

# Floodwall

volume2, issue3

spring 2021





# *Floodwall* volume 2, issue 3

*spring 2021*



Cover: Andrew Youngblom, *Conflict and Hybrid of Plant and Ghost*

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*Floodwall* is a production of students at the University of North Dakota. The magazine is produced by volunteers and students in the ENGL 234 course. Submissions to *Floodwall* are open only to University of North Dakota students during our open calls. Submission guidelines and back issues are available on the *Floodwall* website: <https://arts-sciences.und.edu/academics/english/floodwall-magazine/>.

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## From the Editors

### *Floodwall* returns . . . with our biggest issue yet!

Founded in spring 2012 by graduate students at the University of North Dakota, *Floodwall* published five issues of creative writing, interviews, and reviews, featuring writers from across the nation.

These issues are preserved on the *Floodwall* website as volume 1 of the journal. In spring 2020, a team of UND undergraduate and graduate students led by Managing Editor Amy Kielmeyer revived *Floodwall*. Now in its second volume, *Floodwall* publishes creative and critical work exclusively by UND students.

Our student-run, campus literary magazine takes its name from a landmark known well to the community of Grand Forks—the system of floodwalls and levees that line the Red River of the North. The floodwalls offer resilience, hope, and shelter. It's our deep hope that these pages offer something similar for our dynamic creative community at the University of North Dakota.

This issue of *Floodwall* shelters a more expansive, magical community of texts than ever before. Terrestrial dreamers watch the night sky for possibilities. Gardens and lawns become sanctuaries and wildernesses. A meditation on the video game *Outer Wilds* probes the ethics of exploring the cosmos. In our first-ever publication of a play, a pair of gamblers watch a horse race with fatal complications. A painting of downtown Grand Forks renders a construction scene with beauty and grace. And our first-ever themed section on “Growth” collects poetry, fiction, photography, and art that invite us to explore growth as a natural and spiritual process, rooted in the wilderness and the soul.

We'd like to thank all of the poets, storytellers, essayists, photographers, and artists who submitted work for consideration in this issue. Without you and your creativity, there would be no *Floodwall*. We're grateful to you for your boldness and your courage, and we're honored to have had the privilege of reading your work. Your brilliance as artists is one of the most beautiful parts of our campus. Keep making, keep creating. We believe in you.

We'd like to congratulate all of our contributors to this issue, as well as the winners of this year's creative writing scholarship competitions—Michaela Oosthuizen for the Thomas McGrath Award in Poetry and Keely McLean for the

John Little Fiction Scholarship. Congratulations, as well, to the runners-up for this year's awards—Casey Fuller and Charles Henry for the McGrath Award, and Parker Stenseth for the Little Scholarship.

We'd also like to thank our editors, our volunteer readers, and the students in this semester's ENGL 234 course for their hard work this semester in evaluating over 100 submissions to curate this dazzling display of creativity. We'd also like to thank our copyeditors for their sharp-eyed attention to detail.

Thank you, as well, to the Department of English and the College of Arts and Sciences for their support over this past year. Thank you, as well, to the UND Writing Center, where many of our copyeditors and volunteer readers work.

We couldn't have done it without all of you. And we hope, at the end of this long year, that this issue of *Floodwall* brings you some much-deserved joy.

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***prose***

## An Entomologist's Love Letter to the Universe

Jona L. Pedersen

*Jona L. Pedersen grew up in Norway, but has since relocated to the US where they are pursuing a degree in English with a minor in biology at the University of North Dakota. Weaving contemporary culture with old myths, Jona's fiction and poetry unveil the spaces in between reality and dreaming. Passions such as wildlife biology, entomology, and environmental justice also inspire their writing. For more about their work, check out their Twitter (@JonaLPedersen) or website ([www.jonalpedersen.com](http://www.jonalpedersen.com)).*

It was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1999. Aside from the headlights of your pickup truck, the only light I could see came from a McDonald's sign in the distance, hovering like the broken halo of an angel. *Heaven Is a Place on Earth* sounded through the stereo as you played the mixtape I had made for your birthday.

We put the world behind us and parked at the top of a hill. The hummingbirds had gone to sleep in the surrounding orange groves. You carved our initials into one of the trees with your pocketknife. I set up a telescope on the cargo bed of the truck. As we waited, we made up our own constellations. We filled in the distance between each star with stories. I peeled an orange and handed half of it to you.

Then she came. You pulled away from the telescope as a flash of fire lit up behind the lens. Columbia tore through the sky like Zeno's arrow. The space shuttle had one more mission left before she would burn up in Earth's atmosphere and kill a crew of seven. But in 1999, Columbia would bring her astronauts home. We watched as she departed Kennedy Space Center beyond the horizon.

As you pointed out her blazing tail, you told me that your favorite color was red. "The first color of the rainbow," you said, as if it were the first color the Big Bang or the gods or something else had come up with. Space is mostly void, but in 1999, Columbia brought red into our solar system. There were four ladybugs on board, named after the Beatles: John, Paul, George, and Ringo.

As the shuttle grew fainter, you told me, "The same way wolves raised Romulus and Remus, I was raised by ladybugs."

"Did you also kill your twin?" I asked.

“No, only my shadow.”

“What for?”

“I couldn’t let myself be defined by it anymore. Just like ladybugs refuse to be. We call them ladies, but they aren’t always. We call them bugs, but they are much more—they are hunters, pilots, keystones.”

“Then who would you like to be?”

“Anyone, as long as I don’t shy away from the world. The ladybugs taught me to belong fully. To captivate with flamboyance. To let your enemies know that you are not afraid to be seen.”

“But if they won’t shy away from this world, what are they doing up there?” I pointed to Columbia’s trail of smoke scarring the sky.

“You can’t define something that won’t let you. They show us that even if you’re small, you can still achieve greatness. Anyone can aim for the stars.” You went on to explain that if the quartet of ladybugs were able to hunt aphids in zero gravity, they could be introduced to gardens in space. Inevitably, we had started to think about planting flowers on the moon, making our home on Mars, building Noah’s Ark. You picked a white blossom from the branches of an orange tree and put it in my hair. The petals tickled my ear.

You wanted to know where I had been, how it could have taken me so long to find you when Earth is so small. In 1999, when light years had yet to grow between us, I told you I came from the color blue. I said, “Where I’m from, they say that if a ladybug flies from your hand, you should make a wish.” On the night of July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1999, we tasted milk of the galaxy and the citrus on each other’s lips. When we looked to the stars, we made four wishes each.

## Greer MacLaren

### Meghan Bird

*Meghan Bird was born and raised in Chanhassen, Minnesota, and is currently a senior at the University of North Dakota where she is working hard to obtain her BA in English, as well as her certificate in Writing and Editing. Meghan's career goal is to work in publication as she wants to help aspiring writers the way her professors and classmates have helped her!*

Greer realized that being led to the gallows instead of the pyre was a form of kindness. She now shivered against the crisp breeze that blew through the Strath Fillan glen that she, and a group of men, now walked through. No one had broken the damp silence that clung in the air around them. They had collected her from the village long before the sun would even break through the A'Bheinn Mhòr and so Greer had spent the first hour of the walk unaware of who was leading her to her death. They were now about three miles out of Strathyre before the sun began to rise, revealing familiar faces.

There were seven men total that were stationed on horseback around her. Greer knew the men in front well enough to recognize that they were Callan's cousins. Their names weren't rememberable nor important to her, but she knew them to be quite nasty and forked tongued.

*True MacGregors*, she thought to herself.

Beside her were two older men she recognized from her wedding ceremony, and when she turned her head to see the set of men behind her, one of the cousins jerked the rope that was around her neck and sent her face first into the grass and into a choking, coughing fit. When she was finally able to breathe and get her legs beneath her, she lifted her face and noticed that the seventh man, the one leading the party, had stopped his horse, and was now watching her through his lowered hood. Although Greer couldn't see his face, she felt as though she was being stripped naked under his gaze. He wore no tartan or pin that could hint at his clan, and so Greer deduced that he was the Hangman.

*No*, she told herself, almost happily. *Not my husband.*



They were taking her into the Trossachs. Greer knew she should have been trialed at the court in Stirling—or in Edinburgh for that matter—but it had been privately decided that her life was in the hands of the MacGregor clan. She knew *why* they hadn't brought her case to the mercy and minds of the Stuarts of Stirling, or any Stuart clan. They were Greer's most powerful ally and every clan in Perthshire knew it. She also knew that if the court caught wind of rising witchcraft amongst the clans, allies or not, every highlander would suffer. And so, Greer would be hanged and forgotten in the Trossachs, left to rot in its dark, quiet trees.

She had never liked the quiet.

It was something she had never grown accustomed to, even after the death of her family. Growing up, Ma had made music and dance a requirement within the halls of their estate. Ma, who had come from a long line of royal bailees, a few lairds, and a Duke—or so she's claimed—had been bred for such arts. And so, Greer and her sisters had vocal and dance lessons with her while Leith, her only brother, learned the pipes from Da. Greer had learned patience from those breathless lessons, as well as how to cure a splitting headache from Leith's heinous attempts with the squealing instrument.

With those lessons, weekly performances became tradition after dinner. It had been Greer's favorite because she loved the way Ma looked at them while they sang and reeled to whatever tune Leith had learned that week. And guaranteed at the end of every performance her parents would join in; their experienced feet bringing awe and laughter to her and her siblings as the pair danced to silly drinking songs they'd bellow together. Da had told anyone who would listen that he had fallen in love with Ma the moment he heard her sing at the gathering of the MacLaren's and Stuarts. The MacLaren clan had been loyal to the Stuarts for over a century now. It all began with a marriage between a MacLaren daughter and a Stuart Lord. *We were fated to be*, Da had told her at one of the gatherings. Greer remembered how he gazed softly at the spot Ma took up with her sister at the end of the table and—

Greer met a dip in the ground and she stumbled, her memories quickly vanishing. It had been painful to remember how happy she had been then. To remember her life before. She had forgotten how deeply her parents had loved each other—how *happy* they had been.

It made her want to cry.

To weep and grieve once again that she never got to experience that kind of love. Her throat burned and she blinked quickly, hoping to disband the forming tears before they could grow fat enough to roll down her cheeks. *I would sooner die before I let these deceived men see me cry.*

Greer knew better than to bring up memories of her family. To distract herself,

she observed her surroundings and recognized that they were now along the river banks of the Loch Voil. Greer had played along these banks as a child; dancing and fantasizing with her siblings while her parents watched them with their hands intertwined. Da had grown up north of the river in a small village named Balquhidder, where most of her clan had subsisted before the MacGregor's came.

She estimated that they still had four hours to go.

The men began to venture farther along the river, searching for a section of shallow water that would allow their horses to cross peacefully. This, unfortunately, didn't take long. While crossing, a gust of wind blew through her damp chemise and Greer silently cursed as the river turned her feet slow and numb. It was the end of October and these men had failed to give her shoes or even a kirtle to hide her nakedness. The noose, as it hung uncomfortably tight, scraped continually over her exposed skin. Greer peered down into the water and looked upon the woman who stared back at her. *Who are you?* she asked herself, shivering against the water's icy bite. *I don't recognize you.*

Something within her—something she believed to have been dead—pushed past the mental walls she placed around her heart and mind. Before she knew what was happening, a question had forced its way into her conscious: *Would Rory recognize me?*

Rory.

Greer had forgotten how beautiful that name was to her. How comforting and right it felt to her. Oh, the sweetness she tasted when she formed his name on her tongue and lips! *Rory, Rory, Rory.* Rory had been a dream—he had been *her* dream.

Greer wanted to remember him.

*Greer hadn't known what her Da had meant about fate until her seventh gathering. She and Caitrin were overseeing Leith while their parents talked with one of the many Stuart lords about an unruly neighboring clan—or whatever tedious things adults talked about—when Iona appeared beside her, tugging her close so she could whisper in her ear.*

*"That handsome black-haired lad sitting next to cousin Farlan has been starting at you all night." Greer turned to look in the boy's directions when Iona jerked her hard, "Don't be daft!" she hissed. "Don't make it so obvious!"*

*Greer blushed. She was fourteen now, a woman, and she knew that gatherings were a fine place to find a husband. Her parents had met like this after all. So, she glanced around the great hall and feigned interest in the stone-work hearths and banners that she'd seen over a hundred times. She had always adored Doune castle. It had been a second home to her and her clan during these celebrations. Even Queen*

Mary retreated here, *she recalled, feeling one step closer to the Scottish sovereign.*

*This silly play gave her the opportunity to sneak glances at her admirer. Iona hadn't been wrong; he was quite handsome. He wasn't a boy but a young man. His features were quite dark—hair, eyes, and eyebrows all enveloped in the same onyx black. His eyes, Greer would later discover, were hazel and could change color with the weather. His striking face was slightly soft in the cheeks, but she knew that once he got older those suggestions would become definition.*

*He was someone she had never seen before. Greer would have remembered him. "Perhaps he's a cousin we haven't met before?" was all she could suggest. "We tend to marry within the family, so who knows."*

*"Oh hush! He's too handsome to be related to any of us!" Iona pointed out.*

*Caitrin snorted beside them and Greer frowned at her sister, who, although was three years younger, shared a comparable face to her own. Calling Iona plain meant that she would be calling herself plain and Greer, by her own vanity, knew that she was far from it. "All the inbreeding has finally caught up to us I'm afraid," she teased, picking at her nails.*

*"Oh, Saint Margaret, Greer!" Iona gasped in horror.*

*She had another retort, but the rising movement of the young man stopped it in her throat. She watched as he excused himself to Farlan and made his way to their end of the table. Iona had been right once again. He was not a MacLaren, as his red and green kilt publicly announced himself as a Stuart. Smoothing her plaited hair from her face and pinching her cheeks for some color, Greer watched as he approached her and her siblings and bowed deeply as he introduced himself.*

*He was Rory Stuart, son of the 4th Laird of Ardvorlich and he wanted to dance with her.*

Rory had been decent at dancing, Greer remembered, but she had been better. Rory had always been quite tall, having over a foot on her, and at the time she had blamed his lanky limbs for his sluggishness. To put him out of his misery, she had led him away from the group of reeling dancers and had brought him to the corner of the room where she showed him the foot movements in slower motions. The image of his flushed cheeks flashed in her mind and she wanted nothing more than to place her cold hands upon his young cheeks and warm them. *He had always been so warm,* she recalled.

Greer struggled to take a deep breath. She wanted more of him.

*They were staring at each other now and Greer shamelessly let her eyes wander to Rory's lips. She watched the poor man blush and for a split second she envisioned herself getting on the tips of her toes and kissing him. Now she too was blushing at her improper thought.*

*Rory was the first to break the silence. "I was told by Farlan," he began, "that the only way to a MacLaren woman's heart was through his dancing ability."*

*"Aye, it is one of the ways." She breathed out, cheeks still flushed.*

*"And so, I demand nothing but the honest truth when I ask: could my dancing win affections amongst the women in your clan?"*

*Greer couldn't stop herself from smiling. "Depends on the MacLaren woman you're trying to win affections with." To her own delight, Rory laughed and she couldn't help but join in. It was a warm thing, his laugh, and Greer wanted to hear it again.*

*He ran a hand through his hair, a lingering smile had appeared on his face as he watched her through dark eyelashes. "And if you were that woman, what would you say?"*

*Greer's body tingled with a soft, intimate excitement she had never felt before. Perhaps this is what Da had felt with Ma! She had just met Rory, but she wished for nothing more than to know him further. To know how he filled his days and what made him happy. She wanted to know everything.*

*"Well," Greer sighed, "I'd say we have a lot of work to do."*



The memory of that night blurred as Greer realized she was struggling to breathe.

Realization struck her. When Callan's cousin had jerked the rope, the noose around her neck had tighten, restricting her airflow. It had been uncomfortable at first, but now it was unbearable. Greer's natural response was to reach for the rope, but her hands were uselessly secured behind her back.

They were beyond the river, perhaps six miles out of Strathyre when Greer started seeing black spots in her vision. She knew that if she fell behind, the rope would likely be yanked once more and maybe, she wished darkly, it would finish the job. *I'm a dead woman either way, so does it really matter if I died in some field outside of the Strathyre forest than in some damn tree in the Trossachs?*

Hell no longer scared Greer. She was already there.

As Greer slowed her pace, readying herself for the rope's devilish mercy, an awful choking sound escaped her narrowed throat before she could stop it. Heads whipped towards her and curses flew as Greer, with all her might, threw herself backwards.

Her world went dark and she forgot who she was.

When Greer finally came to, she was being hauled to her knees and rough hands were pulling the noose free from her neck. Someone in the swimming background snarled into her ear, "You're dyin' on our terms, you bloody she-devil!"



She could hear fragments of a heated conversation in between her ragged breaths. Greer swore she heard someone telling the others to give her a moment to rest.

*I'm going crazy*, she thought to herself.

Once Greer finally got her breathing under control, she lifted her head and looked upon the seven men who decided that allowing her to resume the walk with a noose around her neck would be a shite idea.

Greer felt the Hangman studying her from his position in the front. Refusing to shrink under his gaze, she slowly rose to her feet and took in his dark form. His hood still covered his eyes and most of his face while a dark, cropped beard and grimacing lips were the only things exposed. They stared at each other, neither one backing down.

Greer was no longer afraid of death, and she realized that he knew it too.

Suddenly, the Hangman dismounted from his horse and began walking towards her. "Don't touch me!" she hissed, taking another step back. "I'll walk!" He gave her no response as he approached her. *He's going to hurt me; make me pay for slowing them down. He was going to—*

Greer watched the Hangman in disbelief as he carefully lifted her up into his arms and walked them back to his horse. He placed her in his saddle, dismissing the cries from the other men as he mounted behind her. He was sitting so close that she could smell him. *He does not smell like Death*, Greer thought to herself. He had an earthy aroma of highland grass and snow drops, she realized. *How odd...*

*Three hours left*, she estimated as they entered the Strathyre Forest. The last time she had been through these woods, roughly six years back, she and Rory had been a week away from their hand-fasting ceremony.



Realistically, Greer knew that marriage was for political arrangements and never for love. Anyone with a motive knew that.

However, her parents had married for love and so Greer declared that she would accept nothing else. After her and Rory's first gathering, they had spent the next two years finding reasons to be within the other's company. Rory's family were the Stuarts of Ardvorlich who were of the same flesh and blood as the Stuarts of Balquhiddy. They *always* knew what was happening in their village. Nothing slipped past them.

So, it was no surprise when they had learned about her and Rory's affections for one another and began inviting Greer and her family over whenever they hosted Rory's. This was how they had fallen in love. She had taught him how to properly reel during the span of three different feasts, and by the time the next gathering came

around, the two of them were on the floor all night dancing to the point of collapse. She learned that Rory was a man of nature and would spend his days walking the banks of Loch Earn or hiking the hills of Ben Vorlich, as he had studied botany at St. Andrews. Greer had begged him to teach her all that he knew.

That was how their walks began. Cold mornings through damp glens led to grand talks about plants, politics, art, and passions. Greer wanted to forever walk these lands with him; to watch the sunrise wash over him and his beautiful eyes. Rory was kind and thoughtful and true and Greer wanted to spend the rest of her life with him.

Greer was just shy of seventeen when her family received an invitation letter to join Rory's in Loch Lomond. His mother had family matters to attend to but wished to make a holiday out of the journey. The letter had also suggested a time to conduct her and Rory's hand-fasting ceremony. However, Auntie Elsbeth had traveled to their estate several days before their departure to the loch, and so everyone but Greer remained behind.

Greer had been standing on the steps of her family's estate, kissing and hugging her family goodbye as Rory and his mother waited for her in the drive. She felt a tightness in her belly which she first deemed as excitement and nerves, but now she wasn't sure. It felt wrong to leave while her family remained behind... she just couldn't shake this strange feeling that she needed to stay.

"We'll be reunited in a weeks' time, love." Da promised, kissing her forehead. "Before ye know it, we'll be together again!"

Greer, comforted by this, kissed and hugged her family one last time before descending the stairs to the drive.

When they reached Loch Lomond, Greer and Rory never got a moment alone. She had been passed from one relative to the next, always asking about her upbringing, her family's trade, and how much land did her Da own. There were three more days of this until they had finally found their moment to slip away one early morning.

They decided to walk the banks of the loch, and when they reached it, Rory sat down in the grass and encouraged Greer to join him with a gentle tug of her hand. Greer sat with him, folding herself into his warmth as he wrapped them up in a thick blanket.

"I love you," he whispered sweetly, pressing a warm kiss to her temple. "I always will. Never forget that."

Smiling at the kiss, she closed her eyes and snuggled deeper into Rory and inhaled. He smelt like highland grass. She knew he meant every word and so she told

him, "I love you too."

They stayed like this for hours; snuggled deep in each other's warmth. It wasn't until the sun had reached the hilltops did Rory speak, but his words died on his lips as voices in the distance screamed their names with such urgency that Rory and Greer ripped themselves from their reverie and followed the voices back home.



*In 1558, clan MacGregor had killed eighteen MacLaren families and seized their lands.*



In the end, Greer did *not* marry Rory.

She had to marry a young man named Callan MacGregor as a bond of manrent paid to her and her clan for the killing of her family, alongside seventeen other MacLaren families. Her clan had tried to obtain help from their stronger neighbors, the Campbell's, but the bastards had tried to force them into a bond of their own, which ultimately would have paralyzed the MacLaren clan.

She had screamed and screamed and screamed till her throat became raw and silent. It had been the Campbell's fault. They had persecuted the MacGregor's, which had driven them into Balquidder—into *her* land—where her clan lacked the power to stop them. Lands were pillaged and families were killed—*her* family had been killed.

The Stuarts eventually came to help, forcing the MacGregor's so far into a corner that manrent to her clan was the only thing that could save them. The Stuarts believed it was the only way to establish peace and forgiveness between the clans. It also kept them from expanding deeper into the highlands, which the Stuarts benefited greatly from.

She had cried for months. She had cried for her parents, for Caitrin, Iona, and little Leith. She had cried for Rory too and for their ruined future. Since they weren't hand fasted yet, Greer wasn't legally bound to him. This meant cutting ties with Rory and his family had been easier than she wanted it to be. When they had met to say their final goodbyes, it had taken several clansmen to pry them apart.

Rory had punched Callan on his way out.

Rory married a year after she did. Greer learned of Rory's new wife and how they resided in England eight months out of the year. After learning this, she never returned to another gathering; too broken to see him there with someone else, living the life that had been meant for her.



Greer was still closely wrapped in the Hangman's arms as they grew closer and clos-

er to the Trossachs. He was so close that she could feel the man's heart thudding heavily into her back. *Why was his heart beating so fast? Was he scared...of me?* She wondered.

"I didn't—I'm not a..." Greer began to whisper. She didn't know why she suddenly felt like talking...like she had to explain herself. Perhaps it was because he was the kindest thing she had experienced in years. "It was his fault—Callan's the reason why my family's dead."

He didn't answer.

"I was so tired of being alone."



Greer had suffered her first miscarriage at seventeen.

She hadn't realized what the severe pain in her abdomen and back had meant until she started bleeding. It didn't stop until a week later. By the time she had turned twenty-two, Greer had suffered four more miscarriages and two stillbirths. When she had given birth to her first stillborn, Greer didn't let the babe go until Callan had to pry them from her arms a day later.

All Greer had ever wanted was to have a family again. Callan was not her family. He had taken them from her—he was legally bound to fix this! All she needed was a family; a child to hold and to love.

And so, she contacted a midwife in Callander. There had been whispers amongst the village women that she possessed herbs that had helped several other families in Perthshire conceive. After a few exchanges by letter, Greer and the woman had settled on a time to meet.

They had met in the older women's home and Greer had explained her situation as briefly as she could. The woman, Fia, had only looked upon her with sad, wrinkling eyes as Greer repeated, *I don't want to be alone*. She had been sent back home with several bags of herbal teas and salve, and that was that. There were no other meetings, no more letters, and for once there was no pain—only hope.

Hope, however, had been short lived when Greer had awoken to Callan and several other MacGregor's dragging her out of bed. While she thrashed and flailed, Callan began throwing furniture and clothing across the room as he began his search for *evidence*. He had screamed the word over and over again as her family heirlooms were smashed and destroyed. Callan only stopped once he found what he was looking for in her wooden chest.

The conception herbs.

Fia, Greer later learned, had been convicted and brought to Stirling on the charges of witchcraft. They found her guilty, on the account of her own confession after several days of torture, and was brought to Edinburgh where she was burned.



When they had first collected Fia from her home, they had also collected anything that could be used against her.

This included Greer's letters to the woman.

The only reason why Callan and his family now held her prisoner was because the guards who had found her letters were Callan's cousins. They brought the letters back to the clan.

According to the MacGregors, she had bought those herbs from the witch to kill Callan. *It is no secret that she is unhappy in her marriage*, someone had screamed at her. Other clansmen came forward and explained that they believed the reason why she had lost all the babes was because of her relationship with the devil. Some agreed, arguing that they had been sacrifices.

And through it all, Greer didn't say one bloody word. There was no point. She had realized that when she had been dragged out of her family home. She knew she'd never see it again.

*No point.*

After days of careful inspection, painful tests, and further lack of evidence, they had decided that Greer was *not* a witch, but she had conspired with one, which was just as bad. And so, the MacGregor's convicted her for attempted murder and for conspiring with a witch. And because this went against the bond of manrent and the peace treaty Callan and Greer's clans had made when they married, Callan declared that it was his right to do with her as he saw fit. Burning her would cause a large enough scene for the Stuart's to get involved, which was what the MacGregor's were trying to avoid.

So, he settled on having her strung up and forgotten about.



Without realizing, they arrived in the Trossachs. Greer had lost track of time; spent too much time in her head. She watched as the cousin's pointed to the tree they wanted, and the rest of the men dismounted and began setting up.

The Hangman was the last to dismount. She watched his hands as they opened and closed several times around the reigns, as if he didn't know what to do. A moment later he finally released his hold and slipped swiftly down from the horse and offered his hand. She took it and he slowly helped her out of the saddle. When Greer touched the ground, she had to squeeze her eyes shut to prevent herself from crying out. After the pain in her ankle had lessened, she reopened her eyes and found the exposed hazel eyes of the Hangman staring back into hers.

She couldn't breathe.

*"Rory."*

She could never forget the beautiful dark eyes that now stared into hers. He

was as handsome as she remembered him. These past six years had been kind to him as time molded him into man. His face had lost the soft, gentle youth that had first captured her heart and was now stretched tight over his high cheekbones.

And for the first time since her conviction, Greer let herself cry.

What would be mistaken for tears of fear and regret, were tears of momentary happiness. She couldn't remember the last time she felt this way. There was too much to say to him, so Greer said nothing at all. She wanted to hold him and apologize and explain why she never came back to another gathering, but she realized that she couldn't do any of that... not without hurting the both of them.

*How?* Greer wanted to demand. *How did he find out? How did the others not know who he was?* But she already knew the answers.

The Stuarts of Balquidder knew about everything that happened within their village. They even have eyes and ears within the neighboring parishes, so if anything got out about her hanging, the Ardvorlich Stuarts would have known. And soon will the Stuarts of Stirling. And these men wouldn't have forgotten what the 4th Laird of Ardvorlich looked like because Rory spent the majority of these past six years in England.

It was all too perfect.

Rory's eyes held hers and she knew if he reached for her she could do nothing but reach back. For years she tried to forget him, but even in her darkest hours she couldn't. *He was here! He was truly here!* Rory would save her; he would take her away and he would love her and he—

*No.*

Rory wasn't here to save *her*, Greer realized.

Rory came to save the young MacLaren girl he had planned to marry six years back. She knew, however, that if she allowed him to look at her— to *truly* look at her—the warm memory Rory kept of her would be changed forever. Greer was no longer the girl who taught him how to dance, or the girl he spent hours roaming the highland hills with. She was no longer the Greer MacLaren he had fallen in love with. She had died when her family did. And she knew that this was exactly what he needed to see.

So, she let him see her. Truly see her.

And he did.



Callan's cousins came to her now, each grabbing a wrist and directing her to the tree.

It was time and she was no longer afraid.

During the years Greer had spent cold and alone, she often imagined what life would have been like to love Rory as a husband. How he would have pieced her

back together after the loss of her family and how he would have erased the guilt and loneliness that followed it. However, having Rory here now wouldn't change what was about to happen.

Greer was ready to see her family again.

She let the tears roll as the Hangman—the real Hangman—fitted the noose over her neck once more. She watched Rory turn away.

Greer would see all of them in the next life. Her parents, Iona, Caitrin, Leith, her children, and Rory. She will get to love again them in the next life. This next life would be better. They will all be together again, just like Da had promised.

In the next life.

In the next life.

In the—

## **A Gamble of Trust: A Ten-Minute Play**

**Derek McFarland**

*Derek McFarland is a commercial aviation student from Pennsylvania.*

Characters:

Aaron, 28

Maddox, 56

Time: Late Afternoon

Setting: Chain-link fence outside of a secluded part of a small-town horse race track.

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*(Lights on. Aaron is sitting on a cooler at the fence, looking through binoculars. He has a race card sticking out of the fence, and a beer in his hand. Enter: Maddox.)*

MADDOX

*(sneaks up behind Aaron)*

That fool ain't gonna put the visor on her?

AARON

*(spills beer on himself)*

Jesus H. Christ!

MADDOX

I ain't akin to folk taking the Lord's name in vain.

AARON

I didn't think I would hear the shot that killed me.



MADDOX

Oh, you'll hear it. Clear as day. Clear as that starter's pistol, followed by the forever silence you only get to hear in the half-second when them horses cross the finish line, not even a chain link apart.

AARON

But see, don't you just love that? Heart in your throat, jaw clenched, palms so sweaty that they wipe away the ink on the race card? The "forever silence" might just be worth that.

MADDOX

*(laughs in disbelief)*

You'll toss anything in the ring, won't you, kid? I've seen folks gamble their cars, their houses, clothes, rings, watches. Hell, they even gamble their lives too, but you manage to do all that and feel good about it. No addict I know can manage that.

AARON

It's only an addiction if you ain't good at it, then it's called a passion.

MADDOX

That fancy college teach you that? What's the funny name for it? Dart Mouth?

AARON

It's one word, chief.

MADDOX

Oh, well, you'll have to excuse me. I understand the small-town Tennessee kid went to Dart Mouth and got himself educated. Now he's a big shot, correcting the common folks' speech as he swindles them out of their money. Says he uses it for his "passion." Well, I'd hate to be the bearer of bad news, but all that school did was teach y'all to put a foot in your mouth. How's that for irony? *(laughs at his own joke.)* Addiction is addiction. They're ain't no getting around that.

AARON

You're close, but you still have it wrong. I learned to put my foot in my mouth at Boston College. I learned about addiction by watching dudes at the Dartmouth frats while I was getting my Doctorate. And yes, I'm addicted to hooking people in the stocks, but I'm a hell of a gambler, you wouldn't know me for this long if I wasn't. I'd be just

another one of those weekday news stories. “Local broker found dead, DOW up to record high,” et cetera, et cetera. And maybe I gamble with my life, but you’ve beaten me. You’ve sold your soul to your boss.

MADDOX

Is that a fact?

AARON

Oh, that’s a fact. I’m in debt to you, but you’re OWNED by him. That’s why you’ve kept me around. You still need me, and you know I deliver. So, when you come at me with your little death threats and shots at my intellect, all it does is make me yawn. Maybe I’ll just let your boss know what you’ve been planning, let him drop you in a ditch, and I’ll take my winnings and go.

MADDOX

I don’t need you for one damn thing. I ain’t owned by him or any other sorry fool who thinks they’re untouchable. All of them are young fools just like you, and all of them will die young fools, just like you, if you don’t watch your mouth.

*(Aaron forces a yawn.)*

Don’t fuck with me, kid.

AARON

*(chuckles to himself)*

How original. Come up with that yourself or was it just something your cell mate would say when he wasn’t in the mood?

*(Maddox tries to respond but Aaron cuts him off.)*

Don’t try any of those witty shark comebacks with me. Y’all are the exact same. Carbon copies of each other. You want the money and I’m just about to cash my ticket in for you. It don’t matter that the field is sloppy. And it don’t matter that the back-up fool jockey is on the reigns. Dawn Star is the winner of this race, even without the fix on. I’ve been around horses all my life. I rode horses after school every day on my Pa’s ranch, and I’ve been to the tracks time and time again. When there’s that one gem of a mare on the roster, that royal flush of a stallion walkin round the track, I sniff it out. Look at me, chief. I can wear this Armani and any other Armani suit whenever I want.

That's what y'all couldn't figure out. You don't need to beat people to make the big numbers. You just gotta tell them they're getting rich, too. And while they're pissing their money away in the market trying to find the big winner, you spend it on your own vices.

*(Maddox snatches the binoculars from Aaron and scouts the horses. Silence. Aaron paces a little, then turns back to Maddox.)*

You really aren't gonna say anything to that?

MADDOX

You said not to try a witty response.

AARON

So now you're taking orders from everyone?

MADDOX

I ain't in no prison, kid. I ain't taking orders. I'm waiting on my money. You said the magic word. Fixed. That means I really am getting paid, and with the biggest vig I've ever held a man to in my lifetime.

AARON

Oh . . . well, yeah, chief, it's all worked out.

MADDOX

I'm sure you think that, but how.

AARON

My bro has this down to a science, no worries.

MADDOX

Science. I don't know much science, kid, but I do know people. People are dumb. Hard enough to get the fix on, but it's doable. I just don't know if you can collect. How do you plan on it?

AARON

Well, my bro is usually here with me, and he finds a third guy. A random fool. I mean

the porch lights are on, but no one's home. So months, maybe even years prior to a day like this, my bro tells the guy how much of an expert he is, right? He says, "Hey, don't believe my words, trust the cash. Bet on some prelims with me and you won't be sorry." Well, obviously, the prelims are fixed, so it works out great for the guy. Nothing huge, but enough to hook the guy and gain his trust. After a while, my bro calls him up and brings him out again. He gets him to bet huge on this one race. So when this guy wins, he freaks out and makes a scene, which makes it seem all legit. He collects his cash, and my bro takes him down to the stables. He tells him what's really going on, and now the guy is about ready to piss himself. I mean he'll do anything to keep this secret. Mostly because he's scared, sure, but it's also partly because he's still walking away with a good wad. My bro ain't here, though, so that just means that we meet somewhere out of town to get paid.

*(Maddox smiles, hands Aaron the binoculars back.)*

MADDOX

Your "bro" is a stockbroker, too.

AARON

So you HAVE figured out the easy way to make money.

MADDOX

Ain't nothing easy about it. It's a dirtier business than what I do.

AARON

*(laughing)*

How do you figure, chief? I'm working within the law. There ain't no blood on my hands.

MADDOX

My job might draw blood, but folk know exactly what they're getting into beforehand. It might not be within the law, but there's still rules. You borrow money, you pay it back. That's the end of the story. With you, they have no idea what they're getting themselves into, you just have them dive in head first.

AARON

They should learn not to blindly trust someone they don't know.

MADDOX

Is that how you justify it?

AARON  
(*pause*)

No, I guess not. Is that how you justify what you do?

MADDOX

Not justify. Rationalize. In the thirty odd years of doing this, I've never been the one to pull the trigger on a man. Got folk who enjoy that sort of thing.

AARON

If you don't enjoy it, and you can't justify it, why are you here?

MADDOX

Well, I was a young fool once, like all the rest. Only I didn't die. I met a man who gave me a bit of direction. It was the wrong direction, sure, but it gave me purpose. Don't need to trust folk, just need to make them pay their dues. That man knew I was good at it, and he's had me doing this ever since. He was like a Pa to me.

AARON

So you don't trust anyone, just like me.

MADDOX

I ain't say that either. I said I ain't NEED to trust them.

AARON

So who can you trust?

*(Aaron notices that Maddox has been fidgeting with his hands the whole time. He sees the ring, and he laughs.)*

You've got a wife?

MADDOX

Fiancée.



AARON

Oh excuse me. Fiancée. What, she's waiting for you after work every day, for you to go, "Honey, I'm home"?

MADDOX

College boy still thinks he knows everything. She's in the ground kid.

AARON

*(pause)*

Oh...I'm sorry.... What happened?

MADDOX

My Pa happened. I was gonna call it a career for her. Live the straight life, own a ranch. She was something. Never a motive for what she did for me, except love. That's how you trust someone, kid.

AARON

You're Pa happened?

MADDOX

Yeah. He don't like losing money just either. If I leave, he loses money. She was killed the night before the wedding day.

AARON

Jesus.

MADDOX

Don't take his name in vain.

AARON

Sorry. So why didn't you try to kill him yourself? He killed the woman you loved.

MADDOX

There's still a code kid. Can't kill a man like that. He's got folk all over. I'd be dead, too. Can't stop working for him, cause, well, you guessed it. I'd be dead too, and I know my girl wouldn't want me getting myself a gravestone before it's time.

*(another long pause)*

AARON

You know, you're an alright guy.

MADDOX

*(laughs)*

Tell the kid a sap story and he gets all weepy.

AARON

*(laughs with him)*

Yeah I guess so. It's taken care of too, by the way.

MADDOX

How?

AARON

He got picked up in Knoxville for a drunk and disorderly. My Ma is the Assistant DA there. When she found out about the warrants for him in Biloxi, she had him transferred. You're clearly not the only shark to come out of there. I have guys there waiting for him. All my debts will be settled soon.

MADDOX

*(voice cracks)*

Well, that's a goddamn shocker. You might be good at that passion after all.

AARON

Thought you weren't "akin to folk taking the lord's name in vain."

MADDOX

Wasn't akin to other folk sinning like that. I do it all the time.

*(They laugh. Aaron grabs a beer out of the cooler and hands it to Maddox.)*

There's still the issue of my money. How do you know where to meet your "bro"?

AARON

He gave me his card with the address.

MADDOX

And you trust him enough to be there?

AARON

Enough to take the chance. And you know me. That's saying something.

*(They both turn back to the track.)*

MADDOX

Your gem of a mare is lined up.

AARON

Yeah. She's a beauty ain't she? I know the outcome, yet I still feel the rush. It ain't quite the Kentucky Derby, but it's still for damn sure the most exciting two minutes in sports. Can't wait for that Forever Silence right before the end.

*(Sounds of the crowd getting louder, announcer over the speaker making the last of the introductions. Race just about to start. Starter pistol goes off. Crowd cheers. Smoke comes up from Maddox's hand. Aaron falls to the ground, binoculars and beer fly from his hands.)*

MADDOX

There's your forever silence, kid. Can't have you killing the boss and living after.

*(He bends down and pulls out Aaron's wallet. Pulls out a business card. Turns and walks off stage.)*

## Justice for All

### Brenda Kezar

*Brenda Kezar is a short story writer pursuing a bachelor's in English. She has the uncanny ability to imagine the worst that could happen in any given situation, and she channels that superpower into writing speculative fiction in the genres of horror, science fiction, and fantasy. When not reading or writing, she wrangles research rodents for the UND School of Medicine.*

Marly couldn't tear her eyes away from the stranger at the far end of the counter. Although he never left his ragged barstool, he remained in constant motion: he swiveled his stool side to side, swirled the ice in his glass, tapped a restless rhythm with his toes on the foot rail. He dragged a napkin across his sweaty brow, crumpled it, and tossed it among the others that drifted on the counter in front of him. He feigned interest in the football game on the dusty television, then scanned the room with wary eyes and caught Marly watching him.

She dropped her eyes to her glass and hoped the bar's gloom hid the heat blooming in her cheeks. She turned and searched for something else—anything else—to occupy her eyes. On the flashing pinball machine, a buxom, bikini-clad woman screamed silently from the clutches of a giant gorilla. A well-used dartboard hung not far away, surrounded by a halo of black dots, holes from misses thrown by drunken players. At the pool table, three men in blue work shirts circled like Olympic wrestlers looking for an opening. The bar was a dive, and her colleagues in the district attorney's office would be mortified to see her there, but she grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood just like this one. Being here felt like home, especially when she faced a difficult case.

As if pulled by a magnet, her eyes wandered back to the stranger.

Johnny, the bartender, stood with his back to the stranger. He was absently drying a glass, his eyes riveted to the television. The stranger slid off his stool and thumped his empty glass three times on the bar in front of him. His lips moved, saying something to Johnny's back, but Marly was too far away to hear.

Johnny's attention remained on the television.

"Hey!" The stranger slammed his palm on the counter.

Johnny continued drying.

The stranger reached out, his fingers barely brushing Johnny's Semper Fi tattoo.

Johnny spun around, lips twisted, mustache bristling like an angry rat. "Don't touch me, dirtbag." The stranger held up his hands in conciliation as the air between them trembled with tension.

Marly held her breath, wondering if Johnny would reach under the counter for his Glock, wondering what she would do if he did.

After an eternity, Johnny snatched a whiskey bottle off the bar and filled the stranger's glass, his eyes locked on the man the whole time, daring him to start something. Wisely, the stranger kept his eyes submissively downcast.

Marly dropped her gaze to her own almost-empty glass and sighed. *It's a good law*, she reminded herself. The legislature passed it almost as she had written it. It flew through both houses with nary a protest, and the governor was quick to sign it into law.

The stranger was the first person she had seen in public since her law went into effect. To make matters worse, the case currently weighing her down was related to her new law: a man, just like the stranger, had been cornered in a bar, like this one, and beaten to death by four men. The defense attorney was seeking probation for his clients, claiming temporary insanity brought on by frustration over a judicial system that gave criminals no more than a slap on the wrist. Marly could relate. Her own frustrations with the system had left her on the verge of leaving the DA's office. At least until she had conceived of her "public disclosure law," a compromise between criminals' rights and public protection. Now she had to decide whether to agree to the defense attorney's deal or prosecute the men. Her decision could have a tremendous impact on the future of her law.

*It's his own fault. If he hadn't broken the law in the first place . . .* She drained her glass in one swallow, accepted responsibility for the hangover she'd have in the morning, and waved Johnny over for a refill. Johnny poured her drink and turned away, and her eyes wandered to the other end of the counter again.

The stranger was gone.

She frowned and leaned sideways, craning her neck, expecting to spot him heading for the restrooms at the rear of the bar. She leaned right into him.

She jumped, and her face grew hot again.

"Thought I'd come over and give you a better look, maybe let you take some pictures for your social media." He was short and stocky with sagging, bulldog jowls,



his nose crisscrossed with red rivers.

Marly stammered, dropped her eyes to her drink as if dealing with a raging animal. "I didn't mean to stare. It's just, I've never. . ."

"So I'm the first." His gravelly voice reminded her of the junkyard dogs she had passed on her way to elementary school and their growled promises of carnage should she stray too near. At least there had been a sturdy fence between her and the dogs; the stranger was close enough she could feel the heat of his anger coming off him in waves, smell the cheap cologne barely covering the hidden sweat smell beneath.

Marly nodded, kept her eyes locked on her drink. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw his lips curl into a sneer. He leaned in closer, and she could practically taste the whiskey on his breath.

He paused, narrowed his eyes. "Hey, don't I know you?"

"I don't believe so." She hoped she sounded convincing.

She searched for words to appease him, words that would make him go away and leave her alone, but couldn't think of any. She made her living with words, used their magic to convince people, but all her words left her now. She snuck a sideways glance at him, but his attention was no longer on her. He was eyeing the three pool players sauntering their way.

"Hey, sicko." The one with the 'Ray' name patch lifted his chin in challenge. "Bout time for you to hit the road."

The second pool player smiled, his eyes glimmering coldly beneath his ragged baseball cap. The name patch on his shirt read, 'Chuck.' "Yeah. We don't want your kind hanging around here. Johnny's gonna hang a sign; no perverts allowed. Right, Johnny?" He grinned and winked at the bartender.

The third pool player, 'Bill,' scowled and cracked his knuckles.

Marly glanced at Johnny expectantly. He'd keep things under control.

Johnny leaned back against the counter indifferently. "Just don't you boys break nothin'. And if you make a mess, you gotta clean it up yourselves." A smile crept from beneath the edges of his mustache.

Marly shot a quick glance at the stranger. For the first time, she noticed the dark smudges beneath his eyes, the greasy, waxy pallor of his skin, and the way his clothes sagged on him as though he had lost weight. He looked tired and defeated.

"I'm going." The stranger held up his hands. "I didn't mean to bother no one."

He threw one last glance at Marly that made her face burn with shame, and she held her breath as he slunk to the door like a whipped dog. The pool players jeered and taunted him as he passed, but the roaring of Marly's blood in her ears drowned out their words.

At the jangling of the bell over the door, Marly exhaled and turned to watch the stranger leave, her heart still pounding. On the other side of the door, even in the dark of night, she could still see his shirt, his permanent uniform required any time he was out in public thanks to the new law—her law. The text, in bold black letters on both the front and back, jumped off the bright orange of his shirt and seemed to hang in the air even after he was gone: SEX OFFENDER, KEEP AWAY FROM CHILDREN.

She drained her glass again and decided to call the defense attorney first thing in the morning.

## ***The Outer Wilds and Manufactured Wilderness***

### **Seth Thaelke**

*Seth Thaelke is a recent graduate of UND with a B.S. in Computer Science and B.A. in Honors. He has long been fascinated by the power of storytelling, especially science fiction and the draw of fantastic worlds. He currently works as an Associate Computer Scientist at Microbeam Technologies, Inc.*

*What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute?*

– Andrew Jackson, Second Annual Message

*Who needs wilderness? Civilization needs wilderness. The idea of wilderness preservation is one of the fruits of civilization, like Bach's music, Tolstoy's novels, scientific medicine, novocaine, space travel... and a thousand other good things one could name, some of them trivial, most of them essential, all of them vital to that great, bubbling, disorderly, anarchic, unmanageable diversity of opinion, expression, and ways of living which free men and women love, which is their breath of life...*

– Edward Abbey, "Freedom and Wilderness, Wilderness and Freedom"

The concept of wilderness is fleeting and ephemeral. It means so much, yet at the same time means nothing of value. Because it evokes such differing meanings to different people across cultures and times, it is difficult to precisely define it and evaluate its relationship with humanity. This paper will not attempt to arrive at an exact definition of wilderness in this sense; rather, it will explore what falls under various categories of wilderness, the concept of space as wilderness, and the purpose, value, and hospitability of wilderness. In many ways, space truly is the final frontier, and with our species on the brink of becoming a spacefaring civilization, it is imperative that we collectively work through the implications of a human presence on other worlds.

The starting point for my own thinking regarding space as wilderness is the video game *Outer Wilds*, a small but ambitious title primarily about exploring a minia-

ture alien solar system. The player journeys to each planet in the system, uncovering new information about the world, exploring ancient ruins and learning about the alien race that built them. One of the guiding philosophies of the game's development was to provide the intimate feeling of camping, but in a science-fiction space setting. Each planet draws inspiration from different national parks or scenic wilderness areas like Yellowstone and the glaciers of Iceland, and most characters are named after types of minerals (Noclip, 2020). Some of these characters are other space explorers, and the player can seek out their campsites on each planet, complete with a blazing campfire and marshmallows for roasting. The narrative is deeply personal, engaging with the player in unique ways and exploring existential questions about life and the universe.

Though this is a wildly speculative game set in a fictional world, it sparks interesting questions and possibilities. As hard as emotions are to quantify, the feelings I had while playing the game and after completing it were intense and undeniable, and it spoke to my long-held desire to explore among the stars. Other works such as the *Foundation* series (Isaac Asimov), the film and novel series beginning with *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick), the original screenplay *Interstellar* (Jonathan and Christopher Nolan), and the ongoing novel and television series *The Expanse* (James S. A. Corey) feed that desire on a grand scale, but *Outer Wilds* engages it successfully on a more intimate level. By giving the player freedom to explore a smaller world where everything matters and the player truly cares about what happens to themselves and the world around them, the game manages to express a sincerity and gravity of space exploration not attainable by other mediums. When humans finally set foot on Mars, they will indeed see grand, sweeping vistas, red cliffs and valleys stretching far beyond the horizon—but the experience of wilderness has always been intensely personal, no matter how grand the scenery. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Frazier Nash quotes from the writings of Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand after visiting New York in the late eighteenth century: “but in this deserted region the soul delights to bury and lose itself amidst boundless forests...to mix and confound...with the wild sublimities of Nature” (Nash, 2014). This sublimity of nature is common through many philosophies of the wilds, and *Outer Wilds* captures it well.

While science fiction has been an extraordinary driver of passion for space exploration since the genre was born, it has only formally existed for the last few centuries. Humanity has been enamored with space, however, since the beginning of recorded history. At various points in our shared history, we have idealized the stars as spiritual entities, observed planets and moons through rudimentary telescopes, and even sent probes and manned missions beyond Earth's atmosphere. It seems

inevitable that humans will one day establish permanent societies on other bodies in the solar system. Overly optimistic estimates predict a sustainable population of a million on Mars by 2050, but even the most conservative estimates still predict a more modest settlement before the end of the twenty-first century (Musk, 2020). NASA has detailed plans for a permanent moon base, to be constructed by 2024, that will be used to train for and launch future missions to Mars (NASA, 2020). One way or another, it seems that humans will maintain some sort of regular presence outside the bounds of Earth's atmosphere, much further than the International Space Station, by sometime in the middle of the century. This opens the possibility of further space exploration and colonization, asteroid mining, manned research missions, and perhaps even terraforming projects in the far future. If this is to be the case, certain questions arise about human life outside our home planet. How will prolonged exposure to radiation and low gravity affect the human body? How will the psyche react to such remote, alien conditions? And more to the point, how will humanity's concept of wilderness and nature evolve as we spread throughout the solar system?

The terms "wilderness" and "wild," at least in the Western mind, tend to evoke images of the untamed natural world in some form. Though there is still variance here, it almost always refers to animals, forests, deserts, or similar aspects of the natural world apart from human influence. In establishing a colony on a landscape as barren as the moon, all these aspects of nature are lost. The moon's surface consists only of dirt and rocks, pocked by craters and swept by solar winds. No organic material exists at all, and no geologic activity brings the ground to life. Earth's only natural satellite is more desolate than any desert and is so far away that traveling there is equivalent to circumnavigating Earth nearly ten times. It is difficult to imagine anyone finding this landscape hospitable. Yet the first men to set foot on the moon, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, described it as "a magnificent desolation" and having "a stark beauty all its own" (Associated Press, 2019). This appreciation seems to follow alongside the mindsets of modern wilderness philosophers like Edward Abbey, whose ideas and experiences are recounted by Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind*:

Abbey's paradise was the "real earth" and particularly the desert which he characterized as "spare, sparse, austere, utterly worthless, inviting not love but contemplation..." Repeatedly he warned nature lovers and God seekers to stay away. "The desert," he made clear, "says nothing..." Why, then, go to the desert, or any wilderness? Abbey offered an answer in 1977 in the form of a hike in northern Arizona... He concluded "there was nothing out there.



Nothing at all. Nothing but the desert. Nothing but the silent world.” And then it struck him: “That’s why...” It had to do with emptiness and otherness and the way that wilderness was the antipode of civilization and all its myths, including those concerning wilderness. (Nash, 2014)

When contemplating one of the only landscapes on Earth that truly resemble the surface of Mars, Abbey found beauty in the emptiness just as Armstrong and Aldrin did on the moon. Even desolation has value, and it can be considered sacred even without religious overtones. Wilderness is what it is, and it does no good to impose other values or definitions on it.

Given this context, it is easy to classify celestial bodies as wilderness as they currently exist, in a way just as valid and important as any forest or desert on Earth. If the moon and Mars are considered a wilderness, then, what do we do with all that land, and what value can it impart to those who will one day live on these alien landscapes? Some have suggested setting aside land modeled after national parks on Earth, which would be preserved for many reasons, including protecting various environments, promoting scientific study, and simply maintaining the original landscape. Regarding Mars, the following rules have been suggested:

- No spacecraft or vehicle parts to be left within the park
- No landing of unmanned spacecraft within the park
- No waste to be left within the park
- Access only on foot or via surface vehicle along predefined routes, or by landing in a rocket-powered vehicle in predefined landing areas
- All suits, vehicles and other machines used in the park to be sterilized on their external surfaces to prevent microbial shedding (David, 2013)

Setting aside what amounts to Martian nature preserves is certainly a goal worth pursuing, but the concept would need to be enacted and enforced by state authorities, and there is little precedent for such acts occurring. Some of the only legislation to exist are the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 and the Moon Agreement of 1979, which broadly reserve all of space for peaceful, non-commercial purposes that benefit all mankind (United Nations General Assembly 21st Session, 1967) (United Nations General Assembly 34th Session, 1979). These agreements are only somewhat supported, however, and many nations have not signed them. Though they provide a solid baseline for future space exploration, they must be developed further before humans venture much farther beyond the atmosphere.

Another ecological and ethical issue that arises in discussions of land use on celestial bodies is terraforming. Though not an immediate concern, terraforming must

be discussed as humanity spreads throughout the solar system. The process creates a livable, Earth-like environment and atmosphere on otherwise inhospitable bodies, making planets like Mars much more easily settled. A thicker, more oxygen-rich atmosphere would allow Earth life to expand and utilize more of the land, as it would no longer be confined to carefully controlled habitats, and it would help block radiation, which remains a deadly threat. It would, in essence, make Mars into a second Earth, another blue and green marble in the solar system.

This remains a highly controversial topic, however. By definition, the process destroys the prior ecosystem completely. Whether this is a problem depends on the viewer's perspective on life and ecology, and it again brings up the question of where value is found—i.e., does the Martian landscape have inherent value? Or should it only be preserved if it hosts indigenous life? By current analyses, Mars appears to be lifeless, though that verdict does have the potential to change. Perhaps a middle ground could be reached: if various original environments are preserved via similar methods to controlled human habitats, would it then be worth turning Mars green? It is a complicated topic and one that likely has centuries to be fleshed out, but it is important to acknowledge and consider the possibilities even before humanity has the capability.

One more thing that needs to be considered before humanity establishes permanent settlements outside the bounds of Earth is the psychological need for greenery. If a barren landscape has value as wilderness, it still provides no analog for flora or fauna. The degree to which humans have an innate need to be connected with nature is uncertain, but the effects of exposure to nature on the human mind is beginning to be studied with promising results. Specifically, visiting or living by natural or manufactured green areas seems to provide benefits to mental health, reducing stress and promoting relaxation, and can help the immune system, reduce risk of chronic diseases, and even reduce mortality rates (Chavaly & Naachimuthu, 2020). These advantages are too important to ignore. Crucially, a permanent moon base or Mars colony would lack significant greenery of any kind; there are no forests to walk through or parks to visit. Any plant or animal life must be brought from Earth and cultivated, often at prohibitive resource costs.

But manufacturing wilderness spaces might be necessary to promote mental health and provide a reminder of home, especially since long space flights are already some of the most mentally taxing experiences anyone can go through. Establishing permanent colonies and being stuck millions of miles away from home will almost certainly be even worse. Having a facsimile of a forest to escape to and recuperate from the stresses and other harmful effects of life on another planet could greatly improve long-term physical and mental health in the population. Though the

resource cost of developing and maintaining such an area seems high, one simple solution may be to open existing farmland for recreation. Allowing settlers to relax and recuperate in the green areas that already exist would eliminate the need for separate, impractical parks, and the farmland would be doubly efficient as it serves several purposes instead of just feeding the population. Other strategies may prove effective as well, but regardless, having access to a green area in some capacity will likely be extremely beneficial to the psychological well-being of long-term settlers, scientists, and explorers.

Exploring the solar system is and will be one of the greatest achievements of humanity in all its history. While humans will likely never feel the thrill of stumbling upon ancient alien ruins or uncovering a cosmic mystery like in *Outer Wilds*, expand across the galaxy like in *Foundation*, or find physics-breaking spacetime anomalies like in *Interstellar*, the real world is infinitely more vast, strange, and exciting than anything we can imagine. For now, media like this feeds our collective desire to explore and discover new realms, but one day those dreams will be made reality, possibly even within a generation or two. What humans make of that cosmic wilderness is yet to be seen, but the wastelands just beyond our reach will soon be home to many. It will be difficult, dangerous, and lonely, and it will take centuries to achieve truly sustainable, independent societies. The wilderness is harsh and unforgiving; it owes us nothing. Yet it continues to inspire, and the desolate, stark beauty of space will undoubtedly motivate spacefaring pioneers for generations to come.

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## Mycelium I

### Kai Szulborski

*Kai Szulborski is a graduate student, English GTA, and writer at UND. He first tried writing after he fell in love with a badly written gothic space-opera about a small blue ghoul who uses the soul of Charles Dickens to power his giant hammer-wielding robot. Now, he mostly writes about giant sad women crying in deserts. He is currently working very hard to accelerate the process of entropy in order to eliminate all stars in the universe. That way, he can sleep in as long as he wants.*

Black skin tilts like sand over the expanse of a small, planetary surface. Across the pale darkness, green shoots arc and wither towards the curved horizon born from the ancient collapse of dust-discs and scattered light. The shoots flit mindlessly through unchanging functions, first filling the sky before stowing downward to crash into the black pools on the planet's surface. Once they've gone, their tails continue to chase each other beneath the dark waves, like seeds or bright-worm formations sliding heavily across the seabed. Neither the tails nor their sunken parents carry any awareness of the importance in their movements, their paths controlled only by lines of light and wind. Within their intersecting trajectories, they operate outside the framework of subject or object, instead forming an anti-idea.

The silence sits intractable on the planet's surface, blanketing its mountains and the violent chemical storms that sweep across its oceans. The light coming from the small sun heats bebies of liquid hydrogen hiding in the fissures between the planet's jagged mountains. Occasionally, the sun heats the planet's surface enough to crack an itinerant fault-line along its current superposition, spewing cold gravel out onto the scree at the mountain's feet. These stones plume briefly into the sky like glittering faces, the light from the sun reflected through their fizzling central chimneys towards the ragged peaks. When the plumes shatter back down to the ground, they open high-pressure vents which release streams of sulfide steam that bind together the valley's frigid arms.

Near the planet's equator, the brightest sky-serpents often fall on rings of small hills that once formed the headwaters of a large chemical spring in the planet's violent past. In its early days, the planet bled with rivers of sulfur strapped up to the

surface from its burning core, its ground scoured white under blooms of acidic teeth. Nothing now remains of those blooms or the springs themselves, aside from the long lines of red oxidation sloughing off into the valleys like layers of skin. The stars wheel into frigid black pools on the shores of the mountains, stopping briefly on beds of iridium and compressed carbon before falling into the distant chasms undergirding the bottom of the world. No rocks or planetary surfaces stray the stars from their path, their journeys tracked instead by maps of invisible radiation. They cannot disappear.

When the sun expires in future time, it will drag itself down to the surfaces of its cold children and seed them from the system like the galactic equivalent of fungal spores. The planet itself has prepared for this moment since its inception, the careful arrangement of rocks and dust designed by gravity to suit the hungry needs of the sun. At the bottom of the planet's largest ocean, intense pressure crushes carbon into dark jewels which the planet will present to the sun when its preparations are complete. At that moment, the sun will take the jewels into itself and transform them into jets of plasma to scour the surface of its predatory serfs. When the sun finally devours its children, it will do so gladly, without thought.



## You Must be Judith...

J. Alcon

*J. is an undergraduate at the University of North Dakota graduating in the spring of 2021 with a Bachelor of Accountancy degree. She is married to the most wonderful man alive and they have two exceptionally sweet boys. She lives a life of exquisite seclusion just north of the badlands on Blue Creek Estate.*

Raindrops splintered against the window, singing a song against the panes as they hit in varying chain rhythms. The smell of water and earth permeated the closed doors and crevices, the clammy chill creeping in through the walls. Spring in the country, the rain playing its annual part breathing life back into the world by drowning it. Flowers hesitantly opening, cautiously licking the drips off their lips as they drizzle along their petals. Rain, rebirth, renewal.

An ache ran sprints round her knee cap. She stared dismally at the dazzling aquatic orchestra. It was forecasted rain all weekend and as everyone always said, "We needed it!" She sat in the middle of her bed, her sore leg outstretched beneath her overstuffed down comforter and linen sheets as she methodically rubbed the throb to no avail. The heat didn't help; it didn't hurt, but it didn't help. Like clockwork, when she turned 40, she was welcomed into her new life phase with insomnia and a twinge in her knee whenever the weather changed more than five degrees.

It was 6:27 a.m. Her alarm was set for 6:30, but she never needed it, just kept it for nostalgia from a time when she couldn't will herself out of bed. A low crackle of wood burning came from her wall-mounted fireplace, emanating heat throughout the oversized bedroom, keeping the moist chill from reaching the inhabitant. The crackling played in a perfect, imperfect loop generated for optimal white noise effect. Her demeanor was calm. She slowly massaged her knee and stared listlessly forward. A single tear rolled down her cheek mirroring the scene she was witnessing. Her mind

was a raging torrent. The tear hovered at her jaw before breaking off and falling to the covers with an almost silent tap before absorbing into the woven fabric. She only allowed herself the one, but let it dry to a delicate crust, growing tight along the line it drew across her face.

6:28...6:29...6:30—BRRRRRRRRRRRIIIIIINNNN.

She abruptly leaned over and shot her hand to the night stand to silence the vintage clang of her alarm clock. It sang a slow *ting* as it settled back down for another 24 hours. *Get up.* Edith took a deep breath in, closed her eyes, and held the oxygen inside her lungs for a moment, then exhaled evenly, opening her eyes slowly. She threw the blankets off, inched her way to the edge of the bed then swung her legs off the side and slowly slid her feet into the waiting velvety slippers. She paused and rubbed her knee for one last moment, then stood and groped for her robe. The sight of rain gave her a chill that wasn't physically noticeable, but the thick fabric of the robe gave a sense of comfort in the weight of it on her shoulders.

Edith had a gorgeous, quaint kitchen just above her, but instead of making the journey upstairs for her breakfast tea, she had a small kitchenette installed in one of the corners of her room. It was similar to the living room bars from the '60s, but modernized with a white marble slab counter and white-washed wainscoting enclosure. She always filled her French spout electric kettle the night before so she only had to switch it on. Edith paced around the counter to the cupboards for her tea cup and porcelain tea pot. *Asinine...every morning boiling water in a kettle, then moving the boiling water to another kettle for steeping.* She made the same gripe every morning but refused to steep her tea in the electric kettle because the manufacturer explicitly said not to. Edith placed the set on the counter with a faint clatter, then swiftly turned on her heel to face her array of tins containing all her artisan teas. She paused, considering her choices, but every morning, always the English Breakfast blend with two tablespoons of non-sweetened almond milk creamer.

Although she complained inwardly about the process, Edith thrived on her mini rituals where she was in complete control. Control of how to execute, control of when—control. Edith liked control. After making the tea came drinking the tea while brushing her hair, then journaling to clear her mind.

April 5 - Saturday

Today's the day. Today. Today. Rain, rain go away. Today. Come again another day. It's raining, third day in a row now and supposed to continue until Monday. I usually love the rain, but today...no, I still love the rain. It's really coming down and my stupid knee. Always with the knee. Spring and Winter wreak havoc on my goddamn knee. Tooooooooddddaaaayyyyyy. Hmmm. My mind is swirling, but nothing is coming!! Just spit it out!! Get it out of there!! My Opalescent to meet my

one and only. Xoxo. I want to say it's too soon. That's a lie, it's been three years. I want to say no for absolutely no reason at all. Why do they need to meet?? A question I've asked too many times. They both know about the other so why meet? What's to be gained? Although, what's to be lost...nothing. So if nothing's to be gained and nothing's to be lost, then I am at an impasse, again. AAAHHHHHHHHHHH!!! Okay, just shake it off. What else is there? Today is Saturday, Saturday is my favorite day of the week next to Thursday. Why are you making me dread my second favorite day of the week? Why didn't I say Friday? Then I would have this whole thing behind me and I would be relaxed today on my second favorite day. Favorites, I have all the ingredients, 1) baklava, 2) chocolate chip cookies, 3) Perrier...how pretentious, who drinks that in real life? She didn't get that from me...4) spaghetti, and 5) croissants. She will be here in roughly 3 hours. Ah, I remember driving all night and day. Leaving the windows down and letting my hair whip through the fresh air. Okay, enough of this. Nothing will help me today.

The pen lay loosely in her hand. She stared at the page, then looked at the clock. 6:59 a.m. Edith could easily fill two pages in the thirty minutes she allowed herself every morning to journal, unloading her thoughts, bringing structure to her day, looking at all her brain spilled upon the page, and neatly putting things back in order. Today she would be given no solace. She closed the book and snapped the pen down on top. She took up her cup and hovered over the top, letting the steam roll over her face and tickle her nostrils. She then tentatively sipping the scalding tea. She sighed to the empty room as she gazed out the window, then returned to slowly drinking the milky caramel elixir, focusing on the sweet burn as it left the back of her throat, past her lungs, and into her stomach.

The tea left her body warm as she continued her morning ritual. Next: yoga. Her iPhone's vibratory buzz broke Edith's savasana. *Perfect*. She grumbled as she snapped her eyes open, shaken from the blissful end of her morning vinyasa. In her distracted state, she had uncharacteristically forgotten to turn off all her notifications. The ensuing buzz meant her state of tranquility had sharply dissipated and her curiosity at the pending messages won out. She rolled to her side and rose, rolling up her mat and stowing it carefully in its place before granting her psyche the chance to see who was interrupting her ritual.

O: *Awake yet??*

O: *Regretting everything yet?? Call me.*

Edith smiled and snuffed a giggle.

Edith: *Yes. Yes. No, shower time. Call you after a while.*

She lingered for a moment to see if she would get an immediate response. Her pause was rewarded with a response bubble, then a reply.

O: *Wish I was there ;) I eagerly await your call, malady...*

Again, Edith smiled, then set her phone back on the table.

As the hot water drizzled over her, she closed her eyes and recalled her resolve to follow through with today's events.

Before, their legs had entwined beneath the covers as the faint light from the fireplace softly illuminated their exhausted faces. Opal turned to Edith with a serious expression, but Edith couldn't bring herself to look back. She knew what was coming. It had been too long. She knew what Opal wanted, but she didn't want to move forward. "I'm not Brittany, ya know," Opal said, flitting her eyes downward when it was apparent Edith wouldn't look at her. Edith smiled slightly, then finally turned to face Opal. "I'm not ready." Opal smiled brightly, not what Edith expected. She was expecting Opal to toss the covers off in a theatrical exit then angrily throw one of Edith's treasured possessions before promptly gathering her things and storming off. "I know." Opal slowly combed her fingers through Edith's hair, then repeated, "I know."

A year and a half had gone by since Opal's affirmation of understanding, and here they were at the cusp of an event so miniscule to any ordinary person, but momentous to Edith. She wasn't ashamed of her lover, although the age discrepancy at times made her wonder if perhaps she should be. She wasn't protecting her adult daughter, who had always been appropriately updated as to her mother's comings and goings on a weekly basis. Edith liked control and control was only supremely accomplished when she was alone. Perfection was compromised when more than one character was allowed beyond the entrance to Edith's public façade of grace and poise. Few were privy to the chaos that loomed behind her beautiful emerald eyes.

Edith emerged from the condensation to find no messages on her phone. Opal had long since realized Edith's intolerance for clinginess, but somehow, today alone, Edith wished for someone else to need her reassurance. Being strong for someone else is always easier than being strong for yourself. She dialed Opal and set her phone on speaker while she finished towel drying her hair. No one picked up; her call went to voicemail. Edith hung up. As was her process, she closed her eyes, inhaled, then exhaled slowly through her pursed lips before opening her eyes again. Just then, she heard her door open. Opal. She went back into the bathroom pretending to feign ignorance as her lurker made her way towards the stairway leading to Edith's bedroom downstairs. Edith felt calm now, as if the impending aura of Opal washed over her to soothe the disparaging thoughts rolling around in her mind. Inhale...exhale. She took one last look at herself in the mirror, opened the door, and then in a majestic firework display everything went black.

"Tsk, tsk...are you awake yet, my sweet?" Edith was slowly rolling her head to the side as she regained consciousness. An involuntary moan poured out of her lips as

the anesthetic of the temporary coma wore thin and the excruciating sharpness of the blow to her temple was being realized. It took her a moment to recognize she was bound in her chair. *Still at home. Still in my room. Opal?* Edith's vision was slowly coming into focus as she regained her faculties, she looked around the room for the voice and found its owner standing at the kitchenette making a cup of tea.

"It was hard to find this place. I thought Google Maps had everyone pinged one way or another, but you...always elusive aren't you?" Brittany was leaning over the counter slowly stirring her tea, staring straight at Edith. "Wanna guess how I found you?" she asked with a twisted smile growing across her face, "Go on, guess..." She toyed with Edith as she began sipping her tea.

*Opal.* She didn't say the name aloud. Edith wasn't entirely certain of what was happening, but she had her wits about her enough to revert back to her reclusive self. While Brittany wallowed in her victory, Edith was considering her bonds. *Ankles and wrists. Sloppy. She must have rushed, not knowing when I would wake. Duct tape...how original. I'm not tied to the chair, but damned if I try to wiggle around and end up flailing on the ground like a fisherman's catch of the day.*

Brittany was becoming agitated now, realizing that her prey was not being more amiable and fearful. She had played the scene out a hundred times. From the moment she first saw them walking to the coffee shop three years ago, Brittany had become obsessed.

"This was not how it was supposed to be!!" Brittany screamed. She launched the teacup at Edith, who was now completely lucid and poised in her chair. Edith didn't flinch. *I'll need to pick up some more super glue to fix that.* She stared pensively out the window at the rain still streaming down the panes.

"You've never been good at composure. I see you haven't changed, Brittany," Edith replied coolly. She kept her gaze on the window.

Brittany huffed at the remark. Tears began welling in her eyes, angry and hot, threatening to ruin her determination. She briskly made her way over to Edith and pulled a small revolver out of the back of her jeans. She clutched a handful of Edith's auburn hair and wrenched Edith's head backward and pushed the barrel against Edith's chin.

"You mean to kill me, is that it, Brittany?" Edith nonchalantly inquired. She slowly turned her eyes to meet her attacker. She didn't blink. She stared at Brittany with no malice or fear, but looked beyond her as if Brittany was nothing.

This obstinate display slightly shook Brittany for a moment. As if Edith had the higher ground in this fight when she obviously did not. "Yes," Brittany said with a slight shake in her voice, not as authoritative as she had hoped, but it was out now. Edith broke her contemplation of Brittany and went back to the window. "You can't



even LOOK AT ME??!" Brittany couldn't believe the audacity, even now, at gunpoint, Edith was incapable of being reasonable, rational, human. She let go of Edith, tossed the gun on the bed, and backed away. "You took two years from me..." Brittany whispered, almost sheepishly.

"Hmmm...more like five years from the looks of it," Edith retorted calmly.

Brittany looked up and laughed. "Yes, yes, Edith, you're right. You're always right, aren't you, Edith! Fine! FIIIVVVVEEEEE FUCKING YEARS!" Brittany's eyes looked wildly at Edith who looked as though she was bored at a movie. "I have her," Brittany broke the silence.

Edith's expression remained monotonous. *She must be in the trunk of her car. Stare, don't weaken. Opal is okay.* Again, Brittany's dramatic fictional performance was not playing out. Nothing about this was satisfying. No, she would not leave here unsatisfied.

"What if I told you all you had to do was tell me you're sorry. That you were wrong for once. And admit that you hurt me and didn't care. Just tell me the truth! Tell me you're a bastard for how you left me and just picked up this new girl and gave her everything you couldn't give me. TELL ME!"

"And why would I be sorry? You left me. I should be sorry for letting you leave me? How profound the paradox you've created inside your mind, bravo," Edith replied. She smiled at Brittany.

Brittany ran to Edith and slapped her across the face. "How dare you mock me! I was trying to be close to you, but you just couldn't, could you? But for, oh, what's her name...Opal. For dear, precious, little fucking sweetheart Opal, you let her in? After I laid all the groundwork, warmed you up, and then you give all my hard work to some child who's named after a grandma from the 1930s?! No! No, this deserves retribution, and I will have it! I deserve it! Tell me the truth!" Brittany was spitting and panting with her fervor.

"You don't want my truth," Edith replied, wincing at her burning cheek, then turning again to look out the window.

"Why? Why, with all your infinite wisdom? Are you God? I can't handle *your* truth like it's some power to behold? You're ridiculous," Brittany scoffed, feeling momentarily superior in her rebuttal.

Edith sighed, "Fine."

Just as Edith was turning to face Brittany, Opal came silently from behind with a chunky ceramic vase Edith's daughter had made in the fifth grade and swung it against the right side of Brittany's head with a single resounding crack. Brittany crumpled to the floor. Opal stood shakily, her chest heaving up and down trying to recover from the adrenaline coursing through her veins and throbbing in her temples.



The vase was sturdy; it hadn't broken. It hung at the end of Opal's now flimsy grip. It slipped free and thudded to the ground. Opal's bottom lip began quivering as she began bathing in the entirety of the situation.

Opal sent the text, knowing Edith wouldn't respond, but merely acknowledge. *I know she's freaking out right now.* Opal sat for a moment contemplating before she jumped up and grabbed her keys. *What's an extra hour or so early? She's lying if she says she minds.* Opal had a way with Edith. She accepted her coldness and distance. She never held it against her. But Opal also knew when Edith was floundering. Edith had this way of tensing the corners of her mouth and screwing up her brow when she was overwhelmed. She could see Edith now, rubbing her knee when she woke up, drinking her tea, doing her breathing, doing the yoga, all in an effort to loosen that tension, but more to lessen the strain on her emotions. *Ha! I bet she's mad I texted during her yoga.* Opal snickered inwardly as she slid into the driver's seat. She pulled the door shut, put the keys in the ignition, checked the side mirror, then before she could check the rear view, cold, hard metal kissed her temple as she turned. Her breath choked. She slowly raised her gaze to the rearview mirror and saw a crazed woman sitting in her back seat, face plastered with a clown-like smile.

"Let's go see our Edith, huh?"

Opal felt like she was going to vomit. "Wh-whadda you want?" she managed to stammer out.

"I want..." the stranger cocked the pistol against Opal's temple, "to go see Edith."

Opal slowly nodded, forgetting what to do next. *Seatbelt.* She fumbled with the belt but it locked in place from being jerked around, but she finally got herself buckled in. *Turn the car on.* She slowly turned the key and the car roared to life. Opal squeezed her eyes shut and sent a silent prayer to any God that might be listening, then opened her eyes and put the car in reverse. The woman didn't say anything during the drive. Opal didn't recognize her. Edith wasn't the type of person who had enemies, let alone ones who would want to shoot her. Once they turned towards the approach to the house, the woman instructed Opal to park. The panic that had slowly abated during the drive flashed back in full force as this surreal scene's climax was implicitly creeping up. Opal hadn't wanted to consider the end of this drive, but here they were. The last thing Opal heard was the crack of her own skull before everything faded into darkness.

Later, Opal stirred awake and blinked hard, trying to see in the darkness around her. She listened intently to the rain tapping on the metal. She couldn't hear any voices. Opal knew she was in her trunk when she caught the scent of the in-

cense-saturated blanket next to her. Her mouth was taped closed, hands taped behind her, and ankles also taped. She stayed still for another minute to listen for any sign of movement. When she was sure there was no one, she began maneuvering her hands towards the lever in the back of the trunk. She never understood the purpose of one seat being able to lay down via a lever from the trunk until right now. The seat popped halfway down. That woman had left Opal's parcel intact on the seat. Opal managed to painfully right her hands from behind to in front of her, then remove the tape constricting her breath. She used the lever to make a cut at the end of the tape around her hands, then untied her ankles.

Carefully, she slid herself into the backseat of her car, then slowly peeked up to see if anyone was outside.

It was as if everything had been a dream. Nothing was amiss. *Edith!* Opal regained her composure, left the car, and ran to the house. She prayed she wasn't too late.

\*

"Opal," Edith spoke in a hushed, yet stern tone.

Opal's attention was pulled from her reverie and back to the scene of Brittany laying in a puddle on the floor. Opal wiped the tears streaming down her face and clumsily ran to Edith, who was still bound on the chair.

"No, Opal, call the police right now." She looked directly into Opal's eyes as she said this, trying to focus and calm her at the same time.

"Um, okay, I-I don't, I don't know where my phone..." Opal was shaking and confused.

"Calm down, breathe," Edith cooed. "My phone is on the table."

Opal complied.

Edith could hear her whispering to the operator on the line behind her. Edith kept her eyes fixed on Brittany. She was still breathing, but her hair had fallen over her face. Edith couldn't see if she was waking or still knocked out. "Opal," Edith whispered. Opal was giving instructions to the operator and pacing back and forth to use up her excess energy. "Opal," Edith hissed this time, becoming anxious at remaining tied up and not knowing the state of her attacker. Opal realized Edith's tone, finished the call, and hung up the phone. She quickly returned to Edith's side to begin cutting away the tape. Opal was just able to free Edith's hands when Brittany shot towards the bed and retrieved the gun. Opal stumbled backwards in surprise and Edith held up her freed hands pleading as if in defeat.

"I loved you," Brittany blubbered, a demented look in her eyes. She pulled the trigger with a resounding pop that rippled throughout the room like a shockwave, then silence. The rain pattered softly on. Metal tittered along the tiles. Knees cracked

hard, then what was left of the face, smacked on the solid ground as the sickly, fresh blood washed her hair.

“Moooooommm!!!” a cheery voice came from above as the door slammed shut.

It was an eerie quiet. Something thick in the air, air that would have otherwise been refreshed from the rains outside, was stifling as soon as she closed the door. “Mom?” she said again, now uncertain and anxious. She stood in the living room listening, feeling for any movement in the house. She tiptoed towards the stairway leading to her mother’s bedroom and cautiously leaned forward, again straining to hear anything. She felt foolish for a moment, thinking she was overreacting and that maybe her mother was in the bathroom and couldn’t hear her, but something in her stomach churned. Something was not right.

She took one step at a time, making sure to avoid the squeaks she had learned over years of use, until she stood at the landing looking over the entire room, soaking in the scene that had unfolded, unbeknownst to her, just minutes before she turned in to the approach to the cottage. She blinked and covered her mouth to stifle a scream, then sat backward onto the step.

Opal turned her head when she realized someone new was in the room. She rose from where she was sitting on the edge of the bed and slowly walked toward her, hands out in the universal sign of “safe” and to show her that she didn’t have a weapon. She said, “You must be Judith.”

## A Period of Self-Reflection

### Elise Unterseher

*Elise Unterseher is a current University of North Dakota student who will graduate in spring 2021 with a bachelor's in English and a certificate in creative writing. Starting fall 2021, she will be attending the George Washington University to earn a Masters in Publishing. In the future, Elise hopes to have a career in the publishing or copyediting field, and then later on further her education.*

Dear Diary,

Once again, I'm here to talk and you are there to listen. I don't know where to begin; there is never a great way of knowing where to start. Should I ask what you wish to hear? The good or the bad? I don't like discussing the wonderful things in the commonplace. Those memories have to be stored behind my mind, so I can casually smile when I think back on them.

I don't actually want to get to the point.

I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. Aren't you sick of my bullshit? These negative heart-to-hearts are demanding, but the weight of this heavy cavity in the lowest part of my stomach is beyond endurance. The discomfort is rimming my bronze eyes with tears. I have my logical brain, irrational heart, and wild composure working against me. I cannot confess anything to this trio. Depending on the day, I'll be strained to the advice I don't acknowledge, or I'm hooked on the diluted answers that I'm directly seeking for. My head isn't consistent with its reason, my heart is not the best judge of character and I usually restrain my common sense.

You are an amazing confidant. Do you have the ability to shoulder all my dilemmas?

I'm unable to be honest with myself. Because that's hard. That's fucking impossible.

I'm trying to liberate myself from the bitter affairs accompanied by the brief ach-

ing. I'm simply deprived of appeasement. For there is a safety on this ivory, pale-blue lined pages bound in teal cardboard tightened by a sewn spine.

Beauty, the combination of authentic physical appearance that extends into a genuine nature mixed with alluring sexuality. From personal experience, it is punishing trying to get ahold of all these pieces. From personal experience, the procedure of securing beauty requires more than purifying all invading insecurities. I mold my cheeks around with my fingers. I stretch, push, and attempt to shrink, and any bystander would think I'm making funny faces. Temporarily, I'm envisioning another image of my appearance. For me, there is no trust in mirrors. I hold an unbroken doubt in my own portrait that is reflected back. I don't want to look like myself. I hope to become an imitation of her.

Her. Beautiful her.

I've become an addicted observer to every post on her Instagram. Yet, there is one picture that I deeply study. The delicate way she arranges her curves with impressions of her ribcage pressing against that golden kissed skin. My eyes then travel to her flaunted flat abs. My thumb would trace over all the lines while my other hand caresses my own untuned abdomen. Her desirable pale-rosey lips go along with that tempting smile. How her effortless tousled hazel-brown hair catches the sun, giving her natural highlights. Finally, those crystal sea-colored eyes, I can see how any man would be enchanted by her. I'm completely enthralled. However, I cannot blame genetics for providing me with common brown orbs.

She simply stands out against that boring brick wall background. My meager envy has converted my individualized judgment into a new mindset. Every time I gaze onto my face or body, I seem to find a flaw. As mentioned before, I don't have a strong belief in mirrors. There are moments where they operate like the ones at the carnival. Each time, my physique is distorted in a new way. It could be mighty legs, a monstrous nose with matching elephant ears, or an overflowing torso. Although, sometimes that carnival-looking glass is broken and I catch a glimpse of what I want. I'm cursed with a jaded dysmorphia, for I won't have the ability to not notice my imperfections. The battle between body and self is an all-out war. But I am not gentle either, the way I grip my stomach, thighs, and biceps leaves them with scratch marks or hints of red bruises. It's a bond built off of love and hate.

But, then again, me and I rarely agree, because me is the one who carries the overly critical frame of mind. Me is the face that is presented to the world, and I tend to be kinder to what me is going through. The conversations between these two either end with tears or disheartening unease. Me and I are in control of every bit of myself. Unfortunately, myself is the one who bears the aftermath of each debate. Myself is the frequent loser in each battle of internal conflict. Not that myself could even

be a contender in these matchups. Myself is too timid, it wants to people please.

But despite all that, when a menacing inconvenience arises, all of these sides will shelter away and leave this empty vessel to fend for itself. That's why it's hard to blame something or someone for this kind of temperament, it's all crafted by me, myself, and I.

Needless to say, I do make an effort to come off as customary, at least when I was in front of him. Yes, him. You and I have had many consultations about him before, so I hope that I do not have to jog your memory on our previous ups and downs. For how much I speak about him, I am sure that you are fully educated on what has happened. I am also sure that by now, you are sick of it. I'm sorry to continue this narrative, but will you be happy to know that we are over?

At least, for now. However, I'm ruminating a lot. The persistent thoughts, "what did I do wrong" or "what did he do wrong" are now companions on my sleepless nights. Although, I strongly believe it was more my fault this time around. His tricks remained identical, there weren't even different magic words. He whispered each turn of phrase while he distracted me with the wave of his hand. I understand that I look foolish, but feel some sympathy for me because I was captivated by the roses he pulled out of his sleeve. The relationship between him and I was always complex, but it was designed that way. Neither of us is solely responsible for its demise, even so, my actions during this part of our saga may have to do with this current conclusion. I left. In dramatic fashion without a clean pause, I left with sitting guilt and my departing gift to him was bewilderment.

Pervious to the end, he and I occupied our closing moments in the quickest way to immediate gratification. His dense head sat halfway between the crook of my neck and my naked chest. I lightly leaned the weight of mine on top while I weaved my fingers through his blond locks. I felt the dampness towards the base of his hairline and at that moment, I couldn't stop my mouth from tugging into a smirk. Each and every stroke I bestowed on him was done with purpose. I wanted him to sense something else alongside the pleasure. I could not see his cobalt eyes, his lids covered their radiance. But if they were open, I would stare back with silly adoration and ask, "can we stay like this until the morning sun peaks through the window glass?" I knew that the fantasy would finish once he lifted his head from my breast and returned to his pillow. The excitement between him and I became a grim figment of my imagination. Reality discovered ways to throw in hard to ignore plot twists. That's why I ran away. I didn't want to. I never wanted to leave him, but for mine and his sake, it was a better solution.

There's a brunet that I'm currently in pursuit of, but for right now I spare the details about him. Let's just say, I don't hold any high hopes.

I ask you, dearest diary, when do I get to say fuck it? I'm not there yet, but the day when I do get to utter that phrase could be tomorrow or next year. I know that when I am allowed to speak it, it will be said for a reason, don't you agree? The problems that I express to you are not tremendous, but we both can acknowledge that they are frustrating. The consequences of these events are influenced by my choices, and I don't decide on the smartest ones. It's the age-old excuse of I'm only human.

To you, I probably come off as a pessimist, but despite all my worries I actually yearn for the future. The future is undetermined. It is like a gift, perfectly hidden away. I can easily daydream about my life. There are multiple routes that can be taken, Robert Frost said it best. I guess that is how I define myself against everybody else. I'm not wary of the years to come. Honestly, I fall into a haze and imagine. To look forward means I am allowed change; I can change into anything I please.

Oh, dearest diary, I believe our conference has concluded. Thank you for giving me all your attention. I do not feel like I have reached an epiphany, but I feel at ease. Maybe you and I will get there next time.

Love,  
Your patient writer



***poetry***

## Sanctuary

### Leah Hanley

*Leah Noel Hanley is currently in pursuit of a Master of Arts degree in English at the University of North Dakota. Her writing focuses on the exploration of deeply human experiences, through which she hopes to inspire empathy across cultural boundaries, and to promote the need to conserve and preserve our Earth. When Leah is not writing (or completing schoolwork), she is likely cross stitching, cooking, or spending quality time with her loved ones.*

There are at least four dozen birds  
in my yard this morning.  
They are plucking seeds and crunching beetles,  
flitting from bough to bough in a game of chase, chirping in delight.  
Crabapples drop like confetti,  
the ground is a bouquet of green and yellow with splashes of red,  
the ruffled grass erupting with brown birds.  
A single robin perches on the porch railing,  
patrolling for bugs in the grassy forest below;  
With a cock of its head, it swoops gracefully to snag a plump breakfast from the dirt.  
The red-breasted nuthatch rummages at the feeder for shelled peanuts,  
his black & white racing stripes a blur as he zips back to the birch.  
Chickadees relay back and forth between the shade tree and the feeder,  
pausing to chatter over seeds at the trough.  
I smile, seeing them take refuge on this patch of land.

Yesterday, the old man next door  
was marching backwards in his driveway,  
pumping poison onto the concrete  
with a steady thrust of his arm,  
his shoulders hunched to his task.  
He winced when the bushy weeds in my garden  
hailed his attention with

fronds extended in salute,  
and the spindly vines between my driveway cracks taunted him  
with their confident laziness.

His recoiled gaze

swept back over his property

with grim satisfaction;

At least when he closes his weary eyes

his last sight will have been

a yard with no weeds.

When finally he hobbled up his tidy brick stairs,  
the dandies in my lawn stretched their necks to see him leave  
and beckoned the bumbles to their upturned faces,  
clusters of thistles dispersed the black beetles that took shelter  
under their thorny canopies.

Across the street is a succession of  
Glistening emerald carpets  
Freshly swept and shampooed,  
Houses cast beveled shadows,  
Lawn King paper signs flutter in the breeze  
Like cocktail umbrellas in a deli display.  
Regiments of hostas, shrubbery, ferns,  
Tulips neatly organized behind short retaining walls,  
Plastic window boxes cradling new geraniums,  
White letters against navy siding:  
W-E-L-C-O-M-E

But the bees visit the wild raspberry patch by my garage,  
butterflies taste the tangle of tiger lilies by my front door,  
a rabbit nests her babies in a patch of tall grass behind my deck,  
squirrels travel on power line highways  
to bury their winter treasures in my garden,  
and birds dance in my unkempt lawn.  
My sliver of Earth bursts with life,  
and I write my name  
in the fog of my breath  
on the bay window glass.

## lovers departing

Erin Breen

*About Erin: I'm a part-time, online student here at UND with an anticipated graduation date of June 2022. I earned a certificate in creative writing with a focus in poetry from Idyllwild Arts Academy where I also served as the nonfiction editor and social media manager at <http://parallax-online.com/>. My pieces have been published in a few publications and my chapbook, Misconceptions, was published by Wild Idylls Press. Outside of UND, I work full time and intern at Cars.com. I live in Elgin, IL, with my teacup poodle, Betty, and my best friend since high school. I taught myself how to read when I was four and haven't stopped since.*

i can still feel your hot tears on my neck  
wetting my hair, pooling into my skin and entering my bones  
you said you had strong castle walls my soft touch wrecked

i didn't notice the grey outline around your brown eyes until i really looked  
but you already knew how mine changed from green to blue to harsh grey stones  
i can still feel your hot tears on my neck

you told me my skin's warm; called it snowy white  
i imagined myself melting into a tepid puddle of pheromones  
you said you had strong castle walls my soft touch wrecked

my hair tugged at my scalp when you pulled me closer and wept  
my nostrils flared as they filled with your sweet colognes  
i can still feel your hot tears on my neck

every day you proclaimed your love even when I was unkempt  
every night i still miss the gruff sounds of your groans  
you said you had strong castle walls my soft touch wrecked

in every residual drop of dopamine i can feel you like i never left  
you retained the good half of me on loan  
i can still feel your hot tears on my neck  
you said you had strong castle walls my soft touch wrecked

## Apologist

### Elise Unterseher

*Elise Unterseher is a current University of North Dakota student who will graduate in spring 2021 with a bachelor's in English and a certificate in creative writing. Starting fall 2021, she will be attending the George Washington University to earn a Masters in Publishing. In the future, Elise hopes to have a career in the publishing or copyediting field, and then later on further her education.*

Good God, it's so ugly / The Devil praise be, are you a humble servant?  
I need the silence, can't you savor the vile whiskey, it lingers on your tongue,  
Gagging at the sour.  
I want to know the clear phrase / I want to be clarified,  
I lost the hymns of this chapel. They were replaced by your vernacular,  
how stern it has become.  
One Might / One Meek,  
Forbid the newspaper,  
I'll try to change the way the typewriter clacks,  
Liar, Liar,  
A series of angry epistles, reduce to ashes  
It is Their Word, His Word, Her Word,  
Everyone is now a false prophet.  
We cannot only preach one word,  
Sinner, Sinner.  
For Fuck's Sake, I'm trying to sing.

## Invar

### Kai Szulborski

*Kai Szulborski is a graduate student, English GTA, and writer at UND. He first tried writing after he fell in love with a badly written gothic space-opera about a small blue ghoul who uses the soul of Charles Dickens to power his giant hammer-wielding robot. Now, he mostly writes about giant sad women crying in deserts. He is currently working very hard to accelerate the process of entropy in order to eliminate all stars in the universe. That way, he can sleep in as long as he wants.*

*After Wilfred Owen's "Futility"*

The clay cannot claim itself  
For all its import and purpose, inside of a circle  
The clay cannot claim itself  
If it sits idly by, dissolved by the sun  
Grown cold in harsh politeness and three feelings  
The first is letting go of itself; to tunnel underground  
Here the clay will mire and surge until it breaks peace  
The second is thunder, coming both from underground and inside of the clay  
The thunder is timid and it cannot stir the fire of the sun  
Asking questions of the half-sown field  
The third, and final, is the sleep of the earth  
The sun asks of its clay to break the sleep  
But in thunder, and the tunnels below the snow,  
In the frozen core of the Earth  
The sun cannot reach and the beams cannot break sleep  
And the cold star which hailed the seeds from the starship  
Has vanished back past the planets  
And hidden behind the moon.

## Abandoned

### Jacqueline Raatz

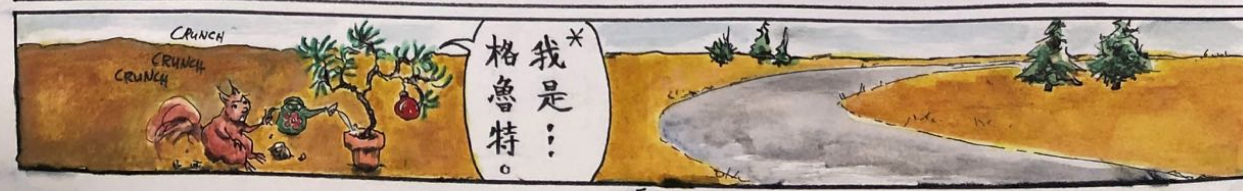
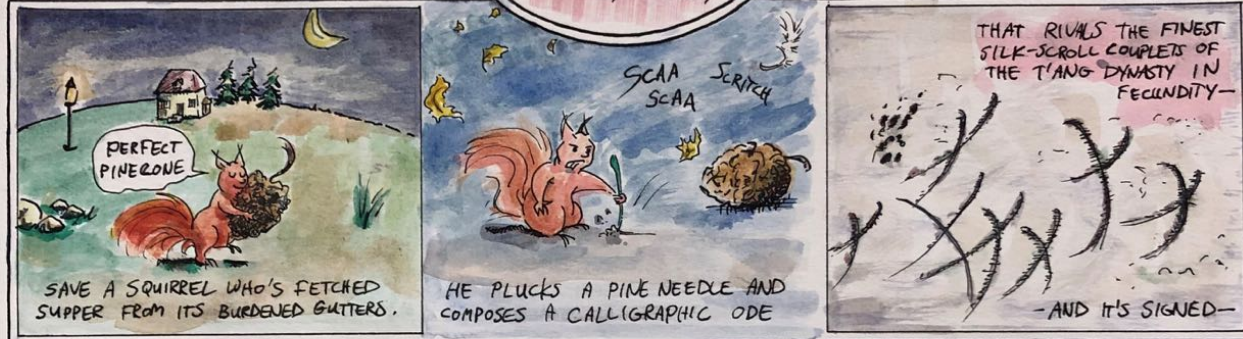
*Jacqueline Raatz is a senior Drawing and Painting BFA major with affinities for French Cuisine, biking, newspaper comics and Baroque paintings. Since retiring from the ND Army National Guard, she spends most of her time with her family and in her garden, kitchen, and art studio.*

The vacant house across the road  
Slouches in the amber lamp light.  
Leaf-choked gutters rasping, wheezing,  
Blowing, gently, into the good night.  
Silvery moon shards stream  
Across the walls of the upstairs room  
The neighbors' chimneys churn out clouds  
Their veiled windows bestrobed by flickering screens  
And kitchens warm enough for bare feet.  
By day, twiggy seedlings press ever upward,  
Worming their roots into basement cracks  
The flag on my porch tilts in the breeze—  
And is reflected in that darkened foyer window.

### Note

This 2019 painting (ink and acrylic on paper, 18 x 24") is based upon the above poem and is also a homage to George Herriman's great newspaper strip, *Krazy Kat*.





\*[I AM... GROOT.]

## Tinkerers

### Heather Barry

*Heather Barry is a Mojave Desert native living off-and-on between Grand Forks, North Dakota & California. She's an English major in her senior year. She (hopes) to be joining the North Dakota Army National Guard in 2021 & continue to write poetry & short stories, but mostly poetry & social issues more widely.*

Our shadow box is like a small hearse we make pretty  
 In it, the crimson rouge for you has gone rogue, Cirque du soleil—  
 A circus of your Sun  
 I signed off on this project & our secrets did as riders.

We're set in these errors, up on a wire  
 No finger on the pulse or ears to the ground  
 I coast off into the blue—the blue blocks of text  
 Aimless & wanting, wanting you to speak up once in a blue moon or when you're  
 blue  
 You never made a sound  
                                     Gone. Blocked.

I coo over the black box of Memory:

*Soothe*

*Soothe*

I am nuts  
 A word will not link us like I'm the great Blue Tooth Viking  
 It will not nest us together in a sweetheart booth  
 A word will not work. A word will not prosper,  
 We are goners, Caspers as it were but *soothe* is somehow soothing  
                                     *Soothe*

*Soothe* is not the name of our death

Humans usually like to name the things we've packaged and put to rest.

What did we ever get from just tinkering?  
We were not artists playing with paints  
We were shadow-boxers & I kept missing  
I kept missing you because I misunderstood you  
I mistook you for me  
I thought I was circling us, getting better but maybe I just looked like a Vulture.

New shadows start to give us shade & discernment starts to seep  
How did we let it in? Hearses do not have sunroofs & the casket's is no flyleaf  
We will not tinker with it anymore!  
We will not make it pretty.  
I will not say a peep!  
I will not, I will not  
I will still think to when we dug in in that dug out on the bright side of night  
if Hearses have moonroofs.



## lies i tell

### Maria Matsakis

*Maria Matsakis is a first-year graduate student in the English Department at the University of North Dakota.*

i choke on smoke for breakfast  
and try to remember the last time my mouth did not taste like blood.

crouched down in the trenches, hugging the corpses,  
i have no idea whether i am being dirtied by the mud or cleansed by my tears.

i've learned to say each goodbye like it's the last  
because in this place, it might be.

i line up my shot before pulling the trigger,  
but pray the bullet doesn't make it to its destination.

## 18 Years

### J. Alcon

*J. is an undergraduate at the University of North Dakota graduating in the spring of 2021 with a Bachelor of Accountancy degree. She is married to the most wonderful man alive and they have two exceptionally sweet boys. She lives a life of exquisite seclusion just north of the badlands on Blue Creek Estate.*

O', sweet, my baby boy, so fine,  
    Close those creamy, dark chocolate eyes.  
I thought I had more time.

Your lovely cherub face does shine,  
    Hush, hush, son, there's no need for cries,  
O', sweet, my baby boy, so fine.

The years trudge along, old grandfather chime!  
    God, the sleep deprivation, time doesn't slip, it flies!  
I thought I had more time.

Strapping young man, so gentle and kind,  
    Growing and learning this world's hidden guise,  
O' sweet, my baby boy, so fine.

Constantly moving, ebb and flow, leaving you behind,  
    Just one more task, one more chore, working 'til sunrise.  
I thought I had more time.

Now your cap is fitted, you smile back as you fall in line,  
    So foolish! The wasted rush, I thought was wise.  
O', sweet, my baby boy, so fine,  
I thought I had more time.

## They're Singing Again

### Charlotte Hatch

*Charlotte Hatch is a senior at UND majoring in Commercial Aviation, hoping to get hired as a certified flight instructor this summer. Originally from Central Pennsylvania, she enjoys this spring weather. She spends her free time painting, weaving, playing drums, and biking.*

The windchimes are singing again.  
Flashing their silver smiles at me, clanking in sharp February air;  
Metallic music consumes all of my oxygen. I choke on nothing.  
Their leaden songs poison you to self-inflicted violence.  
'Sane,' you'll find, will leave your mind, and they'll still smile silver all the same.

The sun had waved goodbye weeks ago, and the grey will never leave.  
Just as last November began, sawdust snow clings to my bleeding heels,  
Toes rigid in the ice, cracking the bones as easily as the crumbling concrete curb.  
I forgot my shoes on purpose, my soles are strong enough to bear the cold.  
Pink plastic Gillette shards litter sticky tile floors, gleaming scales sleep in my drawer,  
I don't want to die anymore

Fresh ripples accompany old waves on flesh; ice skates shred once smooth ice.  
Little lines run up and down, tiny silk ribbons that crack and cry,  
I don't want to die I don't want to die

While striped sleeves may be failing, pointed teeth saturate my melancholy skin.  
The marks won't go, but then again, I want them to stay.  
Will I get out of bed today?  
The windchimes are singing again.

## Garden in the Mire

Connor Grenier

*Connor Grenier is a student at the University of North Dakota. Among his hobbies of reading, going outside, playing games, and enjoying the company of others, he finds time for his favorite of any artistic pursuit, writing.*

Violet seeds lay cold in the Earth  
These seeds proceed a gloomy birth  
Fed by freezing, lonesome rains  
Surrounded by frozen dirt

They sprout into decaying trees  
Heartache is a wicked weed  
Its roots are deep and clog your heart  
And is watered by bitter seas

Their flowers are wilted when they bloom  
Their fruits, if eaten, will spell your doom  
Your heart, a bog where nothing grows  
But sickly dank perfume

It's easy to fall into places so deep  
Where despair is so heavy you think that you'll sink  
But take a breath you mustn't drown  
There's nothing for you underneath

There are worms in mud that feed baby birds  
For every foul utterance, there are beautiful words  
The heart can be weeded and the soul can thaw  
And you'll find that a change has occurred



A rosy sun can break gloomy skies  
And nectars of flowers can bring butterflies  
Just remember that love, through flowers and weeds,  
Is the joy of being alive.

# ***creative writing awards***

## **Thomas McGrath Award for Poetry**

Michaela Oosthuizen, winner

Charles Henry, runner-up

Casey Fuller, runner-up

## **John Little Fiction Scholarship**

Keely McLean, winner

Parker Stenseth, runner-up

## Something Sad in the Music

Michaela Oosthuizen

### **WINNER, THOMAS McGRATH AWARD FOR POETRY**

*Michaela Oosthuizen was born in Stellenbosch South Africa. She loves studying literature and running the 800m on the track and tries as best she can to balance the two passions.*

*Ever since childhood, she was fond of writing stories and poetry. At age 9, she used her favourite place—a farm in Nelspruit Mpumalanga—as her first muse to begin writing poetry. In high school, she shifted her focus to people and events and has explored them ever since. Her poetry attempts to capture some of the complexities and depths of the human experience through simple, yet compelling verse and imagery. She also likes to season her work by experimenting with different rhyme schemes, sounds, and form.*

*Michaela is currently completing a Masters degree in English at UND whilst competing in track and field for the university.*

On Michaela's poetry, the Creative Writing Scholarship Committee observed: "Michaela Oosthuizen's 'Something Sad in the Music' brings to the page a candescent lyricism and a rhythmic melancholy. The slant rhyme and in-line rhyme of this poem prove especially moving—an eloquent and rhythmic counterpoint to the literal piano music of the poem."

There's something sad in the music,  
I told her quietly  
A tear dropped from my blue eyes  
onto the piano key.

But her gentle hand soothed mine small,  
Through childish ears I heard her say:  
'Darling, it's the sound that counts.'

'Listen to the steps of the Alto-man,  
dancing with his lady of the Dante-clan.  
Listen closely, you can hear them breathe,  
The music may be sad, but the magic doesn't leave.  
Turn your ear as the melody mounts—  
Oh darling, it's the sound that counts.'

Raven braids and faded dress,  
the other girls only wore Sunday best.  
At night we ate from yellowed plates,  
And mommy always cried  
'Cause daddy sang for someone else,  
The woman of the night.  
I spied them often, I told her then  
There's something sad in their music.  
Then sighing at her son's fall, her lips would this resound:  
'Oh darling, it's the lesson that counts.'

'Listen to the falter of the Tenor-boy,  
Falling for the notes of her soprano-ploy.  
Listen closely, you can hear them spin,  
The music may be sad, but the truth will win.  
Turn your ear as the melody mounts—  
Oh darling, it's the lesson that counts.'

Then childhood left like a faded dream,  
My first love broke my heart at fifteen.  
But more broken still was the sound of home—  
Daddy moved out and mommy tried,  
Before my eyes  
To kill herself,  
Twice.

I wanted to scream, I wanted to run,  
There was something even sad in the rising of the sun.  
And what could she say, to soothe my aching soul?  
'Oh darling, it's the hope that counts.'

'Listen to the tread of the Bassto-man,  
Dark and somber, but there is a plan.  
Listen closely, you can hear it change,  
The music may be sad, but the light's in range.  
Turn your ear as the melody mounts—  
Oh darling, it's the hope that counts.'

To this day, I can still hear,  
Her voice resounding through the years.  
It gave me refuge, she showed me hope,  
Despite the sad music, I was able to cope.  
And when again, I held her old hand  
And kissed her forehead one last time,  
A tear crept from my eye  
She whispered, 'It's so sad to say goodbye—'  
I said  
'Darling, it's the love that counts.'

'Listen to the twinkle of the piano-notes,  
Dancing like a girl in her faded coat.  
Listen closely, almost hear her smile,  
The music may be sad, but it's only for a while...  
Turn your ear as the melody mounts—  
Oh darling, it's the love that counts.'

## Two Poems

Charles Henry

### ***RUNNER-UP, THOMAS McGRATH AWARD FOR POETRY***

*Charles Henry is a second semester English M.A. student at UND, with interests in composition theory, sociolinguistics, and the early modern and medieval British periods. He received his undergraduate in English and Education at West Liberty University, where he also began his creative writing journey. His writings often deal with exploring the underside of the expected experience of language and examining the shifting forms and conventions of writing. Charles has lived all over the eastern U.S., originally growing up on a farm in the Ohio valley, and he enjoys bringing those experiences into his writing.*

On Charles' poetry, the Creative Writing Scholarship Committee observed: "In his poems, Charles approaches the substance of everyday living with candor, warmth, and sensitivity. His poems make deft use of enjambment, indentations, and the silence between stanzas to invite us to meditate, in comfortable silence, with the speakers of his poems."

## Silly Little Word

Where is that word,  
    that I just had in my head?  
                    Ah! It found its way to the page,  
                    by going through my fingers.  
Silly little verb,  
                    always doing something.  
But, I'm not sure I like what it's doing.  
So, I picked it up and threw it on the floor  
    Then grabbed it back up  
    to see if it could become something more.  
I rolled in my hand,  
    to see if I could give it a sense of self,  
                    and all of the sudden it became something else.  
An adjective!  
    ...that's fun,  
    but not quite what I need.



Next, I gave it a bend, but it broke in two;  
that's not what I was trying to do.  
Infinitives don't give a sense of who.  
So I taped it together and gave it a stretch.  
Stretched it right into a gerund,  
but the word wasn't quite there and...  
I wanted something closer to a name.  
Frustrated I let out a sigh, picked it up, and held it to my eye.  
And pled,  
"Help me, silly word, I need something profound."  
It jumped from my hand,  
back onto the page.  
And when I looked down,  
I was surprised at what I found.  
The little thing had bent itself into a noun.  
"Ah, yes of course!  
That there is just the thing.  
What a good team, you and me."  
Then I smiled.  
How flexible that silly little word can be.

## **My Old Friend**

The waves of time pull at me.  
They pull at me all the time; I've come to find.  
Like swirls in the surf,  
my attention draws to the questions near the center.  
Questions to which the answers can only be found in time.

The ebbing waves used to be my friend, you see.  
They'd wash over me, but I was unaltered by the pull.  
In truth, I couldn't even feel the waves. I felt only my youth.  
But I could see the pull,  
though only on others.  
But the pull on others, delighted me.  
I'd point and giggle as time pulled wrinkles on my family's face.  
They'd blush, or laugh,  
and then warn me of time's fickleness.  
Then all of the sudden,  
I realized that time could pull too hard.  
In a reddish casket with white pillows laid  
a familiar grey face in front of a small boy.  
That was the first time my little heart cracked,  
but I didn't understand the crack,  
just as I didn't understand the pull.

Time comes in waves though.  
And I've seen several low tides since my first.  
Oh... I suppose I've seen just as many high tides, as well.  
For years, I tried to tug back at the tide, even if only in words.

But it seems that time tugged at me first.  
I can see the tiny crevices, from the times that I smiled so wide,  
that it cracked the skin around my eyes,  
and I can see the creases, from where the tears were pulled down my face.  
The tears that time had pooled into puddles of dangling questions  
that swirl with answers yet to come.

These cracks,  
they're not that deep, you see.

These cracks that time has placed all over me.  
I've still time to watch them grow, I know.  
But seeing them hurts all the same.  
And they'll deepen, as time pulls at all of the things that I love.  
Those loves will slowly fade at the hours' grasp.  
The hours and minutes will slowly pull, and then pass  
until I no longer see the moments, at all.  
And instead I'll only remember the waves.

Time is not all loss though.  
Sure it rises and falls, pushing then pulling, and it slowly drags us to the sea.  
And yes, because of time, one day I will die, and you... just as me.  
Because the cracks will never not continue to grow.

But... just as it ebbs, it also flows.  
My skin had to suffer these cracks  
and my eyes had to crease.  
Because without the flow of time,  
I couldn't have met my favorite niece.  
The one that loves to point out the wrinkles.  
That she can clearly see, even easier than me.  
I blush and laugh, and pass on the warning,  
but then she asks, what the world was like before I had them.

And time had to swirl for me to make up my mind  
on what kind of life was supposed to be mine  
and to make me decide what my purpose should be.  
It took time for time to pass into memory.  
You know the one I mean, the one's half hers,  
that kiss, that blush, that first time under the covers.

Time then has two parts.  
The first, of course, is my enemy  
But it would seem the other part is still my friend,  
Because time brings more than only the end.

Casey Fuller

***RUNNER-UP, THOMAS McGRATH AWARD FOR POETRY***

*Casey Fuller is an English PhD student in his first year at UND. He grew up in the cloudiest city in the United States: Olympia, Washington.*

On Casey's poetry, the Creative Writing Scholarship Committee observed: "In his poetry, Casey Fuller extends and explores the possibility of the line, the lyric, and the subjectivity of a poem's poetic persona. In his use of the visual field of the page as an expressive medium, Casey's poems bring to mind the work of such poets as Marie Howe."

## Once upon a Time in New York City

Keely McLean

### **WINNER, JOHN LITTLE FICTION SCHOLARSHIP**

*Keely McLean is a sophomore at the University of North Dakota from Rosemount, Minnesota, majoring in Commercial Aviation with a minor in English. Keely has spent her time here by attending hockey games at the Ralph, collecting plastic bags for the Energy & Environment Club and studying at Archives Coffeehouse. Keely is looking forward to returning to her summer job where she teaches children's golf camps, getting sushi with her friends and hiking in her local regional park. With her education from UND, she plans on traveling across the country and abroad to pursue her passions in journaling and flight.*

On Keely's fiction, the Creative Writing Scholarship Committee observed: "Keely McLean's 'Once upon a Time in New York City' draws the reader instantly into the narrative with the beautiful, figurative comparison between skyscrapers and reaching, pleading hands. This primes the readers for Caroline's experiences in this story. Moreover, the story's deft use of a third-person narrator keeps us at just the right emotional remove from Caroline—building the story to a jolting, clever reversal."

Skyscrapers are like hands. They reach their glass-tinted fingers up toward the sky, scraping at the blue hue that encompasses the air surrounding a rock floating in space. The palms of these buildings are rooted deep into the ground; their veins running with subway cars, blood pumping people from Broadway to Fifth Avenue. Hand after hand, palm after palm, covering the tiny island of Manhattan. Hundreds of hands, each with their own story.

Among these people is Caroline James. Her mind crafts analogies, similar to the skyscrapers and hands. She once watched a movie starring Audrey Hepburn, where her character pulls herself together enough to make the trek to the Tiffany's diamond store in New York City in the early hours of the morning to eat a croissant. After watching this film, Caroline twists her hair up and puts on the largest pair of sunglasses she owns to ride the subway over to Tiffany's to eat breakfast just like Ms. Hepburn. She views her character as an analogy for making it big with whatever you've got.

Caroline James is also easily influenced by what she sees around her. She once heard on the street about a new workout that can get you to look like the beauti-

ful Ms. Hepburn. This workout is called yoga, and even though Caroline did not know what this was, she scoured the streets of Manhattan until she found someone who did. While she ultimately decided this “yoga” was not for her, she decided that she would soon need to find something else to try.

One morning, Caroline was eating her croissant and admiring the finest pair of diamond earrings that she had ever seen, when a man that she had never seen before approached her.

“You do know that it is raining, right?”

Caroline James peered above her croissant poised directly ready to satisfy her morning hunger. “Why, of course I do, but I must eat breakfast. Doctors are saying that it is the most important meal of the day, just like how apparently now smoking is going to kill you!” Caroline is satisfied with her education lesson for the stranger and goes back to munching on the flaky and buttery breakfast delight.

The stranger at first seemed puzzled, trying to determine the story behind the woman dressed in tweed and sunglasses atop her head even though it was raining. Most noticeably without a coat. “Doctors also say that if you stand out in the rain, you’ll catch a cold.” He offered her a spot under his umbrella.

Now, the stranger does not know that Caroline James is confident and feels as though if she needs something, she will procure it herself. She once wanted a vanilla latte, so naturally she went to her favorite coffeeshop. However, when she was told by the clerk that they were out of vanilla, Caroline thought it was best to travel all the way across the Brooklyn Bridge to find herself some. Now, most would wonder, how could the nearest vanilla be across the Brooklyn Bridge? Well, according to Caroline James, the best vanilla is across the Brooklyn Bridge and if she was required to get herself some, it would be the best.

She looked at the spot underneath the stranger’s umbrella and back up at him. Even in her heels and with her considerably tall height, there were still several inches between them. “You aren’t a serial killer who is about to claim his next victim, right? Because this would be the part in the horror film where the audience yells at me to turn your offer down and run away.”

“Do you watch a lot of films?”

“Yes, I do, it’s the ’60s and I have a lot of time on my hands,” Caroline replied, but still took ahold of the umbrella. They started walking down the street, making their way past the skyscraper fingers. Mirrors reflected the handsome young man and the pretty young woman eating a now soggy croissant underneath an umbrella. “I think that films are great influencers for life, I mean, who wouldn’t want to find love in a convenience store?” She had a slight pep in her step, walking with nowhere to go. Audrey Hepburn’s character had many places to go, and this is where Caroline

James and her differed.

The stranger glanced at Caroline. "I think that other people are great influencers. I mean, take the late great Abraham Lincoln for example, he really knew what he was doing: freeing a people with whatever power he could muster."

"Very admirable, I agree. May I ask, where exactly are we going?"

"I'm going to take you to one of favorite cafés. My name is Stewart Myers, by the way. Very nice to meet you." He also had a slight pep in his step.

Caroline undid the clasp of her fingers around the umbrella for a moment to shake Stewart Myers's hand. "Very nice to meet you, too. I'm excited to see your favorite café."

The rain slid down the glass fingers, piling up on the concrete sidewalks. The drops made their way down into the sewers, congruent to the subways and veins. Caroline James and Stewart Myers walked like little pawns on the large palm of Manhattan. She has no idea what Stewart Myers has in mind for her, and the audience watching the film of her life on the black-and-white television screen is yelling at her to turn around and run.

Caroline believes she has good intuition. When she was a young girl, she lived on the coast. She constantly heard seagulls distantly bark in her ears, with sand in her hair and sun in her eyes. Her mother was deathly scared of the sea, but her father made his living in it. He would go away for months at a time, leaving his thalassophobic wife and lonely daughter on the shore, waving goodbye. One day, she was building a sandcastle when her hands began to shake so terribly she knocked down a tower on the castle. As she gave a quick glance around for her mother, something that had washed up on the shore caught her eye. She slowly stood up, a sudden pit in her stomach growing larger. As she approached the limp mass, the ocean waves lapped the shore, seemingly giving the sand innocent and salty kisses. The first thing she noticed was the stench, then the blood. Caroline stumbled upon a lifeless body, bloated from the ocean. She stood there staring, the movie reel of her life getting caught in the projector and tearing. She did not know what to do and she does not remember what she did, but the next thing she can recall is the policemen knocking her sandcastle down.

She was once at a record store by herself. She was now twenty-something years old, still young, but she has experienced the exciting parts of life. While she let her fingers dance along the frayed edges of old vinyl cardboard covers, her hand began to insensibly shake. She could not figure out the cause or how to make it stop, but before she knew it the unsuspecting store clerk was suddenly held at gunpoint and forced to dump the cash register out into a large linen bag. The robber looked like he was straight out of a cartoon, a black sash covering his face but with conve-



nient slots for his eyes. Standing there poised with the bag open, he resembled a raccoon. Mostly stealthy in the nighttime yet highly successful. After staring at the Saturday morning film reel unfolding in front of her, sense was knocked into her head and Caroline ducked beneath the rows upon rows of records. She heard a pop, smelled the smoke, and saw the bell that alerted the store clerk of new customers jingle as the door swung shut, leaving the cash register empty and the store clerk empty as well.

Caroline does not think that she has bad luck, but that bad luck simply seems to follow her. As Caroline James and Stewart Myers jingled the bell at the café, Caroline's hands start to shake. This motion alerted her that something terrible was going to happen in the café. Turning around completely on her heel, she calls out, "I'm so sorry, Stewart, but I'm going to have to take a rain check!" While she could barely muster out the words, she tries to grab the sunglasses atop her head and slide them onto her nose, but her buttery fingers fumble and she drops them on the ground. In her head, all she hears is silence, except for the deafening crash of her large, black sunglasses hitting the cold, marble floor. Very similar to how the store clerk dropped mid-scan of a record. Very similar to the crimson ocean waves crashing around the body.

"I've got it, and I'm sorry to hear that. I was looking forward to get to know you." Stewart, bent down, takes the sunglasses, then delicately puts them on for her.

"Oh, how very sweet of you," Caroline's face instantly blushes. She wonders if maybe her hands were wrong this time. "Yes, I was excited to hear more from you as well. Maybe we'll simply have to catch a film together sometime." As she turns to go, Stewart Myers grabbed her arm.

"Well, let me at least give you my card. How are we supposed to meet up again for a film if we cannot get in touch with each other?" Stewart reaches into his sport coat pocket and pulled out a business card. This simple action reminds her of the fictional Mr. Gatsby, a richer-than-rich chap who throws elegant parties in hopes for one lady to come. They both ooze charm, but somehow she knows that Stewart Myers must have a secret similar to Mr. Gatsby's.

As she takes his card, her hands begin to shake so badly that the small piece of cardstock slips right through her fingers. "Do we have butterfingers miss?" Stewart asks, accompanied by a chuckle. While still in the foyer of the quaint, moody café the baristas' faces are plastered with annoyed looks. Annoyance due to jealousy of Caroline's interaction with the handsome man? Or because they have spent time in the establishment without ordering any coffee? Caroline James and Stewart Myers did not find out.

She reaches out for the card again, this time able to get a firm hold. The front

is adorned with a simple symbol, unbeknownst to her, but the back reads his name: *Stewart Myers Manson*, with the subtitle of “Influencer Beyond our Time”.

“I thought your name was just Stewart Myers?” She looks up at him with big, bambi eyes underneath the black tint of her sunglasses.

Stewart takes the frames and pushes them back up past her hairline. “My name is Stewart Myers. But my adoptive father’s last name is Manson, so I like to formally go by that as well. I’m from California and he teaches us the sweetest things over there.”

“I’ve always wanted to go to California. They film most movies over there, you know!” Caroline forgets her trembling fingers from earlier and focuses on the stranger’s dazzling smile and perfectly floppy hair.

“I could take you there.”

For a quick moment, Caroline pictures herself being whisked up and taken away by the handsome stranger and starting a new life underneath blue skies and palm trees. Banana pancakes every morning while sitting in the sun on a front porch drinking the sweetest vanilla coffee. Days that pass by in a yellow haze, with the stranger’s iridescent smile guiding her all through the calendar changes. Her day-dream of a life glazed in honey that feels as refreshing as a cool pool on a hot Hollywood day.

Caroline snaps back to reality, her reality with croissants in front of big diamond earrings and glass fingers that reflect her ribbon headbands and white boots. “I have a life here that I love, but thank you for offering. Only crazy people pick up everything and leave.” She peeled her eyes off the stranger’s dazzling smile and perfectly floppy hair, “and I’m not crazy.”

She quickly turns around and dashes out of the café that once felt chic, open, and groovy, but now like a shrinking box. Caroline hails down a cab and climbs in.

As her hands viciously shake, her life suddenly seems not bad. While still small in comparison to everything else, not bad. She loves crossing the Brooklyn Bridge to buy the best vanilla, she loves her white boots that give her four inches, she loves watching films and altering bits of her life to mirror them, she loves being independent in the big city, she loves the pink sunsets that hug the tall buildings each evening, she loves riding the subway to her job, she loves riding taxis back to her cramped apartment that was dripping in greenery and filled with good records, she loves wearing big sunglasses that can mask her eyes, she loved being—

The door to the taxi swings back open and Stewart Myers Manson slides his body into the backseat next to Caroline James, and he proceeds to give the driver an address she has never heard of before. Suddenly cramped in the back seat, he turns his head toward her and states, “Well, I am.”

## Past Manifesto

Parker Stenseth

### ***RUNNER-UP, JOHN LITTLE FICTION SCHOLARSHIP***

*Parker Stenseth is an undergraduate student studying English, Economics, and French. He has a special interest in film studies. At this point, he's just trying to figure out how to have a less successful version of Paul Auster's career.*

On Parker's fiction, the Creative Writing Scholarship Committee observed: "The hallmarks of Parker Stenseth's 'Past Manifesto' are its precise dialogue, its vivid portrayal of a college campus, and its meditation on themes of belief and disbelief. The story delivers these—and more—with a subtle and trenchant wit."

There were twenty of us in the apartment, legs grazing legs as we sat on couches and countertops. Unfiltered cigarettes were passed around. Nobody smoked. We liked the atmosphere they evoked as smoke glanced off wood-panel walls and seeped into shag carpet. It validated us. People wore turtlenecks. They wore corduroy. Everything was sepia toned. A gramophone played in the corner. Low strings rumbled out the brass horn. Occasionally a scratch would send the record tumbling back a few seconds. The music was too quiet to listen to. It was loud enough to embolden.

Parmenides stood in the center of the room, speaking down. That wasn't his real name. It was, but not the one he'd been given. He changed it. That's why he was our leader. He was the one who taught us old ideas and how they could never die. We were seduced and begged for more. He always had more: endless stories, schools of thought, and notions nearly extinct. We held his words in our mouths and appreciated their weight. Through the teachings of Parmenides our foundations were firm. New ideas weren't as substantial or textured; in fifty years they might be. The modern world was flimsy and concerned us little. We'd have just as soon disappeared from it, collectively, and left the apartment empty, save for receding vapor trails and a basket of phones collected at the door. The past existed, but we couldn't retreat to it. We had to remain at our vantage, staring back and observing it. This was advantageous, I suppose, because the further forward you are, the more there is to

look back on. We had more than enough material to keep stimulated as we churned through mountains of historical pay dirt. Our hunger was relentless. We wanted more. This is because we didn't believe in any ideas but cherished them all. We collected them. The sole qualifier of value was how much history had imprinted on them. People had a hard time understanding this. Anyone who would've understood was long gone. We were displaced, but likely right where we were supposed to be.

Parmenides closed his lecture, as he always did, with a nod. He shook hands with those seated in the front row. He'd make his way around the room as everyone milled about, exchanging books and compliments. We did those sorts of things. A voice broke across the room, claiming he'd heard someone say we were a cult. This was met with raucous laughter. We knew about cults, they had aims and aspirations. We did not.

I was paging through a book someone had handed me when Parmenides broke off to my corner of the room.

"Dear friend, how are you?" he asked.

"Fine as ever."

"You look well. And your classes?"

Most of us were still in school and those who weren't were always inquiring about our classes.

"I'm learning a lot, hardly anything substantial. That's where you come in. But listen, there's something I wanted to speak to you about." I had his full attention. If you were talking to Parmenides, you always had his full attention. It made you realize how rare that was. "I started on a document, a manifesto of sorts, for us. It began as a composition for class but branched off. I've been working on it in the evenings. It's a description. It describes us, how we exist. This was hubristic of me, I'm only a disciple, but I was wondering if you'd look at it, my fledgling manifesto, and tell me what you think?"

I made sure to use the word manifesto twice. I knew he'd like this. He liked words that carried their own power and didn't need to be superficially charged.

"What inspired this?" he asked.

"We're devoted to old ideas," I said. "That's our contribution to time. Ideas have to be recorded to age properly. If they aren't, they're in danger of being lost. I don't want us to become lost because we've been too busy finding."

"It can't hurt to look. The mark of an educated mind is to be able to entertain an idea without accepting it."

"Aristotle?"

"Misquoted Aristotle, but it certainly sounds nice."

I pulled a collection of papers from my jacket and handed them over. This was

my only copy because I'd written longhand, but I wasn't nervous, not giving it to Parmenides. He stowed them in the back pocket of his jeans.

"Now I'll ask something of you," he said, "a return favor. We've been operating in our members' interior lives. That's where our organization was born, where it survives. There's no room for us in the physical world. Look how cramped we are in here. It's time for us to expand, incite interest, engage the public. There's a hunger for substance in the present. Substance doesn't exist in the present. We've always known this. I made pamphlets." Pamphlet, like manifesto, was a word that excited him, although its power had been widely forgotten. "I've been working on them for weeks," he said, "in secret. Secrecy is important. The pamphlets highlight several ideas, some of the oldest, most beautiful, aesthetically or otherwise. Wait until you see them. I put contact information on the back for those who understand. Contact information is a relatively new concept, admittedly, but one of the best. I can't wait until it ages."

"And with these pamphlets, you'd like me to..."

"Distribute them. You're a young person. You have access. Hand them out at the university where we can encounter fresh minds. They're without convictions. So are we. It works out that way."

He guided me to his bedroom where he dug through outdated maps and scrolls in languages he didn't speak to uncover a cardboard box of glossy pamphlets, about a hundred of them. He gave them to me and told me to come back when they were gone, and we would discuss my writing. I thanked him profusely and we shook hands again. Our whole organization shook hands frequently. The apartment was clearing out by then, so I gathered my things and took my leave, exchanging pleasantries out the door.

The following day I went to campus early, cardboard box in hand. It was warm out but not oppressively so. I walked across trim lawns to the library. To distribute the pamphlets, it seemed sensible to go to a place where people were willing to read. I was wrong, mostly. I stationed on a pathway just off the front entrance. The clock tower's shadow fell over me but receded as the sun climbed. I wanted to empty my box before the shadow disappeared, leaving me exposed. I didn't know how much time I had, but knew it wasn't long.

Passively, the stream of students swept by. Passersby had to be intentional to avoid me. Many of them were. Those caught unaware perked up at the offer of something free before shying away from the resource materials. I saw Parmenides's plan was ill-equipped to engage the public. His notion of the pamphlet was outdated. This is why he loved it, but it's also why the students couldn't understand it. Parmenides

saw pamphlets as the literature of revolutions, thrown about the streets or raining down from the sky. They had the potential to overturn political and economic systems. The students surrounding me had a different context. To them, pamphlets were the epitome of banality; they were the furnishing of guidance counselor offices, filled with information on safe driving and STIs. Students saw them as dull and sanitized while Parmenides saw them as explosive and dangerous. It is difficult to convince someone whom you don't understand and who doesn't understand you.

I began to push my wares forcibly so as not to be stuck perpetually offering the past between the library and the clock tower. I doubted anyone would read what I gave them, but I was completing my assignment. It was out of my hands after I'd shoved the pamphlet into theirs. That was the one thing I learned over the course of the morning; people were unlikely to take the pamphlets, but if I placed it into their hands before they were aware of what was happening, they were unlikely to give it back. More simply put, they were unlikely to commit to an action because, as we know, doing nothing is always easier.

I was halfway through my stock—a fair portion of the distributed half were crumpled in the garbage twenty feet to my right—when a student cutting against the crowd, knocking shoulders with his peers, caught my attention. He was directed toward me, intentionally it seemed. I couldn't tell if he was looking at me—he wore the variety of glasses that darken outdoors—but I figured he must have been.

"Hello, what a delightful day it is," I said as he approached, opting for pleasantries since it was apparent he intended to speak with me.

"What is this?" he asked, raising a pamphlet that'd been trampled and smeared with dirt. His brow furrowed. His eyes were little black orbs behind their lenses.

"It's information from an organization I'm involved in. It's difficult to describe, but if you read—"

"This is misinformation," he said, flipping to the first page and pointing at text accompanied by a hand-drawn diagram. "Here it advocates for a geo-centric universe model."

"Yes, a beautiful system, isn't it?" I said, admiring Parmenides's drawing.

"But it's not true."

"I don't believe it says anywhere that it *is* true." I wasn't completely sure. I hadn't read too closely.

"Why would you advocate for a belief that's inherently wrong?"

"People may want to know. There's a beauty to it, perfect circles, man at the center of everything. It appeals to more than one aspect of human nature."

"You're corrupting people."

"How?"



“With lies.”

“I’m terribly sorry,” I said. “We have no intention of causing harm. I don’t believe we *are* causing harm.”

“Here, here,” he said, turning the page, “it outlines Plato’s Utopia.”

“A brief overview, yes.”

“Plato championed the aristocracy. He believed in slavery.”

“Unfortunately true.”

“Do you support those things?”

“Of course not. That’s horrendous.”

“But it’s in your pamphlet.”

“People ought to know it.”

“But you don’t believe in it.”

“Absolutely not.”

“What do you believe?”

The clock tower struck eleven. I paused long enough to count the chimes, a nervous habit of mine. And when I say nervous, I really do mean it. I become anxious every time they start to sound, because once a chime has chimed, you can’t count it anymore. They’ve vanished, which I find terribly depressing. It’s worse when I consider the number of hours each day, I don’t have the wherewithal to count. I’ve let so much slip away. The student speaking to me must have seen a glaze pass over my eyes because he asked his question a second time.

“What do you believe?”

“I believe in the past. I can’t explain the metaphysics, but I know it exists. There’s nothing larger than the past. It’s getting bigger, swallowing the present and chasing us as we run away. I want to stop running, to embrace the past and learn from it. Hopefully it will swallow me whole.”

He took off his glasses. His eyes were small. They flicked back and forth, searching my face. I smiled for him. He tore his pamphlet down the middle and threw it onto the ground.

“That has got to be the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Please don’t litter,” I said.

He ripped the box out of my hands, shoving me to the ground in the same motion. I landed on the grass, jarring my neck. The sun broke over the clock tower and struck me in the face. I couldn’t look at my assailant without squinting desperately. He tensed his body, the pamphlets tucked under one arm, waiting to see how I’d react.

“Why would you do that?”

“You hate truth.”

“I don’t hate anything.”



“You resist truth.”

“I don’t resist anything.”

“These,” he said, brandishing a handful of pamphlets, “are barbaric.”

“How so?”

“They’re intentionally misguiding, leading away from progress.”

I sat cross-legged on the ground to make myself more comfortable. I would have rather been standing but that struck me as an admission of defeat.

“I think I see our misunderstanding. We’re not attempting to guide anyone. We don’t care about results. We have no expectations for the future. It doesn’t concern us.”

“But you must make plans, to come here today for instance.”

“Yes.”

“Then your ideology is full of contradictions.”

“Most things are if you look at them too closely. We try not to let it worry us.

May I have my box back?”

“Of course not.”

“It’s not kind to steal things.”

“You were giving them away.”

“True, but one per person. You may take one. I’d be delighted if you took one.”

“I’m going to take all of them. You’re irresponsible, unfit to share your thoughts.”

“Because we disagree?”

“Because you disagree with yourself. If you want these back, which I suspect you will, come to the library’s tech support desk. I work weekday evenings. Bring one of your superiors—I hope their competency exceeds yours—and maybe we can work something out. Don’t hold your breath though, you might pass out. I suppose I’ll be seeing you in the future,” he said with a smirk.

“Future present,” I corrected under my breath as he walked away, into the library. I gathered the torn halves of his pamphlet and threw them, amidst the others, in the trash. My greatest disappointment was at having failed Parmenides, until I realized that the limitation of one pamphlet per person was something I’d placed on myself. In a broad sense, I’d accomplished what he’d sent me to do.

I went to Parmenides’ apartment after my classes. It was always unlocked, and he insisted that we enter without knocking, to treat his apartment as our own. He was in his office when I walked in but came into the living room as soon as he heard the door rattle shut behind me.

“Wonderful to see you again,” he said, “and so soon! The pamphlets, are you

finished with them?”

“It was a pleasure to hand them out.”

I settled onto a stool at his kitchen counter. He busied himself by the sink, putting away cleaned dishes.

“I’m curious to know,” he said, “how did people react?”

“Across the board. It would be impossible to summarize, but I’ve been left optimistic.”

“Wonderful news. Can I get you anything to drink, to eat?” He prided himself on being a conscientious host and considered this to be one of the great callings of the present.

“I’m alright.”

“How about music?” he said, crossing into the living room. I swiveled on the stool to track him. “I was going to put something on anyway. Debussy? Rossini? I have both ready.”

“Either would be excellent.”

He put one on—I couldn’t tell which—midway through a song.

“Now I supposed you want to talk about your manifesto.”

“That was just its beginning, but yes. Did you get a chance to read it?”

“Several times.” He sat on the couch, casting his eyes to the floor. His head bobbed in time to the music. “It raised concerns.”

I couldn’t understand. I had downplayed the effort that had gone into my writing. If it was good, I wanted it to be viewed as a stroke of genius, not a labored effort. If it was bad, I wanted it to be a work in progress, not a misstep. Still, I didn’t know how it could have been bad. I considered myself a sound writer, and this was the subject matter I was most versed in.

“Was it not comprehensive? Did I miss the mark?” I asked.

“On the contrary, I doubt I myself could have produced a better account of our implicit bylaws.”

“What’s the issue?”

He looked at me, searching my eyes, searching himself.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to come up with. It’s unsettled me, seeing ourselves expressed like this, in a written form. I’m unsettled. It becomes too easy to compare ourselves with the ideas we collect. I’m afraid we don’t hold up well. You said the purpose of this was to preserve ourselves, to allow our thoughts to age, but now I’m not sure if that’s wise, if we’re worthy of being maintained. I’ve seen my reflection in ink and paper, and I didn’t much care for it. This is heresy against my own sect, but I believe we’ve been looking back too long to see what we’ve become. Introspection has become our antithesis.”

“Know thyself.”

“It was on the temple wall and we never saw it.”

“But the manifesto, it was good?”

“It described us perfectly. I saw the mess that we are. I don’t know what this means, the implications, but something has to be done.”

“You can’t be implying a reformation,” I said.

“It’s necessary, inevitable. Thoughts evolve over the course of time. We know this better than anyone. It’s our turn.”

“That’s only for ideas of their age. *They* shift with the times. We’re removed from that nonsense.”

“Dear friend, you can’t believe that.”

“Unless the past changes, neither should we.”

“The past is always changing.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

I meant the nature of the past, of course. I could have clarified but chose not to. We regarded each other in silence, unsure of what came next. The music swelled. It hit a scratch and swelled again. It hit a scratch and swelled again.

“I’m going to need my manifesto back,” I said.

He clutched it to his chest.

“I have to hold onto it a bit longer. It will be the measuring stick we use to gauge progress.”

“There will be no progress,” I said a bit too loud, “only past.”

I stood before him with my hand extended, willing to do whatever it took, unsure how far this went. I was frightened by the potential I felt. I was excited by it. We were men of thought who lived inside ourselves. This encounter was unprecedented. My nerve had caught fire. He saw this and withered before me. The papers were back in my possession and I was disdainful of how easy he’d made it. I felt as though I needed to say something to him before I left, something to punctuate our relationship, because, as far as I was concerned, his omission had cost him his title. I would ascend in his stead

“Your days as our leader are behind you. Be thrilled by that.”

My brain vibrated as I burst into the world. Appendages and amendments to the manifesto spawned rapidly, defenses to ensure our form was unalterable. I was in control, dictating our identity. All it took was my deciding so.

The sun had set but there were traces of its light painting the sky. I noticed this while walking into the library. My body had directed me there. I had forfeited planning.

I anticipated looking back on what I'd done.

I pushed through double doors, past shelves brimming with hardcovers, past study groups huddled around tables, past the computer lab, and planted myself before the tech support counter. My assailant greeted me with my box. He placed it on the counter between us, his hand resting on top, protecting it.

"So you came," he said.

"I was bound to."

"You haven't brought a superior along like we discussed."

"I have. It's me, I've decided."

"The purpose was for you to bring along someone who might be able to compose a more competent argument as to why—"

I slapped him across the face, my open hand connecting with his left cheek. He didn't cry out, although the sound of the blow drew the attention of those around us. His hand still rested on the box. I slapped him again, more recklessly. He shouted and jumped back. I snatched my pamphlets and promptly departed. I had nothing to say to him. Bystanders made way as I charged forward. They were horrified. I would have been too, but I'd come to a conclusion in those frenetic moments that absolved me; present actions hardly mattered when preserving the past. The end outweighed the means. This was set to be the first extension of my manifesto, a past manifesto, and it revealed our true source of power. Parmenides was too constrained to ever realize it. We were justified in our actions in the present, however grotesque, because immediately after, they would fall into our domain, where our authority resided, where we were the collectors and the curators. It would all be in the past. It was already in the past. The past was inexorable and so too were we.

***photography and art***



## Springtime Orange

### Jacqueline Raatz

*Jacqueline Raatz is a senior Drawing and Painting BFA major with affinities for French Cuisine, biking, newspaper comics and Baroque paintings. Since retiring from the ND Army National Guard, she spends most of her time with her family and in her garden, kitchen, and art studio.*





## Tea and MRE

Jacqueline Raatz





## Frozen in Time

### Cole Dennis

*Cole Dennis is a recent UND graduate from Kansas City, MO. He majored in Air Traffic Control. His complete bio is available in the contributor notes section at the end of this issue.*



## Together under the Stars

Cole Dennis



## I Saw a Turkey on My Way to Work

**Andrew Youngblom**

*Andrew Youngblom is an MFA candidate at UND who specializes in drawing and painting. He expands upon classical realism by embracing multiple strategies that may draw connections between concepts, raise questions or highlight contradictions. His current work reflects on everyday routines and existential concerns.*





## Two Face

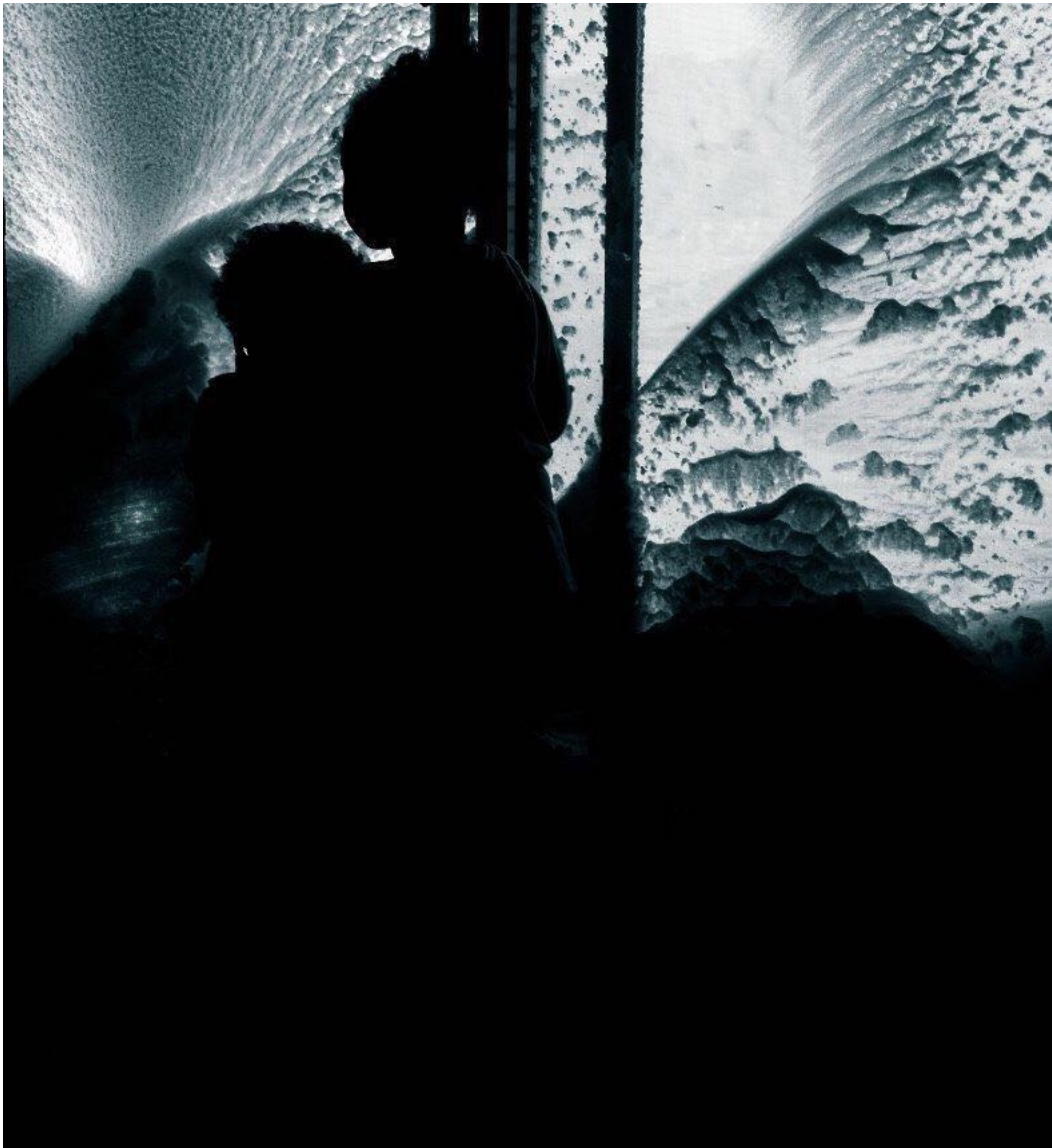
### Zamzam Ulow

*About Zamzam Ulow: Hello! my name is Zamzam Ulow. This is my first year here at UND currently majoring in Computer Science. I like to read, sleep, think, and, of course, take pictures in my spare times. Photography is a passion of mine that I would like to continue pursuing and advance at. Most of my works are candid portraits of people showing raw emotions which I find beautiful. Hope you enjoy and have a good day!*



## The Storm

Zamzam Ulow



## Fear

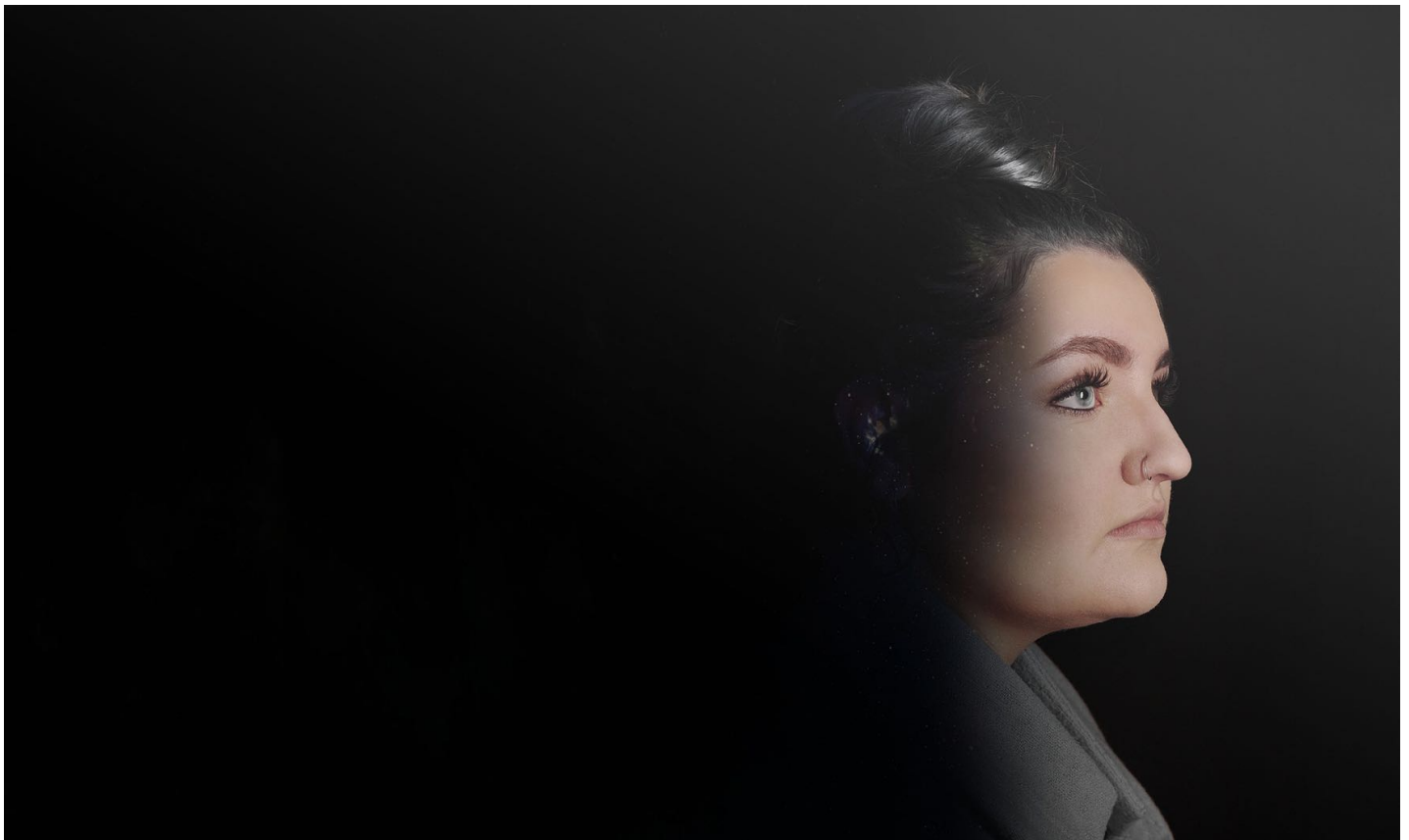
Zamzam Ulow



## The Stars in Her Eyes

### Meghan Bird

*Meghan Bird was born and raised in Chanhassen, Minnesota, and is currently a senior at the University of North Dakota where she is working hard to obtain her BA in English, as well as her certificate in Writing and Editing. Meghan's career goal is to work in publication as she wants to help aspiring writers the way her professors and classmates have helped her!*





## Darkvine

Meghan Bird



# ***special section: growth***

## **From the spring 2021 Special Call:**

Growth. Plants breaking from the earth after the last snow melts. Buds emerging on the tips of branches. The icebergs shrinking but the oceans rising. Sharpie marks on a bedroom wall to track your height, year by year. A valley apparently sprawling forever, as seen from a mountain vista. The gradual accumulation of stuff—Amazon boxes in the corner, or plastics littering the beach, or the remnants of old satellites suspended in orbit around the earth. The slow expansion of the universe. The teeming billions of bacteria on an agar plate.

## Senecio Radicans

### Grant McMillan

*Grant McMillan is a first year PhD student in UND's English Department. Grant moved to Grand Forks from the Appalachian region of North Carolina and spent his first North Dakota winter growing herbs and tending to his house plants. As the weather has gotten warmer, he has been reviving the old garden bed next to where he lives and is looking forward to growing summer veggies.*

Kneel to replace the dried juniper bonsai  
with cuttings from their String of Fishhooks—  
enacting intercession.

You learn that succulents sprout  
from their smallest points.



## Sidewalk Flower

### Charles Henry

*Charles Henry is a second semester English M.A. student at UND, with interests in composition theory, sociolinguistics, and the early modern and medieval British periods. He received his undergraduate in English and Education at West Liberty University, where he also began his creative writing journey. His writings often deal with exploring the underside of the expected experience of language and examining the shifting forms and conventions of writing. Charles has lived all over the eastern U.S., originally growing up on a farm in the Ohio valley, and he enjoys bringing those experiences into his writing.*

Stupid, stupid, stupid  
 sidewalk flower.  
 Can't you see this is a place for people?  
 things that walk.  
 Not for stringy little things that just creep up  
 when I'm not looking.  
 Can't you tell, I've clearly put a sidewalk here?  
 and there, and there, and there.  
 So that we people could always be safe  
 from growing little things.  
 You work so hard, just to obscure my view.  
 why shouldn't I just pluck you?

Hello, hello, hello  
 sidewalk walker.  
 It appears you've placed so much,  
 without much care.  
 A place to guide you from here to there.  
 you're right,  
 I could've grown nearly anywhere  
 with ease.  
 And it is true it is much harder to grow here  
 or there, or there, or there.

But I knew that if I grew right here,  
that you and me,  
Would have a friend every day to see.



## Synergy

### Kylee Danks

*Kylee Danks is a senior at UND graduating in December 2021. She is majoring in Communications and Visual Arts with an emphasis on Painting and Drawing. She has interned and worked at UND Art Collections and has been involved in local art events. When not working with the arts she spends time with her dog, Casper, and enjoys the outdoors.*





## I am so impressed

### Shilo Previti

*Shilo Virginia Previti was born near the marshy outskirts of noirish Atlantic City, NJ, and raised in a cedar bog during a natural Pygmy Pines wildfire deep in the Pinelands reserve. They have held various jobs on the east coast, including teaching English in county jails, assisting with writing workshops for Murphy Writing, and moonlighting as a waitress & a newspaper deliveryman, but they have recently moved away from the sea to complete an M.A. in English at UND.*

by the population density of cars  
vying for citizenship  
in the Black Hills  
    national park  
parking lots  
following directives to rush  
more hurry up  
    let's go and  
    wait

because every one of these cars  
    is a good  
    American  
even if some are foreign-made

because they are  
    participating  
        in our  
        beautiful  
        backdrop  
    *stolen* landscape

manifesting their destinies  
queuing up in neat columns  
desperate to get closest to  
the ticketing office toilets  
and concessions stands of  
this outdoor portrait gallery

cutting their teeth  
exploring  
a New World  
of curated wilderness—  
come see it before it's gone  
and better not forget to take a picture—  
down carved paths of  
founding foreheads

so it's a good thing they expanded  
that parking lot—  
did you know park land  
is the crown jewel of  
America the beautiful,  
America of the beautiful  
asphalt—  
in the name of progress  
a nature conservation  
convenience campaign

or this wouldn't be  
what I see  
(see that fresh-air so hard  
it steals the breath  
right out of you)  
at Six Grandfathers.

America  
aren't you proud?

## Unaccompanied

### Kylee Danks

*Kylee Danks is a senior at UND graduating in December 2021. She is majoring in Communications and Visual Arts with an emphasis on Painting and Drawing. She has interned and worked at UND Art Collections and has been involved in local art events. When not working with the arts she spends time with her dog, Casper, and enjoys the outdoors.*



## Water for Flowers

### Grant McMillan

*Grant McMillan is a first year PhD student in UND's English Department. Grant moved to Grand Forks from the Appalachian region of North Carolina and spent his first North Dakota winter growing herbs and tending to his house plants. As the weather has gotten warmer, he has been reviving the old garden bed next to where he lives and is looking forward to growing summer veggies.*

In 2nd grade,  
it was your turn to recite the Act of Contrition  
in front of the class:

*My God, my God,  
I am heartily sorry for having offended thee.  
I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell...  
I firmly resolve to confess my sins, to do the punishment—*

—Sister May admonishes you, in 2nd grade,

*Penance, not punishment! Don't you understand the difference?*

....

Your partner's hand reaches to turn the doorknob,  
as their other hand presses a giftbag to your palm.  
Their voice states simply, without flourish and as fact:

*You deserve to wear flowers on your feet too.*

Five rolled-up pairs of pattern socks,  
bursting colors, unfurling vines, sunshine sewn in.  
Petals dance up and down

as you sit to pull on a mismatched pair.

A soft smile as you shut the door behind them.

You stand alone in your apartment.  
Tears water the flowers on your feet.



## Why You Stopped Writing Poems

### Casey Fuller

*Casey Fuller is an English PhD student in his first year at UND. He grew up in the cloudiest city in the United States: Olympia, Washington.*

They got in the way. They felt like little speed bumps in the life you were leading. You got tired of conjuring a whole world in the few words you were overhearing. Your neighbors with their high fence seemed less fearful than you first believed. The gravel crack of car tires seemed less like being crushed and more like pulling into the driveway at home. Natural things occurred. Your parents became flesh and blood people who needed help reaching dishes off the top shelf and less like metaphors in a darkly plotted drama trying to sleep with you. Jung seemed wrong. Marx became foolish. Whitman seemed sad and full of what you now see as terrible longing. You lost sense of the line. You gave up referring to ideas and movements and began to forage in the forest all alone. Big screen crystalline TVs were there for you, of course. And all the internet forever. And at night the bright blue light from your iPhone washed over you like you were first being born. Quiet things happened. In ways you could no longer explain. So you stopped trying. Then one day you were just typing instead of writing.





## Writing Prompts on the Special Theme: Growth

### The ENGL 234 Class

*The ENGL 234 class is "Introduction to Writing, Editing, and Publishing." In this course, students focus on the publishing industry through the prism of little magazines. In the process of studying little magazines, ENGL 234 students contribute to the production of Floodwall, the student-run, campus literary magazine at the University of North Dakota.*

### The Prompts

Although the special call for submissions on the theme of growth has closed, the readers of Floodwall would like you to have the sequence of "Growth" prompts to inspire your creativity!

1.) Growth: noun. The act or process, or a manner of growing; development; gradual increase. Size or stage of development: It hasn't yet reached its full growth. completed development. Development from a simpler to a more complex stage: the growth of ritual forms.

Sometimes, in order to grow, we need to change. Change, however, can be hard—is hard. It's a journey, an experience, a person, a challenge; anything. How or why we grow into the people we want to become can happen from anything we encounter in this world. Sometimes it's easier achieving or understanding the growth we want for ourselves through others, perhaps even characters.

Try any of these prompts:

- Write a scene where your character is acknowledging things they want or need to let go of. Are they willing to let them go, or will they try to fight against it?
- Write a scene where your character is working hard towards a personal goal. How will they achieve it and why is it important for them to achieve it?
- Write a scene where your character wants to move forward in their life. Does your character have any regrets? If so, what are they and how can they get past them?

2.) You wipe the fog off the mirror, look, and you are faced with the reflection you have known for twenty-some-years. On this solemn Sunday morning, you are left with the opportunity to reminisce on the moments that have led to this one. Now, you

realize, it is through growth that you have become the person you are today.

Assume the position of the omniscient person above, and tell us, what does growth look like in your life? Literal or abstract, physically or mentally, personal or collective—tell us your story

3.) Pencil lines on a door frame. Shirts that once fit becoming crop tops. Too-long pajama bottoms becoming flood pants. Finally being able to fit into the jacket that your mother swore you'd grow into. Mixing up your shoes with your dad's, not because of the style, but because you now have the same size foot. Growth can be shocking, a delightful surprise, humorous, and even scary at times. With these aspects in mind, write a piece of nonfiction, fiction, or poetry focusing on the rapidity of physical growth and the sudden realization of it.

4.) Find a significant item from your childhood, whether it's a piece of clothing, a stuffed animal, or baby blanket, it doesn't matter. Write out what this object means to you and any important memories you have with it. Then write how those memories impacted you overall. Write the changes that the memories you have with your item of choice influenced the decisions you've made as you've grown up. Then use the words in the passages you wrote to write a poem about your growth over time.

5.) Imagine seeing two photographs in front of a character. One is of that character and their best friend from when they are very young. The other is of them in the present. Write about how that character sees their best friend's changes throughout the years.

6.) A Petri dish is a small glass enclosure that scientists use to observe the growth of a microorganism in isolation. Have you made any observations while living as an isolated organism during the last year? Many introverts have relished the chance to organize themselves and expand at their own pace in their own space, freed from the pressure of surviving in an unforgiving environment. For many extroverts, self- and government-imposed isolation has instead been a nightmarish experiment in human psychological limits, leaving them stymied and stressed, unable to flourish without the nourishment of a diverse world. What would you put in your lab report after a year of gathering data?

7.) Growth can happen in big or small ways. You could grow 2 inches in a month or you grow out of a bad habit. Growing up can go faster than you expected. Think back to elementary school when everything was simple. Do you remember waking up on the weekend morning and the most important thing was which cartoon show was premiering that day. Walking to the kitchen, you can already smell breakfast being

made. Write about a simple day in your childhood, then parallel it to now as a young adult and reflect on how those small excitements slowly shifted into different forms of entertainment or seriousness. Capture the innocence of being young and the growth you've gone through in the years after.

8.) Write a poem or a short story that responds to one of the following scenarios:

- A garden is slowly dying, until the owner's son comes to visit and decides to do something about it.
- Person A's significant other, Person B, has died. Person A has been in a depression for two years until they meet Person C. C helps A move on from their grief.
- Person A has a fear of water, but agrees to a boat trip with some close friends. However, when one of them gets injured, A must overcome their fear in order to help.
- Person A has been terrible at playing any instrument they touch. But their school rules change, and now every student has to play in either the orchestra or band. A has no choice but to try and get good at an instrument.

9.) Consider and write about the theme of growth as being facilitated by our capacity to wonder—the ability to imagine not how things are, but, instead, how things might be. How does wonder and imagination facilitate growth in individuals? Is all imaginative, or creative, activity inherently progressive?

10.) Growth can be subjective; one individual may see more or different types of growth in themselves compared to an outside source looking in. When it comes to the past year or so many individuals have had the opportunity to focus more on themselves and their friends and family while in lockdown. In what ways have you been able to improve yourself and seen yourself grow in the past year or the past few years? Growth can be seen with learning new skills, picking up a healthy habit, expanding music taste, reading new book, and trying new food. The possibilities are endless for personal growth, and no achievement is too big or small.

11.) We want to see how students have seen the word "growth" represented in their lives. This prompt challenges you to interpret this as intellectual growth. Perhaps you're a college student adapting to new learning styles. Or maybe you have been watching your sibling navigate kindergarten. Whatever it may be, write about how you have viewed or experienced intellectual growth, whether that's yours or someone else's.

12.) Climate change is affecting the world, whether people believe it or not. The

actions of humans dictate the future of Earth. That said, what does the end look like for humanity? Desolate? Green? Or does someone else step in to clean up after the humans?

13.) Does growth even involve agreement, or are we thinking about this all wrong? We are all separate, yet when we come together, beautiful things can happen. However, unless we are willing to work together—terrible things can happen. Our question for you is this: how do policies or laws come into play here, and at what point is the emphasis on growth, from a societal standpoint, an unethical one? You can explore this question in any genre or form you'd like.

14.) “You’re late.” How many of us have been haunted by those accusing words? Think of a moment in life where you felt late—or were late. Missing the bus for middle school, turning in an assignment late, or letting an opportunity slip through your fingers. For every moment that you’re “late” to, imagine a world where you made it to those singular or multiple events. Then, describe your growth.

15.) Growth is rarely easy. To explore this, try writing one or more of the following:

- Consider a character. Step into their shoes. Write a scene, a monologue, a soliloquy.
- Write about getting everything you’ve ever wanted, only to find it hollow and unsatisfying. Did everything change, or just you?
- Write about taking the easy way instead of the right way. The damage it can cause.
- Write about wrong choices and betrayal. About reconciliation and unconditional love.
- Write about realizing you’ve been wrong about something, for a long, long time, and there are consequences—for you and others. You don’t know how to fix it, but you know you have to try.

16.) I recently watched a personal favorite film of mine, the 2002 Christian movie called *Time Changer*, where a Bible seminary professor from 1890 travels via a time machine to the year 2002. When he arrives in the present, he is shocked at how different the culture in America had become in just over a hundred years. Times were much simpler back then; there were no cars, TV, radio, computers, or social media. Despite the problem-solving these machines and forms of entertainment provided, he saw them as a distraction from God. Write a journal entry or short story of whether you view these advances in technology as a positive or negative (or both) growth to our economy, efficiency, and our overall well-being.

17.) Growth is the purest and most refreshing sign of life. The budding of the flowers blooming after a frigid and frosty winter. The enchanting green of fresh spring grass or the returning of color to the lifeless iced-over trees. Spring is the perfect time to jump into the idea of growth and what it means to you as an individual. As the elements regain their magic and go through their own journey of growth, take the time to reflect on what it means to you as a person and what you can do to discover your own magic through ideas, words, and art.

18.) Growth occurs all around us. You may see it in the two-mile run times you've logged for the past month, the lengthening of days after the winter solstice, or (hopefully) in the grades of that class you put blood, sweat and tears into. Think about what growth means to you. Where do you see it in the past and present? How does it impact the future? Write your interpretation of growth.

19.) A baby is left abandoned on your front doorstep. You don't know why he was left with you, but it feels like a bit of a miracle, as you and your spouse have been trying to have children with no luck for years. After taking him to the hospital and talking to the police, you and your spouse decide this baby is meant to be yours, and officially adopt him.

It's been fourteen years, and you know teenage boys tend to go through growth spurts, plus, his biological parents could have been tall. But your son is now ten feet tall, with the body mass to fit, and hasn't yet fully grown into his big feet. Write the story of this family and the son's continued growth.





## Contributor Notes

### *Floodwall* volume2, issue3

*spring 2021*

**J. Alcon** is an undergraduate at the University of North Dakota graduating in the spring of 2021 with a Bachelor of Accountancy degree. She is married to the most wonderful man alive and they have two exceptionally sweet boys. She lives a life of exquisite seclusion just north of the badlands on Blue Creek Estate.

**Heather Barry** is a Mojave Desert native living off-and-on between Grand Forks, North Dakota & California. She's an English major in her senior year. She (hopes) to be joining the North Dakota Army National Guard in 2021 & continue to write poetry & short stories, but mostly poetry & social issues more widely.

**Meghan Bird** was born and raised in Chanhassen, Minnesota, and is currently a senior at the University of North Dakota where she is working hard to obtain her BA in English, as well as her certificate in Writing and Editing. Meghan's career goal is to work in publication as she wants to help aspiring writers the way her professors and classmates have helped her!

**Erin Breen:** I'm a part-time, online student here at UND with an anticipated graduation date of June 2022. I earned a certificate in creative writing with a focus in poetry from Idyllwild Arts Academy where I also served as the nonfiction editor and social media manager at <http://parallax-online.com/>. My pieces have been published in a few publications and my chapbook, *Misconceptions*, was published by Wild Idylls Press. Outside of UND, I work full time and intern at Cars.com. I live in Elgin, IL, with my teacup poodle, Betty, and my best friend since high school. I taught myself how to read when I was four and haven't stopped since.

**Kylee Danks** is a senior at UND graduating in December 2021. She is majoring in

Communications and Visual Arts with an emphasis on Painting and Drawing. She has interned and worked at UND Art Collections and has been involved in local art events. When not working with the arts she spends time with her dog, Casper, and enjoys the outdoors.

**Cole Dennis:** Howdy, my name is Cole Dennis. I am an Air Traffic Control major from Kansas City, MO and graduated in the spring of 2020. I am currently working for a company called UFA in Mayland and am waiting for the FAA to start hiring so I may become an Air Traffic Controller. During my time at UND I was a proud member of the Pride of The North marching band and a member of SATCA. In my spare time, I'm out for bike rides around the greenway, hanging with friends, or out taking photos (the night sky is one of my favorites to shoot). I really enjoyed my time at UND and can't wait to comeback and visit friends and take more photos.

**Casey Fuller** is an English PhD student in his first year at UND. His grew up in the cloudiest city in the United States: Olympia, Washington.

**Connor Grenier** is a student at the University of North Dakota. Among his hobbies of reading, going outside, playing games, and enjoying the company of others, he finds time for his favorite of any artistic pursuit, writing.

**Leah Noel Hanley** is currently in pursuit of a Master of Arts degree in English at the University of North Dakota. Her writing focuses on the exploration of deeply human experiences, through which she hopes to inspire empathy across cultural boundaries, and to promote the need to conserve and preserve our Earth. When Leah is not writing (or completing schoolwork), she is likely cross stitching, cooking, or spending quality time with her loved ones.

**Charlotte Hatch** is a senior at UND majoring in Commercial Aviation, hoping to get hired as a certified flight instructor this summer. Originally from Central Pennsylvania, she enjoys this spring weather. She spends her free time painting, weaving, playing drums, and biking.

**Charles Henry** is a second semester English M.A. student at UND, with interests in composition theory, sociolinguistics, and the early modern and medieval British periods. He received his undergraduate in English and Education at West Liberty University, where he also began his creative writing journey. His writings often deal with exploring the underside of the expected experience of language and examining the

shifting forms and conventions of writing. Charles has lived all over the eastern U.S., originally growing up on a farm in the Ohio valley, and he enjoys bringing those experiences into his writing.

**Brenda Kezar** is a short story writer pursuing a bachelor's in English. She has the uncanny ability to imagine the worst that could happen in any given situation, and she channels that superpower into writing speculative fiction in the genres of horror, science fiction, and fantasy. When not reading or writing, she wrangles research rodents for the UND School of Medicine.

**Derek McFarland** is a commercial aviation student from Pennsylvania.

**Keely McLean** is a sophomore at the University of North Dakota from Rosemount, Minnesota, majoring in Commercial Aviation with a minor in English. Keely has spent her time here by attending hockey games at the Ralph, collecting plastic bags for the Energy & Environment Club and studying at Archives Coffeehouse. Keely is looking forward to returning to her summer job where she teaches children's golf camps, getting sushi with her friends and hiking in her local regional park. With her education from UND, she plans on traveling across the country and abroad to pursue her passions in journaling and flight.

**Grant McMillan** is a first year PhD student in UND's English Department. Grant moved to Grand Forks from the Appalachian region of North Carolina and spent his first North Dakota winter growing herbs and tending to his house plants. As the weather has gotten warmer, he has been reviving the old garden bed next to where he lives and is looking forward to growing summer veggies.

**Maria Matsakis** is a first-year graduate student in the English Department at the University of North Dakota.

**Michaela Oosthuizen** was born in Stellenbosch South Africa. She loves studying literature and running the 800m on the track and tries as best she can to balance the two passions. Ever since childhood, she was fond of writing stories and poetry. At age 9, she used her favourite place—a farm in Nelspruit Mpumalanga—as her first muse to begin writing poetry. In high school, she shifted her focus to people and events and has explored them ever since. Her poetry attempts to capture some of the complexities and depths of the human experience through simple, yet compelling verse and imagery. She also likes to season her work by experimenting with different

rhyme schemes, sounds, and form. Michaela is currently completing a Masters degree in English at UND whilst competing in track and field for the university.

**Jona L. Pedersen** grew up in Norway, but has since relocated to the US where they are pursuing a degree in English with a minor in biology at the University of North Dakota. Weaving contemporary culture with old myths, Jona's fiction and poetry unveil the spaces in between reality and dreaming. Passions such as wildlife biology, entomology, and environmental justice also inspire their writing. For more about their work, check out their Twitter (@JonaLPedersen) or website ([www.jonalpedersen.com](http://www.jonalpedersen.com)).

**Shilo Virginia Previti** was born near the marshy outskirts of noirish Atlantic City, NJ, and raised in a cedar bog during a natural Pygmy Pines wildfire deep in the Pine-lands reserve. They have held various jobs on the east coast, including teaching English in county jails, assisting with writing workshops for Murphy Writing, and moonlighting as a waitress & a newspaper deliveryman, but they have recently moved away from the sea to complete an M.A. in English at UND.

**Jacqueline Raatz** is a senior Drawing and Painting BFA major with affinities for French Cuisine, biking, newspaper comics and Baroque paintings. Since retiring from the ND Army National Guard, she spends most of her time with her family and in her garden, kitchen, and art studio.

**Parker Stenseth** is an undergraduate student studying English, Economics, and French. He has a special interest in film studies. At this point, he's just trying to figure out how to have a less successful version of Paul Auster's career.

**Kai Szulborski** is a graduate student, English GTA, and writer at UND. He first tried writing after he fell in love with a badly written gothic space-opera about a small blue ghoulish who uses the soul of Charles Dickens to power his giant hammer-wielding robot. Now, he mostly writes about giant sad women crying in deserts. He is currently working very hard to accelerate the process of entropy in order to eliminate all stars in the universe. That way, he can sleep in as long as he wants.

**Seth Thoeke** is a recent graduate of UND with a B.S. in Computer Science and B.A. in Honors. He has long been fascinated by the power of storytelling, especially science fiction and the draw of fantastic worlds. He currently works as an Associate Computer Scientist at Microbeam Technologies, Inc.

**Zamzam Ulow:** Hello! my name is Zamzam Ulow. This is my first year here at UND currently majoring in Computer Science. I like to read, sleep, think, and, of course, take pictures in my spare times. Photography is a passion of mine that I would like to continue pursuing and advance at. Most of my works are candid portraits of people showing raw emotions which I find beautiful. Hope you enjoy and have a good day!

**Elise Unterseher** is a current University of North Dakota student who will graduate in spring 2021 with a bachelor's in English and a certificate in creative writing. Starting fall 2021, she will be attending the George Washington University to earn a Masters in Publishing. In the future, Elise hopes to have a career in the publishing or copy-editing field, and then later on further her education.

**Andrew Youngblom** is an MFA candidate at UND who specializes in drawing and painting. He expands upon classical realism by embracing multiple strategies that may draw connections between concepts, raise questions or highlight contradictions. His current work reflects on everyday routines and existential concerns.



# Floodwall



**J. Alcon  
Heather Barry  
Meghan Bird  
Erin Breen  
Kylee Danks  
Cole Dennis  
Casey Fuller  
Connor Grenier  
Leah Hanley  
Charlotte Hatch  
Charles Henry  
Brenda Kezar  
Derek McFarland  
Keely McLean  
Grant McMillan  
Maria Matsakis  
Michaela Oosthuizen  
Jona L. Pedersen  
Shilo Previti  
Jacqueline Raatz  
Parker Stenseth  
Kai Szulborski  
Seth Thaelke  
Zamzam Ulow  
Elise Unterseher**