

THE OUTLET

BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED



*ARTS AND LETTERS
FIFTEENTH EDITION, 2024*

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Cover Artwork:

"To Be Everything (side 2)," by Em Coté
Collage Mounted on Cardboard

Booklet Design and Layout by Jessica Leake

JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

Selection of Arts and Letters

VISUAL ARTWORK

Juried and selected by

Gary Bergel and **Sandra Baker**

Gary Bergel, a multidisciplinary exhibiting artist, is a member of the Berkeley and Jefferson County Arts Councils and co-op galleries. Gary has been awarded the 2nd Place Juror's Award in Photography at the Washington County Museum of Fine Art Cumberland Photography competition.

Sandra Baker, Digital Media Instructor, is an active member of the Cultural Events Committee and has written fiction herself. Her passion for expression extends to photography and digital art.

Dr. Katherine Cox, Associate Dean of Humanities and Professor of English, has published twelve poems in *The Outlet* in the past. She has written an unpublished novel in which every chapter opened with a poem. She currently is working with a writers' group, Bookends, which has strengthened her voice and expanded her versatility as a poet.

LITERARY ARTWORK

Juried and selected by

Dr. Katherine Cox, **Aspen Monsma**,
Dr. Billie Unger, and **Nicole Yurcaba**

Aspen Monsma, serves as the Student Access Coordinator, and this is their first time working with *The Outlet*. They previously served as the senior prose editor for the literary magazine *Sans Merci*. They have published poetry, drama, non-fiction, and fiction, as well as had their original play *Welcome to the Poetry Club* performed by Shepherd University's Rude Mechanicals drama troupe.

Dr. Billie Unger, Tenured Professor and Liberal Arts Program Coordinator, has written poetry as gifts for friends and family members since she was a child, was instrumental in the creation of the original *Outlet Literary Magazine* in 2009, and has been a regular contributor of photos and poems over the years.

Nicole Yurcaba (Никола Юрцаба) is a Ukrainian American of Hutsul/Lemko origin. Her poems and reviews have appeared in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Atlanta Review*, *Seneca Review*, *New Eastern Europe*, and Ukraine's *Euromaidan Press*, *Lit Gazeta*, *Chytomo*, *Bukvoid*, and *The New Voice of Ukraine*. She currently serves as the Humanities Coordinator at BRCTC.

ART WINNERS

First Place

Mother Nature in the Garden

by Dianne Rose

pg. 19

Second Place

101 Clowns

by Antonia Capriotti

pg. 29

Third Place

Winged Harmony

by Heather Huggett

pg. 43

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Relevé

by Kerri Namolik

pg.15

Tusked Lovers

by Ari McGhee

pg. 41

Humid Grain

by Robyn Hunt

pg. 56

LITERATURE WINNERS

First Place

Untitled

by Em Côté

pg. 6

Second Place

Nonbinary Poetry

by Ari McGhee

pg. 50

Third Place

My West Virginia Home

by Melinda Tauler

pg. 52

HONORABLE MENTIONS

The Painter and the Poet

by Leah Ratcliff

pg. 18

Love the Skin – A Letter to My Daughter

by Cheria Brittingham

pg. 22

2009

by Em Côté

pg. 34

UNTITLED

by Em Côté

and what are we
if not poets

just women
and that's enough, I think

we are the breath in our chests,
and the ground beneath our feet

the laughter of my sister,
and the glass of wine shared between us

the delicate fingers braiding my hair before bed,
and words spoken and unspoken
both equally close to my heart

even if I never touch a pen to paper again,
that will be enough poetry to last me a lifetime



LUNA

by Ann Gentile
Digital Photography

P.E.A.C.E. - POSITIVE ENERGY ACTIVATING CONSTANT ELEVATION

by Timothy Payton

When one is of high frequency, fear is nonexistent,
Gratitude and blessed energy are brought into positive existence,
When in a humbled and content mind state, happiness manifests,
Truth and problem-solving will be easier to digest,

Living by faith and not in a fearful state,
Thankful in gratitude, leads you to a graceful place,
To improve in a lifestyle, making it a habit,
Leads one from tragedy, into a life of magic;

Being of inspiration and wanting to share this feeling,
Brings motivation into motion, self and soul healing,
To be of good aura, that's felt and seen,
Attracts many feelings of comfort, as an angelic heavenly beam;

To be genuine and caring, also joyful and kind,
Develops a person of character, that matures with time,
To be of great spirits, allows PEACE to awaken,
One to be of, Positive Energy Activating Constant Elevation.



BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED

by Tony Mercede
Acrylic on Paper

TIMELESS

by Katherine Cox

No breeze with you, my love, but steady day:
We fall in love, without the fall, and stay
when fall comes to the door and says to stray,
as leaves before a cold that comes our way.
Catch up with me as we walk in the cool
of later months and later years' stern rule.
The founding rock beneath a home of stone
won't be disturbed when evening winds are blown.

Take up my hand and come with me again
to walk our wandering talk of why and when
the days of aging will catch up with us.
The days of childish temper, making fuss,
will fall away as we are in our prime
forever, thanks to you, my love: No time.



ASCENDING MOON

by Tony Mercede

Acrylic on Paper

EIGHTEEN MINUTES

by Bruce Kowiatek

Disclaimer: This is a work of fiction; it is not, in any way, to be construed otherwise.

White House Chief of Staff Harry Robbins – H.R. “Bob” – Haldeman leaned in closer over the Wilson desk of the president in the Oval Office. “Are you saying that you knew about it, Mr. President?”

Richard Milhous Nixon spoke in an even tone. “No, Bob, but I’m sure that Liddy took it upon himself to greenlight the break-in,” he said, referring to lawyer G. Gordon Liddy. “I gave Mitchell a call,” Nixon continued, now referring to Attorney General John N. Mitchell, “and cheered him up a little bit. I told him not to worry, that we might be able to control this Watergate thing.”

“So, we’re going to cover it up?” Haldeman asked.

Nixon now leaned in closer to Haldeman. “We’re going to damn well try,” he said. He then leaned back in his chair and paused. “Then again, maybe we shouldn’t.”

“Sir?”

“Bob,” Nixon began slowly, “I think it might be time to let you in on a little secret. Well...maybe not so little.”

“Wait,” said Haldeman. “How many ‘silver bullets’ have you had this evening, Mr. President?” he asked, referring to Nixon’s nickname for martinis.

“Only three,” said Nixon with the corners of his mouth curling up slightly. They then fell flat once more. “You see, we’ve...I’ve...been perpetrating a hoax on the American people, if not the entire world...”

Haldeman fell silent.

“...You may recall that back in January, NASA pitched some of their ideas to me regarding the future of the space program.”

“Yes,” Haldeman spoke up, “the word is that they suggested, in addition to unmanned probes, either a manned lunar base, a manned Mars mission, or a manned near-Earth shuttle-type spacecraft, and that you went with the shuttle program because you couldn’t bear to see another Apollo 13-type incident occur.”

“That’s the official story,” said Nixon. “The truth is that I went with the space shuttle because right now, we can’t send men past near-Earth orbit due to the damned Van Allen radiation belt. They would get fried if we tried. Maybe someday we will...I hope...be able to, maybe not. But for right now, we can’t. We can send all of the damned unmanned spacecraft we want...they are able to survive.”

“But...” Haldeman stammered, “...the Moon landings...they’re still going on...do you mean to tell me that they’re all...”

“Staged,” Nixon finished for him. “Fake.”

“What? How?”

“Kubrick,” Nixon said flatly.

“As in Stanley Kubrick, the movie director? Stanley ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’ Kubrick?”

Nixon nodded in the affirmative.

“Wait,” Haldeman continued, “the radio signals coming into Mission Control in Houston from midway between the Earth and the Moon, and those from the lunar surface...”

"We have a relay probe midway," Nixon spoke up. "Officially, it never made it, but it's there. And we already have all of those unmanned Surveyor landers on the Moon that we bounce signals off of."

"What about all of the photos, like the Earthrise?"

"Those from around the Moon aren't a problem with our unmanned Lunar Orbiters, and those from the surface, again we have the Surveyors there. The midway photos of Earth are a bit trickier, but the astronauts manage in near-Earth orbit to use a reflection off of one of the cabin windows of part of the Earth below them with the cabin darkened. Pretty ingenious actually!"

"What about Apollo 13?"

"We needed the drama to drum up waning interest in the space program, which no doubt you realize is quite an investment! Did you know that people were calling TV stations covering the Apollo 12 mission – the very next one after Apollo 11 – and complaining that it was interrupting reruns of 'I Love Lucy'? Reruns of 'I Love Lucy' for God's sake!"

"How are you keeping the astronauts quiet about all of this?" Haldeman asked.

"The Apollo 1 fire took care of that," said Nixon starkly. "It sent a message to them about what would happen if they talked. Veterans Grissom and White had the rookie Chaffee talked into blowing the whistle with them on what was being planned. But!" his voice raised, as did his index finger, "I had nothing to do with that! That was all Lyndon," he continued, referring to former president Lyndon B. Johnson. "After what he did to Jack Kennedy, I never put anything past him!" After a moment, Haldeman spoke up. "But why?"

"We couldn't let it look like the damned Soviets made it there first!" said Nixon. "Hell, they don't believe it's happening anyway! But we did make up some photos to distribute in the future of the 'landing sites,' complete with white radiation-bleached flags that make it look like they're taken from lunar orbit."

Nixon paused, and then continued. "Besides, the country was counting on us to fulfill Jack's promise. He's damned well nearly become a saint! But..." Nixon smiled wryly once again, "...we both know that's not the case!"

Haldeman returned the smirk and then both men fell silent for another moment. Nixon then resumed. "You know, Bob, we can never let any of this leak out. There are already doubters in our own country, and they will probably increase in number over time. That's why we may have to let this Watergate thing possibly blow up and play out."

"Use one scandal to cover up another, much bigger one," Haldeman mused.

"I can never let the American people know, or the world for that matter, that what's being perceived as the greatest achievement in human history is really a lie. I'll take my lumps for the Watergate thing, whatever they may be."

"You also can't let the recording of our conversation here ever get out, Mr. President."

"That's ok, Bob, I'll have Rose 'accidentally' delete these last twenty minutes or so from the tape," Nixon said, referring to his secretary, Rose Mary Woods, and the tape recordings that he habitually made of his Oval Office conversations. He smiled. "Maybe it will add controversy to the whole Watergate thing, if it does become a scandal."

Haldeman smiled back nervously.

"So, where were we?" continued Nixon, still smiling. "I believe we were talking about Liddy and Mitchell..."

ON 24 FEBRUARY 2022, I HEAR THE NEWS OF AN INVASION

by Nicole Yurcaba

My mother.

My land.

My dear Ukraine.

It has been too long since I tasted your summer dust on my tongue,
felt your sultry sun on my brown shoulders.

It has been too long, dear Ukraine.

Now you hang your head, stand, & weep.

The world

backhands your cheek.

Our people suffer.

My motherland,

how long will it be until I fall to my knees, kiss your cheek,

& turn

to your cool blue sky & shout

Thank God!

Thank God!

Thank God I am home?



RELEVÉ

by Kerri Namolik
Digital Photography

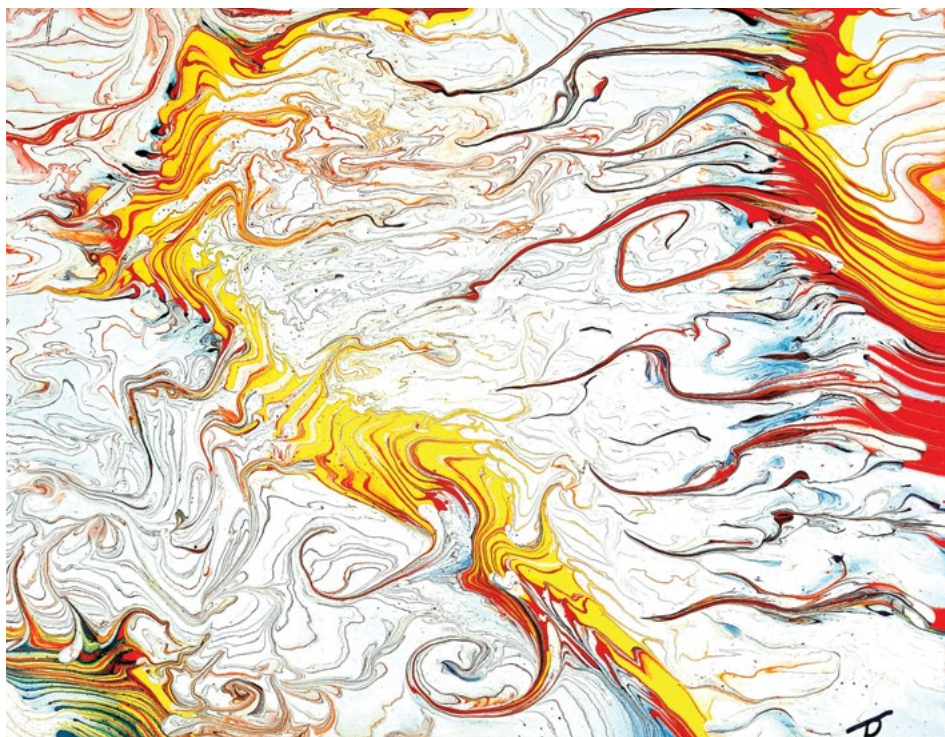
THE MOJAVE

by Erin Miller

My uncle picks me up,
an intimidating small giant
in the huge McCarren.
He stands beside the
suitcase carousel, waiting for me.
When he sees me, his smile
is gigantic and we share
a huge familial embrace.
With him, I know I'm safe.

His dodge caravan is our
horse and buggy as we pass
the mountain views. They
are imposing giants on barren dunes.
Soon we see a skyline of fireflies
among the pitch-black.

My uncle points a finger to
the village of dancing insects.
We are about to enter Pahrump and
naively, I think a temporary visit
will help me reconnect with
family whom I haven't seen in years.



SUN WAVES

by Timothy Payton

Painting

THE PAINTER AND THE POET

by Leah Ratcliff

A blank canvas
Gave into the rush
A burst of shades
Of paint and brush

Wild violets and clematis
Holly and ivy
All the worries faded
And the whispers behind me

The brush as it danced
Brought wishes to light
But then the rain came
And we're left in the night

And then the words appeared
I remember how they rang
And you were there
You heard as they sang

Bursting through me
Like wind and waves of the sea
But then we lost balance
And shipwrecked, were we

The bells and whistles
They're faded and colorless
And you've left for now
But you haven't cleaned the mess

A dancing painter then
But the paint is chipped
Now a poet on pause
The words left unfinished on the script



MOTHER NATURE IN THE GARDEN

by Dianne Rose

Photoshop Multimedia

HONEY WATER

by Katherine Cox

I drank hot water with honey for the first time yesterday,
sweet and vaporous and healing. I sipped and swallowed gladly,
throat no longer sore. What a gift to a sick one waiting
for strength to come back and peace. I tend to turn to my muse,
my beloved who brings me strength, my husband who, always new,
beckons me to name love, but, for a moment only,
water sweet and tea-brown came to my relief and surprise.
I learn that a little newness interrupts and turns me
like a glass in white light catching and reflecting.
“I too may be healing,” I want to tell the world
sweet as honey water over spilling good will,
grateful and with spirit, soulful and unleashed.
“Let me give myself uncontained and free,
for I have known honey touch away an ache,
for I have been healed, joined and not alone,
surging with a life, not my own but shared,
water-fluid press, heavy, able, ready.
Know with me of peace at a point of pain,”
I will say and mean, new and simple straight.
Now I have a voice supple and dependable,
light and without warble, whole at point of breaking,
thankful for the glass mug and the water touched with sweet.



FOGGED

by Ava Violet

Digital Photography

LOVE THE SKIN - A LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER

by Cheria Brittingham

All day long I preach to you, love the skin you're in, you're beautiful, every inch of you is a piece to be loved.

All day long I encourage you to be yourself, to be courageous, to be fearless.

All day long I try my best to instill in you how worthy you are, I want you to love yourself and every single thing that makes up you, I want you to celebrate.

And then you lay your head down on your pillow and as your sleepy little eyes begin to close, I place my hand upon your cheek, and underneath I feel your skin and a sad thought creeps in.

This very skin that was created to protect your small fragile body, is the very skin that will keep you from opportunities and the very skin that will cause you to be prosecuted before it's even fair.

The skin that lies beneath my hand might as well be red and white because with it comes a built-in target that will only go away if a dream of a King ever comes true.

You are asleep now and as I study your pure innocent face; I use this time to pray. To pray you never have to be a victim of hate, that you won't be another statistic in the war against you.

That you are always safe, and no harm comes to you. I also pray that you are able to continue to see the beauty in your skin that's been systematically used to fail you.

As you lay here fast asleep, I allow myself to imagine a future where you won't be targeted because the color of your skin, the very skin created to protect your small fragile body.

A future where all those who pledge to protect and serve actually do so. A future where you don't have to be afraid of breathing without anticipation of it being your last.

All day long I preach to you, love the skin you're in, you're beautiful, every inch of you is a piece to be loved. Child, your skin is meant to be celebrated, don't let them steal that from you.



TO BE EVERYTHING (SIDE 1)

by Em Coté

Collage Mounted on Cardboard

STILL WIND

by J. W. Rudder

Wishfully thinking of roses in Baltimore
Constantly hoping that maybe you'd call
Tomorrow is Sunday, the still wind is rising
And blowing the cigarette smoke in my eyes

Potions of moonlight lay gently beside me
Seeking a surface but never inside me
Is crying from missing, the still wind is rising
And chilling the light on my moon painted floor

How does it feel when you've stepped from a painting
The painter was holding and still was arranging
The frame and the holder, the still wind is rising
And I don't have the coat that has warmed me before

Take time to write me and tell me you're are happy
And tell me the painters and poets are gone
To a surface to stand on, the still wind is rising
And warming the brush of a poet we've known



DUAL GAZE

by Megan Angeline Anderson

Digital Photography

I'LL COME AROUND

by J. W. Rudder

You've wood for your winter fires
And dirt in your good fields
And me with my rubber tires
And ever turning wheels
 You'll turn your ground every spring
 And pray your seeds to grow
 I'll come around and I'll sing
 To you and then I'll go
We shared so much so long a time
We searched for ways to go
We parted ways, you stayed behind
I'd no choice, I guess you know

We're now apart but not alone
And you with life- long friends
Sometimes I miss what you call home
But there the missing ends

It's hard to talk about these things
But please for what I am
With hollow bones and reaching wings
I'm happy as I am



MORNING SERENITY

by Rebecca Chason

Digital Photography

A STORY WRITTEN WITH PAINT

by Ayla Bard

His brush strokes upon the leather canvases. In the colors blue and gold. A masterpiece in the making, a story untold.

With each brush stroke, he tells a story of love and pain, all these emotions his heart cannot contain.

The brush strokes become more vibrant, as his feelings start to spill. A river of inspiration, that flows against his will.

A thousand words unsaid, but the painting speaks them all. A silent conversation between the artist and his call.

He takes a step back to admire his creation, which is now complete. A story painted in brush strokes, that reflect his heartbeat.



101 CLOWNS

by Antonia Capriotti

Prismacolor Pencils

DRIVING IN THE MOUNTAINS IN NOVEMBER

by Aspen Monsma

Driving in the mountains in November
the climbing cochlear pressure
tips the mind over the edge— to soar
past guard rails into open sky

Below— spiraling roads lay gently
over heaps of orange leaves—
The telephone poles climb
as steady soldiers marching
up into windy confetti filled clouds

Caution yellow slows descent—
Toes dip down into fading fields &
crinkling husks twist and dance
to a silent eerie song that—
only they can hear.



COUNTRY ROADS TAKE ME HOME

by Challice LaRose

Digital Photography

ELECTRIC CATERPILLARS

by Aspen Monsma

Electric caterpillars
Winding through
Mazes of blue lights
Hurry on—
Into the city's nights
Always beyond the bend
Ever hungry—
Never stopping
Marching endlessly—
Endlessly on—



SKYSTONE – ONE WINTER BERRY

by Gary Bergel
Digital Photography

2009

by Em Côté

mud in my palms
the smell of chlorine
rough tree bark underneath my fingertips
a song to put me to sleep

plastic cups of lemonade drank underneath billowing sheets-
tied to the fence with ribbon-
pinned to the ground with piled books

with the taste of salt and honeysuckle
the laughter of my mother
the smell of open windows and wet paint in the spring

memories still held by the hands of a child,
one that wears my face and tears and name

cicadas stirring under my bare feet
the death of my father's dog
a bright orange vcr



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

by Holley Ralston

Digital Photography

EVERYTHING

by Rebecca Paulin

We fell in love in the summer of 2006. The New England mountains were calling our names and we jumped in the car without a care in the world. Our arms dangling out the window turned pink; music so loud we had to scream to talk to one another.

We drove down winding hills, the trees around us green with the life of summer time. We were young but not young enough to be calling out of work on a random Tuesday in July. Sitting next to each other in the front seat of my car, we held back laughter as we dialed our managers, faking coughs with raspy voices.

There was a simplicity in who we were together. You were unusually tall but the rest of you was average. Your sun-dusted hair and deep brown eyes were unremarkable against your pale, freckled skin, but your laughter was loud and boisterous. Next to you I was almost comically small, even with my hair messily bundled at the top of my head. My voice was quiet and shaky and only knew confidence when you were around. Together we were effortlessly in love, although we'd never admitted it.

That day in the mountains, we drove down dirt roads searching for swimming holes and streams, any way to get our feet wet on a hot day. It was easy to keep falling in love with you. I followed wherever you'd let me, which was everywhere. Over rocks and under waterfalls, you took my hand in yours.

"Don't let go," you smiled as we ducked under tree branches, finding our way to the river. I think we wanted to say those three words but somehow it never felt like the right moment. Instead we splashed in the water, utilizing any excuse to get closer. Your laughter, so loud even against the splashes, made me laugh too and we spent the day getting sunburns on our shoulders and our noses.

By late afternoon we were sprawled on the rocks, soaking up the last of the day's sunshine. You turned onto your side, propped up on your elbow, and stared at me. Even though I wasn't looking at you, I could hear your smile, "This might be the best day of my life."

Looking back now, I didn't realize the weight of those words. I didn't understand that one day they would be burned into my memory. The sunshine, your sun kissed body turned towards me, those words.

At some point the sun started to set over the mountains and the water settled into shades of oranges and gold as we packed our bags to go back home. You sighed that same sigh I'd heard for the past two years we had known each other; the one that meant you had a lot on your mind.

"I wish I could live every day like this with you, ya know," you said, turning to face me. The water droplets on your shoulders glistened under the setting sun and I nodded, too nervous to look you in the eye. I could feel you step closer to me, the heat of your energy connecting with mine. The air felt different, heavier almost.

I stepped back, "We should go."

The irony was that I wanted to kiss you. I wanted to let myself love you but doing so would threaten all that was easy between us. You nodded and let me be scared, backing off

like you thought you should.

I expected the drive home to be quieter, with windows cracked to let a slight breeze in, music playing softly in the background to break up the silence. Instead, you managed to bring us back to who we were. You turned up the music and screamed the lyrics, rolling down the window to duck your hand out into the night air. I turned to you and saw you smile, nodding your head to the beat. My stomach filled with regret for not kissing you earlier, disappointed that I let the moment pass.

"I don't want to go home yet," I screamed over the music.

Instead of heading back south where home awaited, we found ourselves driving around aimlessly, watching shooting stars jump across the sky. With no sense of direction, we let the roads guide our way. It was well past midnight but we didn't care. The roads were dark, letting the stars shine brighter up against the black sky. We drove for hours until we came to a field in the middle of nowhere. You told me to pull over and I did.

You jumped out of the car and ran to my side, pulling me out with you. The feeling of your hand in mine gave me butterflies and you didn't let go. Instead you led me through the grass, with your neck craned back staring up at the sky.

"How incredible," your voice was the quietest I had ever heard it as you looked up in awe.

Even though you couldn't see me, I nodded. I pushed myself closer to you and looked up at the same sky. It was remarkable, you were right. The sky looked massive and we felt so small and so big at the same exact time in a way that felt near impossible. It was as if I'd never seen the sky before that moment with you.

When I finally looked away, the moonlight had cast shadows on your face and I could tell you had stopped staring at the sky to look at me. You were still holding my hand in yours but your body was turned towards me. I nodded slightly to give you permission and you leaned down to kiss me. Instead of backing away, I let myself fall into it, into you. There was no holding back this time. Once we broke free and our lips settled back into our own skin, we walked back to my car, hand in hand.

"It's 3 o'clock in the morning," I whispered once we got inside, still smiling.

I didn't let the thoughts of tomorrow and its unknown distract me. I didn't want to give in to the questions that were trying to form, to make sense of everything that had happened. Instead I let it be.

We drove the same dark streets as before, music too loud for the neighborhoods we were passing. I held one arm out the window, letting the wind push through my fingers, trying my hardest to push it back. Your hand was on my thigh, making swirls with your fingertips. We screamed the words to songs we loved and discussed plans of trips to foreign places. We were almost to your house when you turned down the volume to our favorite song and moved your body in my direction.

"I need to tell you something," you said in a suddenly serious tone, so different from your usual demeanor.

The butterflies in my stomach swarmed up my throat; I knew what was coming. The road curved and I turned my eyes to look at you.

“I think I might be in—“ your voice was cut off by the sound of metal crashing into metal, rubber screeching across pavement. Headlights from another car burst through my windshield like a spotlight, illuminating your body as it lunged forward through the glass. I screamed instinctively as my own body pushed forward into the airbag.

There was no sound after that moment; everything went silent. I screamed your name but there was no answer. My body slumped forward over the wheel, bones surely broken in places I didn’t know could break. My vision was blurry and my body felt like it was on fire but I still called your name.

“I love you! No, I love you,” my voice was hoarse but I screamed louder as sirens in the distance grew closer and closer.

My consciousness was going in and out. I saw red lights flashing, paramedics saying words I couldn’t understand. I saw them lean down to the body on the ground in front of me but didn’t hear the words they were saying. My eyes shut and the world went black.

I woke in the hospital sometime later, sunshine bursting through the windows of the small room. The monitor beeped beside me and instantly the pain in my body pulsed. I called for the nurse and asked where you were.

It was a drunk driver who hit us, going 50 miles per hour around that corner. He never even saw our headlights. His truck hit the corner of my car and spun us forward, pushing you from your seat through the windshield. Your seatbelt likely would have saved your life had you been wearing it. But you weren’t. You were pronounced dead at the scene; the other driver ended up with a concussion and a broken arm.

I thought back to the words you were whispering just seconds before my world completely changed. I would never know for sure what you would have said, what I would have whispered in return, though I think it would have changed the trajectory of our lives forever. Instead, you were taken from me, so maliciously, in a way that will never make sense to me. Now my memories are etched with traces of you everywhere, the sheer magnitude of who you were consuming me most days. I think of the stars we gazed up at, fully convinced your body landed among them somehow. Every time I look up into the darkness it’s you I see, your sun kissed body turned towards me, a lazy smile on your face. “This might be the best day of my life”, whispered in the wind as a reminder of those final hours we spent together, falling more in love in the mountains of New England.



BUDDING ROMANCE

by Dr. Billie Unger
Digital Photography



GIRL AND A CASSOWARY

by Ari McGhee

Ink Pen and Alcohol Marker



TUSKED LOVERS

by Ari McGhee

Colored Pencils

ARS POETICA

by Nicole Yurcaba

A *pysanka* nestled in white and yellow tissue paper
in a dented plastic container:

It sleeps with its black-blue dyed face
gazing toward the dented ocean-colored lid,

burning like a shot of *horilka* at a Hutsul wedding feast
as lilac wafts through spring's air and wedding songs

drift across a village geography and time forgot,

and then it creeps like wooden wagon wheels
rutting a muddy road as musicians arrive

so that evening festivities can commence
while a mother braids her daughter's hair

like the *korovai* waiting on the table
where a grandmother sits, remembering

her own dance many years ago.



WINGED HARMONY

by Heather Huggett

Digital Photography



IONU

by Sandra Baker

Digital Art



I SEE YOU SUSAN

by Sandra Baker

Digital Art (Combined with Original Photos)

CAT BURGLING WITCH (A LIE HOUSE ON THE CEMETERY YARN)

by Chris Nelling

Calico Mouscher lay on the kitchen table, sleeping; the cat's tail curled around her body and its tip wagged slightly in front of her closed eyes. The ghost glided out of the hallway and through the closed kitchen door. About two seconds later, Justin walked from the hallway to the outside door and looked back the hallway, as he reached for the knob.

"The others must be sleeping. No one is awake to talk me out of this. Though it would be nice if Jimmy could come along since he's already been there."

Justin glanced at the table as he opened the door; Squeaky, the mouse, leaned with his back against the cat and his feet propped up on the middle of her tail. The tail tip continued to wag in front of her closed eyes.

"I always knew she and that mouse were friends."

Justin stepped outside and closed the door behind him. About two seconds later, Penny walked from the hallway to the door, looking around nervously.

"Sometimes, I wish he really WAS adopted," she said, "I think I'd check on the return policy." She opened the door and turned back to the kitchen table. Squeaky still lay against Mouscher the way Justin saw him, but he waved to Penny when he saw her looking at them. Daring flew out of the hallway and landed on Penny's shoulder.

"Huh-uh, no way," she said, "You aren't coming along, this time."

"Trill."

"Shhhhh." She placed Daring on the back of a chair, but when she turned to the door, he flew back to her shoulder.

"I mean it. You aren't coming."

Penny tried to pull the dragonfly off her shoulder but he clung tight.

"I know," she said to herself, and then said to the dragonfly, "Daring, get the mouse. Get the mouse. Show that dumb cat how it's done."

Daring looked at the cat on the table, made a 'yuck' face, and said, "Blech!"

Penny frowned, "What's wrong? You're supposed to be carnivorous. You should like to eat-"

But when she turned back to the table, Creaky, the skeletal mouse, leaned with his back against the cat, and his feet propped up on the middle of Mouscher's tail. The tail tip continued to wag in front of the cat's closed eyes. Creaky waved to Penny, his bony phalanges making noises to justify his name.

"...um, mice," she finished her sentence, halfheartedly. She pointed back the hallway and said,

"Quick, there goes the rest of him."

Daring flew back the hallway and Penny ducked out the door, shutting it behind her. About two seconds later, Jimmy walked from the hallway to the door, dragging Joffe, who was dragging his feet, trying to hold Jimmy back, along behind him.

"C'mon, Joffe. we have to help her."

"No, we have to watch out for ourselves. Besides, she's wrong about Dr. Stein; he's not really out there."

Joffe pulled back on Jimmy, but Jimmy took another two steps forward. Jimmy opened the door and turned back to the kitchen table. Freaky, the ghost mouse, leaned with his

back against the cat, and his feet propped up on the middle of Mouscher's tail. The tail tip continued to wag in front of the cat's closed eyes.

Joffee said, "Will you listen to me? That girl and her crazy brother are going to get you turned into a-

"Ghost!" Jimmy screamed.

"That's right, they'll get you turned into a ghost."

Jimmy pointed to the table. Joffee turned to look and Freaky waved to both of them, green glowing fingers flickering as they wiggled.

"On second thought," said Joffee, "the crypt may be safer than this house, considering Dr. Stein and the 'vampire' won't really be out there, but we've now seen two ghosts in here."

Jimmy said, "But how will we find Penny?"

Daring flew out of the hallway, over their heads, and out the door.

Joffee yelled, "Quick, follow that dragon!"

The boys ran out the door and followed Daring off the porch, heading for the gate near Ima Gaughn-R's tombstone. The metal screen door slammed shut behind them.

Glenda Winkelpleck slowly stepped onto the first porch step. Midnight rested on her shoulder, looking down at the steps as the witch hesitated.

"Into their safe haven,

we'll stealthily invade,

and if they harbor my cookie,

they'll face my tirade."

"I always knew she and that mouse were friends," a boy's voice rang out in the darkness.

Glenda ducked around the corner of the house, and hid in the nook between the window that opened over the sink and the fireplace jutting out from the wall. The boy in question walked out the door and ran to the gate by Ima Gaughn-R's Tombstone. Glenda reached up to the rat on her shoulder and scratched Midnight's head, as she spoke.

"I wouldn't believe that insult,

if I hadn't seen it.

Confusing you with a mouse,

I'm sure he dint mean it."

Glenda slowly peered around the corner and looked at the door.

"I thought we'd have trouble

reaching the door,

but whoever that was

is gone now for sure."

Glenda turned the corner and stepped lightly on the first porch step, again.

"Who's on the lookout,

as we case this joint?

Was he speaking to us?

If so, what's his point?"

She took another step up the stairs and sniffed the air.

"I smell not, no humans:
and no one's in sight.
Should we advance?"

"Squeak," said Midnight.

"Okay, I'll bite."

Glenda took another step up the porch stairs, but another voice, this time a girl's voice stopped her from going further.

"Quick, there goes the rest of him."

Glenda jumped backward, down the steps, and ducked around the corner of the house, as Penny walked out the door, looked both ways, and ran down the other set of porch steps, toward the gate near Ima's tombstone. Glenda scratched her scraggly-haired head, while she pondered that outburst.

"There went the rest of who?

And where went the first half?
Clowns reside in this house-zoo,
Am I the butt of their laugh?"

Glenda slowly peered around the corner and looked at the door.

"Wait, that voice was different.

Is there more than one guard?
Does the caretaker hide many kids
that would fry well in lard?"

Glenda quickly turned the corner, pulled the front brim of her purple, cone shaped hat down toward her eyes, and marched halfway up the stairs, where the next voice, another – different - boy, stopped her.

"Ghost!"

Glenda nearly fell down the steps, but she recovered and ducked around the corner of the house. Daring, unseen by Glenda, flew out the door, following Justin's and Penny's path. Glenda held herself tight against the wall, still around the corner.

"Ghost? Do they think that I'm gullible?

Or slow-witted and laggin'?
The next thing you know, they'll shout-"

"Quick, follow that dragon!" yelled still another boy's voice.

"If they think I'm soft-headed,
their wits must have slid.
A ghost and a dragon and
a half-finished kid?"

Jimmy and Joffe, also unseen by Glenda, followed Daring and the door slammed behind them.

"Then again, in this house,
there's much git up and go.
Perhaps before entry,
we should gaze in the window."



LATE KNIGHTS

by Omar Williams

Digital Photography

NONBINARY POETRY

by Ari McGhee

My Body is like Poetry
a Song to be heard
by those with deaf eyes.

It's mine alone to show
to grow and to hide
from those with dead opinions.

My gender is nonexistent
and loud and Proud
for those with blind love.

My poetry is like a body
a heart that beats
and longs to be lived by me.



KOI POND

by Em Côté
Oil on Canvas

MY WEST VIRGINIA HOME

by Melinda Tauler

There is a slap-slap-slap sound that sometimes comes from outside.

The first night we lived here, I was nervous there was an intruder. It turned out to be the gate on the deck that had been left unlatched. When the wind rushed up, the gate flung itself against the house as if to say that someone had forgotten it.

There is a drip-drip-drip sound that sometimes comes from the kitchen faucet.

At first, I didn't hear it at all. This house is big and there were new sounds to get used to. My husband asked the day we moved in if I thought we would ever get used to having so much space. I said that we would, and sure enough we have. I thought having a big house would mean never having to deal with clutter again. In fact, it means the opposite. Having a big house means feeling justified in owning more things than you need.

There is a scrape-scape-scape that comes from outside the front door.

That is just the cat wanting in out of the cold, or the hot, or the wet, or whatever weather he decides is not fit for him to deal with.

In the mornings, there is a certain spot that if you sit and look outside, the light hits the trees just right and lights them up as if they are on fire. The whole world is alive with possibilities again, and for a moment, it is nice to just exist.

In the evenings, that same fire lights up the sky on the other side of the house, painting sunsets in every hue – a new canvas full of originality every evening. It is nice to sit outside and take it in.

There are weeping cherries in the front.

There are grapevines climbing my gazebo.

The crepe myrtle stands proud and the cypress trees form a border for the yard.

Butterfly bushes fill with thousands of butterflies and other insects as we move toward summer.

Leaves fall and then snow gathers on the ground as we reach through the seasons to winter.

Through the seasons, through the years, I know that this is home.



MAJESTIC

by Challice LaRose
Digital Photography

MY FRIEND, ART

by Melinda Tauler

A young man has trouble relating to others and finds comfort and companionship in a ghostly presence which resides in his mother's toy shop.

"You're special," Mama said, "Someday they'll see that. Until then, you've just gotta hold on. You're not the one with the problem, honey, they are."

She was trying to cheer me up as she mopped the wide plank flooring of Hockman's Toy Store. Mama bought the place when old man Hockman died. I sat on the front counter sipping cherry coke in my Members Only Jacket, unsure of what to say. That jacket was the mark of "cool kids." My single mother stretched to buy it, but it didn't help me.

"It's not that easy, Ma," I said, "Bullies are bullies because they enjoy it. They pick on me because I'm different."

The truth was that this was just the way it had always been. Most fifteen-year-old boys spent their Friday nights at the movies. My weekends typically went by right here. I had a hard time with people, but the dolls never gave me a hard time. I always came away from them feeling a connection and couldn't say the same about time spent with people.

I got my favorite doll, the one I named Meg. She had auburn hair, freckles, and green eyes. I sat there stroking Meg's hair and talking out my troubles. A voice came into my head that I had heard many times before.

"They're wrong, you know. Knowing yourself doesn't make you weird. I can take care of your problem. You just have to listen to me."

This voice only showed up at Hockman's during quiet moments when I was alone. He told me to call him Art. I thought I was going crazy, but when we began having actual conversations, I realized this was more than just my imagination.

"Alright, Art," I half-seriously entertained his suggestion, "What do I have to do?"

I wasn't sure what he was capable of, and to be honest that scared me.

"First thing you gotta do is bring 'em here," he said. "I'll do the rest."

"You're not going to hurt them, are you?" I asked.

"Naw. Just teach 'em a lesson."

If things were ever going to be different, something had to change. I needed to stand up for myself. I'd been dealing with daily wet willies, swirlies, being stuffed in a locker, and worse for years and I was more than tired of it. If someone wanted to help me get back at these mean kids, I'd go along with it.

"I'll try to get them to come, but I'm not sure it'll work."

Monday after school, Nick was alone. He was the meanest one, with white-blonde hair buzzed so short he was practically bald. His clothes were always dirty and threadbare. I approached him, unsure of how he would react.

"Hey," I started.

"What do you want?" he sneered.

"Hey." I said again, this time with purpose.

"We have new candy at the store and need taste testers. I don't know anybody. You wanna try some?"

"What's the catch?" he asked, sizing me up.

Gulp. Could he see through me? I was lying through my teeth.

"No catch. I can't eat it all. Weak stomach."

He laughed.

"Shocker there. Weak like the rest of you. Sure, I'll come."

Gotcha! Boy, was that easy.

We walked there together. I could hear Art telling me to lead him into the back room and I started unwrapping samples. As they dwindled, Nick told me I was too stupid to amount to anything and that my mother should place me in an institution. He told me there isn't any place in society for people who can't learn to interact with other people.

Then he slapped me, hard. When he slapped me, something came swirling from within my favorite doll Meg and entered Nick's body. Nick went stiff and straight like a board, and collapsed onto the floor with a resounding and sickening thud. Once he recovered, Nick extended his hand with a friendly, crooked smile I had never seen before.

"Hey, I'm Arthur," he said, "I think we'll be great friends."

I was confused about what just happened.

"There was a child. I was cruel to her. I followed her here and beat her up. When I did, something came from one of those dolls and swirled through the air before pulling me from my body. I became trapped in that redheaded one you like. The police were called. My body was carted away. That day I ceased to be human. I wrestled for years to overtake you, but you were too strong. I had Nick here within a minute or two. Now he is in that blonde doll, and I have a body again."

"You've been using me?" I cried.

"Just biding my time."

Mama heard me.

"Break. The. Doll." she said, more serious than I had ever heard her before.

"What?"

"Break it. That's the only way to release the spirit."

I broke it into as many pieces as possible. Mama told about her frightening experience with a doll as a teen. She visited a shaman, but never fulfilled the ritual because she was afraid that Arthur would come back. She worked at Hockman's and purchased it to protect others from the power here.

Nick's soul would be returned to his body, and we would seal things to send Arthur on. He would be like a wisp in the wind, unable to attach to anything. My mother chanted. Louder and louder she grew. The words became difficult as Arthur fought like crazy to hold on to Nick's body. He finally let go and Nick returned to his body, grateful and exhausted.

After that night, I never played with dolls again. I cannot imagine a closer friendship than the one that Nick and I share. I forgave him and he taught me how to relate to people, and for that, I will be forever grateful.



HUMID GRAIN

by Robyn Hunt
Film Photography

ROLLING ON THE RIDGE: RHODODENDRON'S REVENGE

by Megan Angeline Anderson

Portend: It's lunchtime when the shattering of glass interrupts Raegan and Jamie's relaxing reverie in the Megan S. Stoner library. Raegan is so startled she drops the book she's been engrossed in, *Razorblade Kyiv*. This is serious. Her friend Jamie is almost more alarmed by that than the sound of the glass. Raegan is an avid bibliophile, and this is one of her favorite books! She grabs Raegan's hand to help her up, and they're booking it in a flash, moving towards the glass cases outside the PSUT Office Suite. They fly up the front stairs, and as they turn the corner, they catch a glimpse of a bright red raincoat slipping through the back stairwell door as it snicks shut. They're more distracted by the dangerous scattering of glass covering the hall; the entire pathway to the suite is now a hazard. Neither will remember the glimpse of the red coat until it's almost too late. For now, what takes precedence for everyone as they pile out of their offices is this: *the president's scepter is gone!*

Revelation: Melly Swift, sitting in the front of the room with her blonde hair in a high pony and her sleeves rolled up, is all business today. It's Alumni Sweatshirt Day, so she's wearing her favorite Shepherd University sweatshirt over a blue Bengal stripe button-down. The president's scepter is a prestigious actor in the annual graduation commencement activities. It is so much a part of the college culture that it makes the rounds, taking turns on display at each of the college's departments throughout the year. Melly, as the Operations Manager, coordinates the scepter's travels, and she's mortally offended that it's disappeared under her watch! She's assembled everyone in the conference room for her investigation.

Katarina sits with a legal pad, ready to take notes. She's casual in her Harvard sweatshirt and jeans since it's Friday, but her steely grey eyes betray her anger over the theft. Jamie, beside her in a burnt orange Virginia Tech sweatshirt, sips from her favorite aqua-colored Stanley mug, the one Raegan had given her last Christmas. *The last month before all this thievery began*, Jamie thinks to herself, sighing aloud.

At the impromptu gathering following yesterday's smash-and-grab, they'd all had tidbits to share that painted a disturbing escalation of events. Incidents that had seemed minor, really, until they looked at them all together. Jan Armstrong's plant had gone missing. She'd thought maybe the cleaning crew had thrown it out. *Evie Greene had been looking a bit like a dried-up weed*, Jan had been forced to admit to herself at the time. A baby shower gift of Zara's had come up missing – one of her Halo sleep sacks, but she had chalked it up to getting lost in all the happy bustle, perhaps dropped in the parking lot while packing up. Reba's favorite red grading pen had gone missing, but pens sometimes had a way of making off on their own. Renetta, the new Writing Coordinator, had been more puzzled by her missing item. She'd picked up some special dog treats for her sweet pupper on her lunch, but when it was time to head home, they'd been nowhere to be found! For Vicky, the new Humanities Coordinator, it had been the beautiful beaded necklace she had hanging on her wall. For Spike, the new E-learning Support Specialist, it had been his sci-fi novel, a Heinlen, *Glory Road*. Raegan's pen holder, the red man featured on page 43 of the 2022 publication of *The Outlet*, had disappeared. Sage's daughter's drawing had gone missing from her office, the one featured in the same publication on page 29. Jerri's favorite silver beaded bracelet

from Ink + Alloy was gone, though she had dismissed it at the time, assuming Raegan had put it on thinking it was hers. They both were longtime loyal customers of that boutique, which resulted in them having some matching sets. Everleine's cool black astrology mug had gone missing from the breakroom. Jacob was missing his lucky tie clip – the one he always wore to graduation! It featured a little apple in homage to his role as Education Program Coordinator. It had been a gift from Sage to celebrate his receiving the You Make a Difference Award. Randy's AirTag, ironically, was also missing. It had been Raegan's white elephant contribution last year, and he hadn't yet had a chance to pair it. And maybe worst of all, on Valentine's Day, Brenna had brought in the homemade cupcakes her partner Devin had baked to share with everyone, and they'd been gone within an hour – though no one could remember having a single one!

News: Sage and Randy gather in the front of the room with Melly, filling her in on the important (and perhaps a little exciting) news they now have to share at the meeting. Sage is wearing her navy ODU sweatshirt with a monarch emblazoned on the front. Randy is mixing it up today, wearing a white blazer over his red and black sweater to represent Frostburg State University.

Jerri and Lollie have brought in snacks to calm everyone down – sandwiches and brownies. Jerri's in her WVU sweatshirt with a popped collared polo beneath. She always likes to be fashion-forward. Lollie's bucking the system with her Depeche Mode hoodie, though she could just as easily have worn WVU like Jerri, or something from the Free University of Berlin. Billinda and Reba having biked in together today, are both sporting WVU, too. Reba even has a pair of WVU sunglasses, which are doing the job of holding her hair back now that she's inside. Billinda and Reba love to adventure and are known for taking long bike rides to de-stress. *If this thievery keeps up, they're going to wind up riding the whole state of West Virginia*, Raegen thinks. She's sitting with Jan Monet and Alice at Jerri and Lollie's coveted snack table. Upon entering, Reba and Billinda beeline to join them, making Raegan a purple streak in a sea of WVU blue and gold in her LSU sweatshirt. She's wearing her gold and purple preppy poplin underneath, though, so they all share their gold. It's serendipitous.

Alice, formerly known as Bree, is also in WVU blue. Alice has told everyone this semester that she'd really rather go back to using her first name instead. She'd started going by her middle name, Bree, for a while because, as she'd explained at the time, her first name sounded too much like the name of a sister whom she hadn't been getting along with very well, and it was bringing up bad memories. Now that she felt all that was behind them, she wanted to return to Alice.

Stefan, having been out playing soccer with the students, darts into the room in the nick of time wearing his orange University of Texas sweatshirt. And that's when Raegan notices Jan Armstrong, clad in her navy Shepherd sweatshirt, popping the final bite of the last pb&j into her mouth, *uhh-ohhh*, Raegan has time to think to herself before Melly brings the meeting to order.

Sage, always calm and collected, begins the meeting by reassuring everyone of their safety, outlining the new precautions being taken by the campus security team, and ending

with the exciting news that Dr. D, in his urgency to regain the scepter in time for graduation, had created the new SRRG: Scepter Recovery Research Grant. He has directed each department to work as a team. The department able to locate the treasured item prior to commencement will be awarded the SRRG annually for 10 years as a reward. Everyone's excited now. It certainly helped to temper the low mood that losing the heirloom and discovering the petty thefts had cast. The meeting doesn't have a chance of lasting long after that – everyone's too eager to get started! They quickly get a plan together and head out.

Progress: A week later, Melly's storming around the office with her Somehow I Manage notebook in tow...

See How The Adventure Ends!



Scan or click on the QR code to view the remaining text for this submission

LILLY WRIGHT

by Madison Harvey

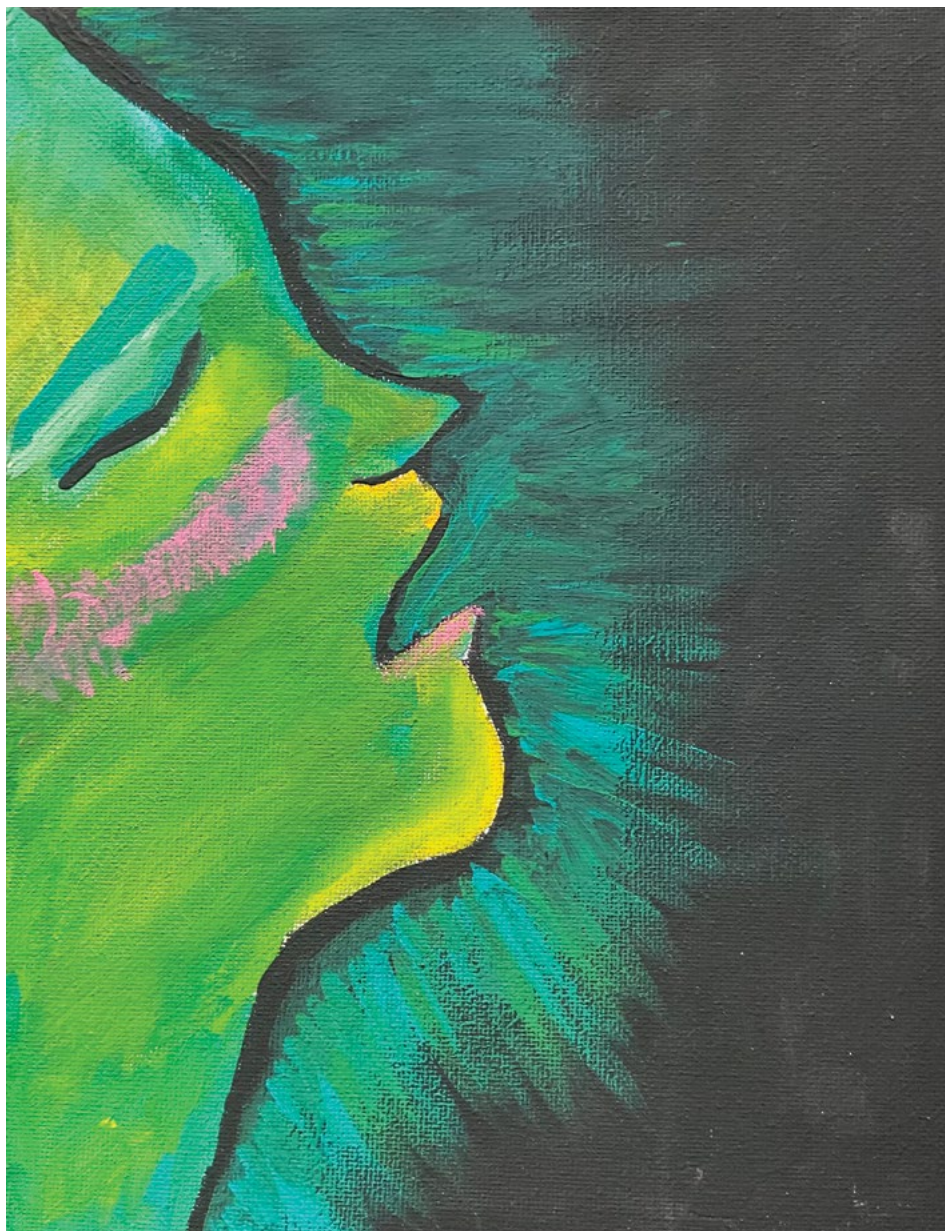
and maybe she could hold it in
for five more seconds
or hours
or days

but the weeks turn into months
and the months turn into years
and she promised herself

“I’ll do it”
“I’ll tell them”

but the thoughts get washed away
like the other things she promised herself

there were no seconds or hours
because she knew
that deep down
she was going to tell no one



CALYPSO

by Madison Harvey

Acrylic on Canvas

WELL...

by Dr. Billie Unger

Well, I wandered through the well-groomed woods
where once I'd found the well.
With pennies pitched and tears welled up,
I wished that he'd be well.



PIECES INTO PLACE

by Kelly Shurnitski

Digital Photography

A LETTER TO THE SUNSET

Original Lemko by Nicole Yurcaba

English translation by Nicole Yurcaba

Захід сонця--
Де ідете?

Вечер приходити
і завідувати ся.

Sunset—

Where are you going?

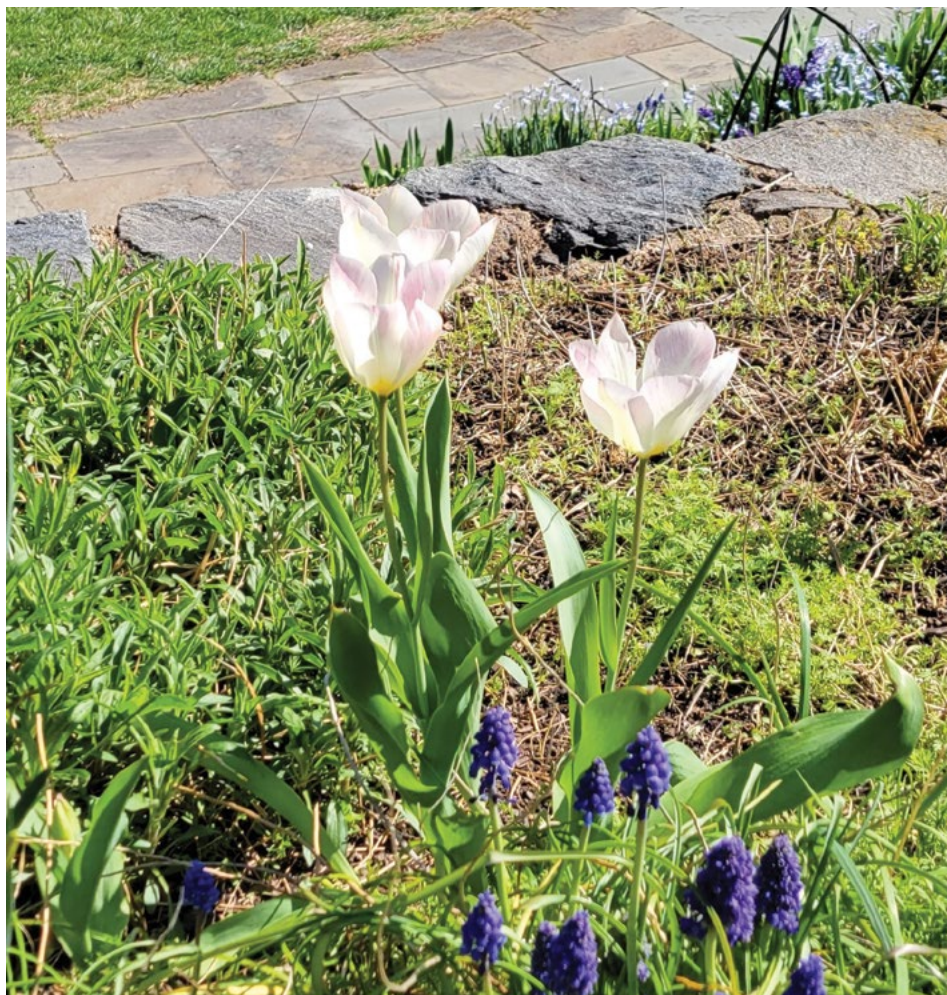
Evening approaches
and asks a question.

Note: The Lemko language, while often considered a dialect of Ukrainian, is actually one of the many variations of the Carpatho-Rusyn language, spoken by the Lemko in various parts of Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine.



LIGHT UP MY LIFE

by Shauna Seering
Digital Photography



TREMULOUS SPRING

by Kathy Cox
Digital Photography



LOVE LINES

by Megan Angeline Anderson

Mixed Media – Digital Photography, Line and Electric Drawing

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