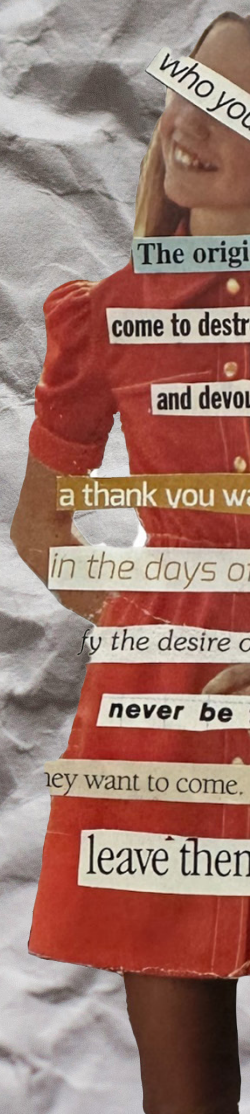


Floodwall

volume 2, issue 8
fall 2023



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Front and back covers: collage with detail from the "The Innocent," by Lillian Quinn

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Masthead

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From the Editors

It's our absolute delight to introduce you all to our eighth issue of Floodwall, the student-run literary magazine at the University of North Dakota. This semester has brought forth its own round of challenges, but just like its namesake, Floodwall withstands the trials of time. Floodwall continues to stand as a beacon of opportunity and hope for our creative community. As time passes by and students and their creative work enter this community, their work develops in ways that reflect, represent, and impact the communities and world around them. Art is an act of defiance and protest, and it is Floodwall's privilege to have held space for that art since its revival in spring 2020.

Floodwall's role—and this has been true since our revival—is to provide a home for the stories of our community. Truly, Floodwall represents the protection and preservation of the hopes, beliefs, challenges, and resistance of the creative community here at UND, just as the flood wall represents those of the communities affected by the 1997 Red River flood. For hope to survive, communities must band together and resist adversity. That's exactly what Floodwall intends to do.

As the fall semester comes to a close, we couldn't be more excited for you to spend time curled up with this issue. The cover portrays a portion of Lillian Quinn's graphic poem "The Guilty The Innocent," which paints a poignant picture of gender expectations and their impact on the development of generations of women and girls. As you dive in, you'll find pieces exploring the world through our eyes: all of the terrifying, heartbreaking, introspective, and beautiful parts of it. The importance of community, unwinding, and bliss. Portfolios of art and photography that present beauty as both something inherent and something to be created and shared. Indigenous history and culture living on in the present, through story. Analyses of the mirrored

interactions between men, society, race, violence, and education in a world that needs intersectionality more than ever.

It's our immense honor and privilege to provide a safe haven for our contributors' creative work, expression, and artistic defiance. We're so incredibly thankful for their trust and for the hard work of our volunteers who made this absolute dream a reality. And thank you, dear reader, for meeting us here in this moment and holding space for us. We couldn't do what we do without the support of you all. We hope you enjoy.

Floodwall

volume2, issue8
fall 2023

contents

<i>masthead</i>	5
from the editors	6
<i>fiction</i>	12
Lunch Break Korbyan Chavez	13
The Cold Brenden Kimpe.....	15
An Object Lesson in the Humane and Ethical Treatment of Others Charles Henry	23
META Kira Symington	26
A Cold Line: A Ten-Minute Play Adam March	35
<i>art & photography</i>	47
A Midsummer Daydream Kira Symington	48
Fortune Abby Petersen.....	52
Haunted Playground Gon Carlson.....	54
<i>poetry</i>	57
Invocation October 2023 Casey Fuller.....	58
Nohoilpi John Michael Lockett	61
Words Meant for a Notecard. Brenden Kimpe	62
Three Poems Dani Ogawa	64
Two Poems Maren Schettler	69

The Guilty | The Innocent | Lillian Quinn..... 73
out of spite | Jayden Buckau 77
Flicker | Chloe Piekkola..... 79
Seasons | Rachael Erickson 81
Birds That Live in the Ivy Wall | Katerina Sladko 82
Two Poems | Chad Erickstad..... 83
Ode to the Mento Moon | Abby Petersen 87
Oranges and Losing You | Clara Anderson-Cameron 89
An Ode to Friends Past and Present | Autumn Thompson 92
Everyday | Alyssa Martinez 95
return to soil | Jasmine Patera..... 97

contributor notes 99

fiction

Lunch Break

Korbyan Chavez

The bells tolled ominously, indicating that noon had arrived. Twelve hits of the bell, every staff member pausing to count in order to make sure they had the correct time.

When the reverberations fade into the air, a general shift occurs in the office. Every staff member stands up and walks to the cafeteria in an automated fashion. No formal lines were formed, but no friend groups were uniting to discuss the day thus far either. Every individual marched at their own pace, expressionless, heading in the same direction.

The cafeteria was large, with white being the primary and only color on the floors and walls. Those who weren't accustomed to it would have been blinded temporarily, but everyone here was settled in a routine, a strict one. They were indeed used to the brightness. They were also used to the fact that there were no tables or chairs, no counters, and no food stations. The cafeteria was simply a large, empty, white room.

Small, light gray-covered vents are what the employees stood in front of, now forming a queue. The vents were about waist-height on an average person, dozens covering one wall of the cafeteria, directly across from the entrance. The only noise heard was the pitter-patter of dress shoes on linoleum floors, which soon began to fade as the lines were formed. The staff was patiently waiting for the next step.

Silence filled the room; nothing appeared to happen at first. Then, a shuttering emanated from the vent-covered walls, sounding as though some machine was creaking behind it. It shook the wall, and seemingly, the room as well. No one reacted; they simply waited.

Suddenly, the jittering comes to a halt, and a small bell releases a quiet *ding*. The vents open silently, and a tray is extended to those first

in line. Bland, gray food is offered, and without hesitation, those first in line grab the tray and walk out of the cafeteria, heading back to their desk.

The queue moves with ease, the vents dispensing more and more trays of mush, and employees taking what was given and walking out. No one bumps into each other; a system is in place to avoid such things. No one speaks; not even the sound of breathing can be heard from the staff. Only the shifting of the line and the footsteps of those leaving.

Eventually, the rush is over, and the cafeteria is empty once more. The staff are all back in their offices, taking bites of their food and typing away on their computers. None of them seemed to be upset by this, having to eat and continue working at the same time.

There was a project to be completed, after all.

Korbyan Chavez is an accounting major working to earn their bachelor's and master's. Though accountants typically can't write, this one somehow can.

The Cold

Brenden Kimpe

The first few days of my cold weren't too bad. The runny nose and scratchy throat were relatively average as far as colds go. Before, I was prone to some pretty serious seasonal allergies, so I was annually subjected to this discomfort. It wasn't until the fourth day that I really began to resent the sickness that resided within me. Waking up with completely blocked sinuses has to be one of the worst feelings ever. I smacked my tongue and cringed at the taste of my dry mouth from breathing through it all night. This morning's breath was certainly horrific. While the stuffed-up nose and sore throat are certainly downsides to being sick, the inability to taste breakfast is the ultimate torture. Withholding the taste of my orange juice or peanut butter and jelly sandwich in the morning should be considered a federal crime.

"Come lock 'em up!" I said to myself in the mirror. I was thinking of those super weird Mucinex commercials where the snot dude acts like a stoned drifter who somehow got into somebody's apartment. I skipped down the stairs to greet my mom at the table for breakfast. Of course, the classic PB&J cut corner-to-corner. Every sandwich connoisseur knows that triangles give the best bites all the way to the end. My face fell with disappointment when I bit into the side and couldn't taste anything. The dry paste of the peanut butter and the spongy texture of the bread was all that greeted my tastebuds on this now not-so-fine morning. I couldn't even taste any of the sugary raspberry jelly.

"Gabe, honey, are you feeling alright? You've hardly touched your breakfast." My mother's face brandished a look of parental concern with a touch of annoyance.

"Yeah, I'm fine. My allergies are just really acting up this morning."

I sniffled in the middle of my response and noticed a dull itch in the back of my nose. A stuffed-up nose and an itch I can't scratch. Just my luck.

"Well, the pollen count was pretty low this morning. You're probably coming down with something; are you sure you're okay? I can hear in your voice how stuffy your nose is." My mom was the type to be overly concerned when she finally did notice things. She pressed a cold, dry hand to my forehead and instantly prompted a violent sneeze that shook my entire body. As soon as her fingers touched my skin, the itching feeling was unbearable. I shrunk back instinctively.

"I said I was fine, Mom. I can take some cold and flu medicine before I head for the bus stop if it'll make you feel better."

"I think that's a great idea," she tentatively responded. "It's best to get a jumpstart on it now before it gets really bad." Her face was filled with confusion and worry.

I hastily popped two pills of cold medicine on my way out the door, making sure that my mom saw me down them with a bunch of water. On my way to the bus stop, I kicked a rock down the sidewalk. I usually grabbed a rock from the landscaping around our house and tried to kick it all the way to the waiting area on the corner of the block without having to pick it up with my hands. I was unsuccessful today and had to bend down to pick it up twice. I noticed the itch in my nose each time I bent over to pick up the rock. It was like a feather tickling the back of my nostrils, and I couldn't do anything about it. I was getting annoyed now. It's not like I wanted to deal with this all day. I tried to perform a classic farmer's blow by plugging one nostril and blowing hard out the other. No luck. I tried both nostrils and failed so miserably that my ears popped. Next, I tried sniffing air in. I nearly passed out from a lack of oxygen. I was trying so hard to just get *something* to come through, but I was unsuccessful every time. Later, I would fondly look back upon these foolish attempts. It looked like I was just going to have to tough it out.

I figured it would clear up sometime throughout the day, but I was wrong. My nose refused to budge in any of my classes. I couldn't even get a couple of air bubbles to creep through in my hourly attempts to

blow or sniff. My lunch was dumped into the trash half eaten. I couldn't taste any of it anyway. The strange itch continued to persist in the back of my nose. The weird part was whenever I tried to eat something, it would kick in, and I would have the sudden urge to sneeze. I couldn't get any of my food down because of it. I didn't really mind, though, since all the food on my tray just looked unappealing to me anyway, and the relief from the itching was worth the grumbling stomach. I texted my mom and asked her to pick up some stronger medicine on her way home, but I doubted it would help much.

"Gabe? I brought home some more medicine! I also picked up some Campbell's vegetable beef soup, your favorite." Mom had loads of other groceries in her arms as she came through the front door, but word of this soup caught my attention. I popped the top, dumped the contents into a ceramic bowl, and shoved it into the microwave as she put away the refrigerated products.

"How are you feeling, honey?"

"Fine. Not any better than this morning. Although I have noticed that the back of my nose has been itchy today." I was massaging the area underneath my eyes and around my nose as I said this. It had progressively gotten worse to the point where I felt this itch even if I wasn't bending over or trying to eat something.

"Probably both allergies and a cold. What rotten luck to get hit with both at once." Mom replied.

"Yeah, just my luck." I was sick of this cold, and it had only been a few days. I wasn't greeted with comfort from my soup. I nearly sneezed every time I attempted to bring a spoonful to my mouth. For some reason, whenever I tried to eat some vegetables or sip some broth, the itch would start bothering me, but not when I ate any of the meat. Beefless vegetable soup was dumped into the trash can that night. Later that night, while I was doing my science homework, I couldn't help but sneeze uncontrollably for nearly thirty seconds. It was one of the worst sneezing fits I had ever had. The itch in my nose had become unbearable. It was spreading through my eyes and cheeks and descending my throat. It sometimes felt as if something was tickling my

tonsils or the backs of my eyeballs. Each sneeze would have an itching response that seemed to reverberate out from my nose and extend to my eyes and ears. It got so bad that I thought clawing my eyes out would be a friendly alternative to what I was feeling. I had never had a sickness like this before. Honestly, nothing had ever made me feel like this before. The unusual cold was one thing, but the now constant state of itching was truly something spectacular. My mom expressed her constant state of worrying by running a hot shower for me and forcing me to take liquid cough medicine. Ugh. My head hit the pillow in hopes that I would at least feel a little better in the morning. Sleep overtook me instantly.

I woke up to go to the bathroom and found that whatever was clogging up my nose had cleared a bit. I was able to strain and suck in a bit of air. I was on my way downstairs, absentmindedly picking my nose, when it happened. The booger I had located and set my intentions on forever eradicating was flipping out of my grasp as if it were sentient. As soon as I pressed it against the inside of my nose, it would shrink back like a lively earthworm that had just been poked with a stick. Finally, I drew out a long string of snot in disgust. The only problem was that it wasn't detaching from my nose. I pulled on it with my hand clenched in a fist, but it just slipped through my grip in slimy defiance. Finally, I wound the strand around my hand and pulled with all my strength. There was a pop and a rush of cold air in my nose. Finally. The inhalation of fresh, cool air in my nostrils was nearly intoxicating. A sigh of relief escaped my lips as I enjoyed my newfound freedom. The breath hitched in my throat when I caught sight of the strand of mucus I had pulled from my nose. There was a disc-shaped object on one end, completely enveloped in snot. Placing it into my palm, I wiped away the mucus and found that the surface of the disc was slightly rough to the touch, like fine grit sandpaper. It weighed next to nothing and didn't look like anything the body could produce naturally. It was completely black with streaks of broken gray running through it. When I poked it, I felt that itchy feeling once more, but it was in the back of my head this time. Sneezing, I scratched the back of my scalp but couldn't get to the itch.

The *inside* of my skull was itching. Squeezing it slightly, I rushed to the bathroom, where I could examine it with better light. It was exactly the size of a Babybel cheese wheel. Was this what was blocking up my nose all day? I had no clue how or why it got in my nose in the first place. My mind was racing, and sweat started to bead on my forehead. The strange itching was constant and irritating. I suddenly felt a great urge to know what was inside of it. What made up this strange disc, and why was it in my body? It was obviously foreign in nature and was unlike anything I had ever seen. I feverishly rummaged through the drawers of the bathroom to find something sharp to cut it open with. The cold sweat had begun to drip off the end of my nose and streak down the sides of my face, but I paid it no heed. I found a pair of small cosmetic scissors and experimentally poked the disc.

Expecting more itching like before, my eyes flew open when I was met with a sharp pain in the back of my head. Like an electric shock had been applied directly to my scalp. My mind was screaming for clarity. To stop the itching and pain, but for some reason, I felt I needed to do this. I wasn't sure why, but I felt as if it was imperative to my survival to cut this strange disc open. The desire to discover the inside was nothing like I had ever imagined. It didn't come close to the cravings I would have for candy or to play a video game. This was something else entirely. It pulled at every fiber of my being and awakened a deep primal instinct that had been lost for hundreds of years. I set my teeth and jabbed the scissors into the disc. The pain was unbearable. My eyes clouded, and tears streamed from my eyes and salted my lips. There was no logical reason for me to feel this way. The disc had no physical connection to me, and the pain in the back of my head was nowhere near the area where I pulled it from. I was gasping for breath at this point, desperate for the pain to stop; I pulled the scissors from the disc and observed an oily black liquid leak from the puncture site. Suddenly, the room was filled with a sickly sweet smell as the liquid washed over my skin and dripped to the bathroom tile. It stained my hand and was warm to the touch. The smell made me dizzy and nauseous, but there was also a strange wave of serenity that enveloped me. The pain in my

head didn't subside as I thought it would and instead got worse. Stars were visible on the edges of my vision, but when I turned my head to look at them directly, I saw nothing. It was only at this moment that I thought of telling Mom about what was going on. To ask for her help. I was too weak to cry out or make my way to her room, and the thought of sleep sounded so divine to me. I slid to the cold tile on the bathroom floor and hazily stared at the object in my hand that led me to this predicament. The center of the disc that had been punctured with the scissors continued to leak the oily black fluid. It coated the bathroom floor along with my hand. It was so inky black that it looked like it was glittering. I might have even seen a strange shape forming in the liquid before the world faded to black.

I awoke in my own bed and was surprised to find my head clear and free of pain. It was so vivid. The colors, the pain, and the feeling of the greasy black liquid on my palm were something I couldn't get out of my mind. The brain plays some crazy tricks while the body is asleep. There was a small chittering sound in the corner of the room that suddenly caught my attention. It sounded like a squirrel. I reached for my phone on the nightstand and froze when I saw my hand. It was stained a faded black.

"So, it wasn't a dream," I said to myself more than anything. I was in awe of what I was seeing. How did I get back into my room? Did I try to wash the black liquid off my hand? What happened to the strange object I pulled from my nose? At the sound of my voice, the chittering sound reverberated through the room once more. Louder this time. It sounded closer, too. I quickly grabbed my phone and flipped on the flashlight while aiming it at the foot of my bed. What was residing there was no squirrel. It was unlike any animal or thing I had ever seen. There were three legs, and all of them were of different lengths. It should have wobbled because of this disability, but it seemed to carry itself with graceful elegance. With horror, I realized that it was patterned exactly like the disc I had pulled from my nose. Completely black with gray streaks shot through the body and curling around the legs. On the very top was a strange hole from which the chittering sounds came from.

They were hypnotic at this point. Rhythmically cooing and chirping. It was letting me know that everything was going to be okay. The sweet smell from my dream once again washed over me and set me in a strange trance. There was some part of my brain that screamed for help. I needed to get out of there. I should go after it and kill it before anything bad happened. I wanted to run out of my room, crying for my mom to save me. I stayed put. Frozen with fear and wonder at what was now crawling up the foot of the bed over the covers. Suddenly, my brain caught up to my eyes, and I scrambled to rise. Before I could blink my eyes, the creature was upon my face. The smell was intoxicatingly sweet. The creature began to nestle upon my face while positioning the ends of its spindly legs within one of my nostrils. Thick and greasy black liquid began to pour from the underside of the creature's body that was positioned directly above my mouth. My mouth opened instinctively to produce a scream, but the strange liquid killed the sound before it could pass between my lips. I began to choke and convulse with desperation. My fingers clawed at its warm and pulsing body in a feeble attempt to wrench the creature from my face. It was slippery and coated with a substance that made my nails slide without purchase. Wriggling with purposeful intensity, the creature manipulated its warm and quivering body through my nasal canal as its legs stretched my nostrils to inhuman proportions. Each of its legs slithered into my face and anchored itself in various positions. My head and face were once again filling with the pressure of a stuffed-up nose that I had felt from the previous day. I coughed and sputtered in vain attempts to expel the vile liquid. I was drowning. Amazingly enough, the creature eventually nestled its entire entity within my face and drew back its legs with one final sigh. The perfect fit. Breathing once more, I gasped quietly as I felt the creature make minute adjustments within my cheekbones. The itching once again resumed in my nose and behind my eyes as the creature took its rightful place within my facial cavity. Black spots faded into my vision once more as the night overtook me.

I suppose, in the end, I became thankful for my friend. They invigorated me with a strength I never knew existed. Sure, the

experience was what humans would call “traumatizing,” but I look back upon it with warm eyes. The days and weeks after the hatching were confusing. I still felt many of my former human emotions mixed with my new ones, the ones my dear friend flooded my brain with. Chemical keys that fixed themselves to my brain with purpose and wonderful intensity. Eventually, I gave in to the urges, and what I felt was elation. Feeding was an amazingly satisfying activity. The flesh tasted savory, sweet, bitter, and sour all at once. It was as if every dish imaginable was rolled into one exquisite meal of satisfaction. I never again craved human food or anything that had to do with them. Their bodies were an exception. Having the appearance of a seventh grader made for delightfully terror-filled meals. No one ever expects much from me until I show them what I am capable of. The itching that I so despised became a source of comfort for me. A constant reminder of something that relied on me. I never found out where my wonderful friends came from or why they chose me. I will never ask. The only thing I shall be grateful for is the opportunities they provided for me. Although, sometimes I still crave a peanut butter and jelly sandwich cut into triangles.

Brenden Kimpe is a fourth-year student majoring in English and secondary education with certificates in creative writing and writing, editing, & publishing. Brenden enjoys everything that involves literature and spends lots of his free time reading, writing, and spending time with his cat, Marceline.

An Object Lesson in the Humane and Ethical Treatment of Others

Charles Henry

I joined the army when I was twenty-three. The army sent me to the desert to do my job.

There I met a man named Chili Bowl.

Chili Bowl was a derisive moniker. I learned that his real name was Ahmad. I suppose he was called "Chili Bowl" because those who grew up in the 90s simply recognized what a bowl hair cut was. Chili was added to the front, as it is the natural measurement of a bowl.

He was short, maybe 5'6". His complexion reminded me of a piece of cherry wood that I'd stained, in the seventh grade, with linseed oil for a chessboard that I was making for my dad. I don't recall seeing it ever displayed. I suppose it went wherever you put the things that your children give you. He was just as hard as the wood, and the game. But he glinted the way I wish that board had.

I became a teacher when I was twenty-three. I got a job teaching in Appalachia.

There I met a man named Big Beau.

Big Beau was an ironic nickname. I learned that his real name was Robert. I suppose they called him "Big Beau" because Beau is just a nickname for Robert in certain parts of the country. He was "Big" because he was small, as the natural inversion of a clever joke.

He was short, maybe 5'6". His complexion reminded me of a piece of cherry wood that I'd stained, in the seventh grade, with linseed oil for a chessboard that I was making for my dad. I don't recall seeing it ever displayed. I suppose it went wherever you put the things that your children give you. He was just as hard as the wood, and the game. But he glinted the way I wish that board had.

One morning Chili had a bandage on his face. When asked what happened, he said "Corruption!" and flashed a smile while he mimicked an explosive fist running into the flat palm of his hand, "but, I am fine." Sometime in the night his house had been attacked. He rushed his wife and kids through the back door. Then he and his brother had an old-western-style shootout into the wee hours of the night. They came for him because he helped us. We'd promised to make his desert better, but he had believed us.

I didn't see him for about a month, but one day he just came back, out of the blue. In the coming weeks, he became a regular presence. His family had moved in with a relative, somewhere. He even ate with us, most days. He laughed more than I thought he would. And we laughed too, even when we didn't know what he was saying. I think that those weeks were when I realized that every person in this world is just another person.

He became my personal savior, though we didn't believe in the same God. I think I had still believed in a God at that point. He was versed in at least four languages, though not English. One day at lunch, and the entire time we spent trying to muddle through the few words that we knew in each other's language. At the end of it, I came to the realization that Chili Bowl grew up near a mountain, and that was important to him.

It was an hour well-spent.

One morning Beau had a bloody lip and black eye. When asked what happened, he said "COPS!" and flashed a smile while he mimicked an explosive fist running into the flat palm of his hand, "but, don't ya'll worry." Sometime in the night his house had been raided. He rushed his wife and kids through the back door. Then he and his brother had an old-barroom-style brawl into the wee hours of the night. They came for him for the same reason that we did. We'd promised to make his life better, but he hadn't believed us.

I didn't see him for about a month, but one day he just came back, out of the blue. In the coming weeks, he became a regular presence. His family had moved in with a relative, somewhere. He even ate with us, most days. He laughed more than I thought he would. And we laughed too, even when we didn't know what he was saying. I think that those weeks were when I realized that every person in this world is just another person.

He became my private mission, though we didn't believe in the reason for education. I think I still believed in the purity of education, then. Beau was smart in practical ways, though not English. One day at lunch, we spent the trying to muddle through the few ways that we knew each other's world. At the end of it, I came to the realization that Big Beau grew up in Appalachia, and that was important to him.

It was an hour well-spent..

After our lunch. Chili was my constant companion as we went from village to village, person to person in that desert. Despite many films, not all soldiers are primarily there to shoot people. My job was more about mitigation. Find the dangerous part and avoid conflict.

He was a wealth of knowledge when it came to the truth of how the locals felt, and why they might be lying. He wasn't physically aggressive, though he could've been. He met the world with kindness, even though his own life had been steeped in violence. He translated his world to mine through a telephone game of language and translation. Sometimes with no point. Sometimes with an unexpected insight.

One morning he walked up to the local city mayor and shot him in the head through the open car window. The mayor's men were on him at once. Chili died on the ground bleeding into the sand.

After our lunch. Beau became my most dedicated student as went from lesson to lesson, subject to subject in that semester. Despite some rhetoric, most teachers don't want to indoctrinate their students. My job was facilitation. Find the seed and encourage growth.

He was a wealth of knowledge when it came to the truth of how the locals felt, and why they might be lying. He wasn't physically aggressive, though he could've been. He met the world with kindness, even though his own life had been steeped in violence. He translated his world to mine through a telephone game of language and translation. Sometimes with no point. Sometimes with an unexpected insight.

One morning he walked up to the local city chief and shot him in the head through the open car window. The city chief's men were on him at once. Beau died on the ground, bleeding into the dirt.

Charles Henry is a second year PhD student in the Department of English at UND. He enjoys studying the language and interpretation of premodern literatures. In his writing, he tries to play with the convention and expectation of forms in order to focus on craft choices.

META

Kira Symington

Dreams lap at the shores of my unconscious.

Uncontrollable waves hitting the sand.

Craash.

Craaash.

Crash.

And soon I would be rid of them altogether. It was strange to imagine a night without dreams, a whole world without them. **But they had to go.**

“What good were they?” my META therapist once asked me, their hologram fuzzy with static. And I could not answer; my mouth filled with the cotton of unformed words. *Words that felt dry. Jumbled. Sticky?*

What good were they?

I had wondered that many times myself; **they stole the time** I could have spent sleeping awake: learning new lines of code, networking... and *god, anything other than dreaming*. I was **half as productive, as connected, as human** as I could be. You know, like that myth that people believed back then; the one that went something like we only use 10% of our brains (or was it 2%?). Like that but true.

I only said it aloud once, but I sort of... liked losing control for a brief moment in time, the way one could only do in dreams. I liked living the unscripted fantasy and I liked not working; all of which were **symptoms of escapism**, as my therapist said.

Could you blame me? I had been (**soon no longer**) partially blind (in function) for so long. The META had escaped me, not the other way around. I was the one digitally disconnected from the whole universe of being, the augmented world, because my body, my frail spine, my sluggish nervous system, whatever the doctors said was wrong with me that I didn't listen to because I was sick, sick of hearing that **I wasn't normal**, that I was stuck on this lesser plane of reality, that I am utterly and terribly alone and now! Now **they could fix me**.

The appointment is in three days.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Waiting.

I could be patient. But I can't help tapping my fingers, my toes, and any other limb capable of tapping.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Like a metronome of anxiety, counting every minute, every second, every millisecond, I tap. I remind myself; *I could be patient. I could be patient. I could be patient.* And a thought interrupts the metronome, *I would be a patient. Ha! Clever, without even meaning to be.* I fight the smug, self-satisfied smile that crawls up my face like some sort of irrepressible balloon that pulls and tugs at the corners of my mouth.

Vanity. I try to pop it.

A bizarre twitching coils under the muscles of my face. Instead of the *tap, tap, tap*, there was now a *twitch, twitch, twitch*. I breathe in and out. *In and out. In and out.*

I wonder if the others, the ones that could see the world perfectly, as it

is, also felt anxious. Did they ever feel nervous? Were they ever struck by the horrible, stomach-clenching, shaking-hands, sweaty-brow nerves that I was? And did they ever feel the heights of relief as I soon would?

I had asked my therapist that once. They shook their head slowly, and, as if speaking to a child or someone very very old, they said that **the perfect connection of META cured any mental ills caused by the alienation of individuality.** *Alienation*, I taste the word on my lips. I roll it back and forth on my tongue. *Aliennnationnnn. Alieennnation. Aliennnnnn. Alien.* It tasted bitter like wine or horseradish, but there was a hint of something else. *A bird? A bird's wing? A blue, open sky?*

I think this alienation is driving me insane. I know my therapist would agree with more technical-sounding words, **"The only cure for the distress caused by the state of this lesser reality is META. META offers perfect relief to the troubled mind by the seamless integration of..."** *Yada yada yada.* I got the drift the first time.

But they were proud of me (so they said). I had made do with the META contacts for so long. **An imperfect solution for an imperfect person.** (They said the first part; I could fill in the rest).

But I hate the word perfect. I don't want them to call me that once I'm integrated. It disgusts me, even more than my condition. It tastes like rot and smells like something evil.

I fiddle with the case in my hands. It's sleek and black with little scuff marks from the times I dropped it, which I did often because of its godawful glitches. One moment I would be walking up technicolor stairs with gleaming, gold balustrades and the next, there would be this *fuzziness*

in my ears,

my eyes,

my head,

then I would be walking on dirty stairs made from a material I did not have the words for. **The real world, the augmented world**, would melt away, like a witch in water, into this ugly, physical *thing*. My castle transformed into a mudhole, my work into mindless machinery.

It was in those moments that my legs would trip over themselves, my case would fall to the floor with a *thunk!* and my arms would flail wildly in the air as I fell.

The physical world was, *is*, such a painful thing. Covered in bruises and a dust I hadn't known was there moments earlier, I would become keenly aware of the physicality of the people helping me up, their chameleon coats glitching in and out of existence, showing the raw flesh under their virtual skins. Their smiles flashing back and forth, sparkling white teeth transforming into yellowed chipped ones and transforming back in the span of milliseconds.

And I would choke.

Mouth agape.

No breath.

Then panic, dizzy, spiraling panic coursing through every last vein—*veins! How terribly aware I would be of their veins! Their real skin never had them, but the wrinkled, veiny hands reaching towards me, towards mine!*

The appointment is in two days.

Waiting.

Waiting.

I must be excited, they told me on our last holo-talk. It felt more like a command than a statement. Maybe it was. If it was, I must take it seriously. They were the ones with the title. Royalty had gone under a name-change. The duke was now a Doctor of this or that. The baronesses have several such degrees of importance. But what does that make me? The court jester?

I had looked at my therapist in that moment, building a tower of true sincerity and utter seriousness, *a feat that took much mental willpower, more than I imagined it took the average person*, and then! Like juggling balls spinning and twirling and flying and crashing down (with the sound of those cymbals that little toy monkeys smash together), my tower came tumbling into this *fuzziness*.

bzzz

phzzzz

fzzz

Their hologram had blurred in and out of being, and at once I could see that there was someone standing behind them, their holo-clothes, their META skin, their whole being stripped bare in a flash.

I looked around.

Someone in a pinstriped suit, now naked.

A floating dress disappeared like a magic trick gone dirty.

A bejeweled crown snatched out of existence.

*And they were all so unaware!
Unaware of their bodies!
Unaware of their poverty!
Unaware of their ignorance!
As naked as the day they were born, wearing imaginary clothes, walking
in imaginary castles, connecting with imaginary people!
Adam and Eve factory-made!
Never bothering to eat the apple.
Never bothering to open their eyes.
How funny!*

All that in one millisecond.

Then the glitch ended.

And I was utterly, truly ashamed of myself (**as I should be**).

I felt seasick, lurched back into reality so suddenly.

Stupid.

Mad.

I was alone, insane, laughing at a joke that wasn't there.

Not for much longer.

The appointment is in one day.

Waiting.

I did not sleep. I did not want to miss my unproductive dreams. **They were bad** for me, like eating until you were bursting at the seams and

then choosing to drink your day's allowance of water all at once like an idiot and feeling so filled that you might explode like a balloon or a missile or a shooting star.

Boom! Pow! Whoosh!

I still ate. Apparently, when you were fully integrated into META with the whole thing inside your brain like some sort of benevolent parasite or hive mind (a *parasitic wasp!*) so you can **live in reality** instead of having to use a shitty ancient version of the tech which only really worked on your sight and still glitched like hell because you were kinda born too different for the world to be nice or even exist for you... and I don't remember where I was going with this.

Sometimes my trains of thought run off the rails, whatever trains were. People didn't need to go anywhere these days. Not when you could work in your sleep. Anyway, **that wouldn't happen after my META surgery**, I'm sure.

Remember. It was something about food...

Steak, juicy and delicious.

It will taste better in META.

Bliss.

*There was that saying... how did it go again?
something... was bliss?*

Today.

The appointment is now.

They usher me into the waiting room.

I do not wait.

My ushers stand guard as they strap me onto a black table.

My body is spread in a perfect t.

Grave silence.

Sacred quiet.

They smile, and, although there is no glitch, I can see their yellowed (*sharp?*) teeth.

Their virtual clothes are blindingly white.

Their scalpels gleam.

Their hands are cold.

I feel small.

I feel scared.

And I don't know why.

They poke something in my arm.

It hurts.

I feel the ocean of my unconscious rise for one last time. My final dream engulfs me. And my heart thunders in my chest like the foamy peaks of the sea dashing themselves upon the rocks. I want them to slow, to be

normal, to be steady. I wonder why they throw themselves into formless oblivion. Why do they wish for their own destruction? I breath in and out. In and out. In and out...

Uncontrollable waves hitting the sand.

Craash.

Craaash.

Crash.

This time there are no others to take their place.

The blinding surgery light evaporates the ocean.

Dust.

Ashes.

Bones.

And utter silence.

...

...

...

"How are you feeling?"

"..."

"Perfect."

*Double-majoring in philosophy and English, **Kira Symington** likes to take philosophical approaches to her writing. Outside of her literary experiments, she is a general reporter and the opinion editor for UND's student newspaper, the Dakota Student.*

A Cold Line: A Ten-Minute Play

Adam March

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SAMANTHA DANIEL:

A woman in her late teens.

ANDREW CRAW:

A man in his early to mid-twenties.

OSCAR JERVIS:

A man in his early forties.

SCENE: *In a cramped office and equally cramped apartment.*

TIME: 11:30pm.

At Rise: Sam sits at her desk in front of a computer with a phone ringing in one hand and a pen in another. She is on stage right. There is a wall between her and Andrew. He is on stage left.

SAM

(speaking to herself)

Alright, alright. Stay relaxed and remember to engage with them.

SAM

(phone stops ringing)

Thank you for calling. My name is Sam. How—uh—are you doing today?

ANDREW

(hunched over in chair)

Hey. Um... I'm doing fine.

SAM

Good. That's good. Could you help me with some personal information, just like a formality-type thing? Could you tell me your name, age, address, and a bit about yourself?

ANDREW

Yeah, I know the spiel... It's Andrew. Uh—Andrew Craw. I'm twenty-three, currently living in Arlington, Washington at—wait, hold on, are you new there?

SAM

(she says while filling out forms with the information)
Yeah sorry, I've only had a couple clients. It might take a minute, but I could transfer you to someone else if you'd like...

ANDREW

(he interjects quickly)
No, no. That's fine. It's just that I noticed you didn't ask me if I or a family member served in the military. No to both by the way. Y' know, for your formality.

SAM

Wow, I guess I did forget. Sorry, I might be a little distracted. I'm not really used to the whole having a job thing yet. Sorry, uh, how did you know that?

ANDREW

(he says in a reserved manner)
Uh, you could say I have a bit of experience in that hellhole, but I've since stopped to preserve what sanity I have left.

SAM

(interested, but also a little nervous)
Really?

(short pause)

What pushed you away?

ANDREW

(he gets up and starts pacing around the room)
Well, originally, it was just a job that I got to help me through college. It worked well with my schedule, and I guess I figured, what the hell. I went in and made the

calls as best I could. I figured I'd keep it during my time there and later start looking for a job closer to home.

SAM

That sounds good. And uh, what changed for you?

ANDREW

In general, I wouldn't say that it was that bad. You'd deal with some pushy people here and there, but most were surprisingly nice and talkative.

(he pauses and sighs)

I had one call though, came in at two in the morning, that I could tell, just from the start, would be a pain...

Blackout. Scene transitions showing the past conversation. Andrew is moved to Sam's desk and Mr. Jervis is placed in Andrew's chair.

ANDREW

(in a more robotic, chipper tone than before)

Hi, my name is Andrew. Thank you for calling. What can I call you, and how can I help you this morning?

MR JERVIS

Um, yeah, I'm sorry for calling. I just really needed someone to talk to. My name's Oscar, wait no... Yeah, Oscar's fine.

ANDREW

Alright... I just need a bit of information from you, and we can get started. Are you okay with that?

MR JERVIS

(says while holding something back)

That's fine...

ANDREW

Ok, so, how old are you?

MR JERVIS

Forty-three...

ANDREW

Could I get your address, please? Just state and zip code are fine if you aren't comfortable with giving out the full thing.

MR JERVIS

Yeah, um...

(pause)

Just, St Helens, Oregon, zip code is... 97501.

ANDREW

Wow! No way! I'm in Portland right now for school. Ok, alright. And finally, could you tell me if you or anyone in your family has served in the military, and do you have access to a—

MR JERVIS

I'm so sorry, but I'm not sure if I can keep going anymore... I have nothing meaningful in my life. I have no connections, no hobbies, nothing! Just a senseless cycle of work and an endless pool of hate. I've put off calling for so long, but I just need another person to hear me!

ANDREW

Do you want to tell me about what's been going on? Maybe uh—Maybe I can offer some advice to help you

cope with your negative feelings.

MR JERVIS
(sarcastically)

Yeah, cope.

(slowly builds dissatisfaction through this speech)

It's honestly hard to say what's been going on. I'm not doing bad professionally, I guess I just expected more by now. Something at the end of the rainbow. I've always kept a smile on my face and worked hard to better myself, to beat my insecurities and make my life something worthwhile. But... I feel like I've never truly lived. I've probably been repressing every real emotion for years.

(defeated)

And now I'm probably too far gone to make things better...

ANDREW

I'm so sorry that you have to go through that every day. If it's an ongoing issue, we could maybe set you up with a more direct line...

MR JERVIS

No, that's alright. I really don't want to make this an ongoing thing.

ANDREW

Alright Oscar, could you tell me if you've had any thoughts of suicide and how recently?

MR JERVIS

I—I don't know, I guess not really, I just want things to change... *(angry)* I'm sick of banging my head into the

same brick wall and having no support when there's a headache!

(sighs and calms down)

I'm sorry, I guess I'm just a little high-strung right now.

ANDREW

Alright, that's ok. It's good to know that it's not an emergency. I can talk for a bit, but if you're not suicidal, I can't justify spending too much time on this call.

MR JERVIS

Really? Are you seriously saying that I'm not worth your time?! How is that fair?! How can you say that's fair?!

ANDREW

I'm really sorry, but we're not really trained to be therapists. I can listen for a bit like I said, but we need to give opportunity to others. Many other people might be on the verge of never coming back.

MR JERVIS

(holding back tears)

Okay. Yeah, that's fair. I'm grateful for your time, thank you.

ANDREW

What? Are you sure?

MR JERVIS

Yeah, I'm okay.

Blackout. Scene transitions back to Sam and Andrew.

SAM

Is that it? There has to be more to that story.

ANDREW

I only had one conversation with him. Now, based on what you heard, I want you to try and rate my performance with that client. Just, y'know, just like out of ten.

SAM

Well, it sounds like you did all you could for him. But I'm not necessarily gonna pretend that "all you could" is enough. Then again, I'm not really sure what I could have done in your situation.

ANDREW

You're really not sure, huh? Ok. So, what rating would you give me?

SAM

Maybe a seven? I really don't think I can be an accurate judge without being there.

ANDREW

I'll ask you this. Do you think Oscar went on to enjoy the rest of his days with a smile on face?! Do you think he went on to find meaning and purpose in his life?!

SAM

Well, maybe—

ANDREW

And even if, by some miracle, he managed to do all that, do you think it was our call that helped him?!

SAM

Why are you berating me? I had no part in it! And—and you probably don't even know what happened to the guy!

ANDREW

(sighs)

Look. The whole system accomplishes nothing. I didn't mean it as a personal attack towards you. I'm sorry. Although, it really doesn't help your case that you're basically brand new.

(he pauses)

And, the truth is, I do know what happened to him.

SAM

Oh no... Please don't tell me. Did he...

ANDREW

Did you expect this story to have a happy ending? I remember I stopped by my grandma's apartment. She usually has the local news playing on her TV 24-7. Apparently, the night before, some idiot was driving on the wrong side of the interstate. There was no evidence of drug use or alcohol. The man was identified as Oscar Jervis. His body was nearly mangled beyond recognition. Apparently, the dashboard of his car folded in and ripped off his legs at the waist.

SAM

(look of fear)

That's horrifying. Do you know for sure that—

ANDREW

I had only talked to him two days before. Of course, he had to choose the most selfish option! Thing about doing it that way, you're not just putting your own life at risk. The other car was carrying two other people. A mother named Brooke Adderson, who was killed in the crash and her son, Billy Adderson who was found in critical condition. I looked into it sometime later and he—he didn't make it either. I was stunned. I had just murdered three people.

SAM

But that was his choice! You said it yourself, he was selfish, and ultimately, he didn't really give you a chance to help him.

ANDREW

But that just shows that the system doesn't work! The hotline can't accomplish anything. If any people are at their breaking point and come here, they expect to find the missing ingredient, the solution to make their lives better. Truth is, we can't offer that.

SAM

But we have to try! If we can just... listen. Maybe then, making an effort is better than doing nothing.

ANDREW

That experience was truly a wake-up call for me. I was gone from that hellhole the next day. No notice, no formalities, just gone. If only I had gotten out before it cost me my sanity.

(Andrew moves over to desk and hunches over the drawers, reaching inside.)

I'm going to offer you something that can't be measured with any definition of value. A controlled dose of realism.

SAM

Wha—what the hell do you mean by that?!

ANDREW

(He pulls a gun out of his drawer and puts it to his head.)
I can't live with the pain anymore... Maybe you'll be able to.

SAM

STOP! You need to stop right now and think. How can you—uh, how—

ANDREW

I'm listening. Go ahead, give me your best coping strategies, just try to make it better.

SAM

Wait! Can you just give me your address? Maybe I can send police and they can—

The gun goes off. Andrew falls to the floor.

Sam sits for a few seconds at the dial tone and then hangs up. She sits in shock, staring into space. The phone rings. She looks at it in horror. After a long pause, Sam picks it up, unblinking.

SAM

(With a painful, manufactured tone)

H—hi! M—m—my name is Sam.

(pause)

Thank you for reaching out to 988 Suicide Hotline. How are you doing tonight?

Blackout.

Adam March is looking to find his creative outlet. He enjoys reading, running, and pushing his limits. This is his first real pursuit into the world of publishing fiction. He's enjoyed writing many short stories and poems, but now he wants to send it out in to the world to live for itself. He is very nervous and excited to see how this plays out.

***art &
photography***

A Midsummer Daydream

Kira Symington

Artist's Statement

"A Midsummer Daydream" blossomed from my regular walks to Grand Fork's Sertoma Park last summer. As I read, painted, and took photos of whatever caught my eye, I had begun to recognize the familiar rhythms of the nature that surrounded me.

Each photograph in this collection captures those fleeting yet repetitive moments that became my visual poetry—the golden sun illuminating the very tips of the flowers for the same brief instant every day, the colors of each petal changing with the sunset, and the dusk and birdsong following hand in hand.

Through this series, I aim to share my intimate connection that I forged during those quiet summer walks, inviting the viewer to resonate with nature's rhythmic symphony. These images are not just my visual memories but a larger invitation to experience the enchantment of a midsummer daydream, when the golden hour strikes, and time stands still.





*Double-majoring in philosophy and English, **Kira Symington** likes to take philosophical approaches to her writing. Outside of her literary experiments, she is a general reporter and the opinion editor for UND's student newspaper, the Dakota Student.*

Fortune

Abby Petersen

Artist's Statement

I have always loved the world of art, whether that's writing, doodling something, or watching various things online. I've always found myself drawn to things that people put together for other people, or for themselves that they've decided to share with the world. Because of this interest, I always wanted to create something of my own. I always thought it was a superpower to look at the world and capture it in a unique way, and I wanted to do that myself. Due to wanting everything to be perfect right away, I hesitated to even try art. This held me back from expressing myself through art, even though I love it so much.

This year, I decided to participate in Inktober to force myself to draw more and be happy with what I made while exploring the process. One of the prompts was Fortune. I looked at the prompt as someone who could see the future and was haunted by it but also found power in it. I decided to do a negative piece where, instead of adding color to the piece to make the picture, I took away color and then added the purple at the end. I'm not sure if there is a message to the piece except maybe a milestone in my own artistic journey.



Abby Petersen is a second year law student. She enjoys costuming and creative writing in her spare time as well as reading fiction.

Haunted Playground

Gon Carlson

Artist's Statement

Inspired by the ghost photoshoot trend, I took my friends to the playground to capture the sense of playfulness and wonder that we remember from our childhood. Halloween has been a way that we were allowed to express ourselves without judgment, whether it be with cheap Walmart costumes or a simple white sheet. Although the playgrounds from our past might differ, we all bond over what it means to meet with your friends in one place and play. As college students we take on new responsibilities and learn how to deal with them, often forgetting how young we once were. I think that occasionally you should stop and remember to let your inner child run free. Play on the playgrounds, haunt your friends, and remember to have fun. For how will you know how far you've come if you don't look back to where you started?



Gon Carlson is a psychology student that came to UND from the Philippines. Gon always had an interest in photography starting with a Disney princess film camera that she got from her mom when she was 7. Now, Gon spends her spare time between class and work taking pictures of the changing seasons, her friends, and random events across campus.

poetry

Invocation October 2023

Casey Fuller

Liver of sky, colon
of hinge, rest well,
set inside us now,
unspectacularly,
unromantically,
reside steadily
beside each
muscle, each
tendon, each
acid digesting there,
quite normally even
when inaccurately
invoked, as if
a body could be
founded in the sky,
holding barely on--
protect now
the intestines and
cavities that could
crash or shatter
without ever bearing
accurate witness
to few of the shared
and amazing
inner conjunctions—
please: flawed vessel,

oddly enjambed,
continue to press
and pump out
from all of our
insides to all of
the fine extremities,
center us, let no
unwanted implements
enter, no casual
recklessness occur,
no encounters
around corners
we're not attending to
take us into a bright
imaginary land
in an imaginary sky,
no, let no haters nor
authoritarians decide
from a panel what
constitutes care, love,
kin, nor disembodied
from behind some
monitor and controller,
let them mist any of our
billion-year-old
bodies into vapor,
into burnt ash, into
non-origin without
even seeing what
flew from above
to X us out
from our still existing,
season generating,
goldilocks-distanced

green and blue
planet, Earth.

Casey Fuller is an English PhD student at the University of North Dakota. He is from the cloudiest city in the United States: Olympia, Washington. He writes, drinks coffee, and rides a bike.

Nohoilpi

John Michael Lockett

Who wins men
When luck runs out
What will the People glen
To wield a double edge sword, I doubt

Only Time will tell.
Perhaps only Nanbozho will chortle
Will it end in Hell?
Floating on a Styxian turtle.

Charion saw culture expand.
Surely, he has a sad tale —
Of guns, germs, steel, and lost land.
Of lost people, lost cities, of many things for sale —

Nanah Waiya is lonely and unkempt.
What will the Ways be once spent?

John Michael Lockett works for the Aerospace Network in Odegard and is a graduate student getting a master's in computer science. He is a member of the Caddo tribe and previously worked for the Choctaw Nation for 7 years. He wrote his poem for this issue of *Floodwall* in a creative writing course at UND last semester.

Words Meant for a Notecard.

Brenden Kimpe

I. Translucent Bugs.

Translucent bugs crawl beneath my skin.
They make my scalp and armpits itch.
Gorging on the abundance of my worries.
The more they feed, the more they must eat.
They are normal to me. Every day, tiring things.
They never used to be.
Those first moments when they burrowed under my skin,
Into my thoughts,
Never to be forgotten.
I could rid myself of these bugs.
A pill here or a drink there, as they say.
Well then what's the point?
After all,
They worked so hard to get there.
Against all odds these translucent bugs found refuge within me.
They beg me to let them stay,
With their bulging bellies and mewling cries.
I wasn't sad to see them go.

II. Shaky Lines.

My hand glides yet it writes nothing.
The words have no meaning until I assign it.
You can believe in them if you choose,
But I can't make you.
These words meant for a notecard were never meant to be seen.

Only by me, through use as an outlet.
Now by you, something to plug into.
My pen hovers above the page,
Afraid of being misused and abused.
Shaky lines and uneven spaces,
I ask you to judge them,
When they cross your mind.
It's what they are meant for.
These words previously meant for a notecard ring within my head,
Waiting for a listening ear.

Brenden Kimpe is a fourth-year student majoring in English and secondary education with certificates in creative writing and writing, editing, & publishing. Brenden enjoys everything that involves literature and spends lots of his free time reading, writing, and spending time with his cat, Marceline.

Three Poems

Dani Ogawa

Pierced

the little girl i was wanted to be a knight.
A child that never cared for fine dresses
or the idea of being saved.
i wanted to do the saving,
the fighting, and the conquering.
i liked the shiny armor,
not for its glimmer, but for its ability to be
beautiful while guarding something so sacred
as a heart

i had found a castle as an adult of eight and ten
after years of sharpening my sword and
polishing my chest-plate.
it was a tall, towering castle i would save.
i climbed it for months, years even,
fighting the dragons that curled up the side
and slaying the beasts that crept up behind.
i told myself this battle was all i wanted,
it kept me climbing.

i was fighting for something i wanted a long time ago.
hoping that after i claimed it and won the battle,
that it would all be worth it in the end.

until i realized there was no end
and i would be climbing that crumbling rock,
fighting forever and ever after.
over a teenage dream
i stopped wanting and dreaming
as a young girl of twenty-two.

at the top of that castle i understood
that the fear of the hurt
of that dream ending,
of my heart being pierced through that shiny exterior,
was what kept me fighting for so long.
now i peel my armor from my skin
and find blood pooling in its wake.
i had been pierced all along.

so i shall be naked from this day on.

I Long to be a Wizard

I have always admired poets,
with their secret language,
using the words I utter every day.
an entanglement of
letters like a beautiful braid in your hair,
so simple yet so everlasting and pretty.
A puzzle explaining the secrets of
Life or just a recipe for cherry pie.
I eat it up, I scream YES---

That is how I feel.

I think they *are* wizards, sorcerers, magicians.
They are the wizards, pencils as wands,
Paper; their flying carpets.
I long to be a wizard and say my secret spells,
So that I may make magic happen,
And so that others may think I am a wizard too.

Lycorises

I find it somewhat conflicting,
the way that I'm thinking,
and the way that it sends me awry.
Tip top on the surface,
though I'm actually quite nervous,
and I can't form a thought as to why.
Jumbled things in my brain,
a light drizzle to hurricane,
and no one knows it but I.
I regret that it's true,
that I'm fading to blue,
I see the dark clouds from my eye.

No one else understands,
a language of my own hand!
no one knows how to conjugate.
A loophole would be ideal,
of why I feel what I feel,
the only problem now, that I'm too late.
A train has left the station,
one of my own vocation,
its destination: still unknown to me.
Loved ones stand and wave,
as I smile, though a slave,
to the puppeteer grinning with glee.

Oh, if only kind hands,
could cut these white rubber bands!
Their tight grip on me, so very taut.
I feel my hope wearing thin,
that my armor of tin,

will withstand my intruding thoughts.
I should have seen it all along,
what was once great, now so wrong,
my stomach clenches just to remember.
I used to love the rain,
now it seeps into my brain,
and I have no choice but to surrender.

Someday it will come,
that bright light from the sun,
one that conquers all storms that come by.
I can just see it now,
my face smiling, head bowed,
admiring the ground beneath me all dry.
Lycorises bloom at my feet,
and the dark clouds will retreat,
I'll smile and say a solemn good-bye.
But until that time comes,
I shall drink your cheap rum,
and turn my face up to the sky.

Dani Ogawa is a senior English major at UND. She plans to graduate in the spring of 2024 with her bachelor's in English, in addition to a minor in communications, a certificate in creative writing, and a certificate in writing, editing, and publishing. When she is not writing stories, you can find her reading on her Kindle at archives, listening to Taylor Swift, or teaching dance. Dani is from Grand Forks, ND.

Two Poems

Maren Schettler

Silly–yes–but sweet

I read the book she wrote in
Marked with scribbles, scrawls, and lines.
She annotated every page,
Before she let the book be mine.

I read the book *she* wrote in
But cared more for what she wrote.
The printed words faded away,
Beneath her penciled notes.

A smiley here, an *oh no!* there,
A question after every page—
I walked along beside her thoughts,
Tracing shock, joy, and rage.

...I knew she kept a pencil,
Tucked inside her purse,
For at any moment she just might
Have inspiration for a verse.

In the margins she would write,
Bits and pieces of all kinds.
Phrases, words, and lines she loved,
Allowed me glimpses of her mind.

I began to think like her,
Living in each note she shared.
My thoughts were written in her hand,
In loops, all messy, emotions bared.

My heart stopped in its tracks,
When my own name caught my eye—
A note addressed to me,
“This!—reminds me of you and I...”

I melted when I thought about
The fact that she would think of me,
That I—me!—would be on her mind
As she read this book she knew she’d lend me.

Did she write for my benefit?
Did she write as I now read?
Feeling giddy...a little silly...
Hopelessly hopeful, I concede.

Page by page, I fell in love,
With the girl behind the penciled tears.
I’ll return the book to her tomorrow,
With answered notes and abandoned fears.

The ghost who lost his shadow

"Oh dear, oh my!
I just had it by my side!
Did it run away from me?"

The ghost who lost his shadow cried
Empty glass teardrops
That fell, shattered, left no debris.

"What will I do?
I have already left the living,
But now I am truly alone!"

The ghost spent all his time with the sun.
Trying very hard to cast a shadow of his own,
But had not a soul to shed.

"I'll glow in darkness
By myself every night,
And hope my shadow returns with the dawn!"

But the ghost didn't know
That outside his hiding place, the moon of the night
Was waiting for a friend like him:

Without shadow, reflecting light.

Maren Schettler is a senior studying English, music, and political science. She loves the outdoors and enjoys camping and hiking with friends and family. While in school, there is no end to her frustration with the lack of leisure reading time. Her boxer dog Pacha is her favorite reading buddy.

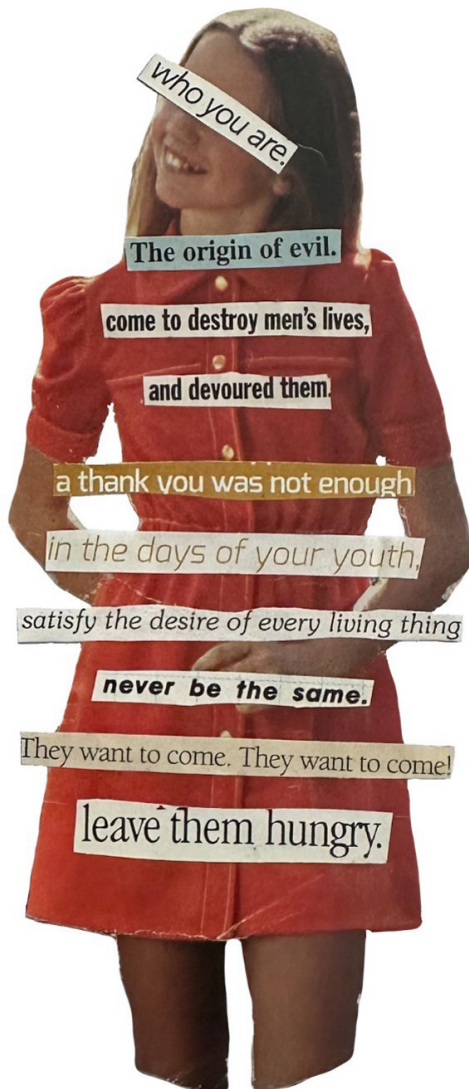
The Guilty | The Innocent

Lillian Quinn

The Guilty



The Innocent



who you are.

The origin of evil.

**come to destroy men's lives,
and devoured them.**

a thank you was not enough
in the days of your youth.

satisfy the desire of every living thing

never be the same.

They want to come. They want to come!

leave them hungry.

Lillian Quinn is a Grand Forks native, and a sophomore at UND studying English education. In her free time, she loves to read and write creative fiction. This creative fiction usually takes its form in the dark and macabre. Going forward, she hopes to expand her knowledge of writing tips and tricks in order to better her writing.

out of spite

Jayden Buckau

out of spite

my best writing always
had a healthy dollop of spite
despite the respite of the written
word my vision colors crimson from
the blood used as ink as I color the page
with my furious words my biblical rage my
ever-present grief the dead girl in my head the
child with no name finds comfort in my calligraphic
callous cacophonous chaos oh oh oh others beg me to set
down the pen as I carve into the skin failure they failed me
the tiny child inside me screams everyday not to forget her she
didn't think we'd live this long everything hinges on my writing and
with her little lungs wailing so I don't think I'll ever stop writing no never
scream child let me hear your grievances I am your unelected official fueled by
the currency of my youth wasted no child shriek because I want it back out of spite

Jayden Buckau (2002) is a graduate teaching assistant and master's student in the English Department. He did his undergrad at Black Hills State University in South Dakota. He has lived in many places across North America and enjoys traveling, which inspires a lot of his writing. He's queer and trans, has a dog named Bailey, and has a deep love for queer and gender studies in literature as well as the new historicism form of criticism.

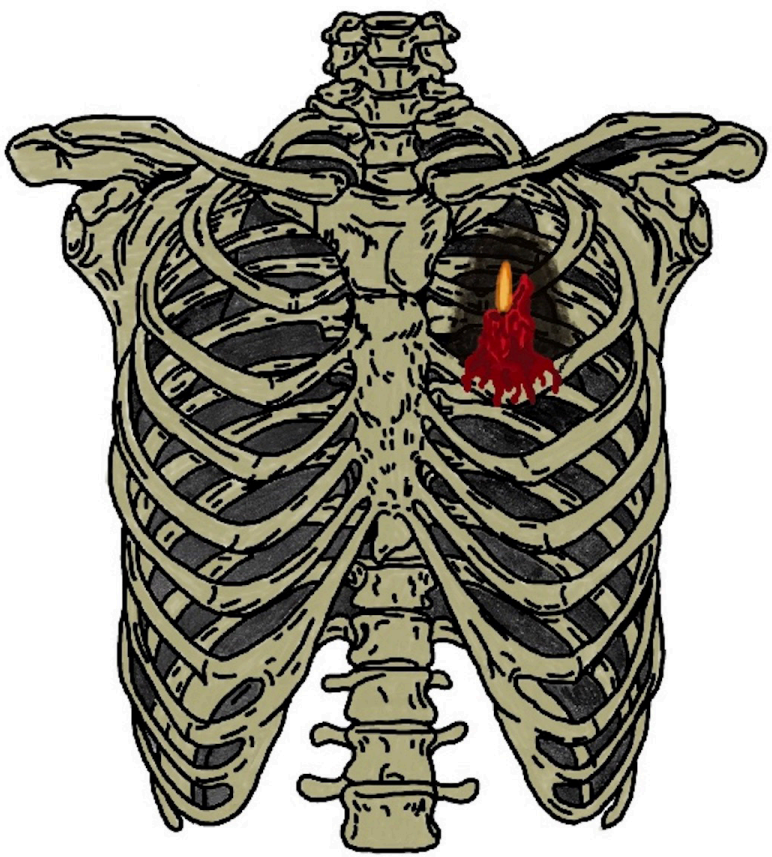
Flicker

Chloe Piekkola

Wax pools from the candle
that burns deep within my chest.
Its flame dwindles as the wick flickers
with all it has left to give.

Drippings of wax harden amongst my ribs,
with no light left for it to warm.
The cold wastes no time as it
eats away at the void in my chest.

The flame dies, I delay lighting it.
Within the darkness I trim the wick,
flick the lighter, and let it
burn my thumb to feel the
warmth a little bit longer.



Chloe Piekkola is a student at the University of North Dakota. Chloe is a writer and poet who frequently loses herself in poetic thought and the allure of a captivating story.

Seasons

Rachael Erickson

When things are just for a season, may our ever so fragile and loyal hearts remember the joy of what was.
Seasons change and leaves die too.
There will be growth and beauty that will soon come from the soil, where trees once burned for each other.
The courage to not look back and to let go.
To no longer let the bitterness put your soul in chains.
To live your life and smile with joy, like no one is watching.
Knowing the tears will dry up.
You'll meet new people.
You'll find joy in the mundane again.
And you'll be proud to say that you're ok.

***Rachael Erickson** is a senior here at UND, majoring in communication, with a double minor in leadership and non-profit. She has the honor of leading a small group within Chi Alpha campus ministries, and discipling those around her. Rachael has a passion for writing about mental health with the hope that whoever reads it will feel less alone in their journey. In her extra time, she also enjoys being active, whether that's working out, hiking, or playing tennis.*

Birds That Live in the Ivy Wall

Katerina Sladko

I noticed today that there are birds that live in the ivy wall.
It gave me pause...
I stopped. And breathed. And stood a moment.
And thought of all the little things.
Things here and there and everywhere,
Of droplets of sunshine that make up the sea.
I think that sometimes, though we see the forest, we miss the trees.

Katerina Sladko is a student at UND who loves to explore and create. She has many interests that range from photography, writing, and art to engineering and linguistics.

Two Poems

Chad Erickstad

Jug Wine

soft and silly
thoughts
unravelling
our heads
filling
with dry
crisp
apple
overtones

sinking into
oblivion
with you
guys I
wouldn't
want it
any other
way I
love

you guys
are my
best

fiends
friends
where are
we how
are we
here

Pulled to Light

I am muddled, motionless,
suspended between surface and
weedy lake bottom, looking up
toward a murky, greenish glow.

I have not yet spent stretches
of summer kicking limpid water,
gripping the rounded concrete
edge of my small town's public
pool, finally unmooring myself,
free to propel into more turbid
depths of uncertain purpose.

Gripping my tiny wrist, my father
pulls me to the light, removing
me from the lake, gently laying
me onto the dock as water drizzles
from my slack, drained body.

Years from now my father's heart
will burst while jogging, preparing for
an Army National Guard physical
test, having never left the service
after conscription during Vietnam.

I will keep his dog tag, studying it,
wearing it from time to time, running
my fingers over the raised letters, a
blind search for remedy or meaning.

Looking up at my father, I am scared
by the worry I see, his face a mask
of distress unfamiliar to me before
a broad smile transforms it as he
realizes that I am unharmed and safe.

I want this to be my father's
expression, his experience upon
dying: suddenly, painlessly, beatifically
pulled to light by some savior
like I was pulled to light by mine.

Chad Erickstad is a senior at UND majoring in English with a minor in communications.

Ode to the Mento Moon

Abby Petersen

It was almost time.

The sun was setting on the small cotton fields with its big lemon drop body nestling down into the horizon.

The tiny wire goats began their prancing out into the field toward the sweet gumdrop tones of the liquorish flute held by none other than the almond bark man.

He stood tall on acorn hooves and clutched the instrument in chipping hands.

It had been years since his cracked lips parted. Years since the lemon drop sun had dripped below the horizon, allowing the creatures of the night to prance amongst the cotton fields.

He blew practiced breath into the intertwining laces that seemed to carry it down the lost shadows and valleys to the ears of those in hiding.

What did the lonely do when the watcher left?

What could they see when the wool was taken from their eyes?

A sweet dance began amongst the goats which transferred to the almond bark man.

His hooves began to stomp into the chocolate ground below them creating craters for small sprinkle ants to fall into.

His fingers danced along the flute as he turned and swung, his body sweet grass in the breeze.

His song luring out the creatures from hiding.

One by one they emerged into mento moonlight.

One by one their bodies joined the swish and sway of the melody.

Their dancing limbs stirred up the ground until cocoa powder coated the air.

The chocolate mist mingled with sweet tooth and velvet tongues until the creatures were drunk on the taste.

Arms raised, they yelled out to the mento moon, the almond bark man their direct line to God.

As the sweetness of the powder began to dissipate and the lemon drop sun began to climb its way back to the surface, the creatures began to sob saltwater tears.

Their wails lifted through the night on wafer wings.

The Normals may mistake the sound for that of coyotes or an infestation in the walls but the mento moon always recognized her children's voices.

Always knew who called to her in the night.

As she began to lose her hold on the surface, rain pelted the ground around the creatures. Big sour tears for her children.

The almond bark man played his farewell song as they retreated back to hiding.

On the last note, he closed his mouth.

Until next time.

Abby Petersen is a second year law student. She enjoys costuming and creative writing in her spare time as well as reading fiction.

Oranges and Losing You

Clara Anderson-Cameron

I watch from a careful distance,
The way your brain betrays you
I watch as my mother loses pieces of you,
And therefore herself
Nothing is more terrifying and sickeningly sure
Than the deepening twilight of a gentle mind

*It's years ago, I'm sobbing as mom drives away
The night stretches endlessly in front of us
My brother is in another room and you are
With me, soothing me, but I can't be calmed*

The slow progression of loss rips through a few
Generations at a time
Do you remember, Grandma, the smallness of my
Soft baby hands, of my mother's?
Can you still smell it, that fresh baby smell
When they handed her, swaddled, to you in the bed?

*You line up small toy bowling pins by the doorway,
I stop crying to watch you work,
We don't have a ball, you note, and we
Set off into the house searching for something to use*

You taught me how to use a soup spoon
Each time we sat down to eat last week,
I listened and nodded, and each time I learned something
Not new, but precious
I learned three times where to place it while setting a table,
I learned that your hands shake more, these days

*Your eyes light up and you exclaim,
Aha! In the excitement of the hunt, I'm no longer afraid
I can still see the look on your face
When you point to the orange sitting unpeeled by the sink*

You were a little girl once, Grandma
Just as I was, just as Mom was
Were you afraid of the dark then?
Are you afraid of it now? Is it awful to un-become?
We three are knotted together like stitches looped between knitting needles
Someone is pulling on the tail, you're falling apart, coming quietly undone

*It's dark outside the windows when we start to bowl
Rolling the fat orange over creamy linoleum
Cackling at the crashing of pins and I
Can feel those thousand dimples in the waxy peel*

We will write out the rest of our lives
With the same letters you used before us
I can see them falling from your lips
And I rush, to collect them with cupped hands
Grandma, tell me more, tell me everything
Do you remember that night with the orange?

*Oh, the backs of our hands were
Smoother then, and skin was pulled taught,
See how we loosen with age,
See how mother becomes daughter
Keep me as long as you will,
In the back of your mind that slips,
sleepily, into a blackness so sweet
And so soft. For you, Grandma, I'll remember it all.*

Clara Anderson-Cameron is a junior at the University of North Dakota, majoring in English and minoring in French. She plans on attending graduate school after UND and hopes to eventually join the world of publishing and editing. She spends much of her free time writing and reading and gets outdoors as often as possible, with her favorite music as an important backdrop to all activities.

An Ode to Friends Past and Present

Autumn Thompson

Belated

It's my birthday today
I'm twenty-two years old
I think about how quickly the time slips by me
Old Christmas cards sent in the mail
Alphabet magnets on the fridge
Ace of cups reversed

Though I sit
Alone on the kitchen floor
Wisps of candle smoke on the stagnant air
I am not truly alone
No, never truly

She is small and fragile
Only knowing of how warm it is to sit next to me
Where once she knew vast lonely spaces
And cold empty nights

She knows not of her birth or death
Not of past and future
But only of am, are, we and together
She makes no sound as she settles next to me
A gentle sigh escapes her as she releases the tension held in her tiny limbs
Small body
Small chest
Heaving small and shallow breaths
She knows not of her mother
Or of a family not so long past

Only of my strange, sweet embrace
And soft coos of adoration
I envy her for it
To be so blissfully unaware
Of her origins
Of times endless stretch
For her moments are so swiftly passing
Fate is cruel with this bittersweet gift
To know not that my love is unconditional
But to accept it wholly regardless

So, I sit next to her
On this day I was born
Casting sideways glances to blown out candles
Atop the single slice of cake
Open envelopes
Wilted flowers in empty vases
The soft hum of the dishwasher
Enveloped in the sweet silence
Because in this moment
I too, could not think of anywhere else I would rather be

After

I awake on a bed of soft green clover
The air is warm and comfortable
A pleasant, gentle breeze caresses my skin
My surroundings are unfamiliar, but I am not afraid
I am well rested, completely, and wholly at peace
Meadows span as far as my eyes can see
Wildflowers whisper on the wind with a distant floral scent
Snow peaked purple mountains line the horizon while pastel clouds move in a
slow, graceful dance across the sky
I feel no pain
No hurt
No hunger
Out of the corner of my eye
A shadow-like figure slinks silently to softly sit beside me
Her familiar gracious green eyes, a perfect match to lush fields which envelop us

Hello, my angel
It has been so long, hasn't it?
Oh, how I have missed you

We sit like this, quietly together
And rest under the enteral sunrise

Autumn Thompson is a fourth year student at UND studying biology/
dietetics on the pre-medicine path. When not studying, Autumn enjoys
baking, writing, and showing everyone pictures of her bunny.

Everyday

Alyssa Martinez

I wake up
I get dressed
I hope today won't be like yesterday
Deep down I know it will
Do I look fat in this shirt
I put on the sweatshirt even though it is 90 degrees outside
I can't let people see more of my body
Not when I already know what they say when I am not there
I don't eat before I leave
Too many calories
I go to class
Lecture after lecture
I smile and talk to my friends
Not because I am happy
Because if I don't smile they ask what's wrong
I don't have that answer
I still don't eat
Still too many calories
I go home
Do homework
My roommates come home
I go to my room
I don't have the energy to smile anymore
I smoke and get high
Drowning my problems in substances
All my problems are suddenly gone

Now I can smile
I eat
I regret it
I weigh my options of living
I decide it's too much work to die
I go to sleep
I repeat

Alyssa Martinez is a college student currently attending the University of North Dakota. She is majoring in criminal justice and sociology, while also gaining a certificate in writing, editing, and publishing. She believes that writing is a powerful tool for self-expression and creativity. Her goal is to share her love for writing with the world and inspire others to find their own voice.

return to soil

Jasmine Patera

the pack welcomes us, me and my siblings.
we are blind, deaf, nosing into each other:
gray, warm, suffocating fur.

we are so young; the bounds of the cosmos elude us.
i know not the sun or the moon:
they are only friends to chase, to sing to.

the fawn's bones splinter between my jaws.
my mate licks the blood from my maw.
we howl. surely we have always been here, this, our territory.

incomprehensible creatures lumber outside our forest. we run.
they do not give chase. my pack's scent welcomes me.
we lap up water that pools beneath our paws, reflecting light.

every piece of our existence is formed in the void,
forged in the furnaces fueled by the death of countless stars.
we hunt and sing, unaware of it all and happier despite,

or maybe happier because.
i lay down, fatigued, my muzzle gray.
i have no doubt that i will wake again.

Jasmine Patera is an aspiring poet from Mandan, North Dakota. She has been writing for as long as she can remember. Pursuing an English degree at the University of North Dakota, Jasmine hopes to one day be an editor at a publishing company.

Contributor Notes

Clara Anderson-Cameron is a junior at the University of North Dakota, majoring in English and minoring in French. She plans on attending graduate school after UND and hopes to eventually join the world of publishing and editing. She spends much of her free time writing and reading and gets outdoors as often as possible, with her favorite music as an important backdrop to all activities.

Jayden Buckau (2002) is a graduate teaching assistant and master's student in the English Department. He did his undergrad at Black Hills State University in South Dakota. He has lived in many places across North America and enjoys traveling, which inspires a lot of his writing. He's queer and trans, has a dog named Bailey, and has a deep love for queer and gender studies in literature as well as the new historicism form of criticism.

Gon Carlson is a psychology student that came to UND from the Philippines. Gon always had an interest in photography starting with a Disney princess film camera that she got from her mom when she was 7. Now, Gon spends her spare time between class and work taking pictures of the changing seasons, her friends, and random events across campus.

Korbyan Chavez is an accounting major working to earn their bachelor's and master's. Though accountants typically can't write, this one somehow can.

Rachael Erickson is a senior here at UND, majoring in communication,

with a double minor in leadership and non-profit. She has the honor of leading a small group within Chi Alpha campus ministries, and discipling those around her. Rachael has a passion for writing about mental health with the hope that whoever reads it will feel less alone in their journey. In her extra time, she also enjoys being active, whether that's working out, hiking, or playing tennis.

Chad Erickstad is a senior at UND majoring in English with a minor in communications.

Casey Fuller is an English PhD student at the University of North Dakota. He is from the cloudiest city in the United States: Olympia, Washington. He writes, drinks coffee, and rides a bike.

Charles Henry is a second year PhD student in the Department of English at UND. He enjoys studying the language and interpretation of premodern literatures. In his writing, he tries to play with the convention and expectation of forms in order to focus on craft choices.

Brenden Kimpe is a fourth-year student majoring in English and secondary education with certificates in creative writing and writing, editing, & publishing. Brenden enjoys everything that involves literature and spends lots of his free time reading, writing, and spending time with his cat, Marceline.

John Michael Lockett works for the Aerospace Network in Odegard and is a graduate student getting a master's in computer science. He is a member of the Caddo tribe and previously worked for the Choctaw Nation for 7 years. He wrote his poem for this issue of *Floodwall* in a creative writing course at UND last semester.

Adam March is looking to find his creative outlet. He enjoys reading, running, and pushing his limits. This is his first real pursuit into the world of publishing fiction. He's enjoyed writing many short stories and poems,

but now he wants to send it out in to the world to live for itself. He is very nervous and excited to see how this plays out.

Alyssa Martinez is a college student currently attending the University of North Dakota. She is majoring in criminal justice and sociology, while also gaining a certificate in writing, editing, and publishing. She believes that writing is a powerful tool for self-expression and creativity. Her goal is to share her love for writing with the world and inspire others to find their own voice.

Dani Ogawa is a senior English major at UND. She plans to graduate in the spring of 2024 with her bachelor's in English, in addition to a minor in communications, a certificate in creative writing, and a certificate in writing, editing, and publishing. When she is not writing stories, you can find her reading on her Kindle at archives, listening to Taylor Swift, or teaching dance. Dani is from Grand Forks, ND.

Jasmine Patera is an aspiring poet from Mandan, North Dakota. She has been writing for as long as she can remember. Pursuing an English degree at the University of North Dakota, Jasmine hopes to one day be an editor at a publishing company.

Abby Petersen is a second year law student. She enjoys costuming and creative writing in her spare time as well as reading fiction.

Chloe Piekkola is a writer and poet who frequently loses herself in poetic thought and the allure of a captivating story. With an appetite for crafting strong narrative voices and evocative stanzas, Chloe's writing skillfully employs detail and language to stir powerful emotions that resonate with a broad audience. She extends her creative talents beyond writing, embracing the role of a digital creator who utilizes technology to breathe life into her imaginative ideas.

Lillian Quinn is a Grand Forks native, and a sophomore at UND studying

English education. In her free time, she loves to read and write creative fiction. This creative fiction usually takes its form in the dark and macabre. Going forward, she hopes to expand her knowledge of writing tips and tricks in order to better her writing.

Maren Schettler is a senior studying English, music, and political science. She loves the outdoors and enjoys camping and hiking with friends and family. While in school, there is no end to her frustration with the lack of leisure reading time. Her boxer dog Pacha is her favorite reading buddy.

Katerina Sladko is a student at UND who loves to explore and create. She has many interests that range from photography, writing, and art to engineering and linguistics.

Double-majoring in philosophy and English, **Kira Symington** likes to take philosophical approaches to her writing. Outside of her literary experiments, she is a General Reporter and the Opinion Editor for UND's student newspaper, the *Dakota Student*.

Autumn Thompson is a fourth year student at UND studying biology/dietetics on the pre-medicine path. When not studying, Autumn enjoys baking, writing, and showing everyone pictures of her bunny.

Floodwall

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Jayden Buckau
Gon Carlson
Korbyan Chavez
Rachael Erickson
Chad Erickstad
Casey Fuller
Charles Henry
Brenden Kimpe
John Michael Luckett
Adam March
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