

Elektrophrog

A stylized illustration of a red frog with long, flowing tentacles. The frog is positioned in the center, with its body and tentacles rendered in vibrant red and orange tones. The background is a deep blue, featuring radiating lines that create a sense of depth and movement. The overall style is graphic and artistic.

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STAFF PAGE



Hi everyone I am **Victoria Chamberlain**. I was born and raised in Harford County Maryland. Even since then I knew I wanted to be an artist, and am currently an Art Major. Right now I am exploring different mediums to discover my style and voice and the best way I can make positive differences in the world. I have a love for animals, and home has always been full of all kinds of pets. I am fascinated by sea life and I dream to go to Australia because I adore the wildlife there. I also desire to travel to as many places as I can. Other than drawing I like to bike and swim. It is great to meet you all and I hope for the best for all of you!



Hello my name is **Craig Eckert**. I immensely enjoy fish tanks and I am currently in the process of setting up my first reef tank! I consider myself to be a gamer and have a great time with my friends playing Dungeons & Dragons or Halo. I aspire to be in the business field and the end goal is to own my own business. I want to do what I love for a living, which would be to own a aquarium store or run a comic book shop. I am currently engaged to the most wonderful woman! We spend time together by going out for dinner or a day on the beach. I live in Florida but my heart belongs to Cold Spring New York. I have lived in Europe and traveled to Australia but it cannot beat that small town. I am a fiercely loyal person to those I care about. I've been known to be "loud" although I don't mean to be. I hope this class goes well and I am excited to meet everyone.



Hello, my name is **Kirstie Hosek**. I am from a suburb of Chicago called Oak Lawn but have lived in Florida for over ten years now, so I guess you could say I'm part Floridian! The beach is one of my all-time favorite places to be. My dream is to travel the world and try all of its delicious foods. I love writing, art, cooking, and reading. Creativity is a passion of mine. Painting and writing poetry are a few more of my favorite things to do. I love making jewelery and doing anything with crafts. I hope to major in early childhood education, but am currently undecided. I wish you all the very best!



My name is **Joshua Moon**. I am an avid pursuer of life and all its shortcomings. I am originally from Texas and went to high school just outside of Philadelphia. I enjoy hiking, writing, beach time, fire dancing, photography, travel, and poetry. I once spent two years hitchhiking the country with a band of hippies and little dog to figure out what it was I want to do in life. After traversing 38 states I finally came to my conclusion. I am working towards a degree in Journalism, Photography, and Film. I want to walk around the world and document real issues in real time that face humanity. I have a few projects in the making and am working hard to make sure they become a reality. History is writing itself in front of me and I want to record it.



Hi! I'm **Ashley Stevens**, nice to meet you!
I'm originally from Maryland and I have lived in over 10 states. Florida is my least favorite state to reside in; it's just too hot! I appreciate forests and mountains more than I do beaches. I'm big into the occult and astrology, and I love horror films! I raise saturniid moths from the egg stage to its adult stage and I release them. I love writing, which I can't boast about but I do it regardless. I also love reading and I'm interested in pretty much anything fiction. I'm a proud pet parent of one happy betta fish, an apple snail, an African dwarf frog, and a soon to be axolotl! In my spare time I like playing video games and watching anime. I'd love to have a career that involved writing, the arts, or psychology. Currently I am majoring in psychology and my minor is in creative writing. I wish you the best this semester and hope we can be friends!

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How to Be a Frog

By: Tim Nail

First you got to eat flies. Wait; scratch that... that is the last step.

The first thing you are going to need to be a frog is at least two buckets of green paint; make that three you are bigger than the average human. They do not have to be expensive, but they do have to be exterior paint. Indoor house paint will not be able to withstand your new lifestyle. Also, make sure it is one of these six colors of green: Emerald, Olive, Kelly Green, Shamrock, Spring Green, or Jade. After getting the paint go to the shower, naked, and dump the paint on yourself. Make sure to cover everything, and I mean everything. Every hair. You want to make sure that no one, and I mean no one, can mistake you for a human covered in green paint.

Now I know the paint will not make you instantly into a frog, but that is why you must learn the basics. Frog 101. It is where every frog starts, and where you will soon be. I can't just throw you into a frog class. They will instantly know that you are a human covered in green paint and trying to act like a frog. That is why I am going to put you through frog daycare, so you can start to pick up on basic frog. Make sure you bring water wings, and don't stomp around because they are small like tadpoles. Wait, they are tadpoles, but that is beside

the point. I know that you are wondering "why do I want to be a frog." Stop, that is a lesson for Frog 101. Just do as I say, and you will be a frog in no time. After that you can ask why.

"I can't just throw you into a frog class. They will instantly know that you are a human covered in green paint and trying to act like a frog."

After tadpole daycare and frog 101 I will show you how to catch a fly. They always say they will show you at the end of Frog 101 so that you are ready for Frog 102, but they never reach the end of the syllabus. You won't be ready right away to catch them, but at least you will have been showed how to. It isn't a long syllabus they are just lazy. Sometimes it seems like they are slow like toads, but they are definitely frogs. I know firsthand if you know what I mean, and let me tell you somethings as a frog are good and sex is one of them.

You think bunnies are good at multiplication, but then there are frogs.

After all the schooling, you will know how to be a basic bullfrog, but you will want to be more than just basic. Now listen, the next step is sort of optional, but I highly recommend this. I didn't do it and now I am missing a toe. Listen closely, you can, if you want, get poison and keep in a squirt gun. It is as close as you can get to the poison glands that some frogs have, and I wish I had them. The frog life is a dangerous one. Anyways, this is purely for defense, but now that I think of it you are going to be an urban frog. Maybe you won't need it, but do it anyways. You know what they say better to be safe than croaking. You are probably thinking you would be better off with a knife or a shot gun, but that wouldn't be very frog like of you. Just stick with the poison. I know that it is tough being green, but you can do it.

If you are still asking yourself why you want to be a frog, then let me answer that question for you. Do you

like being a human? As a frog, you don't have to get up every day, force down a cup of coffee, go to work, suffer, go home, and repeat it all the next day till you die. We frogs just have to wake up, eat flies, and relax all day. Some of us float on lily pads, some of us live in pipes, and some of us just hop around playing all day. Now doesn't that sound much better than your daily torture? I think you will like it. We will set you up near a lake on the side of a highway, and you will have plenty of flies to eat. Occasionally, I will come and check on you.

One last thing I think I should mention is that this process is a one-way trip. It may sound easy to just wash off the paint, but you will have acclimated to being a frog. You will miss the frog life. Plus, do you think anyone will hire a person who has been living outside doused in green paint? I don't think they would.

She Was Wild

By: Madeline Crites

She was wild.
Wind all through her hair.
He was subtle; she knew he was there.
Their difference was so, like the night and the day
Leaving love so craved, never finding its way.
Though fond and content, he belonged to another,
Yet was whispered a wish for none but each other.
But cowardice shadowed his dark twisted mind
Thus leaving a chance for true love behind.
Craving closure, but never did dawn
Our heroine was destined to
Only move on.

Minding the Lizards

By: Brandie Hyde

As a matter of profession, my position here on our grounds is unique in that I get to glide across campus in a tiny chariot which is every bit as much fun as it sounds... unless of course that sound is a lizard.

Most of the time, my tiny creatures scurry this way or that in keeping a clear distance between the rolling beast and themselves... **mostly**.

But then there are the startled ones, the poor indecisive, hapless little souls. Watching the decision making process wrestle back and forth as it zig-zags trying to make up its mind whether to go left or right until...

It's all over.

The noise a lizard makes when caught between rubber and concrete is a **horrible snapping** sound... like **bubble wrap**. Leaving in its' wake a two-dimensional dissection splayed out to remain until the carnivorous ants and birds can clear away the peach colored entrails.

Then having to roll past the carcass with every subsequent patrol and being haunted by the last sound it made.

Personally, I'd rather mind the lizards.

Cobwebs

By: Charlie Drago

If she cleared the cobwebs from the window then I would go crazy with happiness. I watched her as well as I could, what with my dead eye and all. Her heels clicked across the oak wood from one side of the room to the other as she walked. She opened the writing table drawer and began rummaging about for something.

Craning my neck I could almost see her in my good eye and--oh, she moved again. I made a small, desperate sound, hoping to catch her attention but her steps showed no sign of hesitation as she smartly turned towards the door and shut it.

The lock clicked. I stared in the direction the sun should have been shining in on me. I realized, moments later, this was not going to end. It was never going to end.



Thomas Prettyman, Composure

Beware The Fae

By: Ashley Stevens

My mother warned me
To be wary of tinkling bells.
Melodious chimes, sweetly disguised spells
That came from 'round the Rowan tree.

Never step inside the mushroom ring
And if you see them, avoid their eyes.
The ethereal creatures as lovely as butterflies
With alluring faces and bewitching wings.

They come for their tithe on Walpurgis night,
Pilfering treasures and knotting locks.
What they really want is for us to rot,
Craving human flesh and blood in bitter spite.

Ah, here comes Titania the fae queen
Ruling both the graceful seelie courts.
To see her is to find death; *trovare la morte*
Chiming laughter as she spirits you to worlds unseen.

Monster

By: Megan Finsel

I raised the gun and put my finger on the trigger, aiming for just between his eyes. "You know how long I've been looking for you, bastard?"

He smiled, his metallic eyes glinting. "Yes, yes I do."

"Then you know I'm here to take you in," I said.

He nodded. "Indeed."

"The high court has charged you with six counts of murder."

He twiddled with the swash of silk from his lapel. "I am aware of the charges."

"And you're just going to stand there and let me point this gun at you, then?"

He shrugged a shoulder, staring past the barrel into my eyes with an intensity I had never experienced before. *This man is deranged.*

"You're under arrest. Put your hands behind your back."

"You won't shoot me," he said.

"Won't I?"

His smile darkened. "No. you won't. I'm sure of it."

Despite myself, I was intrigued. "Why is that?"

"Because, I am inside your head..."

The gun began to tremble.

"I know you."

My finger tightened.

"I am you."

I fired. Glass shattered. The mirror fell at my feet and I stood there trembling, staring at the broken shards of my reflection. He stared back at me; his image fragmented into hundreds of pieces. I watched as he adjusted his tie, turned, and walked away.

Fatherhood

By: C. Eli Newlin

"I just don't understand how you deliver babies all day at work, but don't want to have one of your own," Carl said to his wife. She held the pregnancy test in her shaking hands.

"YOU try watching the bloody little things drop out of vaginas all day, THEN you can preach to me about 'having one of your own,'" Sandra yelled shrilly, trembling as she waited for the results. She wouldn't normally scream at him like this, but she was stressed and he understood.

"Look, we're in the clear. No babies just yet," he said, pointing to the test. Two blue dashes indicated a negative result.

"Oh thank God," she said, breathing out a sigh of relief.

"Honey," he started, the middle of his brow raised in concern, "I thought we were ready to have a baby."

"We are..." she said, softening her tone. "I'd just rather not grow it inside my body. I don't like the thought of some parasite inside of me, feeding off my nutrients, swelling and ripping at my insides." She began coughing hard into her hand. She looked down at her palm in disgust, then got up to wash it off. Carl noticed a reddish tint in her hand as she walked away.

"It's not a parasite. It's a baby. You can grow a little human inside you. It's like a gift from God," he said.

"What, are the poor foster children not good enough for you? Why do we need to bring another child into this world when there are already so many out there that need someone to love and care for them?"

"I just think we'd make adorable babies," Carl admitted. She looked at him with revulsion.

"More than one?" She held her stomach, her face contorting in pain.

She began coughing hard over the sink, her hand over her swollen stomach. Carl got up and rubbed her back. He supposed she just gained weight, in the hopes that everything was normal. When she spit blood into the sink and he dropped that thought and faced the truth.

"Honey, you're not okay," he said.

"I'm fine. Can't we just adopt?"

"Let's shelf that conversation and get you to the ER," he said worried

#

After an extensive wait at the hospital, Sandra explained her symptoms to the doctor.

"I'm not pregnant... but my stomach hurts like a mother, and it's a bit swollen," Sandra told him as he typed up some notes on his computer. When she was finished, he said he would send in his nurse practitioner and asked them to wait patiently. A lady in scrubs appeared

about half an hour later. She sat down and told Sandra to consider the possibility that she was pregnant.

“No!” Sandra screamed, holding her stomach in pain, “Don’t you people listen?!”

The nurse did some blood tests to make sure, after few hours had passed the doctor came in with the results. Men in lab coats clamored behind him excitedly as he shut the door to explain her condition to them.

“It’s gigantic! Perhaps, a whole 3 feet long, and wide, too! We will need to schedule a surgery right away.”

“This is unlike anything I have ever encountered before in my career. We might have a book on our hands,” he said, as she started to pale. “You have a worm-like parasite growing in your abdomen that neither I, nor any of my colleagues, can identify. I can’t wait to dig in there and see what exactly this creature is. Carl caught Sandra as she fainted.

The surgery was to happen the next morning, leaving Sandra in conniptions throughout the night. She wanted it out immediately, but the doctors were firm on the schedule.

“We need to get someone in here to record this for my book,” her doctor said. “Besides, no one is going to die before tomorrow morning.”

Sandra stared at her stomach the whole ride back, her eyes cold and distant. Carl attempted to make conversation, but she was not receptive. He felt himself silently wishing she would break down and cry in his arms, but he knew that was just not how his wife dealt with things.

He wasn’t surprised when they got home and she said she wanted to be alone to think and immediately locked herself in the office. He heard what sounded like muffled whimpers coming from down the hall. He waited up a few hours for her to come to bed, but ended up drifting off to sleep before that happened.

In a dream, he was holding up her legs as she gave birth to a baby. She was resilient through hours of labor. She had always been a pinnacle of strength, and he had always admired that. He fell in love with her all over again. The doctor put the child in his arms. It looked so beautiful and innocent. It stared right into him and didn’t even cry.

He awoke in the morning to the sound of Sandra cooing gently, her back turned to him. Her figure was silhouetted by the sunlight coming through the window in their bedroom. She was talking in a hushed voice to something cradled in her arms. She turned her head at the sound of him stirring, a tired smile creasing her face.

“Come see our baby,” she said. Carl got up slowly and stepped across the room to his wife. In her arms there was something in a bloody baby blanket that lay against her bare abdomen, which had been stitched up crudely. “The doctor was wrong,” she said softly “I needed an emergency C-section or he would

have died. I'm so glad I saved him. Look!"

Carl stared in abject horror at his wife. Fleshy-tendrils reached out of the baby blanket toward him. Six tiny, beady, black eyes protruded

from a mass of worm-like tentacles. Carl beheld the fantastically terrifying creature. He reached out toward it and stroked what he imagined was its cheek. It was warm to the touch. He shivered.

Across The Sea

By: Joshua Moon

First there was only a few
They came by boat, tired, confused and afraid
They were welcomed, given asylum with no borders
So terrible is the state of their homeland
to drive its blood born into a foreigners' reign
Together we all cried
Until they started coming by the hoards
Their children's bodies washing ashore
Too young to remember when life was good
All they knew was fear
Their watery grave must have been an unknown silence
Unlike the bombs from which they fled
The actions of a few
Condemned an entire race
The fences started to rise
"Turn Back" we started to say
Paranoia replaced human decency
In their greatest hour of need
Where are we?



Victoria Chamberlain, "Meroctopus"

Illegal Imagination

By: Willow Shafer

The girl passed the hanging tree on her way home from the food bank. The nooses swung in the breeze and there was a woman hanging from one who had not been there before. Nothing special. The girl kept walking.

When she arrived at home, she walked through the rickety door and was greeted with the warmth of flames from the fireplace. The air inside was warm but the moldy dampness from the recent rains still remained. She spotted her parents by the fireplace, nudging it with a rusting iron poker, tossing in the last little scraps of wet wood they had left and trying to make them catch. Her mother glanced to her as she heard the unstable rattling of the door. Her eyes were expectant at first, glinting in the flames, but upon noticing her daughter's empty hands, her hope drained like stale rain in the broken roof gutters. "Sarah," she muttered, "out of food again?"

Sarah nodded. She had stood in the food line for at least an hour, without an umbrella in the depressingly frigid rain, soggy mud seeping around the edges of her rain boots several sizes too large. Everyone in the small ruined town went there during the weekends; that place at the end of the dirt road where the giant truck would open up and masked men from the cities would load out dozens of cans of food. There always *looked* to be so

much, but there never seemed to be enough. And the girl had just been a bit too far back in the line. The food ran out before she could have any. In her home only a few hard slices of bread remained, maybe a small puddle of congealed grease from the last supper huddled into the sides of a pan on the stove. They were too tired to be stressed or angry. Another week of starving was ahead.

The sighs of her mother always had an amount of melancholy that no spoken word could adequately express. "Never mind. We'll get more when the next shipment comes." Her mother paused when her father nodded to her expectantly. Interestingly, a small smile melted onto her face. "Your father and I have something for you. You just can't tell anyone, okay?"

Sarah was confused but nodded anyway. Her parents began to securely shut all the curtains and ensure all the outside doors were locked. An odd uncertainty began to seep into the air. Eventually, her mother brought something out from under the couch. It was wrapped very securely with a thick blanket. Every word her parents said were automatically reduced to wary but eager whispers. "Well," said her mother, gesturing to the object. "Open it up."

The girl wondered momentarily. The absolute silence and the extreme

secretive caution in her parents' actions made her somewhat hesitant, but eventually she reached out and unraveled the thick blankets. She didn't know what she was looking at when she saw it. It was rather simple-looking. It was rectangular and hard on the outside while on the inside there were many, very thin, white-ish sheets of what she assumed was paper. The girl couldn't remember when she had last seen paper like that. So bleached white and perfectly cut and thin. She might have seen individual sheets, but never so many bundled together, and intricately marked up with countless perfect lines of text. There was some text on the front of the rectangle as well. Sarah furrowed her brows. "What is it?" she asked. She didn't think her voice had been all that loud, but her parents shushed her anyway, not harshly, just carefully.

"It's a book," her father said, his voice so quiet the girl had to strain her ears. She didn't understand why they had suddenly become so secretive.

"Do you remember your alphabet?" asked her mother.

"I think so," answered the girl.

"How about you try to read what's on the front?"

Sarah studied this book for a few moments and looked at the text on the front. Her mouth was dry and uncertain as she tried to figure out how to pronounce the symbols on the paper. "Al...ice.... Alice... in... Won...der... Wonderland." The girl paused and looked up to her parents. "What is this?" Her voice was certainly not a whisper and her parents hushed her more intensely this time.

"You're too young to know much about it," her mother explained after the hallowed silence was restored. "It was a couple years after the beginning of the war when they outlawed books...."

"Is the war still going on?"

There was a lengthy pause. They all listened to the same crackling of the half-dead fireplace. "Yes. I was around your age when it started. They took away books. Just took them away. They burned most of them. I didn't think much of it then. I was a kid. I used to play in the ashes. They just burned them all in the streets...."

"They?" asked the girl. "You mean the bad people?" The bad people, the only name for the people in the white uniforms and black masks who could be so scarcely seen wandering the muddy streets and spotted far more as shifting silhouettes behind the cloudy windows of government buildings. The kind of people everyone feared. The people who didn't talk or reason, as if motor oil ran in their veins instead of blood, who acted only to uphold the law. Not the police; police were far obsolete. These were the heaven-sent angels with disguised traces of hell still stained onto their baited breaths.

"Yes," answered her father instead. "That's why you can't tell anyone about this."

"But where did you get it?" Sarah asked curiously, holding the book eagerly to her chest.

"It doesn't matter," her mother said, dropping the entire subject with only a smile. "Why don't you read to us?"

Sarah slowly opened the book and began to read aloud, doing her best

to remember the alphabet and pronunciation. She continued until she grew tired and fell asleep with the book beside her. The air had turned from cautious to content. But what the parents did not know was how closely the cameras outside were watching and how even their whispers were still far too loud.

Someone was shaking her. Someone was whispering. There was a loud, frequent banging-noise coming from somewhere. Her mind was slow to emerge from sleep's murky mire. When she opened her eyes she saw her mother shaking her awake. She did not like the pale, almost sickly expression on her face. The fire in the living room had died and the following funeral was cold and silent. Sarah realized the loud banging was coming from the other side of the front door. Her father came into view and looked just as panicked as her mother. "Sarah," said her mother, stroking her daughter's short hair, with eyes that strangely watered. The knocking at the door grew more hostile. "You have to be very, very quiet, okay? Think of it as a game. It's just a game. You have to be as quiet as you can and everything will be alright, understand?" Sarah nodded languidly.

Her father came to her and draped one of his big, heavy coats around her shoulders. "But you need this," she said, looking up at him and pulling gently on one of the sleeves. "It's still cold."

For some reason, his eyes were glassy too, and his smile seemed unusually forced. "You'll need it more." The knocking stopped and instead was replaced with a much heavier kicking noise. Each kick seemed to

match the skipping of her nervous heart. The girl was distracted, trying to find answers in her barren home of dust and ash and familiar echoes. The door began to creak uneasily with every abuse. Her mother cupped her face in her hands and kissed her on the forehead. "I love you," she said. Tears finally escaped her eyes and crawled down her face. "Your father and I... we love you so much. Can you remember that? If you forget everything else, can you please remember just that?" Sarah nodded. She opened her mouth to speak but her mother picked her up before she had the chance and carried her across the room.

"Please." Her mother was begging and more tears were falling. Her voice was unstable. "You'll be safe in here. You just can't make a sound, no matter what you hear or what happens. The game, remember? Can you promise?"

Her mother and father moved a bed and lifted up a portion of the floorboards, which revealed an extremely small, empty space with just enough room to fit a small child like her. Inside, it was mostly dirt and she could see the occasional worm crawling around. Her mother began to lower her into the hole but she protested by keeping her hands against the ledge. "What's happening?"

“Please.” Her mother was begging and more tears were falling. Her voice was unstable. “You’ll be safe in here. You just can’t make a sound, no matter what you hear or what happens. The game, remember? Can you promise?”

“Yes.” The girl allowed to be lowered into the cramped, dank pit. Her mother gave her the book she had read the night before, and she held it tightly in her arms. The pit was cold and tight and unwelcoming, but she couldn’t protest, not even when the floorboards were placed back over her head. They forgot to put the bed back in place. The game was still on. She just had to be quiet. She couldn’t see much, just light and shadows seeping through the creases in the floorboards. She could hear everything. She jumped when she heard the door be kicked down, and hard voices crashed in with the same violence. Two new voices started talking, and the harshness of them reminded her of the guards, the guardians, from the government buildings. She didn’t know what they were talking about, but she heard the word “arrest.” Then, “You have a daughter by the name of Sarah, yes?”

Both her parents coldly responded, “Yes.”

“Where is she?”

“She’s gone.”

There was a cold silence. “I’m sure you’re aware of the security around this town. The last recorded activity on this house took place yesterday evening when your daughter entered the house.”

Her father huffed. “Maybe your cameras have some blind spots.”

There were a couple moments of silence before a sudden jolting noise

echoed sharply through the house and a dull *thud* accompanied it. She had heard the sound before, just a few times, when the guards came to troublesome houses and a few moments later some bodies would be carried out. Often times there would be a lot of red and the bodies wouldn’t move. Sharp little sounds with an accompanying flash, the pops of a gun. She saw the flash, she heard the sound, her heart was in her throat, she couldn’t believe it. It always happened to other people, not her, no gunfire, not here. She didn’t see the red anyway. She didn’t see anything. When the sound died away, everything seemed colder. Quieter. Slower. Then the raw scream of her mother tore through the air. The girl in the hole couldn’t stand it. Her skin was devoid of color, her blood was stuck in her veins. She began to press against the boards above her, moving them slightly. She needed to see. Light snuck into her eyes. She wasn’t breaking her promise and she wasn’t losing the game, just as long as she stayed quiet.

She saw the color red. Dripping out onto the dark hardwood floor, and the source: a man on the ground with wide blank eyes and a dark hole in his head, a familiar man that gave her his jacket. The color red, spreading out, dark and shiny, staining into the wood as it did with her brain. Then her mother. Screaming, the screaming was all she could hear. Her mother dropped to her knees and tried to crawl to the dead man on the ground, her face contorted in agony, and she could not reach her destination because the guardians held her back by her arms. The girl watched. She could not look away. There was

an emptiness in her that swelled like a balloon, and her eyes were beginning to water as her heart twisted itself into knots. One of the guardians dressed in blessed white put a gun to the woman's head and pulled the trigger. A shower of red almost like rose petals, everywhere, across the floor and through the air, staining white uniforms scarlet. The screaming stopped. There was a limp thud as the body hit the floor without resistance. The pool of blood on the ground doubled. Two bodies and four pairs of eyes without focus were staring out at her. She was not peeking out from the hole, she was standing, staring, in plain sight. It wasn't happening, not to her, always to somebody else but not to her. The blood on the floor did not belong to her parent's, the scream that still echoed in her head was not of her mother, the thud was not of dead bodies, she did not see the color red, there were no

guns in the guardians' hands. But then she blinked. And everything was there. Everything was true. Lips parted, unable to breathe, a horrible crushing, swelling in her chest. Disbelief. Belief. It was still a game. Everyone was playing. Everything was fine. The guardians began dragging the bodies away and a fine trail of red was lost behind them. The bodies did not move. They did not sit up and laugh. The girl began to think that maybe this had never been a game.

She opened her mouth and screamed. A raw wail just like her mother's, tearing out from her throat like a creature that had been trapped for centuries. It hurt her, everything hurt. There was no game to lose anymore, and one could not keep a promise to a corpse. So she screamed. And the masked guardians in their rose splattered uniforms turned to her with blackened eyes.

The Day the Clowns Cried

By: C. Eli Newlin

“The tent’s on fire!” someone yells,
Arousing suspicion from the crowd.
Is the smoke all part of the act,
Is this the show’s grand finale?

The band plays “The Stars and Stripes Forever”
An alarm to circus folk all around
The acrobatic Wallendas descend from the sky
Leaving, as flames lick at the Big Top
The show can’t *always* go on.

The panic sets in and the running begins,
The young and old are trampled down.
Strong and weak alike, fighting
Through the tangled bodies of the mob.

Children flung over the animal cages,
That blocked two of the exits.
And a 14-year-old unnamed hero
Slit holes in the tent with his pocketknife.

7 minutes of flames engulfing
Paraffin wax and gasoline-coated canvas nourishment.
7 minutes of screams and burning flesh
And years to follow of sad-faced clowns crying.

Little Miss 1565, a six-year-girl,
Enjoyed a day with her family at the circus.
No one knows who she was,
She had a great day with her family at the circus.
Until her remains lay down in the grass, between charred twins,
No one knows who she was.

Doll Girl

By: Ashley Stevens

Adela was destined to be my betrothed.

I'd often catch glimpses of her in the garden, her delicate hands inspecting each blossom, silky skin meets satin petals. Her milky skin was a flower of its own; a gallant and fragrant lily, the loveliest bloom in the garden. She must have been God's most sacred angel, and if God created us in his image then surely his inspiration for her was taken from something even more beautiful than Him. Catching a glimpse of her cherub face causes me to get a thrill that's unbearable, and at first I'd totter away in a flutter of extreme anxiety and awe. She'd always watch me as I fled, doe eyes wide with curiosity and rosied-dawn lips in a surprised pout. For a while, this was how our meetings went.

It was my custom to court a lady properly. Before the sun could silently reproach me, I would tread through her morning dew sprinkled lawn and leave a gift, a present for my beauty. She loved her little trinkets; alabaster dolls with curly ringlets and frilly gowns. Every week she would take her pet rabbit, her only companion, and set up a table with fine china and fragrant teas in her garden. She played the part as hostess with her porcelain guests and pet, but the sight of her parties made me feel a certain loneliness that ached in my

bones. The absurdity that a woman of her grace should have to seek solace in artificial children vexed me.

I thought of how forlorn my dearest must be. I cursed myself for being a timid man, but who in this world could approach her glow and not become vulnerable? As she stood up to clear the table, I had to wonder if she wanted to replicate the beauty and cleanliness of the dolls. If such a thing were true, then she equally shared their hollowness.

One day a gentlemen came to see my Adela. He was a tall man with a lean build and arched eyebrows which made him look permanently surprised. It was barely permissible for him to see her once, but his visits became frequent. Adela reached a level of radiance that was sickening. What was once a pitiable garden was now a joyful setting, with two voices instead of one. She would link arms with the man and toss her head back and laugh, and he'd kiss her hand and put a blossom in her locks. From afar amongst the trees I watched with a sinking feeling. Something inside of me was writhing; it was cracking my ribs apart in a bestial desire to consume my heart. I knew I had to do something. I had to give Adela some gifts she would truly love. Only I knew what she adored.

The gentlemen stopped visiting after I had delivered her gift. It was bliss to know I had won her heart, and to see her chase the man away in between fits of sobbing and yelling was gratifying. Adela's crying face was so different than her usual elegant look. I saw a lot of her tears after I had delivered her present. What was normally so composed was now contorted in such a sad structure that it broke my heart. To see her Easter lily-colored flesh streaked in tears and puffy, with red-rimmed eyes and a rueful frown was in itself a different form of perfection. I don't know why she was hysterical. Amongst her dolls she looked out of place, and they judged her unmoved. I gingerly climbed down from my hiding place, determined to make her face placid once more. It was time for us to meet.

It happened sooner than I had planned. She caught me admiring her in the garden and charged at me, completely miffed. I was face-to-face with my beau, and I shivered in paralyzing delight. Her breath was sweet, and with every toss of her tresses I caught a whiff of what one could mistake for perfume, but I already knew it was her scent. The faces she made were so terrifying; they say the angels from biblical text were monstrous, and I imagined that this was the type of rage the seraphim's had when they defended the throne of God. The things she said to me made indelible marks. This was not the meeting I had planned, nor was this the reaction I had expected. She demanded to

know who I was, and if I was the one who placed the rabbit head on her door step. Her expressions twisted from spite to undiluted grief and I started to panic. She began to threaten me, she told me her father would have the court intervene and that she would never see me again. I cupped her face in my hand and hushed her with a kiss, a moment I've been waiting for, and assured her she would be happy with me.

These days my Adela is so peaceful. Just as I thought, she loved being with me. My lovely Adela no longer gives me that wounded-animal look, eyes glazed over in fear and lovely lips trembling. She's still the most hallowed flower in the garden, an untouched bud, the forbidden fruit of Eden. I must admit, she is still very reserved around me despite spending all of our time together. Her golden hair is framed against her porcelain skin, shielding her from me like a shy lover. I unveil her and although she is still, the sight of her leaves me breathless. I wonder what kind of dreams she has through her glass eyes. I position her so that we can hold hands, her ashen hand cold against my warm pulse. I have given her the finest china and the most splendid of gowns, and she outshines her doll sisters. I knew Adela would be happy with me. I kiss her resin lips, just as salacious as when they were once separable, and I lean her head on my shoulder. In this way, Adela remains my blushing bride forever. She has become my still doll.

Today I Saw Edgar Allan Poe Smile

By: Charlie Drago

She was walking down the street and muttering to herself
hating life, the unfairness, pain, darkness, Hell,
soaking in it like a hot, frothing bath

When she came upon a man, a most predictable man, an infamous,
nefarious, heavy-hearted man. He was sitting on the bench, raven-less,
flask-less, cloak-less smiling to himself

His eyes crinkled with joy and--were those dimples? She stared,
horrified, appalled and shook her pounding head viciously.
No no no this is wrong! This man, who is he to smile? He
cannot be happy, can feel nothing but anguish, loss, decay
and drunken-ness.

She continued to bore into him, her gaze unfaltering and broke
only to shudder from the ice in her lungs and she exhaled
betrayal, her breath a fleeting cloud of cold.

"My life is a lie," she croaked. "If you can smile, then
that means everything you wrote--was a facade." A frowning
tic worked at the corner of her quivering mouth as she
stood there in the cold, rooted to the spot, freezing...

...Until she realized he was still smiling, not seeming to
notice his offense. "How dare you." she finally said,
beginning to melt in fury. "You lied to me. You've been
happy this whole time, smiling like an idiot lying to
us all!

And she raged for several minutes, screaming at the poet,
cursing his existence, vowing to move on and never read him
again, the heat of her anger puddling the snow at her feet.
She spat at him and stalked off in seething agitation.

The frozen cadaver, blissfully unaware of his transgression, of
anything, continued to smile.

Abejance

By: Megan Finsel

I start at the sound of glass shattering on the concrete. I am standing behind the fence watching as everyone passes by, men and women walking to work, horse-pulled buggies trotting down the streets. No one ever comes to visit us; no one ever opens the gates. When I first arrived in this place this baffled me the most so I asked Headmistress Tulla why this was. She just shook her head. "They do not know what to say," was her response. So now, every afternoon I stand at these gates and watch as the world continues on its merry way. As glass and stone continues to break behind me, I wonder what life outside is like. After all, I cannot remember it.

Those who come in, "the new wards" as the Headmistress calls them, never say what it is like outside. They only cry and hug each other until she sweeps them away. I stand in the hallway and watch them as they enter through the giant doors of this giant house. They always look so scared and little, all so young and dirty.

I cannot remember why I cry but I do, some days, standing with my head against the gate. I feel like there is something I should remember, that it should be odd I cannot recall anything before my arrival here, that there should be more to this life. After all, I am young. I recognize this fact and realize that even though I

have been here a long time I am still young. We all are. We do not seem to be growing older like the children I see in the park across the street from us. I watch them play from this place behind the gates, and I see children I recognize growing taller, stronger, until they eventually stop playing and start sitting on the benches instead. Then they disappear, only to come back to the playground with little children of their own. Still I remain here, with the same length of nightshirt touching my knees in the same place, and the same locks of hair never growing longer than my ears.

I ask the Headmistress about this and she shakes a finger at me, reprimanding me for being so analytical. She tugs at my nightshirt and ruffles my hair, rubbing at a smudge of dirt on my forehead. I ask her a lot of questions: sometimes she answers, sometimes she does not. The ones she does not answer I always remind myself to hold onto because they seem the most important.

#

I found blood on my neck one day while I stood there at the gates watching the city wake up. I was standing there and I reached back to itch behind my ear, and my fingertips came away red. I started to cry, not understanding why I was hurt, why I

felt no pain, or why no one ever told me. Headmistress Tulla did not seem as concerned when I told her. She rushed me off to supper without a word of comfort or worry. I sat at the table that evening swinging my legs and exploring the wound with my fingertips. There were bumps and tears in my flesh that should have hurt, a deep wound that I could not feel no matter how hard I pressed into it, and I wanted to cry but I could not.

Then I began to notice the other children here who had bruises, cuts, and wounds that should have been alarming to the Headmistresses, yet Tulla did nothing about it. Little girls ran by me in the hallways, bare feet slipping on the tile, braids bouncing, with blood trailing down their arms. Little boys played in the yard outside, roughhousing as boys do, covered in soot and purple blotches that did not seem to wash off. In the evenings a young boy, older than I am, sat in the living room staring out the bay window. His leg was severed at the knee, but he did not seem to hurt. He sat and watched as the others caught fireflies in the yard while his fingers trailed over the spokes of his wheelchair. He looked thoughtful, but not in pain.

Then there are those who do not leave their bedrooms. The ones we never see. They do not come down to break our fasts or for suppertime. Headmistress does not even visit them or acknowledge their presence. But we know they are there; we saw them when they arrived, when they were swept inside looking paler and thinner than the rest of us.

I felt in my gut that this was not normal, yet still I could not get a

straight answer from Tulla about it all.

In the evenings, I examined myself in the hall mirror, turning this way and that so the candelabras cast different shadows across my face. I began to notice subtle things; the pallor of my skin, the blue of my veins snaking up my neck, the deep purple underneath my eyes. I rubbed at my papery cheek and scrutinized the way my skin seemed to pull away from my skull. The longer I stared at myself, the more I began to wonder if this was normal, or if it should feel normal. I had the eerie inclination that it was not.

...This was
not normal...

#

When the walls in the foyer began to crumble, I knew something was wrong. I stood watching as the wallpaper uncurled to lie at my feet. As bigger and bigger pieces fell, a realization dawned on me. This house was falling apart, and even though we did not seem to age, it apparently was.

I asked the Headmistress about this, but she clucked her tongue and reprimanded me for being critical. This house was serving its' purpose; it kept the rain and the wind out. That night I lay on the bed I called mine as raindrops struck the windowpane by my head, and water dripped from the ceiling onto my cheek.

We were not like everyone else. No one came to visit. No one seemed to know we were here. Nobody here seemed to age, but the house seemed to be falling apart around us. I rolled onto my side, letting rain strike my ear, and wondered what secrets the Headmistress was keeping from us. I wondered, too, why no one else seemed to question all this.

###

I have no memories. I cannot remember how old I am, or where I lived before this place, or even if I had a family. I know I should remember my family, but I do not. I stand and watch the children in the park, running to and from their mommies and daddies, and I recognize that I should have that. A part of me longs for it. But I cannot remember, no matter how hard I try.

An automobile passes loudly and billowing smoke. I do not cough.

Lately I realize I do not need to inhale or exhale, and that I cannot smell. I watch as the strange contraption whirls down the street, and I wonder vaguely when those things had arrived and when the buggies had disappeared. I noticed buildings that had not been there yesterday. I realize the more our building crumbles, the more new ones appeared around us.

Now, while I stand here, I see a little boy stop on the sidewalk; he looks at me with wild eyes. I think he can actually see me, although Tulla says that they never really do. When I reach through the gate, he flinches and backs away from me. His mother yells from down the sidewalk. He runs to her and I do not see him again after that.

I asked Headmistress why we scare them, but all she said was: "They just never know what to say."

Tribute to the Moon Goddess

By: Ashley Stevens

I follow the dusty path
The same one we loved
Once, your celestial voice enchanted this place
Your pink toes pattered against the soft Earth.
You were the loveliest maiden
So bright and vestal
That even Lady Artemis could not match your glow.

The trees tower silently and mourn
The wolves howl in your name
I pluck the pure white blossom
The one you so adored
Diana's temples remain empty
But every night I pay this tribute to you.



Beyond the Barrier

By: Willow Schafer

Leto ran to the edge of what was known, out to the forests that were larger than the oceans, after her dog that had ran away. It ran after the howling within the forest with the trees that grew as tall as mountains. She tried to chase after it, but it was too fast and she lost sight of it too easily in the night. She was forced to stop when she encountered the gigantic looming wall surrounding the endless wood, dotted with torches to separate their village from the unknown. The workers on the wall that smelled of smoke and oil stopped her and told her to go back home. She kept trying to move past them, trying to catch sight of her dog, but it was no use. The howling within the great wood continued, a sound that induced shivers down the spine of humankind. She did not want to turn back. She didn't care about the stories of the forest, of how it was completely uncharted, how no one had ever crossed its span, how the light never seemed to shine through the branches of the trees. She didn't even care that the reason the wall had been built was because of the indescribable creatures that seeped out from the woods and slaughtered their livestock and children. She, just a child herself, wanted to find her dog. But the workers turned her back.

She would not stop looking over her shoulder, back towards the forest. She had always wanted to know

why people were so afraid of it, the barrier of trees that spread from horizon to horizon. She heard hissing in the bushes. She turned and saw a boy about her age with messy blond hair and a catty smirk. "What are you doing?" asked the girl. "You should be sleeping."

"So should you," said the boy, crawling out of the bushes. "I saw you going after your dog. I could help you find him. I know how to get passed the walls."

Leto faltered. "Lupo, we're friends, aren't we?"

"Course," said Lupo.

"Will... you go into the forest with me?"

The boy shrugged and nodded his head. "But you gotta do everything I say, okay? Come on, I'll show you the way."

She followed the boy. They circled around the wall, avoiding the light of the torches and the gaze of the workers. She was led to a small hole that had been dug under the wall, just large enough for a child to fit through. The boy beckoned her forth when she hesitated. She had never been so close to the forest before. The boy laughed at her. "What, you scared?"

"No," she insisted. She forced herself through the small hole and the two children ended up on the other side of the wall. Immediately, it was dark. She followed the boy and with

every step, the ground strewn with dead leaves gradually declined. Lupo skipped across rocks and kicked around branches. “Have you been passed the walls before?” Leto asked.

“Yeah,” Lupo said proudly. “I don’t know why they bother putting up the wall. It’s amazing. Wait ‘till you see.”

When she looked over her shoulder she could no longer see the torches on the wall or even the wall itself. She continued searching for her dog, whistling into the stagnant air. She looked up and could just barely see the stars through the tops of the trees. It was awfully quiet. The boy suddenly grabbed her by the arm and pulled her forward. “What are you doing?” she hissed.

“You have to see,” he said. “This is the place I always come, just come on!”

When they stopped in a small depression in the ground, she saw it. There were mushrooms all over the ground, some producing their own blueish light, there were small birds everywhere with the wings of dragonflies, tiny mice-like creatures that hopped about like rabbits, and upon the bark of trees there were bits of crystalized sap that glowed faintly, almost like stars. She looked around wondrously. She reached out her arm and smiled when one of the strange birds landed on her finger, its wings buzzing quietly. “Why would they want to keep us out of the forest?” she asked. “It’s beautiful.” He didn’t respond. He looked oddly sad. “Lupo?” she said. “Lupo, we’re friends, aren’t we?”

He finally looked at her. “Course.”

“Do you believe the ghost stories the grown-ups tell us about this place?”

He shook his head. “Nah. Grown-ups are always talking about things worse than ghosts anyway.”

She paused. “Well, what’s worse than ghosts?”

The ground shook deeply, like the earth itself was taking its first breath. It stopped. Then it returned, periodically. Lupo looked around and ran further into the forest. She shouted after him but he wouldn’t listen, so she went after him. Her foot caught on a root and she tumbled uncontrollably, hitting rocks and branches on the way down. She only stopped when she slammed against the trunk of a tree. “Lupo!” she called. He did not answer. The shaking of the ground continued. Her friend suddenly came into sight and helped her up. “Why did you run?” she asked.

They began to hear things.

The shaking of the ground became so bad that leaves began to fall from the trees and they could hardly stay on their feet. It was darker than the darkest night. They could hardly see each other. The air was damp and foul. The trees blocked out the sky and everything drooped like it carried the weight of the world, covered in heavy vines and blankets of moss. They froze when they saw the darkest shadow, misshapen and gargantuan. With each step it took, the ground shook. They couldn’t tell what it was at first. Moss hanging off in sheets off its matted black fur, mud dripping off

it, huge branches tangled in its antlers. It was a stag, a monstrous stag larger than all the buildings in their village combined. Its eyes were the most disturbing, like great cloudy orbs of a sickly yellowish-green color, glowing like the bits of sap trapped within its fur. The gigantic stag paused for a moment and seemed to look right at them. It sniffed slowly at the air, dead branches falling from it as it moved, and then it continued on, the shaking of the ground fading as it went. "What was that?" she whispered.

Lupo shook his head. "I've never been this far inside the wood before. I don't... know where we are." They wanted to go up, but suddenly every direction led further downwards. They had no choice but to keep moving.

They could see nothing. Not their hand in front of them, not each other. The glowing sap was gone, there was no light. They held on to each other's hands and used sound to guide them. The ground's incline only grew steeper. The only way was down. They began to hear things in the bramble around them. They stopped in their tracks. The boy let go of her hand. "What are you doing?" she said, fear in her voice.

"Your dog is dead," he said.

"Why would you say that?"

She heard the crunching of leaves. "I'm sorry." She called after him but there was no response. Her heart pulled and her eyes began to burn. She heard things she had never

heard before, all around her, clicking, mumbling, gargling. She began to see amorphous shapes darker than the shadows, and as they moved she saw some of them had portions that glowed, either their cloudy eyes or the saliva in their jagged maws or growths upon their shapes. All of them were gigantic, snaking around the trees, dripping like tar. She ran, tears falling from her face, hardly able to breathe. The ground shook horrifically and she heard mangled sounds chasing her. She remembered something her mother once said. "You should never go into the abyss with someone else."

"Why?" asked the girl. "Wouldn't it be safer?"

"No. The darkness in the forest is not the same as the kind here. If you ever become lost in the forest with someone else, lose them as quickly as you can, do you understand? The forest will make people do things they wouldn't normally do."

The girl couldn't believe it. She ran as fast as she could, the screaming of the monsters behind her, shadows all around. Even if she was able to see through the darkness, she would have been blinded by her tears. She wanted to go back home, she wanted to see again, she didn't want to believe Lupo had left her to die. But the ground kept descending. "Lupo," she sobbed, her voice strained and mangled with fear, her legs not able to carry her any faster. She asked, even though there would be no answer. "Lupo, we're still friends, aren't we?"

Worthy of the Gift

By: Joshua Moon

A ghost hums through my bones like pans midnight flute
 Singing a song of strength through the muscles
 giving color to the skin
 reflecting this blue world in its eyes
 recalling from lives already lived
 exploring this new body
 Different than before
 With its own quirks
 its own tolerance
 its own story waiting to unfold

Drawing on the memory of the past
 forgotten until my next death
 Driving this new vessel is new, yet familiar
 Every molecule revels in opportunity
 for the path before me now
 is hidden
 waiting to be explored
 ME, the ghost, the traveler of the cosmos
 the survivor of time
 constantly searching for the answers
 locked away in every cell

This body contains all the secrets of its ancestors
 all their love
 all their tragedies
 constantly morphing and creating
 this bipedal form
 in hopes that I, a new inhabitant
 will continue their dreams
 entrusting this, the work of centuries
 to me to do something grand
 to know my responsibility
 to sing the song of my freedom
 to fight against those who would take it away
 Most importantly make them proud

Leaf

By: Megan Finsel

The little town was so bleached by the sun even the bricks the buildings were made of were faded. There was nothing remarkable about the place, with its single stoplight and plain-looking storefronts. The people were just as dull: sun-bleached, wrinkled, and dreary. It was nothing spectacular, except for the ivy.

The vines had grown exponentially, uncontrollable and dangerous. At first, no one noticed them much. They snuck up out of nowhere, starting in the flowerbeds and front yards, the little green leaves poking up between rhododendrons and chrysanthemums. At first, no one paid them much mind; they just pulled and weeded as normal. But then their growth exploded, spreading like gossip through the Lyle & Lois Attorneys' building on Fairway. They climbed the library, and the courthouse, they spiraled up the stop signs, and across the bridge leading to the old flour mill.

The townsfolk tried to combat them. They bought weed killers and weed whackers. But the blades on the lawn mowers broke, and the vines continued to thrive despite the chemical

warfare. Yards were consumed, and the people were frustrated.

To calm down the townsfolk (and because elections were coming and he wanted to secure some votes) the mayor hired professional lawn care services from the neighboring county. The professionals spent several days working on the problem. But as they tried to cut it back, the ivy grew around their ankles.

Perplexed, the mayor brought in botanists from the city (requiring the treasury to pay hundreds of dollars) to determine what type of plant it was and what could be done to eliminate it. When the test results came back, the experts were baffled; never had they encountered a weed like this before.

Meanwhile, the ivy raged on, consuming the Arthur Cain golf course, and Lovell Park on Sportsman Lane. Eventually, it began to spread across the streets in the less populated areas. It wound itself up the lamp-posts, climbing the sides of suburban households. The town began to look more and more like a jungle.

At this point, the foliage began to hinder the lifestyle of the townspeople. Driving became nearly impossible and all public

transportation came to a standstill. Men and women commuting to the office made a habit of storing machetes in their briefcases. To get through the doors, the clerks had to cut back the vines. When the buses couldn't pick up the children both Benjamin Elementary and Waterly High closed. Simone's Grocery followed suit when the delivery trucks couldn't make their rounds.

By now people began to panic.

Then the vines did something unexpected: they produced buds. The people wondered if perhaps they would bloom flowers. The mayor tried desperately to work this new twist into his political campaign. Everyone

was suspended in anticipation as they waited for the mysterious blossoms to bloom.

Every morning, the mayor stepped out onto his balcony to inspect the vines that poured in over the railing. One foggy morning he looked out to see that they had burst open, spilling out petals of a sickly yellow hue. He approached the doors for a closer look, but stopped when he saw birds falling out of the sky. Dead butterflies lay on the balcony floor. His phone was beginning to ring when his secretary rushed into the office, telling him to turn on the news. But he could hear the sirens, and already knew this wouldn't help his votes at all.

The Life Inside the Writing Desk

By: Willow Schafer

I didn't know who they were. I never found out. I didn't know their name, their voice, how they looked, who they were. A stranger. But I knew how they thought and how they strung words together, how I seemed to be their only friend, how they could so perfectly communicate their emotions into simple symbols. Happiness in the handwriting, humor in the ink, woe in the pencil shavings, mystery in the stories, finality in the scratches in the wood. A nihilistic life written into writing desks, never on paper, always addressed to me even when no name was given. I never met them, but it felt like I did. It felt like I killed them, too.

Everyone was flooding into the classroom at once, one after another. Outside, I knew the sun would be setting. My ears rang with pencils clattering against the surfaces of the wooden desks, papers crackling, muttering, backpacks shifting, a calculator falling to the tile floor. Everyone ceased to be in such a hurry when they realized the teacher hadn't even arrived yet.

I pulled a worn notebook and some pencils from my bag. A few people walked by and I became aware of the soft scent of dust

and pencil shavings. My notebook slipped out of my hands and dropped to the floor. The heavily used pages crumpled beneath the weight of each other, revealing how they were littered with endless amounts of notes and hopeless scribbles of flowers. The flowery sketches silently communicated that I did not particularly enjoy paying attention in class. Prowling teachers had caught me several times with my pencil more focused on blooming chrysanthemums and rose stalks than on my studies, but their frustrated lectures did nothing. The only class I actually had any sort of enthusiasm for was biology, of which classroom we huddled in currently, but the longer we had to wait for our faceless teacher the more my vague excitement diminished and the more I planned what type of flowers I was going to scribble into my papers.

I reached down for my fallen notebook and the moment my hand closed around its sloppy pages, I caught something interesting. Most of the other students had already arrived and settled into their seats, but the large classroom still had a few empty desks. There was one such desk across from me, sandwiched between a greasy-

haired boy and a girl with fuchsia fingernails. The empty desk was absolutely the same as any other, except I could just barely see some grey scribbles across its otherwise blank surface. It didn't seem to be any kind of sketch—it was too neat—and the longer I stared the more I could make out the presence of small letters, but the desk was a little too far away for me to tell what it said. As I was about to get a better look, the door opened and the teacher finally entered. The lecture quickly began and I never got my opportunity to find out the writing, but for the next couple hours, for the first time in a long time, my focus was not on any sketching of flowers.

My gaze had been locked onto the tauntingly empty desk for the whole class. When a few students passed me, I quickly took the opportunity to slip over to the desk and see what had been scribbled. The handwriting was nice, but the message was not: *I hate this place*. I stared at it for a moment. I came up with an idea. I grabbed a pen. The janitors only came around about every other day, so maybe my message had a short-lived chance of reaching someone, perhaps this questioned, pessimistic writer. I briskly wrote under the other lettering: *So do I, but it's always easier to put up with if you can focus on something you like*.

The next day I managed to glimpse at the empty desk while waiting for the teacher, and I

noticed that both the messages that had been scribbled onto it had been cleaned away and replaced with a single new message: *Interesting advice, but doesn't really help when you don't like anything*. I was so badly temped to write something as the students were still settling, but the teacher entered the class and again the grey atmosphere was drowned with

No one really knew about the messages. It felt like if I were to tell anyone, it wouldn't be so excitingly mysterious.

usual boredom. My focus was not on flowers but instead on dozens of eager little messages in my notebook, crossing some out and circling others, trying to figure out exactly what I was going to write next. I had never expected there to be a reply; I was sure the next janitor to find the writings would just clean it away and that would be the end of the curiosity, but for it to continue was a tale I had never expected. The next thing I wrote after class was a slight experiment just to see how this ghost-messenger would react. *Roses are red, violets are blue, do you*

like poetry? Because I think it would like you.

I found myself in a cycle. Every day when I went to that classroom, I would find another message on that same desk, I would wait through the entire class and write down a message of my own and wait until the next day, thinking about how the janitors would clean off such useless dialog, and I would find a new series of words on the desk to continue the lengthy and silent conversation. No one really knew about the messages. It felt like if I were to tell anyone, it wouldn't be so excitingly mysterious. Our dialogs were pretty meaningless, but they felt like they had some kind of significance, like I was actually getting to know every little detail about this person as if I had hung around them every day. We even came up with our own code of writing so no one but us could understand. Through a river of days and words, I would learn something new, not from the lectures I ignored, but from the messages left by the person who seemed to practically live inside the writing desk. *So what do you look like?* I once wrote.

Well, started the reply the next day. *The usual. Seven feet tall, deadly good-looks, got an ivory horn growing out the side of my head.*

That's funny. I look like that, too.

If you don't like anything, I began, what do you do after school?

What do you do?

I'll go out with my friends, I'll hang around, I might read something.

You brought up poetry once, came the words. You like poetry?

Have you ever seen a flower that did not gleam? I answered. What about a rose that bent at its seam? Have you ever seen a flower that did not sway? What about the dandelions shunned from play? If you have ever seen a dead flower, what do you say? 'Please let another flower bloom this day.' Yeah, I guess I like poetry.

The day was extremely depressing and stormy when I saw the response. It hadn't been raining when I arrived, but the clouds were so dark that from the inside it seemed like it was already night. The air was heavy and damp and I was often able to hear the heavy rolling of thunder. Inside the halls everyone still went about as usual, only ever pausing when a particularly strong hail of thunder came along and shook the hanging lights. We paused when the rain started as well, just because of how hard it came down on the roof.

It was especially hard to pay attention to the lecture that day because the classroom had no windows and I could only guess what was happening outside, and because I could see another message on the writing desk across from me and it was a bit longer than usual. As soon as class ended and people began to

rise from their seats, I swept to the desk and read what it had to offer. *I guess you like flowers, too.... Those words I cannot chew. I may not like any-thing, but I'll make an exception for you.... What do you think, Flower-Kid?*

I was smiling to myself like an idiot. My friend was calling me but I hardly heard her, just as I hardly heard the wind or rain as I was so focused on extracting a pen from my backpack. I set the tip on the wood. The lights went out before I had the chance to scrawl a single letter. I heard scattered gasps and people began muttering quickly. The wind was louder than ever, roaring

We started to hear screams coming from somewhere outside the classroom along with the wail of alarms.

passed the concrete walls and through our ears. The sheer volume of the thunder was not even the most horrifying part. We started to hear screams coming from somewhere outside the classroom along with the wail of alarms. The students around me started rustling in panic. My heart lurched when the building began to groan. There was a horrible, internal

tearing of the structure, and wind rushed into the classroom when chunks of the roof were ripped off. Everyone was running, trying to escape even if the hall was no safer. People who fell were trampled and cracks appeared in the ceiling right over my head. I looked up and could see the glints of endless rain whirling around. I also saw the roof cave in over me.

I broke my leg. I had to be dug out of the buildings after the storm by some firemen. No one died, but several were injured. The doctor said my injury wasn't serious, but I still had to wear a cast for about two weeks, which was around the same amount of time for the school to be fixed up. The tornado hadn't actually damaged too much of the school, just certain unlucky parts of it. I happened to be in the unlucky part. Remaining in the hospital was extremely dull and all I did was sketch flowers and write meaningless poetry on my cast.

For the first time in my life, I was excited to go back to school. When I first walked into the classroom, everything looked more or less the same, except the new paint on the walls and the roof. Some of the desks were new, too, and for a moment I wondered if I would not find any more messages. But I saw the familiar scribbles from a distance and eagerly approached. My happiness slowly trickled away as I read. *Sorry for bothering you.* This confused me. I blanked out of the lecture and

time seemed to fast-forward until I was looking back down at the small words on the desk. I wished so badly to know what this person was thinking. I knew them so well through their words, it felt like we were already friends. With furrowed brows, I wrote: *What do you mean?* And I waited.

When I saw the message of the next day, I fell into such a panic I had to rush to the bathroom and press my hands to my mouth to muffle myself and try to remember how to breathe. No one else could understand the message except me because we still wrote in our own code. The first part had been short and it was what consumed my mind most: *I'm going to kill myself today.* Burning tears fell endlessly down my face and it took several minutes until I could recall the rest of the message. *You probably don't want to see me, but I kinda want to see you. You don't have to come, but if you want to, I left where I'll be tonight on the center desk in the chemistry classroom. The janitors are here today... maybe you should check the desk there to see if they cleaned off the writing already. I don't know. Bye, Flower-Kid.*

I burst from the bathroom stall and stormed down the halls. I could still feel twinges of pain in my healed leg, but I didn't care. It didn't matter what was in my way. The tears in my eyes burned worse than any fire. The chemistry classroom

would be empty at this time, but I could see some janitors around, and every time I saw one my heart grew more sporadic. I had to get there, I had to see the writing, I had to know where they were going to be. I couldn't let them do it, I had to see them, I couldn't let them die. They were my *friend*. Just the ghost inside the writing desk, but I *knew* them and I *cared*. I couldn't do anything but run. I turned down a hall. I was almost there. There was no time to tell anyone; if I didn't find the message before it was washed away, then the life was already gone.

I could see the door. I saw the dull lights seeping through the bottom of it. It wasn't yet time for class in that room. My heart was beating out of my chest, I could barely breathe. It had to still be there, it had to be, I couldn't lose them, not when I haven't even met them yet. I burst through the door to the classroom and the air upon entering caught painfully in my throat. Only a few lights were on, but I could still see too much. I almost collapsed but still managed to stand. There was a different flower drawn onto the surface of every desk, perfectly detailed, exceptionally realistic. Roses, carnations, forget-me-nots. The desk in the very center also had a sketched flower, but it was wilted and dead, and a collection of words I could not quite see accompanied it. My heart stopped when I saw a janitor there, a spray

bottle in his hand, a cloth already moving across the surface. I almost choked on air. Not yet, not this way. I screamed from the back of my throat but I

had no idea if the life of the person I had never met yet knew so well had already been extinguished like the dead flower scrawled across the wood.

“WAIT!”

Ink

By: Charlie Drago

Liquid ink coursing through my veins
 spilling out onto the page
 Through a pen through a printer
 out my fingers onto paper
 Making marks
 forming phrases
 weaving webs of wandering thoughts
 Day dreaming
 night waking
 recording the whispers of God on parchment
 To dip the nib into the well
 I gather unborn thoughts
 and scratch the surface
 with tiny lines
 witnessing a slow birth of the divine made flesh
 one hatch and stipple at a time.

With a needle I can pierce the skin
 permanent pictures to be worn
 a statement of my adoration for this
 raven liquid
 flowing like the Stygian down my arms
 I paint my sorrows and elations
 with brush in hand
 my vision forms
 and from this
 my world can be yours

The Cartographer's Study

By: Megan Finsel

The map would not hold still. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't pin it down long enough to make his notes. It tore up the nails and flipped over the weights. The inkwell was upturned; his quills scattered on the floor. *You're impossible*, he thought. He tried rocks, heavy glass marbles, and large books, all to no avail.

The map shivered in fear as he dragged it to the floor and proceeded to pin two corners beneath the bed. Finally, with the other two staked to the floorboards, he stepped back with a huff and smiled at his handiwork. The trapped map was panicking, and for a moment he wondered if what he had done was inhumane. He shook off the thought, and went to collect his quills.

Yet they had now disappeared. He found them trying to crawl beneath the bookcase. They pulled themselves along towards a crack in the floorboards; he snatched them up in a tight fist.

He found his inkwell hopping under the door; its glass clinking against the wood. He grabbed it with his free hand while he had to use his heel to pin down a corner of the map that had pulled out from under the bed.

"Will I get any work done today?" he shouted.

The bed stamped its feet; the journals on their shelves all rustled their pages. The Cartographer sighed heavily while he piled dictionaries on top of the map, only to have them get up and shuffle away.

"Today is just not my day," he muttered. The map struggled in response as the quills pricked at his fingers. Frustrated to the point of exhaustion, he slumped in a chair and stared at the rebelling room. The window opened and closed itself repeatedly and the door mirrored it. All the furniture was stamping in protest. The map had escaped its binds and was leaping about madly.

"Alright, alright, that is enough," he said, "we won't work today."

Abruptly everything stopped moving; even the drapes hung still. As the cloud of feathers the pillows had thrown at him settled, the Cartographer propped his chin in his hand and stared out the window at the sunny forest beyond. *Damn that witch! If only I had taken her more seriously.* The map continued to flutter around him, reminding him of her parting words.

"You will regret saying no to me."

AUTHOR AND ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

VICTORIA CHAMBERLAIN

Hi everyone I am Victoria Chamberlain. I was born and raised in Harford County Maryland. Even since then I knew I wanted to be an artist, and am currently an Art Major. Right now I am exploring different mediums to discover my style and voice and the best way I can make positive differences in the world. I have a love for animals, and home has always been full of all kinds of pets. I am fascinated by sea life and I dream to go to Australia because I adore the wildlife there. I also desire to travel to as many places as I can. Other than drawing I like to bike and swim.

MADELINE CRITES

This piece is about someone who wronged me. I've forgiven him now of course, but it was an experience that shaped the way I deal with matters of the heart. I view poetry as a form of therapy, there is something about writing words down and making them beautiful that really helps me conquer obstacles, and even receive closure when there is none to be found in a situation. I was distraught while righting this (over a year ago now) but I think when I came to the last line, I realized that the person I was writing it about wasn't worth even my breath, I deserved better. At least I got a nice poem out of the whole thing!

CHARLIE DRAGO

Charlie was born and raised in Southern California. After serving four years in the military, she and her husband moved to Florida, where she attends State College of Florida pursuing a Studio Arts degree.

MEGAN FINSEL

I'm a Special Education major, but writing is my passion; it is how I connect with the world and share my thoughts. My goal is to inspire at least one person through my work, and then I know I've done my job. This is my last semester at SCF and I have to say thank you; it has been a true honor!

BRANDIE HYDE

Of the many varied hats that I wear, Licensed Security Guard is one, and Student is another. I'm currently experiencing a **total divergence** from my college academic career path to date as I have already successfully completed and graduated with my 1st B.A.S. degree in Public Safety Administration and as a matter of working toward my 2nd B.A.S. degree in Homeland Security it is necessary to take an additional 15 credit hours that are **both** 'upper level' courses **and** not included or counted for my first degree. So basically I'm venturing into ENTIRELY unexplored waters so to speak for the next year attending at ½ time status into whatever upper-level courses happen to be available at the moment. I've found myself essentially tackling bachelor level electives at present which I believe that like their lower level counterparts that they are geared toward making me a more 'well-rounded' student in my overall academic experience.

JOSHUA MOON

My name is Joshua Moon, I am going into my second year at SCF. I am getting old at 26 but loving life. I am from Texas originally but have lived in Colorado, Pennsylvania, Florida, Cali and a couple other places. I am an avid traveler and love getting lost in the woods. I am studying to be an investigative journalist hoping to eventually work for Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International!

TIM NAIL

C. ELI NEWLIN

Cassie Newlin is working on her Associate's in Arts at SCF. She has an interest in art, psychology and creative writing. She is co-historian of Swamp Scribes. She enjoys horror, psychological thrillers, anime and comic books.

THOMAS PRETTYMAN

My name is Thomas Prettyman, I am a portrait photographer local to Englewood, Florida. I am 21 years old, and entirely self-taught in the art of photography. My favorite medium is film, which I love to process and develop myself. Photographing people is a passion of mine, because I love expressing stories through my photographs. Someday I hope to teach photography, and self-publish my own work.

WILLOW SCHAFFER

On the shores of Lake Erie in Ohio, I was born with the passion to write. After moving to Florida, I graduated at 15 years old from homeschooling while volunteering at the Sarasota County Library. I am presently a student at SCF, pursuing a major in archaeology, and a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

ASHLEY STEVENS

23 year old student who likes to pretend to know how to write.

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