



# FLIGHT

- 2017 -

# Flight

## 2017

An Anthology of the Written and Visual Arts

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*Angie Medrano* / **Her Body**

My hands are my own

They are the pushers and tellers of “no.”

Your eyes are not allowed to undress me

They are not allowed to pierce through my clothing

And imagine my body

*Elisabet Salas-Alvarado* / **My Wish for You**

I want you to think of me when you see the color red.

I want to haunt your dreams,

and be the star of your nightmares.

I want to run through your veins like a poison

That you can never bleed out.

***Capree Lambrose / Lost in Socialization***

Who are you?

Do you even know?

Can you even say?

Go back, before they entered . . .

Now start over, without them.

Who are you?

You've allowed yourself to be defined roughly

By what they've given you.

Information gathered through their eyes, their views.

But what are your views?

Who do you see?

—*No one . . . I don't exist.*

***Cody Rukasin / Calyptra***

Plato spoke, then

went into his cave;

bouldered inside,

he found himself

wasting three days

on a written cliché.

## *Rebeckah St. Laurent / Lies*

*It wasn't like I was lying, right?*

Swallowing back the bile, I roughly wiped against my mouth. Red stained against white. So much red against white, like some sacrificial offering to a demonic, porcelain god. Oh ye god of toilets, I pray you accept my offering, grant my wishes, yadda, yadda, yadda. The hollow chuckle escaped my mouth as I rested my forehead against the cool rim. Fighting against the urge to heave, I flicked the handle to flush. Flush away all the evidence.

*I mean, omitting the truth wasn't really **lying**, right?*

Pushing myself to my feet, I stumbled over to the bathroom counter. Copper coated my tongue, coated my teeth, copper mixed with the acid left over from my stomach. The room swayed the faintest bits as if the world were rocking me to sleep. Funny, how your reactions change with different life experiences. Months ago, I would have been angry, seething, throwing things around the house, shouting, crying. Right now? Right now, exhaustion filled my muscles. The type of exhaustion that settled deep under my skin.

*Besides, what would change if I told the truth?*

Snagging a toothbrush, I scrubbed at my teeth and tongue. The mint ate away at the copper and acid that dusted my tongue. A cleansing of my secrets that started with my first offering to the porcelain god. Pressing a trembling hand against the counter, I spat the toothpaste into the sink. White-tinted with pink, all washed down the drain with water. Ignorance is bliss, right?

*Our relationship would go back to those days. He'd be sad again.*

Gripping the edges of the counter, the world swayed once more. Black settled at the edges of my vision. Squeezing my eyes shut, I willed away the rolling in my stomach. Honestly, it was just a sandwich. A stupid, midnight snack. Opening my eyes, I focused on the wall above the counter. A wall missing a mirror greeted me back.

*We wouldn't have our stupid arguments or wrestling matches over the remote.*

He said it was because of the expression I wore when I looked at myself. The stupid idiot removed all the mirrors. Spouting out senseless, romantic crap on how he didn't care what I looked like, but that if I didn't like my appearance, I'd just have to rely on his opinions instead. Stupid. He really was completely stupid.

*Am I being selfish?*

I'll admit, some weight lifted from my shoulders that day. Not having to see my ugly mug made it easier to breathe. Wiping a hand over my hairless head, I brought it down to rub at my eyes. Tugging at the edges of my shirt, I yanked it over my head. It reeked of my former midnight snack. No use, really, I'd have to wash it tomorrow. Picking up a sweater, I pulled it on.

*It was definitely better this way, right?*

The sweater was too big. It engulfed my frame, folding around my arms and torso like a loose, second skin. A warm blanket that washed away the dip of ribs and the jutting of shoulders and the flatness of a stomach. With this sweater, I could hide away from all those whispering comments on the beach. Why are you wearing a shirt out here? Aren't you too thin? Are you two really together? Folds of fabric that hid away the too-pale skin. Being with someone with a larger frame had its perks, I suppose.

*I mean, there's the off-chance that things could get better, right?*

Flicking off the bathroom light, I stepped back into the bedroom. The room around me was painted in shades of shadow. A thick, unbreakable blackness that engulfed my senses. In the darkness nobody could see a tight chest or a lump in the throat. Wiping at my eyes, I clamped my jaw shut. I wasn't crying, alright? No. I wasn't crying. I wouldn't cry. Only the weak cried.

*There's a chance. There has to be a chance. No use worrying people when there's a chance.*

“A, that you?”

His groggy voice broke through the darkness. Straining against the darkness, my eyes slowly adjusted. The soft moonlight from the window tinted everything with the faintest of whites. Quickly scrubbing at my cheeks, I studied the half-slumped figure sitting up in bed. Just the sight of him loosened up the tightness in my chest.

*Was it selfish to want this carefree attitude to last a bit longer?*

“It’s . . . two in the morning. What’re you doing up?”

In the near darkness, I reached. Just how did we end up together? He was first to flirt, but I was the one who hounded to date. I was the first to kiss, but he was the one who said those three, stuttering words. Our defined roles were elusive. Maybe that’s why this relationship worked out so much better than those in my past.

*Was it selfish to have hidden away the letter until everything was over?*

“I think I’m constipated.”

His soft, sleepy snort was followed by him yanking me down onto the bed. This man was perpetually warm like some human furnace. Like some eternal fire with no expiration date, he was always bright, always shining. He was the sun. Sidling up next to him, I sagged against his warmth. Maybe, just maybe, his warmth would seep down into the coldness of my bones. If he was the sun, then I, most certainly, was the moon.

*Was it inevitable? Were people like us never meant to be?*

“Hey . . . how was your doctor’s appointment?”

The silence of the room hadn’t felt so silent. No. The silence of the room was a deafening roar. The rushing of blood in the ears. A roar that mixed and turned with my pounding heart. *Thump, thump, thump* . . . do you hear it? *Thump, thump, thump* . . . why are you so afraid?

*The outcome was inevitable, wasn’t it? Despite what I chose, it’d end the same way.*

“Was it bad?”

Pressing forward, I wormed my way as close as I could get. I used to think people like me were pathetic. I puffed up my chest, raised my nose, and proudly claimed that I’d never be like them. You’re better off alone. Life is easier when you brushed off those fickle emotions like the buzzing mosquitos they were. Emotions were always meddling, trying to make you *feel* all the time. Who had they thought they were, my mother?

*Was I wrong to want to be here beside him without that darkness looming over our heads?*

“Nah, still in remission. I just got a stomach bug, that’s all.”

The darkness closed around me. Yet there was warmth here. Warmth that surrounded me. The silence no longer roared. Instead, the room filled with a gentle instructions on staying healthy. A monologue interjected with my gentle hums and tiny nods of agreement. A silence that filled with the sound of a heartbeat. His heartbeat. Strong. Steady. Alive. If a silent tear or two slipped out, that didn’t mean I was crying.

*Maybe it was. Maybe all I’ve ever been was selfish.*

“I’m alright, really. Sandwich was a bit much, I guess.”



*Rebecca Langlands*



*Steven Hill / Ghosting*

## Victoria Zepeda / Dear 14-year-old Me

Dear 14-year-old me,

*Pick yourself up.* This is just the beginning. Stop telling yourself you're not good enough. Losing the boy will be nothing compared to losing the most important person to you. It may feel like there is no use in living; like trying to place a broken record on the player. Like you're still trying to find that missing sock you lost years ago, but stop intentionally reliving the past. The hardships, the pain, they keep repeating, that's inevitable, but what happened to you that would fall at five years old and pick yourself right back up? Remember that you?

*Stop avoiding the truth.* I don't care how much you hate to say it but admit it you are in a darker place than you were two years ago. It may not seem that way, but your biggest fear is the number zero. If that's not low, I don't know what is. You're still sick, and you will remain sick unless you admit the truth. Tear down the facade, you're not fooling anyone. Go to Spanish class because the content *of that class* is so much more important than how many friends you have *in* that class. Quality is so much better than quantity.

*You have so much potential, stop wasting it on a boy.* Stop chasing the boys that use you and throw you away. Spoiler alert, that boy you spent so much time being head over heels for, you'll kiss him, more than once, but you'll also let him break your heart, more than once. When you say you miss him and he doesn't say he misses you, that's not a relationship; that's the salt seeping into the already deep wounds. You can't keep making excuses for these supposed gentlemen because a boy liking you doesn't make you like yourself. The kiss from the boy may feel like it fills this empty feeling, but it's a temporary fix to a permanent problem.

*You're beautiful.* Stop looking at yourself and hating what you see. A complaint is not equivalent to a double tap on a picture or a star on a selfie. Look at yourself and appreciate--genuinely appreciate--who you are. If you don't do that no one else will. Don't look for that happiness in someone else. It won't work. It never will. All the time you spent criticizing

yourself could be spent bettering yourself.

*You will learn so much more about yourself in four years than you have in 14.* I know the thought of graduating high school makes you want to vomit. I know the last thing you want to think about is college, but you will get there. Through all of the pain and tears, you will make it. You shouldn't be ashamed of the scars on your wrists. They're a statement. They prove you're a warrior, a fighter. You'll learn that your past is your past, not your future. Use the past to change the future. Don't hinder the future, by trying to change the past.

*You made it to 19.* I told you you'd make it. You thought you were so worthless. You thought you'd never make it this far. Guess what you're doing now. You're working and going to school. You have grown so much. You still have bad days, but they're not *bad* days.

Dear 14-year-old me,

*You are only 14.* You have so much more growing up to do. You have so much more to live for.

## ***Kimberly Sawyer / Impact***

It is like I have fallen into a world that I do not fit into.  
Like you are the hands, and I am the Rubik's Cube.  
I consistently try harder, but I just keep falling.  
Mind you, the entire time I hear the angels calling.  
Even on my knees, when I weep and I pray;  
the clouds open up portraying a much brighter day.  
Every week is a struggle, my head hardly above water,  
I push myself beyond my means for myself and my daughter.  
I cannot give up and I will not give in.  
My soul is too old and destined to win.  
In a world of hate filled with constant curiosity,  
Looked at like a freak and some kind of oddity.  
If only you could walk a day in my shoes,  
A look at the sadness of the world from my point of view.  
"She has no hair," whispers from behind.  
A woman makes a woman, hair does not define.  
When we can think and perceive another's point of view,  
Then and only then can others awake too.  
We are one, not divided,  
Love can conquer and is not one sided.  
Communication is key when it comes to understanding  
I long for acceptance, and I will wait here standing.

## ***Kailyn McKeown / Brain Dead***

The splintered edges of my mind collapse.  
Numbers turning to Greek  
time turning into an equation where  
x marks the spot, divided by misery and the distance traveled  
only on Tuesdays.  
I think about how I could win the lottery  
but then I hear there is an equation for that and I wave the  
thought away  
I suppose I could be a stripper, isn't that what all students think  
at some point?  
Easy money, or so I hear from friend who dances that dance. I  
wouldn't have to worry  
about tests, or tuition, or grad school, or what am I even going  
to major in.  
But then I think about all that liquor I'd need in order to keep  
myself sane  
and how it would take all the fun out of drinking in the first place.  
  
My brain sizzles, begging me to end its torture for another night  
I tell it to square both sides against the root and hope for the best.  
  
I'd make a lousy stripper anyway.

## ***Jasmin Rodriguez / Standing up for Myself***

It all started when I entered fifth grade. New grade, new class, and a new teacher. My new teacher was Ms. Reese. One day, Ms. Reese was teaching something to the class. I was actually paying attention while she taught, but I had accidentally started daydreaming. I tend to have problems paying attention in class. It's just something I've always struggled with growing up. A few seconds later, I hear her yell, "Jasmine! What did I just say?" In front of everyone. I sat there, with all eyes on me, trying to figure out a response. Nothing came out. Ms. Reese then pointed to an empty desk in the back of the room and told me to sit there. With all eyes still on me, I shamefully took all my stuff and sat at the empty desk. I remember feeling embarrassed because I couldn't pay attention like everyone else. That moment affected me over the years because I was afraid another teacher would embarrass me in front of everyone like she did, even long after I left her class.

Another time later that year, my class and I were correcting a practice test we'd just finished working on. I raised my hand to answer a question and I ended up getting it wrong. In that moment, by accident, I almost ended up saying a curse word. It was weird since I never cursed growing up. Even though it was a mistake, Ms. Reese wasn't happy. She had shock and disgust written all over her face. People began defending me, saying that I had made a mistake and they were right. It was a mistake. However, she didn't believe them. She decided to send me to the principal's office. Being so young and never being sent to the principal's office before, I began to cry. I remember sobbing in front of the class, with everyone's eyes on me. I will never forget one girl's reaction to seeing me cry, she looked over at me and rolled her eyes. It was as if I was an annoyance to her.

Thankfully, the principal was not there that day since he was at a business meeting. I was then sent to the vice principal's office. She was new to the school and I barely knew anything about her, but I got to know she was really nice. She was pretty understanding of the situation and let me stay in her office for a little while to calm down. She began asking me tons of questions, like what my favorite subject was and who I sat next to in class. Things to distract me so I could stop crying. I found it weird that

the vice principal wasn't mad about the situation. After the bell rang, the vice principal let me go and sent me back to class. After I left the office, the first person I saw was Ms. Reese. She told me to get back to class, nothing more.

A few months later, I left fifth grade and went on to go to middle school. After a while, I began to develop pain from the whole situation. In high school, I was around a lot of the students who were in that class with me. All I felt was the embarrassment of what had happened when I was around them. One guy who was in that class with me would bring it up sometimes when I was around my friends. He laughed about the whole situation because he thought it was funny. I would laugh with him to try to hide my embarrassment. I felt like that young little girl was overshadowing the person who I wanted to be. I felt like no one would see me for who I really am. All they would see was that girl who cried because she got sent to the principal's office. That legacy would be with me forever.

I also began developing a hatred for Ms. Reese. I blamed her for everything. If it wasn't for her, I would be happy with the person I am. For about six years, I sneered at the thought of her. I even scratched out her face in my school yearbook. I always imagined her as a person who took happiness out of my sadness. Sometimes, I imagined her talking to her friends, laughing about what she did to me. In my mind, she was someone who took happiness out of my sadness. However, in my senior year of high school, my feelings eventually changed. While I still blamed her, I didn't hate her anymore. I realized that hatred wasn't good, I needed to forgive. Things got better when I began college but once in a while, I would still feel that shame and embarrassment creep up on me.

One day, around the time the spring semester began. I decided to google her. Honestly, it was just out of complete curiosity, I wanted to know whatever happened to her. Through some google searches, I found some information. I discovered that she was still teaching. I then found her Facebook page. It had some basic information about her and a few photos. I then got a crazy idea. I should message her. It was finally my chance to tell her about all the suffering I had to put up with. For the next two months, I practiced and wrote what I wanted to tell her. I also thought about the pros and cons of telling her. If I told her, I would be able to fi-

nally vent out all my frustrations, but I could also hurt her feelings. Eventually, I decided to do it.

The message told her about how terrible she had made me feel after all these years, that I am in college pursuing my dreams, but that I forgive her. Finally, a week before my spring break, I sent the message. I received a response from her a few days later, and her response changed my life. She not only apologized, but she said that she cared about me. She said that she loves teaching because she cares deeply about the students she teaches. She then told me that she went through the same thing. A teacher she had when she was younger embarrassed her in front of her class. She said her mission as a teacher was to never make a student feel that way. She also wrote that she was proud of me for going to college and working on achieving my dreams of being a writer. She said that I was a great student who worked hard for what she wanted. I couldn't believe it.

Her response really changed me. It showed me that there are two sides to each situation. I felt like she was mean to me for no reason, but it wasn't true. All those scenarios I imagined, like her taking the joy out of my misery and her laughing about me to her friends, weren't real. I also saw some of the faults that I had in the situation as well. I chose to feel miserable for all those years, I chose to hate her and I chose to feel embarrassed. Ms. Reese wasn't a terrible teacher, she was a great teacher and I'm so grateful that she was my teacher. She cared about me and all the students she's taught over the years. It just took a little bit of growing up for me to see that.

## ***Merry Fuston / The Search***

The wind blows hard against my sunburnt face,

And touches me with a sense of sorrow.

I step onto the soiled ground with my bare feet,

And reach to the wilted flowers for comfort.

I find none.

I feel the warmth of the sun pressing down on my shoulders,

And burning my soul inside.

The fragrance of the wild air fills me with purity,

And I sing to the clouds floating above my head.

My hair lifts with the wind,

And reaches towards the colored leaves

That fly with the free spirits.

I long to be one.

Closing my hazel eyes,

I picture a world with no judgment.

A single, salty crystal tear escapes me.

I gather my strength from within;

I ready my heart,

And continue my search for the truth.

## ***Miguel Audor* / Watchmaker's Obsession**

*Fixitfixitfixit.*

I must fix it.

Everyone tells me to leave the watch.

Too much work, it's not worth it.

But the watch it's a hidden gem.

I see the potential it holds.

*Fixitfixitfixit.*

I must fix it.

The watch it's an art piece.

Every part moving together.

Second, minute and hour hands dancing a tango.

But do you hear it, it's offbeat.

Tic tic toc, tic tic toc.

*Fixitfixitfixit.*

I must fix it.

I know it's weathered and worn,

But underneath there is beauty.

Once fixed, it will glimmer like the finest diamond.

Everyone will see the rustic beauty that lay beneath.

*Fixitfixitfixit.*

I must fix it.

I have lost everything for this watch.

Obsession, they call it.

But I see the stories and memories it holds underneath.

All it needs is time and patience to show all it holds.

*Fixitfixitfixit.*

I must fix it.

It's fixed.

The hands doing the perfect tango

Tic Toc, Tic Toc, Tic Toc.

The face shines as bright as the rays of the sun.

It's the envy of all that lay eyes upon it.

*Fixitfixitfixit.*

I must fix it.

All watchmakers sought after it.

And treacherous watch betrays me.

The day has come that it has left me,

For the best watchmaker in town.

My life's work gone.

But wait what is that?

A broken clock.

Yes. I see it now the potential it holds inside.

*Fixitfixitfixit.*

I must fix it.



*Lexianne Okimura*



*Angelica Colot*

## ***Kathryn Flores / Can't Change Who I Am (an excerpt)***

Minding my own business as I meandered out of class toward the commons, the song “Kai Kai” rolling into my head, I began to realize that I was being followed. And I knew who they were: dammit, *them*—George Queensberry, Jack Douglas, and Andrew Phelps. Why in the world would these guys follow me around? Oh, right! Because I’m fucking queer. They are such assholes... so I turned around to face them, light blue dress floating at my ankles.

“Don’t you boys have something better to do than follow me? Like throw a ball through a couple skinny goalposts?” Geez, I just said that? Charlie would beam at my confidence, yay me! I stood my ground, clutching my binder to my chest.

Jack strode toward me, his swimmer’s body pulsing with slow-burning rage. “Yeah. Me and the boys were on our way to practice. Then we see you coming.”

“ Oh, stop the presses! JOCK BLOCKS CONFRONT JASON MAYBEAR! This would be front-page news to me because?”

“Why? Aren’t you late finding a sausage to suck on, fag?” Jack pushed at my shoulder, throwing me a bit off-kilter. He said that damn word, just waiting to get a rise out of me. George and Andrew appeared on either side of him. Although I felt strong, my legs turned to jelly as Andrew lunged at me, grabbing my hand and pulling it close to his crotch.

“You want any of this, sweetheart?”

“No, I don’t. You’re not my type.” Shit, I shouldn’t have said that. George took hold of my upper arms, slamming my body up against the cold metal lockers with such force that my binder toppled to the floor. Near Andrew’s sneakers.

George purred in my ear, tilting my head to see the tears forming in my eyes. “Aw, what’s the matter, Jason? You afraid that we won’t be good to you?”

Jack chimed in, gently pressing a hand to my waist. “Or do you want us to take you out to the practice field and finish there? Go all *Boys Don’t Cry*?”

I protested, shaking my head. “No. I’d rather have you basic budinskis hurt me until I’m painted purple and blue.”

George and Jack’s fists aimed at my face and stomach, my back hitting the lockers with a crash every time they punched. I attempted to kick them back, wanting to stab my burgundy Mary Jane heels in them where it hurts, but my feet wouldn’t move. Andrew had my binder tucked under one arm, sick smile across his cheeks. His knee bent as he had a turn at using my body like it was a wrestling opponent. They slammed, punched, and kicked at me for what seemed like 15 minutes. I attempted to cover my face from their impending blows as George let me slide to the ground. All three of them wouldn’t stop taunting and beating me. I felt like I was done for, then they stopped for a moment. Andrew’s shadow towered over me as he pulled one of my favorite pictures of Sharon and Alaska out of my binder. He glanced at it for a second, and then waved it in front of my bruised and bleeding face.

“Who are these, you stupid fairy? Your mommy and daddy?”

Dammit! He was mocking me. I weakly nodded my head in utter shame. “Yes.” I was quiet until I heard the dreaded sound of the picture being ripped in half. I screamed until my throat hurt, delicately holding the two halves of the picture to my chest as they kicked at me with more force than earlier. I really thought that I was going to die. Then I peeked out of the corner of my eye, through my attacker’s legs. I knew in an instant who it was—Coco! Her lacrosse gear was strapped across her back, binder and a couple textbooks balanced in one arm. Eyes laced together in anger, she set her things down on the Senior Walk and raced toward the guys.

“What are you doing? Get off of him!” Pumped full of superhuman adrenaline, Coco pulled George away; I got to admit, she’s a badass. A *strong* badass. George was a mountain of muscle. Then she took hold of Jack and Andrew, tossing them aside like they were hay bales. Oh, boy, if only I could’ve seen the looks on their faces! I managed to crack

a tiny smile through my forthcoming tears. Coco placed her hands on her full hips as she looked George, Jack, and Andrew straight in the eyes. A look of pure unadulterated anger was on her face. She stood in front of me, shielding and protecting from the guys.

“Haven’t you fuckers learned anything? Why in the world would you do this?”

“Someone needed to change the little queer’s attitude.”

“Don’t you come for me with those words, Jack. Plus, when you say them, you’re hurting someone.”

“So? What are you going to do?” Andrew retorted.

Coco’s back straightened. “Unless you educate yourselves, the only attitude that needs to change is not his,” she jerked her thumb to point at me, “it’s yours. Now leave him be.”

All three of them left with shoulders hunched, tails tucked nice and tight between their legs. Scared shitless by Coco’s words. She crouched down to sit next to me, taking my face in her hands. Tender, motherly. I started sobbing, tears flowing without end.

“Thank you, Coco. I didn’t realize, or know, that they would hurt me as much as they did. They’re right! I am a stupid little fairy!”

“No you’re not, Jason. You’re confident, handsome, and beautiful in your own unique way. Calm down . . . Want me to sing to you?”

I sniffled, wiping my nose. “Sure.”

Coco drew me into her warm embrace, tan track and field sculpted arms holding me against her chest. She caressed my hair like I was a small child. “What’s your favorite song, Jason?”

“G-G-Glow in the Dark by S-S-Sharon Needles,” I managed to choke out.

“Okay, sweetie.” And she began to sing in her lovely soprano, softly, like a lullaby. It was comforting. “I want Charlie! Get Charlie! Please, Coco . . .”

“Alright, darling, I’ll get a hold of her. We stick together. It’ll be okay.” Placing a kiss on my bloodstained cheek, she got up to retrieve her phone from her gym bag. She immediately sent a text to Charlie in the time it took for me to blink as I rested my head on her bundled jacket

lying next to me on the ground. I am so grateful that Coco was there at the right time to save me. As I somewhat recovered, Charlie was sitting patiently in Mrs. Ryder’s Geometry class when her phone buzzed in her purse near her feet. After she finished the notes on the board, she pulled out her phone, eyebrows furrowed. She read the text:

*I New Message from--Coco Goodwin*

*Charlie. SOS. It’s Jason.*

Charlie’s mouth fell open, sucking in a breath. She rushed from her seat quick as a whip.

***Jack Olson / Remembrance***

Remember when skies were made of crystal  
and the stars were lamps that fell in the sea?  
I treasure that night with her, so blissful,  
the look in her eyes, her lovely body.

We spread a warm blanket under the stars.  
We pondered such lofty philosophy.  
The world never knew a love such as ours.  
We made love and wrote it in poetry.

But now here she lies, ill-natured and sour.  
Pain in her back, low spirits in her head.  
She sighs forever, hour by hour.  
She refuses to leave her pensive bed.

She fakes her infirmaries, head hangs aside.  
But her cheeks are still rosy, she can't hide.  
Faints on the floor, and languishes with pride.  
I help her to bed, I know that she lies.

On the opulent bed she sinks with woe,  
Cloaked in a muumuu for sickness and show.  
How will she be thought of after she dies?  
I choose to recall when joy filled her eyes.

***Priscilla Lopez / The Crave***

There's this itch  
on my hand,  
and I scratch  
and I scratch  
and I scratch  
until my skin becomes  
raw.

Sometimes there's  
relief,  
and the itch is gone  
and I can rest easily,  
but it comes back  
and it starts  
all over again.

## **Kelly Villalobos / The Paper that Slaughtered my Soul**

During my lifetime, I have survived countless atrocities. When I was in the fourth grade, my mother stopped packing my school lunches for me and told me I was on my own. In the sixth grade, my youngest brother chucked a hearty handful of human feces at me. Once, in the ninth grade, the “love of my life” had found and read a poem I had written about him. Every single one of these experiences left me questioning the worth of a human life and the cost of ending it. However, nothing tried my limits quite like my most recent calamity--a paper I wrote ten months ago titled “Who Are You?” Unfortunately, the paper is an accurate reflection of who I am. This is due to the fact that too many resources had been used to produce something ambiguous and fake that did not go anywhere.

“Everyone wants to be different,” I said. It was brutal. Only a few short words into this paper, and I had already committed an offense towards the individuality of all human beings. This statement was not written--it was spat into the literary eyes of its entire audience. To further ensure my reader’s anguish, I had not even attempted to explain why I believed that. And even then, there was no way I could have believed it. Many people want nothing more than to rid themselves of their personal differences and weed out any deviations. They do this to conform to the preposterous standards and consistently evolving expectations of their peers. When I was a young child, I wanted to fit in, too. In this paper about who I am, I had already lied about a fundamental aspect of my personality. It only took me about four seconds to realize that this essay would be the most astoundingly unsightly work I had ever laid my eyes on.

I continue to relentlessly massacre my own will to live with the first words of my next paragraph--“I believe that school is one of the most influential things in my life.” I cannot expect that any human being would be able to read past such a weak statement; it was far too vague. I found myself drifting off into a deep slumber at the very sight of it, and I was the one who wrote it. It would have been a great service to my reader if I had only illustrated the statement. I had the opportunity to show that if I

had not succeeded academically I would likely find my way to the streets in adulthood, unwashed and rueful. I missed that opportunity completely and instead gifted them a sleep aid that proved far more effective than any over-the-counter drug.

Later in the same paragraph, I talk about John Green. John Green is an overrated author of young adult novels, and in this paper, I named him “a great author.” At the time I had written this paper, I had not yet read any of his books. I did not know whether John Green was a great author or not, and clearly I was not fit to make that type of judgement.

It does not end there. In fact, it never ends. This essay provides an eternity within its few short pages. Its only purpose is to torture me, as abundantly shown in the next few sentences. I reference my “aspirations” and “goals” multiple times, but never elaborate. I never mention what those dreams and goals are. There is a lot of rambling on about how I intend to reach those goals, but no substantial details or solid information on my plan. I spend at least 200 words saying nothing.

You may be wondering when this hellish paper is put to a stop. I have told you, and I will tell you again: it never is. In “Who Are You?” I write an entire page about how I would like to become more proficient at writing. The sad truth is, dear reader, I never did learn to “better condense my writing” or “really get through to people with my words.” Ten months later, and I am still spewing garbage and scorching retinas on a regular basis. All I ever did by adding these “goals” was meet the word count.

Each statement should be vital to strengthening my message but none of them do. Especially the statements I make in this ironic passage about “becoming a much better writer in the future.” Becoming a better writer is not a worthwhile goal. There is no logical way to measure quality of writing. Even if one person’s measures had been used, it would always be arguable. The subject of English is so underdeveloped that every teacher has an almost entirely separate set of rules, so this goal could never be certainly reached. If I had instead set a goal such as, “Keep the verb tense consistent throughout my writing,” maybe this paper could have said something.

I do not even continue to make interesting mistakes. My paper is

full of the same nonsense, rephrased dozens of times. I keep tormenting my reader with padding when I tell them, “My environment prepares me for my future by encouraging me to learn and grow,” or “With the help of my education, I can achieve my goals in the future.” This paper is stuck in an infinite loop of nothingness. The essay is essentially a black hole, its gravitational pull so strong, not even the light of the reader’s eyes can escape it.

The closing paragraph is less of a conclusion and more of a final blow to any remnants of its reader’s soul. It is somehow a more excruciating restatement of the introduction. It does not tie up loose ends or clarify previous ideas or provide a feeling of closure. It does not even touch on key points of the essay. It is only a continuation of the meaningless page-filling. I finish it off using my favorite technique: throwing out a generalization and following it up with misinformation. My last two sentences read, “The ability to overcome personal obstacles is what makes each individual unique.” And then, “Originality is a wonderful trait that I am fortunate enough to have.” Of course.

Perhaps, if I had taken a step back and stopped congratulating myself for being so original, I would have noticed that I had actually used the exact same sentence twice in my essay. It is devastating that I thought my paper was strong and the message was clear. What is somehow more upsetting is the lack of improvement between then and now. My words were incredibly incoherent then, and today they are no different. I will always struggle when I am writing for academic purposes because I know that the paper I write so proudly is the same work I will later despise. I sit here composing another rough sheet of toilet paper that I will most likely regret in the near future. I am currently writing a future “Paper that Slaughtered my Soul.”

## *Alex Yamada* / **Do Not (a poem to read at my funeral)**

Do not weep, do not make a sound

Do not mourn me not being around

Do not let Death get you down

Do not worry I’m safe, in the ground

Do not be saddened by the sight of me, oh so pale

At least the mortician made a good sale.



*Crystal Yager*



*Suzanne Fox / Faded Beauty*



*Aleksis Reed*



*Jocelyn Sanchez / Sushi*



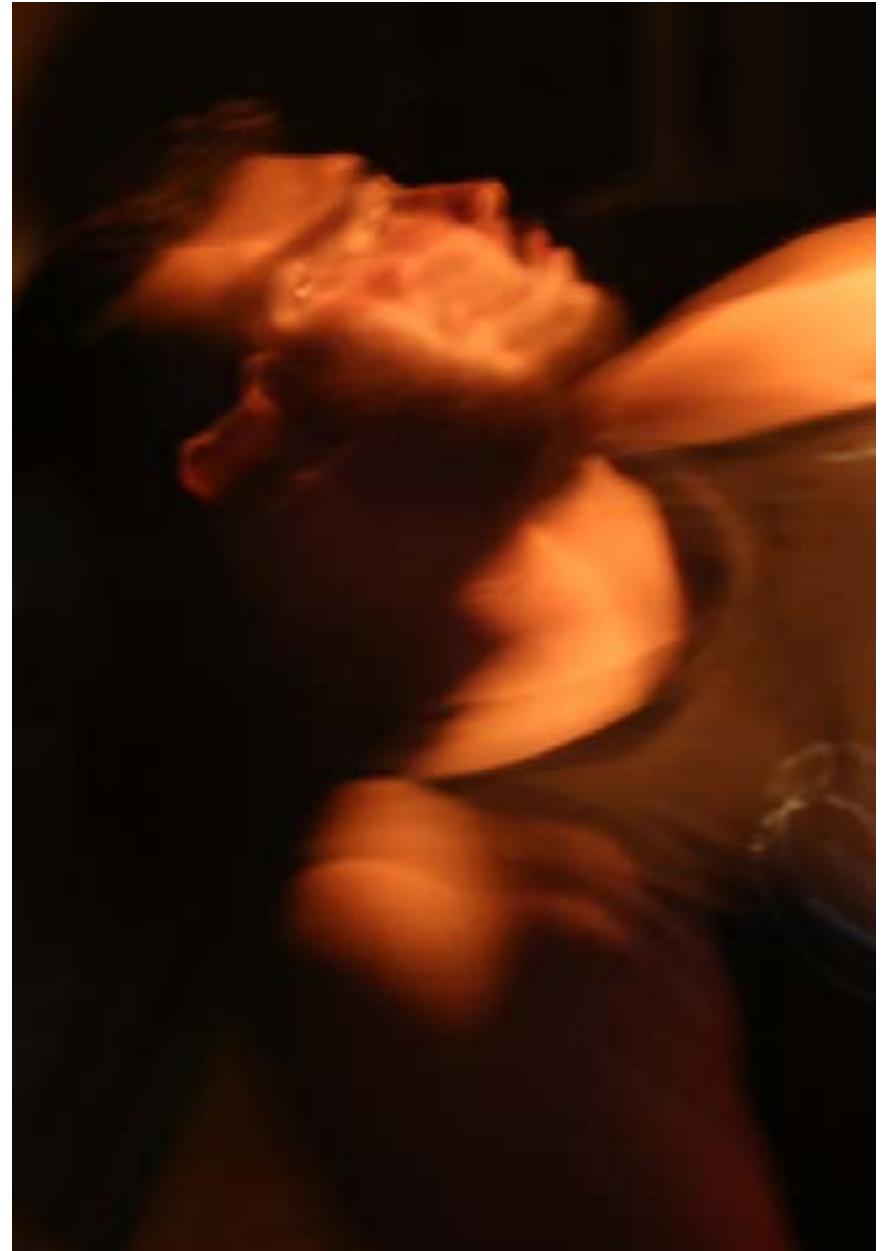
*Steven Hill / Daydream*



*Rebecca Langlands*



*Miguel Estrada* / Because Everything Is Not . . .  
What It Seems



*Andoni-josep Diaz*



*Kaylee Romine*



*Alex Yamada / Black Sun*

***Joshua Rivera / Inescapable***

Inescapability is the gift,  
Granted to those unwillingly  
Able to survive, the demise,  
Of nations once so prized.

When the past two hundred years,  
Don't define the minds of a culture  
Decimated, incarcerated, and redefined.

I think the situation or even the system,  
Is single handedly inhibiting,  
A population that is exhibiting,  
The characteristics of nonconformity.

Or maybe this noncompliance,  
Is the effort that can't seemingly comply,  
Abidingly to a system that has too long denied.

Equal rights.  
In exchange for systematically  
Separating, segregating, and underestimating,  
Those willing for change,  
By challenge and chains.

***Denise Gamez / I Am***

I am **loving and dependent**  
I wonder what lies ahead of me  
I hear the roar of waves, so far away from me  
I see a glowing light showing me the way  
I want to be more **loving and dependent** someday.

I pretend to be strong, even when I can't  
I feel my pain and guilt running through my veins  
I touch others with the words I have to say  
I cry like a child in pain  
I am **loving and dependent**.

I understand I'm only human with sensible feelings  
I say to others that I'll be fine  
I dream of happier times  
I try not to disappoint those dear to me  
I hope for the best . . . in all things  
I am **loving and dependent**.

## ***Brenna Sydney Fregozo / The Bird Who Touched the Sun***

The world looked so small when I died. When I was born, I was a tiny, brown bird. I hatched from an egg that was directly below the sun. I could only see its glow and it had hurt my eyes. But then it helped me to see my mother. She had been bigger than I, though as we would explore the world together would I realize that she was a tiny part of a world filled with giants.

Our wings could barely lift us up. We could only fly short distances as the Gods had designed us to be better suited for the Earth. Upon my hatching, I was called Ratite. It was a unique name, but one that would lead the other animals to mock me. As I was gifted with the talent of digging burrows, many would refer to me as “Rat” rather than Ratite. It did not bother me as I was blessed to be a part of a loving family that I could dig tunnels with. We were proud of our brown wings. We were proud of our beaks which could put a mole to shame. The mud cooled us down in heated summers while also warming us up amidst the freezing winters. We didn’t have to migrate and we could see each other at any point in the day.

There was one I felt the most grateful towards: the Sun. Although we were birds that shunned the world above, it was the Sun that scared off the clouds and the rain so that when we emerged we could play for hours. The Sun gave us light that provided our sight. I could see the other birds, all brightly colored and long, flying to the clouds that were underneath the Sun. In days to come, I prayed to the Sun that one day, I might be able to fly to it and touch its gold.

One day, I had gone to the world above in search of honey to treat my family. While I was away, the Sun had lost to the rain, and I took shelter inside the heart of a nearby tree. Rain was nothing new to us; we had built strong foundations that would deter the water that would rush through our holes. But this time was different. The rain had lasted longer than what we had been used to. It lasted for weeks. I stayed put inside my tree as I chewed on the termites that dared to invade my shelter. Once the rain stopped, the Sun had come out again. I flew to the burrows, only

to find my family popping out of the water that formed a stream. Some bodies were faced down, others were faced towards me. I flew down as I landed on a piece of bark that had floated among the watery graveyard. My mother was there, too. Her body bumped against the bark. I dragged her on top and huddled my head close to her chest. She was so cold and so wet. I pushed the bark away from the stream. I dug up a proper grave for my mother. It was her turn to give her body to the insects and bugs we once ate. And it was my time to leave my home and find a way to reach the Sun.

I travelled the world and asked every animal that I came across if they knew someone who had touched the Sun. All of their answers could be summed up as no. That is, until I found a caterpillar with a long, green body and horns emerging from its back. They spoke to me, “My kind has touched the sun.” I asked how. “We give up our earthly forms to stay in capsules. When we emerge, we are given large wings that are made of fire. We do not live long, but we do migrate to the sun while we are alive. If you’d like, you may accompany me on my life journey. When I become a fire moth, I will lead you to the path of the sun.”

And so, the caterpillar and I remained together for a time. They, too, had lost their family. The short life spans do not leave room for them to really get to know others of their kind. The caterpillar was also mocked, for although they looked frightening, they could do no real damage to predators. We were alone in a world that had made us so unlike others of our kind. The time came for the caterpillar to create the cocoon. And so I waited patiently next to it.

During my wait, a large, white bird came and attacked. It had an intimidated glare, with claws that ripped apart its fair share of prey, no matter the size. I hid my friend behind me as the devilish bird circled around us. “You’re that Rat bird, aren’t you?” it asked. “Your kind makes for a fulfilling meal, but I grew tired of your taste now. That cocoon, however, looks appetizing.” As it drew its head closer, I pecked its head. It laughed. “Why protect something we birds have always eaten?” I spread my wings and readied my beak. My friend would not have a short life because of that brute. The ghastly bird grabbed me easily, but I dug my claws into its throat. It released me momentarily as I scooped up my friend. I cre-

ated distance between us, although my wings could not keep up for long. I hadn't been used to flying for so long and at such a height. I realized, then, that I had been getting closer to the Sun. But the white bird flew around us and was shooting itself straight for the cocoon. I felt my friend coming out. They would come out with their own wings. And so, I threw the cocoon out as my friend emerged as a flame moth. The white bird pierced through me with its beak. It used its claws to get me off and I fell down.

My friend tried to come after me, but I told them to touch the Sun's gold for me. They couldn't keep up with the speed I was falling in. And so they left to the Sun. Upon landing on the ground, I could see every little bit of grain and minerals that made it up. The tiny strands of plants and the fur that came down, too. They had been the last I had seen of my first life.

I heard voices. I felt something warm carry me. "Oh, brave little bird," the voice said, "you have earned your chance to start anew. You will be dosed in the Sun and emerge. You will die, but be reborn with the same flames as the Sun." Very soon, I woke up surrounded in warm, glowing fire. I came out as a red and orange giant and flew over the Earth. Some places caught my flames, and those places would be reborn, too. I transformed birds that were alone to be like me. I took them in to be a part of my family. My friend was granted the gift to be reborn as one of us. Together we flew and touched the Sun. Together we became the greatest bird to grace the Earth: the phoenix.

## *Patricia Ellis* / **The Ballerina**

One day, while performing her dance routine, the Ballerina turned and found true love outside the encasement of her glass globe. This love set her free from the prison of the globe. Her profound love filled her with happiness and joy, allowing her to dance openly around the room with complete abandon. It was only a dream. Sadly, the Ballerina stopped and found herself still trapped inside the glass globe.

***Ciara Hughes / That Night (Days Apart Count) \ Vanished***

The night of our first Valentine  
It was a picture black that I could barely make footed  
    where I was going  
There was just a bit a *light* that I might get noticed  
All those thoughts uncertain suddenly rushed in me  
That first ring of that bell made me frightened  
After seeing him I felt more nervous what I had in my hands  
We had SIMPLY seconds alone  
Those hugs weren't enough for me he knew that  
I had taken what I could get couldn't whine like a child  
Eventually he had me giggling then made me feel loved that night  
That night *his heart* was racing while he saw me *first*  
His night was brighter than all times, we spent last time  
It was our night for a second in the universe  
Walking back to my door,  
for I wasn't ready to let go of you  
in that dusky falls linger in the air . . .  
days apart count, you take hold of me *gently*  
I was a wreck in these hours sitting in your car  
It got better for *me*, you held my hand while just spending the day  
Hearing that laugh made me fall deeper in love with *you*  
Driving back you filled me up with smiles, bear hugs  
Those kisses were sweet, tender; however, this time around

was extraordinary how seriously he *missed* his girlfriend  
We walked back to my front door, standing so still to keep *warm*  
before you *left* me you gave a small peck  
gone  
A bad nightmare came in and steals the happiness  
Who now sees just brokenness and anger?  
We try to imagine what took hold that hasn't fully made sense  
That what occurs with your close friend  
Somehow I had to pick up the pieces that *burnt* me  
She begged to meet a couple of friends then vanished in months  
I had to ask her if I will see her again.  
She wasn't clear how to reply to me  
Now it just dawdles in the atmosphere  
Sooo . . .  
I had stopped waiting *several* months for her to care  
Bye.

## *Christina Avalos / The Owl and the Stork*

In the midst of the night there was an owl, who was having a drink of whisky, just as he always had. He would drink his whisky and brush his feathers in front of a mirror every night before going out. This owl was known by many of the lady birds in town. He had the nicest feathers and the roundest eyes, and he knew that he was gifted with such charming looks. Whenever he went out into town at night, the lady birds would flock to him and fly next to him with the hope that he, one day, would ask them to marry him.

One night, Miss Marabou Stork decided that that night was the night she would finally talk to Mr. Owl. She had heard all about him and spotted him in town a few times but never really had the time to talk to him. Her mother, you see, was a town witch who made Marabou Stork learn all of the spells in existence. Miss Marabou Stork was destined to be the town's healing bird and spent much of her time learning spells day and night.

So, that night, after Miss Marabou Stork's mother went to sleep, Miss Marabou flew out to town to finally talk to Mr. Owl. She saw Mr. Owl sitting perched with fifty lady birds surrounding him. Miss Marabou Stork walked gracefully up to Mr. Owl and the crowd of birds parted for her.

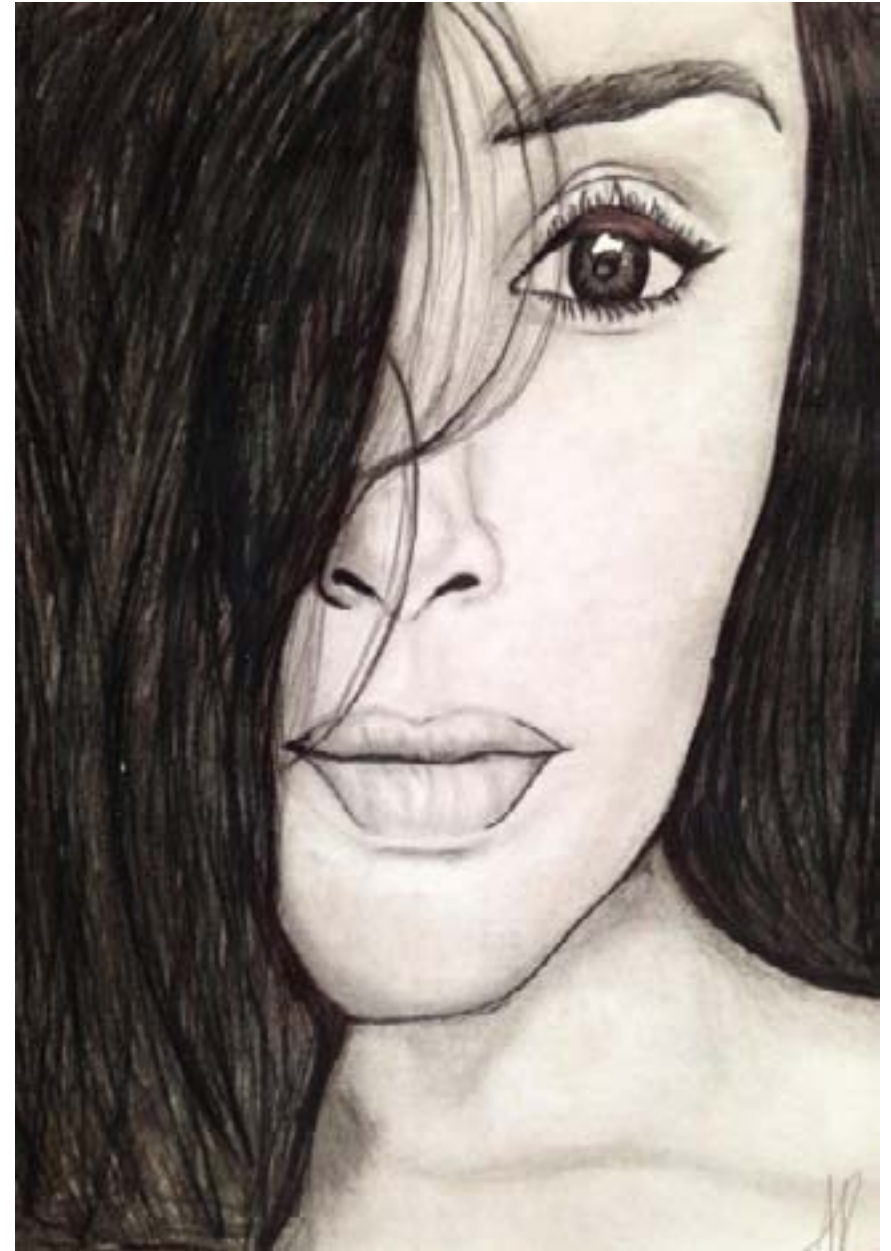
Now, everyone knows that Miss Marabou Stork is not the prettiest of birds; however, all birds had much respect for Miss Marabou and her family, as they were the town's healers. It seemed as though everyone knew whom the town's healers were, except for maybe Mr. Owl, because, just as Miss Marabou Stork approached Mr. Owl, he looked at her with his big brown eyes, screeched really loud and said, "Why, you are the ugliest thing on the face of the earth! Be off with you!" In that moment, all birds were silent. The father of Miss Marabou Stork had overheard Mr. Owl and immediately cast a spell on him to never hurt another's feelings again. Miss Marabou was just so embarrassed and heart

broken. All of the lady birds turned an eye away from Mr. Owl and flew to the comfort of Miss Marabou Stork.

It was after that day and still today that Mr. Owl has no friends. He sits alone up high and has only one word in his vocabulary, and that word is "who," because Mr. Owl will be alone and asking "Who? Who? Who?" as in "Who will be my friend?" for the rest of his lonely life. And that is why we should be kind to all, regardless of prettiness or ugliness in appearance.



*Devaun Hebert* / Back to Back



*Alyssa Rietsch*

## ***Daicia Crouch / Be Careful, You Never Know . . .***

“I want to see this very special night through your eyes.” Chaz’s mother said as she pinned the corsage to his fitted coat pocket. She had custom made everything for this night. His senior prom night. He was about to graduate so soon. She wanted it to be perfect. His date was his high school sweetheart, Aniela. Dace even made Aniela’s dress and their corsages by hand. The pins through the corsages had tiny cameras in them. Dace planned on making scrap books of moments from this night.

She tucked her tears away, took one last photo and kissed him on the cheek. She said to her most beloved son and only child, “No matter what happens, or where this life takes you, please remember this. I will always love you, you are stronger than you may know. And be careful. Always use your intelligence, you never know.” He stood there slightly confused and asked, “You never know what?” His mother smiled slightly and answered, “Exactly.”

Dace tucked him in the car and stood there, as he backed her graduation gift to him, out of the driveway. A while after he had left, she finally went inside and sat down at her computer desk. She had to know if he was safe, so she opened her video monitoring system and pulled up his camera feed. She watched him pull into his date’s driveway. He got out with her corsage, and walked to the front door. Aniela’s father was the one to open the door, just as Dace knew he would. The kids had been dating for a few years, so Dace had met Aniela’s parents many times. She pegged him as the over protective, “show your masculinity to intimidate your daughter’s boyfriend” type.

Everything was perfect, he was polite and humble the entire time. From making a great impression on Aniela’s parents, to being a perfect gentleman all throughout the night. As they were leaving the school, Chaz noticed he was running out of gas, so he stopped a few miles away from the freeway. For some reason, the freeway was packed, perhaps because it was a summer weekend. To bypass the traffic, he decided to take the mountain freeway. This put an extra fifteen minutes on his driving time,

but he thought it was worth it to pass the chaos and make the night last just a little longer.

About twenty minutes on the secluded, tree-lined highway, there was a loud noise in the distance. From the computer feed, Dace couldn’t quite make out what the sound could be, or from which direction it was coming. Chaz wanted to cover his ears but resisted because he didn’t want to drive off the road. The sound was so loud, seeming to come from all round, and lasted around three minutes. Once the horrible noise subsided, dead silence ensued. Aniela was clinging to Chaz’s jacket, terrified by this strange happening and silent as a whisper. Chaz was tense and so was his mom, who was unmoving watching him drive with an emotional petrification.

The silence was so eerie that when it hit, everyone was stunned. Something as big as a semi-truck hurtled through the tree line, moving lightning fast towards the car. Within a matter of seconds, the object had collided with the car and for a few moments, Dace couldn’t see anything but moving blurs. She was in shock and disbelief. After a few seconds, the moving stopped and she could see small movements from Aniela’s corsage camera. Dace was terrified by the images in sight but couldn’t really make out what was happening yet. Dace recovered enough to get her phone and call 9-1-1.

When the police arrived at the scene, there was nothing to be discovered. Both Chaz and Aniela and the vehicle’s wreckage vanished without even a trace of glass. Dace showed the police the video footage, yet they could not offer any explanations. Living without her only son would not be something she could go the rest of her life doing. She promised a silent vow to never stop looking for him, at any cost. She did the only reasonable thing that came to her mind. Picking up the phone, she hit speed dial. Waiting for him to pick up the phone, she tapped her finger lightly on the desk. When he answered the phone, she did not wait for him to speak before she said, “Our son is missing, you will help me find him.”

## *Miguel Audor / Cycles*

Fag. Bitch. Queer.

Sticks and Stones

Break my bones

But words can

Never hurt me,

But my soul

Breaks, crumbles, dies .

Fag. Bitch. Queer.

Dark. Scared. Alone.

Memories I Remember.

With no one

To accept me.

With no one

To understand me.

Fag. Bitch. Queer.

Disappear. Cut. Suicide.

Thoughts I conceive.

With no one

to miss me.

With no one

to save me.

Fag. Bitch. Queer.

Friend. Lover. Mentor.

Experiences I lived.

With someone

To love me.

With someone

To appreciate me.

Fag. Bitch. Queer.

Hope. Salvation. Love.

Emotions I experience.

With someone

To protect me.

With someone

To hold me.

Fag. Bitch. Queer.

But my soul

Builds, Empowers, Strengthens.

Sticks and stones

Break my bones

But words can

Never hurt me

***Kaylee Romine / In My Skin***

When I was alive  
I felt, I touched and I protected  
From the beginning I was covered  
I was soft and I was new  
As time went on I grew  
I peeled, I bruised, I sweat  
And if I felt dry I moisturized  
But when I aged  
I stretched and I wrinkled  
Then. I was burned because  
In the end it was my turn  
Now I rest in pieces in this urn.

***Brandy Donini / Alyssa***

I know you didn't ask to be brought into this world,  
That alone was my choice  
I alone bear the responsibility of every aspect of your life,  
Guiding you in a path that leads to success  
I gave you life and nursed you through infancy  
As a toddler I taught you to speak and walk  
I nursed your boo boo's and dried your tears  
I gave you kisses and hugs  
Made sure you felt loved  
I read you stories, tucked you into bed  
I listened to you speak  
Answered your questions  
You'll never understand the sacrifices I made  
You've been my world since the day you were born  
I never realized how much I could love another  
You'll never know the extent of my love for you  
You saved a life I never knew was worth living  
Gave me purpose when I thought I had none

## *Emerie Valentin / Wish*

1. It's three a.m. and she wishes that she could sleep. There is a space in her bed as there has been from the moment she was born. If only there was someone that would take her hand and listen to her whisper into the middle of the night until she drifts off to their comfort. She wants to talk of her grand dreams that are out of reach. She wants to talk about how she's not so alone when someone is with her. There is no such thing.
2. She wishes her boyfriend of two years could be that thing. Except he's too far away, in a house different from her own. Even though she's an adult, she still lives with her parents who beg her to stay. They want her to take care of things around the house that they're too lazy to. Her boyfriend says goodnight to her every time he thinks she's going to sleep, and good morning every time she wakes up in the form of texts. He calls whenever he can, and it's obvious he is completely in love with her.
3. She wishes that she was in love with him, too. Except there is nothing where there is supposed to be something. Every kiss tastes like ash and she feels disgust every time he holds her hand. She can feel his nervous pulse when he pulls her in for a hug, and she wonders what he could be nervous for. They knew each other for so long that there was nothing new. Nothing fresh. Everything is boring her to tears. In her memory, she recalls all the times that she spent with him and when her heart was full, but now there is an emptiness that she can't fix.
4. It's three-thirty a.m. and she is in the bathroom staring at the mirror. There are shadows underneath her eyes, making her appear more tired than she really is. Her hands are shaking as she rests them against the counter, eyes dull as she takes in her appearance. She wishes that she didn't see bones instead of a person. Her pajamas lay low on her waist and her cheeks are sunken into her skull. Her lips are red from chewing them all the time. There are scabs

on the

left side of them. Along her arms are spidery veins that rise from her skin like mountains. All her fault lines brought them up when she shakes.

5. Still, she knows she can't gain weight no matter how hard she tries. Besides, it was better to be skinny than anything else in this society. At least, that's what she tells herself. She ignores her mother who tells her to eat more, even when she feels as if she's going to be sick. Her body is faster than her mouth. In high school, girls told her that she was lucky she's so skinny, but then when they thought she wasn't listening words like "anorexic" or "skinny bitch" were thrown like knives. The scars still reside in her subconscious. To this day, she ignores that everything falls off her hips or that everything never fits right because she's lucky.
6. She'd be luckier if her dad wasn't home.
7. She wishes her mom divorced him when she threatened to do so back when she was still in middle school. He is moody and dark and everything that she is afraid of. Sometimes she swears he walks the halls at night, waiting for her to wander into the bathroom and snatch her soul. He breathes out insults like others breathe out carbon dioxide, and he breathes in her sobs as if it's what sustains his life. She can't remember a time where her father was ever kind.
8. It's four a.m. and she's back in her bed. Her hands are itching to grab her phone as she whispers to herself that she will sleep. She has class at eight and she needs sleep. This is something that never happens. Instead, her eyes wander over to where her desk is and she sees the silhouette of books resting on top of it. She never reads. Not anymore. The words are too small for her always tired eyes and the pages are gone. Her father rips them out while she is away. He says that the only books she needs to read are her textbooks. She hasn't touched any other book since.
9. She wishes for some way to escape. She envisions a mysterious stranger appearing at her window saying he'll whisk her away, but she immediately feels guilty for the boyfriend she doesn't

love. She hates that every touch makes her flinch. He doesn't even realize he's doing it. He thinks that she loves him, too. She is wonderful at pretending. Her words are sugar coated and sweet. White lies that don't need to be found out. They spill from her tongue like honey and he believes every word. Tears prick her eyes because she's lying to him. She should stop seeing him, but she knows that if she does she'll be completely alone.

10. It's five a.m. and she knows she's not going to sleep. Perhaps she'll never sleep again. She watches with blurry vision as light starts to creep up the horizon from outside her window. She buries herself a little further under the covers as if she can escape the day, but she knows that she can't. She never can. For once, though, she wishes that she can.

## ***Kamili Germany / Starry Sky***

Quiet afternoons and somber evenings.

The world quietly sits about the

Young partyer's head as she doubts

Herself in her own woman-made social worlds,

And social words.

She begins to prepare as she keeps

Awaiting all her friends at the party.

Her wicked wild midnight life begins

Quickly.

As she travels from party to party

Teen-angst, boy trouble,

Bleeding hearts and drunkenness, she

Remembers how glitter lights up like meteorites,

She's a nebulae science fantasy

Girl in her heart, though it upsets her

Sometimes.

Walking under the starry sky

Amongst alcohol cups left on the desert

Ground. She peers around at the space

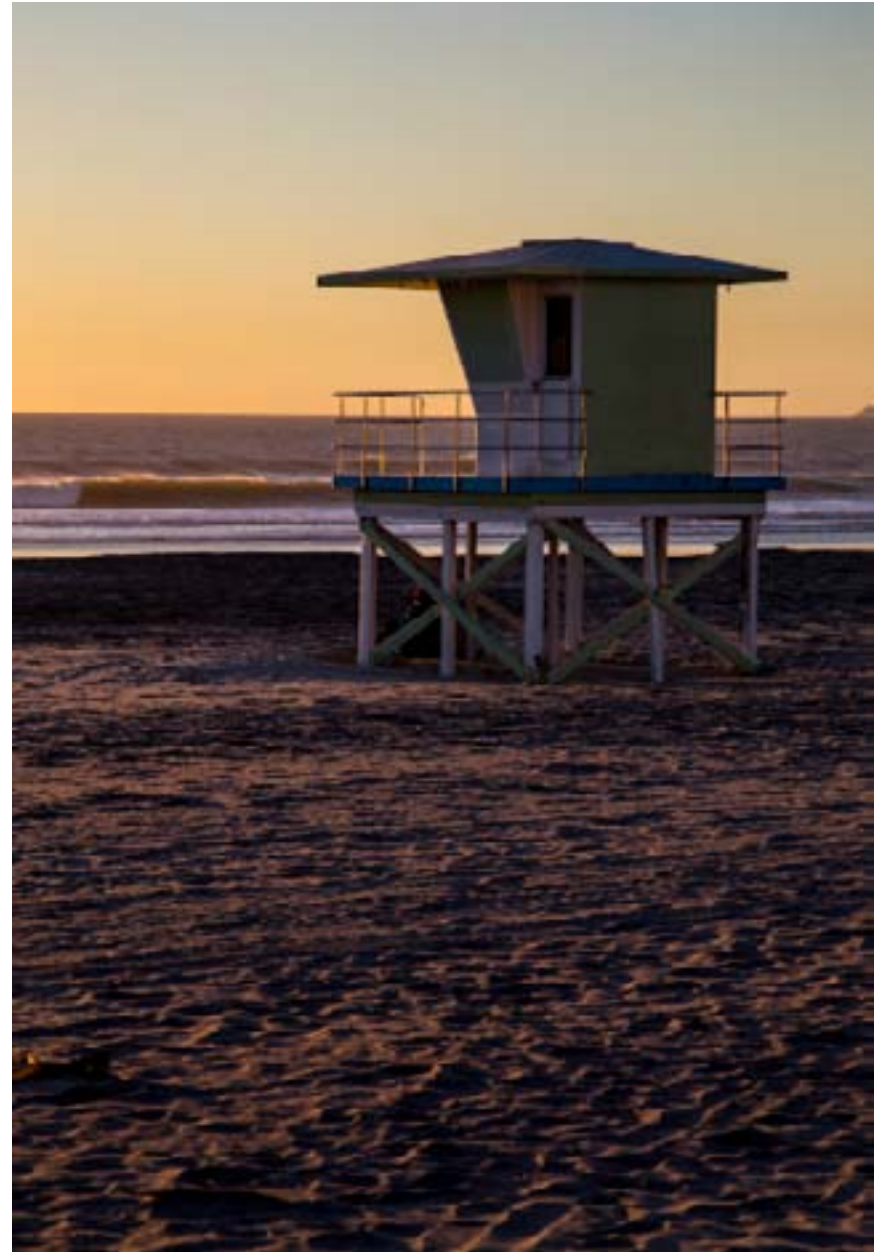
Traveler, at the technology computer

Kingdoms in the valley below the

Desert mountainous hills.



*Brittany VanBuskirk*



*Sheryl Lopez*

## *Desiree Vasquez* / Side by Side

The way she looks and feels  
takes my breath away  
The moment we met I knew  
I knew that she was the one  
something whispered to me  
inside my soul, "This is the one."  
She is the light in my dark world  
Every moment I see her  
my heart skips a beat  
Everyone sees the outside parts of her  
They truly don't know her like I do  
She is the love in this world  
that I have been searching  
for all of my life  
I was lost in this world  
walking with my head down  
walking with my soul broken  
until the day that I met her  
the woman that has been  
changing my life since day one  
we both were nervous when we met  
I was nervous more than she

In all of my life I have never felt that  
way before  
the way she took my breath away  
the way she looked at me  
she continues to look at me  
the way she did the first day we met  
she still takes my breath away  
I get lost in her when I think of her,  
when I see her,  
when I touch her,  
when I kiss her  
I look into her eyes and I can see  
her soul,  
her heart,  
her love,  
her all  
I can see her clearly  
she is my queen in this world  
She always will be  
even in death we will forever be  
SIDE BY SIDE

## ***Chanel Smith / A Black Woman Speaks***

If you think we the same,  
You are the black person who has  
Name, who talks and sings for a dime to come,  
Will you help me when the  
time comes? Will you come up  
when the police harass? Are you ok that  
I'm darker than ash or do I have to be lighter than light?  
Are you okay that I have fried chicken for dinner tonight?  
Do you care if my hair is curly or does it have to be straight  
for your sake?  
Are we the same if I kiss you with my big lips or have your  
hands on my big hips?  
Will you love me all the same or am I what the media told you  
a ghetto  
Dark skin woman with no future ahead?

## ***Angie Medrano / Beauty***

Beauty  
She comes in all shapes and sizes, in all forms  
Yet,  
She is taken from left to right  
Beaten  
Down  
She is taken and is told she needs to improve, she needs to change  
Because she is not living quite up to the standards  
Yes,  
She is slightly below  
Yet,  
Who is taking this Beauty into mere man's hands?  
What do his lips have to say?  
Beauty is of her own  
She is defined by something  
Else  
Something Divine  
Something man cannot handle on his own  
She is the standard

## ***Solana Ortega / Untitled***

I

Wind chimes quietly speaking and warm wind grazes over your skin  
The college radio is playing a weird collective of music  
Feeling beautiful and appreciated  
Yellow daffodils popping up around us  
The myriad of tulips too  
Watching the flowers bloom was my favorite thing to do  
Cooing at squirrels that pass us  
In 18 years, I've never seen one  
You talked about the seagulls on the bay  
Picking up caterpillars and ladybugs  
Naming them, just because  
My head was in the grass  
And yours too  
Decorating your long brown hair with flowers  
And mine with grass  
My heart feels bright  
I think you can see it glow from under my shirt  
I'm so glad I found a friend like you

II

The colors of the sky as it rises and falls  
Dark, purple, pink, orange, red, yellow  
Then blue  
Counting the stars  
On a Tuesday at 4 a.m.  
It no longer felt like impending doom

Exploring Corvallis on a Sunday morning  
It was what you liked to do  
We found a cat and I loved you

Sitting in the middle of the street  
Passing a cigarette from my mouth to yours  
Spring was coming to an end  
Being open and honest  
This is where I felt I always belonged  
With you  
Did you ever move to Temecula?  
Or did you go back to Orange?

I wish you hadn't cut me off  
I just wanted to be with you

## ***Elisabet Salas-Alvarado / I Am***

Together my features are quite plain,  
Average at best.  
But take me apart,  
oh  
Take me apart and  
I am a series of masterpieces.  
Divine creations.  
I am like one of Picasso's twisted paintings  
I am the beauty that is  
Looked upon by all but  
Enjoyed only by a few.  
I am a series of masterpieces  
Thrown together,  
Quite average,  
Quite plain,  
Beautiful and ugly and  
Me.

## ***Joshua Rivera / The Struggle***

While silver-tongued devils  
Dictate, debate, and demand.  
Still, we struggle.  
Struggle with the strife,  
Held through the separation of nations.

A nation's birthright revoked,  
Through repression of aggressive actions,  
Ascertained after the fact.  
The facts we seemingly wish to forget.

The mountain of skulls,  
Buried above and beneath,  
Blanketed with the pox of friendship.  
Still, we debate the degradation of nation  
Birthed from immigration.

This is the home of the brilliant,  
Built on the back of the braves.  
Still, they are the traders.  
Treated like second-class citizens ceasing to exist.

We have a chance to change the status quo,  
And not keep the token in the cupboard,  
Just to remember and resemble a time now forgotten,  
Only by those who wish to forget.  
These lives now bearing the burden of bigotry of the bourgeoisie.

***Capree Lambrose / “Acts of Love”***

I may be tender, I may be fragile.  
but you treat me as a doll and I'm not that at all.  
you're like a young child.  
play once and toss away.  
you do this repeatedly, and yet no one notices . . .  
only we hold this secret, a horrible bond.  
you touch.  
you push.  
you pull.  
you grab.  
you beat.  
I hurt.  
I bruise.  
I FEEL.  
They see and hear the evidence and continue to ALLOW  
you to commit this “act of love.”  
But it isn't that at all, is it?  
Why me? when there were so many others.  
But now I see why me.  
The youngest, unable to fight back,  
Unable to understand what was happening.  
I now understand what she allowed.  
I see clearly what you've done to me.  
I cannot love.  
I cannot feel.  
I cannot touch.  
A cripple of the heart.  
Unable to feel.  
That's what they will call me.  
Not knowing what you did.  
Not knowing how this happened.  
No one ever will.  
I'll keep my secret.  
They will never know I'm weak.  
because I'll never tell,  
because I loved my daddy and he knew this as well.

***Cody Rukasin / Candela***

The building  
is on fire  
  
careless  
like a wisp  
of wax  
  
balled  
into  
fervor.

## ***Priscilla Lopez / IT***

There comes a time in your life

when you have to do *it*.

“it” is existential.

“it” is taking a chance on those fears we dwell over.

“it” is that nerve we bury deeply.

“it” is stealing our first kiss.

“it” is facing that question our heart buries.

“it” is today

but no longer yesterday.