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“Mossy Vortex” by
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Table of Contents

Enemy by Faith Altman	1
I Did It by by Anna Blanton.....	4
The Lives We Have Lived by Faith Altman.....	6
Lonesome Heart by Abigale Woods	9
Tired of the Pain by Hannah Holder	11
My Tower by Kaitlyn Vyas	12
The Gifted Child by Kaitlyn Vyas.....	15
Lucid Dreamer by Luwel Abarintos	16
Movement Underwater by Hannah Holder	17
Inner Thoughts by Luwel Abarintos.....	18
The Shell by Brittany Romanok	19
Follow Me, God by Anna Blanton.....	20
Enough Hannah Holder	21
Electromagnetic by Dane Thomsen.....	22
Vita – Profile by Luwel Abarintos	24
Ash by Anna Blanton	25
Why I Quit Smoking by Brittany Romanok	28
Grant Not Grace by Merritt Simpson	29
The Banyan Trees by Abigale Woods	36
Waking up by Anna Blanton	37
Bacchanalian by Rowan Geddes.....	38
Retirement by Hannah Holder	42
Love. by Abigale Woods	43
Vita – Ballroom by Luwel Abarintos	44
My Bubble Gum Girl by Dane Thomsen	45
A Day at Disney by Abigale Woods.....	47
Ashes by Merritt Simpson	48
Anemone by Rowen Geddes	49
Contributor Biographies	52
Elektraphrog Staff	54

Enemy

By Faith Altman

I dare to ask you
A question you could never understand;
What do you do
When you're on the battlefield
And you're the only one
On the opposition?

Do you question your motives?
Do you ask yourself
"What side am I on?"
Or do you simply accept
A bloody defeat?

It's a set of questions
I've had to ask myself
Quite a lot.
It's not easy
Being born
With a set of horns
And a pointed tail
To a family of white winged saviors
With gold halos over their heads.

So what do you do
When you're damned from the start?

You accept it.
You accept the fact
That your teeth
Will always be yellow
And rotten
From purging your so called
Unholy thoughts
You accept the fact
That your heart will always be
A pin cushion
Holding every
Thin
Tin
Sin
Within
You find that forgiveness
Is only for the rich and famous
And you
Are a soldier
Dying in the trenches
Drowning in the expectations
Of coming home perfect.

Trust me,
I don't want your sympathy
It means as much to me
As the dirt beneath my boots
I simply hope
To give you understanding

So
Now
I'll show my fangs
And bare my claws
My horns and tail
And accept my role
As the enemy

There's no need for precision
When you're surrounded by the opposition.

I Did It

By Anna Blanton

I adjusted my eyes to fixate themselves on my reflection off of my brightly lit laptop screen. I sit there in complete disbelief as to what I am looking at. People, so many people laughing at me not with me, this was, humiliating, degrading even. The feelings I'm feeling are so, intense, so absurd that it is almost merely laughable to imagine it was being housed by my body. I mean fuck, I'm actually proud of myself for being about to stay so eerily calm about the situation I was put in, I mean nobody else would be proud of me for my actions, my decisions I should have second-guessed. But I was just doing just something for myself. People just can't be happy with themselves, they have to have others feel as miserable as them, it's like we owe them something for their feelings but why me? I couldn't live with myself, I can't live with myself. I can't even be I don't want to be as I slowly shut my laptop and bury my face into my hand and sob, just hoping my tears would just fill my lungs and drown me. Everyone loves to preach that life is so short but nobody loves to preach about how deridingly long it is, and I couldn't live like this anymore

Tears roll silently and steadily down my face. I make no move to wipe them away, I mean, what is the point? I slowly look down at my destiny, cold, wet, asphalt. I force myself to stay conscious, I want to jump not fall too my death. I HAD to do this, there was no other choice, I couldn't continue to live like a fool, no matter how used to it I've become. But I wouldn't jump while I was crying, I wouldn't die looking like a wimp. I wait for my tears to run out, and then dry my soaked cheeks with my hands. There, that wasn't so hard was it, Katelyn?

I started to smile at the thought of someone finding my lifeless mangled body slammed into the ground below. I imagined the guilt of an ordinary person feeling as if they were the one to blame for my death. I grinned more, but this time

it reached my eyes, I thought of the shock that everyone I've known, even encountered with would feel about my passing, especially how. Guessing who's to blame, who to point the finger at this time. I kept my grin, craved into my face now but my eyes were closed, this time they wouldn't open again. With my smile held firmly into place and my mood at an all time high, I raised my hands to feel the wind one last, I flexed my fingers to completely relax myself, took a deep breath and jumped to my new ending. I finally did something for myself, its not like this was my first resort, I begged for help, a shoulder, an ear, a friend but it was too much to ask for, I guess. But don't worry, you won't have to listen to me anymore, I'm no longer a burden a beggar, a fool and now I'm just...gone

The Lives We Have Lived

By Faith Altman

The lives we have lived;
We may never remember them
And the sacrifices they made
For us to reach our dawn.

They traveled,
Far and wide.
In rain and in darkness,
That in which they died.

And so,
“...the dawn is ours
before we knew it.”
A symbol of hope
Now signifying our journey.

We must pick up the torch,
Which still burns bright
Despite history’s best efforts,
And voyage through the pains
Of the day and the night.

We dredge,
Dragging our feet
Through the afternoon.
We are tired.

Yet, we persist.
“...we hope-”
And we do not know why.

We the people:
The woman,
Whose dress is torn.
The child,
Whose eyes are faded.
The single mother,
Whose dream is to become president.

And you,
Who
Are
You?

The sun sets,
Sealing your fate;
Your last push
Before you are reborn.

Darkness calls to you,
Buzzing with lost ambition.
Your feet no longer carry you.
You must crawl.

You look to the moon,
Crying for reassurance.
She gives you none,
She does not remember
Who you are.

This hill you climb
 Is steep
And covered with thorns
Of the past.

At the top
You are victorious.
Now sleep.
Die.
Prepare for life.

The lives you have lived;
You may never remember yourself
And the sacrifices you made
For you to reach your dawn.

Lonesome Heart

By Abigale Woods

Stuff it in my pocket,
Throw away the key,
The heart is like a gate,
That dreamers only seek.

It's soft and fragile and vile,
And sometimes a little scared,
Of opening up its gates,
No one was prepared.

Six months in,
Time can tell,
And so can the people around,
Draining isn't the word,
There's no word enough to expel.

My thoughts and feelings,
My heart,
They were only true,
I opened up the gates,
The ones in which you knew.

The gatekeeper sees,
And whispers only travel,
I wish I saw his lonesome heart,
Way beneath the gravel.

Used to be up in the clouds,
But now I'm in the ground,
What happened to that golden gate?
Why did it rust so brown?

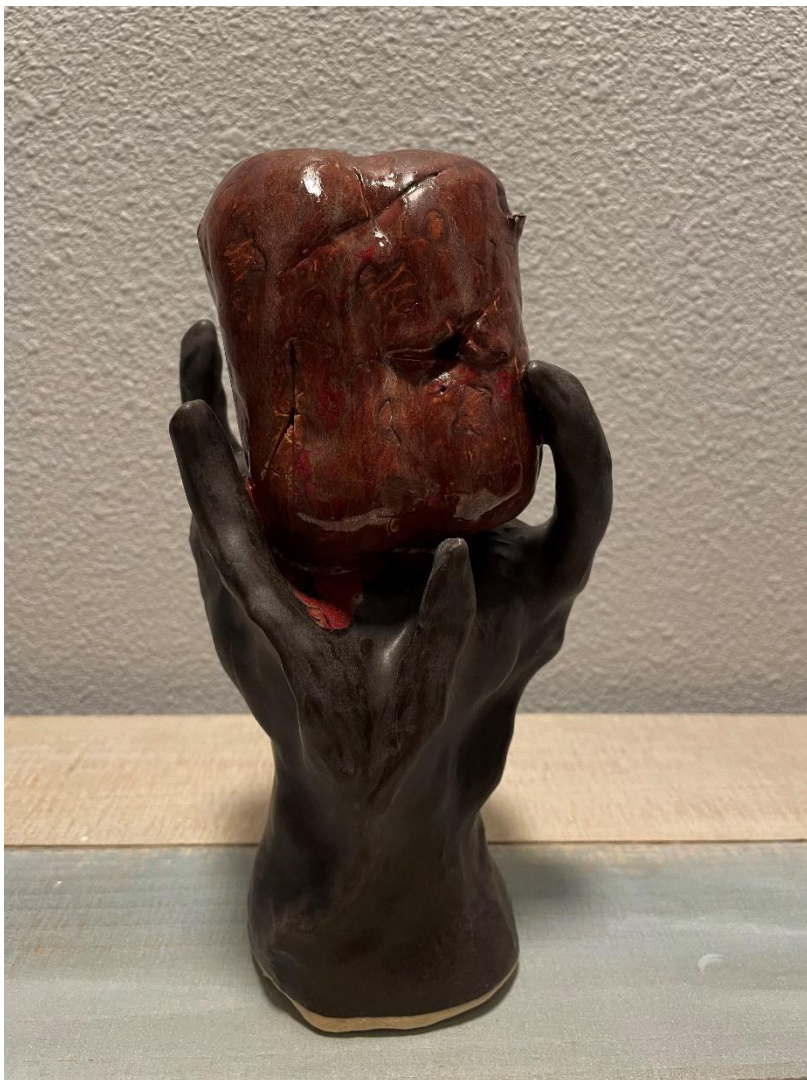
Questions, questions,
It's all a mix of haze,
Yes or nos,
Goodbyes and Hellos,
Why are we so afraid?

The light bleeds dim,
As does the gatekeeper,
The heart is pounded,
Pulped into a piece.

How did we get here?
I'm in another daze,
But now this lonesome heart,
Consumes my waking days.

Tired of the Pain

By Hannah Holder



My Tower

by Kaitlyn Vyas

I sat upon my tower, my legs hanging off the edge. Fall was coming, it was a gorgeous sight. Orange, red, and yellow surrounded my tower. My old brick tower that was covered in overgrown roots and vines, moss growing on the side. It was such a pretty tower, it was one with nature. In the Spring the vines sprout beautiful flowers. It was not Spring anymore though, it was Fall. The leaves were dying, falling off the trees that went on farther than the eye could see. The animals were hiding, preparing for winter I suppose. The breeze was nice, it made the trees sway from side to side. Not a soul was to be seen other than me. Me and my tower, that's how it had always been.

Knights had come to save me, they'd climb the tower with their ropes and daggers. They'd climb to save me, to make me theirs. Unfortunately for them though, it was all for not. As soon as they made it up the tower, I pushed them right off. They did not need to see my face, they did not need to seal my fate. I'd tell them to leave and they ran away. Princes had tried the same but received a similar fate. If they even made up the tower, because some gave up because it was too hard to climb. Fools, thinking they're mighty and strong. They "deserve" a happily ever after, that's what they thought. That was until I came along and told them to shove off. For this is not a fairy tale. I don't need a knight to climb the tower, I don't need a prince to climb up my hair. I'm not Rapunzel, I don't even have long hair. I'm not a princess despite the silly tales. I just happen to find this tower many years ago, when I was young and frail.

The tale goes as follows, a princess kidnapped by an evil old woman, a mean rotten woman who wanted only a daughter with gorgeous blond hair. Her eyes were blue and her hair was gold. The king and queen were devastated, for their only daughter was taken as an infant. They'd never heard her first words or helped her learn to walk. They'd never

shown her what a loving family could uphold. That's the story that gets told. It's an old story, outdated and wrong. For the princess didn't get captured as a baby, there was no old woman. The princess lived a happy life, in her castle with her family. Until one day she vanished, the king and queen barely acknowledged it and moved on. They had already had three other kids, there was already someone more capable to take the throne. So the princess was gone, the eldest of the royal family, yet nobody batted an eye. That's the real tale, not a made-up lie.

The princess was not with an evil witch, stowed away in a tower isolated from the outside. The tower was in fact beautiful and was not hers, it was mine. I know the truth better than anyone, as, in the spring, a young woman with a ripped-up fancy dress offered me an apricot. In return, I gave her normal clothes that fit. She slept in my tower on my bed, she was grateful and humble. A beautiful woman, on the inside and out. I gave her a bag with food and water and sent her on her way. She promised that she'd return the favor one day. On that beautiful Fall day I saw the woman again, she wore a coat and baggy pants. I'd helped her up my tower, with my ladder of course. She said hi and told me about herself and her life. She'd baked me an apple pie, and washed my clothes. She'd told me about how she ran away. How her family made her feel like she'd never be good enough to play the part of the queen. She'd told me of her life in the castle, how she felt alone despite being surrounded by others. She thanked me for helping her, telling me how she found a village. She'd found a kind elderly woman that gave her a job, she'd learned to bake all sorts of treats from bread to cookies. She told me how she made the elderly woman's bakery full of new customers every minute. She had a stable job and found a place to call home. She'd asked if I wanted to come with her, but I said no. For I liked my tower, I liked being alone. She said she understood and said if I needed anything just ask. I thanked her for the pie and the offer, and then she left.

Here I was in my tower, mine and mine alone. I'd harvest plants every day, for winter since it was coming soon enough. I warmed up the apple pie over my fireplace, it was the best treat I'd had in a while. I normally ate whatever I could scavenge, from cabbage to berries. I ate anything I could find. I may be young and poor. I may have nothing to my name but this tower. Yet, that's exactly how I want things to stay. My parents died three years ago, and I was all alone. I was weird and strange, I didn't like books or sports. I was just a kid who liked plants and nature. So I left my village, away from my parents' grave. I wandered for days. I was out of water and food, I was about to turn back. I was trotting through dirt, the sun burned my skin. That was until I found my tower. It was next to a lake. I found berries to eat and I drank from my hands at the lake. I climbed up the tower by the ladder. There was nobody inside, it was empty and bare. There was dust everywhere. I found a branch and tried to "sweep" the best I could. I gathered wood and started a fire to keep me warm. I gathered vegetables, berries, and fruits that grew nearby. Eventually, travelers came by who needed a place to stay, so I let them and they repaid me with a bucket and a pair of clothes. Then I followed them to the village nearby, I traded and bartered with whoever I could find. I found a broken bed that nobody could use and found a mender who helped me fix it and gave them apples to spare. I had clothes, food, water, and a bed. That's all I needed, that's all I ever wanted. So when princes came by demanding to save a princess I was surprised. However, I know the *real* tale of the princess who disappeared. The princes and knights who came knew the real story too, as they got thrown off by me, a young boy at the age of thirteen.

The Gifted Child

by Kaitlyn Vyas

Born to Succeed.

Always under pressure.

Good behavior is needed.

Their grades are not lesser,

Other kids play in the sun

The gifted child can't have fun.

They are extraordinary,

Or a wasted opportunity.

So they work hard so they can see

the look on their parent's face.

Scared to make a mistake,

Their disappointment is at stake.

The letter A is plastered on every test,

It's hard not to be jealous of their successful conquest.

Yes, they may seem perfect

But boy, they have a secret

As the child hands their parents their achievements

Their parents show it off as if their own.

For they are not children,

But a trophy to be shown.

Lucid Dreamer

By Luwel Abarintos

Inner fantasy.

Realms. Adventure. Magic.

Why would I escape?

Movement Underwater

By Hannah Holder



Inner Thoughts

By Luwel Abarintos

Laughter. Smiles. Sunshine.

Can I go back to my past?

Anger. Frowns. Darkness.

The Shell

By Brittany Romanok

Intricate ripples and curves dance along its spine.
Sun bleached, Bone white.
Native roar when I hold it to my ear.
Reminded of a simpler time when I was full of wonder.
My mother's hand in mine.
She smiles down on me with tenderness.
Heart's squeeze with love.
Sand betwixt my toes, licked by the sea.
Dimples, and smiles summoned by delight.
Memories flow from a mollusks empty husk.
This simple little treasure unlocks pastime youth.

Follow Me, God

By Anna Blanton

It was a crisp yet eerie morning, the world felt shifted, almost off center. My brain was clouded, being rained on, damp and down. I placed my feet flat on the cool, wet grass surrounding my bed. "Grass?" I thought to myself, I raised my head off my chest and looked at my surroundings, nature was swallowing me, trees everywhere I averted my eyes too. A large brigade of ants flowed over my feet, like spangles of new color. Am I dreaming, or just lassitude? I take my body from my bed, levitating towards the abyss of the forest, leaving me impotent. The trees around me were breathing, mimicking my breath and body movements as I traveled by. I savored the since of freedom and solitude this forest was offering me, something I've never felt before. Taking in the beautiful scenery slowly became guilt, sin like, "I don't deserve this, not yet" Shackled at my feet, mentally in detention and God's plan of redemption seemed to be out of the question. *smack* The sound of metal on human flesh awoke me, bringing me back to my senses and sad reality. I used to be illustrious, praised by the people who followed me and my power, but corruption got the best of me. All my fame, fortune and control were swept underneath my feet in a matter of seconds, left me no longer undefiled. The other sick people would say my religion is sick, cruel, mind controlling, and my fame was infamy. Me and my fraternity mandated the perfect plan to show our God how much we value his existence, martyr was the only way. The transgression we caused will be put in history and my religion will be passed down to the next ruler who is worthy to carry such power. Putting me in prison will not stop me or what our God can do. To my loyal followers I shall soon join you in Hell, I value each and every one for taking your life for our god, follow the forest to freedom, to home.

Enough

By Hannah Holder



Electromagnetic

Dane Thomsen

For Irinka

Life was dim 'til the High-Voltage Blonde,
Whose antenna crown sparkled like a wand.
Our eyes met and she revealed my true course,
Her chrome heels charged with gigawatt force.

Electric steps revealed a powerful figure,
As every light chased the super attractor.
Our desires made contact and gravity grew,
Then our lips connected, and every bulb blew.

Sparks showered the sky and electrons flowed,
Our souls transformed, a spiritual overload.
Against its current, the world became static,
Surfing this circuit of love, electromagnetic.

Others tuned to our rock shocking vibe,
And our couple grew to a virtual tribe.
“Our bodies hold potential,” she said with glee.
“Take my hand and experience pure energy.”

The city fused people into one smart machine,
Taking their knowledge but purging their dreams.
But our power builds civilizations that sing,
So we took to the sky on lightning wings.

Sparks showered the sky and electrons flowed,
Our souls transformed, a spiritual overload.
Against its current, the world became static,
Surfing this circuit of love, electromagnetic.

We play and spin and twist Reality for torque,
Creating a Cosmic motor and harmonic fork.
The polarity amps and dimensions blend,
So we'll dance and laugh as we transcend.

Our fingers locked and we embraced forever,
As the attraction held our bodies together.
There birthed a new genre: digital romantic,
Energizing this circuit of love, electromagnetic.

Vita -- Profile

By Luwel Abarintos



Ash

By Anna Blanton

She was always a sweet kid, troubled, but still kind and quiet. Surprisingly, this was not the first time she lashed out like this, but she did not need to be this extreme, someone could have died but is that what she wanted? When Ash was born, she was merely anything but normal, she had a red birth mark covering about half of her body including her face, but that is not the only unique thing about her. Starting at an early age she understood things extremely fast, walking, talking, and even writing. She was a genius, the next Einstein, but as she grew up, she used her “gift” against people, classmates. She was extremely cleverer in all school curriculum, but had a burning love for science. She enjoys fire, how it makes things disappear from thin air. But there was one thing she loved more than fire and something that she could not even get.

It was a chilly Christmas Eve and all Ash can think about is the one toy she wants, a huge purple glitter unicorn. Yes, it sounds like a ridiculous toy, but she was only 6 at the time. Now, Ash had been profusely asking her parents to get her the unicorn and well, long story short she never got it. There was no one else she could bother about the unicorn, so, she went to the big man, not God but Santa Claus. She would write letters daily to Santa telling him about all the pleasant things she did and how much she deserves the unicorn for Christmas. You did not hear this from me, but Santa is not real, obviously, but no parent is going to tell their kid that Santa is not real, so they can shut up about a toy. Right? Well, allow me to back up a little bit more; Ash always has not been a “good” kid. Since she could remember she has always been obsessed with fire/danger, she thinks it is because of her name, Ash. And due to her birth mark kids at school call her two faces, so her being the normal kid she is, decides to light a trash can on fire and chucked it at the kids who picked on her. The kids were fine, but this is just

one of the many “flares” she has (It is what she likes to call her episodes).

It is finally Christmas morning and Ash flings herself into the floor, early as hell, so she can unravel her presents hoping for her obnoxiously big unicorn, and like I said she never got her unicorn. So, Ash lit all her Christmas presents on fire and threatened to light her parents on fire, so sweet. To calm her down, her mother put on the TV and placed her in front of it. She hated movies/shows, “If you’re bored entertain your self-by doing something then rotting your brain from the inside out,” as Ash would say. But this movie captured her attention, it was the first Santa Claus movie when Santa falls off the roof and died so the man's house he fell off of must become Santa to continue his legacy. And Ash thought of something, what if she killed Santa and became him?

For an entire year Ash thought of how she would kill Santa so she could be him and receive any toy she wants, whenever she wants. Science experiment after science experiment, she was a perfect arson by the age of 7. Now mid-August where she is so close to finding out the most foolproof way of how to kill Santa, and she finds out he is not real cause of some kids at school so she asks her slow parents if Santa is real. Her father claimed he was the big man not knowing what ride he is in for. So “Santas” death date was a lot closer than she expected, the faster she assassinated her father, the faster she could have her unicorn.

Ash cannot kill her father quite yet; she needs to catch him in the act of being Santa or him barely being Santa. Night after night she would stalk her father, marking every move and even placing cameras so she can see him while she is away. And of course, she never captured him being Santa, so she gave up and accepted the fact she was never going to obtain her unicorn. Fast forward to Christmas Day, and Ash wakes up to the unpleasant smell of smoke filling her nose and lungs. She runs into her sister's room to make sure that she is okay but she is not there. Her parents start screaming for Ash to get out of the house. Ash runs down stairs and

finds the Christmas tree is burning and so is the living room. It is engulfed in flames, the presents, the furniture, the memories, everything is just burning and dying. She finds her sister already outside, covered in ash with can of gasoline. Her sister was the one who lit the tree. But why would she do something like this? Cause Ash got all the attention in the family. Hestia and Ash are twins but unlike her sister she was not as bright as her. Her family always forgot about Hestia, it was always about Ash, never her. She desperately wanted Ash gone but did not know what to do or how to do something so evil to get her out. Finally, Hestia thought if she did something so awful, and made it look like Ash did it, she would finally gain the recognition she demands. She decided to snoop around and get dirt on her but Ash loves fire, everyone knows that so why not just light the house on fire.

Putting the blame on Ash was easy and got Hestia what she wished. Ash got sent elsewhere, to a “unique place for special kids. “It wasn’t hard to convince her parents that it was Ash, but Hestia even advised them about her scheme to assassinate her father over a unicorn and that the fire was just an attempt of murder “gone wrong.” Ash got picked up by some “sinister people” while the house she grew up in, is up in raging flames that she did not cause but is getting the blame for. Ash takes her last and final look at her twisted twin and Hestia was holding a half-burned, obnoxiously big purple unicorn in her arms with a huge smirk on her face as her father picks her up and walks away from burning house and leaving Ash behind.

Why I Quit Smoking

By Brittany Romanok

I inhaled delicious acid black.

The rich taste of bitter earth caressed my tongue.

I exhaled, a plume of burning white-grey smoke enveloped
me.

A tingling itchy line frolicked towards my eyes.

Tears summoned as the entire Los Angeles skyline burned
my eyeballs.

Pleasure pervaded my mind as I flicked the tip.

Fingers lifted to my lips for another sweet drag.

My chest exploded in an ecstasy of fire

Grant Not Grace

By Merritt Simpson

It was a normal summer day in Centerville when Grant was playing outside climbing trees. Climbing was Grant's favorite activity, even in the cold of winter. He loved being high above the world that he thought would never understand him. Just then, Grant's mother popped her head out the sliding glass door and yelled

"Grace, you'd better stop climbing in your dress," in a stern country accent.

Grant hated it when mom called him Grace, which is his legal name. He rolled his eyes and plopped down to the luscious grass below. He thought for a moment about all the times he had wished his mom called him by his chosen name and proper pronouns. Just then, Dad got home from work and Grant rushed inside to clean up. He knew Dad would yell if he saw his little "girl" in torn stockings and a grass stained dress.

Dad greeted Mom with a kiss on the cheek and picked up Grant and placed him on his shoulders.

"Grace, how was summer camp today?" He asked.

"It was fine Dad, all I did was play," Grant said in a deeper more masculine voice.

Grant knew his Dad hated when he talked like that, but he knew it was the only way to get his attention. Dad rolled his eyes and placed Grant in a chair at the dinner table. Dad and Mom sat down on either side of Grant and folded their arms. Grant knew this couldn't be good. After a few moments Mom said,

"Grace, your counselor called today and said you demanded to be called Grant at camp, is this true?"

"Yes, but-" Dad interrupted before Grant could finish,

"But nothing, we told you to drop this boyish attitude and behavior. You are our little girl," Dad stated with a firm tone.

Grant couldn't help but cry. He sat there crying as his parents glanced at one another stunned.

"But I am... a boy, whether you like it or not," Grant finally muttered.

"Grace, that is absurd," Dad said slamming his fist on the table.

"We let you get a pixie cut and wear shorts in public and that's not enough for you?"

"No Dad, you have refused to call me Grant and have refused to see that I am a boy," Grant yelled through his tears.

Dad sat there silently. The silence was too loud for Mom, so she got up, grabbed the keys, and slammed the door on her way out. Little did Grant know, that was the last time he would see his mother for the next six months.

Dad was still sitting silently at the table when Grant started to get up. Dad put his hands on Grant's shoulders and said

"Grace, you are making dinner because that is what women do."

Those words cut deep into Grant, he got up and made dinner as asked. Dad reported Mom missing the next morning when she didn't return from her dramatic storm off. The police kept following leads that were dead ends. The following days seemed to go by much slower without Mom around. Grant knew he had to be the person he was inside. Without Mom around, it was easier for Grant to wear "boy" clothes during the day while Dad was at work. Slowly Grant started to wear more boyish outfits around his father. Months had passed since Grant had seen his mother, he longed for her to come home, but he couldn't help to blame himself for her disappearance. After all, she left during a conversation about Grant and his *boyish* behavior. Eventually, Dad and Grant started to move on, losing hope that Mom would ever return. Dad struggled to become more accepting of Grant without Mom around. But Dad knew that Grant would never be the little girl he thought Grant was meant to be. Eventually, Dad started calling Grant, "G" instead of Grace.

They had just moved over to the next town so Dad could be closer to work.

“Dad, meet the teacher is tomorrow, I know you are busy but can you take me?” Grant asked as his father was washing dishes.

“Sure pal. Maybe the teacher can call you Grant this year,” He said with a smile.

Things were looking up for Grant, even though Dad was the one who was originally upset about Grant being trans, he didn't seem to mind now that Mom was missing. The next day, Dad picked up Grant from baseball practice and took him to meet his new teacher. Grant was nervous as Dad and him roamed the halls of his new school. Dad assured him that his new teacher and classmates would be friendly. They finally found Grants new classroom. The door was painted shimmery gold and there were little popcorn buckets with the name of each child in his class on them. Grant searched high and low for “Grace”, but it wasn't there. Way up at the top, near the door frame was “Grant” written in bubble letters. Grant smiled and gave his Dad a big hug. Grant took a deep breath and opened the door to his new classroom. Inside, the classroom was decorated as if it were the Red Carpet. His new teacher Mrs. Taylor greeted Grant with a big smile. She led him to his desk which had some welcome gifts from her and the school. Grant saw his name tag on his desk and traced over the letters one by one.

“Did I spell it wrong?” Mrs. Taylor asked.

“No, it's perfect,” Grant said wiping away a tear.

Grant had never felt so seen in his life. But this feeling went away on the morning of the first day of school. This was the first year that Grant was allowed to be himself. He was nervous about what the other kids in his class would think if they found out. He pushed that to the back of his mind and sat down to eat breakfast. Grant looked down at his Cheerios and was forced to remember his mother's first day of school pancakes she made every year. Although it made him sad, he was happy to finally be himself. At school Grant found his way to his classroom like Dad and him did

just the day before. The golden door was waiting for him at the end of a very long hallway. He opened it and saw all his new classmates. Everyone welcomed him in, saying

“Good morning, Grant! Welcome to our school!”

Grant was slightly embarrassed as he had never felt so accepted by his peers before. Grant sat down and unpacked his cool red and black backpack. Everything in his backpack was new and had his chosen name on it.

“Good morning class,” said Mrs. Taylor.

“Good morning Mrs. Taylor,” everyone replied.

This year Grant could finally be the boy he truly is without being shamed by his parents. During “morning meeting” Mrs. Taylor let everyone introduce themselves one by one. Everything was new to Grant, he was nervous about lunch. Just then, the lunch bell rang, everyone grabbed their lunchbox and hurried to the cafeteria. Grant was the last out of his classroom, when he finally arrived to the lunchroom everyone had paired off into their cliques, so he sat at a table alone. Moments later, a girl from the grade ahead of him sat down next to him, she opened her lunchbox and whispered,

“I know your secret.”

Grant swallowed his food and almost choked. How could anyone know he is transgender already? He thought to himself.

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about,” he replied.

“If you don’t want me telling everyone about it, I suggest you stay out of my way,” she said with a smirk.

“Will do,” Grant said rolling his eyes.

Grant couldn’t stop thinking about the secret the girl from lunch knew. He slumped back in his chair and pulled out his math book. In the corner of the book, it said “5th Grade Math Workbook”. Grant raised his hand and told his teacher that this had to be a mistake because he was in 4th grade. Mrs. Taylor assured him that there was no mistake made and he would be going to the 5th grade hallway during the math block. Grant snaked through the hallway and found room 502. This door was gray and had no decorations

on the outside. Grant knocked on the door and the mystery girl from lunch opened it. His eyes met hers, she smirked. Grant rolled his eyes and found an open desk to sit at. Luckily, the one open seat left was on the other side of the room from mystery girl.

Weeks had passed since the mystery girl whose name was Amber had confronted him about his secret. Grant tried his hardest to stay out of Ambers way, but it became increasingly harder because Mr. Johnson had made Amber and Grant desk neighbors. Amber always found a way to annoy Grant during class, luckily math block was only 45 minutes long and Grant mostly chose to work alone on in class worksheets.

Thanksgiving break was about to start, and Grant was excited to have a big feast with Dad, but before break would begin, Grant had to endure a grueling 45 minutes with Amber in his math block. Grant had practically forgotten that Amber knew his secret and he turned in his homework as usual. Mr. Johnson stood up and passed out a pop quiz. Many children groaned as the quizzes were being passed out, but not Grant. He loved math, especially long division which is the chapter they finished yesterday. He continued down the page until he was about finished, although he could not help but think about how his mom was always impressed with how quickly he could finish a math equation. He sat there, with one problem left to finish on his paper and thought about all the good times he had had with his mom. Just then Amber gasped and stood up shouting,

“Grant was looking at my paper, he was cheating.”

The classroom erupted, Grant was red in the face and couldn't talk. Mr. Johnson escorted Grant into the hallway. He explained that cheating is not tolerated, and he would receive a zero. Grant began sobbing, he didn't cheat. He told Mr. Johnson about Amber and her threats from the beginning of the year, but Mr. Johnson didn't believe him. Grant knew Amber could be mean, but he didn't know she could ruin his chances at being a straight A student.

Grant slinked home slowly. Dreading the lecture, he knew his father would give him. He arrived home and noticed his father's car was not in the driveway but there was a note on the fridge saying "At the police station, Sheriff Cooper is following a lead on your Mom's case. Dinner is in the fridge" with a smiley face. Grant was excited at the possibility of his Mom being found and coming home. He looked at the discipline report that Mr. Johnson had sent home for Dad to sign, and on the kitchen table was Dad's checkbook with his signature on each of the used checks. Grant practiced a few times and foraged his father's signature on the report. He remembered Mr. Johnson only had the landline number from the old house and Dad would never know about the report. Dad came home with a big smile on his face,

"They found her," he said spinning Grant in a circle.

"Where was she?" Grant asked.

"That's not important, what is important is that we get to pick her up tonight, just in time for Thanksgiving."

Grant couldn't help but to think the worst. He knew he was the cause of his mother's disappearance. On the way to the police station Grant chewed on his fingernails until they were practically raw. He closed his eyes and thought about the last time he saw his mother, the night she left and never returned. Dad finally pulled into the police station. They walked inside to see Mom sitting next to Amber, her dad worked at the police department. Mom came over and hugged Grant and picked him up.

"Hi Grant, I missed you!" Mom said with a little squeak.

"Mom! I missed you too, where have you been?" Grant questioned.

"Oh, I was at Ambers house, her mom is a recovery counselor,"

"A recovery counselor? Recovery from what?"

"Grant, when you were younger, I had a surgery and got addicted to the medication I was prescribed after," Mom admitted.

Everything suddenly made sense, Mom never worked, she never came in to tuck him in to bed because she was asleep, and Dad was doing the work of both of them, and he couldn't deal with the fact that Grant was trans.

"Dad why didn't you tell me Mom wasn't missing?" Grant asked.

"We didn't want to scare you; she was missing for a few days, but I told her she needed help before she was allowed to come near you again. Does that make sense?"

Grant nodded. He was just happy to finally be with his family again. Thanksgiving was the first normal holiday and big event Grant had had in over 5 months. But he knew he had to tell Dad about Amber and her lie.

"Dad, a girl in my class accused me of cheating, but I didn't cheat and she had threatened me back in the beginning of the year-" Grant's father cut him off.

"Wait, son, who threatened you?" Dad asked.

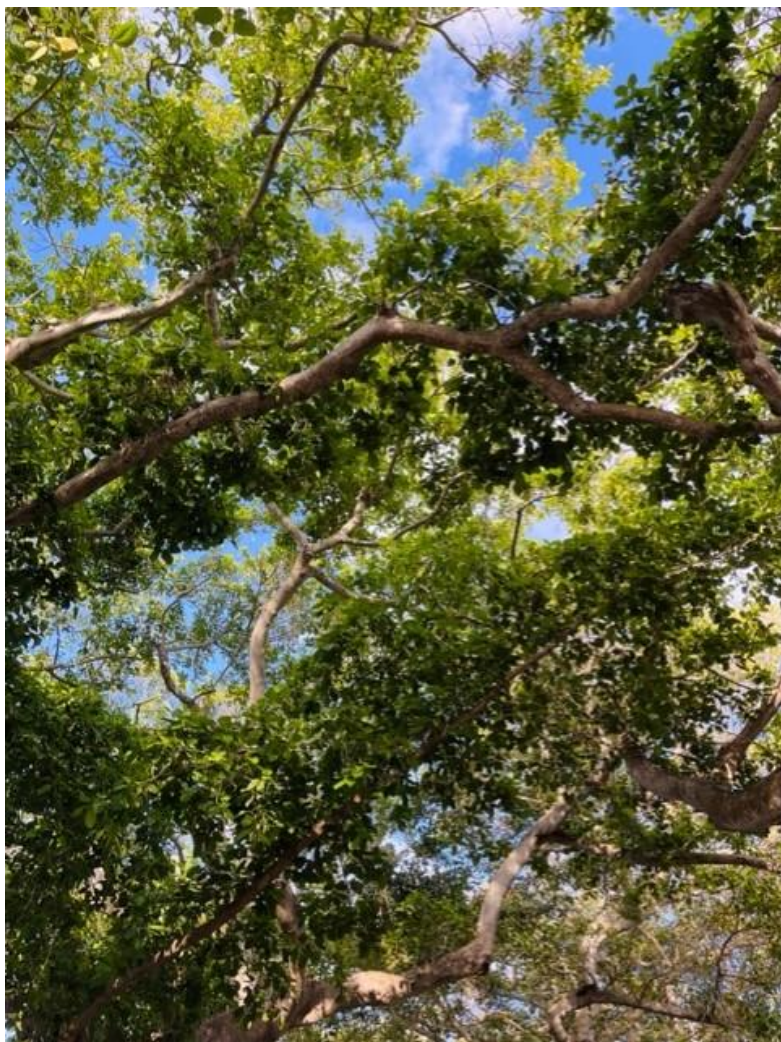
Grant went on and told his Mom and Dad about how terrible Amber had been to him because she knew his secret. At school Mom, Dad, Amber, her parents, and Grant sat in the principal's office. Grant and Amber sat there, exchanging glances every so often. Finally Principal Williams came in and explained the plan going forward, Amber had been moved to a new classroom with less distractions and was suspended from school for a week. Grant just wanted this meeting to be over, he just wanted to be normal. Amber was forced to apologize to Grant and tell Principal Williams what secret of Grants she knew.

Amber stood up and cleared her throat,

"Grant's mom is an addict."

The Banyan Trees

By Abigale Woods



Waking up

By Anna Blanton

As the windows light_up with morning dawn

My mom wakes us up with a yawn

I hear my sisters get fussy and grumpy

As I lay in bed all comfy

I hear my mother scream

While I am still in a dream

She wakes me with a jolt

And I get ready in a bolt

The smell of breakfast fills the air

As I'm fixing my hair

I sit down to eat and enjoy

But it was time to deploy

Bacchanalian

By Rowan Geddes

Smooth under my fingers, you are
round gushing,
full to bursting—a snap—
plucked and nipped
at your prime.

Banner blossoms rustling,
waxen and petal-soft,
falling into my hands,
rolling between my fingers. Firm skin,
soft flesh: I am baring gleaming teeth
to take a bite.

Press it into my skin
(the air is thick
with memory and desire
fermented over time).
You are fragile,
aromatically romantic,
tacky on my fingers—come a little closer for a taste.

(The innuendo is in this: I am holding you in my arms
and you are bleeding

grapes from the vineyard pressed into the
rich sticky body
of wine.)

Swollen lips, syrupy sweet,
red-lined and rich—
from juice
or my mouth on yours, I can't tell
and nor do I care enough
to divine.

The earth is curled around you, and you,
you are rich, wealth itself. Drip
slow, steady,
swirling mauve-maroon
in oak and mahogany.

Smother with time, wiser with age,
blessed by Chronos,
and Kairos alike.
(A bitter edge, madeira) I dip my hand in
rippling red
and you are silk
below my touch.

(The innuendo is in this: you are supple,
slick, and warm, spilling over

a fountain—crashing waves, foam
Homeric in your allure,
and sharing metaphor with the sea.)

Drunk on your laughter,
I am kissing it as it spills off your lips.
Neither of us remember
who drank the wine first,
but it is sweet,
and somehow sweeter still
passing from your mouth to mine.

The column of your throat,
the graceful neck of the bottle—I am
swirling patterns on your shoulders,
wine spiraling in rich,
blood-red rivulets; my mouth
tonguing the patterns—*I love you, I love you, I love you—*
until the words lose their meaning
and I am numb to their flavor.

(The innuendo is in this: I am drinking more so
than drunk; intoxicated inebriation
an infinite fixture,
permanence achieved
in my straining
to touch gods.)

You are Persephone and you are wine,
you are beloved, I am devoted
and you are mine—
hold you tight, press my fingers into your sides
blooming red and purple
under my grasp.

Retirement

By Hannah Holder



Love.

By Abigale Woods

A simple word,

Yet a complex emotion,

All tied with hate, jealousy, and suffering,

Love brings pain.

Love can be the light at the end of a dark tunnel,

The sunshine on a rainy day,

But for some,

Nothing more than a word.

Vita -- Ballroom

By Luwel Abarintos



My Bubble Gum Girl

By Dane Thomsen

In pink leotard and white skates, she's hip for fun
While golden tan and yellow shades reflect the sun.
Blowin' bubbles, she hits the beach n' boardwalk
Where 'Bubble Gum Girl' is scribbled in chalk.

Cruisin' the concrete between the palm trees,
Where flamingos and cherry ride the breeze.
She laughs "Join the fun that don't stop!"
My Bubble Gum Girl goes Pop! Pop! Pop!

Beautiful beach bums laugh and smile
As her playlist swims down the sandy mile.
A sea of hands wave to the chick in the pink,
She lifts her shades and shoots back a wink.

She steers towards the bright lights at the arcade
Where an island of games shout to be played.
Alarms and tickets celebrate her wins,
My babe hops and cheers and her ponytail spins.

Cruisin' the concrete between the palm trees,
Where flamingos and cherry ride the breeze.
She sings "Feel the beat that don't drop!"
My Bubble Gum Girl goes Pop! Pop! Pop!

Her bubbly friends come in every flavor,
All with mouth-watering beauty to savor.
They flock together and dominate the track,
My breath-taking girl comes in a pack.

When the sunset paints a sherbet sky,
She blows a big bubble and rides it high.
She cheers “This party goes straight to the top!”
My Bubble Gum Girl goes Pop! Pop! Pop!

A Day at Disney

By Abigale Woods



Ashes

By Merritt Simpson

My mom is happily dead.
Like sunshine and rainbows
In a children's book.
Death,
Final, Finished, Gone.
She fell off the face of the earth
Never to be seen again.
She might be happy but I sure as hell am not.

Anemone

By Rowan Geddes

fragility is not a concept I've been
given leave to explore, not one of the
many tall poly-syllabic adjectives
stacked before
a recalcitrant reticent child
and told to finish before
being permitted to leave the table.

fragility was not on my mind when I
picked splinters out from under
bleeding fingernails because no matter how many times I
washed my hands, the
fractured mulch refused to leave and only
nestled itself deeper into
thin brown fingers.

fragility only briefly crossed my thoughts when
she cried over a mother in all but name and somehow even
the locked door of the bathroom,
two pillows,
and a set of neon orange earplugs could not muffle the
wailing railing shrieks of a lost and
never found child.

in line at the shitty watered-down walmart
the offshoot, new-root plant from three summers and one
boyfriend ago,
in tearing plaid pajama pants I stole from my father so
far back that I'm the only one who remembers they
were never mine,
is where I pause,
clutch my wallet a little tighter,
and think about fragility.

it's there—holding a box of day old pastries,
confections marked down a dollar
(or two,
or less)
that I will pay for in cash so she does not ask about
where the moneys gone—
that I am suddenly aware of the futility in
self-soothing and that even as I am not crumbling
away, pulled by splintered child-hands into bed with old
stars and supernovae I, I
am still
falling
apart.

sometimes I stare in the mirror
and the man before me stares back
and with wide eyes we ask ourselves whether

I am who I was yesterday or
if I am somehow even less, eroding
(slowly) away;
old glass melting just out of sight
and only visible
once it's too late to do anything
about it.

Contributor Biographies

My name is **Luwel Abarintos**. I am currently a student enrolled to earn my A. A degree. I plan to pursue a B.S. in I.T Management. Besides spending time in classes and assignments, I enjoy drawing, reading manga, watching anime and k-drama. I am a fan of any rom-com. When I want to find a place to relax my head, I love to either take naps or sit in my lanai to listen to the sounds of nature; the birds chirping, the wind rustling the leaves, and a few rabbits and squirrels running through my backyard.

Faith Altman is currently a freshman at SCF and am enjoying my first semester well.

Rowen Geddes is 17, an English major, and currently wading through Ao3 cataloguing hell. I draw and write poems mostly, save the occasional behemoth of a fanfic.

My name is **Brittany Romanok**. I am a 27-year-old Florida native, and currently enrolled in my last semester of college. I'm on track to graduate with an A.A. in December. As for my educational goals, I intend to pursue a B.A. in Liberal Arts focused on English. People who know me would say that I live life to the fullest and love reading and writing. As someone who hadn't written poetry in many years, I would be lying if I said I wasn't afraid of failing to create insightful/groundbreaking poems. In spite of this, I persevered, drawing inspiration from my memories or general life experiences. It was almost ironic that my most minor memories were the most impactful. As a result of digging deep and allowing myself to be vulnerable, admitting to struggling with my smoking addiction, led to writing about my crippling experience in "Why I Quite Smoking." Also, My mother has been an inspiration, a struggling single mother of twins, she always found time for us even while working three jobs. I

captured one of my fondest memories linked to a cherished memento in a poem called “The Shell.”

Merritt Simpson has worked in the creative artistry space since they were 3 years old. They used to write stories when they were little and that slowly developed into creative writing which led them to take classes at SCF with a creative undertone. They have honed their craft for over 10 years but have never had anything published.

Dane Thomsen is an author and essayist. With a love for pulpy dialogue, films with hard-hitting fist fights, and vibrant music, he aims to wrap playful, larger-than-life adventures in lyrical style. His sportpunk novel ZIGZAG is a film set to prose, analyzing politics and philosophy in a social-media driven world. Discover the mysteries of the North American Motherboard at theelectrongods.com.

I am **Kaitlyn Vyas** and I'm a dual enrollment student at SCF. I'm seventeen and I'm trying to graduate high school with my associate's degree. I work part-time at a martial arts studio and I'm working towards my black belt. I'm a big sister of seven and I'm a big fan of creative writing.

My name is **Abigale Woods** and I am a Dual Enrollment student here at SCF. I am a senior at Lemon Bay High School and am pursuing a degree in Psychology or Business. I have plans to continue my education at the University of South Florida after graduation. I enjoy working out, playing basketball, writing poetry, and reading books.

Elektraphrog Staff



Daqone Tirene is the Barancik Foundations first intern ever. At the foundation, he is learning more about the Sarasota County community as he is becoming more involved with philanthropic work that will change lives. He is a Take Stock in Children scholarship recipient, and an NAACP award winner. He is passionate about sports, music, and writing. Daqone played football in high school and college as his highlights can be found on Hudl. Also, Daqone played varsity basketball all four years of his high school career, and he still enjoys playing basketball to this day. He has given speeches at ceremonies which includes his high school graduation, and a special event for the celebration of the Arts that was held at Booker High School. He is the oldest of his mother's four children.

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