Blind

By Nancy Engle

The Common Loon is a diving water bird. Its legs are moved farther back for enhanced swimming capabilities, and its bones are solid rather than buoyant so it can excel in underwater hunting. The black and white bird requires 30 yards to a quarter mile of water to run on for take off, and will find itself stranded if it lands in too small a water body. Sometimes it'll mistake a wet parking lot for a lake.

The ~~Minnesota Resident~~ Common Loon has a chilling cry. It sounds like screams, sometimes somber sobs, echoing off ~~concrete~~ still water and reverberating ~~between buildings~~ in the cold air. It starts off with a stretched out note, low and reminiscent of sorrowful moans made in the face of the deepest pain. Then it ramps up to an ear splitting screech, repeated in short and rhythmic burst like cries of protest. It's haunting.

The Common ~~immigrant~~ Loon enjoys a temperate climate, but lives most anywhere in America. It is everywhere, living in both residential and coastal areas. The loon does not harm. It does not pose a threat to its habitat, and as such conservation efforts are low.

The Common ~~target~~ Loon is peaceful. They do not wish their fellows harm, but are regardless dragged from their ~~homes~~ nests, shot at, or slammed into false lakes. Their cries of panic ring out across Minnesota and have caught the attention of *The People.*

Chapter 7
Seagrass Beds to Rest

--Dreams/Abstract
--Horror, as what's a dream section without mention of nightmares?



"Amalgamation" by Nancy Engle



“Fortune Teller” by Zack Miller

Preferred Sleep
by Nancy Engle

My eyelids are slipping
My mind is a drifting
The sheep are bleating my name

If I'm up till I blunder
Or surrender to slumber,
To my brain, sleep's all the same

Goodnight

Sometimes I dream
Of ludicrous things
And sometimes they're quite tame

Even so, it's nice
To wander lucid sites
Waking up truly is a shame

Good morning



Floral Wreath
by Autumn Helwig



Wonderland?

by Nancy Engle

Dance amid the dahlias
Once you cross the field of flowers

You cannot return.
Only those called forth can cross
Unharmed. Yet,

Fanciful landscapes,
Open to all who wander aimlessly, are
Lost for good reason.
Let it be known
Only those who hear its
Whisper may receive its permission.

Head my warning:
Evergreen is waiting.
Running....has it ever truly been by choice
?

The Anchor and the Sail by Tessa Jones

There is a specific kind of silence that happens at 3:00 AM, where the world stops making noise and my mind starts making demands. It's the time when the currents within stop being a metaphor and start feeling like a physical weight.

On one side, there is the Anchor. The Anchor loves the safety of the harbor. It's the voice that tells me to stay quiet, to stick to the routine, and to avoid the risk of being misunderstood. It values comfort over everything. It is heavy, reliable, and if I'm honest, it's a little bit suffocating.

On the other hand, there is the Sail. The Sail is restless. It catches every passing breeze of inspiration and tugs at the ropes. It wants the open water, the salt spray, and the uncertainty of a horizon I haven't memorized yet. It doesn't care about comfort; it cares about movement. Most days, I am just the wood of the boat, caught in the middle.

I spent years thinking that internal conflict was a problem to be solved, that one day the Anchor would win, or the Sail would snap up the ropes and take over. But I'm learning that "current" isn't the enemy. The conflict is actually where the balance lives.

Without the Anchor, I am aimless, drifting into whatever storm happens to pass by. Without the Sail, I am a decorative piece of wood rotting at the pier. The tension between the two is what makes me a vessel.

I've realized that the goal isn't to be at peace; it's to learn how to navigate. To know when to drop the weight and when to catch the wind. The currents inside don't have to pull me apart; they just have to keep me moving.



Mountainside photography by Mr. Diaz

The Salt Stained Pillow

by Tessa Jones

The sea does not house keep
it offers up its splintered bones
skeletons of cedar and silvered pine
buffed smooth by the weight of a thousand tides
they land like exhausted travelers
tangled in neon kelp and brine

My mind is a shoreline at low tide
waiting for the wreckage to arrive

Each piece of wood is a stolen anchor
a fragment of a ship that never docked
I tuck them under the floorboards of my sleep
one for the wish that went unsaid
one for the path I didn't take
one for the ghost of a summer's heat

We are both scavengers the sand and I
we collect the heavy things
the sun bleached water logged remains
of everything that couldn't stay afloat

By morning the driftwood is bone dry
and the dreams have retreated with the moon
leaving nothing but a salt crust on the skin
and the soft rhythmic hum
of a debt paid back to the deep

Case File 0261304 Statement of Bernie Jones

A Magnus Archives inspired piece by Nancy Engle Trigger warning, it's a tad bloody!

I sat on the slightly deflated cushions of the dentist office lobby. The room is small and purposefully barren to feel more open. There's a box television haning in the corner of white plastered walls, but the old yellowed ceiling light makes the room look beige. There's one of those colorful stimulation blocks in the kid's corner of every doctor's office, but it's faded with dust and unuse.

There's a woman sitting across from me reading a celebrity issue magazine. She flips through the pages and her eyes glaze over the pictures of Hollywood smiles and surgery ads. The room is silent, save for the quiet hum of the broken tv. I had hoped the woman didn't realize I was staring, but there wasn't anywhere else to look. Hanging on the wall in front of me was a mirror.

A nurse comes out fro the connecting hall. I remember looking at her lips as she spoke.

"Ms. Smith? The doctor is waiting," she said. Her teeth were titanium white. She flashes her a smile and I just know it's a tactic, not a pleasantry. There's too much *teeth* for that.

Ms. Smith moves slowly, her hand trembling as she sets the magazine down. Her red nails look dull in this light, and I remember they were chipped.

"The doctor is waiting," repeats the nurse. Her words are as static as that...smile. Ms. Smith just nods, not daring to reveal what lies behind her dry and cracked lips.

I quickly eye the the floor to avoid my reflection. I don't want to know the damage. The tiles are enameled with waxed-over dust, making them thick and ivory. I felt like I sat there for hours despite no signs of a full house.

As the wait dragged on, the TV's hum became a buzz. I waited for the nurse to return, to tell me it was *my* tun to sit in the chair....is that the TV? Or is it the distant sound of dental tools drilling into patients? Perhaps it's the polishing head grinding away at the bone, or the high pressured nozzle rinsing blood from sensitive gums. I was so lost in the numbing hum I didn't notice the nurse hovering.

"Mr. Bernie," she said in that toothy smile. I looked up into those pearly whites; they where so shiny, so slick with saliva I swear I saw my reflection. And in them, my healthy teeth. "*The doctor is waiting.*"

She walked me down a dark corridor to what I can only describe as a cavity. It was open and hollow, save for the sanitation sinks and the chair lit in the center.

The doctor, whose face was concealed behind a face mask and an absurd head mirror, motioned to the chair. "Sit down," he said. "Make yourself comfortable." He pulled on the blue nylon gloves to his forearm and let it go with a snap and reached for his tools before he examined my mouth. As he leaned over my seat, I grimaced at the now unavoidable reflection.

"Come now, that's not a good response!" I didn't realize he'd asked a question. "If you're doing well, then show me a smile."

He lunged at me and pried open my mouth while latex fingertips ran under my lips and felt around the gums. Despite his face being completely obscured, I could still make out that cursed smile under the mask. The outline of his teeth came through with each ravenous inhale, and the hot exhales fogged up his view. But he didn't need to see--he never planned on *cleaning* anyway.

I saw my gums and teeth in the doctor's mirror. They were fairly healthy. A little yellowed, but that's natural. The doctor didn't think so, though.

"Good heavens," he said. "It seems a surgery is in order."

He reached for his tools without looking. The rubbery fingertips crawled around until they reached the pick and scraper. Carelessly, the doctor scraped away at plaque and gum and pierced my tongue as it sporadically flailed around. I could taste salty tears stream down my throat. I couldn't stand to watch, but it was so hard to look away. I managed to shut my eyes, but even then it was difficult to avoid imagining the scene. The sound of metal on bone was sickening. Eventually I could feel my mouth tacky and dry, but from the sound alone I knew y teeth were slick with blood.

The doctor kept scraping the front tooth, searching for something. A searing pain forced my eyes open, and I knew he had found what he was looking for.

That's when I saw...*it*....it was like one large cavity. So many gaps and tears. Hanging from the front tooth was a thin, purple strand.

"Ah, a *nerve*! It's dangerous to leave an exposed nerve be. *We'll have to get rid of that.*"

The doctor pulled a pair of gnarled and rusty tweezers from his breast pocket. The office was silent, save for the sharp tinnitus in my ears. I watched as the strand was pulled and felt the cuts of rust.

I couldn't hear, but I knew I was screaming. Amidst the sobs the doctor gathered his tools and tossed them on a side table. Cleaning them wasn't necessary.

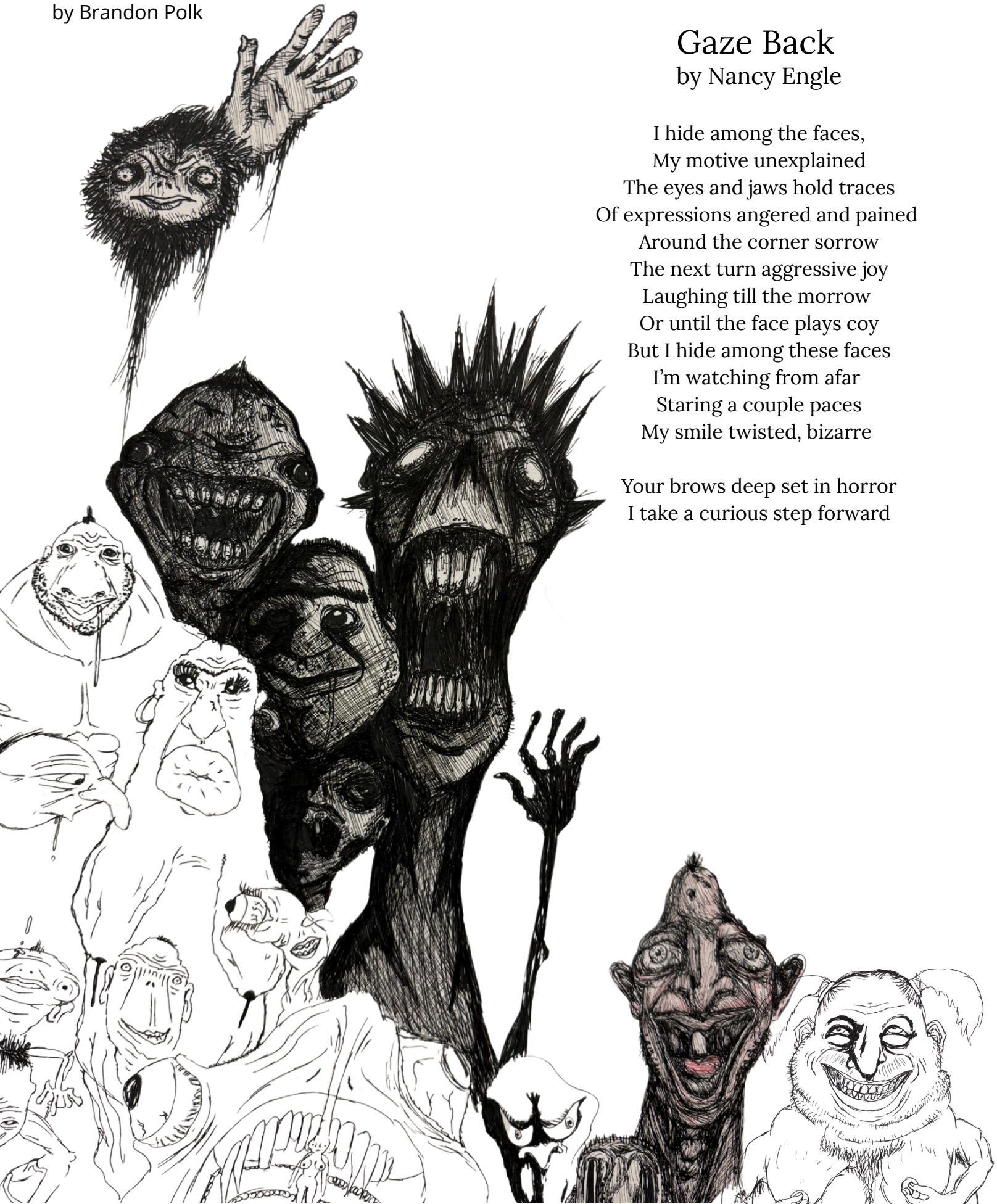
"It'll heal," said the doctor offhandedly with his back turned. I knew it would and as you can see, archivist, it did. It healed many times over, and each time I found myself waiting in that yellow lobby. "When it does, do come in for a checkup."

I didn't need to see the doctor to know; I could hear that *smile* through his words.



"Convenience Store" by William Jackson

Pen collage
by Brandon Polk



Gaze Back

by Nancy Engle

I hide among the faces,
My motive unexplained
The eyes and jaws hold traces
Of expressions angered and pained
Around the corner sorrow
The next turn aggressive joy
Laughing till the morrow
Or until the face plays coy
But I hide among these faces
I'm watching from afar
Staring a couple paces
My smile twisted, bizarre

Your brows deep set in horror
I take a curious step forward



Cup set made by Ivy Trewin, Inspired by Brandon Polk’s drawings

Driftwood Dreams

by Bella Doucette

It comes without anchor,
A splintered sigh of a forest long gone.
Weathered by relentless tides,
Salt-stripped,
Sun-bleached.
A remnant of something—
A forgotten story.

It holds no map,
Only the memory of the deep.
The gray wood whispers secrets
Of storms that tried to break it
And failed to make it dull.

Look closer,
At the gnarled knot,
At the polished curve,
It is a sculpture of resilience.
A dream that did not drown,
But simply floated
Until it found
Its new shore.

Photography, “Driftwood Giant”, by Mr. Tilbury



Chapter 8

Epipelagic Ecstasy

--Happiness/Breaking the surface



Photo, “Mickey ‘Blep’”, by Nancy Engle



“Oshi Yaoi Cake” baked and decorated by Gigi Diou



“Orchid” by Landon Labus



“Cactus Cups”
by Christian Izzo



Photo, “Louie Aslan at Central Park”, by Nancy Engle

A Fair Maiden Who You May Know:

(a Villanelle) by Nancy Engle

I love Annabel lee, you see
Poe's use of assonance and alliteration:
Is an example of poetic mastery

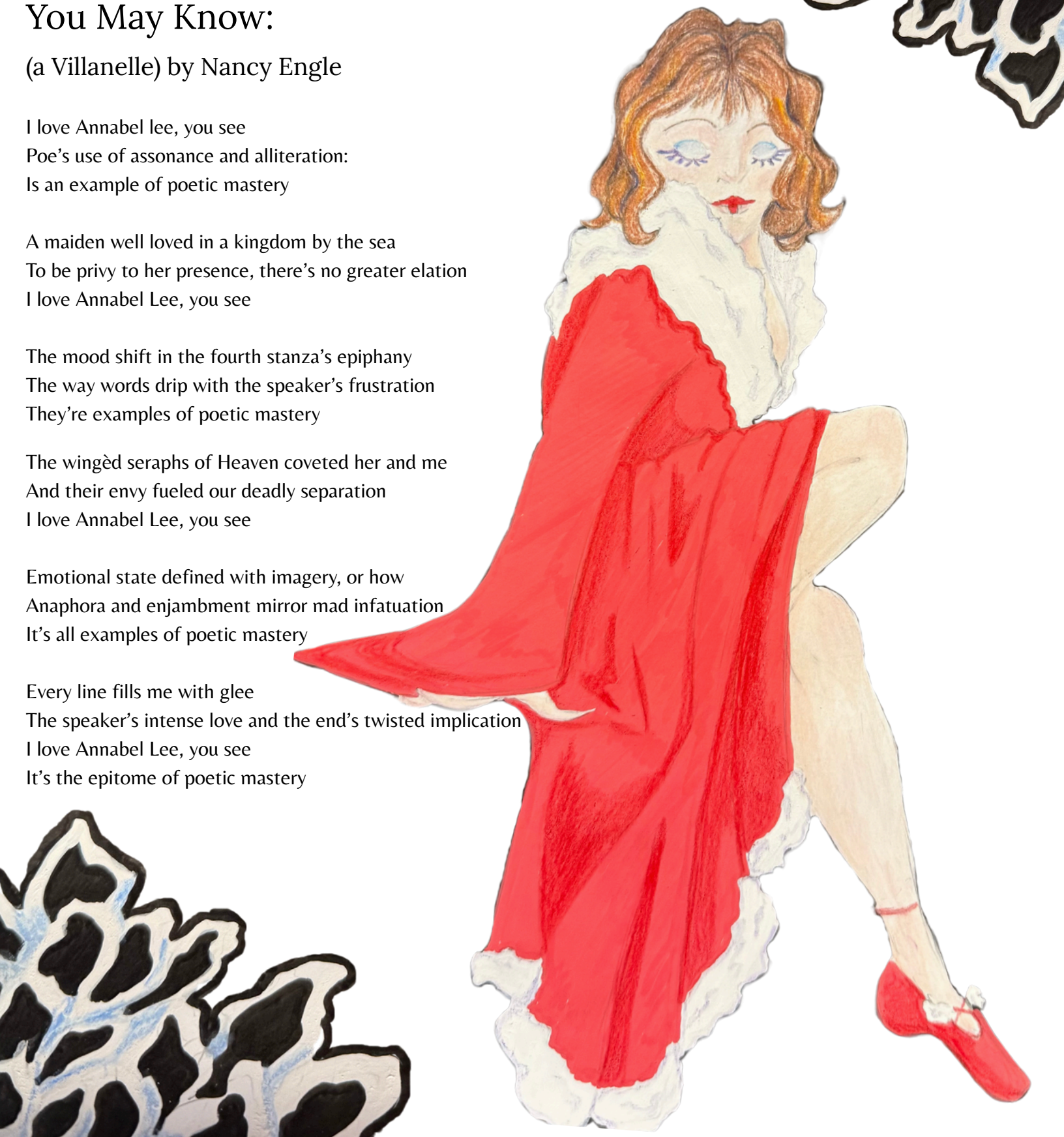
A maiden well loved in a kingdom by the sea
To be privy to her presence, there's no greater elation
I love Annabel Lee, you see

The mood shift in the fourth stanza's epiphany
The way words drip with the speaker's frustration
They're examples of poetic mastery

The wingèd seraphs of Heaven coveted her and me
And their envy fueled our deadly separation
I love Annabel Lee, you see

Emotional state defined with imagery, or how
Anaphora and enjambment mirror mad infatuation
It's all examples of poetic mastery

Every line fills me with glee
The speaker's intense love and the end's twisted implication
I love Annabel Lee, you see
It's the epitome of poetic mastery



"Art Deco Vogue Cover" by Nancy Engle

Love is...

By Paul Tamayo

Love is a lie. We have always been taught that love must be perfect, constant like movies. But the truth is, love is very different to what we see on screens. Real love is not the explosion of fireworks that never stops. Love is waking up everyday and choosing that person. Even when you don't feel the same spark. Love is staying when everything gets difficult. When the routine gets boring. When flaws become obvious. Because loving someone is feeling, is deciding. Love is seeing someone on their worst day and saying, "I am still here." Love that lasts is not the one who never goes through arguments, it is the one that learns how to dance in the storm. Real Love is not the absence of fights, it is trying to solve them together. Maybe that does not sound as romantic as the perfect love shown in movies. But it is more real, it is deeper, and way more valuable. Because Love is not about finding the perfect person, it is seeing someone imperfect in a perfect way.

The Version of Myself

by Yulkesia Brown

The version of myself that once thrived on rebellion and self-centered anger has quietly receded, replaced by a young woman who understands the weight and value of her own potential. Standing on the threshold of high school graduation, I no longer view the world through the lens of turmoil, but through the clarity of purpose. Balancing two jobs while navigating the final steps of my education has forged a new identity. One defined by independence, relentless perseverance, and a commitment to my future. As i prepare to head to SPC for General Dentistry while simultaneously building my career in hair artistry, I am no longer just surviving the transition into adulthood, I am actively crafting a life that balances clinical precision with creative passion, laying a foundation for the women I have worked so hard to become.

Ode to Feet

By Paul Tamayo

I love the helpers down below
They meet the ground before we try.
They feel what we don't know
They keep us steady, never asking why

They see the world through cold pain
Through burning sand and floors full of heat
They press to help us stand again
So balance feels like something neat

Ignored by most, yet beautiful every day,
They work in silence tough and true.
When I see them with white nails, my sadness fades away
They are precious even in blue

So here is my love for what they call our feet
When I think about them, I think I am free

Thank You For Reading!



Beach Photo taken by Mariah Delvalle



Character art by Trenton Thomas