

THE OUTLET

Bloom Where
You are Planted

FIFTH
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

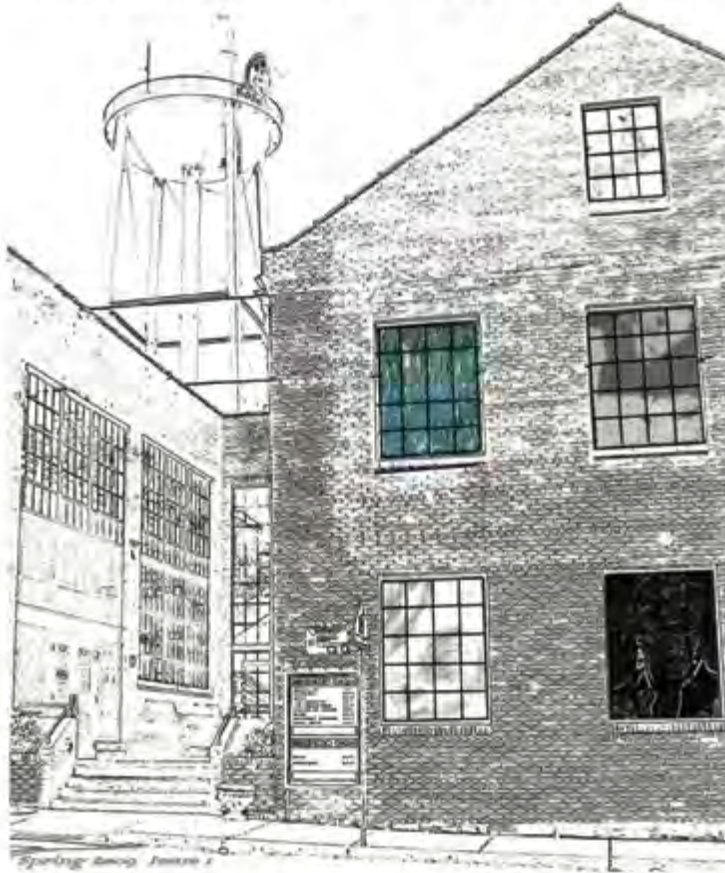
ARTS AND
LETTERS 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Note on Original Publication	3	SNOW THUNDER , Cheyenne Henderson	32
Judges' Biographies.....	4	APPLES , Veronica Wuertzter	33
Art Winners.....	5	CONSTELLATIONS , Makenzie Francis	34
Poetry Winners.....	6	THE GARDEN UNDER THE STAIRWAY ,	
Short Prose Winners.....	7	Makenzie Francis.....	35
SUCCULENT , Jennifer Tipton	8	WHEN PEOPLE CHANGE , Allie Daubert	36
CROSS EYED , Sandra Baker.....	9	MISUNDERSTANDING ALL YOU SEE ,	
AVERY , Honor Martin	10	Kaitlin Penwell.....	37
PLAIN RELIEF , Sandra Baker.....	11	BLOOD , Calvin Smith.....	38
SALT , Makenzie Francis.....	12	GIRAFFE , Abbagail Badley.....	39
A LOSS , Cheyenne Henderson	13	GIVE YOURSELF ANOTHER TRY ,	
OKAY , Adrienna Zirk	14	Andrew Ducommun.....	40
THE HALLWAY OF OPPRESSION ,		GRAND GULCH CACTUS ,	
Chalice LaRose.....	15	Susan Richman.....	41
CONSTELLATION , Adrienna Zirk	16	THROUGH THE NATIVE EYES ,	
UNTITLED , Mikaela Morris	17	Emily Marion	42
REDBUD LATE SUMMER , Gary Bergel.....	18	THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM ,	
HOMAGE TO ANCESTORS AND ALL		Mike Vincent	43
MIGRANTS , Gary Bergel.....	19	NOTICING , Matthew Robbins	44
YOU WOULD HAVE TURNED 64 TODAY ,		UNTITLED , Honor Martin.....	46
Barbara Runion	20	BLOOM WHERE YOU STAND ,	
OUT OF OUR REACH , James Ralston.....	21	Jason Wilson	47
FREEDOM TOWER , Heather Huggett	22	WATER , Johanna Johansen	48
BISHOP'S CASTLE MOAT - WELLS, ENGLAND ,		LAVENDER , Matthew Sneathen.....	49
Kelly Shurnitski.....	23	ON LIVING A FUN LIFE , Calvin Smith.....	50
BITTERSWEET DAYS ON CASCO BAY ,		DECORATIVE ORIGAMI STAR , Sorita Av.....	52
Katherina Muller.....	24	HOW I SEE THE SEA , Barbara Neece	53
LOKI , Emily Marion.....	25	BEFORE THE MOUNTAIN ,	
BOOKISH (YOU LOVE ME ANYWAY ,		Honor Martin	54
CEREBRAL SIDE TOO) , Kathy Cox.....	26	NIGHT BLOOMS , Christine Noad	57
VALENTINE FOR A FRIEND , Kathy Cox.....	27	GOODBYE , Lisa Wood.....	58
PROBABILITY , Sorita Av	28	TWO SAMURAI , Billie McPherson	59
DRY LEAF STUDY , Antonia Capriotti	29	EÍNÍNÍ , Cheyenne Henderson.....	60
WORDS , Calvin Smith	30	BELIEF IN BALTIMORE , Doug Kinnett.....	62
ORANGE DAFFODIL ,		THREE SISTERS , William Kirby Lewis	63
Antonia Capriotti.....	31		

*Cover Illustration by Sandra Baker
Design and Layout by Jessica Leake*

The Outlet



NOTE ON ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

The Outlet: Bloom Where You Are Planted was launched 10 years ago, in Spring 2009, as *The Outlet*. Blue Ridge CTC was located in the Dunn Building at 400 W Stephen Street, and that location used to be an Outlet center for shopping prior to Blue Ridge CTC coming to the building. The original publication was brought to the community by the Residential Writers Group of Blue Ridge CTC. Professor Sandra Baker had the idea of starting a Residential Writer's Group. Professor Deidre Morrison designed the original cover art, developed the magazine's layout, and solicited submissions via a College-wide contest. Professor Billie Unger oversaw its production from 2009-2013, seeing the magazine's transformation over time as the college moved from the old Dunn Outlet Building to its present location, making the subtitle "Bloom Where You Are Planted" a propos. The group who judged the first submissions was Sandra Baker, Tony Early, Chrystal McDonald, Jim Ralston, Billie Unger, and Todd Young.



JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

Selection of Arts and Letters

Douglas Kinnett and Gary Bergel juried and selected the visual art works published in this edition of *The Outlet: Bloom Where You Are Planted -- Arts and Letters* and/or exhibited in the Blue Ridge CTC T41, T60, and Student Success Center Art Spaces at the Technology Center or at the Pines Center in Morgan County. **Dr. Kinnett**, a well-known regional painter, is also the former Coordinator of the Art Education Program at Shepherd University. **Gary Bergel**, a multidisciplinary exhibiting artist, is a member of the Blue Ridge CTC adjunct faculty and a member of the Berkeley Arts Council.

Sandra Baker, Kathy Cox, and Jim Ralston juried and selected the literary pieces published in this edition.

Sandra Baker, Instructor, is an active member of the Cultural Events Committee, a member of the West Virginia Writers, Inc., and has written fiction herself. She has published short stories in the *Artworks Literacy Magazine* and past issues of *The Outlet*. **Kathy Cox**, Associate Dean of Humanities and Assistant Professor of English, has published four poems in *The Outlet* in the past. She has written an unpublished novel in which every chapter opened with a poem. **Jim Ralston**, Assistant Professor of English, teaches creative writing at Blue Ridge CTC; he recently published, *Lyrics for a Low Noon*, the second of his full books of poetry.

ART WINNERS

First Place

Succulent
by Jennifer Tipton
Acrylic on Canvas
Pg. 8

Second Place

The Hallway of Oppression
by Challice LaRose
Photography
Pg. 15

Third Place

Loki
by Emily Marion
Drawing
Pg. 25

Judges' Special Merit

Dry Leaf Study
by Antonia Capriotti
Prismacolor Pencil
Pg. 29

POETRY WINNERS

First Place

Avery
by Honor Martin
Pg. 10

Second Place

Salt
by Makenzie Francis
Pg. 12

Third Place

A Loss
by Cheyenne Henderson
Pg. 13

SHORT PROSE WINNERS

First Place

Noticing

by Matthew Robbins

Pg. 44

Second Place (Tie)

Water

by Johanna Johansen

Pg. 48

Second Place (Tie)

On Living a Fun Life

by Calvin Smith

Pg. 50



SUCCULENT

by Jennifer Tipton
Acrylic on Canvas



CROSS EYED

by Sandra Baker

Photograph

AVERY

by Honor Martin

My toenails are painted red.
It's been forever since I even tried
to look pretty.

He's on my mind,
and it doesn't surprise me.
It happens all the time.

I can't be fine for too long before he crawls back in.
He always crawls back in.

Time to go, my mind chimes in.
My heart is in my throat, begging to stay behind,
But my toenails are painted red,
and it's time to go.



PLAIN RELIEF

by Sandra Baker

Color Paper

SALT

by Makenzie Francis

I had been waiting for your call
daily, with agitated impatience.
Ten sunsets passed,
I longed for that digital pigeon to sing.

I listened closely for that whirr against the kitchen table,
I'd hear each note ring
over and over and over,
lest I appear too eager.

But when the bird's melody finally hummed,
I found myself emotionless.
How could this be
that when I heard your voice there was no excitement,
no jumping on the bed, no tears of joy, no eager laughter?

There were only your words,
Your new unrecognizable words
Words I did not want to translate
Words that filled my heart with salt.

I hoped you would hear through my silence
the unspoken void of "I miss you"
filling in my thoughts
as the saltiness dried my tongue.
I imagined those summer evenings
perched in your hammock
embraced by your cool cotton tee shirt.
Did they even matter now?

My cries desiccated from the drought of your honey once sweet.
This new-found language willed
a bitter taste.

Perhaps if you chose to peer below my surface,
You would have sensed the brine in my wordless whispers.

A LOSS

by Cheyenne Henderson

Autumn cannot come fast enough,
For the leaves are already dying in my soul.
In bursts of colors they come and then fade,
Drifting down to become the winter's floor.

June has died and July barely remains,
One should never take fireflies for granted,

But oh! Let summer die!

Let the heat die!

Let the warmth fade!

Let Autumn come in a blaze of colors,
One last Revolution before death claims the fiery leaves for
winter again.

I want the cold.

I want the color.

Please, let summer die and let come another!

Please let this be a nightmare to wake from.

Tell me you're waiting in Autumn's cold hush!

But when Autumn does come,

I shall only see,

That this nightmare is real,

And you are no longer with me.

My chest will still ache,

My soul will still mourn,

And in the cold wind's kiss,

I will wish I never took the fireflies for granted.

OKAY

by Adrienna Zirk

When you asked me if I was okay,
I lied to you.
I figured it was better if you didn't know
That I was dying inside.
Every star in this galaxy of mine has died,
And now it is just their bodies twinkling in the dust.



THE HALLWAY OF OPPRESSION

by Challice LaRose

Photography

CONSTELLATION

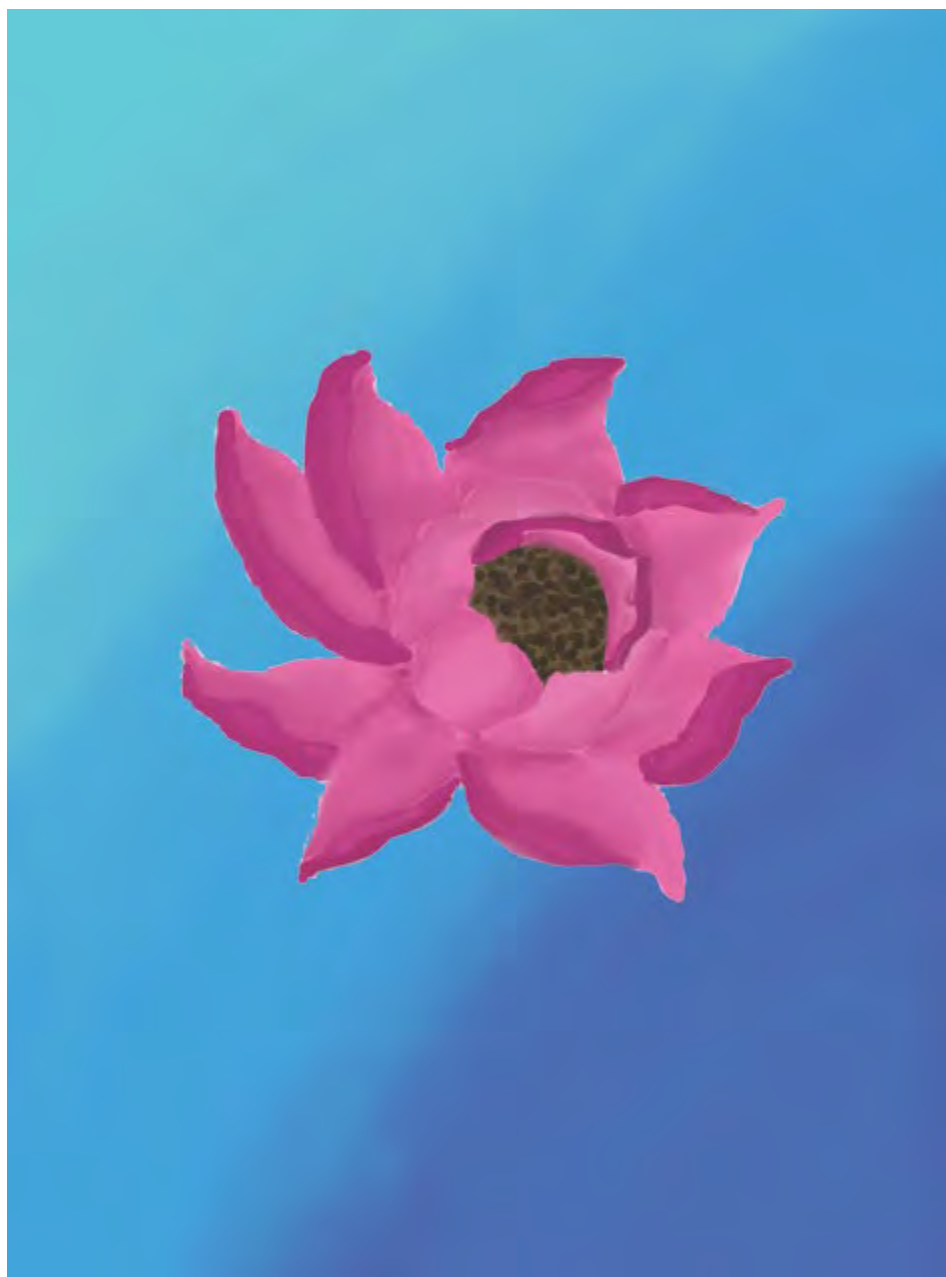
by Adrienna Zirk

We look out spotted windows,
Passed the dirt and the
Grime to what is beyond it.
Grass, trees, outside.

Parents will yell at their kids
To go out and enjoy themselves.
People like me will stare at it solemnly.
Sometimes I see the memory
Of Mom and Dad together.
Happy.
Loving.
Telling us to go outside.

And we go, staring at the stars,
And we wonder what is out there.
I wonder about Mom and Dad,
If they ever looked at constellations
And wondered the same.

Years have passed, but I still
Wonder. Do they
Still wonder of us, too?



UNTITLED

by Mikaela Morris

Digital Art



REDBUD LATE SUMMER

by Gary Bergel

Photograph



HOMAGE TO ANCESTORS AND ALL MIGRANTS

by Gary Bergel

Acrylic on Fired Clay

YOU WOULD HAVE TURNED 64 TODAY

by Barbara Runion

Pappaw is not here, but his love remains
It surrounds us like unbreakable chains
Time goes by, and new memories are made
I visit the ground in which you were laid
Your name in stone, flowers on the ground
I listen for your voice, but there is no sound
Can you see me as I sit here and cry?
Why daddy? Why did you have to die?

Holding tight to the love left behind
Know that you are always on my mind
Visits from you in the form of a dream
Or objects moving from someone unseen
Wherever I go, I know you are with me
On this day and those yet to be

OUT OF OUR REACH

by James Ralston

I'm a new face in the therapy group.
And when my turn in the circle comes
to say what I'm feeling right now,
my tears surprise even me. I shout
that I'm leaving as I head for the door.

Back home with my mortified wife,
soon to be ex, I don't try to defend
my rude behavior. I take refuge instead
in the toolshed, where I find solace
in crowbars, scythes, wrenches, vises,
everything hanging on its proper hook.

True. I'm my father all over again.
Even the day my friend Bennie drowned,
I hammered and sawed my way through it
while Mom lay sobbing in the house.

Dry-eyed, Dad confessed to me that he felt
like someone had punched him in the gut.
He was referring to Bennie's death, yes,
but also to Mom weeping like that,
out of his reach, and mine too.

As we walked to the barn that night
to milk the cows and slaughter
a chicken for the funeral dinner,
I asked Dad why men don't cry.
You just learn to take it, that's all,
he said, handing me the hatchet.



FREEDOM TOWER

by Heather Huggett

Photograph



BISHOP'S CASTLE MOAT – WELLS, ENGLAND

by Kelly Shurnitski

Photograph

BITTERSWEET DAYS ON CASCO BAY

by Katherina Muller

The rain
on the window
pain
your grey eyes
reflect
the mood of the day
as buoys clang softly
and foghorns cry mournfully
in the distance
the rain slowly turns to snow
silently blanketing
the sleeping city
with its magic



LOKI

by Emily Marion
Drawing

BOOKISH (YOU LOVE ME ANYWAY, CEREBRAL SIDE TOO)

by Kathy Cox

My passions are bookish and turn with the tides
Of ebullient churning, interior rides.
My spirit bursts brazen then quietly hides:
Moderate, kindly, and balanced, it tries
Embracing all manner of turmoil and cries
In others, sweet others, who stroke where it lies.
I love your strong passions and see from afar
Your following even my own like a star.
You lead with firm footsteps and be what you are,
My other, sweet other, with no mark or mar.
So where is the wind in my sail you inquire,
The strength of my will and the heat of my fire?
Lost in dull words or the strength of a song?
In others, sweet others, who do me no wrong.
I unify sweetness of life like a nook
In the cliff of a harshness obscured in a book
And you are a rock to me, flashing-eyed look
Of a hero or passion I saw and I took.
So steal with me, heal me, and be where I lie,
An other, sweet other, to stay till I die.

VALENTINE FOR A FRIEND

by Kathy Cox

When love came through,
I opened the back door and the front door
as if it were spring cleaning.

The air was heavy with the smell of grass,
when love came through.
It was full of the first and the new and the old.
I was laughing with a friend.

We were lit up from the inside by the noon sun,
when love came through.
I had been shut out in grief and had had to wait
and watch others light candles,
form caring circles, full of warmth.

Then love came through,
the every and the only answer,
the right grip on priority.

PROBABILITY

by Sorita Av

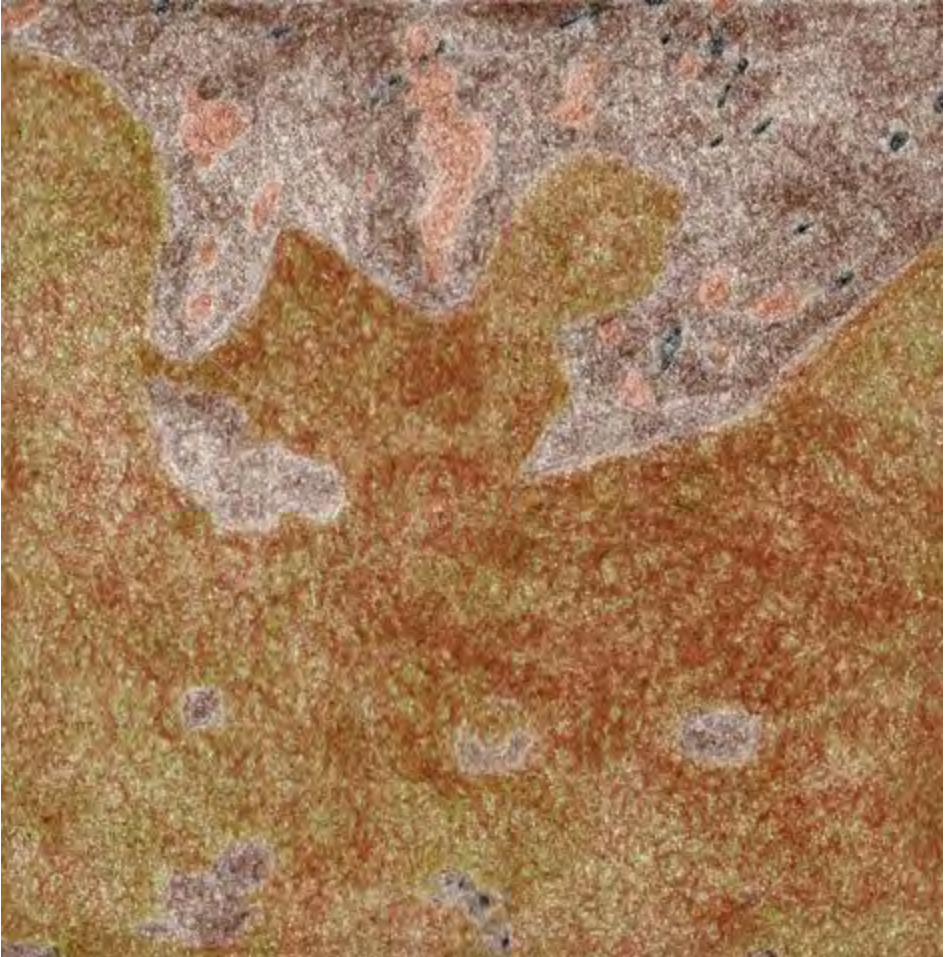
Out of boredom,
I toss a coin up in the air.
Will it land on heads or tails?
Who knows?

As the coin spins in the air,
gravity pulls it back into my palm.
I close my hand on the coin
to check the result.

The coin landed on tails.
“E PLURIBUS UNUM” is shown.
I stop and ponder about it.
Out of many, there is one.

Are there always two sides to things?
Does it affect how they are?
Do they tend to swing more to one side?
Out of many, there is one.

What if we stop to think about
what’s on the other side?
Would it remain an enigma?
Aren’t we all like a coin toss?



DRY LEAF STUDY

by Antonia Capriotti

Prismacolor Pencils

WORDS

by Calvin Smith

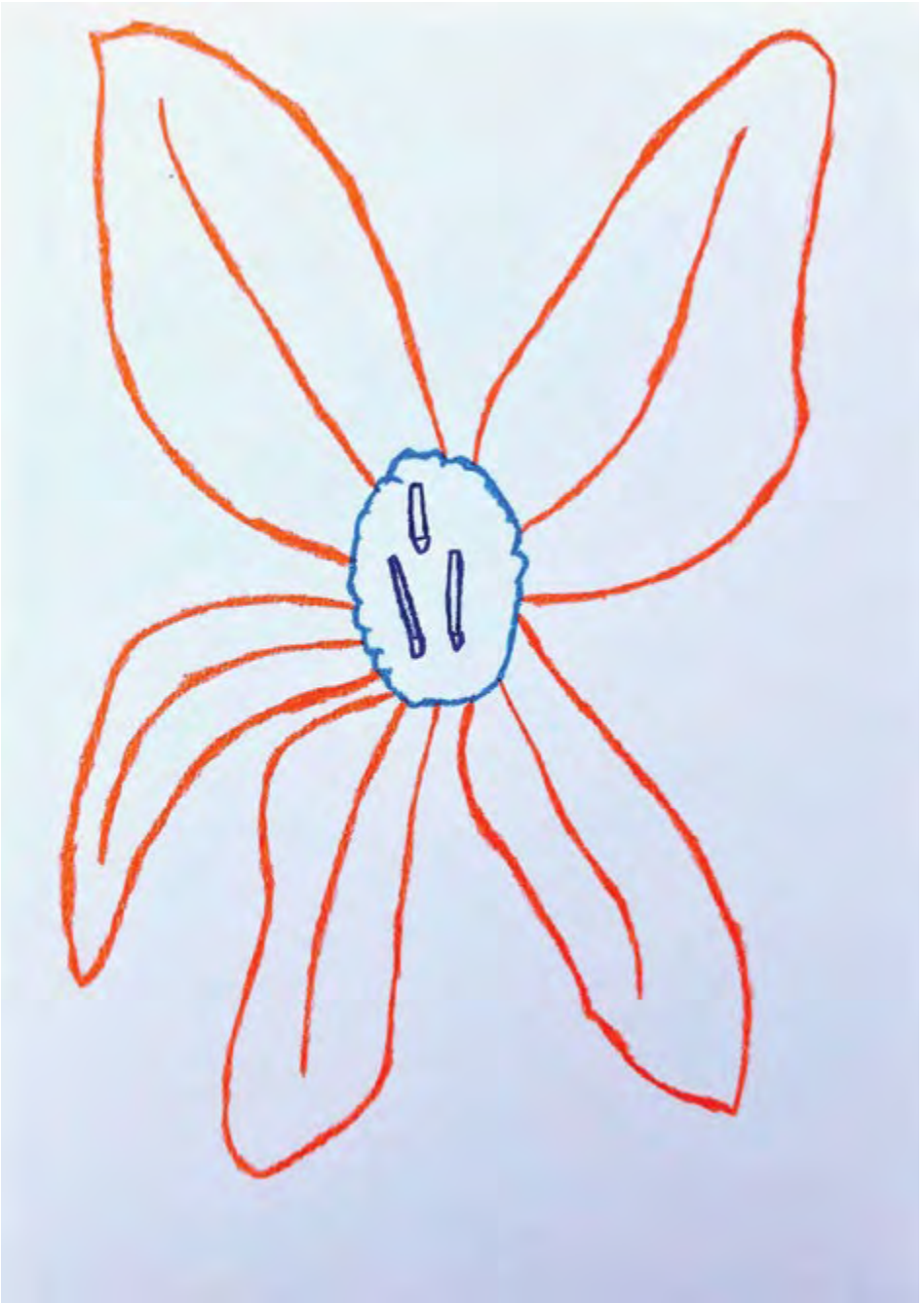
I wonder if we are
on the same page here.

Some say words hold power –
that that power is in
their given meaning.

To me, they are a code,
not to be cracked but felt.
If I asked you to trust me,
wouldn't this be a sign
of a later betrayal?

What people say
takes on a mind of its own.
I speak and you imagine,
we weave narratives that
stimulate and madden.

I look to the whole picture
to make my next move.
I will not blow a piece
of the puzzle out of proportion.



ORANGE DAFFODIL

by Antonia Capriotti

Drawing

SNOW THUNDER

by Cheyenne Henderson

All is still, soft, and white,
A dream, a haze, a plane of silence.
Snow drifts and falls and falls,
But with a cannon boom, silence shreds,
And in the roar snowflakes twirl like fractals of the quiet that was.
The ground shudders at the sound as again it reigns.
The trees sway; their branches quake.
All of the land holds its breath,
Waiting for the strike.
Another blast,
And then silence, silence, silence.
(Like a dream, it has passed)
All is still, soft, and white.



APPLES

by Veronica Wuertzer

Digital Art

CONSTELLATIONS

by Makenzie Francis

Beneath the stars, I rest so dreary
seeing how the constellations dazzle
like the jewel in your eyes,
now ever-so far away.

Across the inkiness,
you lie in a box of bells and whistles.
Commotion consuming you,
brick walls concealing you
from our sky of constellations.

I desire that embrace of warmth
from those summer nights,
where we lay in your hammock
and gazed at Orion.

I remember how our affection felt natural,
like the brightness of the stars.
Though light years away,
They never fail to illuminate the sleeping heavens.

When I awake every dawn,
the anguish subsides
But I know the woe will rise again
in the imminent nightfall.

I pray for more sunsets
to soothe this sensation of absence
because the longer the day,
the more my heart yearns
for more of you.

THE GARDEN UNDER THE STAIRWAY

by Makenzie Francis

How did you find me?
This world is cold
and distant
segregated amongst the stereo and preferable.

Flowers here grow for the elite
in plastics and foams
dancing on the precipice of riches,
withering for the forgotten nuances.

But I blossom from the genesis
brightly through green pastures
in sweet scents of spring,
boldly pursuing every dawn
through the droughts of light.

Here you are,
a surely mossy bow,
searching for that perfect bouquet.

Yet somehow
you have found me
gleaming in the shadows of the crimson dozen,
the golden sunflower
in the garden under the stairway.

You see me,
my naked luster
the pomp of my petals.

Here you are
and here I am
an imperfect bundle
tied in a vase
reflecting the heart
our world may one day find again.

WHEN PEOPLE CHANGE

by Allie Daubert

Two smiles, two girls
greeting each other in a coffee shop.
Best friends since fifth grade.
One with blue eyes, the other green.
One with cascading blonde hair,
the other with dirty blonde curls.
They smile and sip their drinks,
not worrying about anything.
The summer sun is shining overhead.

Fall comes with cool air and orange leaves.
The girl with the green eyes
sits by herself in the coffee shop,
fidgeting to the ticking clock.
Surely, her friend is only late.
Checking her texts, still nothing.
She puts on a brave face,
while staring at her phone,
hating to be seen so alone
on this cold crisp day,
this bleak dark grey winter sky
encircling all around



MISUNDERSTANDING ALL YOU SEE

by Kaitlin Penwell

Digital Art

BLOOD

by Calvin Smith

The steel blade was from
a butter knife, and it was a lot
sharper than it looked!
I had to find out the hard way,
and a crescent shaped wound
appeared at the tip of my finger.

How do you wrap a band-aid
around the tip of your finger?
The concept eluded me so
I just settled for paper towels.
I wrapped it around like a cast,
I was ready to go on cooking.



GIRAFFE

by Abbagail Badley

Drawing

GIVE YOURSELF ANOTHER TRY

by Andrew Ducommun

Do you still feel like you're the only one?
A nobody who's
Finding their way in a crowd of everyone
It isn't right
The black and the white
You're trying
But it's keeping you awake every night

Now you're dreaming of all the things that
You could be
As you lie in wait praying for some miracle
To set you free
It isn't right
The black and the white
You're trying
But it's keeping you awake every night

Don't let anybody tell you
You can't be anything
'Cause it's so much bigger
Than you realize
You were made to touch
Every part of the sky
Yeah, I know it hurts
But give yourself another try

Now you're staring down the edge of the abyss
Fighting through
The will just to know that you're still alive
It isn't right
A heart made to
Please the greatest lies
You're trying
But the loneliness
Is eating at you every night

And when it feels like you've fallen
Far away from the truth
With sadness being the only reality
That you ever knew
I'll be there to guide you every step
Of the way through
In you lies the chance that you
Could bring kingdom's to their knees

Don't let anybody tell you
You can't be anything
'Cause it's so much bigger
Than you realize
You were made to touch
Every part of the sky
Yeah, I know it hurts
But give yourself another try



GRAND GULCH CACTUS

by Susan Richman

Photograph

THROUGH THE NATIVE EYES

by Emily Marion

The horse, once mighty and free,
remembers his power; he gazes
solemnly at the flowing river.
He misses the sun.

He hates the cold bit I shove
between his teeth, the heavy
saddle thrust on his back –
he hates me. He is my slave.

But as history quotes, the free heart
must be broken; I can see it now in
his empty eyes. The wild is silent.
What have we done? What have we done?



THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

by Michael Vincent

Photograph

NOTICING

by Matthew Robbins

My mom really likes the grocery store. Sometimes she'll spend an hour and a half doing god knows what. Going in for "just a few things," and buying enough for weeks. Running from one end to another every time something "we need" pops in her head. In all honesty, not my thing. Often, I stay in the car and listen to music.

It's summer, rather warm, but I don't particularly care. I'm tired and can't be bothered to aimlessly walk around a store buying "milk and eggs" for 45 minutes. So, regardless of the heat, I stay in the car. I throw my earbuds in and put on something soft, probably Coltrane. Leaning my chair back and pulling my cap over my face, I'm blissfully content. For about ten minutes.

Suddenly, my phone dies, and so, I let out a rather huge sigh. Wondering how I'm going to entertain myself now, I go through my options. I don't have the keys, so the car radio is out of the question. And I can't fall asleep anymore, due to no longer having earbuds to drown out the noise of the parking lot. So, reluctantly, I put my seat back up and begin to occupy myself by watching people. It's fairly mundane, at first, just couples with young children, mothers, grandmothers, the occasional bachelor, or what appears to be one. Appearances are everything.

Normally, you can gather the kind of person someone is by the type of groceries they buy. Did they buy fruits and vegetables or junk-food? Sure, there's a huge difference between someone who buys carrots and someone who buys nothing but candy, and society sees that, however, there are small details, too that I find more damning. Maybe they buy pre-grated cheese, not willing to put the extra effort in to grate it themselves. So, I ponder what else they are not willing to put effort into. Take personal hygiene: perhaps they only shower a few times a week, only brush their teeth every few days, or wash their clothes once a month. Maybe they half-ass school and put "in conclusion" at the beginning of their final paragraph for an essay. If it's a couple, I wonder if they put effort into sex, especially if the woman's upset. Perhaps she's sexually unsatisfied, discontent with her partner. If the woman is driving, I assume his balls are in her purse. I mean, she can't be happy sexually if her "man" is so timid, right? Or perhaps she's controlling and alpha, and he is the discontent party. It's easy to see a slob buy shit food and assume they're not worth very much; but it's entirely different when they look normal. No matter how fucked up you are, society won't shun you if you keep up with appearances.

However, watching people put groceries in their cars, and prescribing oddities to them, can only keep someone intrigued for so long. After about ten or so minutes, I think to myself “jeez another half hour of this?” But, aware it’s my only form of entertainment, I continue watching, trying desperately not to make eye-contact. And after a while, I lose sight of my “entertainment” being mundane. I find an amusing irony from silently judging people in my protective metal box on wheels. I wonder what my mom buys . . . do I ever notice? No, not really. Perhaps the “oddities” I projected onto strangers could be thrown at my own family, at myself.



UNTITLED

by Honor Martin
Digital Illustration



BLOOM WHERE YOU STAND

by Jason Wilson

Digital Illustration

WATER

by Johanna Johansen

Gentle are my fingers, but swift is my blood. I carry leaves across lands. I shelter secrets within my depths. I nurture life within myself on my kinder days, yet my wrath can down mighty oaks. My movement may seem lazy, but with the help of time, I can carve valleys into mountains. Life cannot flourish without me. With me, life can seize. I am the end and the beginning. Such is my nature.

For millennia, I have commanded respect. Nowadays, I wonder about these young creatures, these humans. I have watched them grow and develop. They too can move mountains. They too can give life and destruction to the land. They have always needed me to live, yet they pollute me. They respect my strength, yet they try to control me. They see me as a god, yet they use me as a tool. I have killed countless of them, yet they play, celebrate, and trust in me. Sometimes I wonder. I do not need them to exist, but they may one day have the power to end my existence.



LAVENDER

by Matthew Sneathen

Acrylic on Canvas

ON LIVING A FUN LIFE

by Calvin Smith

Sometimes I feel like becoming a fugitive. If I gave myself a really cool nickname, abandoned everyone I knew, and went somewhere completely different, I would be creating a totally new identity for myself. I could even create a bogus story about who I was so that I could completely forget about Calvin Josiah Smith. The possibilities are endless! I could say that I was a millionaire drug dealer who was a part of the mafia only to later lose everything and wind up under witness protection. I could say that I was an archaeologist who never got famous because people kept taking credit for my work. If I really wanted to sound interesting and edgy, I could feign being a hacker from the CIA who uncovered sophisticated webs of international espionage, and due to the fact that I knew too much, acquired a price tag on my head.

While being an international man of mystery is appealing, living a life based on lies has its drawbacks. What if someone got really curious about me? They would start asking me lot of questions, and I'd have to keep making up answers. Whatever I told other people couldn't sound too absurd, or they would figure me out immediately. If I wanted to start living this way, I would also have to carefully control what I said. I wouldn't be able to express myself or relax.

The goal of liars is often to make themselves seem more interesting than they actually are, but we live in such a mundane world, so it would be better to try and find excitement and beauty in the mundane. One of the places I've gone to accomplish exactly this is Sleepy Creek Lake, which is located about thirty miles to the west of Martinsburg. It's surrounded by a large wildlife management area, and camping there for me feels like a temporary escape from civilization. No one is going to ask me for any credentials or lists of accomplishments out in the woods!

I took a trip there last fall. The air was nice and cool, and the lake itself was very cold. I decided to take off all my clothes and jump in. I only stayed in a few minutes before getting out, but the feeling of jumping in very cold water and then drying off was very refreshing. I also got a chance to test out a sleeping bag I bought from Dick's that was designed for freezing weather. It suited me fine for the most part, but I had to apply some blankets to warm my feet and get to sleep that night. Waking up was really interesting, I felt really cold and damp, and I couldn't make myself breakfast because some animals had stolen my hot dogs.

To think about it, does one need to go anywhere to go on an adventure? The simplest way to explore the world you live in is to be mindful of the reality you inhabit where you sit or stand. Just observe what you are feeling, the thoughts that are going through your head, or what's happening around you. You can come to conclusions, but they aren't necessary. When you make judgments, you make reality less open ended. There's much freedom to be gained in realizing how little we can affect the course of our lives.

Sometimes we, as human beings, take trips in order to escape our own repetitive and boring realities. Jobs pay us because they entail doing things that we don't want to do. Family, friends, and lovers are always a mixed bag—sometimes we cherish them, and sometimes we despise them. Although it has become a trend for modern thinkers to say that novelty is a human need, others dismiss the desire for adventure as a cover up for other psychological needs. In our escapism, what is that we are escaping? Why can't we just be content where we are instead of traveling all over the place in search of happiness?



DECORATIVE ORIGAMI STAR

by Sorita Av
Mixed Media



HOW I SEE THE SEA

by Barbara Neece

Fused Glass

BEFORE THE MOUNTAIN

by Honor Martin

It had not been my exact intention to get lost in the mountains, but I suppose it was a convenient excuse. I was expected at a close friend's birthday party, and I was not particularly fond of being forced into social situations. The route from my own house to hers was a simple, straightforward drive, a twenty minute excursion at most. At the meeting of Olive Branch Lane and California Avenue, I made the split decision to take a detour through the Tallahassee Mountains.

This particular venture was a risky one, and I knew that going in. The Tallahassee Mountains were known in my neighborhood as the Black Hole; everything that found its way in was swallowed, never to be seen again. This, of course, was childish gossip, a rumor started several years before my birth, when a teenaged beauty queen and her boyfriend slipped into the depths of the mountain for a romantic getaway. The two were reported missing several days later, and had not yet resurfaced in the twenty-three years since.

I wasn't fearful, going in, but I did hear my mother's voice in my ear, a shrill whisper: *Go forward without fear— but with a good lot of caution.* I brushed the warning aside, perhaps against my better judgment and made the left turn down the gravely open mouth of the mountain. Ten miles in, my car chugged a heavy, exhausted pant as it slipped over its seventh steep hill.

I slapped the steering wheel, as if I could convince the vehicle to endure the last few miles of our detour. As if in apology, the Chevy coughed and sputtered, before groaning, a plaintive sound, as it clattered to a stop. I bit my tongue and managed to swallow any curses. If only *sonofabitch's* and *damn's* had meaning when met with empty air. With no one to hear me yell, I remained silent.

I was not dressed for a hike, let alone for the cold weather and stale, mountain air. I hugged my jean vest around my shoulders and watched, as hot breath intermingled with the chill and condensed my exhales into clouds. Sleek, black party heels dug small craters into the dirt beneath my feet, and seeing as the walk would be much faster without them, I ditched the shoes, gritting my teeth and shaking off the splotches of pain that tickled the bottoms of my feet, pebbles and pointy rocks sinking their fangs into the soft skin.

To my dumb luck, a house emerged in my vision from behind a dense patch of tree. I was admittedly gleeful in seeing there was a potential way out of this place—although years of warnings and cautionary tales, as well as the mountain's unfortunate nickname should've prepared me for the sheer eeriness of the vacant trails, I was

completely and totally taken aback by the emotion they drew from me. Trees, overhead, joining hands, forming a leafy prison above my head.

As I drew closer, I could see three people sitting on the porch of the shady house. It was a bit dilapidated, wooden boards, slightly moldy from the years of hard rain experienced in my town. Two middle aged men in rocking chairs, doing nothing, their faces entirely blank. They looked to be twins—unfortunate in genetic appearance, as they had tangled and deformed features, almost as if they had been burned in exactly the same places. One of them noticed me, and he gestured to his brother, groaning slightly. The other twin, once having noticed me, knocked on the outside of the house.

I do not believe anything could've prepared me for the sight of the woman that exited the front door, just moments later. Like the men, her face was disturbing, crooked. Her skin hung in limp chunks all across her body, as obese as obese can be. White hair, tangled and braided down her back, so long that it dragged behind her as she walked. She was clearly an elderly woman, older than any I'd seen. The bags under her eyes were doubled, tripled, even, as she came into view. She walked with the force of a bull.

“What are you doing up here?” she spat, walking a disturbingly spry gait in my direction. I felt myself backing up instinctively. “I’m sorry,” I apologized, then clarified, “I ran out of gas a few miles back and was wondering – ”

“You cannot be here!” she seethed, and as she got closer, I could see how brown her teeth were, mere moments from falling out. Shreds of old meat stuck out between her teeth, and her breath smelled of rot. “This is our mountain,” she insisted, so close to me that I could count the thick hairs on her upper lip, “And you are not permitted here.”

“Your mountain?” I asked. I’m not sure why, as I should have taken that opportunity to run. “You own the mountain?” One of the twins on the porch rocked back and forth on his chair and grinned.

“Darling,” he said, a thick and repulsive tambour. “We were here *before* the mountain.”

My knees trembled, and I began to stumble backwards, but the woman stopped me in my tracks, a fistful of my hair clamped between her gnarled fingers. “She thinks she can question us,” she groaned, clacking her tongue against the bottom of her teeth with a hollow smack. “She thinks she can disrespect us.”

I was flailing, arms writhing against her rough, wrinkled bosom. “I’m so sorry,” I insisted, kicking at her ankles with my bare feet. “I can leave and I’ll never say anything and I – ”

The old woman ran her tongue across her upper lip. I found myself staring directly into her eyes, silently begging for her mercy. Her eyes, a pale yellow, I noticed, looked like that of a goat.

“It’s been a while since we’ve had snack,” she crooned to the boys. “How about we take this one?” Across the yard, the twins groaned as they stood. “Sounds good to me, mama. We take the bones to the back like last time?” asked one, his fat body lurching forward out of the chair.

Last Time? I found myself asking. And then: Of course. The lovers, twenty years ago. *Snack.* I kicked and wailed with the realization that I was about to be eaten.

Everything that finds its way into the mountain is swallowed.



NIGHT BLOOMS

by Christine Noad

Acrylic on Canvas

GOODBYE

by Lisa Wood

He heard their footsteps clearer now; they were right above of him, racing around the top floor in search of the scent that tantalized their nostrils and caused desire to well in their loins. They were in search of food, in search of blood. He gathered his papers, documents that would mean nothing if he didn't get out of his sister's renovated home, a place she had put so much time and work into, a place she would never see finished. He tossed the papers into the tattered duffel bag that sat by the front door and forced the zipper over them and what clothing he could gather before they broke the upstairs window and came inside. They would find enough to occupy them upstairs, at least for a few minutes; his niece, his precious Julia, wasn't quite in the throes of death when he'd left her in her bed, knowing it would be the last time he laid eyes on her. Surely, she hadn't died yet. If she had, there would be no hope for escape.

With a fleeting glimpse around the house, his eyes falling on antiques his sister had combed Paris for, their grandmother's rocking chair, his sister's lifeless eyes staring at him from the sofa where she succumbed, he left the house and everything he knew. Staying to gather something – anything – to remember them by would mean certain death. He eyed the picture of his family that lay on its side, knocked over when his sister stumbled into the room, taking her last steps. He wanted to take it with him, to walk the five steps between the foyer and living room and snatch the picture from the side table, but he couldn't. Walking into the living room would leave him vulnerable to spying eyes on the top floor. As it was, they might be able to see his shadow along the wall, from where he stood anyway. Either way, it wouldn't be long before they would know there was someone else in the house. They would smell his blood like they smelled Julia's.

He had to go. His life depended on it.

The closing door almost spared him the muted shriek escaping Julia's dying lips.



TWO SAMURAI

by Billie McPherson
Acrylic on Canvas

EÍNÍNÍ

by Cheyenne Henderson

With bare, calloused feet, she whispered through the glens. A changeling child, some called her. Others just a daft girl, who had lost her heart to the untamed glens and had grown as wild as the trees themselves. But to the birds above, she was a bard of beauty and grace, her voice matched to that of the sea itself. To them she sang her lullaby, and to them only did she ease to sleep.

At her lilting notes in Gaelic tongue, the birds leaned in. In their own language they joined her song. And as light faded, beam by beam, to be taken by night, the birds tucked themselves beneath their wings and slept, without fear, for they trusted her to be their watch.

Day after day, the wild girl came and sang to the birds songs of sky and sea. Night after night, she lulled them to sleep with her lullaby of *Eíníní*. As light bathed the emerald glens and their drops of dew like the facets of a gem, the birds awoke and waited, but the strangest thing instead they received: the girl never came.

To the wing they took to find the girl, the one who sang so sweet. The blackbird, the raven, and the crow; the robin, the lark, the wren, and the thrush, all went to find their songstress of glen and breeze, so wild true.

To the *Farraige*, they asked, “Have you seen the *cailín* whose voice is worthy of parallel to yours?” But the Sea had not seen the girl.

To the *Dúlamán*, they inquired, “Have you seen a *cailín* with tresses more golden than yours?” But the Seaweed knew nothing.

To the *Rónta* next they went and asked, “Have you seen a *cailín* who glides upon the turf with grace parallel to yours?” But the Seals had not seen the girl either.

From there they returned inland and went to the *Madraí*, and again they questioned, “Have you seen the *cailín* whose heart is as loyal as yours?” But the Dogs knew nothing of where the wild girl was, and too they missed the lass.

With one last hope, they went to the *Capaill*. “Have you seen the *cailín* with a spirit free as yours?” But the Horses had neither seen nor heard her, and they longed to run again with her through the meads.

The birds returned to the glen, bewildered and sorrowful. Where was their *cailín* of song? Where was the girl with the heart as true as *Eíre* herself? Beam by beam, day faded into night, and still the birds waited. Harsh winds shook the green boughs of the glen, and beneath their pinions the little birds shivered. All was hushed, save for the cry of the *Ulchabhán* of Who? Who? Who?

But as the day began to break, a lilting note rose with the light and again came the girl with her song of *Eíníní*. The birds sang and soared and gathered 'round her as she settled by a tree.

“The Fair Folk had taken me, for they wanted always to hear me sing, and in return forever ageless I would be. But I promised,” said the girl to the birds, “to always sing for my dear *Eíníní*.”

And so even now, in the glens, where the trees, archaic and wise, hold many tales, if one but stills and stops to listen, one might hear through the echoes of birdsong among the boughs the lilting notes of a girl with a heart as true as Éire herself singing *Eíníní*.



BELIEF IN BALTIMORE

by Doug Kinnett
Acrylic on Canvas



THREE SISTERS

by William Kirby Lewis

Acrylic



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