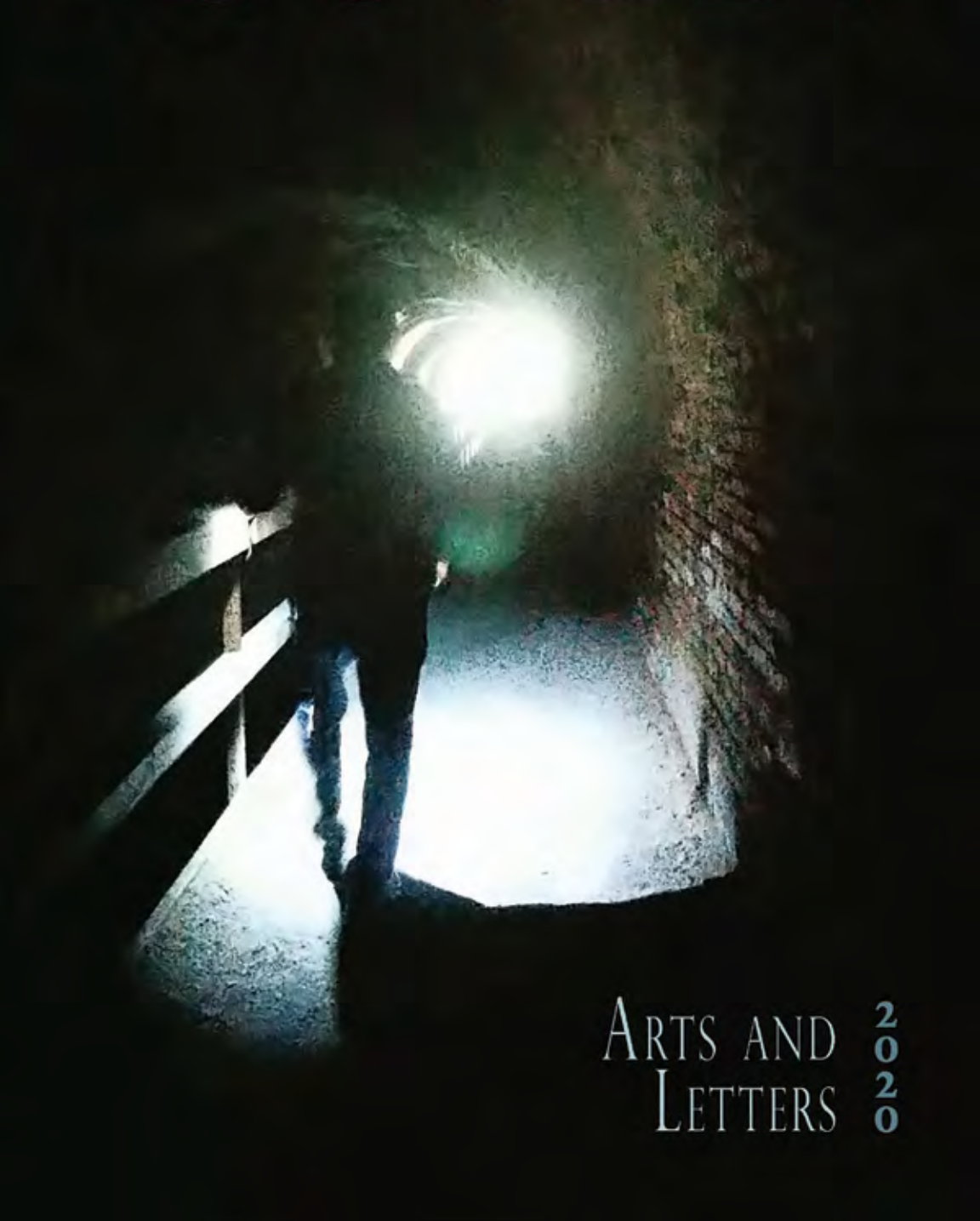


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OUTLET



ARTS AND
LETTERS 2020

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PUBLICATION NOTE

This year's edition of *The Outlet: Bloom Where You Are Planted* compiles the works of committed artists in a time characterized by uncertainty, grief, and isolation. It is a point in the world's history that will last for an uncertain amount of time. People do not know when grief will come, and isolation is a new state of being for a vibrant college community. Wherever planted, the artists and writers have found an outlet and a way to bloom. It is our hope that this magazine in your hands may inspire and plant a seed in you.

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*. **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, has been chairing the Cultural Events Committee, and is 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**, Digital Media 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*. Her passion for expression extends to photography and digital art. **Kathy Cox**, Associate Dean of Humanities and Associate Professor of English, has published five poems in *The Outlet* in the past. She has written an unpublished novel in which every chapter opened with a poem. **Billie Unger**, Tenured Professor and Liberal Arts Program Coordinator, was instrumental in the creation of the original *Outlet Magazine* in 2009 and has been a regular contributor of photos and poems over the years. **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

The Mona Lisa 2

by Nate Wright

Pg. 35

Second Place

Portrait of a Woman

by Omar Williams

Pg. 40

Third Place

Untitled

by Jennifer Sanders

Pg. 7

LITERATURE WINNERS

First Place

For Lack of Sleep

by Andrew DeHaven

Pg. 6

Second Place

Too Many Books

by Jenna Wingert

Pg. 8

Third Place

Am I an Artist?

by Matthew Robbins

Pg. 10

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Untitled

by Angela Lewis

Pg. 13

Winter Walk in Pooh's Woods

by Antonia Capriotti

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Going for Speed

by Baylee Carmickle

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Distressed Peace

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Luray Caverns

by Heather Huggett

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Sanctuary

by Kaitlin Penwell

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Siren

by Tatiana Guerrero

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Morning Glory

by Xavier Hersom

Pg. 55

Trio

by Theresa Weaver

Pg. 39

FOR LACK OF SLEEP

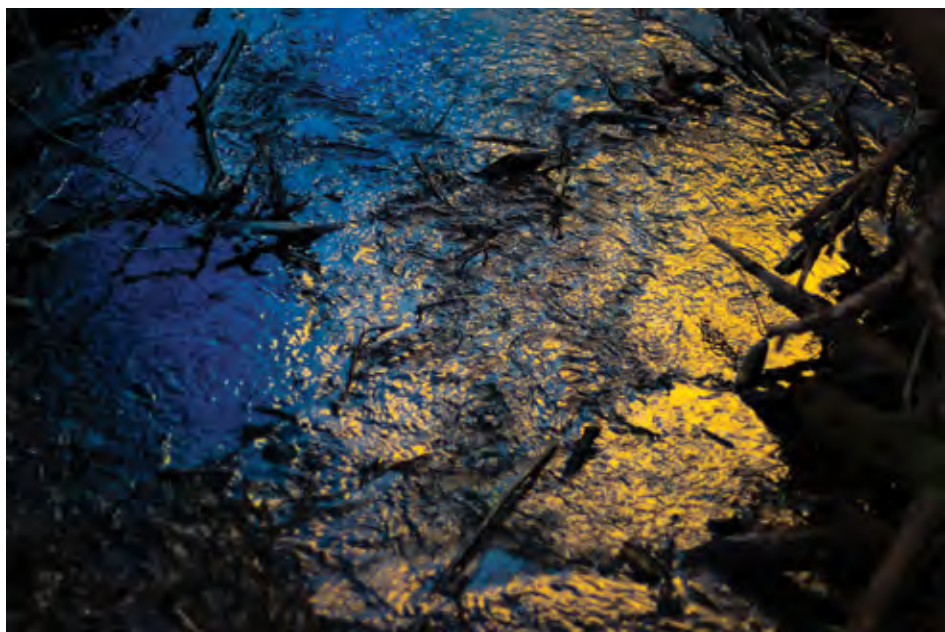
by Andrew DeHaven

The late nights
and early mornings
always seem
to blend together.

In these restless times,
I walk along the wall
kicking up dust
and looking for trouble.

I find it
while smoking
under the bridge
and listening
to the low rumble
of an overhead train.

I throw some stones out,
underhand,
either to fall
with the others
or land in the water
with a *plop*.



UNTITLED

by Jennifer Sanders

Photograph

TOO MANY BOOKS

by Jenna Wingert

As a kid, I read too many books.
I read books about
People with perfect lives,
Happy lives, exciting lives, safe lives.
I was caught up in fictional worlds
Where adventure came knocking, families cared, friends were close,
Conflict was always resolved, boyfriends were unfailingly thoughtful and romantic,
And there was always a happy ending.
Which left me confused
When my life didn't match up. When best friends forgot, when family left,
When life was dull, when loose ends were left hanging, when boyfriends were flawed.
Perhaps that is why I am never satisfied. Perhaps
That is why I doubt my choices and my God.
As a kid, I read too many books, and missed reality.
Now my expectations, set so deep, are hopelessly beyond reach.



GRAND CENTRAL STATION ARIZONA STYLE

by Doug Kinnett
Acrylic on Canvas

AM I AN ARTIST?

by Matthew Robbins

It's damp. The rain won't stop. It isn't a rough storm, but a depressing drizzle. Some like the rain: they can't wait for the rainbow at the end. But me, all I see is mud. On rainy days like this, I don't even bother to leave my apartment, even if I need more paint or canvases. "Screw it," I say, I'll read a book or watch tv if I run out. Who knows, I might get lucky with a football game. I may have the privilege of indulging myself in man's most brutish and masculine pastime: rolling on the ground, sweaty, and chasing after other men.

I finished my fine arts degree about three years ago. Since then, I've found a small apartment and some galleries willing to display my work. I mostly do commissioned work now online, but I hate it. It's not like what I was doing in school. I want to paint my ideas, but it's hard to find the time. I've been making small sketches and forming concepts for a large painting. I tried a few times but threw everything away. I have a feeling today will be different.

It's quarter to noon when I start painting. I grab a pilled sweater, faded jeans, and a pair of scuffed sneakers before I lay a tarp on the carpet of my living room. Laying a 45x37.5 canvas down, I'm suddenly demoralized by the colors I have left. They're all disgustingly bright—yellows, reds, even the blues I have left are far too joyful. I'm not even going to waste the canvas. I know I'll despise anything I make with these colors.

I have to leave and buy better ones; I grab a coat and set off. Walking out of my apartment, I see Mark, a former classmate. He stops me enthusiastically saying, "Hey dude, it's been so long! I can't believe it's really you! What have you been up to?" I absolutely hate talking to past "friends." It's the most insufferable thing, as they're always doing the most intensely banal and worthless profession someone could do. Mark, who was a half interesting anthropology major, is now the regional manager of our prestigious local office supply store. I congratulate him with a smirk before insisting I'm on a schedule.

When I finally arrive, I'm greeted with a "closed" sign on the door of the local paint store, Becky's Art Emporium. Being a Friday afternoon, this really pissed me off. Rebecca is supposed to be open Monday through Friday and from nine to five. I really need new colors, the ones I have are awful. Why is the store closed, I think to myself. Starting to dig my heels in, I turn directions to a 7-Eleven to buy a pack of cigarettes. I'm always surprised by the types of people you find in a 7-Eleven. It's a mixture of homeless and normal people, mostly spending what they have left on scratch tickets

and beer. They're both hopeless, just one group has a house. As I wait in line, I try not to make eye contact with anyone. Maybe it's a symptom of this second-rate town, but the people here will bore you about their life and struggle for a godforsaken amount of time. I keep my face buried in my phone. Approaching the cashier, I say "one pack of Marlboro Black." I'm carded, and I leave.

It's 6 p.m. now and getting dark. I could go to a brand name art supply store, but what's the point? I'll try Rebecca's again tomorrow. I start walking home. I suppose I'm in a bad part of town, since the streetlights haven't turned on yet; the brightest light near me is the brief orange glow of my cigarette. I fit the part, though, still wearing my ragged painting clothes. Suddenly, I hear my name being yelled and two figures sprinting towards me. To my surprise, it's Judy and Elijah. Judy works with Rebecca and always chats with me whenever I'm there buying supplies, sometimes even hearing out my ideas and helping me pick the right paints and brushes. Elijah, her fiancé, is a few years older, but we all met since he stayed to complete his master's degree. He's a great artist, always doing shows in big cities around this area. They're on their way to dinner and ask me if I want to join. Given my circumstances, I flick what's left of my cigarette in a puddle on the asphalt and agree.

While walking, Judy asks, "Have you been before?" "No," I say, which leads to both remarking how much I'll enjoy the food. It's an "eclectic bistro," as Elijah puts it, whatever that means. When we arrive, we are seated and order. Elijah, looking at my disheveled outfit, asks "So . . . what were you working on? A painting, I hope?" "Yeah, it's finally something for myself," I respond. Elijah and Judy take an interest in my project, and I explain my ideas to them. However, I leave out the fact I haven't actually started yet. We eat and talk for about an hour. They're such selfless people, barely talking about their actual accomplishments and focusing on my fantasies. They insist on paying, and we part ways on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant. After about ten seconds, I hear Judy yell out "See you at Becky's tomorrow!"

I light another cigarette and smoke two more before I'm in a part of town with streetlights again. It's almost midnight, and things are quiet on my walk home. When I get to my unit, I have to push against my door, so my key actually aligns in the lock. Entering my apartment, I see a blank canvas and colors I hate.



UNTITLED

by Allison Mason

Acrylic Finger Painting



UNTITLED

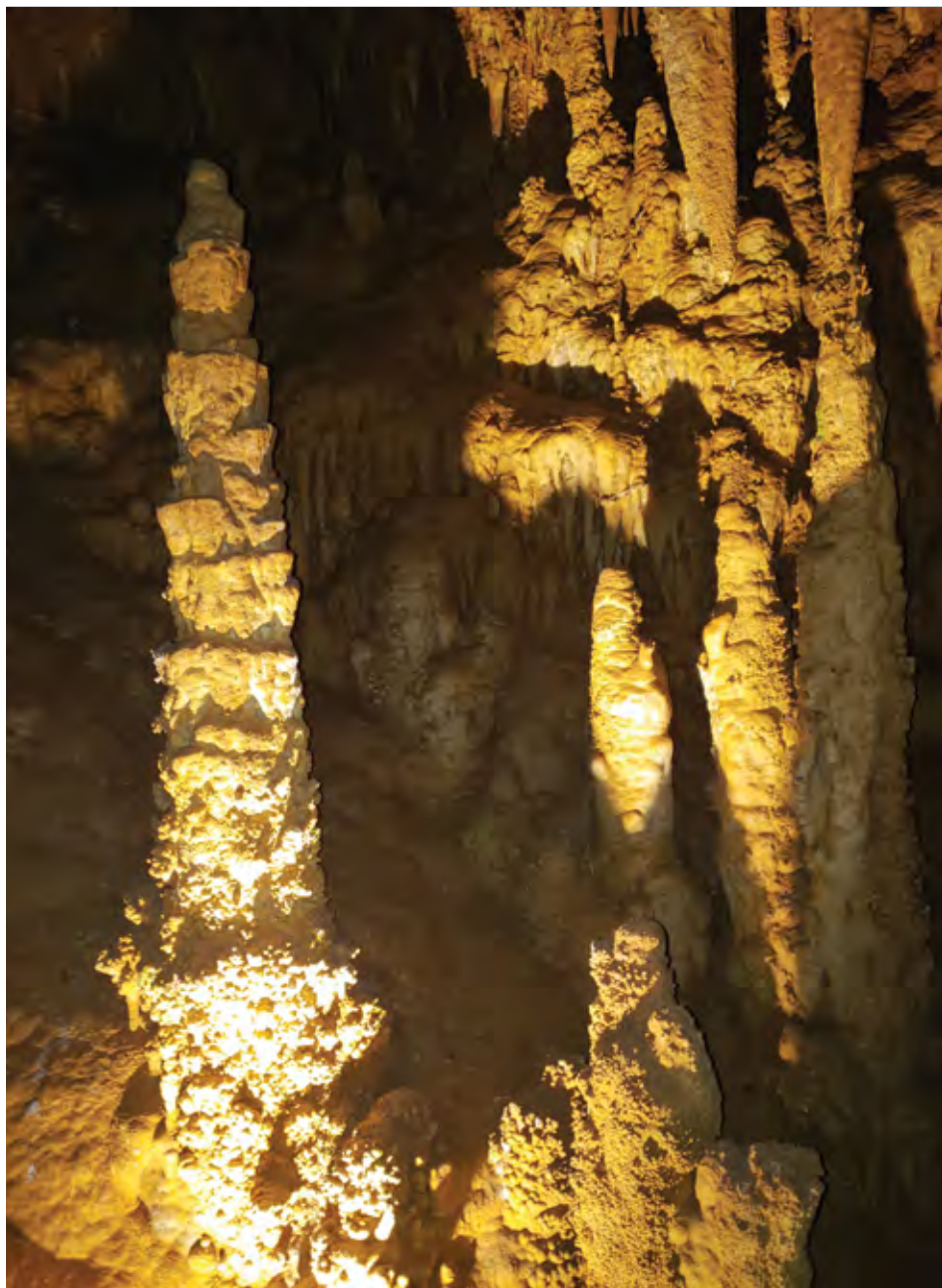
by Angela Lewis

Photograph

25 CROWS

by Katherina Muller

25 crows
in a murderous row
coming from the south
heading to the north
stirring up trouble
everywhere they go
messing with the natives
stealing their babies
trolling their way back home
25 crows
in a murderous row



LURAY CAVERNS

by Heather Huggett

Photograph

AFTER ACUPUNCTURE

by James Ralston

What quackery, I'm thinking,
after he pulls the needles out,
then checks my pulse and says,
"That's better. Much, much better.
Your chi is flowing now."

But later, at the mall, in the parking lot,
I'm lighter on my feet, and everything is
so different -- the shopping cart stations,
the big blue eyes of the baby in the stroller,
the blast of noonday heat, my soon to be
ex-wife clipping along three steps ahead.

Soon we part ways, she to the nail salon,
I in the direction of something I've been
wanting at Walmart. But lost in a maze
of things, I barely remember who I am,
let alone what I came in here to buy --
even as I wander into the fan section,
and stand beside it, look right at it,
on sale, 16.95, a good looking box fan.

My neighbor, the one who recommended
the acupuncturist, says when you get in touch,
when your chi is flowing, God will find you
even a parking space. A car will pull out
as you're pulling in.

As if a Higher Me knows what I want,
I'm guided straight to the gluten free bread
and slightly overripe avocados, for fifty cents
apiece, whereas in Foodland they're a buck;

then to a check-out lane with nobody in it.
I make meaningful eye contact with the cashier,
who gives me this curious wink and a grin.
She says how hot the summer's been.
I mention the good price on the fan.

Nice choice, she says, ringing me up,
in a tone that sounds like she cares.

HOLY WEEK

by Kathy Cox

Palms that paved the path for Jesus
Pass to palms still warm from prayer.
Separate spears, fresh split, still moist,
Coolly carry thoughts of Christ:

How the healer became hated,
Why the spirit wafts and wanders,
What the Ghost has given gatherers
Through the ages, angst, and aches –

Friday's following the feast,
Saturday's doom and darkest doubt,
Sunday's rising right, resplendent.
Life that comes in cool and clear

To the crowd who come for comfort,
Each self stuck in solitude
Till the trembling time of judgment
Brings believers to the brightness.

I in faith would follow fearless,
Though my thankless thoughts throw seeds --
Seminal and strewn in sunder,
Or petals over which walk wonder?

Take the hand and hold the hurt,
Partner, as we pass the palms,
Lone yet linked and living long
To die at last defying dread.



UNTITLED

by Jennifer Kisner

Photograph

DOG DAZE

by Billie Unger

March arrives, lion and lamb
Yellow crocus sprout—it's spring
Dull brown blades of grass turn green
Baby birds begin to sing.
I have to walk my dog.

Coronavirus hits the states
Our country's crisis grows
New York's again ground zero
Our shops and schools must close.
I have to walk my dog.

Pandemic panic's at its peak
Charmin's off the shelf
Virtual life is all we've got
It's each man for himself.
I walk my dog.

Social distance is required
Stay six feet apart
Wear a mask; don't shake hands
Sanitize your cart.
I walk my dog.

Days we don't distinguish
Hair that's hardly cut
Goodbye, makeup. Hello beards.
Online life's a rut.
I get to walk my dog.

Virtual meetings every day
What's *this* one about?
The mic was on, but now it's not—
I swear I'm all Zoomed out!
I get to walk my dog.

My camera fails to focus
I cannot find your face
How much longer will we wait
To be in the same space?
I need to walk my dog

Facetime, TikTok, Zoom--- AWAY!
Please God, some human touch
My clothes get tighter every day
I miss my friends so much!
I need to walk my dog.

COVID-19, you won't win!
Americans are strong
We'll wear our masks and wash our hands
And pray it won't be long.
Thank God I have my dog.

A SHORT STORY

by C. J. Loredó

I have been having the same dream lately. In it I am lying in bed and hear a commotion down the hall. I begrudgingly leave my warm bed to investigate the sound and reach out for the door. The handle is unnaturally cold to the touch and I always recoil. Trying again I open the portal to a bizarre foreign land scape; gone is my home. I step out from my doorway in the cold empty desert before me. The door slams behind me and fades away into nothingness. Yet, I do not react. Instead I turn and glide over the purplish sand. I find myself at the top of a high sand dune. There I drink in the view. The sky is split between night and day, both the moon and sun hang in the air. The temperature is conflicting one side hot the other cold. You would think there would be a breeze, a movement of air, to resolve the tension in the sky.

A shine glitters in the distance. It catches my eye and dazzles in the combined light of the heavens. I am always compelled to hover towards it and no matter how far away it is; I will always reach it in the blink of an eye. Every night it gets closer and closer. I am greeted with impossibly tall gates made from a dark and blued stone. The light refracts in an odd way. No matter how you look at it you will always face the gates. I stare at the gate. It shifts like a mirage. A strange fancy takes me. I must know if the gate is real! An urge so strong it practically throws me against the face of the stone. The pain in my sternum yells at me that the gate is indeed real. My hands dance along the surface its texture is mind shatteringly confusing. The stone is both smooth and rough! I could not comprehend the bluish stone. It is both alien and familiar.

The gate opens. It always opens when the sun and moon are at the highest point in the sky. They almost kiss, almost. In my previous visits to this place this astrological paradox could take seemingly hours or in a few seconds. Never is it exactly the same each time. The air does not move with the swing of the stone. Beyond the dark stone gate is a city, half of it is buried below the lavender sands. Tall obsidian pillars shoot out of the sand towards the sky. They disappear as they reach towards the heavens. I never realize that I am moving on a determined path. I navigate through the strange streets of this long-abandoned place. I know where I am going. Everything is familiar to me, like I have lived here before, like I am visiting home again. The city center is sloped like a cup. Sand gathers at the bottom. A statue stands in the middle of the amphitheater. It is made in the same strange blackish stone. It glitters and sparkles like metal at noon when the sun is the roof of the world.

Its pedestal is only half covered by the sand and I find myself before it. The outlandish runes carved into it are baffling. They trick the eye. A “b” can become an “u” or a number. My brain is racked and puzzled. I cannot focus on any of the letters. Staring at it for what may have been hours (or seconds or minutes), words start to appear to me. Eventually I can make out an inscription, it reads:

“Here, O Great Queen, Is Your Beautiful Visage!”

The rest of it is scratched out and unreadable. The statue is eerie. It is hard to make out what it is supposed to be. It is a mix of a woman, a crab, coyote, and some unidentified creature. The craftsmanship of the thing is beyond masterful. It looks to be very real, so real it feels like it is staring at you. The eyes (?) follow you around. This is the only time I feel dread. This is the first time I feel the wind. The air is moving. A whisper finds itself in my ear.

“Hello again, my little Prince,” the breeze greets.

The icy hands of fear tugs on my lungs. I know that voice. I try to deny I know it. But deep down I am very acquainted with it. I know it is behind me. I know she is there. I can hear the sound of sand crunching underfoot.

“I love when you come back. It is ssoooo lonely here,” I can hear the smile.

Her voice carries into my head. It is like silk and honey. I am a fly already caught in her web. I just do not want to admit it yet. I notice the smell. Like a dumpster sitting in the hot summer afternoon, rotting and festering. I force myself to swallow a gag. I hiccup as the pain travels around my throat. The air is not moving anymore. The smell hangs in the air.

“Please never leave again. I want you to stay here. My Prince,” the voice pleads.

Something grips my shoulder; I am too afraid to look down at it. A hot liquid bleeds through my shirt and stings my skin. More of that horrid odor fills my lungs. My body wants more oxygen but does not want the terrible smell! Please no more! Please! I cannot take it anymore. I do not dare move.

“My Prince, admiring my form? Why don’t you turn around and let me kiss you?” her sweet voice requests.

I know that I will turn around. But I want to run, to wake up in my bed. She is laughing in my ear. It is not laughing. It is a mockery of the sound. A cruel and horrifying imitation. It will haunt my dreams. It has haunted my dreams. I will refuse to sleep; I will die before I come back here!

“You will always return to me, My Prince.”

My body turns without my command. I never see what she looks like. The memory gets fuzzy like the static on a broken television. The feeling of rotten soaked flesh still invades my mind. I remember the petrifying, execrable, dread. My mind wishes to expunge the entire nightmare. I always awake at daybreak. The sound of her sardonic laugh a bare whisper in my head. I know I will return tonight. The city will get ever closer and the monster will get its way. I know what she wants. I will give it to her. I know I will.

Excerpt from New Orange Township Police Report:

Yesterday, Morgan G. Churchill, Age 29, jumped from Old Man's Bridge in an apparent suicide. His body was found by a passing citizen. He didn't have a history of mental illness and his family medical history doesn't show any signs of suicidal tendencies. Interviews with family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors provide evidence that Mr. Churchill was acting strangely. Missing work, lacking sleep, and being irritable. He was said to claim that a woman was stocking him. There is no evidence that he was in any relationship prior to his suicide. An investigation into his previous girlfriends turns up no evidence that they were involved in his untimely death. The Coroner will rule the death a suicide.



SILO UP VIEW

by Marie Castillo

Photograph

ANN, I LOVE YOU

by Angeline Serena Burgess

Ann, I love you.

Those times I helped you feel like forever ago.

One hug for hello, helping gave me more, each more precious than the last.

I miss you.

The days got worse as you didn't wake.

I was scared.

In the seat behind you, one exhale; I can't feel anymore.

They put you on a stretcher, they pumped and pumped as you rolled away.

You looked so fragile.

I was in your room. The noise downstairs covered my weeping.

I saw you.

Always so beautiful, I missed your smile. You told me that you hated being swollen.

Your hand was.

The days went.

The last day, we all cried.

You lay there but not inside.

I want one more hug, but I know I can't.

I love you, Ann.



UNTITLED

by Christine Hersh

Photograph



UNTITLED

by Angelina Loreda

Painting



WINTER WALK IN POOH'S WOODS

by Antonia Capriotti

Primsacolors

AS A TEENAGER, I USED TO CLEAN STALLS

by Kathy Cox

As a teenager, I used to clean stalls.
I worked at a pony farm of a friend,
and the ponies came skittish and new
into the barnyard for a first touching,
rubbing their new halters against an arm,
skin twitching when the neck felt a hand,
Which left me careful of a wild thing,
knowing I could come to work with such,
gentle staggered day by day work,
mounting to a walking ride,
slowly building to a racing
time together one and two.
Perhaps that is why, even now,
I can wait so patiently to be with your impatient
restless wildness, flaring and then getting quiet again,
but am more aware of knowing closeness
than ever with anyone.



IN MEMORY OF IKE ALGER

by Katelyn Miller

Drawing

BEFORE IT MELTS

by Andrew DeHaven

There is a certain peace
on winter mornings
when the snow
blows softly
through the fields.

These days
hold so much
or nothing at all,
and everything is still.

I lie here
for an hour
gathering my thoughts,
little by little,
and staring at the cobwebs
on my bookcase.

The sun's rise
sets a slow pace,
and I am free enough
for passing idle hours
while I decide
how to best
spend my time.



OLD STURBRIDGE VILLAGE

by Kelly Shurnitski

Photograph

DEPRESSION

by Jared Kuse

I can't shake this ugly feeling.
Stuck in the shadows of being misunderstood.

The hardest part is the people closest to me don't understand.
And I feel they should.

I tried every way to explain it, I did the best I could.
Yet it yields no results, I'm still considered no good.

I've been through a lot, and I've seen even more.
Moments of great happiness, others hopeless on the floor.

Rock bottom intertwined with fleeting moments of awe.
From moments of loving the world to days where I can't escape my flaws.

I don't think the same way they do, even when I try.
It fits so wrong on me; I wish I could figure out why.

Why don't I ever want and feel the same things they do?
Indecision and anxiety have me asking myself,
"What is wrong with you?"



THE MONA LISA 2

by Nate Wright

Photoshop Drawing

HORROR AND ROMANCE: DOPPELGANGERS IN NEED

by L. Marie Wood

Genres are categorized by specific tenets, many of which can be identified immediately upon reading the first lines of text. Woman in need of rescue being swept into the arms of a virile, muscle-bound male? Identifiably romance. Creature of the night sinking its teeth into the pliant skin of an unsuspecting victim? Horror, most definitely. The lines are distinguishable and clear between those two genres, the ones that seem to sit as polar opposites of each other... but are they? Consider the duality of the soul – the very thing that embodies the “otherness” of human physiology as one relates to another. Ponder the symbiotic relationship between fear and love with attention to the physical manifestation of each. The properties of genre-specific character arcs, the very tropes that are associated with each genre, reflect the inherent needs of people from all corners of the world: acceptance, sustenance: love. Are horror and romance, not, then, doppelgangers in the psychology of need?

An analysis of the behavior of antagonists used in horror fiction allows for the most authentic assessment of the relationship between the two genres. Early practitioners of Gothic fiction and what has become known as horror fiction have used the nature of need in common archetypes as the impetus for stabilizing tropes. Vampires need blood for sustenance; demons need possession of the physical form for control; pop culture zombies need consciousness and they gain it by ingesting brains while Vodun zombies need simple release of their souls as gained by the culmination of servitude, and; ghosts need a realization of life to find their elusive peace. It can even be argued that werewolves require flesh for pleasure-filled release in the same way that the sport of hunting appeals to the nature of man, providing a dopamine boost enjoyed in the quiet of the woods. The dichotomy of the hunter versus the traditionally hunted in this scenario is beautifully illustrated when the creature’s bestial side comes out to play. Each of these antagonists depend upon the thing they covet for their very existence. Should the vampire not consume blood or a zombie not eat brains, their existence is challenged to its core, both conceptually as character and individually as the “baddie” in the story. They rail against this existential crisis by stealing the life-sustaining object, taking it by force, or by beguiling the host into releasing it, but have it they must or else they risk annihilation.

Romance tropes lend themselves to deeper analysis and the genre's kinship with its long-separated twin as human behavior is often depicted in terms of need via the constructs of want, desire, and yearning therein. Relationship themes, whether mutualistic or parasitic, bring to light the importance of emotional cohesion to the impassioned soul. First love, unrequited love, enemies-turned-lovers, soulmates, fear of losing love – these tropes explore the nature of need building between people and manifesting itself as angst, passion, desire, and desperation. Archetypes such as the best friend, the lost soul, the bad boy, and the hero serve to ignite that emotion, that desire, that need, causing the protagonist to react, building not only the character arc, but also the premise of the story itself. The relationships formed, broken, and then reformed reflect societal expectations and become, by virtue of the subliminal nature of overexposure creating an almost osmosis-like effect, cultural norms. These norms become focal points, measurements of success, perpetuated by the dogmatic persistence of public opinion, manifested prettily on the page.

Desire.

Craving.

Passion.

Alas, need.

An old, familiar adage states it's a thin line between love and hate. So too is the line between horror and romance as they are inextricably linked to the human condition, doppelgangers in the psychology of need.

MOTHER EARTH

by Jocelyn Stokes

God is not a cultic den
nor is she a book written by men.
God is not the silver church offering tray
nor is she the holy water under which a baby's head lay.
God is not a pastor who gives herself to preach
nor does she use words to teach.

God is the dewy grass beneath your feet
she is the love that gives your face heat
God is the ocean connecting all land
God is the nature of wilderness the wind in motion
she is a quiet creek flowing with devotion.

Serve her by climbing the tallest trees
admire the sky and look out for the bees
you need not pray and be Sunday morning bound
when your answers are in Mother Earth and she is all around.



TRIO

by Theresa Weaver

Watercolor



PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

by Omar Williams

Photograph



AVON STONE HOUSE

by Omar Williams

Created Using All Recycled Materials

MY GOLDEN YEARS

by Max Cohen

Battling in your typical suburb,
Bikes and Scooters making up the fleet.
Tires and wheels desecrating the freshly mowed lawns.
Nerf guns & lightsabers forming the arsenal.
Each house and backyard a different skirmish.
Twelve-year-old combatants playing life and death, kind of.
In Nach's house, pillow forts being pieced together for the HQ.
Nerf darts raining down on us,
Yet somehow knowing these are the best of days.
A war of attrition and fun,
The Summers pass by,
Friends move away,
The war finally over.



BOB

by Nate Wright

Painting

MY SWINGSET

by Carter Marcian

I love my old swingset that's in our backyard,
It's like a second mother to me.
It's always been there to make me happy.
And whisk me off to another world.

I loved the sound of the breeze and the bugs,
The sight of the sky and the grass,
The sunshine keeping me warm
And the trees dancing in the Spring gusts.

I loved being given the power to fly,
Be it for a fleeting moment.
Shooting up like a bird, becoming weightless
Like the lumps of cotton above.

I love knowing, today, that when I've got the blues,
Or I'm scared by the world I live in,
My swingset can give me a taste of my youth,
And cut me free from reality.

I love my swingset, even though it's grown old
And rust and cracks have made it their home.
The same can be said of all people and things
and I'll love it as long as I can

I love my swingset, it's captured my childhood,
And when it falls down sometime in the future
I'll thank it for all that it leaves.

It's a second mother to me.



SOCIAL DISTANCING

by Billie Unger

Photograph



OCEAN SONG-DOLPHIN LAMENT

by Gary Bergel

Mixed Media on Canvas



AUTUMN

by Caitlyn Cottam

Painting

MY TEARS CRY TEARS, TOO!

by Roy Bolden

News flash!!! Another body to bury.
Emotionally voided are the remaining.
Mothers, Fathers, Sisters, and Brothers.
Death discrimination is a fable.

The sorrow, the gloom.
The not knowing what to do.
Words unsaid live on unheard.
My tears cry tears, too.

Was it the man on the corner?
The woman next door?
The love of my life?
Could I be next?

Undeniable pain unravels the strong and meek.
Last breaths have breathed.
Tear stains color the streets.
My tears cry tears, too.



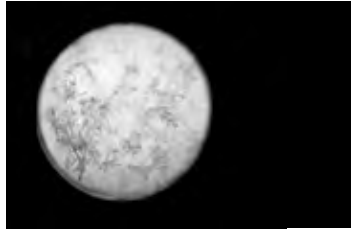
DISTRESSED PEACE

by Christine Storms

Mixed Media

ONE GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND

by Xavier Hersom



one giant leap for mankind

i used to wear a helmet
to protect me from the cold,
suffocating pressure

i would look out to the world
beyond my reach
the colorful blue-green planet
billions of inhabitants

yet i felt separated
and
alone

i drifted across the pale, lifeless soil
leaving solitary footprints
on uncharted sands of time
craters damaged my heart and
darkness consumed me

i used to think
i needed someone
to love me to the moon and back

but all i really needed
was to remove the mask
and love myself
for who i am



PROP AD

by Cheyenne Loredó

Drawing



GOING FOR SPEED

by Baylee Carmickle

Digital Drawing



KITTY KAT

by Christine Storms

Painting

SOMETHING OVERLOOKED

by Andrew DeHaven

I had dusted my room
and vacuumed the carpet
where the note you had left me
was sitting unread.

I said I would get
around to it later,
but things have a tendency
to pile up.

Appointments. Birthdays.
Lunches.
It can all get to be
a little bit too much.

Two days ago,
I had resolved to call you,
but I was too tired
so instead I took a nap.

Three weeks past,
we had lunch by the Potomac
and that dinner in Frederick.
Everything felt so warm then.



MORNING GLORY

by Xavier Hersom

Painting

SPRING 2020 OWN POEM

by Greisy Pupo

Beautiful day
people walking dogs
neighborhood
Spring
harmony
hot chocolate
movies
family, love
flowers and colors
peace
sunshine
warm, days, moon
laughs
gaze.



PERSPECTIVE

by Billie Unger

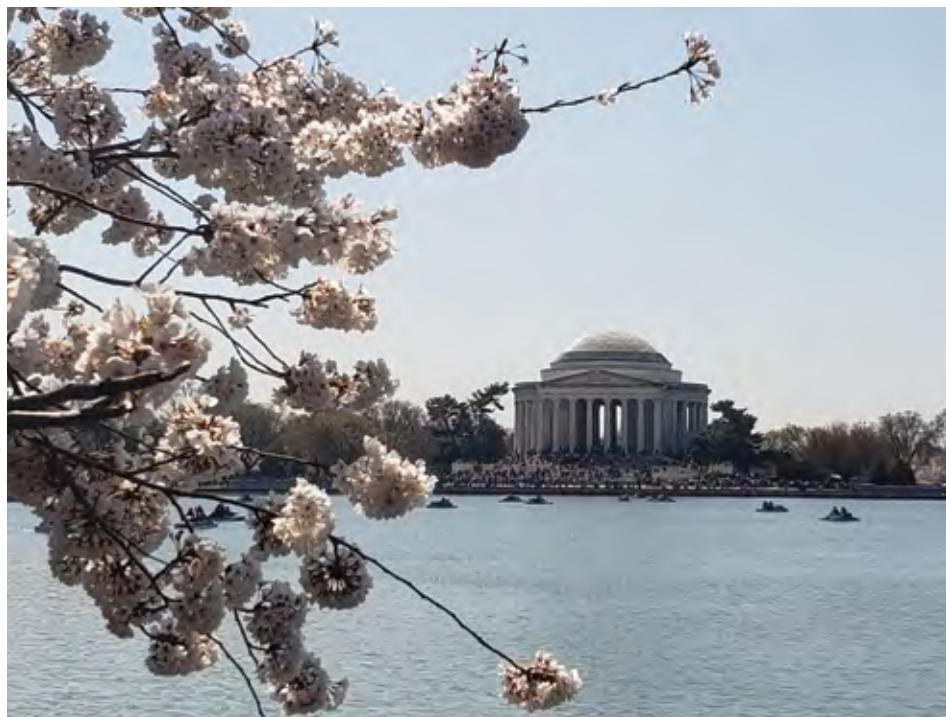
Photograph



RUSTY OLD FREEDOM STAR

by Destiny Kneram

Photograph



CHERRY BLOSSOM

by Heather Huggett

Photograph

THE EVOLUTION OF THE TOAD

by Caitlyn Lewis

I'm just a tadpole, longing to be free
My young eyes have much to see
I see skies through a restricted view from my pond
How I dream to see what lies beyond
I hear about the excitement of the roads
From older, wiser, more experienced toads
My limbless figure only swims around
I long to grow feet and walk upon solid ground

I'm now nearly there yet farther still
I've grown limbs but maintained my gills
My gills breathe water though I yearn for air
So I can move on to the spacious world up there
The prey down here is too easy and scarce
The prey up there seems abundant with spares
I'm bored with adolescence, challenge me, if you will
I've perfected the hunt; I'm eager to prove my skill

The surface of the pond has finally broke
But as I sing for joy, I only croak
Wider space, hundreds of more flies
Only to zip out of reach, into the infinite skies
I crane my neck to see the excitement of the roads
Only to see it paved with the corpses of other toads
I look to the pond and for the first time see
A clear reflection that seems to be me
I stare at the reflection, my thoughts now morose
How did I become so warty, slimy and gross?



SUSPICIOUS

by Angelina Loreda

Painting

UNCERTAINTY

by Sorita Av

“I have a dream” were words spoken by Martin Luther King. I have a dream that I would like to pursue, but recent events of the Coronavirus have made the future bleak with uncertainty. Widespread discrimination against Asians is inevitable, even towards Asian Americans who were born and raised in America for as long as they can remember. I was born and raised in America. My parents are both Cambodian.

There are numerous Asians that fear for their lives and safety during these tempestuous times. I read that in New York, there was an Asian father who was physically assaulted in front of his son by a stranger who struck him in the head before running away (WABC-TV). However, other Asians aren't as lucky as those that only experienced a nonviolent encounter where they escape uninjured. I also read in Law Enforcement Today about a stabbing incident that happened at a Sam's Club in Texas on March 14th where a nineteen-year-old, Jose Gomez, attacked three Asian American family members and an employee with a knife. Gomez slashed the Asian father and his two children, ages two and six, in the face. He also attacked the Sam's Club employee, Zach Owen, by cutting him when he was trying to prevent further damage. Fortunately, Owen arrived just in time to save them. More Asians are buying guns for the first time, even though it hasn't been a trend before this pandemic. Would it be a wise idea to create an even bigger problem by creating a hostile environment that can lead to future criminal activity among Asians? Most Asians are peaceful and hope for the wellbeing of others. Everyone has their limits until they reach their breaking point. Even though there is a growing number of hate crimes against Asians, some Asians are still willing to donate necessary materials for hospitals and law enforcement.

Before people start thinking about harassing, assaulting, or even murdering an Asian, I would like to mention that Asians are the second race (after Whites) that are prevalent in the medical field. I have never been to a hospital in West Virginia, so I can't say that there are a lot of Asian hospital workers. Looking at the statistical data of West Virginia residents, I guess that there aren't many Asian health care workers because there aren't many Asian residents in this state. Based on the census.gov website, Asians alone make up 0.8% of West Virginia's population (U.S. Census...). I can say from experience that I have seen more Asian doctors or nurses in hospitals in Virginia.

Is it worth it to judge someone by their cover when they can potentially save your life or many other people's lives? Would murdering an Asian doctor solve problems?

Wouldn't it be more efficient to focus on trying to find a solution to this serious problem, rather than blaming people and pointing fingers at others like immature children? What if an Asian wants to become a doctor someday? Would bullying them in school or public help motivate them to save the lives of others, or would their experience motivate them to become cold-blooded murderers? Has anyone else even considered this possibility at all? If you had the Coronavirus (hopefully that never happens to you), how would you feel if an Asian was your doctor who put in numerous hours just to try to save people from the vicious claws of death? Would you feel an ounce of gratitude, or would you demonstrate how deplorable a human being you are? I realize that I have asked way too many questions, so I will stop at just nine. I'm sorry if I annoyed anyone who is reading this. I could ask more, but I think that it is better to put a limit on the number of questions I ask.

I don't mean to offend anyone, but there are a lot of people who can't even tell the difference between different nationalities of Asians and just assume that they are Chinese, Japanese, etcetera, even though that is not the case. I have had an experience where someone mistakenly thought that I was Japanese. He said, "Konnichiwa," a Japanese greeting. It was probably cold of me to ignore that person, but at that time, I thought, "Wow, what an ignoramus. He probably doesn't even know the definition of an ignoramus." I was silently laughing at that person in my mind. Of course, I never voiced those thoughts out loud.

My parents think that I should consider working in the medical field because I have a pretty good memory. The idea doesn't seem appealing to me because I am a clean freak, and the thought of working in an environment where there is likely to be a myriad of germs would probably drive me crazy. I would most likely be the kind of person who must take hand sanitizer and sanitary wipes with me everywhere I go if I were to work in a hospital. Instead of being called a doctor or a nurse, people would probably confuse me for the cleaning lady. I am fine with helping others, and the sight of blood doesn't make me feel queasy. Although I don't plan on pursuing a job in the medical field, my dream job, in some ways, can potentially save lives. All I can say is that I'm interested in studying the law. During these tough times, there will be many obstacles that I will have to face in the future. I would like to make a positive contribution to the world in the future, but with recent events of the COVID-19 and the increase of hate-crimes going on, it feels as if everything would become an even greater challenge. To overcome these challenges, I think that perseverance is the key to success, despite a high possibility of racial discrimination. I do wonder if there is a ray of light in these dark and turbulent times.

WHERE HAVE YOUR DIAMONDS GONE?

by Matthew Robbins

Where have your diamonds gone, I wonder,
thinking about you as I drive to work.
It's the morning after our biggest fight
and I'm stuck thinking you've changed.
I remember your diamonds and running my hands through them
they were so soft, just like you were, but now you're coarse and rough.
I can't stand it, I want things to return to normal.

However, I still look, hoping they're on the inside
and I just need to dig them out.
I can't understand what's happened and why you're like this.
Perhaps all your diamonds have been used up, by me, and others.
But I don't want to believe that; I want them to still be there,
waiting for me to find them.

Maybe you've lost your diamonds down a sink's drain,
or they've fallen behind our bed's headboard.
Am I looking for something that doesn't exist anymore?
Have you destroyed them? Did you throw them in the ocean?
Maybe you've hid them in someone else's clenched palms.



UNTITLED

by Isabella Towne

Painting



SIREN

by Tatiana Guerrero

Watercolor Digitally Enhanced in Ibis Paint X



SANCTUARY

by Kaitlin Penwell

Digital Drawing



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