

Floodwall

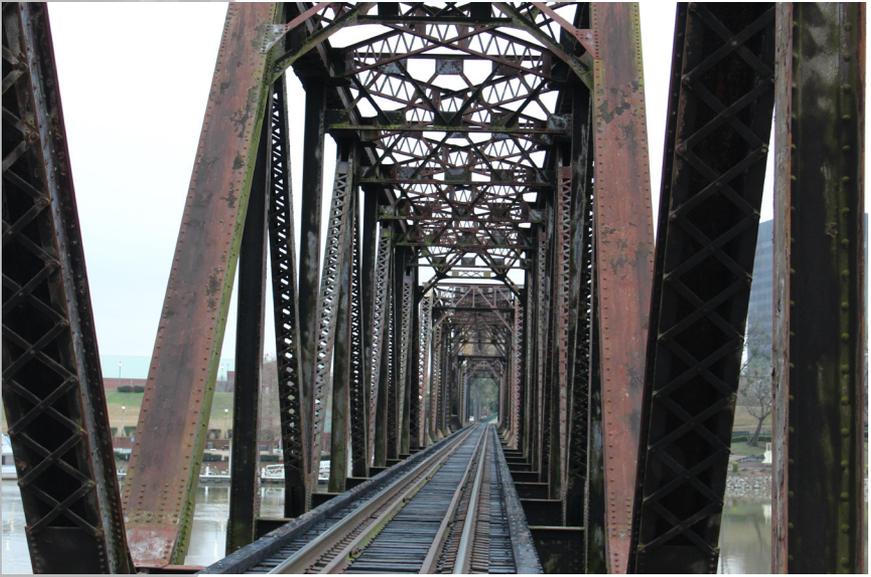
Volume 2, Issue 6

Fall 2022



Floodwall

volume 2, issue 6
fall 2022



Front and back covers: details from a photograph by Emilia Adkinson

Floodwall

volume2, issue6
fall 2022

Masthead

managing editor & social media coordinator: Myra Henderson

fiction editors: Jona L. Pedersen & Aubrey Roemmich

nonfiction editors: Sam Amendolar & Maren Schettler

poetry editors: Charles Henry & Delaney Otto

art and photography editors: Hailey Narloch & Elena Uhlenkamp

chief copy editor: Courtney Litzinger

fiction reading board: Gabrielle Bossart & Jonathan Sladko

nonfiction reading board: Claire Arneson & Muhammad Shamsul Islam

poetry reading board: Emilia Adkinson & Holly Schulz

copy editors: Emilia Adkinson, Claire Arneson, Gabrielle Bossart, & Holly Schulz

design & layout: based off a template created by the spring 2021 ENGL 234 ("Intro to Writing, Editing, & Publishing) course at the University of North Dakota

arrangement & sequencing: the section editors

faculty advisor: Dr. Patrick Henry

Floodwall is a production of students at the University of North Dakota. The magazine is produced by volunteers and students enrolled in the certificate program in Writing and Editing. Submissions to *Floodwall* are open only to students currently enrolled in an undergraduate, graduate, or certificate program at UND. Submission guidelines are posted on the *Floodwall* website: www.und.edu/floodwall.

Copyright © 2022, the contributors. No portion of *Floodwall* may be reprinted without permission from the contributor.

From the Editors

We're excited to be publishing our sixth issue of *Floodwall*, the student-run literary magazine at the University of North Dakota. For three years, *Floodwall* has been—if you'll let us have *just one wall pun*—a load-bearing wall in our campus literary community. Our vision has always been to represent the creative voices and original expression that occurs across our campus community. And in a fall semester that seems busier than ever, it's an immense honor for us to support writing and art in all their forms.

When we're asked what kind of work we publish, we often point to the mission statement on our website, or the editors' notes on the first five issues of volume two. We highlight how important it is to represent the voices of writers at UND, and we emphasize how important it is to spotlight and inspire those creators. But that's also what makes publications like *Floodwall* special—we have the privilege of showcasing the work of writers as our community adapts and changes. Which means that *Floodwall* isn't limited by a "brand" or a marketing strategy or a set of traditions (even if we have started to commit to the iconic look of our covers!). We get to grow and morph and adapt alongside all of you who are reading these pages and sharing your work. And we're all thrilled to be going on this journey with you, dear readers.

And that might even be a recurring theme you'll find in this fall's pages. The writers and artists sharing work in this issue have a clear sense of adventure and a hope for new beginnings: we thought that Emilia Adkinson's photograph of a railroad trestle, with its tunnel-like opening and its airy vibe, is the perfect entry point to the explorations you'll find in our newest issue of *Floodwall*.

What other journeys are in store? Oh, plenty more. An experimental warp-drive plunges a canny crew of space explorers into an adventure at the fringes of time and space. A meditation on ghosts

revels in the ways that we are all haunted. Text messages between English majors snark over the torturous requirements of papers but promise friendship and an emergency *Shrek* screening. A guitarist lit on a grassy knoll invites us to share in the brightness and hope of nature. And other poems, stories, and essays in this volume push us to unwind on blissful nights, or speak in defense of those with chronic illnesses, or let us meditate on our ideals and our visions of reality.

We're grateful to all of the writers who have shared their work with *Floodwall*. We couldn't go on this journey without them. And now we hope you'll flip the page and explore the marvelous work in this issue.

Floodwall

volume2, issue6
fall 2022

Contents

masthead.....5

from the editors.....6

fiction12

The Sparkling Heat I Found in the Bathtub |

Delaney Otto 13

Activation Day | Elena Uhlenkamp 17

Two Flash Fictions | Aubrey Roemmich..... 25

Two Flash Fictions | Claire Arneson..... 32

Midnight Occurrences | Valkyrie Bradford 37

Warp Test | Jonathan Sladko 46

photography & artwork.....68

Photograph | Charles Steinberger..... 69

Two Drawings | Jona L. Pedersen..... 70

Three Photographs | Sarah Dignan..... 73

Photograph | Emilia Adkinson 77

Three Photographs | Elena Uhlenkamp 79

Lost in the Sun | Simi Kaur..... 83

poetry.....86

Fleeting Autumn | Het Mehta 87

stars | Jacob Cummings..... 88

She | Danika Ogawa 90

Three Poems | Elena Uhlenkamp..... 92

Forever Thirteen Claire Arneson	95
Three Poems Aubrey Roemmich	97
The Lost and Found Julia Tietz	102
The Lonely Sea Valkyrie Bradford	104
Three Poems Chad Erickstad.....	109
Tomorrow Caitlin Scheresky.....	115
Conversation with Life Emilia Adkinson	118
the day after Autumn Thompson	120
Two Poems Jona L. Pedersen	122
Blissful Night Dustyn Huber	125

***nonfiction*.....127**

Duane Danika Ogawa	128
Type 1 Issue Grace Miller.....	132
Ghosts Are Real Delaney Otto	138
The Ideal Deconstructed Kira Symington	141

***contributor notes*.....160**

fiction

The Sparkling Heat I Found in the Bathtub

Delaney Otto

I found it wriggling around like a freshly born worm when I pulled aside the shower curtain. It was a chilly Sunday morning and I could hear the church bells ringing, an accompaniment for the ball of light and crackling burning's dance. It didn't singe the tub as it writhed, even though I felt like I would be burnt if I made contact.

"What are you?" I whispered under my breath.

"What are *you*?" it replied in a voice shrill and raspy, like I imagined a crow might speak with. I was startled at its response, though the sound surprised me more than the fact it could talk for some reason.

"I...am a human," I said. "Um, flesh, blood, bones."

"Ah, carbon condensation," the wriggling starlight mused. "Space dust from the cough of a supernova."

At the moment, standing there in pajamas stained from last night's spaghetti, I felt the comparison was a bit too grand.

"So, you know what I am. But what're you?"

"Hm, hm," the hum made my teeth buzz. "To tell you would be too much. Your soul would pour out your ears."

"Well, do you have some simpler explanation? You're in my bathtub, I'd at least like a name, or, y'know, a reason as to why you're in my bathtub."

"You know of angels and demons, yes?"

"Yes."

"Cast those out of your mind entirely."

"Ah." Being raised with religious imagery, I found that impossible.

"I may appear like the burning bush, or Hellfire, or starlight, but I come from something else."

"And that is...?"

The light coiled and rolled like thunder and smoke, shifting what could be yellow to what could be blue. Perhaps it was amused.

"Why do you think I sit at the bottom of your tub, where you wash away pain and sorrow and dirt? Do you recall what happens to the grit and grime that slips its way between the lips of a clam?"

"It makes a pearl."

"Correct! So, what do you make of me?"

"You're... a pearl that I made?"

"Oh, yes, yes. So clever you are, though you think otherwise so often. I am your pearl."

"But pearls are supposed to protect the clam from stuff that gets *inside* it. I wash off dead skin and dirt—that's on the outside. You don't come from inside me."

"No, but also yes. I was born in the pipes beneath the drain, and I wriggled up through the mess and rust. Therefore, I was born within something. But, I come from what you have washed off, what you have let run down the drain, things you have shed. Therefore, I come from outside. However, not all you wash off is external. Do you not wash off your anger, your sadness? Do you not enter the hot water to soothe internal, emotional aches? Do you not scrub off the hatred you are so ashamed of? Do you not let your tears slip down the rusted drain?"

"...Oh, I guess that's right."

"Therefore, I come from within."

The light that might be blue rippled into colors new and newer, as if it was showing off.

"Look at what you have created. Am I not beautiful?"

"You are, you are," I assured it. "But why do you exist? I'm not a clam, I don't need protection. So, what were you created for?"

"Bah, so often do humans question the reason for their births! For their lives! It is a pity, thinking you need to earn your right to exist. Such a sad state humanity is in." It gurgled and spasmed in distaste. "What does your kind think pearls symbolize?"

"I guess, in poetry and stuff, they give value to pain. Even if you go

through something difficult, it might result in something beautiful.”

“Yes, yes, good. And you have agreed that I am beautiful.”

“Well, yeah. But my struggles aren’t very significant. I’m just a regular person, with an average life. Other people have it way worse than me.”

“Again with this! Humans are so ignorant of the improbability of their existence, they seek to find reason for it, and seek to compare theirs to others. Your birth was a raindrop in an ocean, a fallen petal in a field of flowers. You, but a speck of stardust in this wide, black universe! Your woes are as unique as your soul! Do not diminish them so. I sit here before you, a dazzling display of your mind and heart, and yet you still insult me.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to.”

“You are forgiven, my home and creator. But, please, never speak so ill of your own emotions ever again. It is unhealthy.”

“But, some of my emotions are really dumb and...shameful. I can’t just start loving them.”

“Perhaps you do not have to. Not yet, at least. But look upon me, look upon this drop of stardust, born from the supernova of your soul, and know that each moment you live, each thought you think, is a miraculous happenstance in the cosmic pot of probability. Your existence is a highly unlikely occurrence. Do not mar it with self-hatred.”

I bent down, in the cold bathroom on a colder Sunday morning, and wrapped my arms around the ball of light and heat. Its warmth sank into my embrace, and as I lifted it out of the bathtub, I held it close, feeling its wobbling surface tension push and pull. In an instant, I was not cold. I cannot say all my negative feelings were quelled. I cannot say I felt much better about myself. But, I was warm, and I felt a little more full in my heart. No, not fuller. A light shone on the corner of my soul that I thought was empty. I found there was no emptiness at all, but all the little things I had stowed away in the darkness. Perhaps it was time to wash them off.

Delaney Otto is a senior at UND pursuing a major in Communication and a minor in English. She enjoys horror, magical realism, fantasy, and happy endings. Along with writing, she enjoys music and art, and thinks that everyone should try creating something, no matter how small or simple. She has a growing pile of books she really needs to start reading.

Activation Day

Elena Uhlenkamp

Riley's heart pounded in his ears and chest. The hisses and crackling noises around him chilled his blood. He dragged his body forward, trying to find some form of salvation, wherever it was in this hell. Something sticky and warm covered his hands and face, most of it leaking from his abdomen. It smeared on the freezing floor in a trail behind him. Darkness surrounded his vision, and he could barely breathe through the pain.

Claws then dug deep into his scalp, yanking his head up, before it slammed his face into the ground with a sickening thud. He cried out weakly; his vision filled with stars and his ears were ringing. A coppery taste filled his mouth as the same warm liquid dripped from his lips. He choked and hacked, weakly pushing at the weight on top of him. Small, sharp teeth sank into his throat. He let out a gurgled scream, which was quickly silenced as the darkness devoured him.

Riley screamed himself awake, his body jerking upwards. Metal screeched at his sudden movement as he was forced to stay in place. His body burned like hot metal, a thousand knives slicing his insides. He settled back and gasped painfully, staring at the fluorescent light hanging above him. It blinded him with cold, white light that seemed to burn. It hissed and sputtered like an angry cat, excruciatingly loud in his ears. Riley tried to move again but realized quickly that he couldn't. His arms, legs, chest, and neck were restrained.

"Hello?" The single word crackled in his mouth, mashed into something unintelligible. It was his voice, but it also wasn't. It was foreign. Inhuman. The light continued to blind him as his body stiffened.

He jerked his body side to side, struggling to get free. Screeching and banging metal grew louder and louder until it was the only sound bashing inside his head. He let out a cry that reverberated in the dark, something long and animalistic.

A heavy door groaned open beyond his feet, the suddenness causing Riley to stop struggling and go silent. He breathed hard, trying to turn his head towards the light that cascaded in. His restraints soon reminded him that he couldn't. "Who's there?" he asked, or at least tried to. All that came out of his mouth were stuttering sounds of his distorted words.

"He's awake," a woman said. Footsteps came up and around him, the light from outside the room disappearing as the door was shut. He couldn't see any of the people's faces in the blinding light. "Mr. Kooris," the woman said over his head in the darkness. "Can you hear me?"

"What's wrong with me?" Riley asked, his words clearer, but still had a slight glitch. "What's going on?"

"Just relax, Mr. Koo—"

"Riley!" The sound of his voice was harsh. He took in a shaky breath and said more softly, "Just Riley."

"Riley," the hidden woman continued. "Everything is going to be fine."

Voices murmured around Riley, but he was too panicked to try and understand what was being said. They removed the metal strap that laid over his chest, and it made a thunk on the side of the bed. There was an abrupt click followed by a hiss near his chest. His chest lurched upwards as his body suddenly burned with cold instead of heat. "What the hell!" Riley cried out, struggling again in his restraints.

"Easy Riley," the woman said quickly over the startled voices of the others. "It's nothing to worry about."

"Who are you?" Riley's mind began to spin, fearing the worst.

"I'm here to fix you."

"Fix me? What did you do to me?"

"Just hold still, Riley. It's going to be all over soon."

"This is just a dream," Riley gasped, closing his eyes with a click.

"Either that or I'm dying." Flashes of teeth and pale bodies crossed his mind. His breaths became short and sporadic. His body shook, and he pulled at his restraints. "The bastards—"

"Breath, Riley. I understand your fear, but everything is going to be alright. This isn't a dream, and you're not dead," the woman said in monotone. Under her breath, she whispered, "Not exactly."

He opened his eyes to the blinding light, trying to find the woman's face but failing. "What do you mean 'not exactly'?"

"Get me the Shadow Reader."

He jerked under the restrictive hold. Metal screeched under him. "Answer me, dammit!"

Whoever was around Riley ignored him as they did whatever they were doing. Beeps and whirling sounds came from near his chest, rivaling the hissing lights. "297.3," the woman said when the sounds went silent. "That's good. That's higher than the others."

"Others? There are others?"

There was a click near Riley's chest again. He grunted as the stabbing pain intensified, but the cold had passed. "Alright," the woman continued, "I need you to move your fingers."

Riley clenched his hands shut. "Why won't you answer my questions?"

"Please, just move your fingers."

He strained against his restraints, jerking side to side. "Answer me, you bastards!" He could hear the metal groaning around him. Whatever was holding him down rocked slightly. Metal groaned.

"Mr. Kooris, if you don't comply, you will be shut down."

He paused long enough to say, "Shut down? I'm not a damn machine!" He needed to get out of his restraints. Now. He continued to struggle.

"Mr. Kooris—"

The sound of metal breaking was followed by Riley's left arm suddenly flying upwards and hitting the hanging light. The light promptly went out with sparks, the room swallowed up by the darkness. Then his right hand and neck were freed with the same breaking metal sound. He

momentarily froze, surprised by the metal bonds breaking so easily. Yells and curses around Riley snapped him out of his momentary shock. He ripped the metal bands on his legs off without a second thought. Metal moaned underneath him as he slid off the bed and got onto unsteady feet. He walked quickly away like a drunken man, groping around in the dark for the door or a wall.

Clicks and zaps of electric guns filled the darkness around him. The beams of bright, crackling energy kept missing him, hitting the walls and floors with scorching heat. The whole scene seemed to come straight out of a horror movie, and he was the monster the men were trying to kill.

Riley's hands slammed against a wall. He followed it blindly, finding the door swiftly. He groped the handle, vaguely noticing it was smaller than what a normal door handle should be. Ignoring the fact, he opened it and went out into the bright light of the hallway. People yelled behind him, but Riley ignored the sounds and ran out of the room, not sure where he was going. His unexpectedly heavy footsteps boomed against the walls of the hallway.

Riley blindly went down corridor after corridor, metal banging and grinding against itself and the concrete floors and walls. Where the hell was the metal? There wasn't any except for the door and pipes on the walls and ceiling. Why did the sound keep following him?

The glint of light off his hands caught his attention. A quick glance revealed the dull metal that covered his hands. They gloved his hands in metal? He didn't have time to look or think about it. He had to find a way out first.

"Mr. Kooris!" a male voice boomed through the loudspeakers above him. "This is Director Parris Reiman. Stand down."

Riley paused at a t-section. "I never heard of you!" he yelled at the voice before taking a left. The clunks of combat boots echoed around him as he continued to run.

"Mr. Kooris," Director Reiman said over the speakers. "I need you to trust me and stand down."

Riley took another left, finding three men with automatic weapons coming down the corridor. In a stiff motion, they lifted up their guns

and pulled their triggers. Riley backtracked, zips of bullets flying past him. They hit the cement walls, ricocheting around him. Stinging pain slammed at his torso and thigh as bullets sounded off of something metal. Riley vaguely noticed the sound of bullets hitting metal were right on top of him. They must have covered more than just his hands with metal. Riley shoved the realization to the back of his mind and took a different corridor, the gunshots and yells of men following him.

“Mr. Kooris, stop before someone gets hurt.” Reiman’s voice was strained and hard to hear over the gunshots.

Riley took a sharp turn, his momentum causing him to slam full force against a wall. The sound of metal being crushed joined with his side aching. He gripped his side, quickly glancing around. Next to him was a metal door with no noticeable label on its blank surface. It had a card slot, but there wasn’t a light indicating if it was unlocked or not. He glanced back, hearing men running his way but not seeing them. Why were they so far back? They should have caught up to him, especially in his condition.

The men suddenly appeared around the corner, and they quickly shot at him. Not taking his eyes off them, Riley blindly opened the door and stumbled backwards into the room. He slammed the door shut behind him with a boom, the world around him suddenly becoming dark and silent. He found the bolt lock and turned it. He then sat back against the door and closed his eyes, trying to pull in deep breaths. His breaths sounded unnaturally hollow. It was unnerving.

Riley finally opened his eyes, noticing the room wasn’t completely dark like he first thought. A single string of lights shined from the other side of the room, the warm glow reflecting off the dark glass that panned the wall beneath them. He stared at the glass, a pair of glowing green eyes locking onto his. They didn’t move.

Cautiously, Riley pushed himself off the door, approaching the glass and the thing in it. The eyes came closer, their glow fluctuating in brightness. As he got closer, the figure belonging to the glowing eyes became clearer.

The figure was robotic in nature, taking a strange humanoid shape.

It appeared half made; plates were missing from its torso and head, exposing the pistons and wires used to make it move. The plates that were on it were a dull gray, black and yellow numbers visible on their surface. A stubby section of what must have been a partial tail was visible behind it. It looked like some sort of prototype.

The incomplete head was similar to an exposed skull of a reptile. The eyes glared out of their housings, unnerving. Riley noticed shadowy tendrils wound around the mechanisms inside the robot, pulsating like veins. What the hell is it?

Riley finally paused a few feet from the glass, completely submerged in the light. The thing in the glass had followed suit. His eyes widened. So did the green eyes staring at him from the glass. What Riley was looking at was a reflection. It wasn't just a prototype. It was him.

Slowly, he moved a hand up. The robotic reflection followed. He turned his hand. The reflection did the same. He dropped his hand to his side, cursing. "What the hell did they do to me?" he breathed. His reflection didn't answer.

Dazed, he looked down at himself. His eyes and his reflection were not deceiving him. He became dizzy, and his metal hands shook as he gripped the edge of the—his—chest plate. He pried it open. The metal plate groaned, and it was as painful as pulling his own ribs out, but he needed to know what was behind it. He almost screamed in pain when it finally opened with a grating sound.

Riley barely held it together when he saw the inner mechanical workings inside his chest. There was no flesh, bone, or skin to be seen inside. Just wire, metal gears, and hydraulic lines. This wasn't even an elaborate suit. There wasn't anything human about him anymore.

Where his heart should have been was a strange otherworldly stone. Hundreds upon hundreds of wires and ghostly black tendrils congregated at it, and it pulsed a blackish glow in something resembling a heartbeat. Its blue-gray granite surface was rough and raw. He touched it with a shaking hand, the new claws at the end of his fingers glinting sharply in the light. The stone was warm under his fingers. Riley glanced at himself in the glass, staring at the stone-of-a-

heart in his chest. Something about it was vaguely familiar...

He then slammed his chest plate shut and stumbled back from the glass, cursing under his breath. "This can't be happening." He pressed his hands against his unfinished head, his limbs tingling like they were losing circulation. "This can't be happening!"

The clack of the bolt lock made Riley whip around, ready to fight or run. The door burst open, and half a dozen men and women in full body armor raced in, aiming their various guns at him.

"Stop! Everyone just stop!" the woman's voice, from when he woke up, yelled from behind the group. Still training their weapons on Riley, the people parted and created a path. A slim figure noticeably shorter than the average adult stepped forward, their hands up by their head in a non-threatening manner. Through his panic and anguish, Riley realized it was a woman. Her hair was cut short and styled in a way that made her silhouette look more masculine at first glance. "Riley," she said gently, more emotion than what she gave before, "you're alright. Just relax."

Riley laughed bitterly. "Relax?" He gestured to himself. "How can I relax like this?" The lights behind him flickered.

She cautiously came closer. "It's alright. I can explain everything that's happening." She paused a few feet away and extended a hand, palm facing upward. "I just need you to come back with me."

Riley glanced down at her hand but stayed where he was. "Why should I trust you? I don't even know you."

"I'm Doctor Aryonna Reiman. I'm the one who saved you."

"I would have taken death over this," Riley growled. His limbs began to go numb and he suddenly became lightheaded.

"I understand you're scared—"

"Scared doesn't even begin to describe how I feel!" Riley suddenly felt a ghost of himself surge out of him. Warm, shadowy tendrils exploded and lashed out from his back. They hit the lights above him, and the lights burst with sparks. He collapsed in sudden exhaustion, landing hard on his hands and knees. The shadows still extended a few feet from his back, stiff as cobras.

He lifted his head to look at Aryonna, eyes blazing. She stared at

him silently. "Why the hell did you do this to me?" he asked, his voice breaking. "What good reason was there to do this? I died, and I wish you left me dead." He pressed his forehead to the ground, squeezing his eyes shut. "You should have left me dead!"

Riley wanted to cry, but he couldn't. Not anymore. He could only scream, and that's what he did. The power and pain that created that sound cracked the glass behind him.

Elena Uhlenkamp is an English major from a small town in the heart of Minnesota. She enjoys reading and writing fiction, especially fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Besides writing fiction, she likes trying her hand at photography and writing poetry, along with enjoying escape rooms with family and friends. Elena is working on a series that mixes sentient robots with demons from another dimension.

Two Flash Fictions

Aubrey Roemmich

Ballet of Blood Water

I have not been here in centuries, returning like a lost crew member of a long-forgotten ship. The perfume the other girls use to disguise their sweat surrounds me, but the tinge of body odor still permeates the air. The floors are grey and scuffed, aligned in horizontal panels, and kept in place with silver duct tape. I am surrounded—trapped—in the mirrors. Standing in the center of the room a long, tan beam, a ship's mast, cuts through my center: stable, sturdy. I do not recognize myself.

The ceiling starts dripping. Thunderclouds cover the shaky fluorescent lights. The first notes of the piano ring out. I look into the eyes of the girl in the mirror. It's coming faster now, the dripping thunder. The violin joins cutting through the noise like a captain's orders and moves me. Or maybe I move it, the voice of the captain resounding from my own body. I cannot tell any longer who controls the ship. The girl in the mirror copies me, but all I can hear is the dripping. She holds my eyes. They drown out the orchestra waves rushing in her blue eyes. My feet hurt—I'm not longer accustomed to standing on my toes. The tights are strangling. I feel exposed in my leotard. The bun at the base of my skull is pulling my hair tight enough I can feel the strain in my temples. My body rebels against instruction and I am consumed by the dripping. The girl moves gracefully following the swell of the music.

I am moving and it is moving. My ankles are now wet, but I cannot stop. The music is thundering along competing with the monstrous

noise of the water. My feet are bleeding through the pink satin. The girl in the mirror smirks at me. I cannot stop. The dripping is now rushing. It is up to my knees, but I cannot stop. I am spinning... spinning... spinning...

Spinning through stage wings, bright lights, and dressing rooms, my life is rushing around me as I dance. All the laughter and tears are crashing over me in a thunderous wave. My eyes are locked on a light up ahead: a goal, a dream, a longing of my heart. The lights cut out—

The orchestra is gone. I am alone. My left leg is tucked behind my right in a curtsy. My arms sit gracefully curved away from my body. My head is bend in difference to the crowd. All I can hear are the waves of the ocean. I close my eyes tight in a vain attempt to ignore my own pain. It is up to my waist now. The wind picks up and I start spinning again like a flag loose from its ship. The water is turning pink, reef sharks are starting to circle around the smell of blood. The dripping will not let me rest. My heels are blistered. My feet ache. The ribbon cuts into my ankles. The dripping reaches my shoulders. I lift my arms and hold my head high. Fighting against the waves that crash into me. My mind is tired, but my body will not rest. I am gasping for air as the water creeps up my neck. It's cold. My lips are turning blue, and my head is thrown back into the salty water.

I see myself in the mirror: a grotesque imitation of what could be. She is back and she is angry. I cannot meet her gaze any longer. She screams at me like a sea monster from the deep for destroying her life, her work, her purpose. She pounds against the mirror creating fractures that streak across the glass like lightening in a storming sky. The water is to my eyes now. My tears slowly contributing to the ocean as I look up. I can see the sun, the moon, and all the stars. The wind whispers in my ear. The water welcomes me gently.

I have finally stopped. I sink lower. My once pristine tutu is stained with salt water as it floats to the surface. The sun peaks through the middle as I reach like it's a life preserver. Laying at the bottom like a sunken ship, I turn my head once more to the mirror. My hair is loose and floats around my head like a halo. The tights have dissolved, and

a coral reef has grown where my leotard used to be. The waves crash above, and seaweed begins to grow around my limbs, an eel has made a home in my chest. I am smiling. The orchestra sounds lovely down here.

Texts Between English Majors

August 12th, 10:50 am

Eleanor: did you buy the textbooks
for Dr. Mann's class?

Eloise: TBH I was gonna try to
find a PDF to download.

September 26th, 5:49 pm

Eleanor: do you wanna watch
"Twilight" tonight?

Eloise: of course! Plus, I need a
good reason to procrastinate
my lit theory paper

Eleanor: write the paper on "Twilight"

Eloise: don't tempt me

October 12th, 10:55 am

Eloise: I've decided I don't like novels written in
the 1800's, women are always crying and its
over the dumbest stuff. Like literally anything happens and
"the poor, kind woman's eyes began to tear over
my lack of bread despite the fact I'm a rich,
white man who simply had to ride
a horse five miles and I'm totally fine."

Eleanor: you can't fool me ik you
plagiarized that from Hawthorne

Eloise: and it's not even just men writing it,
women wrote that way too! Did they
all have an eye disease that just
made them perpetually cry, like buck
up buddy you don't gotta lose
your marbles over cabbages.

November 20th, 4:15 pm

Eleanor: do you think if we all just skipped class
the day before thanksgiving Dr. Lopez
would just cancel?

Eloise: well she can't fail us all so it's worth
a shot

Eleanor: maybe I'll bring brownies tomorrow
or something and soften her up

Eloise: put dark chocolate chunks in them and
compare her to Elizabeth Bennett,
I'm sure she'll agree with use then

Eleanor: I love conspiring against professors

December 1st, 8:00 am

Eloise: currently living my English major
dreams: sitting in a coffee shop
looking cute af writing my novel

Eleanor: do you wanna write my
memoir essay?

Eloise: I'd rather eat glass

December 2nd, 5:00 pm

Eleanor: we should get our American
lit class together to work on our final papers

Eloise: this Sunday could be a good day

8:30 pm

Eleanor: did you read the Lacan stuff?!
I'm so confused

Eloise: I think academics purposely
make their theories difficult so
no one can prove them wrong

Eleanor: at this point I almost prefer
Freud and his phallic imagery

Eloise: pls don't go to the dark side

December 5th, 9:30 am

Eloise: Dr. Mann used an onion as a
metaphor today and I've had the
"I'm a believer" song from
Shrek stuck in my head
Since then

Eleanor: just bombed my linguistics test

Eloise: just tell your professor that the
three blind mice took it for you

Eleanor: I'll make waffles if you bring over Shrek

Eloise: I'll be over in 10

Aubrey Roemmich is currently an undergraduate student at the University of North Dakota. After her graduation, she hopes to attend law school and get an MFA in creative writing. She aspires to be a literary lawyer and work in the publishing industry. She spends her free time reading, writing, and listening to music.

Two Flash Fictions

Claire Arneson

Pieces of Me

Our eyes met first.
Right outside your family's café.
I remember the yellow flecks that graced the vast ocean of your right eye and the dirt brown of your left.
Mine tentatively touched your dimple as you smirked my way.
I blushed, my grass eyes turning back to the menu in front of me.
"Go talk to him!"
I glanced at Cassie, the homework we brought untouched.
"Just go, Kelly."
I stand up.
I walk towards you.
My breath is static.
Our eyes greet each other for the second time, and I veer toward the bathroom.
I close the door and look in the mirror.
My rose hair is clenched between my fingers, and my cheeks are tomato red.
"Breathe Kells, breathe."
"Good idea," you say.
And I turn to look up into your eyes.
"I'm Barrett."

*

The first time you held my hand was at the football game.

We had just scored or made a goal, or... I don't know, I just went to spend time with you.

You stood up and cheered, I stood up too, and clapped my cold dry hands.

You gave me your jacket, the cold nipping at my skin, but you noticed. My hands felt empty, until you stopped my clapping, and grasped my left.

Your thumb rubbed circles, heating up the frigid outer layer. And then our eyes met again.

*

Do you remember when you first kissed me?

I do.

We were at Cassie's Halloween party; you took me outside.

We went as Casey Becker and Ghostface from *Scream*.

I was unbothered by the noise, by the indecent PDA that was being displayed, I just wanted you alone.

And then you kissed me.

You parted my lips with yours, you held my neck, and you pulled me by my waist.

And I kissed you.

*

When I sprained my ankle, you carried me throughout the house.

You transported me upstairs, downstairs, and back again.

You put me to bed, kissing my eyes, my hands, my lips, and my ankle.

"Feel better, I'll see you tomorrow."

*

Do you remember our last kiss?

I do.

We were in my bed, watching *Scream*.

My ankle was propped on the two pillows you insisted I needed.

Your hand around my neck, my head on your arm.

And your other hand... trailing up my leg.

"Barrett..."

"Come on, Kelly."

It went higher and higher.
And you leaned in to kiss me.
No, you leaned in to own me
You started forcing me.
"Not now, Barrett."
"Please Kelly, I have been so patient."
And then you got on top of me.
"No! Get off!"
My parents rushed into the room.
I bet you forgot they were here.
Sometimes I do, too.
They kicked you out, told you to leave.
I texted you that night.
But you didn't.

*

"Barrett?"
Your face is disguised by your Halloween costume.
The once-fake knife you had, is replaced by a real one.
"What are you doing?"
I only knew it was you, by your eyes.
Your eyes, that hold pieces of me.
"It'll be over soon."

*

Do you remember when you killed me?
I do.
You killed me in my very own bed, while my parents were sleeping in the
other room.
You killed me and cut me up, wrapping me in my own bed sheets.
You threw my eyes in the trash behind your parent's restaurant.
You buried my hands under the bleachers of our school's stadium.
You buried my head in Cassie's backyard.
And you threw the rest of me into the river.
But you kept my heart.
You have my heart.

In-Between

Hazel Rhoads. Loving grandmother, mother, and wife.

Daisies decorate me. They flower around me. They sprinkle more and more on top of me. The rain is forgotten, and the sun is a mere second away, but they are still here.

I am still here.

My family is still here.

The graveyard they chose is nice. It's decorated with the taste of spring and is littered with the tears of mourners. Relevant people or sporadic souls wander through here and cry for ones they do not know. My headstone blends with the others beside me. And describes me, Hazel Rhoads, in three basic words. Words I don't remember knowing. Next to me lies my great-grandfather. A man I hardly knew, but someone I know now. And my wife to my right. She beat me to greeting death by two years, but I see her again.

I am with her again.

Heaven and hell are nowhere in our sights. We hold hands above our graves and look over our children. Our son and daughter. Our accomplishments and our failures are composed into the melody of these two extraordinary human beings. They hold hands, their spouses at their sides, their children beside them. And they watch us.

They cannot see us.

They can't hear the joy in my tone as I reach for my loved ones. The ones I had only dreamed of seeing again if I had gotten into heaven. But here there is no euphoria. There is no utopia the pastors and preachers spoke about. And there is no dark despair in a pit. There is just the in-between. Where you are both happy and sad. Where there are both good days and bad days. My wife and I fight, but we also love. We still cry and mourn, but we know they are just around the bend.

My children are just around the bend.

They are walking away now. Heads held low, but hands held to their sides. The wisp of the winds blows the scent of daisies through the

air. My grandson, turns around, just for a glimpse. We wave, and laugh. And I swear he smiles, and waves back. I turn to my wife. My gorgeous wife.

My life was a matter of letters and numbers. My name condensed into a mere whisper of syllables put together. Counting down the days, speaking a prayer to anyone who would listen. Hoping for serenity. Asking for peace. 90 years old is a long time to live. It's a long time to force a breath every morning when you wake up. Every morning when you wake alone in an empty bed. Every evening when you go to sleep, wondering if you would wake up. But one day you don't wake up in an empty bed. You wake up in your first house. The house holds so many memories. I wake up with her next to me.

"Took ya long enough," she smirks. Reaching her hand out to me.

We are now holding hands above our graves, our old brick house appearing behind us. The porch is decked with a pitcher of iced tea, and two books for us to read. Nothing is said, but I know once we get to the porch we cannot go back. We cannot be close to our children, but instead must observe from a birds-eye view. She squeezes my hand.

"It's time, Hazel."

So we turn to leave. To go to our in-between.

Claire Arneson is a junior at the University of North Dakota. She is studying English and communications and hopes to work in the publishing industry in the future. She loves reading all of the books she can, and cheers the loudest at the hockey game.

Midnight Occurrences

Valkyrie Bradford

Left, right, tug from below.

Right, left, tug from above.

Left, right, knot—

Halcyon huffed out a breath as she yanked the pale thread back through the hole she'd been attempting to patch, muttering a string of harsh cuss words longer than any stretch of time she'd managed to work on this damned chiton. She wasn't unpracticed—not in the slightest. She'd stitched and made several clothes for her family, and this plain, annoying piece her darling fool of a brother Hesperos had torn running about with his friends. It was just difficult to work upon by naught but flickering candlelight in the cool courtyard of her home, all whilst shivering, despite the thick cloak draped across her shoulders.

The sun had set long before she'd set about this project that clearly should've been left for the light of day. Yet there was only so much time Halcyon could spend lying about, staring at the ceiling and pleading for sleep as her thoughts granted her no peace. And so, she'd set about saving this scrap of fabric that should've just been left to the wayside.

Better than thinking about everything—*anything*—else. Better than placing her thoughts back in that vicious whirlpool of torrential confusion and grief that even Poseidon himself would shirk from. Better than letting Neophytos take over her thoughts again and drawing her to his home in the bosom of Athens, better than letting her emotions drag her off her feet yet again.

No, she'd much rather stitch a ridiculous, needless rag back together, thank you very much. And for all her efforts to distract herself,

none were so successful as the wavering footsteps and quiet clack of a cane that drew her eyes up from her sore, pricked fingers and trembling shoulders falling slack as she turned to greet her impossibly late company.

The partial moon and glittering stars above were little help, Halcyon needing to draw her candle higher to better see the figure slowly shuffling through the open archway of the courtyard. Small and hunched, a battered once-white-now-grey cloak the form's only defense from the nipping cold of the eventide wind, hood drawn up to guard their face, yet she could make out an elderly woman beneath.

"I pray you be well, maiden of the morn," the tired, rasping voice offered in greeting. The woman was standing, swaying slightly in the entry of the courtyard. Gods, her voice sounded like gravel grating across stone under metal. "If you not be too enamored with your wicked sewing and hatred of linen, might an old hag beg for but water and a wall to lean upon far from the harsh winds of the west?"

Halcyon had half a mind to say no—she had enough troubles and thoughts and concerns without needing to tend to a visitor's needs, especially one so unannounced. Yet the laws of hospitality were upheld fiercely, under threat by the gods themselves— not to mention father would shout until the well crumbled if she turned someone away so rashly. Besides, anything to think about, act upon, that isn't Neophytos and—

No. Not to be thought of, unless she wanted the rest of her life to be so sleepless and troubled as she was here in the tresses of night.

"Were I a hissing creature of spite, perhaps I should turn you away," Halcyon answered simply, little emotion behind the words as she stood, straightening the folds and now creased edges of her clothes. "However, my bitterness is restricted to the needle that so rudely pierces my fingertips and the cloth that so impolitely avoids its restoration. Step into the home a friend of Halcyon, daughter of Hieronymus, and find yourself in comfort from the cold."

Her stitching left abandoned on the bench, she set her sights upon the kitchens, the sound of the woman's cane and shuffling confirmation

of the woman's accompaniment. Luckily, she was as quiet as Halcyon in entering. No need to wake any others in the home, especially not those who she would like nothing better than to never see again. The counters lay clean and the fire was empty for the eve, so she went about finding the cups and whatever may rest in the cupboards that this guest might eat.

"Maiden of the morn, you've no idea my gratitude for your kindness. So few would aid an old crone who wanders the night. The house paces to the north of your own was so unkind as to turn me away, back into the cold."

Halcyon's eyes tiredly ran across the offerings of the cupboard, settling on the bread and figs tucked in the corner as her offering to this rambling lady, minding little of her words as the feigned interest left her mouth without regard or thought. "How horrific, my lady. Unfortunately, I cannot claim I am so shocked—Cosmas is a wine-seller with little regard for how he lashes his tongue about."

The elderly woman finally made her way all the way into the room, taking time and care as she sat on one of the stools against the wall. "It is my honor then, to have been blessed by you, good maiden of the morn. Were you not so severely punishing that chiton for its impudence at such an hour, I might have fallen ill by the time I found a person in Athens of good tradition and decent faith."

Halcyon didn't dignify the woman's answer with any show of the sting of annoyance that began to prick her thoughts, only drawing a pitcher of watered-down wine out, pouring a cup with a practiced motion. 'Maiden of the morn'—not her name, not even calling her 'daughter of Hieronymus' would give such disrespect to her name. No, only a mocking epithet for her late-night troubles and worries.

"Naught a thing to be worried for, my lady," Halcyon answered with polite kindness, setting the plate of fruit and bread before the woman, clay cup of wine just beside. "Rest easily, for worrying shall not change you found a house of true faith in tradition. Fill your belly and find rest within my father's home, and name yourself as I shall call you, my guest."

The woman, gnarled and leathery hands reaching out, pulled at the bread and shakily lifted the cup to her withered lips. "Ah, a kindness unseen in these days. My thanks to you, maiden of the morn, though placing a name upon me would do it a disservice."

A hum of affirmation her only answer, Halcyon stepped away, seating herself on another stool nearby with wine of her own in hand. This woman was strange in every sense of the word, it seemed, including praising good hospitality, and not bothering to return it in kind. By now, she was split between hoping the woman would speak if only to distract her and praying she'd eat and leave her in peace with her clamorous silence and harried sewing again.

The woman, whether by the will of the gods or of a cosmic spite to Halcyon's frustrations, gave an answer to her hopes and prayers.

"Maiden of the morn, you've a face at least fourteen years of life having lived, and still hold to the home of your father. Might an old crone be so coarse as to ask why a beautiful girl such as yourself is not held within the high regards of a wealthy husband?"

Neophytos, her marriage in two weeks—

"Naught a thing to worry about, my lady," Halcyon simply excused, pointedly connecting gaze with the woman's beady dark eyes to convey her barring of the topic. "I live well as I am and will live well as I grow old."

"I find myself only further confused, maiden of the morn. Your beauty alone could have spurred a dowry equal to a temple's offerings, yet you only further display a clever wit and bright mind that a king would envy for the throne at his left side. I can only imagine you await here for your husband to arrive and sweep you away to your waiting palace. Is this why you stand awake amongst the stars of the morning, waiting for your kingly escort?"

Halcyon's faint sensation of stinging frustration had shifted from a lost bumblebee to an angered wasp. This woman either had lost her vision *and* hearing, or simply sought to test the boundaries of her kindness. "No palace awaits me, my lady, but a husband of good name and home. I've yet to find a man who'd not turn up his nose at the

slightest hint of wisdom in a woman's eye."

A sharp, crude snort of laughter had Halcyon jolting as the woman rattled with the intensity of the perceived hilarity. At this point, she was really struggling to keep the distaste from showing in her face. This woman offered no name, not but a poor nickname her only gift, and now, she went so far as to sneer at her words.

"No, to find a man who sees beyond those jade eyes and obsidian hair to the mind, sharp as the icy cold tonight, would be quite a feat. For that, you are well and true, maiden of the morn."

Halcyon's frown was only growing as her confusion compounded when the sound of bare feet upon the floor alerted her to a new presence, only praying it wasn't—

"Milady Halcyon, is everything alright?"

Every inch of her body restrained the curses and sorrow that wanted to burst free as she turned to the doorway, the manifestation of her grief and misery stood tall and at attention, her dark hair braided back with precision and elegance as always, despite the late hour, dress hanging loose about her still sleep-ridden form.

Halcyon's eyes tore away with furious intensity, eyes locking onto the wall rather than be anywhere near the pale green eyes that she could feel locked on her face. "Everything is quite fine, Roxana. We've a guest, but I've cared for her thus far without issue. Return to sleep."

It took every ounce of self-control she contained not to look over amongst the deafening silence before Roxana's lilting voice returned. "Of course, milady. Good evening, then."

Steps receding, Halcyon released her held breath with care, tilting her drink back to drown the roiling feelings beneath wine and rest she prayed would come soon.

"Ah. No man, then. Not for the maiden of the morn."

With that, Halcyon spat wine across the floor, unable to even process the stains upon her skirts as she whipped her head about to her guest.

How? How did she know? Roxana had stood there for perhaps a minute. Was it so obvious, had others seen before? The panic holding in

her throat, no words would rise as she could only helplessly stare at her guest with a plea for an answer.

"Not a worry, dear maiden of the morn, I've no mind to tell anyone a thing beyond the quality of your wine." The woman set her cup upon a stool beside her, casual as she'd been before, Halcyon unable to so much as blink. Prying a fig apart, the woman continued as normal.

"So, I presume from her poor dress that she's the family slave."

"Her name's Roxana." The defense left her mouth without her permission or consideration.

"Well, I doubt were her name Helen of Troy you'd be allowed to walk your own way home beside her."

Halcyon felt her heart pang, the too true words, while not unfamiliar to her, were like a knife to her chest in their brutality. The woman was right, of course. She'd held Roxana in her heart long before she knew what it meant to love. Yet her father, mother, brothers—none of them knew, for Halcyon already knew what they would say. What the world would say.

Crackling hands like rough-dried clay pressed to her cheek, wiping away tears Halcyon hadn't felt fall loosely down her cheeks. The relief of another knowing, listening to her as she said nothing... it was a weight she hadn't known she'd carried.

"No need for tears, sweet maiden of the morn. 'Shall they harm you, body or mind, you shall strike them down threefold in-kind.'"

Halcyon vaguely recalled the words, amongst the confusion and rapid turn of her sharp emotions. In the temple of Artemis... some priestess had spoken those words, proclaiming them in her sermons.

"Why?"

The woman chuckled, wrinkled and worn face curved in amusement and pitiful sympathy.

"Old words from an old woman, dear maiden of the morn. No need to heed me and my tales. Only a bit of wisdom from one worn from more than my lifetime's worth of experience."

Halcyon sniffed and rubbed at her face like a child, trying to draw her composure again as the woman's hands rested upon her shoulders.

"To exist is to feel pain, my beautiful maiden of the morn. To truly *live*, though...that takes a fight. To hold tight to your truths and to strike at those who struck you first, even to strike first at times. And so, my sorrowful maid of morning and dawn, what truth do you hold dear?"

What possessed her to speak? To give words so honest and true, she had never known how deep it ran within her veins and held to her heart.

"I love her. I—I don't want to marry some rich bastard; I just want to—to be with her."

"Then you've all the answers you need, Halcyon." The woman shifted back as Halcyon froze, shocked at the use of her name for the first time.

"Now, I do believe I should keep going. The winds await someone to push along the streets—though I thank you deeply for the food and good company."

Halcyon scrubbed harder at her eyes, stemming the tears as she let a small, strained laugh out, her awe and confusion raw in her reddened eyes. "Who are you, my lady? You've kindness and wisdom I've not seen the likes of in all my life."

The woman, straightening her himation and tucking her messy, gray hair back into her hood, chuckled in response. "One you've met before, my maiden, and one you'll meet again someday. But for now, witty maiden of the morn, you need only know your own name."

Halcyon let out a stressed chuckle of her own, shaking her head. "I know my name well, though you'd hardly know, for all you use it."

"Perhaps that is the point, then." The woman smiled, bowing her head before starting to hobble her way out the door, Halcyon standing to follow, questions still whirling about her mind as they crossed the courtyard.

"Wait, my lady—"

"No need to beg that I stay, maiden of the morn, you've held good hospitality well. The gods smile on the good-hearted and... well, you'll know what displeasure looks like soon."

"No, that isn't what—"

The words died in her throat as her eyes were blinded by a stunning flash of light on her left, stumbling and blinking in panic as she tried to track the source.

The wall between her home and their neighbors hid most of the sight, but she could see what was going on well enough without. Fire licking and snapping about, the air still seemed thick, crackling with intensity as the sky rumbled and hiss with the aftereffects of lightning: Cosmas' house was swiftly raising ash to the starry sky and blackening, after only seconds.

"Halcyon!"

Roxana's voice reached her only moments before her hands wrapped around Halcyon's waist, and instinct took over, pressing a kiss to Roxana's forehead. "I-It's okay, I'm fine, we—"

Her eyes tore about the courtyard, now lit by ravenous flames of the next-door home. Her mysterious guest was gone, just gone. How does an old woman slip away so fast?

"Halcyon, what's happening?"

Roxana's eyes connected with hers, and suddenly, Halcyon understood. The woman's every word, her coarse voice, and fierce words slipping into place within her heart in an instant.

Shall they harm you, body or mind, you shall strike them down threefold in kind.

Words of the lady Artemis, patron of the hunt, of the night and the Amazons of the eastern mountains.

Maiden of the morn. The City of Dawn, far to the east, the home of the whispered-to-be-free warrior women.

But for now, witty maiden of the morn, you need only know your own name.

Her hands locked about Roxana's, a grin spreading across her face as she began to step further, pulling her companion with her. "We're going."

Roxana's eyes widened, glancing about with harried confusion. "What?! Hal, where—"

"Do you want to be with me?"

She didn't need an answer, and she didn't get one, truly. Only eyes dark as soil and irises green as the sprouts of spring, who knew the answer long before either had dared to ask.

Roxana nodded, hand tightening about Halcyon's. The two shared a smile, taking a hesitant, trusting step forward. "We're going, then."

To the east, Halcyon tugged and led Roxana farther with her, past dirtied and useless stitching that'd long since fallen to the dirt and courtyard walls that couldn't hold them any longer.

To the east, through streets of people staring and rushing about in panic for the home that burned so bright and fast, though seemed to only burn the home it struck.

To the east, to find freedom and a home where they could be safe, to a people of women and power that Halcyon could feel drawing closer with every step.

To the east, following the wise words and curved smirk of the lady of the starry sky and the moon that lit their way across the town and beyond.

To the east, to follow the dawn and the morn as its every ray led them closer to their home.

To the east, away from slavery and marriage and misery.

To the east, and to the future.

Valkyrie Bradford is a second-year English graduate student, passionate about cheesy literature, bad humor, and her dog and cat that constantly distract her from actually writing.

Warp Test

Jonathan Sladko

"*Perseverance*, this is Launch Operations Manager, the Launch Team wishes you good luck, and Godspeed."

"Thank you very much, I know it'll be a good one," Johnson grinned as she quoted Armstrong, turning to the crew. "It's traditional," she said.

Sorenson chuckled and nodded. Johnson had a flair for the dramatic, but when it came down to brass and tacks, there was no one better to be commanding the mission.

"Three minutes, thirty seconds, and counting, we're still go at this time." The voice of the Launch Ops Manager came back through their headsets.

"Initialize forward warp ring," Johnson commanded.

"Initializing forward ring, Captain." Garcia called back, as she worked diligently at her console.

"I'm getting a few strange readings in the antimatter containment, but we're still within bounds."

That was Martin, the ship's lead engineer. He had designed the *Perseverance's* warp-ring engine, alongside Dr. Brenner and Dr. Patching. Brenner was on board with them, down with the science team. Dr. Patching had stayed behind because his wife had just had a child.

Johnson glanced his way. "Define 'strange,' Martin."

Martin frowned and shook his head. "It's gone now. It was just a blip really."

Johnson raised an eyebrow, clearly interested in hearing more.

Martin continued, "It looked like our energy output was higher than anticipated. But the readings are back to normal now."

"Martin, I saw it too. Could be a faulty sensor. It didn't look like anything significant," Brenner remarked over the headsets. "Give me a couple seconds to run a quick diagnostic."

Johnson glanced at her display, then at Sorenson, sitting next to her. "We're at t-minus two minutes and forty five seconds." She turned to Robinson, who was manning the radio. "Inform Launch Ops, I want to be sure it's nothing."

Robinson nodded, quickly relaying the situation to the Launch Team. A moment later they responded, "*Perseverance*, we didn't detect the same anomaly. It could be a detection error. You're still within your launch limits either way. Continue with the test. T-minus one minute."

Johnson nodded, a faint frown still visible on her face.

"Understood, Launch Ops." She turned to Garcia and said, "Initialize aft warp ring."

"Initializing aft ring, Captain."

Sorenson eyed the panel in front of him. The large touch-screen displayed a diagram of the ship, a long and narrow shape with a large ring at either end. The forward ring had filled in blue, and the aft ring was filling. As it filled, thin green lines snaked towards the rings, condensing and passing through the forward ring, staying tightly packed and passing through the aft ring, before expanding and fading off the edge of the display.

"We have a stable warp tunnel, Captain," Sorenson announced.

"T-minus thirty seconds, *Perseverance*."

Johnson nodded, looking down at her own display, and checking a box on the check list. "Life support systems check?"

"Life support in the green, Captain," Carter called from the back of the bridge.

"Communications?"

"Loud and clear, *Perseverance*," the voice of the Launch Ops Manager rang through.

"Reactor systems check?"

"Reactor systems nominal, Captain. We're operating at twelve percent power," Martin replied.

"T-minus ten seconds."

Johnson looked around at her team, making eye contact with each of them as the final ten seconds counted down. Sorenson was at the helm and looking excited. Garcia working the reactor station; she looked calm and determined. Martin was at the engineering station, his face unreadable as usual. Robinson at communications was wearing a big goofy grin. And behind her was Carter, who was in charge of life support systems.

She relaxed her shoulders. When the countdown hit zero, she said, "Who's ready to make history?"

Sorenson grinned and nodded, "Let's do this."

"Accelerate to 1c," Johnson commanded. Sorenson slid two fingers up his display, and a faint hum from the engines became audible. The ship began to glide smoothly forward, and Johnson couldn't help but grin herself.

"Twenty-five percent power, Captain," Garcia called out.

"Roger that." Johnson nodded, eyeing her own panel. The diagram of the ship was displayed here as well, along with the warp tunnel, statistics on their energy production and usage, and brief heads-up displays of other critical systems.

"We're at .5c, Captain," Sorenson announced. He glanced over at Martin and commented, "She's running beautifully."

Johnson chuckled, "I thought we agreed, *Perseverance* is a *he*."

Sorenson rolled his eyes with a grin, "You decided! There was no agreement!"

"Fifty percent power, Captain," Garcia chimed in again.

Johnson consulted her display again, briefly estimating their speed to power consumption ratio in her head. "Martin, how's our power consumption?"

Martin shook his head, his brow furrowed slightly. "We're operating at a notably higher efficiency than I expected. The engines shouldn't be capable of pushing us much past one-and-a-quarter C, but at this rate we'd be able to press 2."

".75 C captain," Sorenson called out again. The blue filling the

rings of the ship on his display had deepened to a dark purple. It reminded him of the eggplants his mother used in eggplant parmesan.

"Martin is it just me, or is our speed increasing exponentially, and our power consumption only linearly?" Johnson asked with barely a hint of concern in her voice.

Martin nodded. "It does appear that way," his voice trailed off for a moment. "Garcia, are you getting any warnings?"

"No, all readings nominal, sir," she answered.

Johnson and Sorenson shared a look, each silently wondering if they'd be able to press past 1c.

"We're approaching .9C, Captain." Sorenson added. Martin was tapping away furiously at his console, a bead of sweat forming on his temples, and Garcia was scouring her own console for any clues.

"Alright, Sorenson, let's hold it at .95." Johnson ordered.

Sorenson nodded, sliding the throttle back down to neutral, "Alright, .95c Cap—" Sorenson trailed off, frowning at his console.

"What is it?"

"We're still accelerating. We're passing 1c now." Sorenson sounded puzzled.

Johnson trusted her helmsman, but she double-checked the throttle on her display anyways. It was, in fact, in neutral, but the ship's speed was still increasing. Now it was nearing one-and-a-quarter C. "Martin, talk to me."

"I'm at a loss, Captain. I don't understand why we're still accelerating. Our power output has stopped at about eighty percent power, and the power levels are steady." Martin wiped the bead of sweat away with the back of his hand.

Johnson looked to Robinson. "Let Houston know what's going on."

Robinson nodded, quickly explaining to Mission Control that they were accelerating beyond their target.

"Garcia, can we decrease the power available?"

She nodded. "I'll see what I can do."

The faint hum of the engines was becoming louder.

Martin grimaced as he announced, "Captain, we have some kind

of feedback loop forming. I'm not sure we'll be able to stop it."

"What do you mean, 'a feedback loop'?" Johnson inquired.

"Our energy consumption is remaining unchanged, but our velocity is exponentially increasing, and it appears to be feeding back on itself."

Johnson gritted her teeth. "In English, Martin."

"The faster we go, the faster we accelerate."

Johnson paled. "*Perseverance* isn't designed to go faster than 1.5c." She look at her screen as the engine noise became noticeably disruptive. "We're approaching 2 now."

"Should I try decelerating?" Sorenson chimed in.

Martin paused for a second before replying, "I suppose it couldn't hurt."

Sorenson nodded and eased the throttle back into the negative range. The ship began to vibrate and groan, and the green lines of spacetime on his display began to distort.

"Okay, let's not do that," Johnson commanded.

Sorenson quickly returned the throttle to neutral.

The ship continued to vibrate and groan. Johnson was reminded of the sound of wind blowing through the caves near her home in Colorado. "Martin, what is this?"

Even with the throttle in neutral, the formerly straight lines of spacetime on their displays were increasingly wavy, distorting more and more. Martin was scribbling away furiously on his own display, and shaking his head. "We might have disturbed the warp field. I think it's going to collapse."

"We are still accelerating, Captain. We're almost at 5c now."

Sorenson sounded nervous. Johnson had never heard him sound nervous when flying.

"I've lost contact with Mission Control," Robinson announced.

An alarm started blaring near Garcia's station, and she quickly added, "I'm getting a heat warning from the forward ring, Captain."

Johnson looked back at Martin, who was still working as fast as he could, and then to Carter behind him. She looked visibly frightened.

"How's our life support, Carter?"

Carter perked up and turned to her console, scanning through the readings quickly, "All readings nominal, Captain." She sounded relieved.

Johnson looked back to Sorenson again, trying to figure out another way to buy time for Martin to figure it out, but she was at a loss for words. Sorenson met her gaze for a second, before piping up, "We're approaching 10c."

Martin spoke into his headset, "Dr. Brenner, anything you can think of?"

There was a moment of silence, aside from the groans of metal and the roar of the engines, before Brenner's voice came back over the intercom, "Jettison the warp core?" He had said it more like a question than a statement, and it hung in the air for a long moment.

"Alright, do it," Johnson commanded. "Sorenson how fast will we be going in five minutes?"

Sorenson glanced over his panel briefly. "I'm not certain. More than 25c if I had to guess."

Johnson nodded, "Robinson, still no contact from Houston?"

"No, Captain. I think our speed is making communication impossible for the moment."

"Understood. In that case, I need you to estimate where we will end up after we jettison the core. Assume the exponential acceleration continues until then, and let me know what objects we'll be closest to."

Robinson nodded and got to work quickly.

Garcia was putting out literal fires with the onboard suppression system.

Carter was trying to help by redirecting O2 flow away from fires.

Martin was hard at work, chattering away about his procedures with Brenner.

Johnson looked back to Sorenson, and found him staring out the windshield with his mouth agape. "Look at the stars," he said.

She looked past him and out at the stars. They were shimmering, seeming to vibrate in place. No, they were slowly sliding towards the rear of the ship, as if someone had draped a black sheet with holes

poked in it across their windows, and was slowly pulling it towards the back.

"20c, Captain." Sorenson's alert brought her back to the moment.

"Martin, Brenner, update." She was in survival mode at this point. The ship's engines were screaming, and it was difficult to hear each other's voices outside of the headsets.

"Nearly there, Captain. I'll let you know when we're ready."

Brenner's voice was staticky and distorted, but still intelligible.

Johnson shook her head. "No, jettison the core as soon as you are able."

Martin looked surprised for a moment, but then nodded and continued working. He wasn't sure he'd be able to hear anything in a moment.

The bridge was abuzz with alerts, updates, and fervent conversation. All the while, the ship was accelerating, the engines roaring louder and the ship shaking violently.

And then it fell silent.

Johnson looked back at Martin. "It's out," he said.

She looked back at her console, the green lines of spacetime had evaporated from the display, and a small marker representing the engine core was flying ahead of the ship.

"Garcia, how are we doing?"

"We're still in one piece, Captain, but I've got damage to multiple systems, and we're venting atmosphere in—"

She stopped short, staring out the front windshield. Johnson turned to look, and saw something she couldn't comprehend for a moment. Space had stopped looking like a sheet. No, it looked like two sheets; the inner one now had a tattered, gaping hole. Strips of fabric, or rather spacetime, were fluttering in an impossible wind, and beyond the hole, unfamiliar stars speckled a purple and blue nebula.

"The core exploded," Sorenson answered her question before she could ask it.

"Martin, what's going on?"

Martin didn't reply immediately; he was also mesmerized by the

show.

As the pieces of tearing spacetime fabric reached the ship, it lurched forward. Everyone was thrown against their seatbelts and a horrible metallic tearing sound filled the cabin.

Johnson didn't know what to say, but was confident nobody would have heard her anyways once the lights went out. She held onto the console in front of her, still illuminated, as green lines rippled from the front to the back of the ship, followed by a bold red line.

She'd never seen a red line on this display in reality, only in the sim, but she knew what it meant: a break in spacetime. A tear, a wormhole. The space ahead of them was not their space. It might not even be their galaxy.

As the red line on the display moved down the length of the ship, the deafening sound of hail clattering on a metal roof filled the bridge. Outside the ship, the stars fluttered and wavered wildly before vanishing, with new ones appearing in their places.

Johnson could faintly hear Garcia yelling something about the aft ring. She looked at her, and saw her gesturing wildly at her screen. Johnson looked down at the console she was white-knuckling and saw what she assumed Garcia was trying to get across: the aft warp ring and been ripped off the ship and was no longer present on the display. Instead, there was a jagged line crossing the body of the ship about three quarters of the way to the back.

She was powerless to do anything. The console was still displaying, but none of the controls were responding. The lights in the cabin were flickering on and off, coms were down, all the crew could do was hold on and wait.

There was another deafening tearing sound, and a piece of the forward warp ring was flung at the bridge. It glanced off the front windshield, making everyone flinch away. Huge cracks in the window spiderwebbed away from the impact point, and for a moment Johnson thought for sure this was how she would die.

Then the clattering sound stopped. The stars outside settled and came to a stop as well. There was silence and darkness.

After a long moment, the lights came on, and Johnson called out, "Okay everyone, status reports."

Carter was the first to respond. "Life support to the bridge is functioning, Captain, but we only have about five and a half hours of air. The CO2 scrubbers are down."

Garcia was next. "We lost the aft warp ring entirely, and two quarters of the forward one. I've got more alerts than I could respond to in a week."

"Robinson, can we reach anyone?" Johnson asked. Robinson spoke into her headset a few times, changing a few settings before she shook her head.

"I can't reach the science team either," Martin added.

Garcia was quick to reply, "I'm not sure they made it, Captain. I'm not receiving any signals from that half of the ship. It could be a systems error, but I've got errors in just about every system we have."

Sorenson spoke up at that moment, "Captain, look." He was looking past Johnson. She turned to look out the window and was met with the sight of an enormous gas giant moving slowly passed the port side windows.

"Is that," she paused for a moment. "That's not Jupiter, is it."

Sorenson shook his head. "No. I'm not sure what star system this is. Should I put us in orbit?"

Johnson nodded. "Yes, get us into a stable orbit. That'll be one less thing to worry about." She turned back to Garcia. "What systems are working properly?"

Garcia scanned her console for a moment. "Bridge life support is functioning, minus the CO2 scrubbers. All but one of the lifeboats are reporting functional. Comms inside the ship are working, at least as far as the midship bulkhead. The bulkhead is closed. I still haven't been able to confirm anything about the science team."

The statement hung in the quiet air for several moments. Carter spoke up first. "May I remind you, Captain, that we only have a little over five hours of air. We need a plan."

Johnson looked around the cabin. Everyone looked as scared as

she felt, and she was sure they could see she was as well. She took a deep breath and faced forward in her seat, gripping the console again. "Okay. Garcia, see what systems you can get back online. Robinson, start charting the system as well as you can; start with this gas giant. Look specifically for terrestrial worlds with atmospheres. Carter, go investigate the bulkhead, and try to reach the science team. We're not giving up on them yet. Martin, assist Garcia, but focus specifically on engines. Sorenson, keep us in a stable orbit."

Everyone voiced their understanding and went to work. Carter unbuckled and left through the door at the aft of the bridge. Martin moved over to Garcia's console, and they spoke quietly about the possible repairs they could make. Robinson worked silently at her own console.

Johnson slouched a bit, realizing how tense her shoulders were. She looked out the windows again, admiring the beauty of the enormous world they were now orbiting.

"So," Sorenson paused, adjusting his controls a bit, "did we, like, tear a hole in the universe?" His voice was both bewildered and awestruck.

Johnson took a deep breath and nodded. "That would be my guess. I'm not sure how."

Sorenson shook his head. "Me neither." He adjusted the controls again. "This is a lot more difficult without all of our thrusters."

Johnson nodded, running through scenarios in her head. "I'm not sure it'll matter. Five hours of air, to fix all this?" She motioned at the ship in general. The large gas giant was now partially obscured by the spiderweb of cracks in the windscreen, and she silently thanked the intern who had suggested double-paneling the reinforced windscreens.

After nearly an hour of working, the crew reconvened on the bridge. They had confirmed the loss of the science team. Their section of the ship, towards the rear, had been torn off along with the aft ring. Robinson hadn't been able to locate the debris on her initial survey, but she had discovered that the gas giant had several moons, two of which

were earth sized, and one of those seemed to have a stable, oxygenated atmosphere.

Carter had also brought back the news that the life rafts were not as operational as Garcia had initially reported. Only five of them were actually operational. On the bright side, she had been able to restore one CO₂ scrubber, which, combined with their O₂ reserves, would stretch their usable air time at least a little.

Sorenson was still at the helm, doing his best to keep them in a stable orbit. The gravitational effects of the gas giant and its moons constantly fought against the crippled ship, and now they were limping their way towards the moon with an atmosphere.

Martin wrapped up their report with the news that they had indeed flung themselves into some distant solar system. He didn't know which. They didn't even know how far from Earth they might be. He had deployed a small buoy that was repeating their transponder signal, as well as broadcasting a general distress call, but he had pointed out that in the best possible case, they had somehow wound up in the Proxima Centauri system, and that it would be over eight years before they could even hope for a reply.

If that were the case, they would need to quickly make very serious repairs to the ship, and then somehow last eight years on whatever food they could scrounge up around the ship. But they had almost none. Their trip had been meant to be a two-day long science mission, an out and back to test the warp drive, as well as perform a handful of experiments farther from Earth.

Instead, they'd likely have to abandon ship altogether. But that raised another concern. Their escape pods—"life rafts," as the scientists had called them—had been damaged. Only five were operational, and there was six of them remaining. Johnson, Sorenson, Martin, Garcia, Robinson, and Carter.

As Johnson laid out the situation, the bridge was quiet. Nobody made eye contact. After a long pause, Johnson started, "As Captain, I think it's only appropriate that—"

"I'll stay," Garcia cut her off. Everyone else was silent, but pleading

with their eyes. "I'll stay," she repeated. "It makes sense. I know enough about the different systems of the ship to try to make repairs. With just me here, I'll be able to make the meals last for weeks instead of days. If you take Martin down to the surface of the moon, he can design a way for you to get back."

"Martina, you can't," Johnson pleaded.

Garcia shook her head and continued. "I have no family at home, no attachments. You have a husband. Sorenson's got a big family to get back to. Martin and Carter, you're both married as well." She paused for a moment, making eye contact with Robinson. "And that leaves me and Robinson. And I'm sorry Robinson, but I have the technical know-how to do this."

Robinson looked at the floor, tears welling from her eyes. "You're assuming any of us are getting home."

Garcia smiled sadly, "There's always a chance."

Martin shook his head solemnly. "Martina, I don't think there is. We're light years from home, best case. For all we know, we're in a different galaxy. Maybe even a different universe."

Garcia forced another smile. "So we just give up? No." She looked Johnson in the eyes and said, "I *will* stay."

With that it was settled. Garcia would stay with the ship in orbit, attempt to make repairs, and get a message home. The rest of the crew would escape to the surface of the Earth-like moon. They were mostly silent as they made preparations to leave. Carter did what she could with the life support systems, and assured Garcia that they would outlast the food. Robinson had tallied up the food, and said that if she rationed, she may be able to last as long as three months. Garcia said she planned on meeting them on the surface if she could repair another lifeboat, but it was obvious she had little hope of that.

An hour later, the crew reconvened in the life raft launch bay, their final preparations in place.

"I'll help however I can via radio," Martin said to Garcia.

"Of course," she replied.

Johnson took a deep breath before addressing the crew. "I know

this seems a little hopeless.” She trailed off for a moment, finding the right words to say. “But we do have a shot here. Martina is going to do everything she can, and I’m sure I don’t have to explain to you all how capable she is. This world has an oxygenated atmosphere, and seems to have abundant plant life, as I’m sure you all have noticed.” She gestured out a small porthole window towards the moon; from this close of an orbit the lush green continents and deep blue oceans filled the entire window.

“We don’t know what kind of life may be down there, how hostile it may be, or how docile,” Johnson continued, “but we are about to make amazing discoveries. Alien life, on another world outside our solar system, and you all are about to be the first to witness it. You are the most intelligent, hard-working, resourceful people I know, and there is no one else I’d rather be marooned with. I can’t explain why, but I know we will make it.”

As Johnson wrapped up her speech, the crew’s spirits were noticeably lifted, their dismal expressions replaced by looks of calm determination.

“Alright, let’s get going. We don’t want to burn any more of Martina’s air than we need to,” Martin said as he stepped into the small cylinder. Garcia closed the door in front of him, sealing him into the life raft with a soft hiss. Martin buckled himself in, looked through the small window at the crew, and gave a hopeful nod followed by a thumbs up.

Garcia nodded back, and pressed a button on the command console in the launch bay, and there was a soft thump as the life raft was jettisoned towards the planet.

Sorenson was next, climbing into the small cylinder and strapping himself in. He smiled warmly at Garcia before saying, “You got this,” and closing the door.

“Thanks, Ben,” Garcia said, before pressing the launch button. A moment later his life raft was hurtling away from the *Perseverance*.

Robinson was third, and she hugged Garcia tightly for a moment. “Come down to us as soon as you are able.”

Garcia smiled and nodded. “Don’t worry, Julie. I won’t abandon

you." Robinson nodded, sniffing a bit as she climbed into her raft. She strapped herself in, and a moment later was also launched towards the surface.

Carter stepped up, and shook Garcia's hand. "I had a moment while we finished packing and tried to scribble down some notes for you. Scrubbers 03 and 04 are not functional, but you just need to replace the sorbent canister on 03, the heating elements on both, and the compressor on 04. If you can get that done first, you should have air longer than you'll have power. Sorry I couldn't do more. Call me if you need any help."

Garcia nodded. "Of course. Thank you, Hayley. Stay safe."

"Always." Carter stepped into her pod, and a moment later Johnson and Garcia were standing alone on the bridge.

"Kate, you take care of them," Garcia said softly.

"I will. You take care of yourself. If there is any way we can help, let us know. And if it comes down to saving yourself, or the ship, save yourself. I think he's pretty far beyond repair," Johnson replied.

Garcia chuckled. "She."

Johnson smirked. "Agree to disagree."

Garcia laughed and rolled her eyes. "I will see you again, in this life or the next. Get going before you breathe all my air."

Johnson nodded, stepping into her life raft. "Take care of yourself," she repeated. "Check in regularly. If you have to, raft number seven is airtight, so you could use it as a last ditch effort. If we ask you to drop supplies, use any of the beyond-repair life rafts. Make sure to save seven for yourself, just in case."

Garcia nodded. "I will. Be safe." She pressed the launch button, and was alone.

Garcia hadn't been able to repair the antenna in time to talk to the crew on her last orbit of the gas giant, but this time around she was prepared. She just needed to ask if there was anything else she could bring down when she abandoned ship. She had run out of food two days ago, while the ship's condition had steadily deteriorated. The remains of

an ancient ring system around the gas giant had filled the space with micrometeorites that continuously bombarded the *Perseverance*, and she knew the ship's hull wouldn't last another trip around the Jovian world.

She was waiting now in the launch bay, with her small pack of personal items, a journal, and a few more assorted components she felt might come in handy. The last year had been rough, but she had managed to extend her food supplies enough to last, with the help of the potatoes in a few of the meals. Sorenson had talked her through a basic aeroponics system, and she had been able to grow them in the hall outside the midship bulkhead. It was the only part of the ship with big enough windows.

That said, there were only so many things she could use to supply nutrients to the plants on a ship, and she had run out months ago. The last of the potatoes had been eaten two days ago, and she was almost happy about not having had to eat anymore. Almost.

"*Perseverance* Ground, come in?" she said, releasing the radio's button. There was a long silent pause. "*Perseverance* Ground, come in, this is Garcia." Another stretch of silence, punctuated by the sound of a micrometeorite impacting the hull of the ship. She flinched.

"*Perseverance* Ground, do you copy?" she asked again. Nothing. "Alright, I'm not waiting around forever," she whispered to herself. She glanced around the ship once more, double-checking to see if there was anything else she could squeeze into her life raft. She wasn't certain that her repairs to its life support system would be effective, so she also had a small tank of O₂, only good for maybe ten minutes. Hopefully it wouldn't be necessary. She climbed into the life raft, strapped herself in, and clutched the tank tightly as she pressed the launch button.

Nothing happened.

She tentatively reached out and pressed it again, and it failed to respond again. She let out a long sigh, opening the hatch release and stepping back out into the launch bay.

After nearly an hour of examining the raft, she discovered the problem: the launch mechanism that held the pods in place was

damaged, likely from the micrometeorites. But that meant it was impossible to launch the life raft.

Garcia wandered back to her bunk in a daze. The thought of joining her crewmates on the surface, of sleeping away years at a time in one of Martin's cryopods had seemed foolish at first, but now it was all she wanted.

She sobbed for a moment, and then performed a Sign of the Cross, whispering a prayer. "God, please. Allow me to join my crew. Please, I will do anything. Abuela, I beg of you, please intercede on my behalf. Spare me this strife. Please." She paused for a long moment, and then took a deep breath, "But Your will be done before mine, Father."

She let out a long breath, and then stood slowly. She knew it was hopeless to try to repair the mechanism. She'd have to do so from outside the ship. She didn't have enough supplemental O2 for another extravehicular mission. She also lacked the parts, or the means to fabricate them.

She quietly resigned herself to her fate as she laid back in her bunk. As she rested quietly, listening to the impacts of more micrometeorites impacting the hull of the derelict ship, she said another quiet prayer, and began to drift off to sleep, her mind unable to come up with another solution.

Just as she felt sleep's restful embrace, she was jolted awake by a deafening bang, followed by a horrible metallic tearing sound. She jumped out of bed and raced for the bridge, but was stopped short by the bulkhead closing at the entrance to the bunks. "No!" She screamed, and pounded on the thick metal. The ship lurched under her feet, and she was thrown into the wall violently, her forehead split open by the impact.

She struggled to her feet as blood dripped into her eyes. She stumbled over to the window and gazed in awe as a swarm of rocks flew by, heading towards the gas giant. She didn't know if it was debris from the rock that had hit the ship, or simply a meteor shower, but she knew it had doomed her case.

Still, she could not help but stare in wonder at the show. The ship

followed the meteors towards the Jovian world, and it was only as she felt the glass in the window heating up that she realized her orbit had been destabilized enough to pull her into the moon's atmosphere.

Garcia didn't stop watching. After all, the ship was without power, without communications, without help. This would be over in minutes. She prayed that her crew would be safe, and that God would take her quickly.

A large chunk of rock crushed the bunk module at that moment, tearing it in half, and flinging its contents into the atmosphere. Every piece of debris and every little meteorite ignited as it sped through the upper atmosphere, burning away into nothing as they fell. A few of the larger chunks of the ship held together, and their scorched remains crashed into the side of a mountain, halfway across the planet from the rest of the crew.

Inside the bridge module, the ship's primary computer core, powered by a shielded fusion reactor, and with a small display found on its top, survived the crash. It contained all the data the team had collected, and all of the designs Martin had mocked up over the course of the year.

If someone were to find it, it would be a valuable guide to developing tools to leave the planet with.

Martin scratched another X onto the wall of the cave, representing the 400th day of their isolation on this planet. They had not yet had a winter, and Robinson had estimated that their planet rarely, if ever, saw freezing temperatures, so their humble camp in the shallow cave was rarely heated. Tonight though he had built a small fire, more for the light than the warmth, but he had to admit that he did enjoy the cozy feeling of a good campfire. Sorenson was onto something there.

He sat at a makeshift table, built out of off-white wood from the native trees, and wrote in a notebook he had made and bound himself:

Day 400. I'll be waking up Johnson in the morning.

The cryogenics I rigged up with the life rafts seem to

be functioning well enough, but they need constant maintenance. The 4th unit especially, I'll need to ask Garcia for more compression coils when she comes around again. My designs and notes are in my blueprint book on page 24.

Sorenson's garden has been relatively fruitful. We still have yet to explain the similarities between many of the plant and animal species here, and the ones home on Earth. Robinson's latest theory is that we didn't tear a hole in space, but in time, and have somehow traveled back to a prehistoric Earth. How we are orbiting a gas giant nearly the size of Jupiter doesn't seem to have factored into her theory.

Our moon is very geologically active, and I'm nearly done designing the generator for the hydrothermal vents to the south. If we're able to build it, we may be able to produce enough energy to get a signal out of the system. See notes above about the radiation in the outer asteroid belt.

Martin paused for a moment and stared into the faint blue coming from the cryo-sleep caskets he had built out of their life rafts. He had been able to strip the fifth for parts to repurpose their life support systems into cryogenic systems. Garcia had sent down a few shipments of supplies from the ship, but had always remained tightlipped about how the situation was up there.

He knew that meant it wasn't good. Judging by the number of components and other items she'd sent down, he assumed she'd stripped most of the ship of its useful pieces, save for life support and communications. The radiation in the asteroid field at the outer limits of this star system made most of their attempts at communication futile.

Martin sighed softly and turned back to his journal, picking up the pen to write a little more:

I've recorded all I can about the flora and fauna around for Carter. She has taken a fascination with the large gecko-creatures. They seem to be forming a very rudimentary society, but neither her, nor Robinson has been able to make any real headway with communicating. I'm not sure why she bothers, considering—

The sound of metal crashing onto stones came echoing in from outside the cave. Martin paused a moment, and was about to ignore it when he heard another, larger crash. He stood up and scrambled outside to find their small wind turbine laying on the ground, smoldering. The blades were detached and looked like they'd come off before it hit the ground. But what disturbed him were the arrows sticking out of it.

He looked into the darkness of the night, but couldn't see anything beyond the fringes of their camp. He couldn't even really see to the end of Sorenson's garden. He stepped back into the cave for a moment and retrieved a torch from the fire. Back outside, he carefully traced the perimeter of their walled off courtyard. The sandstone their cave was dug into was soft and easily workable, and they had managed to build a two meter wall surrounding an area the size of a large back yard out front of their cave. Martin had just finished sealing up the mouth of the cave, save for a doorway, earlier that week.

An arrow flew past his face, barely missing him by an inch, and embedding in the wall. Martin's eyes grew wide, and he turned back for the cave, sprinting straight through the garden, unconcerned with the damage he may be doing to the plants. He had no idea who or what may be attacking them. Their time on the planet had so far been peaceful, almost pleasant.

Another two arrows whizzed past him, landing in the ground near his feet. As he reached the doorway in the mouth of the cave, a shooting pain erupted from his abdomen, and he looked down to see the tip of an arrow protruding from his stomach. He shouted in pain as

he stumbled through the door way, collapsing on his side next to the pile of bricks. Blood poured from the wound, and he could taste blood in his mouth as he coughed and sputtered. He knew this was bad. Perhaps fatal.

Martin looked over at the caskets holding his crewmates. His family. Blood dribbled from his mouth as he groaned, clutching at his stomach. He pulled himself to his feet, desperately looking around for something he could use to protect them. His eyes fell on the stack of bricks next to the door.

Shouting echoed into the chamber from the mouth of the cave, a shrill, but somehow guttural sound. Martin suspected it was the strange gecko-creatures, but he wasn't waiting around to find out. He hastily grabbed a brick off the top of the pile and slammed it down into the door way, scooping some mortar with his right hand and spreading it roughly. His left clutched his stomach, and more blood dribbled out of the wound as he wheezed in pain.

As fast as he could, Martin continued to place bricks, trying to avoid placing himself in the doorway when possible. More shouting and crashing sounds could be heard from outside. It sounded like a war was happening. His mind raced as he placed brick, then mortar, then brick, then mortar.

A few more arrows shot through the small gap in the wall, one striking Robinson's casket. Martin swore, shuffling towards it a few steps before retreating back to the wall. If he was going to protect his crew, he needed to seal up this wall. He took his left hand off his stomach and placed bricks two at a time, trying to ignore the searing pain, and the blood running down his legs. He knew better than to remove the arrow until someone could treat his injuries properly.

His vision started to become blurry as he neared the top of the doorway. He reached up to place another brick in the gap and was overcome by lightheadedness. His head swam. He was going to bleed out. He needed immediate medical attention. He placed another brick. He looked down. He was standing in a small pool of his own blood. He looked at his crewmates, asleep in their caskets. He had to protect them.

He placed another brick. Two more.

Martin's breathing was becoming ragged, and his shirt and pants were soaked in blood. His vision was fading. He knew he only had minutes left as he placed the last brick, pressing it neatly into the last hole in the wall. He coughed again, more blood spurting from his lips.

He shuffled towards the nearest casket, Robinson's, and swore. The arrow had gone right through the control panel. He looked at the remaining caskets holding Johnson, Sorenson, and Carter. He had a vague idea that Sorenson might know some first aid. He had grown up in the middle of nowhere, right? A boy scout or something? Martin dropped to his knees and crawled towards Sorenson's casket. It was on the far end.

He left a trail of blood behind him as he clutched at the ground, moaning softly in between his shallow, ragged breaths. Martin reached Sorenson's casket, and realized this was it. He couldn't reach the control panel from the ground, He couldn't even lift his head anymore. As his vision receded and darkened, his mind began to wander. He had often wondered about the possibility of an afterlife. He had always dismissed the idea to others, but now he was about to find out. He wondered if it would be like that place in Austria he'd been to as a kid. Something about salt. Beautiful flowers. Pain. Rolling hills. Blood. A fortress. A river. A field. The last thing Martin could remember before losing consciousness was the thought that he had done right by his team. They were safe, and the rescue team could find them with the beacon.

Outside the wall in the cave, the field burned, the turbine was ransacked, and the wall was knocked down. The fire burned out into the jungle, and when the extinguishing rains finally came, it washed freshly loosened soils into the cave. The soils piled up against the brick wall, filling in the cave. The jungle pushed back into the scarred pit, reclaiming and rejuvenating the land.

Among the local tribes, the invaders had been conquered. And over time invaders turned into spirits, and spirits into demons, and demons into myth. The cave that held the four remaining caskets was

untouched for generations, viewed as a place of evil. When the Great Flood swept away the nearby village, the only accounts of the demons from the sky was lost, and the four humans slept, frozen in stasis, while time marched steadily onward.

Jonathan Sladko is a commercial aviation major who dreams of flying spaceships someday. He is also studying aerospace safety and space related topics, and enjoys writing science fiction based loosely on the science he is learning. He started writing at a young age and wants to publish a novel before he graduates.

***photography
& artwork***

Photograph

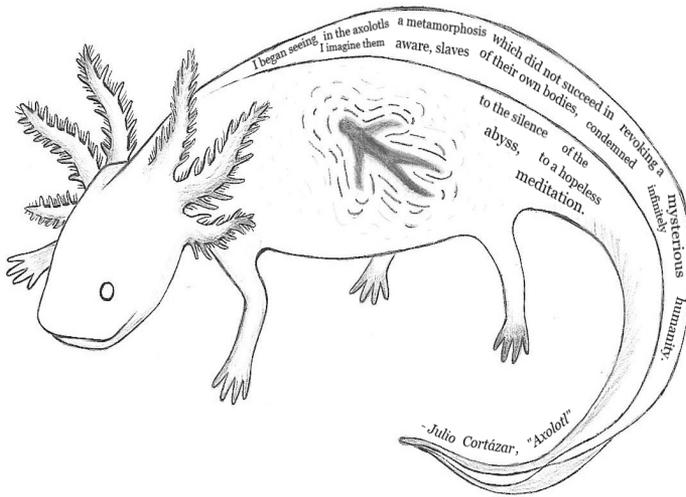
Charles Steinberger

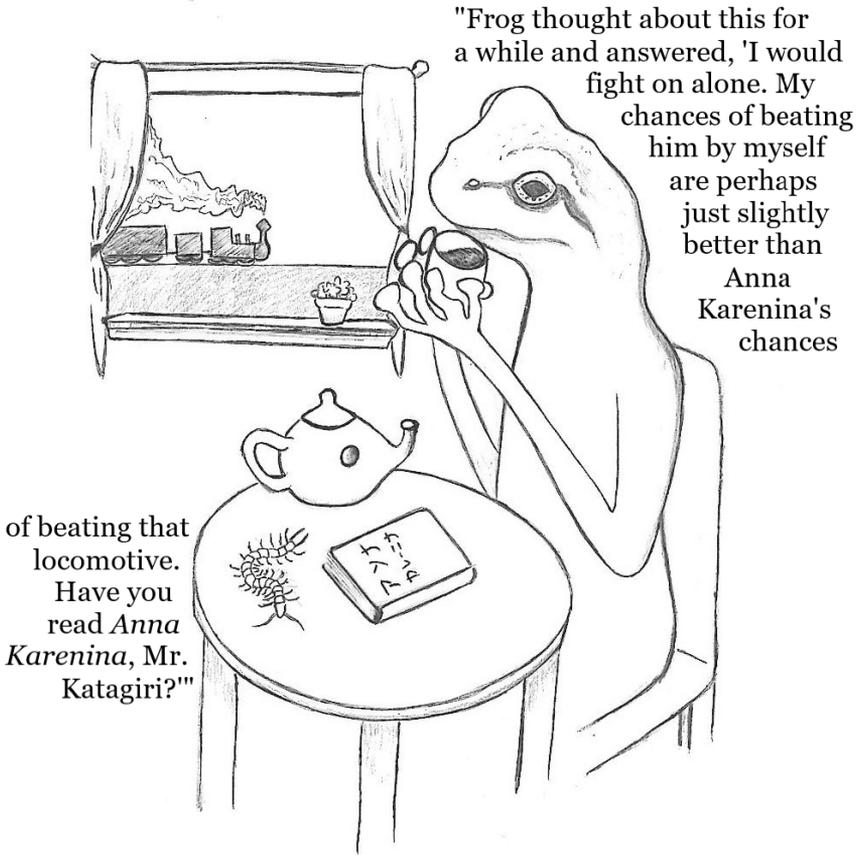


Charles Steinberger is a law student who likes to take photos of cool things.

Two Drawings

Jona L. Pedersen





- Haruki Murakami, "*Super-Frog Saves Tokyo*"

Jona L. Pedersen grew up in Norway, but has since relocated to the US where they are pursuing English and biology at the University of North Dakota. Their work appears in *Floodwall*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *The Allegheny Review*. When they aren't studying or writing, they like to explore the outdoors, roll dice with friends, and create art. Other passions such as wildlife biology, entomology, and environmental justice also inspire their writing. Check out their other work at www.jonalpedersen.com or follow their Twitter @JonaLPedersen for updates.

Three Photographs

Sarah Dignan







Sarah Dignan is a senior communication major, double minoring in English and graphic design. She is from a small town in Minnesota, located five miles south of the Canadian border, called Warroad (also known as Hockeytown, USA). She currently works for Opp Construction as their Graphic Design & Marketing Intern. In her spare time, Sarah enjoys photography, hanging out with friends and family, going to UND sporting events (especially hockey), and mentoring a high school robotics team: FIRST Robotics Team 8188 Grand Force.

Photograph

Emilia Adkinson



Emilia Rose Adkinson is a senior majoring in English at UND. She is working towards her certificates in both creative writing and editing and publishing, with the hopes of being an author or a publisher. She is originally from South Carolina, and she spends her free time reading, doing puzzles, and facetimeing her family. She loves journaling and writing, and hopes to touch people with her work.

Three Photographs

Elena Uhlenkamp

Hello There!



Behind the Pizza Place



Catkins and Moss



Elena Uhlenkamp is an English major from a small town in the heart of Minnesota. She enjoys reading and writing fiction, especially fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Besides writing fiction, she likes trying her hand at photography and writing poetry, along with enjoying escape rooms with family and friends. Elena is working on a series that mixes sentient robots with demons from another dimension.

Lost in the Sun

Simi Kaur







Simi Kaur is a portrait photographer attending UND as a senior. She enjoys capturing the essence of people and their passions.

poetry

Fleeting Autumn

Het Mehta

Sometimes I go down to the stream
and the water makes me long for youthful dreams,
of the fleeting autumn that soon will leave.

As the leaves begin to decay,
I can see my breath floating astray.

And as the autumn breeze fades away,
so do the hummingbirds and their songs the same way.

Taking it all in, I think about this season,
and how it leaves without any rhyme or reason.

Knowing the harsh winter will come
helps me appreciate this fleeting autumn sun.

***Het Mehta** is a medical laboratory science major at the University of North Dakota. He is currently a junior in the program and enjoys writing poetry in his free time. He enjoys winter activities and spending time with his friends and family.*

stars

Jacob Cummings

the elegance of silence
the dark abyss lightened by the stars
a sick beauty in their demise

we search for them longingly
hoping they can tell us
who we are.
if they are saying something
we can't hear them

the gouge of the milky way
showing us how insignificant we are
losing a single sock
doesn't matter on the cosmic scale

to float in the vast emptiness
is a desire close to my heart
will i ever reach it?
will it even matter in the large context of the universe?

no.
so i only dream
longing to be one with them

Jacob Cummings is a psychology major, going into a career in counseling after receiving his masters. He loves to write, whether it be poems, book-length stories, or even song lyrics. He tends to explore topics that stem from his own life experiences.

She

Danika Ogawa

I.

she floats on the surface and skips work twice a week, she can't bear the ringing of that damn sound, her hair is constantly changing and it's blonde now, but tomorrow it will be pink or purple maybe, and her eyelashes and tan are fake like her smirk, and she doesn't go to class and it hurts, and her pants don't fit like they used to, and the lexapro isn't doing its job, and it's all so gray and macabre, and she keeps sipping, keeps sipping, keeps sipping,

II.

and its vomit on the floor and the house is a mess and she hates herself even more for it and she can't not look in the mirror and fix what she's told to hate but expected to love, And the bank account is always empty, and she can't make herself look at old pictures anymore—

III.

And,

Her hair grows,

She calls her mom more now,

The books have more bent pages,

She goes to class now, she even talks,

She looks up at the sun and smiles even though it hurts her eyes.

She bought some new pants, and she likes these better.

She looks behind with a wave.

Danika Ogawa is currently a junior at UND. She is majoring in English while working towards a certificate in creative writing. When she is not writing, you can find her reading, or teaching dance at a studio in town. Danika is from Grand Forks, ND.

Three Poems

Elena Uhlenkamp

Why I Write

Tip-tap goes the keyboard; scritch-scratch goes the pencil;
thunderous thoughts falling into steady words
in hopes of chasing away the little mind devil.

I sit, etching my thoughts in the pages of a journal,
hummingbird phrases flying around my mind's orchids;
Tip-tap goes the keyboard; scritch-scratch goes the pencil.

Here comes the mind-demon, trying to muzzle
my mind, to pull me downwards. I push words onwards
in hopes of chasing away the little mind devil.

Sentence yarn form from my brain's spindle.
I knit prose and verse with the neighboring dryads.
Tip-tap goes the keyboard; scritch-scratch goes the pencil.

The mind-demon doesn't quit; we continue with our battles.
He's gone now, but he'll be back. Ink stains my skin purple.
Tip-tap goes the keyboard; scritch-scratch goes the pencil,
in hopes of chasing away the little mind devil.

Elegy to a Beloved Home

I remember your walls.

Dark, smooth, wood paneling skin,

Horses tattooed in a still dance by my bed.

Mirror eyes of frosted glass and etched trees.

I remember your rooms.

A womb for two growing children.

Bubbles gliding through the air with high-pitched giggles.

Your kitchen stomach and living room heart blended together.

I remember your halls.

Veins and arteries pumping joy.

Nerves and girls racing back and forth.

Laughter and singing, dancing through memories.

But now you have fallen apart.

Your skeleton lays rotting in a field.

Your ribs taken and formed into something new.

I remember you well: your body and soul and mind.

Echoes of History

I stand in the cream-colored halls, and here
I witness the echoes of history.
Eerie music dances wall to wall, where
Pure figures appear in bright finery.
Large masquerade masks shine silver and gold.
Formal wear swirls in ghostly sheets of fog.
One and two. Twirl. Bow. A dance of the old.
The music is the prophet of footslog.

But the ghosts are flyspecked and stained yellow.
Lovely masks hide their sneers and tears and fears.
No difference with us and ghosts; we raze
Our own pasts, unique and flawed, left hallow.
Plain, white, teardrop faces you must wear, peers,
To hide the faults of your pasts and life's frays.

Elena Uhlenkamp is an English major from a small town in the heart of Minnesota. She enjoys reading and writing fiction, especially fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Besides writing fiction, she likes trying her hand at photography and writing poetry, along with enjoying escape rooms with family and friends. Elena is working on a series that mixes sentient robots with demons from another dimension.

Forever Thirteen

Claire Arneson

Here I swing,
laughing and playing.
You get to leave,
but here, I am staying.

Forever thirteen,
because of an accusation.
My body goes slack,
losing sensations.

My breath catches
as I start to go higher.
My body floats,
and my eyes grow tired.

You gather around,
laughing and yelling.
But I am still moving—
I don't smell the burning.

You hoist me up,
the rope 'round my throat.
I cough and sputter
as I inhale smoke.

I drop into the fire,
burning and mean.
My family buries me.
I am forever thirteen.

Claire Arneson is a junior at the University of North Dakota. She is studying English and communications and hopes to work in the publishing industry in the future. She loves reading all of the books she can, and cheers the loudest at the hockey game.

Three Poems

Aubrey Roemmich

Laughter Is Warm, But So Is Fire

The house is loud,
a little bit on fire,
but the laughter is warm.

Cards are spewed on the table
along with grudges and forgiveness.
Food, and drink, and the fact that last year the parents
forgot their daughter's birthday are
crammed in the kitchen.

Did she forgive them?

No, not really, but she doesn't bring it up anymore.

One cousin, two cousin, three cousin, four.

Dr. Suess used to be read in this house,
but he long ago vacated these walls...

the walls, the walls, the walls tell all—
the secrets, the lies, the failures.

What makes a house a home?

What makes a group of people family?

Because in the midst of it all they're lonely.

Lonely and longing for something they can't have?

Or maybe they can?

No one is quite sure but they're all adults with mortgages,
they have their lives together.

Delusional and demented they

dance down memory lane reminiscing on the
good, the bad, and the ugly.

There's nothing like a family gathering to bring out the sharks—
sharks, they're all sharks circling for blood
(at least *I* didn't major in art history).

Poke and prod. Pinch and snap.

The house is loud, a little bit on fire, but the laughter is warm.

Despite it all there's love.

Real honest love.

The type of love you don't always find,
but seems to be forged into the familial structure
(I hate this person, but I love them regardless).

Loyalty, joy, and shared experience all mixed together to
create a volatile concoction of...

Love? Happiness? Heartbreak? Loyalty? A never-ending sense of
belonging?

To something, somewhere—
somewhere I have a family.

A family that loves me and I love them.

Isn't that all anyone can ask for?

A house that is loud, a little bit on fire, but filled with warm laughter?

UNWILLING MARTYR

the HOLY GHOST wants you to feel it
 again, the HOLY GHOST has made a lake
 of itself. you can take it into your lungs.
 the HOLY GHOST animates your blood cells
 and moves your arms like a marionette.
 wading through the shallows the lake
 opens like moses commanded it. trekking
 a mountain the HOLY GHOST burns you like a
 dry bush and etches it commandments
 into your back. the HOLY GHOST wants you to hurt
 again. no more hiding in the whale's stomach,
 it spits you into the deep end and the
 HOLY GHOST makes the doll dance. across the
 water your heart skips like a
 stone. wrapped in a crown of thorns he denies you
 three times and the raven eats your eyes.
 blind, blind, blinded by rage your ribcage
 is a stained-glass window and the single red
 candle signals from your liver. the HOLY GHOST
 lines the chain-smoking angels up your
 spine and wrenches your jaw open. bloody wine
 poured into gaping mouth, staining your
 teeth and labeling you "sinner." knees
 bent before pillars of salt holding your lovers
 hair in your hands, the hangman's noose
 seems so inviting occupied by judas' swinging
 feet and skeletal smile.

*First three lines are borrowed from Brittany Cavallaro's poem *Leitmotif*.

Tough

There's something in the ground here,
Something that keeps me close.
Like the Joads figuring things out,
I hear the sweet call of oranges
And grapes,
But this land is my home.

Home

Home

Home

There is a resilience that my great-grandparents possessed,
They passed it to my grandparents,
And my grandparents passed it to my parents
Who passed it to me.
A resilience that is woven into bone,
And calloused hands,
And warm smiles.
A resilience that is the root of a family's tree.

"We're tough," I used to hear people say.
The same people that survived blizzards.
And floods. And tornados.
Tough could be synonymous with stubborn.
But stubborn implies stupid and these
People are not stupid; they're
Tough.

I hear the sirens call,
They are promising sweet fruits
To eat. But seas of gold are just

As inviting for weary feet.
Rolling hills, and windy plains
Sweep me away, but I always
Follow the river back.

Back to home
And tough people.
Back to windswept gold
And nice strangers.
Back to solid ground
And the lullaby of a quiet night.

Aubrey Roemmich is currently an undergraduate student at the University of North Dakota. After her graduation, she hopes to attend law school and get an MFA in creative writing. She aspires to be a literary lawyer and work in the publishing industry. She spends her free time reading, writing, and listening to music.

The Lost and Found

Julia Tietz

If found please return to—

The sunsets and rises
While she walks aimlessly
Uncertain
Of where to go
Of what to do

Time passes her by in seconds
Everything the same
Lost and unknowing
Of who to go to
Of how to find her way home again

If found please return to—

Baggage claim
Smudged ink for a return address
Watching all who came before her
unsuspecting
Of who they follow
Of what they want

A familiar hand
A face long forgotten
Whispering and telling
Of tales from her past
Of where she belongs

If found please return to—

Expectations that fade away
Her glazed over eyes become clear again
Showing her all
Of what she's missed
Of those who awaited her return

They ask her with sweet kisses
Where have you been?
Did you find what you were looking for?
Welcome home they say
With tears soaking her shirt
We've missed you

Julia Tietz is an aspiring writer and publisher who will be graduating this spring with an English major and Spanish minor. She loves writing about mental health, love, and nature in her poetry but hopes to try out writing about the supernatural. Besides writing, she loves animals, watching movies, and playing music. She hopes to one day publish her own book of poetry and her first novel.

The Lonely Sea

Valkyrie Bradford

She sat close on the edge,
Toes tapping soft the top
Of azure water brush the ledge,
Those sandy shores, never to stop.

She stared at sky of ruby red,
Mourning in her azure eyes,
For it would never be her stead
To be a shade apart from the skies.

She longed to be a midnight blue,
Like her sister's velvet cloak of night.
But she couldn't shed her lapis hue
Anymore than the sky could go white.

Oh, to be emerald like rolling hills,
To gleam of her mother's jade skin—
Alas, instead of verdant frills,
She was cyan, as she'd always been.

She loved her father but could hardly see
Through the yellow rays he bore.
The pain of her heart from jealousy
Of longing for the gold he wore.

But she was not the sun or shore,
Or her sister, with envious skill;
For life or light, she couldn't pour,
Nor shift her shade at will.

No, she was roiling depths and seas,
With endless trenches, sunless streets,
No grass or trees, fog or breeze,
Just her below her rumpled sheets.

Their gaze was love she couldn't face,
Just aching shame, to see her kin.
For they didn't shun her in disgrace,
But they were kinder than they should've been.

It wasn't her purpose or her place,
Sitting below the surface bright,
Longing, crying for her own space
Where swirling colors were alight.

The Sea sank deep below herself,
Back to lament her plight at home,
To cry upon a coastal shelf,
Tears of brine and salt and foam.

For never could she be the same,
Couldn't create as her family did.
She'd never earn the "god" name
So here below, forever, she hid.

Where cousins and siblings succeed,
Life didn't flow from her as them.
No springs or flowers, bird or seed,
Beast and man, none to come.

She'd reached before, for that life,
To admire those above and around.
But all she'd brought to them was strife,
All her loves, in her, did drown.

In her lonely state underseas,
She tried to mold life of her own.
Simple beasts for company,
And reaped the life she had sown.

And life, she made, indeed that day,
Endless swarms of teeming beasts.
Her love flooded in swirling grey,
Welcomed them to gleaming feasts.

Yet even this couldn't still her pain,
Not in the depths, far deep in the dark.
She'd doomed them here, in black vein,
Never to be seen in daylight stark.

And even had they been pulled to air,
The surface recoiled from her spawn.
Insults and fear flung at her heir,
So below they remain, and she is gone.

Fled yet again, to desperately try,
Endeavor near sky to form a friend.
Sleek, clever swimmers, some even fly!
Yet their elegance wasn't seen, in the end.

No, her open fields of cool aqua blue
Were called deadly, forbidden to roam.
Condemned by men on land who grew,
She sank below, to her hollow home.

Sorrow held her heart that day,
Among fins and tails and eyeless stares,
To see even her children swim away.
Let this barren sea be theirs.

She could not comprehend,
That her children of the foam
Shared her need for a friend,
And sought to bring one home.

So far below the surface gleam,
The Sea hid far from her kin;
Far from gods, men, sunbeam,
To wallow alone, deep within.

Storms raged, no more careful reins,
No longer to hold herself at bay.
Let them fear her hurricanes,
Give them reason to shiver away.

No one calls out to the sea—
Why, for the salt that stings,
Landlocked for many a century,
Crowding about their fresh springs.

Of forlorn tragedy below,
The Sea mourns all alone.

Valkyrie Bradford is a second-year English graduate student, passionate about cheesy literature, bad humor, and her dog and cat that constantly distract her from actually writing.

Three Poems

Chad Erickstad

After the Fire

Headline: *Fire ruins Cannon Ball school playground. "Sunday's fire destroyed a swing set and charred other play equipment at the facility on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation," Amy R. Sisk, The Bismarck Tribune, Oct. 12, 2015.*

After the fire
 crawls slowly
 into the playground,
 surrounds each steel pole
 holding the whole works
 in the air,
 after the
 vivid yellows and blues
 blister and blacken,
 after the plastic slides
 drip, then drizzle,
 the swings melt
 and drop into the flames,
 and the merry-go-round collapses
 and tilts unnaturally
 to the scorched ground,
 after this creeping horror
 gently decimates
 all in its inching path,

it disappears like smoke
dissipates, seemingly out of
existence, and later,
when the children
come out for recess,
little do they know
that right now, as they
stand around the structure and
stare with blank faces,
this will be the most honest
and seminal lesson
they will learn at this school,
or any other.

Half-Staffed American Flags

Americans

forget

Americans

ignore

Americans

dismiss

Americans

turn out

Americans

shut out

Americans

gun down

Americans

in the recent past, lowered the American flag rarely—to honor the passing of dignitaries or signify a resonant national tragedy—not eulogize weekly gunshot casualties who lay bleeding and dying in schools and churches and public squares, victims of psychologically distraught Americans lacking any real human connection or ancillary support for serious mental afflictions, packing semiautomatic pistols and bump-stocked assault rifles that spray bullets like drizzles of rain, shooters unable to cope with an unending barrage of sensationalized media voices in their heads, grasping at any relevance available from a mention on the 24-hour TV news, swathing other Americans with bullets and leaving a windrow of dead to winnow in the draft of talking heads howling and pointing fingers without a single significant intimation to help stop the bleeding and the dying and the killing of

Americans

disparage

Americans

antagonize

Americans

outrage
Americans
shout at
Americans
scream at
Americans
gun down
Americans.

Message Received

Dear Writer,

Thank you so much for sending in your writing—reading it was truly an interesting experience. This was clearly an earnest attempt at artistic expression. Unfortunately, we are unable to accept your submission. We feel that your creation needs work. Although we rarely do this, we have included some suggestions:

Consider replacing every word in your composition with a *different* word. Try not to use synonyms. We feel that it is important to change the structure, tone, rhythm, and meaning of your work. Replacing every word will expedite this process. We think that making this minor change will result in a better piece and possible publication (although not in *this* publication).

Honestly, though, publication for a writer of your “talents” is a bit of a longshot. Have you considered other lines of work? Based on your submission, we feel that writing may not be a hallmark of your current abilities. Although, again, we rarely do this, we have assembled a list of possible, more reasonable occupations that you may find more suitable to your talents:

- Restroom attendant
- Chicken sexer
- Self-storage unit manager
- Elf assistant to a mall Santa
- Toll booth operator
- Exorcist (minor order only)
- Test subject in clinical trials
- United States Senator

We at this publication fervently believe that by submitting your work, perhaps as a “cry for help,” you are putting yourself on the right

track toward self-improvement and, hopefully, some primitive form of happiness. Ideally, you will take this advice and bury your artistic dreams deep, deep underground and become a useful member of our crumbling society. Good luck!

Sincerely,

The Editors

Chad Erickstad is a junior at UND; he is pursuing a bachelor's degree in English.

Tomorrow

Caitlin Scheresky

The youth have gone mad.
Breaking windows, twisting words,
turning their backs on what is known.
These kids don't know
what they're doing.
Too loud,
entirely selfish.
A society crumbles
if it lacks the means to survive.
Everything we've worked for,
now a pile of dust at our feet.

Listen to my cry, it is all
I have left. I am bones
and ache and plastic.
I am glass and I shatter.
I am here and yet I am not.
I am forever here, a product
of my upbringing. I leave footsteps
in my wake, I climb the clouds
and reach for the Sun.
How did I get here?

I feel everything and yet nothing at all.
The constant battle between feeling
and knowing I'm alive,

and going numb, painless.
Limbo –
a void of warmth and safety,
what once was can never be again.
This is what the known
has done to us.

Today,
as the planet burns,
as colors fade
from society,
lives lost and hearts broken,
we few, we sorry
empty few,
hold the torch and the cross.
We hold flags and fists
above our heads.
We scream.
We embroider our skin, leaving
flowers and fire.
We take what we can get.

We are the skeletons in your closet.
I am fire and smoke.
I am the birds in the sky.
I am ash. I am dust.
When we come,
you will hear us before
you see us.
The clinking of keys and
screams of the damned,
footsteps of soldiers in a war
none of us wanted.

But we will show up.
Time and time again
we show up,
hope brimming our eyes.
Until time runs out
we will show up,
we will be present.
You will have no choice but to
look us in the eye
and face the hell
you have created.

See you soon.

Caitlin Scheresky is a sophomore English major at UND. When she's not reading or writing ideas in her notes app, she's petting every dog or cat she can find.

Conversation with Life

Emilia Adkinson

Life is a weird thing.

We live and we strive for something just
out of reach, and if we manage to obtain it,
then what?

We keep on living, finally feeling accomplished,
until Death steals it from us.
She creeps in and takes all of it.
The joy, the love, the animation.

I used to think that life wasn't worth living.
How could I live when darkness
kept finding me? I had to learn that you can't
hide from the darkness, you have to live around it.

I had a conversation with Life one time.
She told me that I was too sad, that I
Needed to find my purpose, my happiness.
That it would push me towards greater things.

She could not have been more wrong.

Life is exhausting, a black hole that sucks
all the energy out of me. A void of pain and despair.
A form of existing without feeling anything.
A constant state of hollowness.

Little did I know that Life does not give up,
she keeps trying, keeps pushing me
towards that great light at the end of
the tunnel.

Life is a whisper, not always loud or
decipherable. You have to strain, to really try
and hear, and only when you slow down and listen
do you hear what's truly important.

Life is meant to be taken advantage of. It isn't
all about the dark moments when Death wins out.
It's about turning those dark moments
into something brighter than you could ever imagine.

She might have been right.

Emilia Rose Adkinson is a senior majoring in English at UND. She is working towards her certificates in both creative writing and editing and publishing, with the hopes of being an author or a publisher. She is originally from South Carolina, and she spends her free time reading, doing puzzles, and facetimeing her family. She loves journaling and writing, and hopes to touch people with her work.

the day after

Autumn Thompson

my eyes squint in the blinding light of the early afternoon sun
bottles all across the counter
a spilled drink on the coffee table
half-eaten cardboard pizza, still in its box as if it was just delivered
my favorite plant knocked over—her soil litters the ground like confetti
it might as well be

i sit in the silence that weighs
no voices shout to change the song, footsteps stumbling in suit to reach the
remote
laughter echoes in the walls of my two-bedroom apartment
no strangers shouting up from the ground floor, raising their respective
completely non-suspicious fast food cups in our direction
no drunken dancing, twirling, spinning two-step to some song i don't quite
remember the words to

no
today it is just me
surrounded by ghosts shaped as littered blankets and the bodies taking the
form of red plastic cups they left behind
i am filled with an odd sensation
a warmth that fills me more completely than the alcohol ever could
sinking into the couch, i notice the way the pillows are arranged
there is nothing more human than celebration

celebration of what?
i'm not too sure
friendship? old times? memories of days not so long past?
it doesn't matter
i glance at the vacuum that looms in the corner
not yet
maybe just a few more minutes
then
i'll sweep up the memories from many long nights past
and put them away for safe keeping

Autumn Thompson is a third-year biology student on the pre-professional health plan with a minor in psychology and nutrition. Writing started as a once-in-a-while hobby in high school, and now she continues to write as a way to express herself and to interpret the human experience.

Two Poems

Jona L. Pedersen

eulogy for the giant water bug in the target parking lot

streetlights spoke with you,
little lighthouses beckoning titanic—
but you are my moby doll
and the harpoon is my needle
in your exoskeleton
serrating like your pincers
dragging prey to the coulee depths
and delivering the killing blow. in these rivers
you may be nøkken's violin, but here?
your angel wings fumble
across the parking lot.

your collision into target
reminds me of drowning:
swimming pool blues
haloing my body
on vhs tape. I wonder if
that's how you feel
when I carry you in my purse
and take you home
where I lay you to rest
in the back of the freezer.
as your body surrenders,
are you dreaming in vhs
or of winter?

the english coulee

is called english because here
the english majors congregate
after dark, purifying
what no longer serves us.
the shattered light
of our demolished lighthouse
skims the water's surface
like fireflies seeking each other
in the june night.

descendants
of paradise skip hopscotch
in reverse, leaving tamagotchi
ghosts in our wake. here, in our river
of eden, there's no more birthday
cake—only blown-out wishes
and fragmented light, drifting down
the coulee's spine; pooling together
where we drowned the false prophet
and baptized ourselves
in his blood.

as september lurks
we drink from the coulee's mouth
an elixir of youth. we lie
in the water's embrace
dreaming. then, we awaken
on the darkest day of winter,
surrounded by the lighthouse remnants
of our reckoning, and now,
the coulee carries our bodies

home again—
where crows never die,
wishes upon ladybugs
always come true, and
candles on the cake
never blow out;
our bodies
aflake.

Jona L. Pedersen grew up in Norway, but has since relocated to the US where they are pursuing English and biology at the University of North Dakota. Their work appears in *Floodwall*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *The Allegheny Review*. When they aren't studying or writing, they like to explore the outdoors, roll dice with friends, and create art. Other passions such as wildlife biology, entomology, and environmental justice also inspire their writing. Check out their other work at www.jonalpedersen.com or follow their Twitter @JonaLPedersen for updates.

Blissful Night

Dustyn Huber

As the moon peaks through the clouds,
and the snow falls gently under the moonlight,
it feels like I'm dreaming;
oh, what a beautiful sight.

In this dark blanket, spotted by streetlights,
time seems to freeze.
With the snow dancing and dazzling,
I sway under the harsh winter breeze.

I know not how long this moment will last,
so I stand here in bliss,
etching it in memory, like a chisel in stone.
In order for me to someday reminisce.

Oh what a Blissful Night

Oh what a blissful night

Dustyn Huber is a student at the University of North Dakota who will be graduating with a bachelor of arts in psychology in December 2022. Growing up, Dustyn was involved in the arts, being a stagehand for theater in his school as well as a trumpet player in his school band. He thought to give poetry a shot to broaden his creativity.

nonfiction

Duane

Danika Ogawa

I remember grabbing his hand after it was over. I remember making myself grab his hand. I remember being disgusted with myself for thinking his dead hand was disgusting. I remember expecting it to be cold already, just seconds without blood flow. It was warm. I knew it wouldn't last.

"You're just a body now," I whispered at the lifeless frame. I almost believed it. Maybe saying it aloud would make me believe it more. I ran my thumb along the protruding veins atop his hand, like I had seen my mom do when comforting someone. It's such a shame. His skin was always pink, warm, and plump. Now it's empty, thin, and cold.

"My grandpa is in heaven, not here." I made myself say it. Maybe saying it aloud would stuff the idea in my brain. Maybe I thought it would make me understand. It didn't.

I knew what was happening. I understood that he was in a car crash. It would be odd if a head-on collision going 75 miles per hour *didn't* put you in the hospital. It was the speed of the situation that perplexed me. Not five days ago he was simply driving home from a quick weekend trip. (A funeral, ironically.)

I had never truly dealt with grief. At fifteen, my chief concerns were wishing I had a thigh gap, and One Direction's new single. Grief was the thing in the movies that happened right before the climax, the good part. Always clad with the dramatic montage of crying, wearing sweats to school, and sitting alone at lunch. The reality of it is much more private. There is no climax.

"Come on Dani, let's go." My mom had beckoned me out the door. It baffled me that we were expected to leave him there, alone.

There was no mortician to pull a sheet over his head. Like a movie, the hallways were dark, no doctors or nurses anywhere. Only him. A body.

My grandpa was so likable. He was quiet and loved routine. He never had kids and married my grandma after my mom and her siblings had already graduated high school. His grandkids were his kids. He was homecoming king in 1959, with my grandma as queen. Duane and Mary Ann. They were your typical high school sweethearts. He wasn't Catholic, so my grandma's parents encouraged her to marry someone else. She did and had my mom and her siblings. The marriage didn't last, and she ended up finding her way back to him, thirty years later.

He was always there, quietly. He frequently made Bloody Mary's at night and black coffee in the mornings. A thin bald man with red-toned skin, his eyes were a pale gray, almost blue. Looking back, I was most happy and at peace when I was at the lake with him. He did anything for my cousins and me. Every big event, there he was, the 94 camcorder in his hand.

The summer I was ten, almost eleven, I had a keen interest in American Girl dolls. My friends had large doll houses that they would play with, straight from AmericanGirl.com, and I had mentioned I wanted one. When I went to the lake to visit later that summer, he told me we were going to build one together. In stereotypical suburban America, fathers are the ones who throw the ball in the yard, build the doll houses, and fix the squeaky door. My dad was a little unconventional, so that stereotypical "father" was Grandpa Duane. We had spent the next few days buying pieces of wood, measuring, and cutting in the back of the garage. The doll house was half my height by the time we were done. He put it on wheels, so it would be easy to transport. He made it two levels, with four bedrooms. I wish I had played with it more.

I used to love listening to him hum while he made his peanut butter toast each morning, charcoal gray slippers covering his feet. He would make me my "coffee" in the morning so we could drink it together. This "coffee" was milk, coffee creamer, and chocolate syrup. Though, I remember feeling so important, so cool, to be drinking coffee

like a big girl with him.

I would sit in his lap sometimes, before I grew too old. He would let me hold his electric razor and pretend to shave his face (he left the cover on, thank God), and I would sit and shave his face. My mouth would make the razor sounds, tongue sticking out of my mouth in concentration. The skin on his neck hung down slightly, and when I was young, I would squeeze and pull it. It turns out the “droopy skin” was some sort of disease I can’t remember. It’s a rare disease that causes the underlayers of your skin to age like Jell-O, holding no form. It had caused the five-inch incision in his stomach to reopen, and reopen, and reopen. The cut from the seatbelt that sliced him open in the crash, shoulder to abdomen.

I had always imagined how I would act in a situation of trauma or stress, when the time came. I realize now what a privilege it was to think such a thing. Like my favorite book characters and movie stars, I imagined myself being tough and strong. Or what I believed tough and strong to be. Then, that meant holding in the tears and trying to make everything you do meaningful. Thoughtful. It was the first death that I felt. The first death that I noticed a change when I thought of him. My mother’s brother committed suicide at nineteen, which gutted her and my grandma. They had felt death before. They understood what it meant to lose someone unexpectedly. I didn’t.

I remember when they took him out of the ICU, when they knew he was going to die. They brought him to a room five or so levels up, in a part of the hospital that hadn’t been touched since the ‘90s. It was almost empty. The occasional nurse or patient would walk by, but otherwise it was like an abandoned backroom. There was an unspoken disappointment in the situation.

“Is he going to die here?” I whispered to my mom.

“Yes.”

We exited the elevator without a word thereafter.

Danika Ogawa is currently a junior at UND. She is majoring in English while working towards a certificate in creative writing. When she is not writing, you can find her reading, or teaching dance at a studio in town. Danika is from Grand Forks, ND.

Type 1 Issue

Grace Miller

I can't remember life before the illness. The first sixteen years of my life completely untouched by the pain. I'm just like your grandma, but maybe a little bit more severe? Who knows. Diabetes was an old person's disease to me. Not a sixteen-year-old's problem. My body doesn't work. And it never will. I have a useless pancreas and a real type 1 issue: fuck diabetes.

I went in for something completely unrelated. "Any concerns, Grace?" I had made up my mind that I was prediabetic. I told the doctor this, as she rolled her eyes and said, "You have nothing to worry about, but we will run the tests." I did have something to worry about, it's just that no one knew that. The tests came back positive, indicative that I was sick. I was plagued with Type 1 Diabetes. My blood was acidic. My body under attack by itself. For the rest of my life, I would have to work to keep myself in control. A tall order to ask of me. I never said I felt okay, but I had to be.

How do you tell a teenager that they will have to give themselves shots and manage carbohydrates for the rest of her life? You just say it, and then walk away from the fallout. I was barely old enough to understand, a few more years back and I wouldn't have been able to adjust at all.

It was the summer of 2018. I was wrapped in the toxicity of a high-school relationship. Colten was his name, and now I can realize that there was nothing real about him. He looked at me as if I was a butterfly that was trapped in a cocoon. Like some freak of nature. Those first few

months with this illness were absolute hell, and Colten just happened to be standing in the middle of all of it. I grasped at normalcy with him, but when he said that my shots made him uncomfortable, or that I should stop complaining, I felt that normalcy was never achievable. He looked at me, and I felt like a type 1 issue. This feeling never goes away, as much as you wish it or pray it will.

I laid there and screamed. I was tired. Tired of the shots, tired of the pain, tired of the fact that I had no control over what my body was doing. My mom and dad held together my broken wings, destroyed damaged, not functional. They would never know, but they would feel. It was the summer of 2018. I was sixteen. Sweet sixteen doesn't last as long when you feel like you're dying.

I soon became extremely self-conscious. Did it look like I was shooting up illegal substances when I was just really giving myself necessary medication? Does the medical equipment that I wear look like robotic parts? Does my insulin smell bad enough to turn people away from me? Am I just a type 1 issue? I never stopped worrying.

My parents took me to get blessed by a priest when I was diagnosed. It smelt like incense and uneasiness in the room. I thought I understood why they did that, but now, looking back, I have no idea why. It's not like a blessing was going to cure my issue. My parents are very religious. As if I could just pray away the pain of this disease, they told me to have faith. I would need to find meaning in my suffering. But being a 16-year-old diagnosed with a chronic illness, I couldn't, and still can't find any meaning in my pain. How could their god stand back and watch me crumble? Hey Big Guy in the Sky, you have destroyed my life.

Colten and I broke up in 2019. Sometimes I wonder if he remembers what he said to me, what he did to me. "You would be so pretty without those things on you." "I don't know how you can do that; it makes me so uncomfortable." Well Colten, I know I would be beautiful without

this disease. I would be a lot more if I didn't have this type 1 issue. And to be honest, I don't know how I do any of this. I guess I have no other choice. You know, I really don't enjoy any part of this.

I was once told that cinnamon could cure diabetes. Maybe if I would snort it, it would go straight to my head and it would convince my body that it wasn't ill. People are just so blind to what they do not know. Maybe I am just blind.

I adapted. My fingers, after being pricked so many times, looked like they had mini constellations on them. It hurts when you poke your fingers, especially when you are cold. It's harder to get your blood moving. Then, I got a CGM (continuous glucose monitor) and I didn't have to poke my fingers. It showed me my sickness. When I finally got an insulin pump, it turned me into a robot. And people would stare. Until their eyes burned words into my skin. They would write "It's okay to be different, but not that different." I could feel their uneasiness, their lack of wanting to know. Nobody knew, nobody knows.

But I get excited when I meet other diabetics because they know. They know about the stares, the sleepless nights, the pain. They know. They really do.

My uncle was diagnosed with the old person disease as well. But they just slapped type 2 in front of it. He wasn't getting better. It turns out that the docs misdiagnosed him. He's a type 1 issue just like me. Sometimes we compare our A1C's together, like a little competition to see who is doing diabetes better. It's these little games that we play that make it not so bad.

The financial burden of having this type 1 issue is awful. My parents sacrificed so much to get me all the latest and greatest medical equipment. But I can't justify in my brain this spending of so much money just to keep me alive. Like it's a necessity for me to have certain

medications, but who expects someone to pay \$1,000 a month for a life? I can give you the answer: the people who do not know, and who do not care.

I remember the first weeks of college. Stress levels increased my blood sugars. I felt like I couldn't move. But I had to. I had to be human, normal. Diabetes shouldn't hold me back. I'm more than just a sick person. But on these days, I had to allow myself the feeling that diabetes is me. It will always be me. And I used to be ashamed of that.

Then, I met a man who breathes the same as me. I shyly told him I had diabetes, like it wasn't that big of a deal. It turns out, it really wasn't that big of a deal for him. He didn't look away when I gave myself shots. I found a man that sees. Like my parents, he was there unconditionally. He loved me for me. Diabetes and all.

Time heals, but the healing isn't working. Not for me, at least.

My parents were honest. They told me my medication is life support. And then I think to myself "I am a type 1 issue." The kind of issue that doesn't go away. The burden that I put on my loved ones is so large. I never asked them to care that much, but I guess that is their job when I take the form of a sick problem. Today, I feel like a type 1 issue: for my parents, my friends, my husband, and myself.

The man who breathes the same as me suddenly became a new kind of life support. He helped me change my medical equipment. He put stickers over the devices that I wear so it looks stylish. Like "Look at the latest type 1 issue—new floral diabetes stickers." This help, though small, means the absolute world to me.

One day, he looked at me and told me I was beautiful. I cried. I thought that no one could possibly want someone who is chronically ill. How can he believe I am beautiful if I can't believe it myself? He looked at

me and told me he wanted to spend the rest of his life with me. I froze, shocked because I didn't want to imagine a life with diabetes.

When I was first diagnosed, I quit thinking about things that would happen in the future. I didn't want to graduate high school with diabetes, I didn't want to go to college with diabetes, and I definitely didn't want to get married with diabetes. You know what's really funny? I did all three of those with the type 1 issue.

Now as an adult, my worries lie elsewhere. How am I going to afford the next month's refill? How will I maintain blood sugar levels when school is really kicking my ass? I want my parents to be proud of me. They kicked me out of the nest, I am no longer on their life support. I want them to be proud of how I support myself. I am worried about work and if I will be able to pay the bills. I am worried about my husband and how my health affects him. How do I affect anyone?

What having diabetes has taught me: you don't get an off day. Every night after I was diagnosed, I wished that I was dreaming or that the higher ups would find a cure soon. But it's been four years, and I still haven't woken up from this nightmare. It has taught me to ignore, to embrace, and to coast.

Fuck diabetes I say, as if my anger that has been welling inside me will do anything to change the past. I am tired of acting like life with diabetes is just life. Because it isn't. Doctors' appointments, ketoacidosis, extreme exhaustion, tears, needle holes. Is this what a normal life looks like? I try to not let this part of me define my being as a whole. But it is me. And I can't pretend for anyone anymore. I am a type 1 issue.

Like an arrow, I was pulled back to go forward. Here I am trudging along. July 18, 2018, changed me. It hardened me. But I am here. I am alive thanks to the help of so many people.

I am Grace. I am a type 1 issue, the latest and greatest version of who I used to be. I give myself shots, I wear the medical equipment, and can do nothing but smile now. I am alive, on the world's best life support. I pay for my life. Give the companies what they want. I am normal, or as close to normal as I can get. Today I can live with the disease. Maybe one day I will appreciate what this illness has taught me. Maybe I won't be someone's type 1 issue.

Grace Miller is a junior music and English major. She plays the double bass for symphonies as well as the school orchestra. She has been playing her instrument for five years and has been participating in symphony-orchestras for four years. Her personal goal is to teach English at the collegiate level.

Ghosts Are Real

Delaney Otto

“Are ghosts real?” That is the question pondered by skeptics and believers alike. The skeptic searches for proof of their fiction, the believer for proof of their reality. Poltergeists, phantoms, shades; countless names, one whole being searched for like Bigfoot and aliens.

I can say, with wholehearted conviction, that they exist. Just not how you typically view them.

Ghosts are usually seen as the spirits of people left after they die. These are the results, usually, of a painful or untimely death. There are those who just wander, or those stuck in the moment of their demise.

I see ghosts as things we lost physically, but which stick around in the spirit. They’re lodged in our souls and no matter how hard you tug; you can’t pull them out. They are the memories you look back on fondly or hope to drown in the seas of your subconscious. They are the people and moments that come to you in dreams, the faint sense of *déjà-vu*, the body’s response to a stimulus you long forgot was connected to something that had such a profound effect on your flesh.

The smell of your grandmother’s perfume, something that clung to your clothes hours after you’d left her house; the sound of tires squealing on pavement, that shredding noise in your ears that wakes you from your nightmare. The sight of old, yellowed photographs that your parents dig through of your great-great-grandparents, young and smiling. The touch of a baby blanket you were swaddled in after you were born; the taste of cough syrup on your tongue, from when you were a sick child fighting against your mother’s medicine.

The senses bring up ghosts you thought were long forgotten—ghosts you forgot even existed. Yet, they persist, more than muscle

memory. They are tiny threads knitted into the fiber of your memory, your existence. You are a quilt of happenstances, random moments in time. You will never *not* be haunted.

The earth is haunted, too. Fossils, preserved remains, valleys and mountains carved from wind and water and time. Old forests we chopped down to make way for civilization, civilizations razed and rebuilt, structures of buildings turned into something else. A museum that was once a house is a case of possession, though I'm not sure who is possessing who. Is the spirit of the old house, the old inhabitants, the old memories possessing this new reality, this reinvention? Or is the modernized museum, seeking to immortalize the specter, possessing it, and making it show itself?

Musuems—museums are filled with ghosts. Clothing, tools, art, letters, armor; ghosts upon ghosts upon ghosts. These are the clear ones, the ones you cannot deny. This is where we seek out those old spirits, wondering what their stories are, what memories are soaked into these physical things. The soul of an artist is wrapped within each piece they create, purposefully made ghosts meant to outlast their creator. Other things, incidental things like shoes and tools, are meant to last a long time, to serve. Their longevity is not meant for witnessing—it is for using. To see them on display, not on the body or in the hands of someone, is to truly know what it is to be haunted. Haunted by what once was, *who* once was. The horror of the haunting is the pondering as to what happened to them. The fact that they no longer exist, but these things they used persist.

History is not a ghost. It is the ghost maker. The people it leaves behind, the things, the moments, the debris, are its ghosts. Wars, peace times, revolutions, and recessions. The dust of bombs, the bodies of soldiers and civilians, the old papers of treaties and laws, the statues, the memorials. All of it is the ghost that history is continually crafting. Culling, moment after moment, year after year, all of these events and moments in time. One day, we will be referred to as the past, as the long bygone era. We will be the ghosts of history, in due time. History is made every day, born each moment. It is the short-lived fly, the

ever-preserved fossil. Life and death wrapped into one, inseparable, conjoined. It is beautiful and it is terrifying.

Time, and its passing, is the reaper's scythe. Each day we make new ghosts. Who we were yesterday is gone forever. We can never regain them. We have their memories, their ideas, their dreams, and we carry them in our bodies, our hearts and our minds. We can never be rid of them, no matter how hard we try. So, we carry on, knowing who we are now is going to be tomorrow's ghost. And there's nothing we can do to stop that.

So we make our ghosts. We walk with them every day, every second. I create a ghost as I write this; once this is done, once I shut this laptop and go to bed, this will be a ghost. I kill my precious moments of time with the effort of crafting this. I do not regret it; I think I needed this. I fear death like any other person, and yet I spend what little time I have on earth writing. Each letter is a small phantom, coming to float along the other things I've written, all my other thoughts. Once you have a thought, it is just another ghost, rolling around in your skull with every other thought, emotion, feeling, urge, or other kind of spark between neurons.

Ghosts are real. We are all haunted houses.

Delaney Otto is a senior at UND pursuing a major in Communication and a minor in English. She enjoys horror, magical realism, fantasy, and happy endings. Along with writing, she enjoys music and art, and thinks that everyone should try creating something, no matter how small or simple. She has a growing pile of books she really needs to start reading.

The Ideal Deconstructed

A PHOTO ESSAY

By Kira Symington

Today I will discuss the deconstruction of the ideal in relation to the nude, body modification, fashion, architecture, and dance. First, I will illustrate how the ideal is found within the nude. Second, I will lead us through the postmodern concepts behind certain body modification and fashion movements. Thirdly and lastly, I will argue that, although postmodernism fails to fully remove itself from under the shadow of the ideal, the phenomenological principles behind architecture and dance will allow us to step back from the ideology of the ideal and hopefully move past it.

Symington, K. (2022). *Cropping and Makeup*
[Photograph].

Through the careful cropping, chopping off of limbs, flaws, and imperfections and through the meticulous use of makeup to hide what cannot be sawed off, to enhance and create illusions of beauty unnatural to that individual, the artist seeks to present the ideal hidden under the layers of our fleshy reality. As François Jullien states on pages 9 and 10 of his book *The Impossible Nude*, "Head, body, legs are clipped off, while the face, most notably, would always present a risk of our relapsing into a sense of the particular...." The ideal demands we get rid of our individual imperfections to display its universality.



Symington, K. (2022). *Ideal Body Modification*
[Photograph].

Just as photoshop and makeup represent perhaps a more daily reality in search of the ideal, another example of this search for the ideal lies in certain body modifications, such as the braces above, which allow the human's search for the ideal to extend beyond hiding fleshly flaws to removing them altogether. (Note that some body modification is done for the physical health of the individual, but the individual above got them for purely aesthetic reasons.) The unique idiosyncrasies of the individual can be removed in order that they may look more like the ideal. But this alienates the individual from themselves, instead of seeing the is, they see the ought and thus remain at odds with their own present reality.



Michelangelo (1504). *David* [Sculpture].

A more quintessential example of the ideal lies in Michelangelo's *David*. It is apparent to most viewers of the sculpture that the biblical character of the young boy that killed Goliath most likely did not look the way Michelangelo presented him. I would argue that the sculpture was not meant to represent the individual, but rather the ideals associated with him. Drawing from the ancient Greek's idea that the body was the representation of the rational mind, *David's* body is displayed this way to reveal to the viewers the more permanent ideals that lie within his legend.



As François Jullien puts it on page 54 of *The Impossible Nude*, "The nude "abstracts 'Man' by detaching him from any specific time or social condition. The nude is unitarian-egalitarian; it is atemporal (Adam), and even freezes man in time." Michelangelo's *David* is not a 'man' but a symbol, and through that, it maintains its immortality. In that way, you could imagine humanity's quest for the ideal as an attempt at the avoidance of death.



Teng, S. (2020). *Morly Tse's Collection of Taxidermized Butterflies* [Photograph].

The artist takes the individual, their movement, personality, flaws, and sacrifices them in their search for a universal sense of beauty that represents the higher function of humanity. Jullien says, "I need to make you my object in order to gain access to your infinity" (9-10). To capture the beautiful ideal, the individual is sundered from their form. "I see the being of the model in front of me, whom I have every reason to perceive as being as much of a subject as I am—with a life, feelings, hopes, sufferings, and so forth—and all I retain is the immobilized form; suddenly, through artistic convention, I turn the model into a pure object", Jullien later states (97-98). This is called the pose in terms of the ideal nude. The sacrifice of the individual on the altar of the ideal also renders movement immobile.



Andriessen, H. and Verendael, N. (1640 and 1679). *Vanitas Still Life with a Bunch of Flowers, a Candle, Smoking Implements and a Skull* [Painting].

It is my opinion that this is best expressed through still life paintings, drawings, and photography. It follows that to present the unchanging eternal ideal, one must halt all movement. As I already said, Jullien writes that all one retains within the photoshoot is the "immobilized form". The figures and/or objects are rendered static and thus timeless. The fear of age, decay, and eventual death is fought off by capturing the timeless ideal whether it be through themselves or their models.

Newton, H. (1975). *Yves St. Laurent, Rue Aubriot, French Vogue, Paris , 1975*
[Photograph].

However, with the rise of postmodernism, the ideal seemed more and more outlandish. The ideal woman and man with their prescribed bodies and roles seemed impossible and impractical at the very least.

People tried to rebel against the ideal through various movements such as androgyny. They wanted to uplift the individual in contrast to the depersonalizing ideal. But, as Adam Geczy and Vicki Karminas state in their book *Critical Fashion Practice*, "Although well founded in its intentions as a strategy to destabilize gender along with the bedrock of masculinity, androgyny prioritizes the masculine signifier and its gender-associated sartorial stylings: shirt, tie, short hair, monocle, and suit" (113). By removing themselves from the ideal woman, they fashion themselves in the likeness of the ideal man. In most of these movements, as illustrated above, they fail to fully remove themselves from under the shadow of the ideal.



Symington, K. (2022). *Postmodern Body Modification* [Photograph].

In their reclamation of the individual's body, the postmodern society takes body modification and uses it to enhance differences to the individual's preference. This was to deny the ideal's sacrifice of the individual in its search for universality. Victoria Pitts says in her book *In the Flesh*, "The stigmatization of the tattoo allowed for it to become a mark of disaffection for groups who sought to stage symbolic rebellion and create a subcultural style, and, eventually, to create personal and political body art" (5). Tattoos were a mark of a subculture which allowed the individual to express or enhance less culturally acceptable traits. However, although ignoring the majority's ideal, they followed a subculture's ideal which too could alienate people in the same way.



Wilton, D. (2011). *Harbisson* [Photograph].

To escape the ideal, the cyberpunk community transforms the body from a static rendering of the ideal to a fluid site of technological change. Harbisson is a perfect example of this, to create art, he implanted technology that would allow him to “hear” color by sending vibrations through his skull with visual stimulus. The cyberpunk community in their quest for the deconstruction of the ideal reimaged the body.



However, this was undermined by their reliance on technology to do so. As Pitts puts it, “The individualist rhetoric often dominant in cyberpunk discourse belies the ways in which technology is linked to hierarchies and systems of power” (160–1). A major question is who can afford to use technology in such a way. Another point of contention is that in their imagining of cyberpunk future, they are rejecting their present reality and relying on some future ideal world.



Green, G. (1976). *Poet* [Photograph].

The ideal was not fully removed from the postmodern society despite its attempts to do so. Instead, it was divided up into pieces, recognized as being dependent on culture and subculture, time, and location. It took the form of trends, with the ideal body shifting quickly between things like almost anorexic bodies to the rise of implants and fillers. Subcultures, such as punk, too had their own ideals that overtime became more and more mainstream as evidenced by Vivienne Westwood's now enormously successful fashion line. These individualist movements became swallowed up in competing ideals and then distributed to the public.



Symington, K. (2022). *Consumerist Complications* [Photograph].

This easy packaging and repackaging of various ideals was made possible largely by capitalism. Designs were easily reproduced and then distributed. The consumption of subcultures and culture at large was now efficient and available to most everyone. With the rise in smartphone usage and the widespread effects of technology, the competing ideals were now given an even larger stage. Capitalism ultimately undermined the postmodern escape from the ideal.

Symington, K. (2022). *A Silent Conversation with the World* [Photograph].

Phenomenology offers a new route of escape from the ever-present shadow of the ideal. It calls us to take a step back so we might take a step forward. What this looks like is, rather than interpreting the world through the alienating lens of the ideal, through having a sort of “conversation” with the world. As Fred Rush states in his book *On Architecture*, “Merleau-Ponty holds that the body is the point at which the mind and the other parts of the world overlap” (16). Through our sensory experiences, we may understand and perhaps come to accept our physical reality without ideological filters.



Flexhaug, C. (1996). *Camp Depression Tribute "Persistence"* [Sculpture].

As the body is the site in which the world and mind overlap, architecture offers new ways for that world and body to interact with each other and the mind. Through the changes in the environment, in the feel of objects, the relative roughness or smoothness of a piece, or through the shadow and light, the sensory experiences that offer the basis of our conversation with the world suddenly expand even to the realm of play. Architecture is the world shaped by humanity which then in turn shapes us. This is the interaction with the world on clear display.



Symington, K. (2022). *The Individual* [Photograph].

In the phenomenological acceptance of body not as a signifier of the ideal but as a site for interaction with the world, the individual comes into clearer focus. It is the individual's experiences that inform their perception of the world, not some ideological narrative dictating that perception.



Thus, they can more fully accept their body as it is without being trapped by the thought of what it "ought" to be. It becomes a site that details their interaction with the world, each scar, wrinkle, and particularity tell of the sensory experiences in their conversation with that world.



Symington, K. (2022). *Time Passing* [Photograph].

As the ideal tears the individual from their form, it too renders it static and immobile. However, in the phenomenological approach, the passing of time is to be understood not feared. The eternal ideal is no longer imposed on the body as it acknowledges its own process as a fluid being changed by the world and its processes. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone puts it in her book *The Phenomenology of Dance*, "According to recent phenomenologists, temporality and spatiality are inherent structures of human consciousness-body. They are rooted in man's foundational pre-reflective awareness of himself, and not in the more abstractly refined notions of 'real' time and 'real' space: the immediate lived experience of time and space is epistemologically prior to our notions of objective time and objective space" (11). The ideal must surrender to our lived experiences as beings in time.

Lunde, E. (1987). *School Dance* [Painting].



Part of the rejection of the static nature of the ideal involves not only the acknowledgement of time but also of movement. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone says in her book *The Phenomenology of Dance*, "Any lived experience of the body incorporates a pre-reflective awareness of its spatiality through the bodily schema. Consciousness body knows itself to be spatially present in-the-midst-of-the-world, not through a factual kinesthetic perception of its parts, but through a pre reflective awareness of itself as a spatially present totality. To apprehend the totality of the body is to live the body and not to reflect upon it as a given object or as the sum and sequence of kinesthetic sensations" (17).

Understanding the body as a site of constant interaction with the world requires the understanding of the constant movement of both the site and the world. The ideal must kill and dissect its subjects in its attempt to reach immortality, but phenomenology allows for the reality of our physical experiences as embodied consciousnesses as we age, change, and grow in our communion with the world and ourselves.

Works Cited

- Flexhaug, C. (1996). *Camp Depression Tribute "Persistence"* [Sculpture]. University of North Dakota
- Green, G. (1976). *Poet* [Photograph]. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/may/28/gary-green-photograph-new-york-punk-scene>
- Lunde, E. (1987). *School Dance* [Painting]. North Dakota Museum of Art
- Michelangelo (1504). *David* [Sculpture]. Accademia Gallery
- Newton, H. (1975). *Yves St. Laurent, Rue Aubriot, French Vogue, Paris , 1975* [Photograph]. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/helmut-newton/yves-st-laurent-rue-aubriot-french-vogue-paris-nDflzyA4o0qEafmX0sTOzw2>
- Andriessen, H. and Verendael, N. (1640 and 1679). *Vanitas Still Life with a Bunch of Flowers, a Candle, Smoking Implements and a Skull* [Painting]. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hendrick_Andriessen_and_Nicolaes_van_Verendael_-_Vanitas_still_life_with_a_bunch_of_flowers,_a_candle,_smoking_implements_and_a_skull.jpg
- Symington, K. (2022). *Consumerist Complications* [Photograph].
- Symington, K. (2022). *Cropping and Makeup* [Photograph].
- Symington, K. (2022). *A Silent Conversation with the World* [Photograph].
- Symington, K. (2022). *Ideal Body Modification* [Photograph].
- Symington, K. (2022). *Postmodern Body Modification* [Photograph].
- Symington, K. (2022). *The Individual* [Photograph].
- Symington, K. (2022). *Time Passing* [Photograph].
- Wilton, D. (2011). *Harbisson* [Photograph]. <https://www.dezeen.com/2013/11/20/interview-with-human-cyborg-neil-harbisson/>

Kira Symington is a philosophy and English double major at the University of North Dakota. Raised in rural North Dakota, books and art became vital in the understanding and expansion of her world. A current outlet for that passion is the Dakota Student where she is starting as a general reporter.

Contributor Notes

Emilia Rose Adkinson is a senior majoring in English at UND. She is working towards her certificates in both creative writing and editing and publishing, with the hopes of being an author or a publisher. She is originally from South Carolina, and she spends her free time reading, doing puzzles, and facetimeing her family. She loves journaling and writing, and hopes to touch people with her work.

Claire Arneson is a junior at the University of North Dakota. She is studying English and communications and hopes to work in the publishing industry in the future. She loves reading all of the books she can, and cheers the loudest at the hockey game.

Valkyrie Bradford is a second-year English graduate student, passionate about cheesy literature, bad humor, and her dog and cat that constantly distract her from actually writing.

Jacob Cummings is a psychology major, going into a career in counseling after receiving his masters. He loves to write, whether it be poems, book-length stories, or even song lyrics. He tends to explore topics that stem from his own life experiences.

Sarah Dignan is a senior communication major, double minoring in English and graphic design. She is from a small town in Minnesota, located five miles south of the Canadian border, called Warroad (also known as Hockeytown, USA). She currently works for Opp Construction as their Graphic Design & Marketing Intern. In her spare time, Sarah enjoys photography, hanging out with friends and family, going to UND sporting events (especially hockey), and mentoring a high school

robotics team: FIRST Robotics Team 8188 Grand Force.

Chad Erickstad is a junior at UND; he is pursuing a bachelor's degree in English.

Dustyn Huber is a student at the University of North Dakota who will be graduating with a bachelor of arts in psychology in December 2022. Growing up, Dustyn was involved in the arts, being a stagehand for theater in his school as well as a trumpet player in his school band. He thought to give poetry a shot to broaden his creativity.

Simi Kaur is a portrait photographer attending UND as a senior. She enjoys capturing the essence of people and their passions.

Het Mehta is a medical laboratory science major at the University of North Dakota. He is currently a junior in the program and enjoys writing poetry in his free time. He enjoys winter activities and spending time with his friends and family.

Grace Miller is a junior music and English major. She plays the double bass for symphonies as well as the school orchestra. She has been playing her instrument for five years and has been participating in symphony-orchestras for four years. Her personal goal is to teach English at the collegiate level.

Danika Ogawa is currently a junior at UND. She is majoring in English while working towards a certificate in creative writing. When she is not writing, you can find her reading, or teaching dance at a studio in town. Danika is from Grand Forks, ND.

Delaney Otto is a senior at UND pursuing a major in Communication and a minor in English. She enjoys horror, magical realism, fantasy, and happy endings. Along with writing, she enjoys music and art, and thinks that everyone should try creating something, no matter how small

or simple. She has a growing pile of books she really needs to start reading.

Jona L. Pedersen grew up in Norway, but has since relocated to the US where they are pursuing English and biology at the University of North Dakota. Their work appears in *Floodwall*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *The Allegheny Review*. When they aren't studying or writing, they like to explore the outdoors, roll dice with friends, and create art. Other passions such as wildlife biology, entomology, and environmental justice also inspire their writing. Check out their other work at www.jonalpedersen.com or follow their Twitter @JonaLPedersen for updates.

Aubrey Roemmich is currently an undergraduate student at the University of North Dakota. After her graduation, she hopes to attend law school and get an MFA in creative writing. She aspires to be a literary lawyer and work in the publishing industry. She spends her free time reading, writing, and listening to music.

Caitlin Scheresky is a sophomore English major at UND. When she's not reading or writing ideas in her notes app, she's petting every dog or cat she can find.

Jonathan Sladko is a commercial aviation major who dreams of flying spaceships someday. He is also studying aerospace safety and space related topics, and enjoys writing science fiction based loosely on the science he is learning. He started writing at a young age and wants to publish a novel before he graduates.

Charles Steinberger is a law student who likes to take photos of cool things.

Kira Symington is a philosophy and English double major at the University of North Dakota. Raised in rural North Dakota, books and art became vital in the understanding and expansion of her world. A current

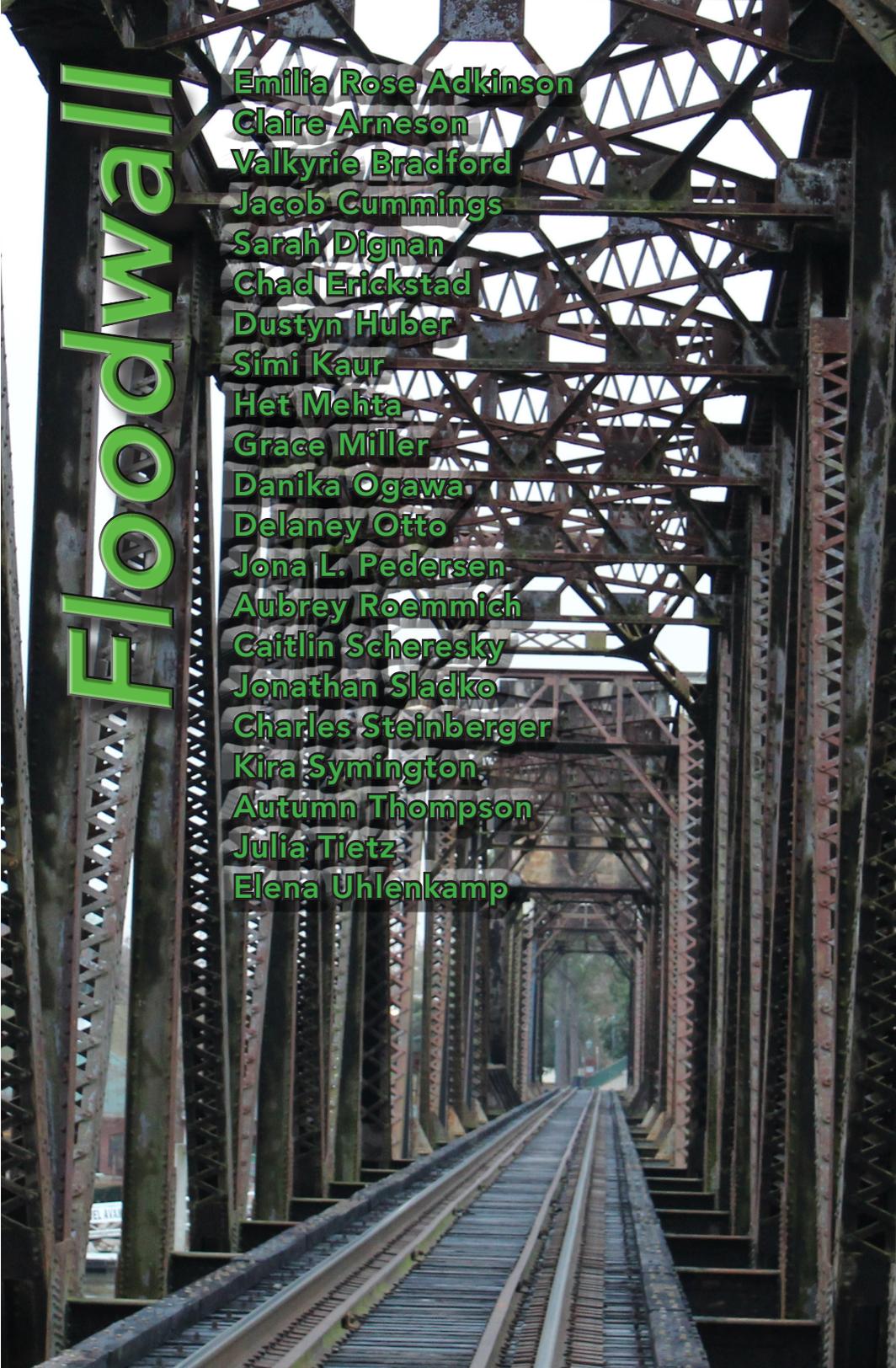
outlet for that passion is the *Dakota Student* where she is starting as a general reporter.

Autumn Thompson is a third-year biology student on the pre-professional health plan with a minor in psychology and nutrition. Writing started as a once-in-a-while hobby in high school, and now she continues to write as a way to express herself and to interpret the human experience.

Julia Tietz is an aspiring writer and publisher who will be graduating this spring with an English major and Spanish minor. She loves writing about mental health, love, and nature in her poetry but hopes to try out writing about the supernatural. Besides writing, she loves animals, watching movies, and playing music. She hopes to one day publish her own book of poetry and her first novel.

Elena Uhlenkamp is an English major from a small town in the heart of Minnesota. She enjoys reading and writing fiction, especially fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Besides writing fiction, she likes trying her hand at photography and writing poetry, along with enjoying escape rooms with family and friends. Elena is working on a series that mixes sentient robots with demons from another dimension.

Floodwall



Emilia Rose Adkinson

Claire Arneson

Valkyrie Bradford

Jacob Cummings

Sarah Dignan

Chad Erickstad

Dustyn Huber

Simi Kaur

Het Mehta

Grace Miller

Danika Ogawa

Delaney Otto

Jona L. Pedersen

Aubrey Roemmich

Caitlin Scheresky

Jonathan Sladko

Charles Steinberger

Kira Symington

Autumn Thompson

Julia Tietz

Elena Uhlenkamp