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Cover Image
Detail from “Violet Dew”
By Rachel Whiteman

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My Child

By Taylor Lauren

My beautiful baby,
I cradle you in my arms,
Your slender wings outstretched as if an angel.
Your mouth opens and closes with nothing but a
Coo.
Your adorable round head and dark blinking eyes,
Stare up at me in wonder. You crane that noggin.
I pinch your pink toes gently in my hands,
And I peck your forehead with a kiss.
At this moment I wonder,
Is it sanitary to love a pigeon like this?

Sunday Morning

By Makenzie Horner

Sunday morning

I go about my day.

I leave my dainty apartment
and arrive at a café.

I look around

of course

with my watchful eye.

I spot people

I spot children

quite sly.

Yet there is one

that brings my eyes to a halt.

A beautiful woman

who comes off as a vault.

Long hair

warm eyes

pursed lips

all uninviting!

She is sat down in a seat
vigorously writing.

What about?
I do wonder
as her beauty pulls me in.

I crave to know
her name
her likes
and where she's been.

The Baobab Family Tree

By Taylor Lauren Poliseo

Gladys began to shed tears. She did not understand what for, for she had never wept for her husband Arthur in any way. As she stood in front of the crowd, mourning her husband, she wondered why she felt a pit in her stomach. Most, if not all, of the people standing there in the summer heat could care less. It's what society expected from those who knew the deceased. Gladys and Arthur lost love many years ago, after their marriage but before their unforeseen child.

The birth of their child was an unexpected experience, soon to be full of worry and doubt. They struggled to keep enough money in the house. This caused uproar and havoc amongst the family. Children are demanding and loose cannons, but are supposed to be there for parents after they've flown the nest. They're supposed to come back and take care of their parents in their growing age. Their son Charlie did not come through.

As Gladys braved herself to speak, she choked on a stifled sob forcing its way through her throat. This chasm of loneliness in the world grew even larger when she reminded herself that Charlie wasn't there for his father. He wasn't there for his own mother. Gladys couldn't blame him, as Charlie's father was never there for him. Gladys began to give Arthur's eulogy.

"Arthur was an abrasive man, who felt the need to show the world how tough he was. His exterior may have been impenetrable, yet his body began to fail him in his later years. The doctors said that he had three to four months to live. Against all odds, he kept giving us his presence for seven months after his diagnosis."

She paused, and tried to think of a positive memory of her husband. She had been struggling with this on the drive to the funeral. Her silence was mistaken for pain, and the pastor next to her put his hand on her shoulder in comfort. This was more emotion than her husband had shown her.

"Would you like me to continue for you?" the Pastor said.

Gladys glanced up at the crowd, shrouded by her veil. Her mind began to wander as she shook her head in response to the Pastor.

She began recalling her early memories with Arthur, attempting to resuscitate any forgotten cherished memories with him.

“He was a quiet man, and provided for his family.” She lied through her teeth. “His sacrifices were not in vain. Although he couldn’t be here today, his son Charlie would not have turned out the way he is without his father. He was a strong moral compass for his son and for me.”

More lies coerced their way through her lips. Everyone knew who Arthur was as a person, and how he treated strangers and those close to him the same. He was dismissive of his wife, and arrogant towards his son. No one could ever be enough for him. Gladys sure wasn’t enough, but she was there and expected to be betrothed to him. No one wants to be known as the whore who shackled up with someone in high school. She didn’t want to be socially ostracised as a single mother, and he didn’t want to be blamed for any misfortunes.

“I felt at home when Arthur was around. I can remember fond memories of Charlie growing up and his father taking him to tennis practice. Charlie was always excited for his lessons, and I was happy for the both of them to be spending quality time together.”

She lied again, and everyone knew this. Charlie sure was enthralled to be enrolled in a tennis club, but only attended one lesson. Arthur complained about the heat and refused to take him to another practice.

Gladys felt resentment more so than grief at this moment. Her lost life, Charlie’s lost experience. If only she hadn’t been afraid to leave him before the marriage, she could’ve been that single mother that she loathed to become and done much better on her own. She cursed at how foolish she was when she was younger. She had half expected society to rear its nasty fangs and bite into her, the way that she feared for her unborn child and herself.

Arthur was never physically aggressive towards Gladys or Charlie however. Emotions were hard to come by in their house. Gladys recalled her husband’s famous sayings. She wouldn’t speak them out loud to onlookers. He would always howl at Gladys, telling her to ‘get that boy in line’ or ‘teach Charles how to be a real man.’ He felt no love for either Gladys or his son. He saw no joy in the world, and

stole any source of happiness from their household. Gladys and Charlie were deprived of compassion.

“Arthur did the best that he could, considering who he was as a man. He showed his love in unusual ways, but never deprived us of what we needed as a family.”

Food, shelter, and clothing were hardly anything to show love. He bought these things because he felt an obligation to. He never held Gladys close and whispered sweet nothings into her ear. She never felt chills of ardor from him, never experienced a lover’s light touch from his fingertips. He never said that he loved her.

He lived with her and their son through obligation, and though she tried, Gladys could not find herself able to tell the truth about Arthur. Funerals are not full of the truth of everyday, but a glorification of the husk of a man. One day soon Gladys will find herself lowered into the ground while being lied about. She hoped it was her son who raved about her, holding the audience captive while he described a woman he hadn’t seen in years. At least with Charlie, Gladys brought something to this world with Arthur. Their time wasn’t lost together, because Charlie found a way to live past what his mother had to go through.

Charlie didn’t have to be in a loveless marriage, or to feel society’s obligation. He had witnessed the effects firsthand while growing up. He was enraged for his mother, while she had given up a long time ago.

Gladys shed tears at her husband’s funeral. She was a widow. She overcame the dependency on her husband.

She had the chance for freedom at the cost of another man’s life.

Charlie cleared his throat and gazed above the eyes of the crowd, drowning in black cloth. He felt uncomfortable in his tight rented suit, which hugged his hips and butt. The cheap fabric was scratchy and thin. It was obvious he didn’t have the funds to be doing this shit, but he had to anyway. No one else would plan a funeral for her, and he was the next of kin. Charlie had the audacity to plan his mother’s funeral on Independence Day.

Her funeral wasn’t drenched in rain like in the movies, and people weren’t bawling their eyes out either. The crowd stood with a stoic

stance that made Charlie uneasy. The party goers obviously felt uncomfortable in the summer heat as well, donned in black from head to toe. The black soaked up the sun, and the sun evaporated their sweat in lieu of tears.

Charlie hated being burdened with debt. To be fair, his mother's cremation was on the lighter side when it came to price. It ended up being closer to the \$2000 mark rather than the \$4000 range that he originally expected. His mother Gladys had taught him to be thrifty. However, the funeral expenses were still high. He felt that she would be content with the way he turned out.

Gladys decided long ago that she was happier listening to his father rather than her only son. She abandoned him when he needed her the most. He struggled from adolescence with his sexuality, and when he explored it, his father was outraged and she was the silent bystander. His father Arthur deemed him to be a sexual deviant and cut all connections with his son. Gladys feigned keeping in contact with her son. She sent a combined birthday and Christmas card every year. *His birthday was in April.* She would write vague feelings and dance around their problems, as their family tended to do with everything.

For years, Gladys never spoke with him other than through the annual card. Even after the death of her husband, she still clung onto Arthur's wishes. She longed to please him, even after he was buried under the weight of the Earth. His decomposing corpse still controlled her. Through skeletal fingers he grasped her conscience and rendered her a trained dog. Her burdened conscience soon began to fade after her diagnosis. Charlie began to find a new avenue of love for his mother in his last moments with her.

Yet there he was, having planned her funeral and half assing a eulogy for her. He rummaged through his mind for old memories that brought a semblance of euphoria to him.

It was a short list.

"Gladys was my mother. She raised me from birth and kept in contact with me even after I left home. She accepted me for who I am and I am grateful for her unwavering compassion. She never ridiculed me for my sexuality, and never tried to shame me for who I was. In her own quiet way, she supported me from afar" Charlie said.

To an extent, Charlie did understand that what his mother showed was love. It was hard for her to look him in the eyes, and impossible for his father to. Once he had turned 18 and left the house with a sour taste in his mouth, his mother admitted through one of her cards years later that he was not his father's son. Charlie was in every sense of the word, a bastard. His father's nickname for Charlie growing up made a lot more sense after his mother revealed his birthright. She never revealed the name of Charlie's real father.

Arthur and Charlie weren't related by blood, which explained why his father resented him so much. The revelation crashed down in waves through Arthur's mind, grounding him to his bed for days, and only got up to use the bathroom. He stopped needing to make that trip after the first three days.

His boyfriend was his supporting force in their relationship at that time. He listened to Charlie and showed him understanding through his struggles. His parents would never have given the time of day to understand Charlie. Charlie's mother couldn't, and his father wouldn't.

"She struggled with expressing herself, but she offered as much love as she could. Although her symptoms and Alzheimer's eventually stole her life, it offered her a reprieve from her depression. She remembered only happy moments, and I believe that the last year of her life was one of her best."

Once she forgot about her sexual assault resulting in Charlie, her world began to open up. She no longer struggled with smiling and laughing. She didn't personally reach out to Charlie after his father's death, but the doctors did.

Charlie was glad that they did.

He found ways to appreciate and love his mother. He learned more about her than he thought was possible. As a child when he tried to get her to open up, she would only close herself off more. Charlie gave up trying to get to know his mother after his 10th birthday.

He learned so much about her and the relationship between his father and mother. Most moments were happy before their marriage, casted in a gold plated overtone. She spoke of their first date

and how irrevocably cheesy it was. She told him of inside jokes, secrets left behind, and passion. On her bad days, she described how they had both lost themselves.

She lost herself first. She screamed and raved, tears ravaging their way down her sunken cheeks. Doctors had to restrain her sometimes, for her own good. They couldn't stop her from speaking, though.

He learned through these bad days that his mother was raped in high school. She never admitted that it was rape, but the descriptions made it clear. Bruised wrists, spotted blood in her underwear, and the disgust of her body made her shiver.

Charlie distinctly remembered having asked her when she started to feel better about herself. She didn't answer him.

She told Charlie about how Arthur never could get over the fact that she was soiled. She confided in Arthur about her assault, and he made her feel shameful for it. She told Charlie about Arthur's pet nickname for her. Arthur would squeeze her hand and call her his bundle of *Gladiolus*. She told him with tears coating her waterline that he raised them for her and would give them to her when they were in full bloom. They were perennials, she explained, so they were always in bloom until he had stopped taking care of them.

The next day Charlie had called multiple florists to see about ordering *Gladiolus* flowers for his mother. He figured that he could give her something that was important to her long ago. It was a small gesture, but the least he could do for the woman that raised him and only now began to open up to him.

"Her emotions began to bloom and then wilt after her dementia had taken complete control of her. She forgot where she was and where she left her car keys, long after she no longer drove. She is not defined by who she was in her last moments, but remembered by the cumulation of all the fond memories that we share with her throughout our lives."

This expression of compassion didn't matter. She had passed away before he could tell her that he found someone who could supply him with the flowers that his mother so dearly coveted. He ordered them regardless, and left the flowers on her grave after dirt and clay covered her ashes. The few people that had arrived on the holiday were relieved to be released. No one likes funerals, as

they're boring and morose. No one wants to be remembered that they will die one day. *Gladys*, Charlie thought, *deserved to have people remember who she was one last time.*

Arthur and Gladys were forgotten, as the dead always are.

Cracked

By Taylor La Fountain

The mirror didn't have a clear reflection,

the glass was dirty,
lipstick kisses in the corners,
and makeup on the sides.

Still you looked at yourself every day,

eyes staring into eyes,
your eyes.

The long-lasting glaze was searching,

possibly finding what she told you,
or finding memories that remind you of being happy.

How could you be happy with knowing,

knowing how she broke,
broke the bond of love.

The tears couldn't help but travel to your eyes,

one slowly left and traveled down,
the mirror cracked slightly,
it too felt the embarrassment.

They were the symbol of true love,

but she had desires,
desires that were met elsewhere,
met by a different man.

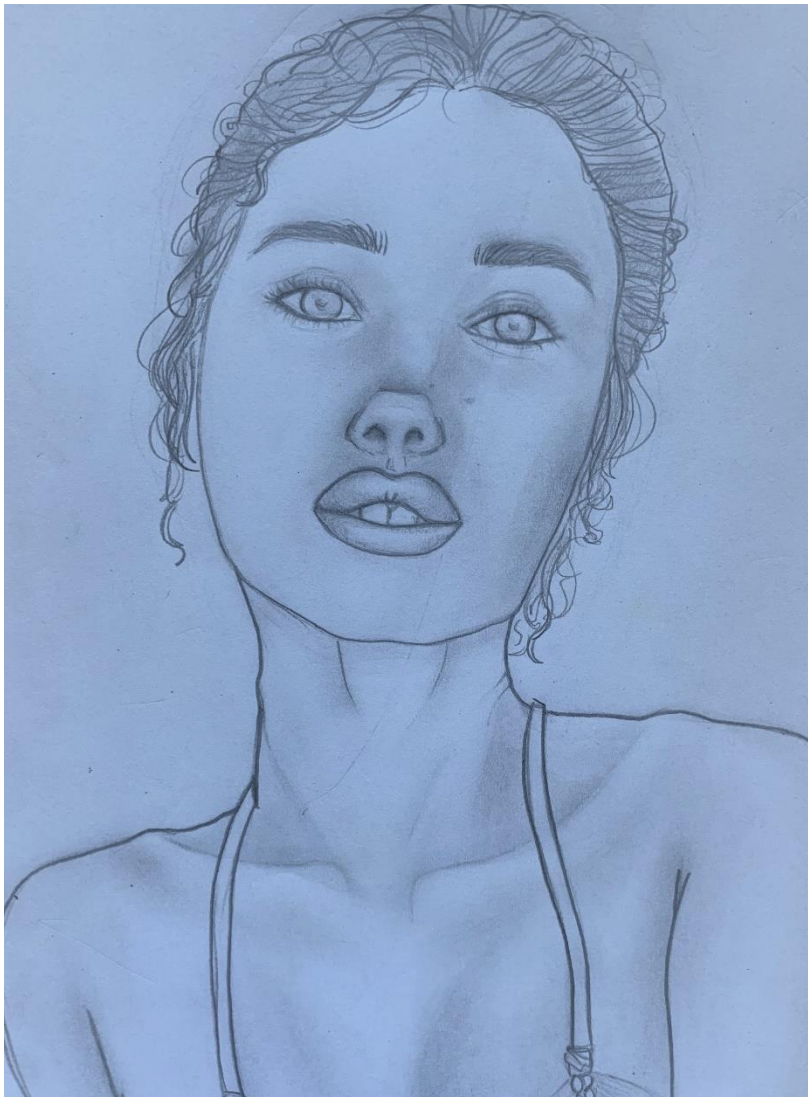
Another tear fell from both you and the reflection,
the crack grew and spread,
it looked like a lightning strike.

She asked for your silence,
this was too much for you,
the reflection judged you,
the tears began to flow like a sink faucet.

This was enough for the mirror,
it fell to the ground,
each piece shattered and flew out.

Reverie

By Abrielle Mannino



Hurricane Celeste

By Cassandra Carmichael

It's like someone hit the pause button. So peaceful and almost sad. The eye of the storm made everything seem calm. The water, of course, was pulled miles back into the ocean, leaving a desert of sand. I hold the camera at eye level, taking in the emptiness. Seaweed, garbage, bottles, shells, it was all exposed, no longer having a blanket of ocean to hide it. The docks now seem like a long bridge into nothingness, ended abruptly, not reaching the water.

"Hey, Pablo!" I shout, looking for that crazy dog. A new line of water sways in, not yet forced to move by the hurricane winds. I look back, taking a picture of the still-standing buildings. Pablo starts barking and takes off. I flinch, sand being kicked up in my face.

"What was that for?" I yell, watching as he chases off, barking away. Pablo leaves footprints in the wet sand as he darts to a blob of junk. Guess the hurricane took something off someone's house. Barefoot, I follow Pablo's tracks. The closer I get, the more the blob changes to a thing, then to a small shape like a figure. Like a person.

"Holy shit." I practically tripe on the sand, running. It was a girl. There was a girl laying in the sand, pale and small, and her eyes closed. I grab at my hair, stepping back. *Oh my God, oh my God, I found a dead body.* Then her eyes open.

"What the fuck." I jump six feet in the air. The girl sits up, pushing her drenched hair out of her face. She doesn't even look at me, just the water.

"I guess the ocean spit me out...Oh well," says the girl. I think my jaw is about to fall off. The wind picks up her hair, and I recognize her pouting lips and sad expression.

"I know you! Celeste, right? We go to the same school. I'm in your grade," I stutter. Yes, that's her, Celeste, the girl who never packed a lunch, and worked at the book store part-time, and took that black gay kid to prom. I think the only drama she had ever been in was when Sierra Jones told her to shave her legs in gym class.

Celeste glances at me, her expression unchanged, "Oh, yeah. Matias, right?" Then she gets up and moves towards the water.

“Wait! Where are you going?”

“Back in.”

“Why? What the fuck are you doing? Are you trying to kill yourself?”

She says nothing.

“You’re *trying* to kill yourself?”

She turns away and heads towards the pulling waves. I grab her arm.

“Why would you want to kill yourself? I went to your party. You’re practically rich!” I say, struggling to find the right words. The words that change minds. The words that save people.

“Let go.”

“Did-did you come out here before the storm?”

“I don’t think I swam out far enough. These shoes weigh me down.”

“What about your family and friends? You’re just going to leave them?”

“I’m never going to leave them. I’ll just look different. I’ll be the smoke from Jane’s cigarette, and Pedro’s winning score and my mother’s charm necklace. I’ll never *really* be gone.”

“What about your boyfriend?”

“He’ll be fine without me. He’s always deserved someone much better.”

“You can’t really do this? I can’t let you.”

“Here. You take my shoes.”

“Shouldn’t I give them to your boyfriend?”

“You want to give my boyfriend his dead girlfriend’s shoes? No. You keep them. As a reminder.”

“Reminder of *what*?”

“Finding peace comes in many different forms. No one has the right to take that from you.”

I don’t know what to say. I don’t know what to do. Is this right? Am I committing a crime? Am I an accomplice? I should tackle her. I should drag her away from the shore. But why does that idea feel so wrong? Her pale pink Sperry shoes soak through my shirt and leave my chest cold and chapped. I should call someone. I should call the police. I should call her name.

My mind goes silent at the sight of her walking into the water. How beautifully sad, but free she looks. Without thought, without intent, without realizing it, I hold my camera up to my eye. Water at her waist. Hands dipping into the icy water.

My camera clicks.

Years later, people still remember hurricane Charley. They remember the damaged homes and schools, lives lost, a time of pain and misfortune. But they don't know about the pale pink Sperry shoes and photograph I keep in my mother's hatbox under my bed. I experienced a different hurricane that day.

I witnessed hurricane Celeste.

Removed Deciders

Nathaniel Palchevsky

Who is it that holds the keys to my Fate?
And who is the Locksmith of my security?
Where is the Dealer of Love?
Or the Assistant to Luck?
Should one have visited me before,
My tale would be more of a show
Where is the Bearer of Skills?
Presenter of Gifts?
Describe them perchance I run into them.
Where does the teacher of Wisdom dwell
That he may come and abide in my home.
Is the Mother of knowledge yet alive?
Or her husband, the Man of Moral?
Who will be the keeper of my soul
That I may know him.
Where is the Guide of Destiny?
He will know where my life leads to.
Yet they are all secretive in their wars.
Impossible to catch, like the sun's rays
Just one, one I beg!
Just one
Only one to remove my regret.

Trigger

Marte' L Givens

“Step one Cock the gun”

“Step two Aim”

“Step three pull the trigger”

“Step one Cock the gun”

“Step two aim”

“Step three pull the trigger”

As she looks in the mirror her uniform is slowly being stained by the tears rolling down her face. Her swollen, blood-shot eyes are red from all the crying. Her hair and her military uniform are the most well-kept part of her tortured soul.

She held the gun in her right hand so tight she could feel the pulse throb against the grip of the revolver. She let out a warrior scream as she jams the gun into her temple. She pushes her face inches away from her reflection in an attempt to look into her victim's eyes. Her breath is fogging and un-fogging the mirror as the intense pain mounts. Her tears roll down her face like a fountain. It was time to kill the monster that was killing her.

She was no stranger to the up close and personal nature of death. As a matter of fact, she was the queen of it. Decorated like a Christmas tree in confirmed kills and admiration and envy of other soldiers. She was a sniper that could knock down doors, shoot from long range and kick in faces, if need be. She was the best of the best and, before retirement, she trained the best of the best.

This begs the question: Has all the death she inflicted on others finally caught up to her? Case in point, the picture on her nightstand and wool sweater next to it are constant reminders of a husband's failed fight to survive cancer.

In the late morning hours of the day, between the curtains of the white angelic hospital room. She remembers holding his warm hand as it grew colder. She watched in horror as the man she loved left the world. She watched his soft eyes peer into her soul with a soft intensity as if to tell her *I love you with the light of a million stars*. She watched hundreds of men and women die before without blinking but this one... this one hurt. Before, death was close and far at the same time, but this time she was held death's hand vicariously through her husband. Her heart ripped out of her chest with every faint squeeze of his hand and every slowed beep of the EKG. The soft intensity in his eyes slowly dimmed as his life faded. The world stopped at that moment. The hospital dissolved into white noise as the world morphed to only consist of her love for him, and his love for her. It was a different type of death but at the same time, it was the same death, but the difference of how that felt was all she could understand. She cried in the white noise as her husband slipped away leaving only his shell behind. She loved him until the last second and adored him until his last breath.

She went home that day, stopped at the doorway of her son's room, and stared at his soft face. Seconds, hours, minutes, it didn't matter how long she was there, but she wanted to remember every distinct attribute she could see on the silhouette of his face. His dark, fanned out eyelashes, his small, soft hands cradling his face, all of it. His father's distinct features lived on him. The resemblance became too painful to bear, and when she started to see her husband's face, she had to turn away. She went directly into her bedroom and just stood in the middle of it. everything in the room was evidence that he once lived. Now the only living proof of his existence was sleeping in the other room, oblivious to the fact that he just lost both of his parents. One from death, the other in spirit.

The sharp click of the revolver being pushed into ready position brought her back to being face to face with her victim once again. The pain in her eyes shifted for a brief second, and in the corner of the mirror, she caught a glimpse of her son's toy razor next to his father's real one.

She dazed into her reflection. She could see her husband, holding up their son to place him on his stepping stool beside him. The father smears his face with shaving cream, and then gently places shaving cream on his sons' soft moist skin. They laughed at their reflection as their son begins to make small elephant picture with his fingers on his dad's chin.

She could see her son's small fingers etching into her husband's foam-covered stubble. Her husband points out his chin to give his son a bigger canvas. Her son leans back with an artist's expression on his face (or at least the closest impersonation that he could conjure up for his age, from only watching television), and says "finished". Both of their eyes light up as they realize how little the elephant actually looked like an elephant.

She could almost hear her husband's voice as he instructed their son on art of shaving.

"Now stand up straight," her husband says.

The son looks at his dad, then looks at the mirror, arches his back, and pushes his chest out. They both giggle at the fact that the son was becoming a man right before their very eyes, with just a simple gesture.

"Now, lean your face into the mirror, son." The father smiles as his son listened intently. "Remember to go with the grain."

The boy replies with an eager and hardy "yes sir."

The memory of them fades away, and as it did her thoughts slowly drag her into the dark recesses of her mind once again.

Before his death, she could be seen smiling, laughing, making jokes at her husband's expense. Holding her son like a prize. Now, her son is a reminder of what she once had. Somedays that hurt, and others it was a life's blessing. No

matter what there was always emotion attached to every glance at his young face. Life draining or life-giving emotion, developed inside of her every time that she looked at him. It was like a constant fight that tugged at her soul. She continually and quietly asks herself in the back of her mind. Does she resent him? Does she resent her son's existence?

His eyes became a daily reminder of the intense pain of her loss, and his touch became a reminder that her disturbed feelings will never go away. She even would sometimes draw into herself when his arms wrapped around her. The touch from his tiny hands was a reminder that was so painful, she had to retract from him. It's harder to move on and be free of the life altering experience when you have a reminder that looks at you the way he does.

She loved him, but it was hard. She wanted to be a strong mother for him, but she can't. She can't talk to anyone about how she feels. Because only monsters feel this way. The kind of monsters that you put away and never let out, so from that day forward, she talked to the only thing that would listen and understand-- a bottle of Jack Daniels.

The bathroom light made a quick flicker. She feels muscle of the gun still pressed to her temple so deep that it creates a fold in her skin. Her face still a breath away from the demon, that was herself. She stares at her reflection, and it stares back. Inside of the eyes she could see the death in her heart; it guided her hands like a puppet on a string, it even became a part of everything she touched. Death even mailed itself to her in the form of a box from Afghanistan. Which she could see on the bed in the mirror's reflection. The wooden box still had the residue of the dessert sand, stained into the wood. You could tell it wasn't handled with care from chips on its corners.

When the box first arrived, inside of it were three items. The first item was a child's jacket that was covered in dried blood. Next was an old revolver. The last item was a note only half folded laying on top of the gun.

She thought back on the actions that lead to a child's blood-stained jacket. She remembered the weight of her M4 as she held the barrel to the ground, the sling felt like a noose around her neck and the sun warmed her face.

Her orders: Don't let anyone across the red line. Enemies have been creating suicide bombers to attack bases heavily that month and the exact words from leadership were to protect your brothers and sisters by any means because this... this is war.

The day before, she could be seen playing soccer with the local kids. The smiles on the children's faces graced the makeshift soccer field as the children ran past.

She handed out chocolate that she snuck from the commissary, so that she could see the satisfied looks on their faces as they ate chocolate for the first time.

But things quickly changed. Yesterday she was their friend, but today she was the enemy.

The adults understood the climate and nature of the situation, so they kept their distance from the soldiers, but how do you explain to a child that they're the enemy?

Answer: you don't.

In the distance, she could see a small rawboned child with an unusually thick coat kicking a soccer ball around in the street.

When he looked up from kicking the dusty tattered soccer ball, she recognized him as one of the hungrier children, who she often kicked the soccer ball around with.

When he noticed her, he greeted her with the same excited expression on his face that he revealed when he was preparing to receive chocolate.

He picked up the ball, stored it under his arm, and began to run to his friend, he raised one arm in the air in an attempt to wave to her.

"No!!!" she immediately barked to the boy as she motioned for him to go away.

But he kept charging toward her.

Her guard buddy could be heard panicking next to her.

The boy had a heavier jacket than what was considered normal for the desert, which made her senses immediately kick in.

Her mind slowed down the action of what was happening in front of her. She could see the loose tattered shoes sinking in the sand as his small statured body made the effort to get closer to her. His large jacket swayed in the hot desert air, with every abated step.

She shouldered her gun, and hoped she wouldn't have to use it, as she pointed the gun in his direction.

She screamed and begged for him to halt... but he didn't ... And then: "Step one cock the gun." Her hand pulled back on the hammer. "Step two aim." She put the boy's center mass in her sight. "Step three pull the trigger..." The bullet made everything silent.

He died instantly. If he had a bomb and a trigger. He needed not to be able to press the trigger. That's how she immediately justified it in her head. "He died instantly and for a purpose." That's what she whispered to herself as the body hit the dirt. He died for a purpose.

Sirens rang but the adrenaline in her veins kept her from hearing it. Her Battle buddy covered her as she moved forward to check the body of the child. It was against every ounce of her training, but she had to know, right then, right there, she had to know. Did she just kill an innocent boy?

Before she was in the bathroom. She was holding the note from the box. The child's blood-stained jacket sat across her lap. The note only read. He would be 19 now. She put down the note, went to her closet and put on her dress uniform. Now here we are. Step one cock the gun, step two aim, step three pull the trigger.

As she cries, her face still inches away from the mirror. At the threshold of her room, she hears a small voice that calls out... "mom."

She turns around, and she is no longer in her home. The granules of sand sank her boots into the ground about half

an inch, her dress uniform, is now her military camo. The sun beat down on her face and her partner could be heard through muffled blood rushed ears saying.

“Sergeant Pandora, what should we do? Should we shoot Sergeant?”

Her eyes darted to the distance in slow motion and she feels the blood flowing through her veins as she watches a child walking toward her in a heavy overcoat.

“WHAT SHOULD WE DO SERGEANT?”

The voice screamed through muffled blood rushed ears. Her every instinct told her to shoot.

“SERGEANT, SHOULD WE SHOOT, SERGEANT?”

his voice started ringing through her head like an order. The words changed to.

“SHOOT Sergeant SHOOT, **SHOOT!!!**.”

She tried to steady herself. Arms shaking, she looked at the child, closed her eyes and said in a calm soothing voice. “Step one cock the gun, step two aim the gun, Step three Shoot.”

Her son lets out a bone chilling scream. Her body instantly transports back into her bedroom the gun still warm from the trigger being pulled. She rushes to her son. She feels as if her body is in two places at once as she runs towards him. Half of her still in Afghanistan the other half witnessing the horrors of what she has done. She immediately picks up her son and puts her hand on his wound as an attempt to comfort him and stop the bleeding.

He grips her tightly with what little strength he can. The blood was pouring through her fingers as she tries to keep pressure on the wound.

His body thrashes about while gripping his mother's arms. His legs kicking as if he were trying to find the ground to kick off from.

His beautiful face is smeared with blood. His eyes were wide and bewildered as he looked to his mom for answers that weren't there. Blood dribbles from his lips as he tries to cry into his mother's shoulder. The thick wet blood finds its

way sliding from her shoulder down to her arm. She panics as she realizes the blood won't stop escaping his neck and mouth. There's so much of it that it paints her uniform in deep red, but the blood stains more than her uniform.

As a soldier this is not a casualty it's a victim as a mom this is simply too much to bear.

Her tears and snot run down her face as she began to rock her boy back and forth. "God no" "GOD NO" she keeps crying out as she holds him close to her body plugging the hole of gushing blood in his neck. She shakes as she rocks him. He gulps and gasps for air. she mutters the words, "I'm sorry" "I'm so sorry" through her tears.

His violent motions slow to a comfortable stillness as he starts to slip away.

His grip on her loosens as his eyes slowly release themselves from the world...

She holds him till the last second and loves him to his last breath...

"Step one Cock the gun"

"Step two Aim"

"Step three pull the trigger"

The house is quiet. The tears stop.

Pandora:

Means "all gifts", derived from a combination of Greek παν (*pan*) meaning "all" and δωρον (*doron*) meaning "gift". In Greek mythology Pandora was the first mortal woman. Zeus gave her a jar containing all of the troubles and ills that mankind now knows and told her not to open it. Unfortunately, her curiosity got the best of her and she opened it, unleashing the evil spirits into the world.

Her son lets out a bone chilling scream. The gun is still warm from pulling the trigger, and his body jerks back. Her heart stops... Her everything stops. As She moves through the air, every inch of ground gained, felt like a mile. Every piece of her was weighted by the grief. Her body is in two places at once. Half of her running to a child in Afghanistan the other half running to her dying son. She watches his

body as it continues to fall. No words, no tears, just falling.
Her thoughts only say;

Save him.

Grab him.

Hold him in your arms and make him feel safe.

Let him know mommies here.

Save the only thing that matters.

When she picks him up panic set in as the blood pours out.

She holds his face to hers as she rocks back and forth uncontrollably.

The blood smears their faces as she buries her warm tears into his body and falls to her knees.

She can hear loud cries and screams. But her child's mouth couldn't make any words... it is her screaming.

Her tears run down her face as she continues to rock her son back and forth. "God no -- **GOD NO**" she keeps crying out as she holds him close to her, while plugging the hole of gushing blood in his neck.

As the blood pours through her fingers, he grips her tightly with what little strength he can.

His body thrashes while gripping his mother's arms. His legs kicking as if he were trying to find the ground.

Blood dribbles from his lips as he tries to cry into his mother's shoulder. The thick warm blood finds its way sliding from her shoulder down to the floor. His cries were a mixture of hiccups of blood, and painful stares.

She realizes the blood won't stop escaping his neck and mouth. It paints her uniform in deep red, and it stains more than her uniform. There is no saving him. There is no fixing this. There is only being there as he gulps and gasps for air through his bloody mouth.

As a soldier this is not a casualty, it's a victim. As a mom this is simply too much to bear.

The only thing she can do is mutter the words, "I'm sorry...I'm so sorry" through her tears.

His violent motions slow to a comfortable stillness as he starts to slip away.

His grip on her loosens.

She cries her final “I’m sorry” into his blood-soaked clothes.

She pulls back to look at his face. She knew these were the last moments, his eyes would ever show light. When she stares into his eyes, they only ask ... why?

As he looks back into hers, she only replies I’m sorry.

She holds him until the last second.

She loves him until his last breath.

Fear

Nathaniel Palchevsky

We speak in whispers,
Yet they come out louder than roars
We creep up while the stillness falls
And lay right in front of you
Who can win?
Who will lose?
Taunting you with every bit
For we control you

Metamorphosis

By Rachael Whiteman



Poem 3

by Emilia Robles

I didn't allow myself to hold high hopes for us because we are so young that it is dumb. I'd rather learn step by step than run.

I found something special something so warm and gentle loving like a new set of wheels, is it me who is dumb or am I just too young.

Descend

By Marte' L Givens

At the end of the hotel hallway stands a boy only distinguished by his long ominous shadow.

Ezell is at the opposite end ready to leave for a dinner date that he setup for his out of town excursion. The distinct face of the ten-year-old child glows under the elevator light as it flickers. The boy holds the button to let Ezell on.

“Thanks” Ezell says.

The boy nods and smiles.

“So -- where’s your parents?”

“My mom... she's gone.” the boy says with a calm but slightly sad voice.

Ezell doesn’t want to know the answer to what gone meant.

“So-- you're headed to your dad.”

The boy smiles, “yep.”

The elevator stops on the 5th floor and the boy gets out.

The elevator opens on the 4th floor and a flood-like motion of two bodies violently slam into the corner and kiss each other with deep passion.

Ezell inches to the furthest corner away from the couple but couldn’t help but take a glimpse at them.

When he does, he freezes. The girl looks familiar but younger than she should be, and the guy looks like him but much younger.

His mind brushes it off as coincidence, but he can’t un-see the resemblance.

He watches as the girl says, “I love you”, and the man keeps promising he is going to leave his wife. They passionately kiss with every promise. Words like “I'm going to be all yours” and “I care about only you” are spewing from his lips.

The elevator stops on the 3rd floor, and as wistfully as they entered the elevator they leave.

Ezell composes himself. He smirks as he reminisces of a time where he made promises to keep a girl's interest. With time he learned married woman require no promises.

The elevator opens again, the lady who enters the elevator looks a lot like the same woman who left but older and slightly pregnant. Also, a little more weathered by the world with sadness and desperation settling in her bloodshot eyes. Her tight black cocktail dress barely shows a pregnancy bump, and her phone is pressed against her ear. He can hear her talking to her lover. Her tears are falling as he explains to her that he will not be able to see her tonight because of his wife. She tells him she is pregnant in a pain riddled cry of desperation and fear of rejection. Ezell begins to really feel uneasy as he starts to recall a moment where he was in that same situation.

In his mind he knows it can't be the same person. This is just an eerie Deja vu. But nevertheless, he can't stop listening. Her distressed tears made it hard to listen as the male voice makes promises; "I'm going to leave her I swear—it's going to be me and you and the baby." She sobs with pain-filled eyes and says "ok." The elevator door opens and as she gets off, Ezell can hear the faint voice of the man as she spirits away saying, "I got you."

He feels taken a back a little but again he knows it's not his same situation. It was too long ago for it to be the same girl, and he's standing right here. Nevertheless, he knows what the outcome is going to be. He would stay with his wife, and that child would grow up a bastard--alone with his mom.

The signal to 2nd floor lights up.

The sight of a blood-covered woman was enough to startle him to his core. It was the same girl, but this time she is distressed. She wears a hospital gown and a plastic wrist bracelet with her phone in hand. She doesn't talk, she doesn't scream, but there is blood dripping down her legs staining the front of her gown.

She calls her lover.

Ezell's phone rings. He picks it up. "Hello?"

He only hears white noise.

Then she hangs up. The call ends.

“Are you ok?”

She ignores him.

He tries to assess where the blood is coming from, but he couldn't.

“Can I help in any way?”

She motions him away.

But he couldn't leave this lady to her own devices. Because what kind of man would he be if he did that? He follows her to her room, standing just behind her until she collapses. He then picks her up and carries her to her room.

When they make it to her room, he could see the 10-year-old boy standing beside the chair. Ezell watches as she uses her own weak strength to get to the chair.

She looks at Ezell and pushes her hair out of her face.

“Do I look nice?”

He stands, stunned, as he starts to recognize her face.

She then looks at the boy. “This is your father.” Ezell stands, shocked. He knows her, she is the same woman from his past that he discarded years ago.

She looks at Ezell. “This is your son—it's time to take care of him now.” Her voice is breathy and frail as she collapses.

Ezell panics, his mind tells him this isn't real. And he backs out of the room quickly. The boy follows. And the door closes behind them, but not fully. Ezell pushes the door open to see the body, but it was gone.

He stares at the empty chair as the boy holds his hand.

Eyes wide and in complete shock, he walks onto the elevator with the boy.

The lights flicker as the boy's warm palm holds his hand and he stares, shocked and dismayed, down the empty hallway... the elevator closes.

Or End Up as I

By Makenzie Horner

She's just strolling right on by
But she caught my attention
Out the corner of my eye

She still looks fairly young
Yet with the look of motherhood
As though she barely slept a wink

She looks as beautiful as ever
And she has her father's eyes
But shall I approach? No, never.

I have watched her for years
Since I got my life together
And quit drinking all those beers

I've loved her always
And I will forever
But it's the decision I made in my childhood days

Here lay the sorrows
Of a remorseful mother
Who didn't understand her dreams of tomorrow

Consider every option
Don't leave any stone unturned
Or end up as I,
A woman who gave up her child
For regretful adoption

Sunlight Query

By Shannon Martino

My eyes fell to the sky

It laughed and said

“You’ll hurt your neck,
holding your head so high.”

My eyes searched the ground

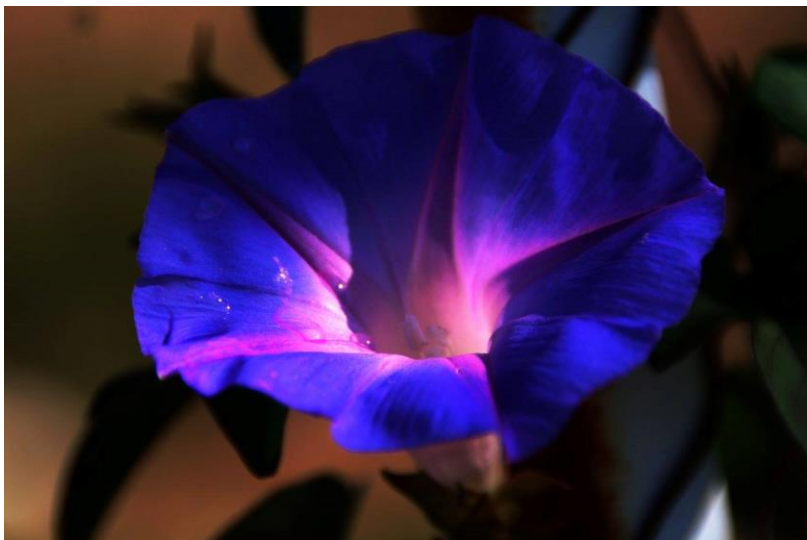
tracing every grain of soil

but with no whisper to be found

So, my eyes fell back to the sky

Violet Dew

By Rachael Whiteman



Lost, Never Found

By Taylor Lauren Poliseo

Apparently, I lost my virginity. Albeit, it's a bit late in my life to lose it. Most people lose theirs in high school, or even middle school. I lost track of mine late in my college career, or so Caroline says. She told me that last night we were with a couple of her friends, and her friend's friends. I didn't know most of them, but I still enjoyed the time spent with them. This joy was probably from the alcohol. I'm not a people person, but something about mildly poisoning my brain and liver gets me going.

I remember parts of the party. The feeling of slowly getting drunker until I couldn't taste how shit the alcohol was. That's the best part, where I could feel myself getting louder and more audacious. Saying and doing things that normally I wouldn't express, let alone do it with a drunk pizzazz and a sudden collapse or two. I'm a dramatic drunk. I discuss existential beginnings with strangers and profess feelings of camaraderie with unknown faces and names. *Kicking ass at Uno*. That's the last thing that I remember. I don't recall being led into a room by a stranger's hand or taking off my socks before sex. Uno, however, is a bold and brash memory. It's a cataclysmic echo ringing in my head, pounding in beat with my hangover. I guess Caroline didn't give me Ibuprofen.

There were multiple rounds of triumphant blurred mouths proclaiming Uno. Each with their proud voices, surrounded by calloused palms and stern manicured nails. Fuck them, I have a +4 card in my hand.

Which one of their hands groped me after holding those creased multicolored cards? Which decided to take my consent away from me?

Caroline told me that she was proud of me for finally losing my virginity. She followed it up by asking how it felt. I told her that I didn't remember losing my virginity or using

a condom last night. Did we use protection? I'll have to check the trash later.

Caroline said that it was one of those girls playing Uno, but I wasn't too sure. It could've been a guy. Either way, they must have been astounded by my strategic Uno skills and wanted to fuck me. Caroline tells me that it's because I have a great ass.

I struggle to remember what happened, and what actions I took that made that masked person think that I was okay with what they did. I questioned how it felt last night. I cannot recall.

Caroline tells me to be happy, but I only feel unsettled. I was sure that this classified as rape, but I couldn't help but feel apathetic. I wasn't there, so I couldn't feel anything un-towards the man or woman who stole my virginity. I was robbed. I lost it to a face I don't remember, a voice that I cannot perceive. I don't think that I was physically assaulted, but *I also don't remember that large bruise on my left thigh.*

I'm going to make a choice at some point whether to swear off of alcohol and blame it for my misfortunes or use it as a crutch. *Would it be better to suffocate with these claustrophobic thoughts, or blind and deafen myself to the questions I will never receive answers for?*

I didn't feel any different physically. I lost something that should have held some importance, a choice that I needed to make on my own. I can no longer make that decision. I wish that I could at least remember a name. Something to hold on to in order to be angry and feel malice. I needed a name to curse when I felt inhuman.

I didn't feel dirty, but I took a shower anyway.

Just one

By Cassandra Carmichael

When we were still us
you asked me if I ever
wrote about you.

I thought for a moment
smiled, and said
just one.

But now you're just like
the rest of them.

Piles and piles of
unsent letters and unspoken
words and
no period at the end

A Day in Infamy

By Taylor Lauren Poliseo

Clifford the Big Red Dog
Was an inspiration to us all.
To be bigger than ourselves,
And to be kind to all.
However,
His kisses drowned kittens,
And steps caused earthquakes.
He crushed civilians in his path,
With no remorse.
The scientific community marveled
At his
Size,
Color palette, and
Biological monstrosity.
This is a sad day in history,
As it marks the euthanization of Clifford.
The dog who lived for only a few short years
Until his untimely demise.
Though he was inherently a good dog,
As all dogs are,
His organs were being crushed
By his massive size.
Euthanization is a mercy for him,

But a tragedy for the world.
We must support his family's decision
To do what is best
For him and his loved ones.

A War at Heart

By Abrielle Mannino

Caitlin Woodworth heaved heavy breaths, running, as the bombs fell around her. Sticky drafts blew through the uncrowded stretch of shoreline, the salty ocean air daubed her lungs in a stinging sensation she hadn't encountered in the past. She refused to believe it was her beautiful ocean's fault and assumed it was the mordant fetor of smoke which slowly filled the atmosphere around her. Trees, houses, signs, cars, and people shook violently after each incendiary touched the fleet of ships off the coast in an immense explosion. Ash and dust collected on her clothes and face while she quickened her pace, unable to make herself slow.

Was she reckless to not look for shelter farther inland? Maybe, but she had a purpose that numbed all other reasoning in her mind.

Caitlin had been separated from her family not moments before when the sirens had sounded. They had intended on spending that Sunday afternoon as they always did, wandering the trails prompting the sea and finding hidden treasures of cowries and triton shells scattering the sandy floor. She hadn't intended on lagging behind her father. However, she, due

to her juvenile independence complex of finding her own way home after an argument with her parents, put herself in a difficult place and strayed into the brush.

Rather than home, she quickly found herself staring at the rich earth beneath her when the first of many explosives to be felt by the island hit. Unable to properly scramble to her feet and out of the way of the trampling feet pounding from the shoreline, she was lifted into the arms of a passing stranger and carried away from the main. The person had carried her into the square, speaking to her in a language she didn't recognize. However noble their efforts, she struggled against them and eventually regained her freedom through a swift elbow to their face.

They cursed.

She ran.

Preceding the guilt of her actions, she darted toward the ocean once more.

Planes carried what felt like hundreds of explosives, for every time one fell another took its place. They left mass destruction in their wake, not caring about who or what was destroyed. Of course, Caitlin didn't care either in the moment, couldn't care. She stumbled over the sandy paths of the coast, not daring to look up and out across the water. She ran towards her house, knowing her family must have fled to their only safe haven. With every step her heart sank. She braved a look out across the sea, and was startled beyond recognition by what she saw. More planes came, more areas became wreckage in front of her own eyes, each bright flash of explosion starkly contrasting the clouded, grayed horizon.

The trauma of the horrific screams would never fully sink in, just pondering the idea of how many people had been destroyed in the horrible ways they were knotted her stomach and caused bile to rise in her throat. Caitlin sped up, refusing to pay any more attention to the grisly scenes displayed before her eyes.

The gravel underneath her trembled with each new explosive and the tremors caused her to wobble on her feet while her eyes blurred from the smoke. Unknowingly, intractable tears slipped down her cheeks hindering her running ability as well. Planes flew, bombs dropped, and as the dust began to clear... she saw it. Her beautiful solace, her memories, the only home she had ever known.

Another plane flew towards her, but this one seemed different. Caitlin's heart jumped into her throat. This pilot was veering away from the fleet, flying towards the one area she was dreading; her home. Maybe it was her imagination, but the pilot seemed to see where she was looking. He met her gaze briefly, only to smile and hold up a small handgun. The weapon was negligible to her, evoking no fear whatsoever,

but nothing could have prepared her for the oncoming horror.

Caitlin screamed as her oasis was desolated, trigger newfound speed into her mad dash forward. Shards of insulation, wood, and brick flew towards her, slicing and nicking her uncovered flesh.

The crumbling world seemed to pause as she looked at her house. The once beautiful shelter was nothing but debris and wreckage. The blue color of the walls had transformed to become what was now a dulled gray through the ash and smoke. The front pillars crumbling due to the pressure from the caving roof above. Glass lay shattered upon the ground, shimmering in an almost impossible, icy way. Her mother's mosaic angel statue, who had acted as a protector of sorts to their family, lay broken beyond repair.

Caitlin looked to the ground only to find her stuffed bear, the one thing she had never been able to let go of since a baby, now charred and armless on one side. She let out a sob before kneeling to the ground to pick it up. Caitlin peered up at the plane through squinted eyes, red rimmed her vision as her rage overtook her. Tears of sadness and rage mixed into an inexplicable feeling she had never known before. Shaking, she collapsed into a kneeling position, shock and grief weighing down upon her frail stature.

Voices of comfort swarmed her head, ones she swore weren't her own.

"You mustn't worry child," one said.

"We will help as best we can," said another, a man's voice that time.

She stayed rigid in her position; eyes frantically searching for people. None could be seen.

"We promise to help, darling," the last voice was one she recognized. Her mother.

Caitlin choked out a sob and dug her face into her hands, "They're not real, they're not real," she repeated, rocking on her heels.

“We are always here, my darling girl, always,” her mother’s voice resonated around her when a sudden gust into the air made her fair hair flutter around her.

Inexplicably, the plane that had murdered everything she held dear burst apart. It showered over her in an array of burning metal and smoking parts. In her dazed state she ignored the raining charred pieces. She hadn’t noticed until a wing came crashing from above her.

“Caitlin, move!” the voice called, the voice that sounded very much like her mother’s.

Diving out of harm's way, she missed the plane’s burning wing by way of sheer luck and adrenaline that pulsed through her veins.

She threw her head in every direction expecting to see her mother, but she was nowhere to be found. Finding herself unable to catch her breath, she did not anticipate or intend for the aftermath. When the wing hit the ground, an explosion of asphalt and shrapnel threw her back into the palm tree, concussing her head. She stood dizzily and stumbled forward, still intent on plodding towards her house. Maybe her mother *was* there.

Caitlin continued stumbling, only to come to a sudden stop as she saw no way to enter without severely injuring herself in the process. Caitlin stifled at two realizations; she was never going back in and no one was ever coming back out. Caitlin turned and looked for someone to help her, anyone. Not knowing what else to do, she ran back to the city’s square. Teddy bear in hand, she ran as fast as her legs could carry her across the quivering ground.

With every fallen projectile, a new ringing came to her ear. Houses fell around her, leaving piles of rubble and destruction. The screams of the innocent would never leave her mind as more houses and streets were filled with explosives.

Deadly fumes choked her air, and her lungs screamed for the breath they needed to let her continue. She collapsed to her knees, but only for a second, realizing that if she gave

up now there was no way she could find her loved ones. Caitlin clutched her bear, continuing her search for her family, listening to the symphony that was the continuous explosions of ships offshore.

Hours seemed to pass, if not days or even years, before the explosions finally stopped. Newly homeless came out from small areas of destroyed homes. They were bloodied and bruised from the sudden attack, mourning their dead.

“Caitlin,” Caitlin froze, searching for the voice.

“Caitlin Woodworth, darling, please,” the voice called again.

“M-mother?” tears blurred her sight once again. All the noise in the world couldn’t silence the voice she was most yearning to hear.

“We are here, but you won’t find us where you expect, we are so sorry,” a very masculine voice responded to Caitlin’s grieving tears. It was the voice of her father.

“No... no, no, no,” Caitlin ignored the pleading voices coming from around her, and continued into the square.

People crowded the streets, holding little or nothing besides their crushed spirits. Caitlin tried to scan for her family, but the crowds were too large to find them. She ran through the people, only to crash into an officer. She begged him to help her, but he was convinced he couldn’t help at any cost, for he had issues of his own. She continued beseeching, weeping, shouting for her family, only to find others doing the exact same.

Her hope had been crushed, convincing herself they were dead. The sudden register made her crumple to the ground, sobbing in a heap of hopelessness. She cried, and cried, and cried in the rubble dirt that surrounded her. She cried for so long her body had no tears left to shed, the salty water dripped to make a puddle underneath her. Scratches from the explosions trailed down her arms and face, to any other uncovered skin. The cuts burned in satisfaction as she gave in to the pain.

“Caitlin,” the voices called again.

Caitlin let out an anguished cry, a last defense against the maddening sounds.

“Caitlin, please, you must listen,” but Caitlin didn’t listen, her spirit crushed, she silenced the sounds with the last of her tears.

The crowds began to diminish, trailing to the police and remaining army officers. Caitlin refused to move from her crumpled position, not considering moving, until warmth seeped up her shoulder.

She turned to find a man whom she didn’t know staring down at her. His dirty blonde hair and blue eyes imploring her to keep his gaze. The sorrow they held was almost as painful as Caitlin was sure hers reflected. She couldn’t seem to recollect any memories of him, but... he looked very familiar at the same time.

He opened his mouth to say something, but Caitlin didn’t let him finish, listening only to the echo of her feet across the pavement in rhythmic steps, leading far away from him. She had scrambled to her feet and ran, ran to the shore of her *own* safe haven. It wasn’t anything special, quite the opposite really, just a cavernous space off a cliff leading to the endless stretch that was the Hawaiian beaches. The cave was where she went if she was granted alone time after school, or had needed time to relax and regain her composure.

Heavy footsteps echoed her hastened treading. She knew she couldn’t stop, wouldn’t stop. She ran to the shore, picking up speed. She took impossible twists and turns down the rocky path. She slid between two rocks that her petite frame could only barely fit through, hoping and praying the man couldn’t follow her. She careered down the dunes, ignoring the constant roar of waves and blare of soldier horns.

Caitlin flung herself into the hollow opening of the grotto, going into its deepest corner and collapsing against the farthest wall.

Her concussed head induced a pulsating migraine and terrible retches, followed by the stench of vomit filling the

craggy space. Her heaving breaths made her light headed as she struggled to keep quiet in the echo of the cave. Shaky hands lifted the stuffed bear to her face, muffling her breathing as a precaution if he was close enough to hear her shallow, waning breaths.

The man seemed as if he was gentle, sweet even, but the voices had said something she was willing to attend to. It was only one word, but enough to make her listen,

“Run,” they had told her, and that she did.

His veneer could only hide so much, and it didn't change the fact he had holstered a gun, the same gun she had seen in the hand of the Japanese pilot, when he destroyed her home, her family, and her life.

Pick Me

By Shannon Martino

“Pick me”

I bend to you,

Like a palm tree

Governed by the winds

A marigold,

roots tucked in soil deep

face in the sun

Pick me

A Simple Bird

By Nathaniel Palchevsky

A Simple Bird

As I sing my, I descend from the heavens

It's a song of no words, of impossible rhythm

Has no end, nor beginning.

No man's voice is as good as mine

Although I'm fowl, I am not vile

I dazzle the eyes of men, but my apparel I cannot lend

For by itself it falls apart

But on my it is a piece of Art

So light, so free,

I can go anywhere I want to be.

Free to fly to any places, yet content to dwell in a cage

I am the wind

Japanese Garden

By Rachel Whitemen



2020

By Elena Samardjieva

Stop! Stop! Stop!

Stop the merchants,

Stop the schools,

Stop the churches,

Stop the hugging,

Stop seducing,

Stop the beauty salons

like creator didn't make us beautiful already.

Close the borders,

Close the eateries,

Close the epicureans,

Close the inns.

Stop the noise,

Stop moving.

So rivers can flow easily

And Oceans will purify,

And Animals can run freely,

Beautiful flowers through concrete will thrive.

Stop the industry.

Stop the machines.
Stop the capitalism.
Stop for a breath and for a laugh,
Stop, to reflect
To safe,
Stop for life
Stop, so then Nature can be heard again.

Contributor Biographies

Makenzie Horner

I am a dual enrolled student from Lakewood Ranch High School and I will be attending SMU in Texas next year!

Taylor La Fountain

My name is Taylor La Fountain and this semester was my first time taking any type of writing course. This is one of my poems i wrote during the class where multiple stories are weaved into one.

Abrielle Mannino

I am a collegiate student at State College of Florida Venice campus and am hoping to pursue a career in communications and international relations. Writing has always been an integral part of my creative expression I often get lost in novels or spend hours painting my emotions onto a canvas. From childhood, communication and the intricacies of expression through the arts have fascinated me. This interest in communications, combined with my innate tendency to take up leadership roles as a result of being the eldest of four children, has catalyzed my love of international relations and politics. In terms of separate passions, I love the natural world and find inspiration there more than anywhere for my pieces. This love was fostered in me from a young age as well, and as I have grown my love of nature has grown with me.

Shannon Martino

My Name is Shannon Martino. I have attended The State College of Florida Manatee-Sarasota since Spring 2019. I am currently seeking my Associate in Arts. I am a prospective applicant for the SCF A.S Nursing program. I love music, art, and science. I am passionate about obtaining as much knowledge as I can from all outlets. These are poems that I wrote in middle school in 2005. This is my first time sharing personal work with my peers.

Nathaniel Palchevsky

Nathaniel Palchevsky is enrolled into the SCF Collegiate School-Venice Inaugural class, finishing up high school while also being a full-time college student. His favorite past times include riding around on bicycles, exploring trails, and playing video games. He is still searching what is for him in the future by trying new things while also working on his A.A. degree.

Taylor Lauren Poliseo

Taylor Poliseo is currently finishing her last semester at SCF. She enjoys the campus life and being involved in clubs. Taylor loves nerd culture, history, writing, and reading at the open mics on campus. She is a dedicated student who loves the staff and students at SCF.

Elektraphrog Staff



Kassidy Boles is a coffee guru, working over five years at a small French bakery, Croissant & Co., in Venice, Florida. She is an aspiring writer with previous publications, including Elektraphrog! Kassidy lives a busy life spending time at work, school, and chasing after her five cats and chinchilla. She'll tell you she spoils them, but really, they spoil her.



of the corporate level.

Jerod Buchler is a student at State College of Florida in Venice and a grocery clerk. He is a former cook, amateur woodworker, and tailor. One of his favorite interests out side of things he can do is getting tattoos and trying to finish two sleeves. Jerod works and is from Englewood, Florida. He is probably best known for his ability to make the best cornbread ever made. Jerod will always try to impress you by trying to make the best meal you've ever had. Jerod is currently trying to work and be at the top



Cassandra Carmichael is a current student at the State College of Florida in Venice. She is a big writer, reader, and traveler. Since 10th grade, Cassandra has been working on a collection of poetry she plans to later self publish hopefully this year. Her favorite books include *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur and *Red Queen* by Victoria Aveyard. Cassandra has traveled to many places such as China, Europe, and Mexico. Her dream career would be working as a zookeeper and self-publishing.

Cherish Crittendon is a current student at State College of Florida in Venice. Where she won the fall 2019 poetry slam. She is enthusiastic about writing, traveling, reading, art, history, and science. Miss. Crittendon has traveled the U.S .A and Europe and has visited Le Louver in Paris. Even more recently she has been writing a number of short stories she hopes to publish a book as well as a book series. Miss. Crittendon is mostly focused on becoming a Marine Biologist and writing is more of a hobby for the time being. She is best know for being brutally honest and drinking tea at all hours of the day and her dark humor.

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