



Elektraphrog

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Cover Image
Detail from “DragonCayenne”
By Miranda Correa

Back Cover Image
Detail from “Western Tussock Moth Caterpillar”
By Daisey Acevedo-Gonzalez

Table of Contents

Clownfish Waterworks By Kaylee Alameda	1
Spring Flowers by Kristin Clark	6
My Mother's Flowers by Kristin Clark	7
The Dichotomy of the Season by Rowen Geddes	8
Sunset on a Lake in Ellenton by Hailey Greene.....	12
Rain Lily by Kathleen Soysa	13
Dragon Cayenne by Miranda Correa.....	15
The Sun and Moon by Kathleen Soysa	16
The Emerald of Elysia by Alayna Robarts	18
A Sunset on Anna Maria by Hailey Greene	26
Mcintosh Memoir by Alayna Robarts.....	27
Make America Great... Again? By Laura Stephenson.....	30
Lady Dimitrescu by Natalie Brown	31
The Fisherman by Christopher Nevins	32
Scared to Death by Laura Stephenson	34
Estranged From a Once Favored Father by Kaylee Alameda	35
Between the Dream by Kathleen Soysa.....	36
The Year of the Tiger by Alayna Robarts.....	37
Boba by Miranda Correa	38
Liya by Alfia Myers	39
My Mistake by Tim Nguyen.....	43
You Knew by Natalie Goodson	46
my Mother, my God by Brianna Connelly.....	47
Brett by Laura Stephenson.....	49
Coffee in the Mountains by Kristin Clark	50
Hopeless Romantic and Manic Kaylee Alameda	51
In Defense Of by Isabella Estrada.....	52
Black Cat Crossing by Kaylee Alameda.....	53

Fire Alarm by Maddie Delong.....	57
A Mother’s Love by Julia Whisonant.....	58
Lottery Chicken for Dinner by Jason Posa.....	61
Cloudy Day by Alyssa Griglen	63
Comfort in Sea Major by Kaylee Alameda	64
It was a Dark and Gloomy Day by Daisy Acevedo-Gonzalez	65
Depressed Drinking Problem by Rosemarie Heiman	66
Western Tussock Moth Caterpillar by Daisy Acevedo Gonzalez.....	68
Contributor Biographies.....	69
Elektraphrog Staff	72

Clownfish Waterworks

By Kaylee Alameda

The story of the little boy fished from the sea the morning after a full moon became an urban legend around the small city, but no one knew just how authentic the origins of the rumor were. The boy was “born” in a town like any other, where the colorful blossoms painted the grass in Spring and the leaves showered down in piles during Autumn. A town where the sea met the land and dozens of old, worn-down docks lined up above the yellow sand full of broken, white, shells. Along the docks were beautiful houses and businesses made of red wood and carved cobblestone, a picture-perfect community to build a family in. But the boy wasn’t truly born in that little, warm town. In fact, he wasn’t truly “born” in the way most people would consider the word. The boy had cracked his way out of a tiny egg and into the open blue vastness of the ocean almost a year before he would inevitably be “rescued”. The little boy, or more accurately, the little clownfish burst from his shell surrounded by almost a thousand of his brothers. Comfort was all he found in the ocean, the deep blue water was always heated by the heart of the sun above and the pastel anemones wrapped around him with tickling bristles that made him feel safe. But on the day of his true “birth”, a netting was thrown temptingly over the coral reef. The little clownfish and several of his brothers swarmed the stringy mass tentatively curious. It twisted and tangled about it the cruel waves and swallowed up the school of fish like a great and mighty whale of folk tales. All the little clownfish could do was struggle and flop uselessly as the fishing net slowly rose from the comfortable warmth the water provided and into the cold harsh air above. Pushing him further and further, until he was drowning and choking on sharp winds, his gills fell over themselves and suffocated him. Surrounded by his dying kin, he took one last agonizing breath, like frozen chips of glass down his transforming throat, and let out a scream, a

scream of life. Thrashing around a lot more effectively, he began to breathe, truly breathing the air around him. The water that had once been his home now bled from his eyes as he kicked and wailed. A hurricane of confused yells whirlwind from the boats above, the fishermen pulling the net up with renewed vigor and hurried desperation to keep the tiny infant from sinking back into the cruel ocean.

Time was a catalyst for forgetting. The years go by, 27 to be exact, and once cherished memories fade behind the never pausing or hesitating flow of time. At 27 years old, Gerry was still nothing more than the adoptive son of an old mariner, with no plans for the future nor hint of his past. Gerry grunted with extrusion as he shoved the anchor off the ship down below the docks. He never understood why his father made him do the heavy-lifting jobs, his frame was not exactly “fit” for such work. It was their second most argued subject, but far behind his origins. Where he came from had always been a divisive subject between his father and him. Anytime he asked, Gerry would get the same old wives' tale, fished from the middle of the ocean? It was nonsensical! But ocean men were known to be set in their ways, and just like the old man's countenance, his story never faltered. All the familiar faces around town had always told him not to blame an old fisherman for telling tales, that it was just in his nature to “exaggerate”. With a frustrated huff, Gerry lifted himself off the low boat onto the moldy wooden docks, decidedly on his way to argue with his father once more. His mind buzzed with annoyance as he stomped along the docks, testing their solidness, so focused he almost didn't notice the unfamiliar face calling to him with an even less familiar accent.

“Hey, kid!” The older gentleman yelled from the comfort of the gravel road connected to his father's tackle shop a few feet from the docks. Gerry halted an awkward distance away from the man, gawking at him. He was rather stout, a little man with a dark suit on and a fedora blocking the sun from

his eyes. "Come 'ere, kid!" He summoned with the confident authority of a king.

Gerry stepped forward, "Um... Yes, sir...?" He twiddled with his fingers anxiously.

"What's that on your face, huh?" The man sniffled as he lit a cigar.

"Oh!" His long, thin fingers came to the orange splatch on his cheek, "Just a birthmark, sir! Had it since my father pulled me from the ocean..." He chuckled uncomfortably. The man eyed him expressionlessly, taking a deep drag of his cigar between his stubby fingers and blowing out a seemingly endless cloud of gray. Gerry coughed violently, inhaling the heat of the day doubled by the burning ash.

With the gentle shake of his lit stick, the man spoke once more, "You've got a unique look, kid. And a sense of humor!" He chuckled as dryly of the tobacco in his hand, "You ever think about coming to the city? Bet you'd do good as a performer."

"I haven't, sir! Never performed before, either!" Gerry tentatively stepped away from him, "Just some old mariner's son, nothing special."

"I'd beg to differ!" The bulbous man took a demanding step in front of him, whipping a little card out from a hidden pocket of his overcoat and shoving it in his palm, "Well, if you're ever in the city, call that number. I'd be happy to give you a chance, and I'm sure you'd fit *right* in with the rest of the gang." His toadlike face curled into a grin, "They're just like you, ya know. Unique." Gerry forced a nod as he gulped. *Other people just like him?* With one last shake of the hand, the man sauntered off, probably to find someone else to disturb. Gerry glanced down at the thick card in his hand. It was shiny and hard, if he didn't know better, he would've thought it was a credit card.

In bold letters, it read: "MARVIN AND SONS FAMILY FOOLERY" with the subtitle, "*Clowning* around for half a century". Plastered in the corner next to the motto was a logo of sorts, a man with a brightly painted face and a wide grin. On the other side was the name 'Marvin Foolsberry',

underneath was a phone number with an area code he didn't recognize.

Gerry read and reread the little card on his walk back to his father's shop and their shared home, the argumentative frustration completely forgotten.

"Father?" The bell chimed in time with his entrance into the oceanic themed store. Gerry stopped in front of the register where his old man stared at him expectantly, "...There was a man out there, today. From the city, I think." Gerry was still hypnotized by the piece of cardboard held between his thumbs and forefingers.

"Bah." His father rolled back in his seat, "I heard about him, short bloke, right?"

"Um, yeah, pretty short..."

"Heard he's been handing out business cards. Is that what'chya got there?" He nodded to his hands with crossed arms.

Gerry quickly tucked the card in his pocket, "Oh, yeah." Silence fizzled over the two of them, inspiring Gerry to shift his weight between his feet. "He told me I 'had a unique look'." He mumbled nervously.

His father scoffed, "Don't mind him, those city folk all have a 'unique dickishness'." The old man pushed himself to a stand using the old wooden countertop, just about prepared to go on a rant, "I'll tell you-"

"No, no!" Gerry interrupted, "He wasn't being an ass. He said unique in a good way. He said I could be a performer." He sighed, brushing his fingertips along his cheek once more, "He said there were other people like me there, as well. Maybe that's where I came from! Maybe this is what I'm supposed to be doing..."

"Well..." His father watched him with saddened eyes, "If you want to try it out, who am I to stop you?" His dry lips cracked a smile, "But you didn't come from any city, not unless it was Atlantis!" Gerry rolled his eyes playfully at the remark, with his father's support, he would go to the city.

Gerry stared up at the cloudy gray sky above him, smoke swirled through the air like an endlessly dancing black swan. The city was cold, dreary, and made of metal. Nothing like the warmth of the little village he had grown up in. But here he stood, outside a dingy old verge-of-collapsing studio and he had never felt so excited. Mr. Marvin had told him to just walk in, but his manners got the best of him, and he knocked against the screen door.

“I told ya to just walk in, kid!” Gerry recognized Mr. Marvin’s voice screaming from the other side.

“Alright! I just wanted to make sure...” He stumbled inside and was immediately grabbed by two pairs of hands, pushing and pulling him through a little door in the back. A half-gurgled yelp broke from his lips and cold paint was splattered on.

“Shh, Shh, calm down!” The person on his right comforted as they helped him out of his fisherman’s coat and into a neon orange, black, and white costume.

Gerry fought for only a second before he was shushed again by another slab of paint, “What’s going on?!” He cried.

“We’re dressing you, we’re almost done!”

After a few more minutes of struggling and frigid strokes of wet paint, Gerry was thrust in front of a mirror. His reflection was that of a clown...fish. A clownfish clown. He couldn’t help but chortle as he reached to touch his face. His makeup artists had managed to include his birthmark in the final look.

“So, what do you think?” He finally got the chance to look his new friend in the face, they were dressed up as a lionfish clown and the one beside them was painted in blues and purples, clearly another type of fish clown.

“I love it.” Gerry the Clownfish Clown’s smile, enhanced by a line of white, grew into a sure grin. The waves of chaos and color he had longed for since his “birth” had finally found him, and reunited him with himself.

Spring Flowers

By Kristin Clark

The beauty of spring,
Awakens with the sun's warmth,
As spring flowers bloom.

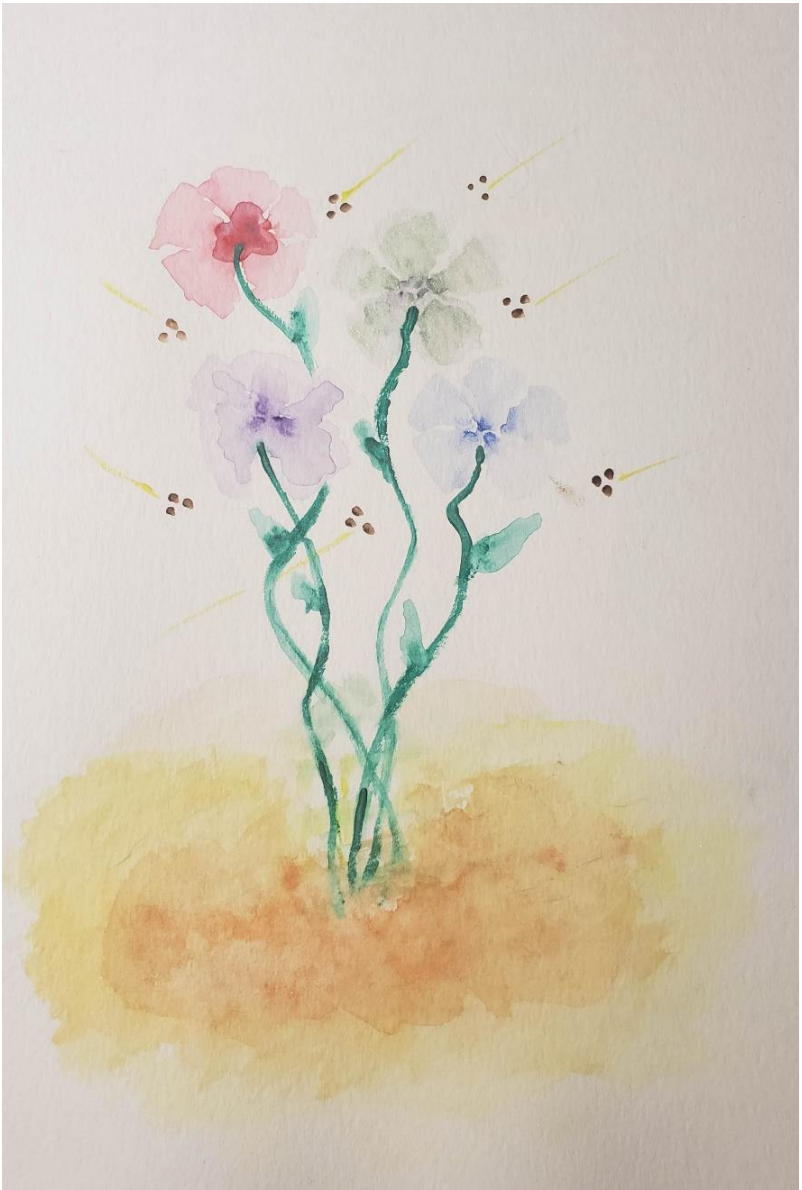
A refreshing breeze,
Opens my eyes to see them
In the pale dusk light.

Spring flowers blossom,
My heart is filled with content,
My moment is here.

I become myself
Within this field of flowers,
During this spring day.

My Mother's Flowers

By Kristin Clark



The Dichotomy of the Season

by Rowen Geddes

when you stare too long at the sun
or even a pale mockery of her light
she leaves her searing kiss
a hazy burn
beneath your eyes
in colors that don't exist

and like her
when i stared too long
you marked my hands and mind
with a phantom windswept glide
of soft fingers and cool touches

when you stand out in the rain
or even under the dregs off her lips
she leaves nothing untouched
the trickle of her waters
a tease teetering on too much

and like her
when i stood beside you
you soaked me down to the bone
with liquid lucid fantasies
and midnight colored lies

you came fleeting as summer storms
a passionate gale
a delicate shower
a drop-
of tepid love
and i cried out begging for more

you scalded me like the sun
a dew fractured beam
a skin crawling blaze
a ray-
of salacious want
and my face burns when i remember

when someone leaves
i think a part of us dies
the sun may be beyond the clouds
beyond the maw of the sky
but the places she touched
ooze sour gobs
of cracking flesh

when someone leaves
i think a part of them stays
the storm may have moved on
clouds swirled and whirled

by a moody wind
but the tears she cried
drip down the world
carving streams and rivers alike

to miss someone
is to acknowledge they left
to realize that who they are
who they were
is no longer something you have

to miss someone
is to lust after a ghost
to want for someone
whose touch will
no longer meet your own

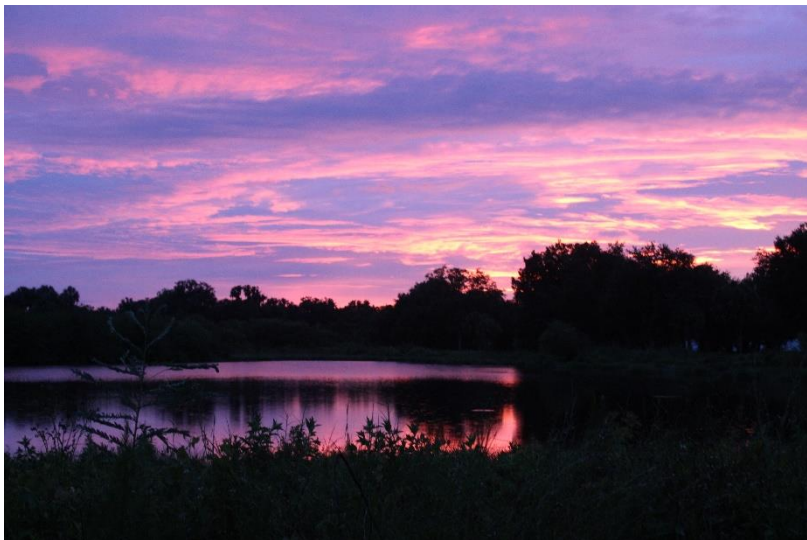
to miss someone
is to bury oneself
to lay in a grave
and die with them again
to hold a crumbling hand
a body held together
by faint memories
and the taste of spring

so really
even as i compare you to the sky
to the world
the sun,
the rain,
even as the best parts of me
rot
with the worst parts of you,
even as i watch what's left crumble
the sweet words we exchanged
dissolved with the skeleton of who you were,
i don't think i miss you at all
because missing you
would mean admitting that you're gone

i don't wait for the sun when it storms
because her light still burns my eyes

Sunset on a Lake in Ellenton

By Hailey Greene



Rain Lily

By Kathleen Soysa

She stooped below society's line,
Down to meet her clear water eyes with his
Gray puddled ones.
As the two waters mixed,
His sunken eyes crinkled like
Rained-on letters,
And a tear (or two) joined the other drops
Falling from an April sky.
His tremoring hands were spotted, uses maps,
Ones who treasure had already been found.
They brushed lightly against hers,
Those slender fingers wrapped in satin,
Which offered a Spring parasol with frills and
Lace.
He took it with polite
Reluctancy
And smiled brightly with a mouth full
Of old piano keys.
The pinkness in her youthful lips faded
A little,
As she smiled back.
The young lady stood
As the rain turned her white dress to gray
And shrank it to cling her thin frame.

Her ravened curls unwound and glistened
As she turned to enter the carriage
Filled with gawking peers.
The carriage door closed, the horses resumed their canter,
And the old man listened to the fading, soft,
Thunder
Of the hooves and wooden wheels.
As the sounds levelled to the rain and his shallow breaths,
The old man pondered the strange kindness
Of the blossoming young woman,
In the rain.

Dragon Cayenne

by Miranda Correa



The Sun and Moon

By Kathleen Soysa

His royal majesty the
celestial Midas who
Demands attention,
Takes up every unboxed space,
Hates any source of
Unwilled retirement.
A merciless tyrant of transparency and
Disclosure.
Making his parodial rounds daily,
We sigh with relief when
He adorns himself in robes from faraway countries
And grandly exits to his complementary chambers.
His reign is done
For now.
When he disappears a
Humble old man
Quietly sells his dripping candles which last the night.
Icing the kingdom with warm silver.
His face,
Marred with age and prayer.
He dons his hooded cloak and walks the king's battered
streets.
Passing our sleepless children
Chuckling to himself of things unbeknownst to the king.

For he is blessed with the quiet beauty of friends
While our king treads his kingdom loud and
Alone.

The Emerald of Elysia

By Alayna Robarts

You didn't expect to be lying in the dirt in the dead of the night, but then again, you never expected your life to go so wrong. You saw your life as peaceful and calm, of no value to the green-skinned demons that stalk the Lesser Veil. Your village is inconsequential, too below their notice to gain their wrath. But came they did all the same... For you were only deluding yourself. They came in the night, clad in bone and fur with arms of jagged steel. Their fangs bared, eyes red hot with rage, and muscles taut with endless lust. Orcs. The many, the few, the proud and bold. The heretical sycophants of the Nightmare Heart. They slaughtered all, sparing not a soul. The men, the women, the children too, all cut down before their blood-soaked fury. This was to be your fate, were it not for the kindly hunter. An orc regarded you with cruel eyes, shattering your leg with a thunderous stomp of his boot. And yet, before he could finish you, an arrow emerged from between the beast's thick skull. The hunter yelled in panicked resolve, pulling you to your feet and pointing to beyond the glade you grew up in. He pressed a dagger into your hand and told you to never look back. To never stop moving. To spare all Elysia from the plague of dreams. As you limp down the dark path, the smell of ash and blood lingers on the faint breeze. The screams are dying down, but they still reach you, your knife-like ears bristling from the horrific cacophony. You dare not look behind you, for you know what you will see. You know what fate befell Thornwood and its people. Your family, your elders, the unarmed and gentle... All slaughtered like cattle. Your beloved village tucked in the trees, the place you'd been born, and your father, and his father before him had become another victim in this senseless war. Your limbs ache with fatigue. Your heart pounds with adrenaline. Your mind numbs to keep you standing. Your leg hurts worse than anything you've suffered, and your vision is blurring and misted from

your tears. But even still you carry on, mind reforged with steel, heart no longer young. Your hand clutches the palm-sized glowing green gem you hid within your cloak. The reason for the invasion of your quiet home... The reason for your life being flipped on its head, denying your petty dreams for one far greater than you. The heart of a true dream, the mind of One, the soul of ephemeral paradise.

The Emerald of Elysia.

It is said that the Emerald was found by the ancient ones, the firstborn sons and daughters who walked along with Elysia's Lesser Veil. Upon its discovery, the ancient ones soon realized its power. Those who wield the emerald have full control of the veils, Greater and Lesser, of their quiet utopia. The Lesser was reality, as it was portrayed by the Goddess of long ago. It is where those of mortal flesh reside, their souls bound to an anchor of body and mind. The Greater is beyond the sights those of Lesser dwelling see. It is a place where magic dwells and demons thrive. An eternal dream, of beyond and between mind and matter. The firstborn ancient ones guarded the sacred gem, treating it with reverence and worship as a symbol of their fair creator. But all did not last forever, as one of the firstborn, an elf, like yourself, had stolen it away, perverting the Veils for his obsessed desires. The goddess could not kill him, for she loved her creation too much, and merely parted the emerald from him and sealed him away. Into the depths of the Greater Veil, where the dreams of dark reside. For Eons, this emerald has stayed safely guarded by the Thornwood Elves, your people, descendants of the ancient elves.

You remember only hours ago; you ran into the temple as it was engulfed in flames. A shrine of wood and stone, carved with your people's history, now ablaze and charred. There on the ground lay the village Oracle, Denisha. She was the wisest and oldest of us, frail and admittedly unhinged, but never wrong in her vision. The sights she saw always came to be, and here she lays, muttering to herself. "I saw this... I saw this all," she says with a feverish inflection, her skin weathered and pallid like leather torn from sickly cattle.

“We need to get out of here!” You said. “The orcs are here, and they’re after the Emerald!” You didn’t pay attention to her ramblings... Your mind was too harrowed, too frayed by the steel edges of orcish blades. You knelt to lift her wiry form, but she placed her shaking hand on your forearm. Blood poured in a steady stream down her face from a gash marking it, the cursed blades of orcs leaving wounds that will not heal. “This is the only way it could be. This was the only chance we had. Forgive me for this child... Forgive this old woman’s sins.” Her voice was sullen and repentant, her bleary pupils dilating as life slowly leaves her body.

Suddenly, her eyes glowed, and her voice, usually so gentle-mannered and quiet, took on a sound so otherworldly and foreign, it was unlike anything you’d heard before.

Wielder of dreams, of humble start.

Born from ashes, and the nightmare’s heart.

The god of nightmares casts his gaze.

Make haste, make haste, lest all be razed.

To the land of Alzier, of scale and claw.

The dragons know the way.

Please, save us all.

She collapsed soon after, her body losing all strength and withering away into a mummified corpse. Any life she once had ebbed away until it dried like an ancient salt sea. Your mind was frazzled but hardened from this besetment. A foreign sense of purpose and willpower overwhelmed you, fueling your limbs to carry you out of the temple even as your vision blurred from your tears

So, at the behest of the oracle, you began your journey.

Now, hours later, here you are, at the edge of an ancient bog of peat and iron. The air stinks of death and decay, of things long buried beneath the brackish waters. You’re more exhausted than the dead, hungrier than a covetous demon, and your body craves the soothing warmth of a fresh hot bath. Blood and muck cling to you like war paint, decorating your delicate pale frame with the story of what you saw. The horrors you witnessed, the gem you carry, and the haggard

clothes on your back... They are all that you carry. And all that carry you. The adrenaline has long since faded at this point, your body heavier than it has ever been. Your eyes are heavy and puffy from the dread you experienced and the dry salt clinging to your face where your tears soaked the skin. You find a relatively stable patch of land amid the bog, laying against the humble willow tree planted upon it. The hanging flowers above in the leaves of the tree gently sway back and forth, lulling you deeper into the realm of dreams. You're so tired, even the weathered bark feels like a bed to you. The long hanging branches of leaves that swept the ground offered you some sense of security and privacy, and that was enough for you. Shortly after you leaned against the trunk, you found yourself drifting into slumber.

You open your eyes and stand in the inky blackness you see before you. A hellish new reality your dreams have led you to, devoid of light and replaced by some twisted placeholder of it. There is neither ground nor sky, merely the swirling, churning sea of miasma, sickly with black and green. The magic here is thick and roiling, and your skin prickles with each harrowing caress. The stagnant air is charged as if electric, a humming inside you sharp and determined, pounding like the delusional heartbeat of a forgotten god. This thing, this unknowable thing, has been waiting. The silent, oppressive presence weighing in your chest. It builds ad infinitum, gleeful and sporadic, overjoyed that this moment has finally come.

You hear a deep chuckle all around you, the voice echoing in your head so intensely it nearly drives you mad. The sound comes from every direction, every corner, every fragile crack in your weary mind. Suddenly, a figure of shadows appears before you, cloaked in this place's darkness. It is tall and wispy, constantly shifting, features too perfect then too contorted, settling back and forth into a beautiful pale elven man and a black beast of nightmare-made flesh. You know this man. You've known him ever since you were born. You knew him before you were 'you'. Before your soul was

blessed with this shell of body and mind. You know him more intimately than anyone in this world. You just didn't realize it yet.

"Epacris," you say with a wavering, horrified voice. Your eyes are wide with realization. Like a memory long-repressed, now open to you. "The King of Nothing. The Nightmare Heart." The figure's mouth widens into a perfect, then fang-lined smile.

"My, my what have we here?" The shadowed figure begins to pace around you, like a predator sizing its prey. "An elven fledgling has crossed into my realm. How *intriguing*." He spoke with a honeyed tone, the words soothing your heart despite his monstrous appearance. Your mind begins to war against itself, a tiny voice screaming in fear drowned by a louder voice, pacified and eager to hear more of that lovely voice.

"And one that knows my name no less..." He chuckles. Oh, what a wonderful sound that is. "I would've thought all knowledge of me would be stripped from the annals. That terrible woman brushed me aside so easily after all... As if I were mere *garbage*."

He says the last word in a lingering whisper that seems to slither within your ear and dissipates like smoke, his fluid silky tone disturbed briefly by a cold and bitter hatred. Your body grows stock still, feeling that endless hate flowing through his dark flesh.

"You have something I want little fledgling, something I've wanted for a very long time." Suddenly, a pale hand with sharp nails grips your chin, and you are met with eyes of lavender. The elven man has cast aside the shadows clinging to him, settling into his fairer form.

"Give it to me." He said as his grip on your face tightens. "Give me the emerald of Elysia."

Your brows furrow and you feel yourself grow bolder. "Why should I give you what you want, god of nightmares?" You asked quietly, calmer than you feel right now. You spoke to him bluntly as to assure him of your confidence. The docile voice within you is drowned out by a sonorous cry,

raging against this monster. You square your shoulders with steel to your gaze. “Why would I betray my people and the eons of service they gave in the protection of this emerald? Why would I give in to you? Why would I submit, mewling and scared over a fake deity long dead?” A light explodes outward around you, burning away the sickly dark clouding you. “Why would I betray the Veils to you?”

The false king of nightmare’s thin lips turned upwards in a smirk, uncaring of the holy silver light now intruding in his domain. “I’m glad you asked.” He said as he backs away from you. He held his hand out with a flourishing motion. Suddenly, in a flash of red light, your little sister stands before you bound in chains. The chains are cold, frighteningly cold. So cold you see ice creeping across your sister’s pale skin, the chill reaching you even from this distance, conjoining with the icy dread that settles in your stomach. The elven man, Epacris, you remind yourself, bows mockingly, an easy-going regal smile plastered on his perfectly crafted face. “Forgive my boldness, but I couldn’t help but wish to invite her over for a little sojourn. A bout of carousing, as it were, to stand out against all this dreadful violence.” His smile grows sickeningly kind to where you almost believe it, his hands wrapping around your sister in an almost affectionate embrace.

“She wanted to see you too, you know. She missed you so dearly. She wouldn’t stop screaming for her dear big sister.” His smile contorts cruelly, the fangs of the beast lining it and disturbing the delicate image he’s put on. “It’s so exciting to see family reunite. Why I’m so overjoyed, I may just accidentally crush her little *spine*.” The darkness swells and churns with violent bloodlust as his grip tightens, the shifting of her ribs audible to you. “Are you going to make me do that, dear fledgling?”

You swallow your dread and continue with a brave face. You so badly wish to scream and demand her freedom, but a whim within you clamps down on that desire and compels you forward. This isn’t the time for emotion, it seems to say. Only action. “What do you want then, Nightmare King?”

He smiles and lets her go, striding towards you with confidence and purpose. That cold pale hand grips your cheek once more, the nails slightly digging into your frail flesh. "I've already told you, dear fledgling. My only desire is the Emerald." His hand trails down your arm, his finger settling over your clenched fist that carries the verdant gem in question. "I want nothing with your precious sister, or your family, or any of the sort. All I want... Is that emerald. Give it to me, and I will release her." His tone grows frantic and excited, like a man teetering the brink of insanity, close to achieving a goal only he can understand. "I'll bring them back and establish a new reality. One free of death, of strife, of the pain that plagues us all! I will topple that tyrannical goddess and write a new order! My order!" The darkness swells like a wave about to crash down, his voice discarding its honeyed tone and slipping into maddened yelling. "Just give it to me! Give it to me! Give me the Emerald!" He's shaking and biting his lip, black tar-like ichor spilling from his split lip. "Give me Elysia's Heart!"

You push him away, the light exploding outwards against the darkness that threatens to swallow you! "I will not!" A voice that is not yours surges from your throat, tinged with an ancient and divine power. "You will not possess the emerald so long as I draw breath! So long as the wind blows, the sun shines, and the moon changes, you will not possess Elysia's Heart!" The light compresses into your chest, filling you with its dense, overwhelming power... Before unleashing in a wave of light, washing away the dark and the Nightmare King in a bloodcurdling scream.

You awaken with a start, your body clammy and damp with sweat from the intensity of the nightmare you experienced. Your neck is sore from the angle you slept at, and the hardness of the willow's wood. You pushed him back for now, whatever that entails. But you know he is not gone, not by a longshot. This merely bought you time, pushed you from his realm of sleep before he could claim your pure mortal soul. A new sense of purpose fills you, however, and a destination is highlighted in your mind. Your hand clenches

around the glowing warm emerald resting in your palms. Alzier... The dragon capital. The regime of scale and claw. They will be your guidance. They will be your solace. They will save the Emerald. Save the Veils. Save us all. You stand on your feet, your eyes hardened with a glint of silver in their dull black pupils. You tighten the cloak around your body and discard your fear, making your way across the death-soaked bog.

Elysia will be saved.

The Nightmare Heart will fall.

A Sunset on Anna Maria

By Hailey Greene



Mcintosh Memoir

By Alayna Robarts

I can't recall the exact moment I realized I had lost you. I don't remember when the panic struck and the shaking began. The chaotic cyclone of thoughts inside my mind made the details fuzzy to me. When had I lost you? Where? How had I let you go? I know one thing for certain, when that shaking started, it never stopped. That cyclone of chaos continues to rage, and I find myself asking new questions. I no longer search for the reasons why you are gone, I know the answers anyway. I simply want to find you in hopes that I might find peace.

So, I began my journey. I hopped in my car, and I searched the town. I went to the beach where you and your brother would spend hours making sand sculptures and splashing at the shore. I remember, you guys would fill a bucket halfway with sand and saltwater. You'd investigate the bucket and watch the sand fleas swim and burrow. They were creepy little things, but children often find wonder in what adults might consider the "unconventional". I recalled the sting of sunscreen in my eyes and as the tears flowed, I blamed them on the phantom pains.

I found myself making my way to the pier under the bridge. This is where your dad taught you how to fish. He'd bring his aerated bucket of shrimp and even though he insisted you learn to hook live bait, you refused. You never liked the idea of impaling something that moves. You and your brother would swing your fishing poles with your dangling shrimp and sing made-up songs about the shrimps' lives. When your dad cast your pole into the water, it was just the shrimp returning to his home. You'd mistake the wriggling of the shrimp for a fish biting, and you'd reel it in so quick. To this day, I don't know if it was for fear of the shrimp being eaten, or for the hopes you'd finally catch a fish and make your dad proud. He realized quickly that you and your brother were a waste of live bait and a bit too

loud for a pastime that was supposed to be relaxing. He stopped taking you fishing soon after.

I continued to your elementary school. The place is locked up now like all schools are. Once upon a time though, you'd go to school on the weekends just to play on the playground. Heck, you even had a birthday party there where you spent the whole time hiding under the slide and eating your green apple lollipop. The school mascot was a superstar, and that's exactly how I would describe you. You were bright and moved fast. Your energy was endless, and you were going places. I linked my fingers through the fence and laid my head against it as I let myself be carried deeper into memories.

Your third-grade teacher often called you a crybaby. She must not have understood the amount of pain you were in. Perhaps that was the year I lost you. That was when the solitude began to sink in. You didn't see the world in vivid colors anymore. You didn't look forward to much. You were tired of waking up in the middle of the night listening to your parents scream at each other. You always loved to dance, but you despised dancing on eggshells. You would walk to your friend's house after school. She lived next to a creek. You would stare down the creek's path that seemed to run on forever and sometimes you just wanted to jump in and be carried away. Maybe you did jump, and that is why you are gone. You didn't stay friends with that girl for much longer. You seemed to struggle with keeping friends.

I drove past the bridge that went over the creek as I made it to the one place I hadn't been in years. It was only a few streets over. I stared at the house from my car that was parked on the side of the road. I hadn't even stepped out of the car and yet a sour smell assaulted my nose. It's funny how a place can remind you of smells.

There was the varying smell of different molds and something else that reminded you of playdough. You used to crouch behind a couch, that was stained and dirty and stare at the front door. You knew it was unlocked and you waited until the people in the house were towards the

back. This gave you the most time to run. Then, you'd bolt down the sidewalk. There would be sunshine, and you'd hope you could get all the way home before they'd catch you. You never did, and then they started locking the door.

I know without a doubt, that a part of you is still there but I just can't find the will to enter that house and look for you. So, I guess I'll go home. Not to where I live, but to where I *lived*.

Suddenly, I was there. The house was different, but it wasn't. The tree your mother planted was taller, but it was there, and the memories flowed as though a dam had just been broken.

Remember when you'd pretend to be a dog named Lady?

Remember when your little brother fell out of that tree in the backyard?

Remember the hot chocolate, the late nights playing games with your brothers, the pets, the laughter, the growing up with nothing but somehow having everything. Remember when I still had you?

I made my way to the door and there you were McIntosh girl, right where I left you. Standing in the window, with your choppy bangs and your big cerulean eyes. Even through the molded glass panes, I could see you wore no smile.

So, I pulled out a cupcake with a big number seven candle and as I handed it to you, I said: "Make a wish."

Make America Great... Again?

By Laura Stephenson

I can't remember the last time America was great. Sipping on milkshakes in the segregated diner. I can't remember a time when "freedom" was free. I remember Vietnam. I remember the gulf war. I remember adrenaline in my veins as I fought for our country. I did what? I killed another man so you could drink milkshakes in the segregated diner. I killed families so that yours could go to schools and shoot 'em up. I watched, blindly, as my battalion raped foreign women to instill fear. They took and I took by staying quiet. I still hear the bombs crashing overhead and see the sky light up in my dreams. I never want America to be "great" again.

Lady Dimitrescu

By Natalie Brown



The Fisherman

By Christopher Nevins

I leave before the sun wakes above the water,
the worms panic as I pierce them with the hook.
Thrusting my arms back sends ripples through my pole.
My prey is not yet awake, I must sit and wait,
the line bounces as I quickly reel in my catch.
It fights, pulls, and prays, I win the fight this time fish.

Every morning I rise to provide, money equals fish.
I am gifted food, hydration, and work from the water,
Not always given, sometimes there are hard battles for a
catch.
I'd fight too if my mouth was filled with a metal hook,
It is a hobby of patience and the ability to wait,
Calm until I see that line start to wiggle the pole.

The vibrations shiver down to the base of my pole,
I begin to build hope for even just a small fish.
The battlefield is active, there is no longer a wait.
Splashes and droplets fly, a mass emerges from the water.
Thrusting and flopping in the air, deeper pierces the hook,
Mid-flight I tug the body, hoping this is my catch

The slimy body soars and I extend my arms to catch,
I reach for the mass and grasp air as I drop the pole,
Its body slams my chest, nearly missed the hook
Bigger than small. Medium, I hold it like a trophy fish,
I stare in awe at him, I stare back at the water,
I place him in a cooler, time to restart the wait.

I replay the adventure in my head, my friends will have to
wait,
I can't resist the adrenaline, this is not my only catch.
I glare at the sun, its glares back, I pray to the water,
"Thanks for the gift, let me get another with this pole,
Just one more. One more big, shiny, smelly fish.
Give me one more bite so I can set the hook"

The river was not gracious, it swallowed my hook.
Once again the energy is paused, it is time to wait.
The sun begins to sleep, shortly follow the fish,
All day blistering heat, for nothing but one catch.
The day is exhausted and so is my pole,
I wave goodbye to my ruthless foe, the water.

Most days are just a wait, with not promise of a catch,
Occasionally the fish will surrender to my hook,
Do not be fooled, my pole is at the mercy of the water.

Scared to Death

By Laura Stephenson

When doom becomes apparent, it infects.

It seeps into all the molecules you breath in.

It pours from the sky like monsoons and crashes onto the shore like angry sea.

When doom becomes apparent, it bleeds.

No bandage can stop it and no cup collect every drop.

No person can hide, no thing can avoid.

“What was that?”

“Who’s there?”

And then the heart pumps faster. It pumps so fast it skips a beat. And then another.

Breathing faster. Hyperventilation is setting in. Scraping noises are amplified. Nails on a chalk board. Closer. Closer still.

When doom becomes apparent, it kills.

Estranged From a Once Favored Father

By Kaylee Alameda

A favored father loved the child he formed
He cared not for the sex assigned at birth
A favored father viewed them as himself
He cared to grant acceptance to a girl

A favored father watched her age with pride
He saw an equal and a ride-or-die
A favored father offered her the world
He saw her more than just a little girl

A favored father changed when she hit twelve
He grew to find her equal to his wife
A favored father lashed out from hurt pride
He grew resentment for his teenage girl

A favored father broke her heart with pain
He snapped a bond he said would never break
A favored father called her lots of names
He snapped and named her useless bratty girl

A favored father became not so much
His once-loved daughter lost without a trace
A favored father gets what he deserves

Between the Dream

By Kathleen Soysa

I'm here again

My sterile breaths are feathered wings, amidst the pain.

Canaried lungs.

Two golden birds with colors mute, their song unsung.

And beads of dew.

Adorn this chest of crackled sleep, a dream was slew.

A misty moon.

Pours milk upon my thirsty lips, I start to swoon.

I breathe the night.

The silkblack hammock carries me, towards the white.

I am a wren.

Free to fly 'twixt sky and sea,

I'm here again.

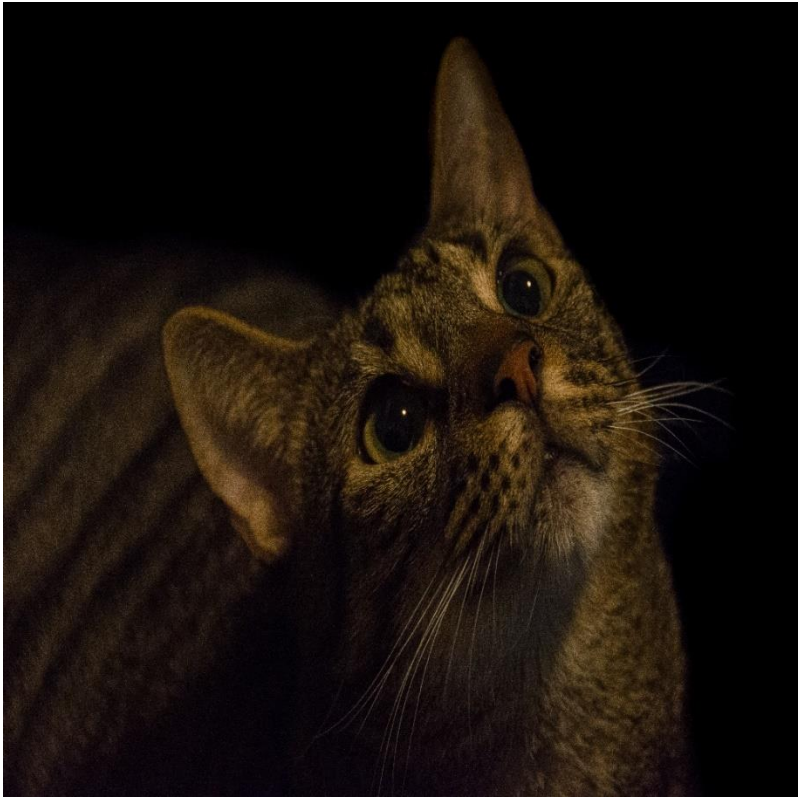
The Year of the Tiger

Alayna Robarts

I am a prowler of the concrete jungle
I am striped and ready to strike
I go “Pow!” to my “solicitous” exes
They say “Jesus! What’s your problem?”
But I don’t think I have a problem,
Because I’m not searching for any solutions.
I’m Daniel and you’re Johnny.
I’m giving crane kicks to the guy next door,
Because he thinks it appropriate,
To comment on my ass.
I’m walking down the street at night,
Mace in my back pocket,
Attitude on high.
And I’ve never felt better.
Why? Because.
It’s the year of tiger,
I’m kicking bullshit to the curb.

Boba

By Miranda Correa



Liya

By Alfia Myers

Liya was awakened at 7 in the morning by her phone ringing. She got up and walked to the kitchen where her phone was charging. She looked out the window on her way, smiling at the early morning. She loved her new bright, sunny, and beautiful home. The house she built with her husband, Petr, in Hostomel. She and Petr moved there from Kiev just one year earlier.

Liya picked up her phone. Her aunt from Ufa, Russia, was calling and apologizing that she always forgets about the time difference, but she had to call her as early as she could because the message was urgent. Liya's only sibling, her younger brother, Robert, had died of a heart attack. Her Aunt said that the funeral was to be held the next day.

Liya slowly sat down and quietly asked "when did he die"? Of course, that was unimportant. She didn't know why she asked. Maybe she needed time to process such sad news. Robert was her little brother and the last living person from her immediate family. Her father died about 15 years ago and her mom 7 years ago. Now Robert.

"I will be there today" – she said quietly to her aunt. I will fly out today, we live very close to the airport. I am not sure Petr can come, he may not be able to leave work, but I will be there. She hung up, turned on the electric tea pot and went to wake up her husband with the bad news.

All Funerals are sad. For Liya this funeral was saying goodbye to her childhood, to her city, to her family. She left Ufa when she was just 19 years old to marry Petr, a handsome man from Ukraine. She met Petr during a family visit to Kiev. Her parents liked him from the first day they met him during that visit. Liya had a brief "Pen Pal" relationship with Petr. Liya then went to Kiev by herself and they were married three months later. Petr and Liya have been happily married now for more than 30 years, they have two

beautiful children together: a son, a daughter, and a granddaughter.

With her immediate family now deceased and many of her close cousins who were her childhood friends having immigrated to the US or to European Countries during the 90's, Liya no longer had many personal connections to Ufa, the city where she was born and grew up. Now Kiev, Ukraine, was her home. She had lived there for more than 30 years.

Her deceased brother's wife asked Liya to stay for a few more days after the funeral to sort out some pictures and documents. She agreed and purchased her return airline ticket for February 26. Liya thought three days would be plenty of time to sort through everything.

Liya woke up the next day on February 24 to the news of the war, to the news that the airport in her town was being bombed.

Although Liya knew that her son was safe at University in Spain, she didn't know where her husband was. Where was her daughter, her granddaughter, her son-in-law? What happened to her friends, her neighbors? What happened to her home? What was happening to her town? She thought "what is happening to me - what is happening to our world?"

The airlines told her - "there were no flights to Kiev, no flights to anywhere in Ukraine". Petr called her on February 25th, the second day of the Russian invasion, and said - "please stay in Ufa, you are safe there". He also told her that he would build them a new home. "Why"? - Liya asked. There was a long pause, and she knew there was no home to return to. Petr then said, her daughter, Nastia was ok. She and their little sunshine granddaughter, Julia, were on their way to Poland with family friends. Petr and Nastia's husband, Alexander, joined the Resistance Army.

Liya hung up the phone and stood in her aunt's living room. She didn't cry, she was numb. Her family, her home, her world was taken from her.

The next day she knew she had to go. She knew she had to be with people she loved.

She finally reached her daughter on the phone. Nastia was very quiet, she said Poland could not take more families from Ukraine, and they were reassigned to Bulgaria by some Refugee's organization. Liya could tell Nastia was tired, distressed and so she didn't ask many questions. Liya just said – "ok, I will meet you there". "Mom, really", Nastia asked quietly. "You are coming to Bulgaria?" Liya could hear in her voice that Nastia held back tears.

Liya realized how strong her daughter had been. How difficult it must have been for her traveling for days in a small car with two-year-old child and another family. It was a cold February and there were only occasional opportunities for stops. Her girls were not spoiled by any means, but they were not raised in a spartan household either. Difficult and lonely. Now Liya had a plan, and she knew she would find her girls in Bulgaria or in another country. It didn't matter if she had to fly, drive, or walk.

Liya was nervous on the phone telling the airlines salesperson that she had a Ukrainian passport and needed to fly to Sofia, Bulgaria. The person on the other end of the line was nice and understanding and did everything to find her the most convenient flight explaining that at this time she wouldn't need a Visa due 'unusual' circumstance. Liya thought the word 'unusual' was very carefully chosen. She was relived and she thanked the kind salesperson many times.

During this visit in Ufa, Liya had a very strange feeling that Russia had a huge split in opinion. Half of Russia was friendly, kind and understanding. They remembered Ukraine as a sister country and believed that this conflict was a huge mistake. There was another segment of the population, the dark half of Russia, where people side with Russia's President, who, to her horror, think that war is explainable. She never knew what to expect from people when they see her Eastern appearance and hear her Ukrainian accent.

During March Liya, Nastia and Julia spent the entire month in a refugee dorm in Sofia, Bulgaria.

On April 1, the refugee agency transferred them to Dublin, Ireland, where they remain today.

Petr and their son-in-law, Alexander, fight in Ukraine. The last time they called it was from Mariupol.

Nastia is learning English; she likes Dublin very much. Liya has dreams about Kiev every night. She is planning to help Nastia to find a job and help her with Julia. She dreams she will be able to go back to Ukraine.

I pray her dreams come true.

My Mistake

By Tim Nguyen

On a day like everyday
On the way to school
I looked down an alley
My best friend was beaten up by bullies
They punched his face
They kicked him
Blood poured from his mouth
From the wound he sustained
All their punches caused him
To fall to the ground.

My mind was split, split in two
What should I do, What should I do
One thought was to leave
As if nothing had been seen
The other was enter that alley
And try to save him.

One thought won out over the other
And as I think about it now
It was the stupidest thing
The stupidest thing I've ever done.
I left him there as if I had not seen

Had not seen what was happening to him.

A loser, a coward ... is that what I am

I went on to class

Dropped my face on the table

I felt as if guilt was all around me

Heavy feeling of guilt

Like a 100k dumbbell

Hanging over my head

So much guilt ... all so heavy

It was hard ... even to breathe.

My face was still on the table

As my friend came into class

He looked at me

He smiled

As if he knew

That I ran away ... like a coward

And abandoned him that day

His smile made me think that

He forgave me

Still, in my mind, that school day,

That day had ended so badly for me.

The next day, my friend
My friend did not go to school
I asked his neighbor where my friend was
The answer they gave me was not what
I wanted to hear
My friend, my best friend had transferred schools
He left and he left me
And I felt so sad
An unforgettable guilt is what
I still have.

Two years later
He came back
When I saw him, I ran away
Like I did
Like I did when I saw him being beaten
Ran like a coward
Although I knew that he forgave me
But I wasn't brave enough to face
Because of the things I did with him
Because I ran away when I saw him being beaten
When I ran he followed me
He said to me :”Forgive yourself”
But how could I be forgiven?
Forgiven for all I did.

You Knew

By Natalie Goodson



my Mother, my God

By Brianna Connelly

Mother,

my god have you tied such a knot around my neck

the kind my kindergarten arms could not reach

my thoughts are not all my own anymore

my Mother, my God,

but your satisfaction is so unattainable

so far from who I thought I was

so far.

Mother,

my god that hurt

I thought I had run far enough

but the knot still strangles me

please stop thrashing

my Mother, my God,

the lines are so blurry

you say there is a man above you

if this man is your God

he must be so far from the tangled string I hang from

so far.

Mother,
my god why do I need your attention
but despise it at the same time
my Mother, my God,
I hate to hang here unmoved
but the commotion hurts
freedom is so far
so far.

Mother,
my god your love is so sweet
I don't know who I am without you
my Mother, my God,
sometimes I wish I could find out
but I know she is so far
so far.

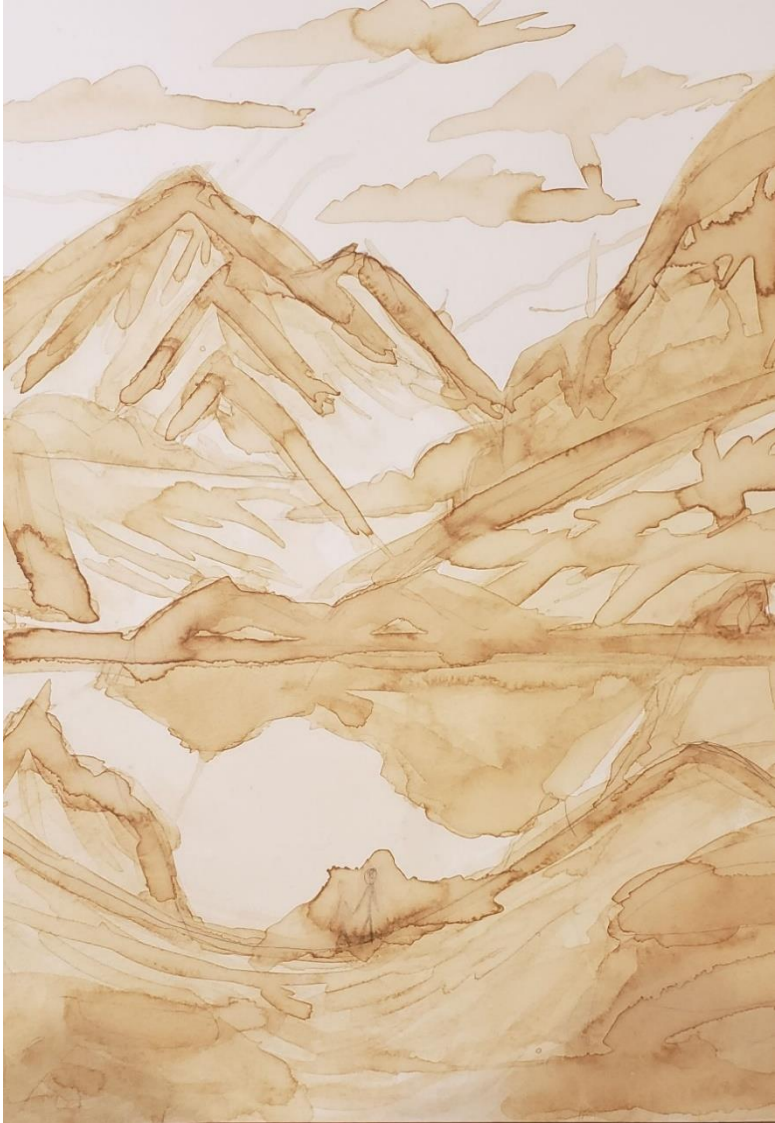
Brett

By Laura Stephenson

We all thought it was a cold. Your wife was sick as well. We all urged you to call an ambulance. And when your ride arrived, we watched the lights drive away into the 3am landscape. We all thought you would be home soon. Time went on, and we watched you become intubated. She recovered, you declined. We sponge washed your hair. We clipped your nails. We prayed when we didn't even believe. How could we believe? We saw your breaths become lighter and empty. We watched her cry over your bedside. Day after day until there was no bedside left. We watched them take your body. We watched them put it in the ground. We watched your daughter scream in anguish and anger and uncertainty. We watched your wife wail at your gravesite and beg for your life back. We welcomed guests into your house for food to comfort them, to comfort us. We went to the store. We went to work. We went on... Without Brett.

Coffee in the Mountains

By Kristin Clark



Hopeless Romantic and Manic

By Kaylee Alameda

I'm meant to be romanticized, not loved. something to admire and watch from a distance, a shooting star barreling through my short lifespan

destroying all those who get too close

I watch myself through other people's eyes

as something beautiful, to be seen not touched

to be thought of endlessly, but never, never approached for fear of getting burned

I'm something to be longed for, wished upon

a blaze of glory shining brighter in the rain

and once I'm gone from their sight, gone from their minds,

I burn out and become nothing once more

In Defense Of

By Isabella Estrada

In Defense of the Introverted

At first glance, she seems quiet and offputting

Filled with nothing more than judgments of her own surroundings

Though her quiet smile and sometimes sideways glance
steer you away Proceed, she is much more than that

She is kind, stubborn, and extraordinarily knowledgeable

She knows the hidden details often missed.

Black Cat Crossing

By Kaylee Alameda

Wheat and corn echoed the soothing waves of wind, swirling and dancing around themselves in a beautiful pattern for miles on. They formed a kaleidoscope of shapes of many sizes with a variety of shades, Meglah could have sworn she saw an anatomical heart right in the center only for it to disappear a blink later. Trees and bushes shivered in a cool breeze as dreamy as the warm sigh that fell from the not-so-young farmer admiring it all. Even such a contented countenance pulled her sun-kissed skin taut and threatened to crack her already chapped lips. Age had found Meglah a hermit covered in small scars of experience and millions of freckles. Her mother used to call her little freckles “Angel Kisses” and press her caring lips to the new ones every night while she tucked her in. Even as a child, Meglah was riddled with the miniature sunspots, she supposed her mother must have loved her very much to notice each one. Meglah found herself thinking of her mother more often now. Bitter heat stung the tip of her tongue as she absentmindedly sipped from her color-changing chicken mug, a previously passed on prized possession she once believed she would pass on as well. But it seemed the lineage of two would end with her. The compelling and rich history of the mug left unknown by the poor soul who would eventually find it still in her cold grasp. Pounding feet of a petite panther padded into the room and quickly onto her windowsill, the charming little bell wringing the dark thoughts from Meglah’s graying head. Her charming, and only, companion Roger’s youthful yellow eyes bore into her aged brown ones. Then, with the curious bat of his small black paw, the yowling began.

“Oh, hush now, Roger!” Meglah cried, balancing her quickly cooling mug of coffee above and away from his playful reach. Roger bunted his fuzzy head against her relaxed arm with a long cry that broke with a crack in his tiny voice. Meglah relented, “Alright, alright, I’m getting up.” Roger

jumped down with a trill and disappeared in a speedy flash of black around the corner. So much energy for such a small creature, Meglah half-heartedly envied him. A pained groan

pushed its way past her lips as she painstakingly pulled her weary body up from her oh-so-comfortable seat and crotchetyly made her way to Roger's food bowl set just past the bathroom at the end of the hall. Pouring a hardy scoop of kibble, her aching joints let ring of chorus of pops and snaps. Roger eyed her a bit less than patiently with his skinny tail swishing back and forth across her almost as thin legs, tickling them almost comfortingly. Meglah breathed remorsefully at the gentle contact.

"I'm sorry for getting snippety with you, Roger." She mumbled, brushing her calloused palm along Roger's slightly oily fur as he stood to eat. He purred and danced en pointe when she found the sweet spot near his rump, he seemingly accepted her apology and happily feasted on his dry breakfast. His affection stole a chuckle from her deflating lungs.

What would she do without her faithful companion? She couldn't imagine how she lived so long without him. Thirty, maybe forty years all by herself after her mother left her when she was still just a young woman. Then, just a year ago, she found that little black kitten all by himself in a large cardboard box on the side of the road, she imagined it once held several of his brothers and sisters who had already been rescued. But there was raggedy little Roger, abandoned, unwanted, utterly alone. She saw her reflection in those big, goopy, yellow eyes and couldn't leave him there. Now they had each other, if only for a little while. She didn't want to think about what would happen when one of them eventually died, leaving the other all alone again. She shunned the thought from her mind, Meglah didn't have time to dwell over the past and even less time for the future. All she could do was live in the present, and the present task at hand was to begin her chores for the day. Slipping on her work pants over her shorts, she wished Roger a good day and headed out to the field.

Thundering clouds moved against the dispersing pinks and purples of an already sunken sun as Meglah made her way back to the house to turn in for the night. Half of what she originally planned for the day was finished but working into the night was far too dangerous, especially in the rain. It wasn't fair, not even a year ago she would have completed everything and more. A fire burned behind her wet eyes feverishly as she stomped the batter of mud from her soles. Decay was the best word she could think to describe her state. Decaying, just like her mother, now buried deep in the ground. She gaspingly swallowed the seed of a sob before it could bloom from her body. Lord knows if her heart could handle such a cry. Roger trotted over to her as she used her remaining weight to force open the screen door. Black fur brushed off the dirt still caked to her worn-out jeans as he rushed to greet her.

"Roger! Wait for a second, peevish boy!" Meglah chuckled pathetically as she fought to slip the jeans off her trembling body, "You don't want to be getting all grimy now, I know how you hate baths." But Roger didn't listen, nor did he ever. He rubbed against her teetering legs with wet pants bunched at her knees, harder than before, knocking Meglah completely out of balance. She toppled like a once-great tree rotted from the inside, falling over on top of her tiny cat.

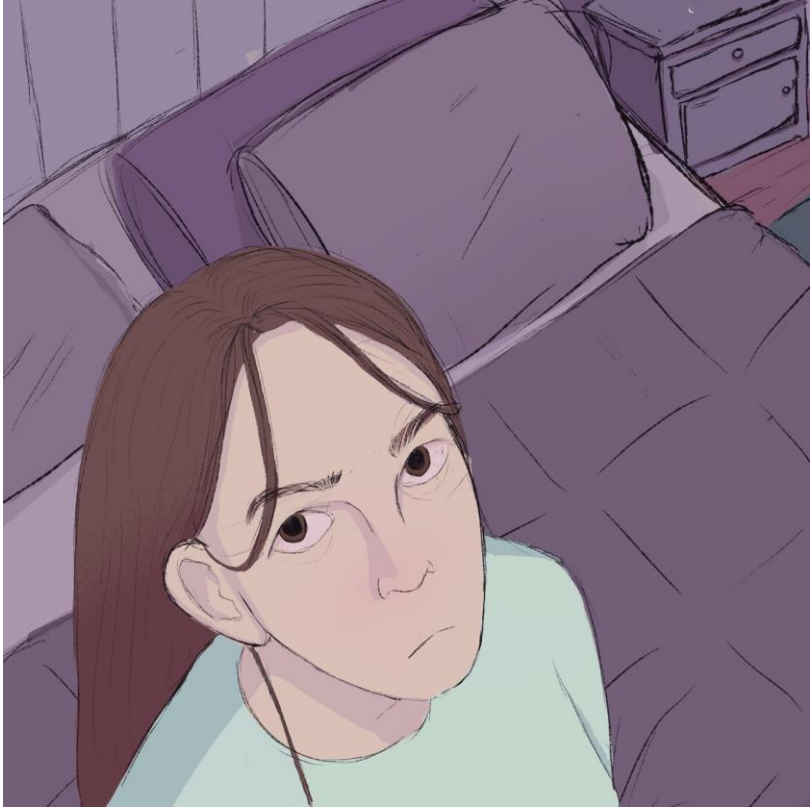
"Roger!" She yelled as she fell, spooking him enough to dart away, to dart with all his vigor out of the still-open door and vanishing into the wet darkness of a dangerous night. Meglah hit the ground hard, gasping for her only friend in the world to come back as she writhed in pain on the cold tile. She wailed his name with the little energy she could muster, but he was long gone. She wanted to chase after him, to search for him all through the night, to do anything. She was not a stupid woman; she knew her chances of ever seeing Roger again were slim to none if she didn't get up. But despite all her begging, her body stayed pinned to the ground by gravity, not an ounce of strength left to fight. All she could do was whimper and curse her fragility. For the

first time in a long while, Meglah cried. She cried hard and long into the night, a heavy cry that made her already wrinkled skin prune. A gasping, screaming cry that clogged her throat and choked her arteries. A torturous cry, shooting pains all through her arms and useless body, twisting most cruelly at her broken heart until she finally cried herself to sleep.

Vapid dreams, memories, of her mother infected her already restless sleep. Visions of her mother in the same state as herself, at the same age she was. Then she dreamt of Roger. She saw him curling into her hollow bosom, a hole where her heart once beat, his soothing purr promising that wherever she went, she would not be going alone. Meglah reached her smooth hand to his back, grazing over the marks of an animal bite through his neck and chest as her full lips tugged into a final, sad smile before she allowed herself to be consumed by warmth.

Fire Alarm

By Maddie DeLong



A Mother's Love

By Julia Whisonant

She carried her weight in the family with elegance and
grace

Flowing from task to task, and without a complaint

Looking after her siblings like a mother would

A mother should look after their children and not the chil-
dren over the children

Just a kid herself, she took on her role in the family

Who could have known that at 16 they would be the pro-
vider for two children

Why was she put into this situation?

She was only 13 when it all started to go downhill

Just a child herself and she had to care for her mother and
two younger siblings

For the rest of her life she would be responsible for them

All because her mother could not take on the role that she
made for herself

Love was what kept her there, love for her siblings who
didn't deserve this life

Like an anchor was holding her down, she didn't apply to
college in fear of leaving them alone

What kind of person would she be to leave them to fend for
themselves

A person exactly like her mother, who she never wanted to
become

She made a promise to herself long ago to never become
her mother and to help her siblings for
as long as she could
Feeling like a burden as a child was something she never
wanted them to know
Joy and happiness was all she wanted them to experience

Joy was the ultimate gift to them, a gift that couldn't be
sold
Listening to her sibling's days were the highlight of hers
Feeling like she made a difference in their lives made it all
worth it
Worries were not something on their minds, she sheltered
them from it all
Setting the worries away to enjoy the present were a chal-
lenge for her
All of her friends pitched in when they could, but the big-
gest weight was on her

A deep breath cleared her head from all that was swirling
around
Just breathing in slowing in the corner of her room calmed
her when she was overwhelmed
Slowly and deeply breathing in and out for a few moments
Like her father used to do when he got mad
Why did he have to leave her here with all of this
Fuck why did he have to leave her here to deal with all this

Falling from her place of solace, and slid down her wall
Against the wall that once brought her comfort and
warmth

Weeping over her life that could have been
Jealous that her siblings would never know these struggles
Learning how to manage the finances of a house at the age
of 14 was not something everyone does
She knew that, but she also know that this was her reality

Sorrow and longing for the life that she could have had in-
vaded her thoughts

Asking why her and why at this young age did she have to
be a surrogate mother

Just because she cared so much for her siblings, Faith got
up and made dinner

Lottery Chicken for Dinner

By Jason Posa

I was told by my wife to pick up food
for dinner tonight.

I wanted chicken.

I love chicken.

She makes an out-of-this-world
chicken pot pie.

I asked her to make it tonight,
and she agreed
as long as I make dessert.

After work, I walked the aisles
of the grocery store
and found a good deal on chicken breast
so I snagged up three packs of it.

Before leaving, I had a sudden urge
to try my hand
with scratch-off tickets.

I bought two or three
I cannot remember now

As I sit at the kitchen table
teaching my children new
and colorful words that
them and their friends
would love to hear.

I won. I fucking won.

One hundred g's
are going into the bank.

Now we can take the kids to Disney
Finally.

Cloudy Day

By Alyssa Griglen

I walked out of the gates
I rushed to my car and unlocked the doors
Tears began to roll down my face
I sat there for hours as my thoughts poured

Stripping the mascara from my eyelashes
I continued to cry
Staining uneven streaks in my concealer
I continued to cry

Waiting for the clouds to move
I try to endure and overcome
The feelings so unbearable
Sometimes it feels as if they've won

I turn on my car and start to drive
I struggle to find a reason
Drifting down the road from side to side
In search of the next season

Comfort in Sea Major

By Kaylee Alameda

I've been drowning for so, so long. Gasping for air and raking my nails through rapid waters, fighting to breathe. fighting to breathe. Now that I'm finally afloat, finally swimming towards my future, I've never felt worse. I'm not me anymore. somewhere when learning to swim, I forgot how to fight. I'm no longer trying to breathe. every day, it's the same stroke. I'm swimming forward. That's supposed to be good, right? I'm swimming forward, repeating the motion every single day. every single minute.

I imagine myself drowning now

Something about drowning helps me sleep, helps me feel better. there's comfort in being swallowed by the tide. comfort in dying surrounded.

How long will I keep swimming before I start to sink again?
How many more mouthfuls of water can I choke down?

It's impossible to tell where I'm going, for all I know I could be swimming in circles. doomed to waste all my energy on nothing, doomed to sink in the middle once again. everything's so jumbled. I'm tired.

I miss fighting to survive. I miss having a clear purpose, one I had to pursue. one I had no choice but to pursue. Now I'm swimming, but just in circles. rambling in about my pain instead of telling myself stories to stay calm. imagining endless adventures that one day I could translate into stories. That's what I'm supposed to be doing but I can't do that while I'm so focused on swimming, so busy staying afloat.

It's easier to drown anyway.

It was a Dark and Gloomy Day

by Daisy Acevedo-Gonzalez



Depressed Drinking Problem

By Rosemarie Heiman

It's a hot summer day right now.

The sun is shining down on my pale skin.

One time i fought the addiction of alcohol

And my friend said enough with the drinking

she forced me to get the help i needed.

Someone once told me that addiction kills.

My family would never forgive me.

I went to a therapist for help.

When i was told this all i could think about was

Who will miss me if I am dead?

When i was little everyone trusted me with secrets

The biggest one is the miscarriage my friend had.

This made me think of why she is judging my drinking
problem When she should not open her legs.

I was once told treat others how you want to be treated

The energy you give off is the energy you will receive

Now I see the reasoning for this.

Those who pass judgement on others tend to
Judge themselves harder than we know.

I came to realize that the only way I can help myself.
I want to get help for my addiction.

Drinking was a way to cope with my depression.
We all have our ways to cope in certain circumstances

As my friends care about me I am grateful for them.
They helped me through my depression.

I thought about the judgement I was going to receive
But then I thought maybe they think the same of me.

All I could think of was a drink.
I craved alcohol in my mouth.

The hot summer day turned night
Now it is cold and rainy like my depression.

Now I am free of alcoholism.
My friends who helped me truly care.

Maybe I am glad to have friends who I call family
because family helps each other with their struggles.

Western Tussock Moth Caterpillar

By Daisey Acevedo-Gonzalez



Contributor Biographies

Daisy Acevedo-Gonzalez: “It was a Dark and Gloomy Day” was taken on 12/29/2021 while on vacation in Tennessee. The location was in Cades Cove in the Smokey Mountains. It was a dark gloomy day and the sun pierced through the clouds like a miracle happened. It lasted less than 2 minutes and then disappeared. It was not rain, just sunlight. “Western Tussock Moth Caterpillar” was also taken the same day. This is a Western Tussock Moth Caterpillar; I have 6 oak trees in my home, and they were everywhere.

Kaylee Alameda: I am just starting on my journey in majoring in creative writing, so I have a lot of improvements to make, but I believe the stories I am submitting are a good representation of my current skill level.

Natalie Brown: “Lady Dimitrescu” is a clay sculpture that was painted with acrylic, done by me at the Venice Location. I created this bust as to make a video game character known as Lady Alcina Dimitrescu come to life. She is a very beautiful and powerful woman and I am very proud of the results of this.

Kristin Clark: “Spring Flowers” is a haiku poem about the change of the seasons and the sense of self that is found within the newly blossomed spring flowers. “My Mother’s Flowers” was made for the beginnings of spring as a gift to my mom for Mother’s Day. It was made through a fun water drop technique in which the paint was very watered down in order to almost create a look of watercolor. “Coffee in the Mountains” is a mountain landscape created through the use of coffee instead of paint, which tested limits and patience in order to create this work of art.

Brianna Connelly is a DE student at SCF. She plans to transfer to a university after earning her AA degree. Currently she plans to major in literature or music. In her free time, she enjoys theater, music, reading, and writing.

Hello, I'm **Miranda Correa**. I'm in school to learn about fashion design and sustainability. I've been passionate about sustainability since 2011. I also enjoy drawing, photography, gardening, sewing, and other crafts.

Maddie Delong: my name is Maddie and I'm really tired.

My name is **Isabella Estrada**. I am a current dual enrollment student at SCF. I am a senior at Lakewood Ranch Highschool and am pursuing an English degree.

Rowen Geddes: I'm 17, an English major, I draw and write poetry based on weird little metaphors that pop in my head. Maybe I write fanfiction. You'll never know.

Natalie Goodson: I'm 16 and a stem med major here at SCF. I do advanced full-time dual enrollment.

Alyssa Griglen: I'm a Dual Enrolled student from Booker High School, "Cloudy Day" is a poem I wrote based on a self-portrait I sketched in high school. This poem describes my feelings about leaving high school and hesitancy towards growing up.

Alfia Myers: I was born and grew up in Ufa, Russia. I received an undergraduate degree in Russian Literature and a Master's Degree in Library Science from Kazan University. I was a Librarian and Instructor at the Medical University in Ufa, Russia. In 1989 the Berlin Wall came down and interesting times began. We were very happy; we listen to Gorbachev with excitement and high expectations. I was caught up in this new world. I was hired by Johnson & Johnson, Moscow. They sent me to study in Moscow and then to Edinburgh, Scotland. Russia was still going through difficult times. One crisis followed another. And the crisis of 1998 was the last one for me. I decided to immigrate to the United States. I arrived in Philadelphia in 1999 and became an American Citizen in 2005. Every word of this story is true except for the name of the main heroine.

My name is **Christopher Nevins**. I am a student at SCF, I spend my time working, fishing, and spending time with family. I am currently taking Creative Writing with Professor Ford. I am

learning about writing and how it can be used as a form of self-expression.

Tim Nguyen: I am Vietnamese, and I'm from Minnesota. I was born and raised in Viet Nam, and I love eating, playing sports, and listening to music.

Jason Posa is a sophomore at the SCF and has lived in Sarasota County for all 22 years of his life. He's planning to transfer out to USF come next fall to pursue his bachelor's degree.

My name is **Alayna Robarts**. I love to read and write in my free time. Poetry and fiction are my favorite genres to write. I'm a Sarasota native who comes from a family of morticians! Naturally, I love to read/watch/and write horror and fantasy. I am working towards having a Bachelor's in English literature and plan to teach English internationally.

My name is **Kathleen Soysa** and I am seventeen years old. I am a collegiate student here at SCF Venice campus working towards my A.A degree. I have a wonderful, loving family (my dad, mom, younger sister, and brother). We moved to Venice all the way from upstate New York about a year ago. I have visited Florida many times, however, because my grandmother has lived here for 30 years. I am an avid digital and traditional artist and I absolutely love composing poems. I hope you enjoy mine!!!

Laura Stephenson: I am a student at SCF, and I work fulltime in an elementary school as the lab manager. I have four kids, 10-year-old triplets and a 5-year-old. I enjoy sleeping and silence.

My name is **Julia Whisonant**, and this is my third semester at SCF. I will receive my AA degree this summer and will be transferring to USF in the fall of 2022 to finish my bachelor's degree in health sciences. I love to write and learn about all different topics.

Elektraphrog Staff



Christian Copley is a student enrolled at State College of Florida majoring in Graphic Design. Christian has an interest in both art and history. He has chosen to pursue a career in Graphic Design because he loves to draw in his free time. Christian's curiosity with art began at a young age due to the fact that he loved to read comic books. Some of Christian's artworks can be viewed on his online portfolio, where it is shown that he has created pieces with a variety of techniques and concepts. Christian has however admitted that he is a bit of a procrastinator, but always manages to complete what is required of him when needed.

Allison Housh is a high school senior at SCF Collegiate School Venice, where she is to graduate with her high school diploma and A.A. She plans to continue to pursue her post-secondary education at University of South Florida in the fall, where she will major in Mass Communications and Broadcast Journalism. When not in school, Allison works at an ice cream shop on Siesta Key, where they freeze ice cream using liquid nitrogen. She enjoys listening to music, reading romance novels, and volunteering her time at her community radio station, WSLR 96.5. You can most likely find her at the dog park attempting to tire out her dogs or spending time with her friends and family.



Lucky Martinez is a wife, mom, college student, and Property Manager for Wagner Realty on Anna Maria. She is in charge of the wellbeing of her children, the companionship to her husband and finding snowbirds a place to stay

for three or more months on Anna Maria Island. Lucky enjoys weekend trips to the beach, dinners with friends, and enjoying a glass of wine after a long day. She will spend her free time with her children and husband, trying new things and living for new experiences. Lucky performs her best under lots of pressure and continues to hold desires for her dreams.

Andrew Murray is an Emergency Room Technician, Navy veteran, and premed student from North Port, Florida. He worked as a media and public affairs specialist in the U.S. Navy for over seven years, where his final assignment was as the public affairs officer for the U.S. Navy Parachute Team, The Leap Frogs. In his role with the team, he produced photo and video content, managed the team's social media presence, coordinated engagements with traditional media outlets, and commentated live skydiving demonstrations to audiences of more than 50,000. Andrew is an avid skateboarder of over 20 years, although he keeps his wheels close to the ground these days as he grows more fearful in old age.

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