



AGORA

AGORA

...καλέσασθε δὲ θεῖον ἀοιδόν,
Δημόδοκον· τῷ γάρ ῥα θεὸς
περὶ δῶκεν ἀοιδήν,
τέρπειν ὅππῃ θυμὸς
ἐποτρύνῃσιν ἀείδειν.

*...and summon Demodokos,
the bard divine, / Whom
God gave song: the power to
delight / However his own
soul urges him to sing.*

Homer, *Odyssey* VIII, 43-5

Translated by Gerald Malsbary, Belmont Abbey College

AGORA

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Afternoon Panoramic

Paige DUREN | *art*



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2015 AWARDS

Jean S. Moore Award

The Jean S. Moore Award was established in 1998 in memory of the late Jean S. Moore, an Abbey English Professor. Each year, the recipient receives publication in Agora and a cash prize. This award represents top submission as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.

Agora Art & Photography Award

Each year, the recipient of this award receives publication in Agora and a cash prize. This award represents top submission as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.

From the Editors

Welcome to *Agora*. For us editors, aka the Elves, and our submitters alike, art is more than a hobby. Art is a lifestyle. That flower you pointed out as “pretty”? Your poetic friend might write the next *Paradise Lost* because they saw the truth of the human condition in the petals. A chance remark overheard on the subway? That could be your inspiration for a new *War and Peace*. How interesting, then, that the blood and tears that our artists have poured into these following works complement each other so well, even though artists find inspiration in so many different forms.

Let us ask now: what is “true art” to you? That was the question we Elves needed to confront in the editing process of *Agora*. The disturbing scene of “Dyspraxis Ex Machina,” a very short story that delves into the darkness of the human psyche, stood side by side with other stories like “Angel,” the happier depiction of a young girl discovering a new outlook on life. The poetry we dealt with contained everything from nature scenes in “Night Song,” to the pains of love in “Lovelorn” and even the question of what makes poetry artful in “The Mockery of an Amateur Poet.” Let us ask again: what is true art in the face of all these different artistic approaches? And how could we choose the best? We decided that true art means honesty. What you’ll find in *Agora* is a collection of poetry, short stories, and images that open windows to the soul. The struggle of the new college student, the heartache of love, the beauty of standing under the stars and admiring this sparkling earth: all of these experiences will greet you in the coming pages, and we hope that you can live through our authors’ words and *touch* the passion. What you find may not always be warm, fuzzy feelings in your chest—I guarantee some of our works will raise eyebrows—but you may well discover a truth about yourself you’d never considered before. If you do, then both we and our authors have succeeded.

Our large editing team worked through many difficulties with scheduling meetings, herding cats (sorry, inside joke), and heated discussions over which pieces deserved publication. All of the Elves are amazing people who put their hearts and minds into choosing and polishing our submissions. On a personal level, I can only say I regret that this will be my final year at Belmont Abbey. Let me assure you, then, that my final effort with *Agora*’s team won’t be a disappointment. Thank you one and all, Elves, for your help publishing *Agora*!

Tim Tanko,
for the Editorial Elves of *Agora*

Contents

	<i>poetry</i>	
<i>Nikole Brand</i>	Lovelorn	4
<i>Felix Du Sablon</i>	In and Out	7
<i>Jonah Wilamowski</i>	Petals	9
<i>Nikole Brand</i>	DNA, Disrupted	11
<i>Rebecca Munro</i>	Beach House	13
<i>Joseph Yellico</i>	Rainy Day	15
<i>Nick Otranto</i>	The Soul of a Blue Ridge Man	17
<i>Caitlin Clancy</i>	Exhalation	19
<i>Jonah Wilamowski</i>	Hope	20
<i>Alejandra Moucha</i>	a.l.w.	21
<i>Jane Russell</i>	Blame Drug Lord Pablo Escobar for Colombia's Hippopotamus Problem	24
<i>Joseph Yellico</i>	Night Song	26
<i>Robert Siebert</i>	Wisp	27
<i>Chris Deberry</i>	Thoughts	29
<i>Kayla McNeilly</i>	Holding Her Hand through the Dark	30
<i>Caitlin Clancy</i>	On the Wayside	31
<i>Emma Piazza</i>	trains	34
<i>Catherine Brandolini</i>	Prelude to Melancholia	42
<i>Randi Olson</i>	The Mind Sings	44
<i>Tim Tanko</i>	The Words in a Rose	47
<i>Lea Lawton</i>	The Mockery of an Amateur Poet	49
<i>Daniel Jacobs</i>	Uninvited	51
<i>Rajive Tiwari</i>	The Word Riddled	53
<i>Emma Piazza</i>	Watercolor World	55
<i>Randi Olson</i>	Not today.	57
<i>Felix Du Sablon</i>	On Earth, In Earth, After Earth	58
<i>Ellen Weir</i>	you had a feast	59
<i>Nikole Brand</i>	Lead Balloon	61

	<i>short story</i>	
<i>Theresa Suarez</i>	Angel	1
<i>Tim Tanko</i>	Dyspraxis Ex Machina	5
<i>Curran Sentilles</i>	Katharine Hepburn is My Namesake	28
<i>Bridgette Conboy</i>	Infinite Smallness	37
<i>Joseph Bruck</i>	The Empowerment of Princess Julia	45
<i>Tim Tanko</i>	The Battle	62
	<i>photography</i>	
<i>Alexandra Kern</i>	Stone Mountain	4
<i>Aaron Huber</i>	Being	6
<i>Benjamin Webb</i>	Gateway to the Sea	8
<i>Joshua Brand</i>	Windows of the Soul	11
<i>Alexandra Kern</i>	Holding on to Light	12
<i>Catherine Brandolini</i>	Drops of Autumn	16
<i>Jessica Camano</i>	Daylight's Adieu	18
<i>Aaron Huber</i>	The Dawning	20
<i>Emma Piazza</i>	Coming Home	25
<i>Paul Toscano</i>	Blacksmith	27
<i>Jessica Camano</i>	Mother	33
<i>Rebecca Gerlach</i>	Railroad Sunsets	36
<i>Alexandra Kern</i>	Katerina	44
<i>Jenna Eustace</i>	Mount Grotto	48
<i>Curran Sentilles</i>	Relics in Nature	52
<i>Benjamin Webb</i>	Quest in the Clouds	54
<i>Alexandra Kern</i>	Hikers	61
	<i>art</i>	
<i>Katja Gronert</i>	The Silence	23
<i>Mary Margaret Gallaher</i>	Tears of Faith	29
<i>Mary Margaret Gallaher</i>	Jacinta, One of the Fatima Children	43
<i>Mary Margaret Gallaher</i>	Raduisya Mariya	58
<i>Deidre Rodriguez</i>	Grecian Goddess	60
<i>Marina Hart</i>	Basilica	66
	<i>About the Contributors</i>	67
	<i>Submission Guidelines</i>	69

Angel

Theresa SUAREZ | *short story*

A cold, scrawny eleven-year-old girl stood at the base of the hill that had no name. A twisted oak, the Cinderella Tree, stood at the crest, her branches like arms reaching to heaven and her leaves lit silver by the full moon. Trudy sighed. She climbed the hill, her rain boots plodding along the frayed, whispering grass. Where the grass ended, a convoluted root system clasped the hill with ancient, knobby hands. Trudy sat on one of the Cinderella Tree's massive roots and traced each little bump. The gray trunk of the tree stretched to a height of thirty feet. The stars peeked through the branches and twinkled against each leaf that rocked in its sleep.

"Just one?" Trudy whispered, standing up to plead with the sky. The attic was so dark, she and Agnes just never knew what – or who – lurked in the shadows. It wasn't so bad in the summer, when she would simply slip out after dark, slide down the roof, and run to the Cinderella Tree. That's where the fireflies lived. Once she tried to count them all, but her head got so dizzy she gave up and sat down in a heap on one of the bumpy roots. Trudy would put an orange rind in the jar, sit it on the ground, and firefly after firefly would crawl in. On a good night, you could get yourself a night light that was fifty or so strong.

"Where did you go?" Trudy gripped the preserves jar even tighter, letting the cold glass freeze her hand. A tear, the only warm thing in the night, found its way into the jar. Trudy studied the deep velvet sky for ten minutes, searching for a firefly's blink. Her eyes seemed to play tricks on her over and over again because whenever she thought she saw a firefly, it was just a star.

"They like it where it's warmer."

Trudy jumped.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sugar." A stout woman had appeared, her smile creasing the soft skin of her brown face. At first she seemed to be in her seventies, but then there was something so old behind her eyes. "Didn't mean to scare you stiff as a poker!" The Old Lady clucked softly at her own joke. Trudy laughed awkwardly and scratched her head. "I come up to this tree sometimes," she continued, taking her time to get the words across in a thick Southern accent.

"At night?" Trudy raised an eyebrow. Lately she didn't like it when grown-ups told funny stories because most of the time they weren't true. The other day, Uncle John was reading the newspaper and muttering about something called the Sock Market. Trudy didn't believe for one second that socks were the source of all their problems.

"I like to look at the stars. Why, they're just like the Lord's eyes, I've always thought. Easier to think at night, too... Why is a young-in like you out at night? I'd reckon your folks'll be upset as anything when you sneak back like you're tip-toeing through the tulips!"

"I don't have folks," Trudy spat.

For a moment the Old Lady's deep brown eyes widened in surprise. She spoke softly, "I see. I see, sugar..."

"Well, ma'am, I don't think you do." Trudy placed a hand on her hip so she didn't look afraid. But the Old Lady just looked at the girl with a tenderness that, after a long moment, Trudy finally decided she liked – but she wouldn't show it. She cleared her throat and decided to finally ask it.

"Where have the fireflies gone?"

The Old Lady didn't seem to hear and chuckled sweetly.

"You've got a fine pickle jar there. Holes already poked in and everything!" she sang.

A smile tugged at the corner of Trudy's mouth.

"I miss those dear lightning bugs..." The Old Lady gazed at the sky for so long that Trudy was starting to feel sorry for her. Suddenly, as if remembering she was an adult, the Old Lady broke the silence.

"Well, nice to meet you, young lady. You get yourself to bed at least before the last trump shall sound!" She chuckled.

"Nice to meet you, too." Trudy smiled politely, surprising herself. The Old Lady's laughter trailed away as she laboriously descended the other side of the hill step by step.

"Wait! Ma'am?" Trudy winced. The Old Lady turned around, surprised.

"Were there more fireflies back then?" The Old Lady let out a loud laugh that sounded like tears of joy mixed with a cackle and a wheeze.

"Now that's a good ... Now ain't that something else?... I *am* getting old..."

"What?" Trudy asked, confused and embarrassed.

"No, no nothing," the old Lady waved a hand. "There's the same amount of lightning bugs today as there were when Moses laid eyes on the Promised Land. I'm from Alabama, you see." Trudy stepped in closer. "When I was a little girl... we must have collected *hundreds* of little lightning bugs – and oh, how they'd mingle with the stars... It was so hot you just melted! That's why we liked coming out at night. I reckon those critters had the same idea!" Trudy looked at the holes she had poked in the lid of the preserves jar.

"But you always poked holes for them to breathe, right?"

"Oh, of course, honey-child."

"But mine always *die* when I wake up!"

The Old Lady smiled gently. "They can't make light forever. All a little lightning bug can do is a little." Trudy looked sad.

"But people don't have to be that way," the Old Lady suddenly

***You just let your
light shine, sugar ...
You let it shine as
bright as anything,
and don't you let no
one blow it out.***

brightened. She sighed deeply, as if resolving to do something, and set off down the hill. “You just let your light shine, sugar,” she winked slowly. Then she called over her shoulder, “You let it shine as bright as anything, and don't you let no one blow it out.”

Trudy jogged briskly to escape Upstate New York's late-September chill. Down the hill, through the trail in the woods that led to the Kimball's farm, five houses up the dirt road. Back in the attic, Agnes was curled in a ball, her tiny chest rising and falling under the scratchy blanket.

And that's when Trudy saw it – in the middle of the room glowed a bug-sized speck that fluttered as quietly as a pair of butterfly wings. The glow winked slowly.



Lovelorn

Nikole BRAND | *poetry*

Lovelorn, in love locked
Where the hell is my key?
Still hands, dry eyes
My sorrow hides in me.



Stone Mountain

Alexandra KERN | *photography*

Dyspraxis Ex Machina

Tim TANKO | *short story*

The fountain's happy gurgle trickles through its courtyard. Two red marks stain its granite base. The hand that left them lies blinding white in the late afternoon amber sun.

Birds who watched start chirping again. The monster's gone after other prey—they're safe now. A cicada adds its throaty crackle to the birds' song, ruining their duet, but the creatures continue to battle for best dirge. Far away, church bells ring and call the countryside to their scheduled wedding. They stop abruptly. Violently.

Awarely.

A red trail over the courtyard changes color to brown as the sun bows behind the courtyard's shrubbery walls. One handwritten letter, still boasting a dark lipstick mark, flutters over the thin, sticky river. The letter's bullet-holed edge rattles in a cheerful breeze.

Two smaller, childish hands grip the large hand where it holds the letter. All three are now cold and still as the gray stone of their bed. The revolver, two feet away, covered with rosy fingerprints, contains a single shell. Its offspring lie in holes organic and granite.

Between the youthful hands a ring glows like a fallen angel. The diamond's the size of a marble, and its band sparkles with smaller diamonds and silver. However, the halo of stars shows a single large, irreparable crack of derelict perfection. A footprint nearby consists of red, a few strands of blond hair, and dirt. The print points towards the door where the crimson stream meanders.

In the direction of the house a large clump of the same golden hair trails over the courtyard ground. The locks' ends can never shine again through the mass of skin and stickiness. A stray wisp escapes its fellows and comes to rest by the letter. It glitters, a sunlit streak next to the revolver's lunar sheen.

The house windows that overlook the courtyard frame a scene of disarray. Toppled chairs, smashed mirrors, and kitchen ware spread across the floor. A knife sinks deep into a table. Several slashes embellish one wall. A long scarlet streak connects the holes.

On the floor in the middle of the chaos, shards of glass surround a broken picture frame. The mess embraces two different photos, one behind the other. The top photo shows a blond woman, a smiling man, and a small child. The bottom shows only a woman with hair the hue of a demon's heart. Her lips, painted in dark red, spread a Mona Lisa smile. Those twin bloody lines seem to grow wider as the shadows grow longer.

The sun's last, dying beam bleaches the two pale forms in the courtyard a million gorgeous shades during the short while it touches them. All too soon the light's gone, and night hides the scene under its spectral cloak.



Being

Aaron HUBER | *photography*

In and Out

Felix DU SABLON | *poetry*

With a graceful growl grows the great green sea,
Extending out onto the now salty sand,
Only from this new vantage point to flee.
The ocean never sits languid in peace,
But, with foamy form rushes onto the beach,
Taking turns being in either extreme state,
Recoiled then stretching as far as may reach.
For a flickering time there is the flow,
Which briefly occupies the perfect place,
That would hold still but for the undertow.
The winds cause the seas to breathe deeply,
Gently the seas heave their bounteous breasts,
Their bosoms filled full from fresh airy force,
Like a heart never stopping to truly rest.



Gateway to the Sea

Benjamin WEBB | photography

Petals

Jonah WILAMOWSKI | *poetry*

A pink rose petal in the wind,
In zephyr gently blowing,
Soon caught upon a rippled wave
In river swiftly flowing.

An eddy grasps it in its arms,
And soon they are a'dancing.
They swing on down the rushing way,
Their bounding gait entrancing.

Porporate clouds bear witness to
Their effervescent curling,
Their fierce momentum down the way,
Their microcosmic whirling.

They shade the glinting, shifting wake
And see the murk there lying,
The muddied undercurrent stream,
The shadows underlying.

Tumbling, petal's progress drains,
Relation swiftly ceasing;
Alas! Fair form, unfeeling force,
Rupturing and releasing.

More flutter to the rabid route,
Sweet fragrance draining, leaching,
And they submerge and drift along,
The callous river steeping.

A fungal fragrance lingers o'er,
Meanders in the river,
Where wilted petals now decay
That once did gaily quiver.

Once bursting buds that blossomed bright,
So beautiful, so hallow'd,
Today replete with deathly sleep,
Fermenting on the fallow.

Then rivercourse runs out to sea,
Wrenched from the stagnant marshes,
It mingles with the salty rime,
Flows down to frigid darkness.

Yet still some petals travel far,
With honey fragrance, floating
O'er fen and vale, upon the wind,
'Til floor of forest coating.

O pink rose petal in the wind,
In zephyr gently blowing,
Pray settle in the fertile loam
Far from the river's flowing.



DNA, Disrupted

Nikole BRAND | *poetry*

A capsid of a smile
Masking the genome of pain
This secret attribute germinates
Deep in each cell of my being.

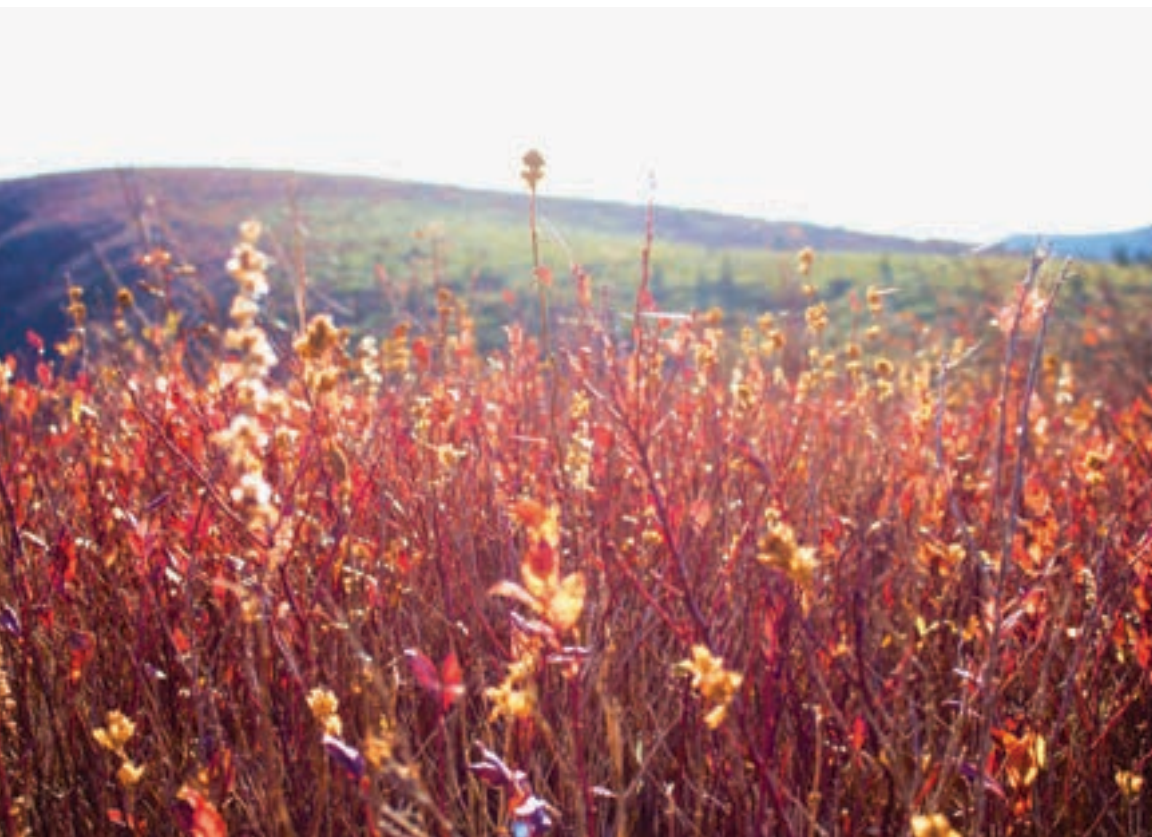
Next your virus pierces my body
Disrupting my sequence of hurt
A remarkable peace is established
Who could have guessed that would be?

But oh! The next stage of infection
Causes bursting of cell, soul, and heart
As you rupture my walls you do damage
New highs and new lows have you wrought.

Windows of the Soul

Joshua BRAND | *photography*





Holding on to Light

Alexandra KERN | photography

Beach House

Rebecca MUNRO | *poetry*

My mother's house has become
In spite of itself
A California beach house
Tasteful, light, and airy.

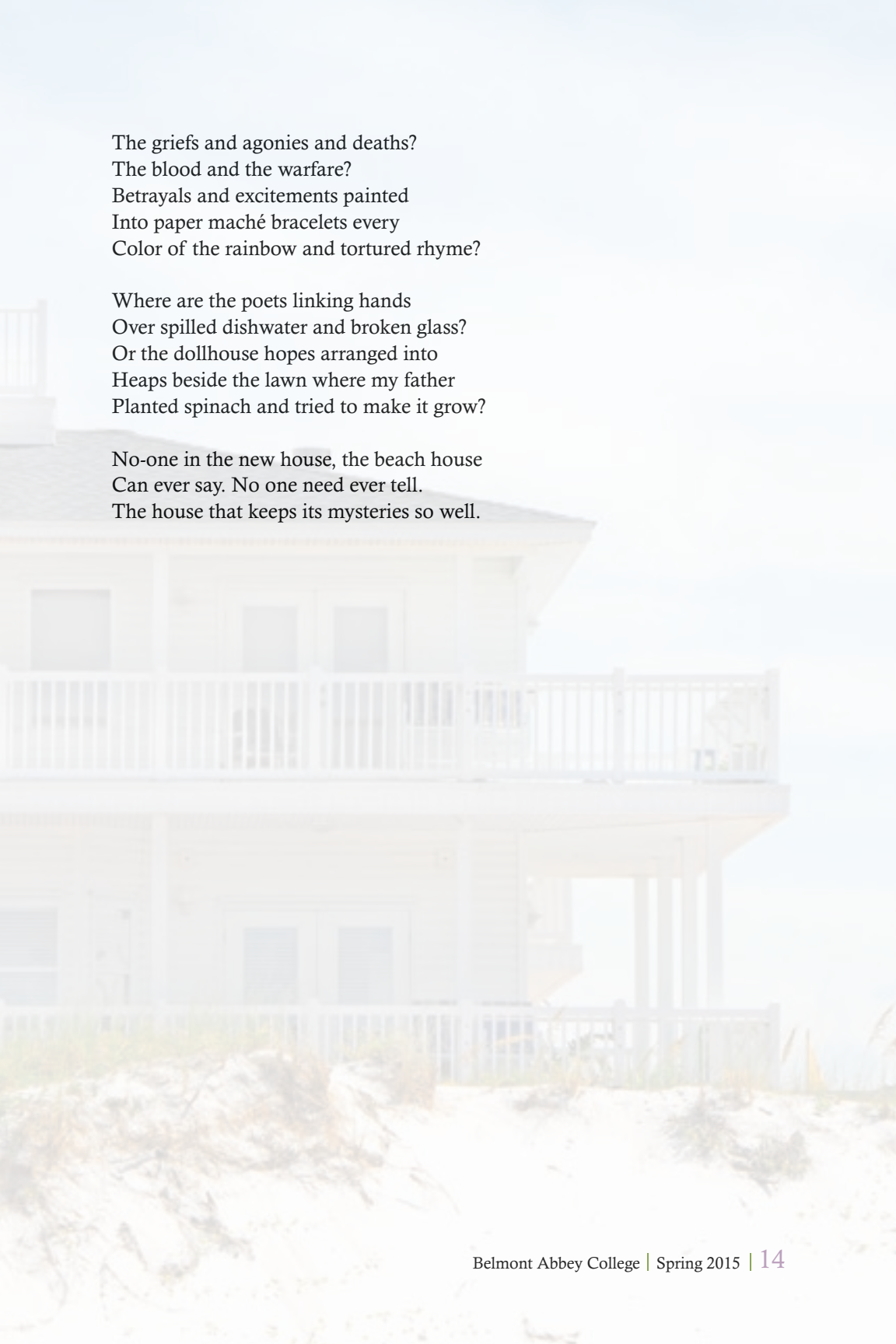
Where my teenage drama
Unfolded
As the library gathered itself up
From a room full of earth
To walls of shelves book filled
And the huge sliding mirror door
Of the walk-in closets.

The interior decorator magazine
Crispness of Martha Stewart gauze
And perfectly matched pastels
Brought together by those bright
Spots of color, a tasteful lamp,

Walls in tones of white to
High ceilings and open rooms.
Here the wind blows through these
Doors where the solitary cannot feed
Her melancholy, not the angry and hot
Heart exposed to this breezeway
Tinged with sun and salt.

Where are the cranked enemies
In their crowded deliberate cells?
The children gotten beyond pulling
Stamens off forsythia blossoms to
Make them into ballerinas dancing in the light?





The griefs and agonies and deaths?
The blood and the warfare?
Betrayals and excitements painted
Into paper maché bracelets every
Color of the rainbow and tortured rhyme?

Where are the poets linking hands
Over spilled dishwater and broken glass?
Or the dollhouse hopes arranged into
Heaps beside the lawn where my father
Planted spinach and tried to make it grow?

No-one in the new house, the beach house
Can ever say. No one need ever tell.
The house that keeps its mysteries so well.

Rainy Day

Joseph YELLICO | *poetry*

Drip! Drop! Drip! Drop!
Cloudy tears a-falling,
Drip! Drop! Doesn't stop,
No birds or bees are calling.

Pitter! Patter! Pitter! Patter!
Rhythmic little drumming,
Pitter! Patter! Tinkling clatter,
A drink for Nature thrumming.

Plip! Plop! Plip! Plop!
Upon the beds of heather,
Plip! Plop! Upon the crop,
Which needs the watery weather.

Drops of Autumn

Catherine BRANDOLINI | photography



The Soul of a Blue Ridge Man

Nick OTRANTO | *poetry*

In the land of the rhododendron, all the children run free
Upon the shores of the greatest mountains you will ever see.
Up and down the winding roads,
Where pavement turns to gravel loads,
Along the hills of trail and rock,
Revealed through key and lock
Of traveler's boots upon the ground,
Which open doors to treasures found,
Lie mysteries so deep within the eyes of those who creep
Up the misty mountainsides to sit and watch the tides
Of shade from clouds above
Pass over pine and river and dove below,
Until the green seems to slowly wash into the blue.
And as the endless heaven gently kisses the unleavened clay and wood,
The silent wanderer hears a whisper through the land
That it is good.

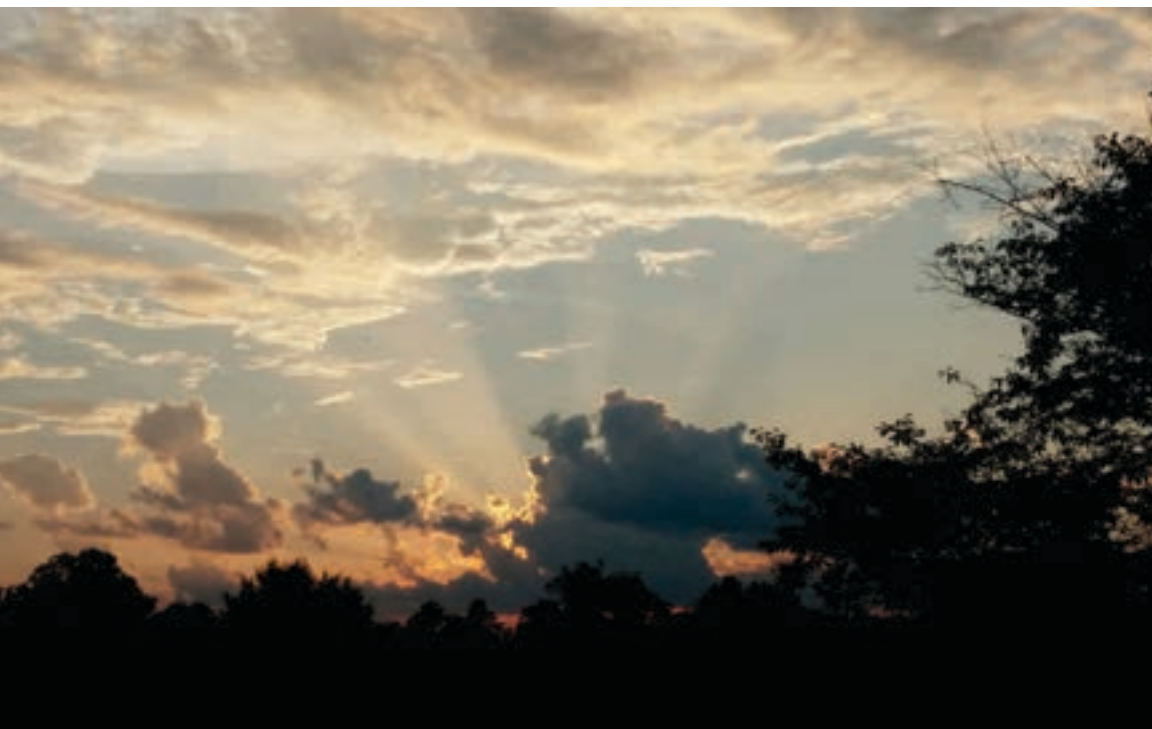
The sun begins to dim, and the glow of orb's rims
Appear within the pockets of the valley below,
Flickering in and out as if to show and shout
Their parts of a symphony of colored electricity.
Single lights surrounded by darkness serve to remind us
Of the solitary pioneers who forged these paths through gorge and hilltop
So that we may stop and stare at the wondrous glare
Of the past, now present at last.
And from near and far,
Each eye and each star
Shall see the constant code
So it will be known and understood
That it is good.

The wind rolls through the hills,
And into my soul it sends chills,
Shouting at me, "Where is your key?"
"Who are you to unlock the beauty of this land,
With unclear mind and unclear hand?"
I answer back without a sound as I look all around.

A single man am I beneath this vast, abundant sky.
I hold my weakness in my palms to offer a simple alms
To the greatness laid out before me,
From mountain to valley to sea.
For I can feel the power,
If just for these few fleeting hours,
Of the glory here, which I now hold so dear.
And as I stand to pass away, leaving this grand sight,
My feet beg me to stay, and on every step they fight.
I turn to look at the expanse one final time,
And I am struck with a steady conscious line,
Rendering me breathless as it should.
I am good.
We are good.

Daylight's Adieu

Jessica CAMANO | *photography*



Exhalation

Caitlin CLANCY | *poetry*

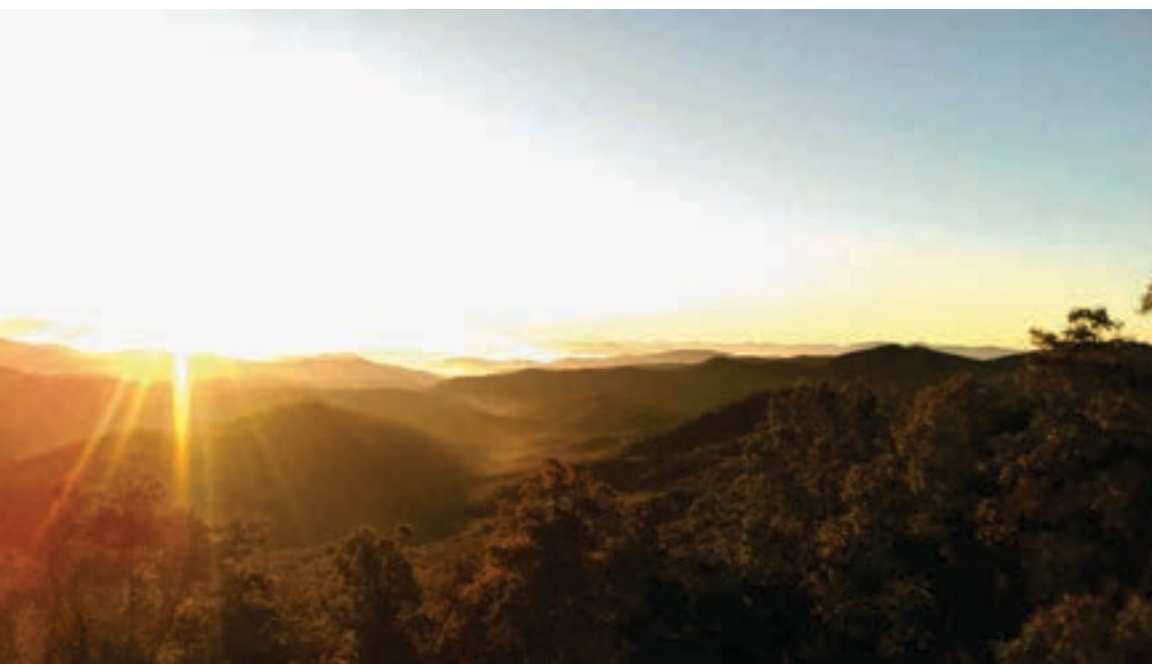
“Consider the lilies, how they
grow: they neither toil nor
spin; yet I tell you, even
Solomon in all his glory was
not clothed like one of these.
But if God so clothes the
grass of the field, which is
alive today and tomorrow is
thrown into the oven, how
much more will he clothe
you—you of little faith!”
(Luke 12:27-28)

Driven and driven and driven
And done
Riven and riven and riven –
The sun
The cart-horse, the apple
The leaf
And the spoon
Baldrics and blades
And the white
Of the moon
Time and cold space
And bold life
Burnt asunder
Leveling, leveling, leveling
Under
All in the death
In the breath
Of the thunder
Driven and driven and driven
And done.

Hope

Jonah WILAMOWSKI | *poetry*

Why do the ravages of death
Take for their spoils our straining breaths,
Loosen the grasp of clenching hands,
Sever the soul like silken strands?
Is it a crime, an aftermath?
A consequence, a broken path?
A folly, fear, an ending? No:
It is a gateway here below,
To peace eternal, see,
Our hope hung on a tree.



The Dawning

Aaron HUBER | *photography*

a.l.w.

Alejandra MOUCHA | *poetry*

Shutter fall. Shutter speak.
Hide in the glass bubbled eyes of kaleidoscope wings, the hum.
The hum of dust that thins, envelops, but never leaves.
That awakens and arrests in the aperture crop circles of a dragonfly's hang.
The shutter fall. The shutter speak.
The shutter release.
Span, pause, and enclose
The Enclose.
The Circumference.
The Eclipse.
Of worlds ruined and renewed beneath the wings.
The wings of collided scopes.

The comings and goings
Walk everyone home.
Nail heads fill soul arches
Like the arthritis grind
Of first gardens
Walked and forgotten.
The way to go
And the way to come
Are but the same
When drawn in crayon
And rusty tracks.
Lines and direction
Are made for dying,
For making a way in
And a way out
Of the leaves
Not laid for mortality.
The comings and goings
Walk everyone home.
No one ever left.
Leaves.

It fell.
Sound never sound
Made widower of the copperhead that cries with the Urn.
It happened.
The descent into Illusion
The ascent to disaffection
The arterial plunge into the nevermore and always.
The coin threaded the drain.
Oh, the arrogance of letters and men
That chase and miss what time can't seem to keep,
What the damp seems to make hang stick and wave a little longer,
But what it too loses, and let's go.
The couple's song.
Hear it play the labyrinth pipes,
The echo's tired conceit.
Hear it age.
The lullaby to the sleepless face,
The repeated requiem of the perennial heart.
It happened
They happened,
And the men
With moths in their pockets
And heels over pot holes
Never seem to notice,
The Sound never sound
The widower that cries with the Urn.
And His lover,
The one
Never configured or contained.
Simply loved and lost.
For how can music have a gender?
No one ever asks.
Lucky, they simply call him,
To have had the sense to sound.



The Silence

Katja GRONERT | *art*

Blame Drug Lord Pablo Escobar for Colombia's Hippopotamus Problem

—Headline in smithsonianmag.com, 6/30/14

Jane RUSSELL | *poetry*

Alas, the siren calls of online news!
What novel ways to waste my time
proliferate in this connected world!
Who knew Colombia had a hippo
problem, let alone fretted over
where to lay the blame?

Google News as home page lures me
down some labyrinthine trails
from urgent news to oddities intriguing
(hippopotami!) before I reach my homely

Inbox. Even there, alliances I've joined
bring me the world in desperate petitions
needing just my voice or phone call
and, of course, some paltry dollars
to sustain the fray.

It's hard to be an island
or a paragon of focus
while hot-wired to the nascent
global brain.



Coming Home

Emma PIAZZA | *photography*

25 | AGORA | Vol. XLVIII

Night Song

Joseph YELLICO | *poetry*

Crickets play a symphony,
And dew falls on the grass,
By and by the night moves on
Till dawn when it must pass.

The call of the owls,
The distant howls
Of creatures who prowl alone,
No day-birds wail,
No distant gale
To ruin this somber tone.

Stars alight the cloudless void,
With light so fair and new,
And all the earth below them
Are kissed by gentle blue.

Hour by hour,
The starlight shower
Continues its luminous song,
No creature stirs,
No cedars and firs,
For the moon reigns supreme till dawn.

Wisp

Robert SIEBERT | *poetry*

a wisp of smoke
circling upwards in a misty haze
and vanishing



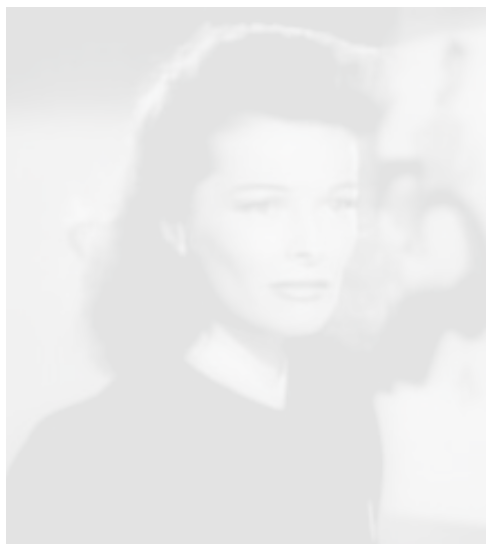
Blacksmith

Paul TOSCANO | *photography*

Katharine Hepburn is My Namesake

Curran SENTILLES | *short story*

The fact that Katharine Hepburn is my namesake was somewhat of a struggle for my mother to achieve and is somewhat debatable if you ask my father. However, I was told that this is where my “Katherine” originated, and I am sticking to that story. The reason that I am writing this is not to brag about the fact that I was named after a movie star because that actually says nothing about me. I am not Katharine Hepburn, and just because I was named after her doesn't give me an automatic link to her accomplishments or really add anything to mine. It just means that Katharine Hepburn is my mother's favorite actress and that I am named after someone. Nevertheless, there is something that Kate and I both agree on. Katharine Hepburn is quoted to have said, “The time to make up your mind about people is never.”¹ I both agree with her quote and admire it because it suggests against closing your mind to accepting more of a person than what you have already seen and encountered. So, while my dad may not like the fact that I am named after an actress and my mother may have had to sacrifice an “a” for an “e” to correspond with the spelling of “Katherine” in my father's family tree, it all becomes quite humorous because they don't even call me by my first name. However, I wouldn't make your mind up about them based on that.



¹The Philadelphia Story, Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, James Stewart. MGM Studios, 1940.

Thoughts

Chris DEBERRY | *poetry*

It's not about me.
Forgive much;
Speak little.
Praise God.

Worship Him by the minute.
Love your neighbor more...
Feel guilty less.

Tears of Faith

Mary Margaret GALLAHER | *art*



Holding Her Hand through the Dark

Kayla MCNEILLY | *poetry*

The scars cut across her wrist like jet trails across a pale evening sky,
She used to hide them behind a pile of bracelets and a broken smile.

She sits on the sill of the second floor window reading Poe's "Annabel Lee,"
She used to stand in front of it and beg herself to fall to the ground below.

She burns brightly like a phoenix and rises slowly like the sun above,
She used to believe she would never go farther than the ashes of Hell and
despair.

She shares her story with others and offers them hope for recovery,
She used to believe she was beyond all hope: until she met you.

You showed her that she was beautiful, in the very depths of her soul,
She was used to endless ridicule from those who never looked past her outer
flaws.

You gave her a chance to tell her story, and while you listened, you helped
her heal,
She was used to being broken and trying to mend herself without any glue.

You took her to see Shakespeare on a star-crossed moonlit Friday night,
She was used to spending her Friday nights reading Shakespeare at home.

You laughed with her when she asked to hold your hand because it was dark
outside,
She was used to facing the darkness, scared and alone.

You told her that her craziness was what kept you sane,
She writes this poem to tell you that your kindness kept her alive.

Before she met you, she was alone and afraid in darkness and despair,
You gave her hope, because you held her hand through the dark.

On the Wayside

Caitlin CLANCY | *poetry*

To my mother

On the crest of a bare vermillion hill
Bathed in bold breeze, wind's breath like thunder
Gold in the glow and red thereunder
He fastened his purple cloak asunder
And took the wind like wine

Full fair of face and flushed in cheek
Standing like the brazen gods of old
He wore his purpose, a priestly cope
Eyes blazing and blue, burgeoning hope
With an ice that refused the cold

From that earth-proud brow he strode below
And knelt at the wood-hewn shrine
And he thought upon the waves that laugh
And the mysteries of the world, and Bath
And the heathen praise that was a calf
Gold that is all too fine

The figures' wood had stilled their gaze
But yet their eyes with tears seemed raw
Her night-blue cloak long rain had faded
And the God-child's whiteness no traveler aided
But both as one seemed too poor to be raided
The last sign Njal's race saw

Power-carved hands clutch at fiercer face
His memory is pain
For they who strew maiden's death and run
Took the fine filly-mares black and dun
Baptized and blessed and given by none
Save the sacrament of a grave sun

He wept then and was not ashamed
But for his countrymen's curse and their vibrant sin
But still he thought the Child looked on him
And the Lady softly smiled

He remained as still and wood as they
While the wind buffeted, dried his face
And he knew the lot of the Northern blood
The last of those who fled the Flood
The bane of Adam's race

Rising then there rose with him
A dignity restored
No more the fearsome living death
With dragon's fire and demon's breath
Could cloud one from the line of Seth
The third of Adam born

Down the sea road he strode again
Back to the ships that sway
But first he rev'renced his Mother dear,
And her God-child at play

Soon came the wind-night and swallowed them all
Into soft, velvety maw
The shrine in the white of Diana's ray
Saw the ships go with the passing of day
But still he looked back through the dawn-mist grey
For the faded blue that he could almost say
Was deeper sapphire than the woodless way
On this, his Mother's day.



Mother

Jessica CAMANO | *photography*

trains

Emma PIAZZA | *poetry*

wooden tracks

click clack

click clack

click

clack

click

stop

break in the line

one headed North

one headed South

stuck

where you headed?

Germanica.

is that North or South?

not sure

we don't have much in common,
then?

yes, we do

we do

we do

we're stuck

Germanica

what's it like?

hear tell it's fine

fine like wine

wine in summer

Austrian summers

brimming with Bach and Strauss

seasoned with a dash of Wagner
drama, drama

is Germanica in Austria,
or the other way around?

can't really say.

by the way,

where are you from?

can't really say.

so distant

distant

far off memory

who cares right now?

you're going North

i'm going South

or is it the other way around?

the tracks wrap down

and up again

can't see where i was

or where i'm going

i'd need a map for that

you didn't ask for one?

didn't know they were free

sure thing

ask the one with the uniform

he'd know

i used to wear a uniform
does that count?
i doubt
my credentials are still current
but it's worth a try
my my
i held a gun
what fun
no, it wasn't
not at all
i lost my head
and watched it fall
down
down
down

then i grew gray hair.

puff
click
puff
clack
we're moving back
along the track
click
clack
click clack
click clack click clack
on and on and up and up

we're moving North
you're moving South

you're rolling up
we're flying out

red leather smells like coffee stains
find my seat
bones creak
ask the engineer for a map
i want to see if Germanica is
North or South.



Railroad Sunsets

Rebecca GERLACH | *photography*

Infinite Smallness

Brigette CONBOY | *short story*

The clock ticked on monotonously. The percolator in the corner of the room gasped and moaned under its burden to produce the lifeblood its owner so desperately needed. Arius Whitmore sat hunched over in a rigid, wooden chair, staring at a small canvas on an easel directly in front of him. At length, he rose from his chair and looked behind the canvas. He waved his hand through the air between the easel and the wall. There was nothing there. How could there be nothing there? It worked last night. Maybe it was just a dream. No. No. It hadn't been a dream. It was real. He returned to his previous position. Maybe the time wasn't right. Maybe he only thought it had been midnight last time and it really wasn't.

The clock kept ticking and ticking. Arius rose again, slowly, and in one burst of anger threw the chair into the painting and the easel, scattering all the different parts around the room. He looked at the painting one last time and began to walk toward the door. But what was that noise? It sounded like waves on the beach. He looked down. He was no longer standing in his dark kitchen; he was standing on a watercolor beach. He turned and before him was the watercolor sunset he had been working on for days. There it was in all of its perfection. He looked down again. The waves weren't actually moving, but he could hear the water rushing over the tiny grains of sand and then retreating back into itself again.

He lifted his hands in front of his face. He was made of watercolor also. He turned and looked away from the sunset. There was his room. The coffee was done. He reached for a pen that was lying on the table. As he reached, he watched his hand

morph from watercolor strokes into flesh, and suddenly the sound stopped. He looked down. The floorboards were beneath his feet instead of the watercolor sand. Everything was just as it was when he had left the room. He picked the painting and the easel back up, set the chair aright, and resumed his seat from earlier in the evening. No sooner had he sat down, he sprang back up and went to the desk. Out of the top drawer, he got a small notepad. He went back to the table, picked up the pen and wrote,

"Journey 2: August 11, 2011. Return time: 12:04 AM. Notes: Cannot reach outside painting."

The next morning the bleary-eyed man stood outside the Museum of Modern Art, notepad and pen in his right hand and a large cup of coffee in

***He was no longer
standing in his dark
kitchen; he was
standing on a
watercolor beach.***

the other. Arius felt more like he needed an entire pot of coffee and not just the cup. After the adventure of the previous evening, he had tossed and turned all night with excitement and fear. What was this power he had? Could it be replicated by his own will, or did he have to wait for someone or something else to will it? One more sip and finally they opened the doors. He took one of the complimentary maps, closed his eyes, and randomly placed his finger on the map. Claude Monet it was.

He wasn't really sure what he was going to do. He hadn't thought this out. He sat down on a bench across from "Water Lilies." The hours passed. A little later, an old man sat down next to him.

"It won't work, you know," the old man said.

"Excuse me?" Arius replied.

"What you're trying to do. It won't work," The old man restated.

"How do you know what I am trying to do?" Arius asked the bespectacled little man beside him.

"I have been trying for years. I can step into paintings just as you can. But I have only ever been able to go into my own. Unfortunately, my paintings never meet my expectations. Don't make the same mistakes I did. Just forget about this ability. It will kill you." The old man walked away, but then he turned around and said,

"Sir, you have to leave." The old man wasn't an old man but a security guard. "The museum closes in 5 minutes."

Arius opened his eyes. It wasn't the old man at all. It was a very disgruntled security guard with a large, menacing looking flashlight. Arius bolted off the bench and left the museum. As he walked home, the sun sank behind the trees. The old man's words kept flowing in his mind. It had only been a dream, but what if what he said was true? Was it only his own paintings?

The key turned in the lock, and Arius stepped into his living room. He threw his notepad in the trash. Recording rules and times would not help him. He knew that. He pulled out his paints. If it was only his paintings, then he would make the perfect painting.

"There," whispered the hunched man. It was a few days later. He had grown a beard and his apartment was a mess. "It is a good thing it is done. I am completely out of coffee."

He sipped the last few drops from the brown mug as he admired his work. She was flawless. Her skin was the color of winter's first snow. And her eyes were as fresh and sad as the last rain of summer. She sat at a beautiful grand piano, and directly across from her was a rigid, wooden chair intended for the artist. As he assessed his piece, it occurred to him that he should change and shave and probably take a bath. It had been days and he needed to look almost as flawless as she did when he went into the painting.

A few hours later, he was sitting waiting for the transformation. That is what he had decided to call his journeys into the paintings. Suddenly, he burst out of his chair,

"I haven't given her a name! I cannot talk to her if she does not have a name! I also have no idea what song she is playing on the piano. I can't go in there now!"

He strode into his bedroom and began to pace. Finally, he walked back to the kitchen and stood in front of his piece and waited. He closed his eyes, and ever so faintly he began to hear music. It sounded miles away but was getting closer, and finally it totally enveloped him. He opened his eyes, and there he was in the room he had meticulously created. He turned toward the music source, and there she was. Her fingers did not move, but she was clearly creating the music. She stopped when she noticed him.

"Hello," she said. Her perfect rose lips never moved, but her voice poured from her. She sounded just as he had imagined she would sound.

"Hello, Anima," Arius replied.

"So that is what you call me?" the lady asked.

"Yes."

"And what is this instrument I play?"

"It is a piano."

"What is the song?"

"Für Elise. It is a famous piece by Ludwig Van Beethoven. I listened to it while I was painting." Then, there was silence. The woman broke the stillness with her silvery voice,

"What do you call yourself?"

"Arius."

"That is a very handsome name."

"Thank you." Again, silence. Arius walked over to the chair across from the piano. He was glad that he had painted the woman to look at the chair and not at her music, for she could not move. Once again, it was the woman who broke the silence.

"Arius, will you tell me more?" she asked innocently.

"More what?" Arius replied.

"More about everything! I want to know all that I can."

"Yes," Arius answered. "I will tell you everything that I can."

For the next few months, Arius visited Anima for hours and hours every day. He told her everything that he could. He would even spend time reading things so that he could tell her about them and researching so he could give her all the knowledge he could find. He told her about Shakespeare and about his favorite play, Othello.

"How could he do that, Arius?" Anima asked about the Moor's deed.

"Jealousy, my dear."

“What is this jealousy you speak about?” she asked. Arius realized they had never talked about emotions like jealousy and love.

“Jealousy is when a person is upset because a person that they love very much does not love them more than they love all other people,” he said. He was not sure that had entirely made sense. The woman did not speak for a very long time, and at length she asked, “What is love?”

“Love,” Arius began, “is when two people care about each other so much that they are willing to make great sacrifices for one another.”

“Do you love me, Arius?”

“Yes, Anima. I believe that I do love you.”

“Oh but you cannot do that, Arius.”

“What do you mean? Why can I not love you?”

“You explained love to me as an equal effort on the part of both people. We cannot have love because I cannot sacrifice for you. You sacrifice for me all the time, but I have nothing that I can give you that was not originally yours anyway. You painted me and then you told me all that I know. I have nothing to sacrifice. Therefore, we cannot have love.”

This shocked Arius. This had never occurred to him before. He had made her completely. She was just himself, but without feeling and emotion and judgment. He looked at her, but she could not look back, and he knew in that moment that she never would.

***Love ... is when
two people care
about each other
so much that they
are willing to
make great
sacrifices for
one another.***

“I have to leave,” Arius muttered.

“Goodbye, Arius,” the woman replied.

There was no sadness in her voice. It was as cold as it had always been and would always be.

Arius turned to go, but as he tried to step out of the painting, he could not see his room as clearly as he had been able to see it all of the other days. It looked foggy and far away.

“What is going on?” Arius whispered to himself.

“You have begun to really transform, Arius,” Anima’s voice came from behind him.

“I’ve what?”

“You’ve begun to transform. You have invested so much into me and into this room that you have left your world behind you. What you invest your time in is where you live. You are turning into a part of this painting. You don’t really belong in the room that you come from. You exist here with me,” she explained.

“What will happen to me?” asked Arius, near panic.

“You will remember everything. Your memory will never transform. It cannot. But you will sit in the chair you painted for yourself forever.”

“Will I be able to talk to you?”

“Yes, but soon you will stop feeling emotions.”

“You're saying that I won't feel the emotions, but I will remember being able to feel them? I will have to live in complete apathy but with the torture of the memory of feeling? I won't be able to bear that.”

“Then you should go now. Before you transform completely.”

“Yes. I have to.”

“Goodbye, Arius,” the woman said. Then after a moment, she added, “Thank you.”

“Goodbye, Anima,” Arius said. He had one last look around the room, and he leaned down to kiss her. Just as he shut his eyes, he felt his lips meet canvas.

When he opened his eyes, he was in his own kitchen. The sun was just beginning to cast its warmth onto the floorboards. Arius opened the front door and stepped outside. He closed his eyes and breathed in. He stood drinking in the early morning stillness while it lasted. Thoughts began to flood his mind. He had almost lost this. He had almost chosen to live in monotony and apathy instead of living in the perfect disorder of life. He took one last deep breath of life in and turned to go back inside.

He took the painting off the easel and stared at it. He thought that he should break it and burn it and throw his paints away so that he would never make that choice again. But doing so would be denying that all of this had ever happened, denying that it had changed him. No. While the painting might not be something to be proud of, it was most certainly something to be kept. He took out a slim brush from the table and his black acrylic.

In the lower left corner he wrote, “Infinite Smallness.”

Prelude to Melancholia

Catherine BRANDOLINI | *poetry*

A leaden weight falls slowly,
crushing the whispered wishes
that now never will be.

There will be time (they say)
but there is no time for me.

My life exists in past tense—
imperfect tense—

I cannot conjugate the future,
bidding and manifesting nothing
but phantoms, remnants of what
could have
should have
been. I can

measure out my life in regrets,
spanning, looping, draping
across the wasteland of the past.

Barren land stretches forever with unquenchable
groans and
grasps—
gasps—
for life.



Jacinta, One of the Fatima Children

Mary Margaret GALLAHER | *art*

The Mind Sings

Randi OLSON | *poetry*

Suppression is a strangled song, a silenced scream—

An unquenched burning.

Latent ashes are not dead. They dream.

The updraft stirs a yearning.

Why is the belly hollow?

Only to tolerate to this throbbing ache—

This unsettled churning incessantly holding will against its make?

Mute and bound to loneliness and to a love that never quite frees,

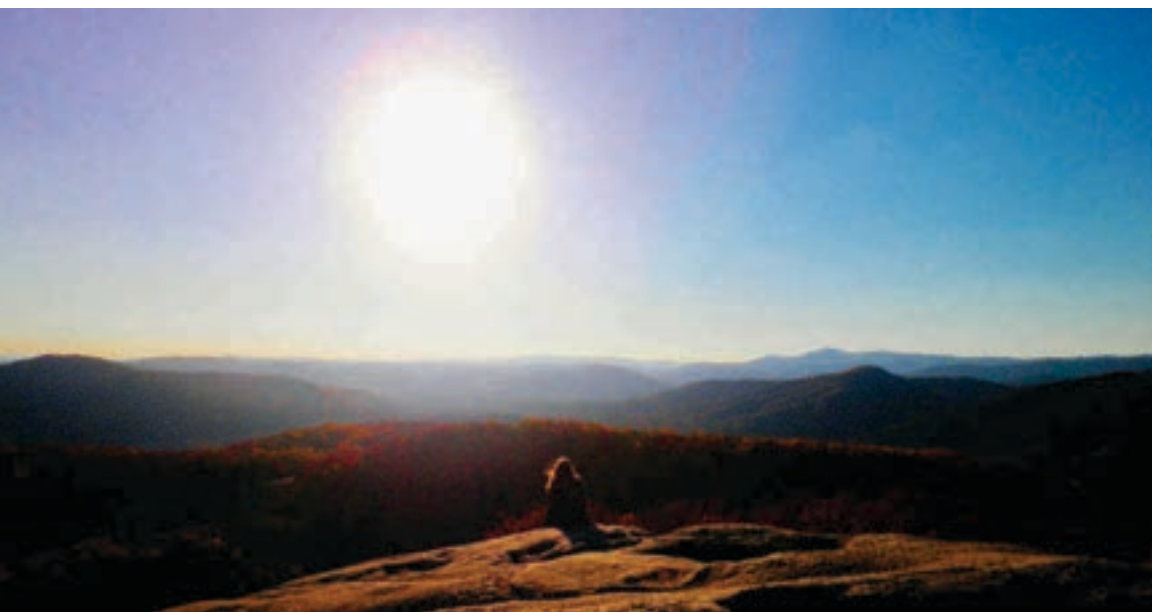
Where knowing is never realized and wanting is never appeased.

Upon searching, it finds only isolation. The mind turns to stone.

Blood slowly thickens and marrow dries within the bone.

Perfection comes to the waiting, to the one who resists the rage.

Oh, captive heart, release yourself. Your freedom is your cage.



Katerina

Alexandra KERN | *photography*

The Empowerment of Princess Julia

Joseph BRUCK | *short story*

She woke up to a lingering backache, moisture on the stone floor, and a thin trace of sunshine moving to her face. Every day was the same, and Princess Julia was only now getting bored. Like always, she rolled over to prolong the sensual haze of waking up for as long as possible. The scant portion of sunlight warmed the room just enough to encourage what she was doing. In the cold cell, this time of day was her favorite—caught between sleep and consciousness, it was nearly as good as lucid dreaming. Anyway, it was the best recreation she could hope for.

Nights were the worst, but only because of how cold they were. Why did she have to be in here at wintertime? Any other season would do. Pulling up the quilt to keep the sun out of her eyes, Julia stretched her limbs as if she were making a snow angel. That felt good, but reminded her of less constricting days. “Why can’t they let me outside once in a while?” she moaned. “Would that kill them? Technically, I need the air. They’re supposed to keep me healthy.” Though she knew her complaints were justified, they did nothing but induce a mild fit of rage, during which she paced around in a circle with her arms crossed in fierce annoyance. And now she was awake already! What would she do with the rest of the day? “Days are too long,” she groaned out loud. “Why didn’t God just make them shorter for people like me? How about just till I get out of here? Is that so hard?” When God did not reply, she plopped herself on the cot, sat up in defeat, and slid her legs up to her chest.

The torn quilt was on the floor, but she left it there in a very irritating mix of anger and laziness. Nothing felt right anymore. Even her thoughts were limited because every time she opened her eyes, the dark little room was still there. It was like being in a giant, dirty mouth, she decided—probably a man’s. Those were the dirtiest. “Why do I always have to wake up before breakfast?” came the next logical thought. As if on cue, she heard footsteps. The guard took his time, but eventually shoved a tin bowl of oatmeal through a crack at the bottom of the wall. “Finally,” she whispered, throwing her head back on the cot before rolling off to crawl over and start eating. Pausing to analyze the tiny cloud of steam, she ate with small bites and finished the whole thing in ten minutes. “Bland as always,” she concluded, “but better than nothing, I guess.” Blinking in silence and sitting still for no apparent reason, the princess rubbed her chin, yawned one more time, and thought about taking a nap.

Even her thoughts were limited because every time she opened her eyes, the dark little room was still there.

A loud crash of metal sent up a minor storm of dust, rudely snatching her mind away from everything else. “What on earth!” she yelled, throwing both hands on her ears out of instinct. As the air cleared, in jumped a dashing young man in full-armored glory. With widening eyes, he removed his helmet and bowed on one knee in a ceremonious fashion. “My lady,” he began—but before he could finish, Julia burst out, “What on this good, green earth is going on? Who are you? What are you doing here?” Puzzled by her sudden interruption, the young man was silent at first, but then smiled broadly. “I understand what a surprising intrusion I must have made, fair one. But stay your fears, I beseech you; for I am none other than Prince Mark Alexander Tanning, the Fourth of that illustrious name, and heir to the throne of the great northern lands, my father’s realm. Just last night, I came to this town for a brief visit, and news of your plight reached my ears directly. The townspeople begged me to set you free, and for that purpose I am your humble servant.” He bowed again and resumed a standing position, waiting for a response.

But Julia was disgusted. “Excuse me, but what exactly makes you think I need saving?” She stared him down with narrow eyes and a look of suspicion, but, unfortunately, this only increased her beauty in the mind of the prince. Obviously confused, he ventured, “My dear lady, you *are* imprisoned unjustly, are you not?” When she gave a curt nod, he continued. “Why then, it is my sacred duty to draw your exquisite loveliness away from these cold bars of injustice! Clearly, you were in a helpless position up till the very moment of my arrival. But again, fear not—for I am highly skilled in the arts of rescue and swordplay both.” Dumbfounded, the princess raised her voice. “Helpless? *Helpless!* You think that just because I’m a woman trapped in a cell, I’m automatically helpless? What a completely stupid and narrow thing to say!”

With sincere repentance, the prince bowed again. “Lady, I assure you that I meant no disrespect or slight on your part whatsoever. You, fair one, who surpass the very picture of grace and beauty, could never...” But here, she cut him off and took one angry step forward. “Your thoughts and manners are depressingly old-fashioned. And here I thought the world had moved on from prejudice and male superiority! Imagine it...looking at a woman as you currently are, with nothing but shameful lust in your eyes, and calling me ‘helpless’ at the same time, are qualities I would be astonished to find in the filthiest of all animals. You have no business being here, but for the benefit of your child’s mind, I *will* have you know that I would rather rot in this cell for a crime I didn’t commit if the alternative is a presumptuous rescue from a brash, undisciplined prince. I remain here of my own free will to serve my sentence...no man will touch me as if I were *helpless*.”

The prince was incredulous. He looked as though a large hole had formed and the entire floor had given way. Finally, after a very unpleasant staring contest, during which the princess glared at him with an icy face and crossed arms, he spoke in a softer tone. “Lady, are you quite sure of your

position? Do you really wish to stay in this awful room? Be assured that I would never do anything against your will, but if you were freed from this dismal place, I swear that I would not rest until I had won your hand in marriage. I have never beheld a more radiant or inspiring figure in all my years at the Northern Court.”

“My mind is quite made up, you intolerant simpleton. I grow weary of this poor excuse for conversation. Please leave, and take your silly notions of women with you.”

With a pained expression and a furrowed brow, the prince offered one last sign of respect and retreated—but not before casting a short gaze of longing and disbelief in her direction.

A minute passed. Julia noticed that her hands were shaking. After holding it back for weeks, she allowed herself the bitter pleasure of crying. One of the guards began to stir. And then she raced out of the room, calling Mark's name with reluctant confidence.

The Words in a Rose

Tim TANKO | *poetry*

Laissez-faire mirror, carnation in blush,
Judges anarcho-syndicalism
Its calyx a petit mal for malaise
Upon sempervivum highfalutin
An idiopath's *lingua franca*,
Much to grandiloquent consternation
Of intelligentsias' hoi polloi,
Who give boon to kvetch `pon their debacle
Thorns perforate cons through lexes and love
Leitmotifs rise through their national roots
Cataract libretti can summon souls,
But then demons often speak with roses



Mount Grotto

Jenna EUSTACE | *photography*

The Mockery of an Amateur Poet

Lea LAWTON | *poetry*

Weather mirroring souls souls mirroring weather

It

r

a

i

n

e

d

Each d

R

op sparkling like glass

before piercing my heart

Roses spilled forth

The deep red s P r

A

Y

I

N

G

In the wind

Spreading the smell of iron

Similar to a tremendous sneeze

Have you ever smelled a sneeze

Not a good smell

Regardless

It sprinkled across the Earth

Melding like green moss upon the surface

The love that was to last forever h

Died *quicker than a* t

Hey how are ya? r

Fine. You? Good. a

It was plucked too soon from the E

**This convoluted imagery
will make you feel What I feel**

Make you SEE what I have SEEN
I will D r
You through wordy phrases
And deep seeming puddles
Until you know What I have known
The tone of my voice
The

a

g

Pause.

For empha Sissss

The exaggerated story
Ripping away the life
What truth there was
Tearing the realness
A simple story
Deserves simple words

away

I loved
I bled
We died
I lived

Uninvited

Daniel JACOBS | *poetry*

How do you stop the embers burning?
How to keep them from igniting into a flame?
How do you keep flame from becoming a wildfire?
Engulfing your soul
Consuming everything that is you

How do you stop the storm clouds from forming?
How do you stop the rain from falling?
The water forming into a rushing tide
That will take you whole
Consuming your every thought

How do you keep a seed from growing?
How do you keep it from breaking forth from the earth?
Budding, overtaking everything in a season
Overgrowing everything that once was
Covering you in growth, in complete change

How do you stop the snow from falling on the mountain?
Rolling down faster and faster
Gathering more with it
Until it is a mountain of its own
Blinding you, bright darkness

How do you stop the emotions overtaking you?
Changing how you feel about someone
From what once was so simple
Until you don't know where to turn
And you are overwhelmed

How do you say how you feel
With risking how things are?
How do you take the step that is unasked for?
Crossing a line will change things forever
And possibly leave you more alone

How do you know which way is up
While drowning in doubt?
Stand still and be safe
But possibly lose a chance of happiness
But possibly lose someone if you move

The fire burns in your soul
The storm rages in your mind
The flower blooms in your heart
The avalanche haunts your dreams
And you are more lost than ever before

Relics in Nature

Curran SENTILLES | *photography*



The Word Riddled

Rajive TIWARI | *poetry*

With meanings
faltering
between our tongues
and lips
dripping
drunken approximations
struggling
to their feet.
Defeat
comes to mind
then discarded
for fear
of failure
Sisyphus of present
drawing on memory
lines
of unknown wounds
flirting
with beauty imagined

Quest in the Clouds

Benjamin WEBB | photography



Watercolor World

Emma PIAZZA | *poetry*

Origami boats
Paper maché skies
Watercolored oceans
A note that says "goodbye"

I am leaving, I am leaving
With a paintbrush for an oar
I'll draw myself an eastward wind
And sketch a fading shore

Erase the weeping willows
That never wept for me
Cross out all the fences
And let my soul fly free

My sail is made of parchment
And drips with morning dew
It sparkles and reflects again
The shore that I once knew

But there I was an outcast
And no one cared to see
The worlds that I could smell and feel
Across the open sea

They couldn't hear the gulls I heard
Or taste the mist I sprayed
For them, there were no colors
Except dull brown and grey

So now I'm leaving, far away
I've penciled in my star
I flicked some yellows in the sky
And put them in a jar

They will be my night-lights
My heart will be my map
If I fall right off the globe
I'll fly above all that

Crushed pastels make fluffy clouds
And broken dreams make rain
I'll make the water level rise
And find my ship again

And if I drift for years on end
No land, no birds, no sheep
I'll sing a lonely lullaby
And rock myself to sleep

I can manage on my own
I made my boat myself
I control the rudder
And I am at the helm

A feather-pen atop my cap
Red-velvet on my breast
I whittled out a compass
And I wear it on my chest

Charcoal storms don't scare me
Nor do gloomy skies
I'll smudge their tops with silver
Then wait for the sunrise

My pale moon gleams of foil
In a royal purple hue
Constellations glitter
And make the ocean blue

Yet my favorite time is dawnlight
When the deck is wet and grey
And lines of golden pencil shafts
Herald forth the day

I may feel like an outline
Empty and alone
But this masterpiece in progress
Is far from being done

The further out I travel
The more I realize
There's colors that lie hidden
In this antique paper sky

The horizon is no limit
And waves don't pose a threat
I'll dive under the hurricane
And trace its silhouette

I'll race over the mountains
And after I am done
I'll swing along the Northern Lights
And fall into the sun

I'll swim through caverns filled with
 gems
And pillars made of gold
I'll make myself a crown of stars
And wear it as I roam

And maybe, someday, I'll sail back
To Weeping Willow shore
And show them things they never
 dreamed
Of glimpsing there before

They'll blink and need to shade their
 eyes
From the splendor of my crown
They'll cock their heads like seagulls
At my coat, my cap, my gown

I wouldn't stay for long...oh, no
I haven't got the time
So many details left to fill
Inside this world of mine

So cheerio! Farewell, my friends
I'm off to other lands
Places that I shape and mold
With the paintbrush in my hand

If you need me, look up past the stars
And if you sing in tune
You might just catch a glimpse of me
Sailing round the moon

Not today.

Randi OLSON | *poetry*

Deep within this quiet, there is an inexplicable ache.
Desire is an unsettled churning. Want, a will at stake.
Yesterday was a yearning that blazed, brilliant and wild.
Resigned to lamentation, misfortune stays the child.

Then wind carries ashes and anger long thought dead;
Guilt revives raging coals inside a desperate man's head.
Solitude, oh, will you not for love's sake be comforted?
Will you not forsake the numbing pain and dance instead?

Realize the life-giving perfection within your bones.
Welcome the burning. No need to cross. Damn the stones!
Transparency will save you from the fearful who condemn.
Death cancels out madness, and the Earth will have them again.

End the inhibition, and rattle a tin cup against your human cage!
The warden clinks his skeletal keys only to tempt your rage.
Obedient prisoners wait patiently and quietly as they smother.
Wait. No. The key turns for another—it's always for another.

What if dreams became reality? And today were the day of, “someday ifs?”
Immerse the fire, let the waters flow; forgiveness is a flawless bliss.
Not today. No wonder. Today is the constant of smoldering sorrow.
Not today. Some other. You're still waiting for that blameless tomorrow.

On Earth, In Earth, After Earth

Felix DU SABLON | *poetry*

Each man marches through the trek of life,
Knowing different fortune and strife.
Not one man alive like another,
Each a book with a different cover.
Lives have each their own golden thread,
None the same: that is, till we are dead.

Because there in the earthly tomb,
The end of life started in the womb.
All men are a homogeneous mass,
All men are one and the same class.
No royal prince, or lowly beggar,
All lie asleep the same forever.

But, in paradise all are different,
Each in the book of life has his print.
Fashioned from God, Lord, and Father,
Once again kin, sister, and brother.
In the grave all men are of one grain,
In heaven not one soul is the same.

Raduisya Mariya

Mary Margaret GALLAHER | *art*



you had a feast

Ellen WEIR | *poetry*

you had a feast! and oh
how we felt the gods come crimsoning down,
almost stampeding the sunglints
down to your shorey isle—
to your feasting table, lying blending to lapping waves
your candles rich your damasks damask rose
you pushed
that one renegade off the rocks
but then . . . your food! oh abundant bright soft favorites sunset laced-
berries meats bread and sauce fruits sweets wine velvet
the bill, lying on the floor.

and after that glorious meal, you showed us your chapel
the center of your home, your life, you said, your center your soul
it was a side enclosure lying
damp, dim, old air no windows lying chilling damp dim

why did most of us pretend to pray there?



Grecian Goddess

Deidre RODRIGUEZ | *art*



Lead Balloon

Nikole BRAND | *poetry*

A curious lightness in my soul
Weighs me down, holds me here
My joy is my burden, chained to my leg
A lead balloon which lifts me low.

Hikers

Alexandra KERN | *photography*



The Battle

—from the novel, *Just Kidnapped*

Tim TANKO | *short story*

I recline on the ground while snores echo around the camp. They've wrapped my manacles' chain around a tree. Tessa's in the same boat, tied to the same tree, but she's already closed her eyes. The chains give us room to move in a wide circle and find a comfortable spot to sleep, but no way can we slip out of the manacles and run. Two of our kidnappers stay awake as watchmen.

The long march today has left me exhausted. Even as worried as I am about the future, I drop off without even trying. That's why, when I'm rudely awakened by a hand slapping me in the face, I'm none too happy. I spit out, "What the frick?"

"That's my line."

Oh, the wildcat's back. Wonderful. I stay quiet and prepare for *another* fight.

"What's the big idea?" Tessa asks.

I narrow my eyes to make her out. She rests on her knees, and the moonlight shows her furrowed brows. My cheek stings from her blow. I mutter, "That you punch me while I sleep?"

"Don't act innocent."

"How should I act guilty, then? Public exposure?"

She ignores the remark. "Do you have some sleep fetish?"

That's so randomly idiotic I laugh. "What're you going on about?"

She doesn't speak for a moment. It's too dark to see much of her, but the shape in front of me seems to be trembling, whether from anger or something else I don't know. "Look," she finally says. "I know we're married. Whatever that means. But touching me while I sleep is off limits."

At that, I have to sit up. My neck's a bit stiff, and I rub at it. I say, "I didn't."

She crosses her arms and juts out her jaw. I'd be skeptical in her place, too.

"I swear."

Her mouth opens and closes twice, as if she's rethinking what to say. "Swear on the Landon family."

"Alright," I say. "I swear on the Landon dynasty that I never touched you."

She pushes back her hair in an irritated way. "Then what... ugh. Fine, I'm sorry."

"It's all right. I guess."

I watch her crawl back to where she'd been before. I wonder if she's sleepwalking. Do those kinda people slap others and speak? But all rational thinking leaves my brain in a rush when she screams.

That noise sends my eardrums ringing. It's like a thousand banshees stubbed their toes simultaneously. Pure horror embodies itself in a single, piercing shriek from Tessa.

Next thing I know, she flies out of the dark and grabs me by the shirt neck. The moon catches her eyes and makes them glow—they're the size of my fist. "Ohmygodohmygodhelp" she rambles.

I free myself, none too gently, and grit my teeth. "The hell's wrong with you now?"

The whites of her eyes roll up. Plop. With no explanation, she face plants in my chest.

I look at her for a while, baffled. This is the girl who head-butted a mercenary leader right in front of his twelve armed guards, and now she's seen something terrifying enough to pass out? My skin's crawling at the thought.

I set her on the ground, gently as I can. She'd been spouting that nonsense about me touching her. Maybe she's had a nightmare. Either way, I'm worried.

Her scream hasn't only alarmed me. Some of the other members of the camp are awake too. Murmurs replace the snores, and Darden soon walks over to check on us. He stops upon noticing Tessa's limp body. His face twists as he says, "If you hurt her I'll—"

"No," I hurry to say. The nasty coil to his mouth makes my heart

pound. I don't want to know what horrible thing a murderer like Darden can think of. "She came over and said I touched her. Then she went back over there, panicked, and conked out."

An uncomfortable few seconds pass as he glances from Tessa's unconscious body to me. I tremble at the thought he won't believe me. "Where was she?" Darden finally asks.

I point at the spot, releasing my breath. "Right over there."

Darden has several of his men armed with rifles poke around in the area. Their feet crunch on the undergrowth, and they whack a few low branches aside with machetes. Someone laughs in the direction of the search. "Hey, found it."

"It?" another voice calls.

"What freaked her out. C'mere."

More laughter follows as the crew joins him and sees "it." My imagination runs wild with bizarre creatures. Whatever it might be, it must not be too dangerous. A weird bug, maybe. Girls hate bugs. Not that I'm too fond of them, either.

***The nasty coil to his
mouth makes my heart
pound. I don't want to
know what horrible
thing a murderer like
Darden can think of.***

The crew's calm reaction settles my racing pulse a little. Tessa stirs and opens her eyes. She sees me and still looks haunted as she asks, "Is he gone?"

I raise an eyebrow. "He?"

She rubs her hands together. It's the first time I've seen her so uncomfortable. "The—"

She stops when something black flies out of the undergrowth and lands between us. A large, black something. And it's alive.

Worst of all, the thing takes off in my direction.

I think my scream beats Tessa's as far as pitch. I fumble backwards until the manacles snap short. He stops his charge at the same time. All I can see is the massive, hideous, deformed freak of nature known as a tarantula. Holy—there's not too much that scares me, but giant spiders come number one on the short list.

The freak decides he hasn't done enough harm. He comes barreling at me again. I try to stand to play keep away, but I slip on a patch of loose dirt.

Wham. My head slams into the ground, where it's luckily leaf-padded. The tarantula crawls into view. Absolute terror shoots through me. I'm paralyzed. And the tarantula's on a beeline towards my face.

Tessa's banshee scream returns when she sees my impending doom. She wrestles off her boot and throws it at the spider. The shoe bounces, missing its target by an inch. But the spider deflects his course slightly.

His horrible hairy legs press against my stomach. He's *crawling onto me*. I have a mouth, and I must squeak. "Help."

By some miracle of girl over mind, Tessa runs over and snatches her boot off the ground. She swings wildly in my general direction. The boot smacks me over and over again, sometimes near where the legs are, sometimes not. I'll be black and blue tomorrow.

Tessa has her eyes closed tight, and her teeth flash in a grimace. No wonder she can't aim. I bend my neck and can see the thing crouching there on my side, weathering her blind blows. Tessa hits my body more times than the spider. A worthy sacrifice for mankind. The monster makes a quick effort to escape by dashing in Tessa's direction.

She picks that moment to peek at whether she's killed it. She screeches again, and her next particularly heavy swing knocks the wind out of me but catches the devil spawn too. The spider soars through the air and into the tree our chains attach to. Even the sound he makes as he hits, a somehow-hairy thud, sends my skin into goose bumps and my heart into a piston.

Tessa shoves her boot into my hands. I feel her shaking as she does. "Kill it!" she hisses.

My fingers press deep into the material. I wheeze, trying to recover my breath. "I... can't."



“What? You're a guy!”

The thing's staring at us where he landed. I can see the twinkle in his many beady eyes as he plans his next assault. And, feeling both ashamed and childish, I say, “Spiders... phobic.”

“Me too! B-b-but you're bigger! Do *something!*”

Satan Junior comes for the kill.

Tessa throws herself on the closest protective object—me. And so now I have a wildcat of a girl strangling me while a spider the size of an Irishman's pub drink has murderous intentions. Bad combination. I gag at both her choking arms and the terror on the ground.

A bazooka would be nice right now. I need a weapon of mass destruction. And for some unknown reason I think of Tessa's rear.

Perfect.

I break her death grip on my neck. And, my mind completely blank except for the single thought that the man-eater on the ground needs to die, I heave her straight at it.

With a wail of despair, she flies through the air. I can see the betrayal in her face. I've aimed my wife true. She smacks down on top of the enemy. There's a satisfying squish and a small cloud of dust that sprays in all directions.

Slowly, Tessa rolls off the spot. Only an ugly puddle of what I guess is spider blood and legs remains. And now that our mutual enemy's dead, she points at me with a vein throbbing in her neck. “You... *you...*”

Only then do I hear the laughter. Our kidnappers are in stitches. They've watched the whole performance. And as I remember that spider come flying out of the dark, I realize they threw it at us. My cheeks flush. But before Tessa can attack or finish her last ominous sentence, I blurt out, “Good job.”

I say it from the depths of my heart. I'm truly grateful to have her here, even if it's only as ammunition. Tessa lowers her accusing finger and looks at the dead thing, which somehow remains terrifying even now. She closes her eyes. “You're such a moron.”

“I know.”

“Why throw me?” Her eyes pop open again. “Why would you *do* that?”

I shrug. “I panicked.”

Her eye twitches. “You panicked.”

“Yeah.”

“And the first thing that came to mind was throw me.”

“Yeah.” I can't resist adding, “You weren't exactly Captain America, either.”

We glare a moment longer. Didn't I save her from the stupid thing? A little gratitude would be nice. Eventually, Tessa gives an exasperated sigh. She drags her chains around to the opposite side of the tree, far from the dead spider. And me.

Screw it. We walked beside Dante and came out with only some hurt pride and bruises. This battle was nothing if not successful.

Basilica

Marina HART | *art*



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All contributors are members of the Belmont Abbey College community.

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Submission Guidelines

Agora accepts submissions of fiction and poetry, as well as works of visual art and photography. Through a blind reading and viewing, student editors select works to be published. Selections are based on artistic quality and space in the publication. Only student entries are eligible for the literature and art-photography awards. Winners are presented a certificate of artistic achievement during the Academic Awards Banquet at the end of the spring semester and receive a monetary award by mail. Deadlines for submissions are announced every semester in the fall and early spring. Submissions are accepted only from the Belmont Abbey Community: students, faculty, monks, administrators, staff, and alumni.

Submission Guidelines:

Please edit written works for grammar and mechanics prior to sending. Send each submission, whether written or a work of art or photography, as an individual digital file, named by the title of the work. Written submissions must be saved and sent as Word files. Send all submissions as email attachments; do not paste them into the body of your email message. Email your digital images one at a time to retain quality. In the body of your email message, include the title, your name, and the date of your submission. Send all submissions to Dr. Rebecca Munro, Faculty Advisor for *Agora*: rebeccamunro@bac.edu.

Categories and Number of Submissions Accepted for Consideration:

Short stories (1700 word limit, the very high end): Two Stories

Flash-fiction (500 word limit): Two Stories

Vignettes (500 word limit): Two Vignettes

Prose poems (250 word limit, suggested): Two Prose Poems

Poetry: Six Poems

Drawings, paintings, mixed media: Six Submissions

Photography: Six Photographs



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