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SAGA Art & Literary Magazine

Spring 2024

SAGA Vol.87 / 2023-24

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SAGA

art & lit mag

vol. 87

2023-2024

SAGA ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE

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Cover art by
Lindsay DeBuhr

Augustana College's student-run
and student-submitted publication

SAGA

volume 87

2023-2024

“Writing, then, was a substitute for myself:
if you don’t love me, love my writing & love me
for my writing. It is also much more: a way of ordering
and reordering the chaos of experience.”

– Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*

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about *SAGA*

SAGA is Augustana College's art and literary magazine, which has been published by students since 1937. While *SAGA* traditionally published two magazines per academic school year, one in winter and one in spring, it has been published as a single, larger issue since 2014.

The goal of *SAGA* and its staff members is to spread and showcase student art and writing around Augustana's campus, and to increase the prevalence of creative spaces and outlets around the place students call home. Those of any major, interest, or background are encouraged to submit, uninhibited and uncensored.

Submissions are open exclusively to currently enrolled Augustana students. All submissions are sent anonymously to hired genre editors and their volunteer student boards who have selected the pieces published in this issue.

We are proud to present this year's selected pieces in *SAGA vol. 87*.

Cover art by Lindsay DeBuhr

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letters from the editors

The availability of art is ever-changing. For example, I only learned about Glimmer Train Press because of its closure. Stumbling upon their website for the first time, I found what appeared to be a sparse page—*Glimmer Train Stories* can only be found in a handful of libraries, and much of their website is formatted as a goodbye. However, I did find a page full of bulletins dating back to 2009. Ten years of essays on writing were suddenly at my fingertips.

The internet holds an extraordinary amount of information on writing. Many people online claim to hold the secret to a successful writing career; Glimmer Train never offered that. Instead, it offered a community of passionate people. The essays Glimmer Train published were sincere explorations of the little things that can be so fascinating and frustrating about writing. At a time in which the value of art is becoming more about its commerciality than its humanity, these essays feel like a breath of fresh air.

In *SAGA*, I hope you will find the same feeling of sincerity. These pages are full of artists for whom the making of art is joyful, necessary, and meaningful. The world benefits from the creation and sharing of thoughtful art. Poetry, prose, and visual art forms allow students to express themselves in unique ways, and I am so grateful to have the opportunity to share these works with you.

On the closing of Glimmer Train, Bret Anthony Johnston wrote an essay to remind us of the importance of making and engaging with art. One quote in particular from this essay has stuck with me for many years: “We will keep bearing witness in stories because they are their own kind of reverie and there’s no surer place to dream than in the deepest and most consuming dark.”

Lainey Terfruchte
Co-editor-in-chief

I recently watched Hayao Miyazaki’s *Castle in the Sky*. It was a film I’m sure would’ve been decorated as an early childhood favorite, if anyone had thought to show it to me, but even without the easily delighted eyes of an eight-year-old, I liked it very much.

I mention it to you here because the film contains two sequences that to my mind marry into a statement about the act of making such a film, or indeed, making anything at all. In the first, a frightened child dares to utter a long string of words without knowing what power they hold, only for her spell to resurrect a broken heap of machinery that fell from its home in the sky. The robot is an unstable wreck, but by awakening it, a new chance at freedom and discovery is made possible.

In the second sequence, the climax of the film, two children decide with considerable gravity to speak a single word that will destroy the very foundations of an entire city. From here, an understanding emerges: to destroy something is fast and easy. You might do it with intense purpose and good intentions, but it will never demand as much from you as an act of creation. What’s more, the thing you might create is perhaps only half its form, shambling and clumsy with no control over its own dimensions—but it will be alive, in its own way, and that alone is worthy of wonder. When you destroy something, you must do it with the knowledge of what exactly will be gone when you are done. When you take the risk of making something, you must do it without knowing exactly what will be made.

I don’t mean to impose upon you anything too grand about the literal action required for writing a poem, or painting a picture. These are material processes that on their own might produce many outcomes outside the realm of reanimating a robot from the sky. Our goal then, is to produce any outcome, no matter how trivial or how daunting. If you abandon your creative impulse, if the fear of uncertainty becomes too great, you withhold from yourself and from the world the ongoing process by which both develop.

In the pages of *SAGA*, there may be no string of words to revive the dead or level the face of a city, but there are words of sincerity, risk, danger, and discovery all the same. There are images and questions and exclamations composed where there never was before. That on its own, too, is worthy of a little wonder.

Megan Yarusso
Co-editor-in-chief

A Letter From Britt, Iowa

Walking with Marigolds
they line the path
on the crest of the hill
Down the Eastern path—
Follow the rails, until you hear the wheat
amber horizons between each grain
capture the sun
and never forget to smell the rain
Lady bugs to greet you, sparrows to call your name
Further, near the creek, a Willow smiles
blankets of violet, yellow, and pink
cascade through the petaled-leaves
and make home on the water
The Toads will need to meet you
The Leopard frogs will need to dance
Set your watch, you won't want to miss your chance
Get a running start—they'll cheer you on from the pond
Ride the rail East, and go from Rock Island—on

Paige Beggs

Clingmans Dome



Lexi Golab

-inspired by my flower notepad-

ropes of wisteria wind around
an open aisle
flanked by promises of
“i do” and
“til death do us part”

bundles of garnet roses
entwined between slender fingers
trapping young hearts
into thorns of passion
and vows

rows of rigid sunflowers
bleed into sunlight
casting shadows on
thin gold bands, on
forever

Sarah Welker

my childhood home

nail polish stains on the bathroom floor
a dent here or there in my bedroom door

pieces of tape still stuck to the wall
baby pictures of me all throughout the hall

pencil markings to see how much i had grown
boxes full of barbies and an old toy phone

splatters of paint embedded in a rug
gifts i've been given, like a "world's best daughter" mug

houses made from lincoln logs
and all my stuffed animals, like cats and dogs

sesame street VHses
and disney princess costume dresses

playing with littlest pet shops and legos
and watching raindrops on the car windows

a zoo-pals dinner plate
and my mom planning me a playdate

making a snowman with my best friend
and crafting a cardboard spaceship to play pretend

dad picking me up from school
and getting home and jumping in the pool

my brother and i saying "trick or treat"
and drawing with chalk on the concrete

dressing up in mom's pretty blouses
and decorating my favorite dollhouses

oh my childhood home
i was so glad to call you my own

Poetry

Charley Williams

Cherry Pie



Oil Painting

Bethany Abrams
Girlhood

I have never felt more like myself than during sleepovers with her. Throughout our friendship, especially in the summer, I slept over at her house nearly every week. In fact, we often couldn't hang out without it turning into something more. No matter when I would come over, she insisted on brewing us coffee poured into Mason jars to ensure we would stay up all night. One day, she switched things up and made us some raspberry tea. While hers was in her usual jar, she gave me a tiny teacup adorned with canary yellow roses. After tea, we washed the dishes together, enjoying a few more moments alone before her family came down to prepare dinner. Rather than rush upstairs, she guided me into her empty living room and told me she was learning how to dance. She never just showed me her hobbies. Instead, she insisted that I learn alongside her. Grabbing my hands, she counted softly to herself as I attempted to follow her movements. Although I was bad at dancing and had a decidedly tense body, any embarrassment I had disappeared as she whispered, "Good job." We danced for hours until the sun set. I'm not sure if I improved, but I never gave up on learning, and she never gave up on me. We spent the next few hours watching horror movies, but they were never scary. Maybe it was because we talked through them, or maybe it was just because she was by my side. As we drifted into sleep, I always ended the night with a secret. I wanted to share a sliver of my own life hoping she would feel as connected to me as I did to her. We knew each other well, and I let her in more than anyone else before. At the time, I would have danced with her forever. Yet, we grew up, grew apart, and we both let it happen. We now have different best friends, and the only pieces of our lives shared with one another are through the pictures everyone else sees.

Karen Rizzo
Insomnia

Nearly
asleep
in my childhood room, reading by the
light of my flashlight, I see my hair illuminated,
dark streaks across the shadow-purpled
ceiling.
—*Bouncing rabbits, barking dogs, the
great wide vacuum of space—*
(...it is like a bedtime story I've nearly perfected.)

I watch
your memory
like it were a shadow puppet, living only
in the place left behind. I move my fingers to
make the horse jump, I move my fingers to
make the cat speak,
—*I see whiskers flutter but it is your voice
that I hear whisper things too sacred for words—*
(...I can feel sleep creeping now, but I let myself
touch this memory once more, then again.)

And to myself,
(for fear of judgment),
I wonder if memories can even be
considered real. They're like shadows, and
made from absence. And I cannot have them
without creating them, I cannot visit them
without being the conductor of their
appearance,
—*it is my fingers that make your outline, my
mind that touches your memory—*
(...it is your absence, yes, but it is my design.)

Emmie Kulak

A Vivid Embrace



Zach Blair
Valiant

And so we left the muggy gym, stinky sweat polluting our armpits, smelling of the same odor you get whiffs of from a McDonald's playhouse. We won, and I can't believe we did it. You change after the game, of course, get that debrief from your coach. That's uniform, yeah, but what's not is the entrapping feeling of victory. It's an imprisonment you want. Something you worked so hard for months on end is now yours. The old man's finally keeled over; the pimple's been popped, pus on the mirror; and what's the other one they say, that I can never figure out?—the fat lady's singin'? Yeah, sounds about right.

Outside, the parking lot's glittering, rain on the blacktop. Streetlights shine in the various puddles scattered about, 'n' in my heart 'n' on my brothers' faces there are smiles.

"Jim, ice cream at Bomby's! Let's go!" one of my teammates calls to me. A glorious form of celebration, but not what I'm feelin'. I'd much rather sit under the stars of the night, waiting for the drizzle to come back so that my tears of joy at hard work and accomplishment could mix with Mother Nature's life-giving ones.

Both of 'em do the same thing, if you really think about it.

Abbey Ellis

Myself, a mirror

I am not made of flesh or blood.

Those have been spilled or torn without notice
but I am made of the spilled ink of artists before me
and the same water that future generations will drink.

I am a patchwork quilt of people who've never known me,
and my own creations have woven strangers

I am a patchwork of the world which distorts itself,
but to hate the world around me is to hate myself.

I love myself, not out of affection,
but because I look like my brother
think like my mother
love like my lover
and create, like every other.

I am wretched. We all are.

Sarah Welker

Taste the Rainbow



In the Garden

The summer my dad married Rebecca, the heat didn't reach the inside of the house.

I didn't know where the thermostat was, or how every room in the house could be kept at a cool sixty-three degrees. I could never find my dad to ask him. He was always on his way to do something, to water the garden or fix the sink in one of the twenty bathrooms; I never saw a single broken thing in that house.

It didn't feel like home yet. We had moved in the day after the wedding, no honeymoon because my dad saw it as bad luck. Rebecca hadn't even told me where the kitchen was—I only stumbled upon the dining room by chance one night to see them sitting together by candlelight.

"I was wondering if you would join us," Rebecca said.

Every night I slept in a different bedroom. I could never find my way back to the one I had slept in before. They were all copies in varying shades of bronze, sepia, and umber, accented with olive or burgundy or mauve. I lost almost everything I set down; my boots disappeared on day two, my hairbrush was long gone by day three, and by the second week I had misplaced my entire suitcase. There hadn't been much in it, but I still felt the loss.

I couldn't find a single door to the outside, even the front door I had come through only a week earlier. I gained some warmth by opening the French windows found in every bedroom, but the perfume of the garden was so overwhelming that I could only keep them open for minutes before getting a headache. I didn't leave the house all summer. I existed like a scavenger, wrapping myself in a throw blanket stolen from some sitting room, eating fruit from the decorative displays, hoping I would find the correct dining room before dinner.

I figured when I saw my dad I would ask him all my questions. But whenever I saw him in the hall or at dinner, my questions suddenly seemed childish. Not even childish but completely idiotic. Where are the front doors? Why is it so freezing? Instead, I would ask him how he was, and he, holding a toolbox in one hand, would reply, "Good, good," finger tapping impatiently on the handle, eyes darting anywhere but me. I would nod and let him pass, and I would go back to my wandering.

Eventually, Rebecca noticed how terribly I was adapting to the house. She took me to her bedroom, a space four times the size of the ones I had been sleeping in. She ran a brush through my hair, which was the longest it had ever been. On the television ran an old soap opera, on the radio some melancholy

piano sonata. Rebecca insisted on painting my nails a blush pink, using small, careful strokes. The windows were open, bringing in birdsong and the faint scent of roses. She put my hair in braids then fastened them to my scalp with sharp pins. When she went to her closet to find something nice for me to wear, I slipped out of the room and ran down hallway after hallway before ducking into a bedroom. I skipped dinner that night and considered eating the leaves from a vase of pale rhododendrons.

After that, I began to follow Rebecca. I lost her often, waiting outside a room she had been in for hours only to eventually discover the room was empty. I saw her open the medicine cabinet and down a handful of pills, lips stained with plum-colored wine. I never saw her with my dad. I stopped coming to dinner, stealing food from the kitchen instead. I found an art studio full of empty canvasses and tubes of paint. I took a tube of black paint and used my finger to draw X's on the doors of each room I slept in, so I could keep track. I never found a marked room.

I thought it must have been close to the end of summer by then, but outside remained bright green and blossoming, and I could never find my dad to ask. I didn't know where or when I would be going to school. Rebecca had given up on me. When we passed each other in the hall, she didn't acknowledge me.

I was beginning to feel like a ghost. I checked every mirror for my reflection. I tried going down every staircase I could find to get to the ground floor, to find the front entrance, or something, anything. But each time I was faced with an empty floor, windows showing the endless, sickening green outside.

I spent most of my time sleeping. I lived off stolen dinner rolls. I opened every window and became familiar with the intoxicating scent of the garden. I never saw my dad or even Rebecca. I hung my legs over the windowsill and sat in the summer breeze, feeling strange and warm and dizzy. I became used to the complete uncertainty.

One day, my dad approached me in the hallway, smiling like everything was perfectly normal again.

"Come on, I want to show you what I've done with the flowers out front," he said.

I followed him around the winding house, watching as he found the entryway with ease. He opened the front door and stepped outside. I went to follow him, but the light was so blinding that I had to close my eyes.

Keela Sawyer

I Hope

To my cousin,

I hope that you never look at your body the way that I look at mine

I hope that you never spend hours in the mirror hating everything

I hope that you never sit there and think about

how you can become thinner faster

I hope that you never not eat because you feel like you don't deserve it

I hope you never meet Ana or Mia, or anybody else

Hope that you're never comparing your body to the people around you

I hope that you never look in the mirror

and wish you could change every part of yourself

I hope that you never work out because you feel like you have to

I hope that you never change yourself for somebody

I hope that you never fall in love with the feeling of being sick

I hope that you're able to love your body and yourself the way you are

And if you've already been through this

I hope that it doesn't continue

I hope that you can see your body the way that I do

I hope you can see the beauty in everything that it's given you

I hope that you think that you're beautiful

Because I think you are stunning

I hope that you never take the same path

or make the same mistakes that I did

I hope you know that you are worth more than a number

You are worth more than the people who put you down

You are worth more than all of the bad in this world

Dash Crow

Skater Girl



Jereme Carter

A Letter to Self (Part 2)

As I set eyes on you this sunny day,
all I see is downpouring rain on your window pane.
I'm taken aback by how much you have changed
Your appearance is pretty much the same but,
It's your body language that I have come to find strange.
That confidence and sense of strength is gone,
You don't keep eye contact for very long and I,
rarely see you without a mug on.
I could be wrong but something doesn't feel right.
You dimmed your light that was once so bright.
Even as I write, I tense up a little when I think
of the important things that are missing.
Standing tall, eyes straight, chin high, and shoulders back.
Seeing you lack that bold, cinder block, I-will-
not-be-moved presence is heartbreaking.
You're fading, you're fading into that white noise of
small talk, small thoughts like small pox are
spreading like a contagion
Where did your spine go?
It appears that you have ceased to grow.
I apologize if I hit too low, but
who else knows you better than me?
who else knows what you are destined to be?
who else can tell me, I don't like what I see?
So let's start planning and stop reacting.
Then we can begin to build where we are lacking.
Unpacking, mistake upon mistake living in the past.
Failing to learn from living too fast,
Let's slow down and say it LOUD,
no longer improving myself is allowed!

Poetry

Binh Minh

A Dog Story

Five minutes away from my apartment was a dog meat restaurant. People are creative when it comes to food: stir-fried with galangal root, steamed with ginger, or slow-cooked with plum wine. *But nothing beats dog sausage*, my dad declared. I remember during my great grandma's death anniversaries, Dad and Uncle would often bring some dog sausage and some wine, and start reminiscing about their childhood memories with their grandma. *It's her favorite dish also*, Dad said. A few years ago, Uncle passed away. Sometimes, I found Dad placing dog sausage on my uncle's altar and sitting there for hours.

My mom didn't like having pets in the family. *Our apartment is packed enough*, she explained. All three of us lived in a one-bedroom apartment that was not big enough for a fourth person, so when my brother was born, Dad moved out to a house near his workplace. We would often visit him on the weekend, me and my brother, I mean. His house was not much bigger than our apartment, and it didn't have much either. He would often bring us to eat outside. Our favorite place to visit was a seafood market, where we got to see living fish, crabs, and shrimp playing around in the transparent glass tanks just a few moments before they ended up in our stomachs. Yet we never went to that dog restaurant. When we asked about it, he always refused. *I don't want you to regret this when you're grown up*, he explained.

Eventually, Dad got his first dog. She was a Dalmatian. She had a name: Bubu, like our favorite comic character. Me and my brother looked forward to the weekend, when we got to play with Bubu. It was a good thing that he moved out so we could all get a dog without hearing Mom complain. Dad liked to send us pictures of Bubu playing around in his backyard. She then got a stray cat friend, which my dad eventually decided to adopt, and later on, a boyfriend, and gave birth to five puppies. Dad brought her to the vet to get spayed, so she wouldn't get pregnant with her boyfriend again. *Just Bubu and these five are enough*, he said.

One day, Bubu got kidnapped. We were asleep, heard some barking, ran outside, and saw two guys with a big sack on a motor scooter. We had never seen Dad that desperate and furious before. He yelled and chased after them until the night turned silent again. Just like that, Bubu was gone. That night, I found him sitting in front of Uncle's empty altar, with the faint smell of incense lingering all night.

Flash Fiction

The Factory on 8th

Sleeping on the sidewalk
Roaming in the Spring
black needle, and a
hardened stump
the Factory closed thirty
years ago, but a man
with cloudy-eyes opened
it up yesterday—Gravel,
holes every now and again
rain falls, my boot leather
tightens and I hope to stay dry
but I want to see the man inside
Everyday, at least a quarter,
she's selling her art from behind
where trucks used to load
They found her yesterday, in a ditch
in the next town over—Her art was left,
with nobody to buy, so I took one home
and now I feel haunted;

The other day, passing the factory,
music, lights from the first floor
my street lights flicker, rusted at the base
some are crooked, like the way
home is sick
I've been burning the midnight oil
getting high off the fumes
—It was always here, before
I was born
Kept alive by some circumstance
Bought by the Electric Company
Bought by Mennonites driving
a new Bronco
Maybe
Someday
I will walk into the center—and meet the man
With cloudy-eyes, and be the center
be-the-light

Augustana Victory Chant!

Low Hum build up.

Hmmmmmmmmmmmm

Bass entry.

Hoo! Ha!

Decline.

HEEEEeeeeee

Repeat 3x

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

Inspiring Soloist, Building tempo

Viking's pride, viking creed

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

Liberal arts, mighty deed

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

Sing this chant, sing with me

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

Augustana, victory

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

Enter everyone!

Our team is strong, we will succeed

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

Our culture cares, we all compete

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

See us, witness our great feat

Hoo! Ha!

HEEEEeeeeee

All shout climax

AUGUSTANA VICTORY!!!

Call of the Vikings

Sing-song rally

Up and down scale to gather singers

oooooooooooo

Sing loudly and pause for commas.

Stomp your feet and/or clap your hands after each line

Call of the vikings stamp your feet
Raise your fist, drain your mead
Share of the tales, your great feats
Blow the horn like those proceeded

This is our saga, 'tis our time
Augustana, by and by
They know our cheer; know our cry
Augustana on the rise

Sing with brothers, sisters too
Gather the warband they/them and you
Together we're better today we grin
Vikings sing and vikings win!

So hoist the mast, our mighty ship
Conquer the seas, hear our quip
Blue and gold will never fail
Call of the vikings to prevail!

Emma Watts

Compass Point



Lexi Golab

wires crossed

thin strings of dialogue
tangled
jargon jumbled,
twisted together,
braiding hyperbole with nonfiction.
a steaming vat of
miscommunication,
of alphabet soup.
A,B,C...
antagonistic, bitter, crying
1,2,3...
one mistake, two apologies, three begs for forgiveness
outer dialogue turned
inner monologue as
forever fades to finite,
two subtracts one,
and blame breeds brooding nights
alone?

Kobe West

Western Union

Telegraph lines hang like vines
 swaying at the wilting posts
they wrap around the Bur Oaks
 that will fade into autumn
when the leaves steal the sun
 and the wire has gone silent
The lines weave over the hills
 Into the plains
 under the thickets
into the burrows of all that sleep with the soil
 Into towns
Into stations that closed with the last brick kiln
 Feeling with the earth
 Vibrating with our feet
A new transmission key
thudding away sweetly—

Bethany Abrams

Nothing but a Telephone Pole



Phoebe Fuller

i am sex

i am two 17-year-olds
in a pastor's house
in a bed that is not made for them.
i am a first attempt that ends
in blood and distrust
and lasting pain.

i am two 17-year-olds
in a bed they should not be in
on thanksgiving day.
i am exciting and scary
and connecting.
i am to become a bittersweet memory
and honestly, a foundation
for higher expectations.

i am 18 and 21
in a dorm room
on a bed she should not be in.
i am confusion and anxiety
and pure fucking lust.
i am to become a fiery connection
that fades to nothing
just as fast as it sparked.

i am 18 and 20
in a dim-lit room
that looks over a bridge,
yet another bed she should not be in,
three times this will happen
until he decides
"i don't like hook-up culture,
we should just be homies,
but i have a friend you might like"

i am two 18-year-olds
exploring each other's bodies
and their sexualities alike.
i was thought to be enjoyable
but ended up being scary
and disappointing.
i will never be mentioned again.

i am 18 and 19
i am the question
"is this okay?"
i am not entirely ideal
but i am safe and
for the first time
i am in a bed
that they should be in.
and the next time they see each other,
i will not be an expectation
but i will be wanted nonetheless;
i am not to make her feel like a quick fuck
but instead
in control of her body and mind.

Binh Minh

Do You Wanna Sell Some Of Your Lifespan?

www.lifespandonation.com

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why should I donate my lifespan?

There are approximately eight billion people in the world, and millions cannot even celebrate their eighteenth birthday. This is due to various reasons: sickness, domestic abuse, poverty, etc... To solve this problem, the [Department of Population](#), which oversees everyone's life record, has found a way to transfer lifespan from those who have an unwantedly long lifespan to those who are not expected to live to the age of eighteen. Your donation today can ensure a newborn reaches adulthood.

How does it work?

Our company has been authorized by the Department of Population to legally collect your lifespan. All you need to do is sign a contract and we will inject a tiny little chip. The chip speeds up your cell reproduction and stores it. Finally, we eject the chip and use the cells for those in need.

Why do lifespan sellers receive money for selling?

Because your life is more worthy than you thought! So you deserve to receive money for giving it to those in need.

How much do I earn?

It depends. Everyone has their own price. Our [Human Values](#) department will thoroughly research your past, present, and future to determine your appropriate price. A person's life is typically worth no less than two million dollars.

What if I change my mind?

You can refund everything before the last three hours of your life. Please complete the [refund form](#) and attach [supporting documents](#) by that time to ensure the process goes smoothly.

Is it legal to donate my lifespan?

Yes! It's completely legal to sell your lifespan. This is different from murder or suicide. In fact, since the Government has banned suicide, those who commit or attempt to commit suicide have to pay a heavy fine. Click here to watch a

testimonial video from [Jake](#), our first client. After his first failed suicide attempt, he decided come to us for a simple, straightforward, and meaningful life.

To what extent can I sell my lifespan?

We buy "lifespan," not "life," so you can sell as much as you want except for the last three days. We're not allowed to take all of your life. That's murder. We gave you three days to rethink, and you can still refund everything before the last three hours. Very humane.

Is it safe to donate my lifespan?

Yes! It's completely safe to donate your lifespan. As long as you follow our contract, you can spend the exact amount of time you have left.

Does it mean I will reduce my lifespan?

Even though the concept is new, it is the same as your working hours. Don't think of it as reducing your lifespan. Just think of it as the time that you have to waste while sitting in your office and hating your boss. Isn't working also selling your time and energy for capitalism? Instead of spending half of your life working a job you don't like, why not donate some? This way, you'll come closer to financial freedom and help make the world become a better place.

How often can I donate my lifespan?

Except for the last three days, you can sell it as often as possible.

Is there a minimum period that I have to donate?

We accept anything from thirty minutes to the final three days of your life. Please keep in mind that people's lifespans vary.

How long does it take to donate my lifespan?

You only need one hour to go through the process, including signing the contract, and inserting and ejecting the chip.

How and when can I receive my money?

Your money will be transferred to your bank account within five business days of the donation.

How do I get started?

Schedule an appointment with us through this [link](#). We will have a fifteen-minute phone call to ensure you're suitable to donate your time. Then, visit one of our [lifespan collection centers](#) to start the donation process.

[GET STARTED HERE!](#)

Emma Watts

Rosary Joan



Lauren Dickinson

A Ring Too Small

I found my mother's old engagement ring tucked away in her drawer.
I slid it on, only for it to stop above my first knuckle;
Too small.
How small her hand must've been.
Dainty.
Petite.
The perfect woman.
I stare down at my scarred and twisted hands.
Scorched and
Scratched and
Broken and bloody.
A woman's hands
Mine were not.
Chubby and dry.
Nothing like the smooth, kind, healing ones my mother has.
How ironic, her only daughter, more a man than her sons.
It's a miracle she hasn't seen it in my stance or walk,
In my shoulders or my scowl.
I just pray she never looks at my hands.

Sarah Welker

your instagram

i sneak onto your profile
and see you've got a new hairstyle
you're starting to wear different things
and it seems you've spread your new wings
your friends have all changed
and in the background of a photo, i see letters we exchanged
and i see you got some new sneakers
they're the same ones i had when we were seniors
i swipe through and see new jewelry
and i'm glad i don't see our matching bracelets, truthfully
but you don't sneak onto mine
because after we split, you were just fine
and i'm not wishing to get back with you
i promise, i'm gonna let you do you
you've become a different person
and i think i'm afraid to know the new version

Marlene Cabada

Deep in Thought



Phoebe Fuller
the auction

it's hard to dissect you
to detach our bodies
taking a scalpel to your chest
removing a frog heart, myself

i figured drunken thursday nights
would be lonely these days
but i've found the frogs
camouflaged in brush

i was auctioned off
to one sole bidder
auctioneer ignoring all bids
that were more than a few crumbs

that's what you gave me
it was all i survived on
a few crumbs, a frog heart
and a scalpel.

Dash Crow

The Green Light



Phoebe Fuller

a love poem to the male entity

sometimes i find myself wishing i was born a male.
it's not that i'm unhappy in my body,
nor do i believe i was born in the wrong one.
sometimes i just wish i was born a male.

i want to be a male in the way that they can nod at a random guy on the street and
it's comfortable;
i want to be a male in the way that guys encourage each other at the gym;
i want to be a male in the way that men can walk outside alone at night;
i want to be a male in the way that i am listened to when i speak.

i don't want to be "pretty" or "beautiful"
i want to be handsome
i want to be tall and clean in a suit
maybe even a blazer with silk-lined lapels.

i want to be male like hardwood,
like pinecones and warm apple cider,
i want to be male like denim,
like protein, like shooter games
i want to be male like rock music,
the color purple and rust
and plaid pajama pants and bar soap
and grilling and podcasts and expensive shoes.

i want to be male like safety,
like freedom and leniency
like audacity and victimization.

but fuck it, part of me feels like
i would accept being male
like football
like cargo shorts
like kiss-and-tell
like mansplaining
like locker room talk
like "boys will be boys"
like 5-in-1 shampoo
like yelling and being noticed yet unchecked
like i deserve to fuck on the first date (because what else am i here for?)
like 20 different girls thinking about me before they go to bed because i've con-
vinced them all that they're the only one
like too-high-of-standards for
a man on tinder
(i'm not shaming dating site users, but damn, have you seen the lengthy bios with
lists of requirements for women? they're longer than a fucking CVS receipt)
like my lack of attention to my wife is a meme on facebook
like "i don't know what you want me to do" in response to a girl who sent me para-
graphs about how much she loves me and misses me and feels like she has to beg
for my time and attention
like uncle george in "indian camp"
like manly pointer in "good country people"
like fuckhead in "jesus' son"
like cain
like judas
like cowardice.

Sarah Welker

buffalo plaid



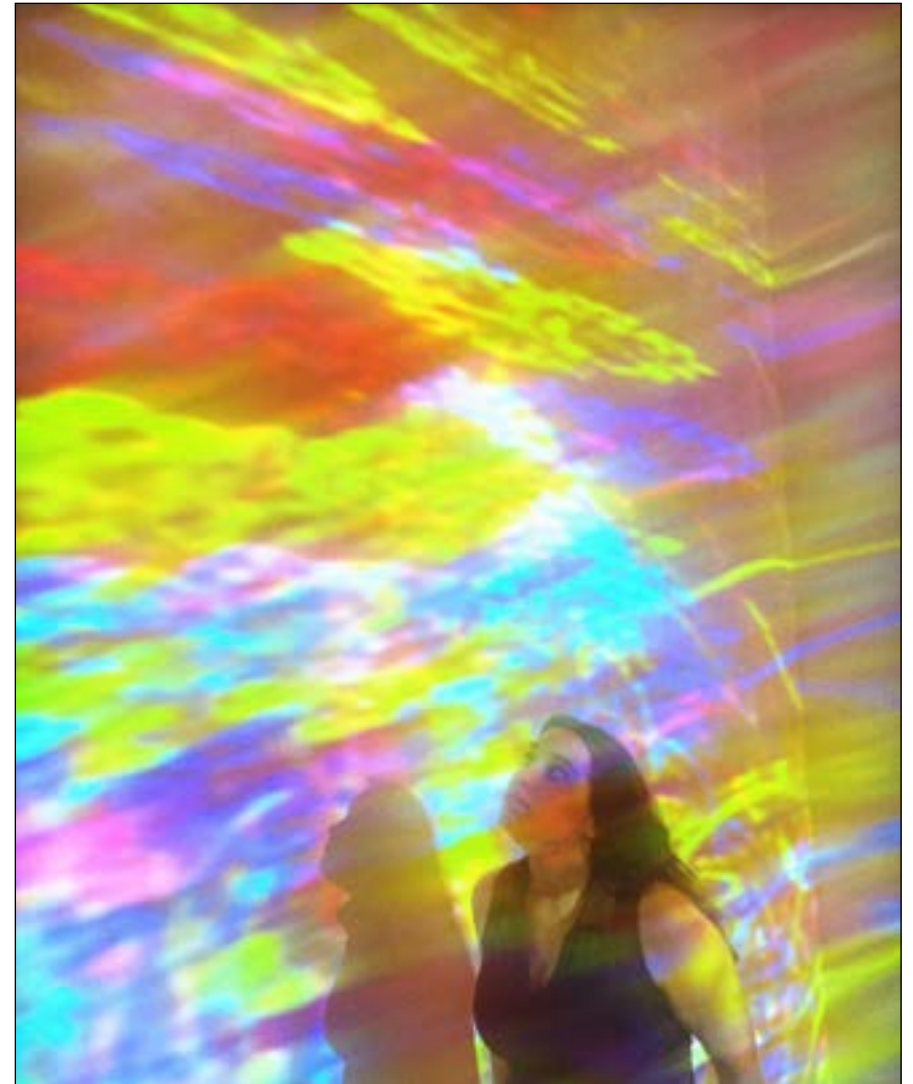
Bethany Abrams

God's Indifference

can anyone, with certainty,
say that God *loves* them?
i don't seek love -
i've spent my existence trying to prove
He didn't waste His time on me. secretly
i yearn for His fury. the Hellfire
to destroy me,
skin searing eternally
at least, then,
i'd be worthy of Something

Georgi Feigley

a liminal example



Charley Williams
Navy



I will never be a good fruit.
My seeds are sharp,
stuck between molars like knives,
and hands are left sticky from my sweat.

Anyone who I've let dig their teeth into me,
can only bear the taste until the
filth embedded scrapes their tongue raw.

I do not kill what I touch,
nor does it turn to gold.
If Midas gave me his touch,
all he would see is a lingering stain,
too sickening to bear,
and even more of a burden to get rid of
than a week-old wine stain.

I have been told that our cleanliness is indebted
to godliness, we can never restore.
So, run your tongue across your gums again
my dear friend.
I stain what I touch,
and you get rid of what stains.

Anya Giordano
Bitter

I will never be a good fruit.

My seeds are sharp,
stuck between molars like knives,
and hands are left sticky from my sweat.

Anyone who I've let dig their teeth into me,
can only bear the taste until the
filth embedded scrapes their tongue raw.

I do not kill what I touch,
nor does it turn to gold.
If Midas gave me his touch,
all he would see is a lingering stain,
too sickening to bear,
and even more of a burden to get rid of
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I have been told that our cleanliness is indebted
to godliness, we can never restore.
So, run your tongue across your gums again
my dear friend.
I stain what I touch,
and you get rid of what stains.



That morning, Elliott woke to the sound of rain. He shut off his alarm and burrowed back under the covers. His wife stirred beside him, but ultimately remained asleep. He lay in bed for a moment, willing himself to stay awake. The bedroom's darkness almost convinced him he had time to rest. But before the rain could lull him back to sleep, he left the warmth of his bed and got ready for the day.

By the time he got to the police station, the rain was pouring down in sheets. It drummed against the precinct's roof like pellets in a bucket. Despite the inclement weather, it was business as usual. Telephones rang, officers mulled about. Civilians sat on benches, waiting to meet with other detectives. Elliott sat at his desk, finishing up the paperwork from his previous case. He had stayed up late working on it last night before exhaustion clouded his mind. It was tedious, but a necessary evil.

He had just put his paperwork into the file holder when the captain called him to his office. The fluorescent lights sharpened the older man's jawline and the crow's feet around his eyes.

The captain cleared his throat. "We got a call from Sheriff Martinez down in Springford. They got a homicide, but they don't have enough manpower to handle it. They need one of us to come down there and help them out."

Elliott frowned. "Just one?"

The captain shrugged. "That's all they can afford."

Springford was barely a dot on the map. Elliott raised an eyebrow. "You're sure this is in our jurisdiction?"

"We're the closest precinct."

"The state police can't handle it?"

The captain sighed. "They're backed up with other homicides."

The thought of driving in the terrible weather worsened his mood. Elliott's weariness must have shown on his face, for the captain added, "The fresh air will be good for you! If you need anything, just give me a call."

The drive should have only taken two and a half hours, yet it felt like ages before Elliott reached the countryside. The sounds of traffic dwindled as he

drove through the winding roads and prairie fields. The street signs were sparse and tucked away behind trees. The only buildings nearby were dilapidated farmhouses with cows.

It stopped raining about halfway through his trip, but the sky remained overcast from the storm. He turned on the radio to replace the rainfall, but it did little to quell his unease. It was times like these when he missed the constant background noise of Chicago. At least there he had something to help him think.

While reminiscing about his days in the city, he took a wrong turn onto a residential street. The houses seemed so far apart, each one in their own bubble. It took a couple tries, but he finally turned himself back in the right direction. In the distance, he saw a one-story brown brick building. The parking lot was nearly empty, save for a couple of squad cars. Small puddles of water filled the cracks in the asphalt. Stray cigarette butts littered the curb.

Elliott pushed open the double doors, creeping inside. Directly across from the entrance was a woman at a reception desk.

Elliott went up to her and showed her his badge. "Hello, I'm Detective Johnston from the Cachebrook Police Department. I'm looking for Sheriff Martinez."

"He'll be right out." The receptionist sounded bored.

Elliott sat down and took in the building. Behind the reception desk was a table with a half-empty pot of coffee. In the very back was a small row of desks. By the stairwell was a door leading to the holding cells. Behind them was the door leading to the sheriff's office.

A man with a mustache walked out. Elliott masked his surprise. He had pictured a much older man closer to his father's age. Instead, Martinez was around his own age, in his thirties.

"Hi, I'm Sheriff Martinez." He shook his hand. "You must be Detective Johnston. I've got my people securing the crime scene, so we can head over there now."

Martinez filled him in on the drive there. The victim was Neil Collins, thirty-seven, a reporter for the local newspaper. Two days ago, he was reported missing by his coworker Rowan Leigh. He lived by himself, no pets. His closest family was two hours away.

They parked at the edge of the forest. Sunlight broke through the clouds and filtered in through the trees. Insects buzzed louder and louder. His

shoulders tensed with every step he took. Branches snapped under their feet as they moved further into the forest.

As soon as he saw the yellow caution tape, he was hit with the stench of rotten meat. Elliott suppressed a gag. A decaying human foot poked out from behind the bushes.

The corpse of Neil Collins stared back up at him.

The body was white as bone. Dried blood stained his mouth. Flies crawled on his skin. Animals had eaten chunks out of his arms and legs. It looked like he had been dead for a few days.

Elliott got out his notebook. "Who found the body?"

Martinez swallowed. "Finn Nigel. He said he was taking a walk when he found him. I took his statement this morning."

"Alright, let's get him, and go from there. Do you know where he is right now?"

"We'll probably catch him at the diner. He usually goes there about this time."

The diner was mostly empty. The decor made him feel like he was in someone's house. Jazz music played. While they waited for Finn, they ordered coffee. The menu was smaller than he expected.

The barista made their orders quickly. Her name tag read 'Jane'. She wore a thick black watch on her right wrist.

She gave Elliott his coffee. "So you're the detective, huh?"

He nodded. "Word travels fast around here. Did you know Neil well?"

Jane shook her head. "He stopped by here every once in a while, but he mostly kept to himself."

As he sipped his coffee, he observed the other customers. A lone woman sat in the corner booth, bouncing her leg. Her eyes darted around the diner, before looking back down at her own drink. At a nearby table, a girl playfully threw a straw wrapper at her partner.

The front door chimed. Finn was easy to spot. He was a balding, middle aged man who was slightly overweight.

Martinez waved him over. "Have a seat." Finn slid into the other side of the booth. "We just wanted to go over your statement again, if that's alright."

Elliott flipped open his notebook. "We want to ask you about the body you found. You said you found him where?"

"Uh..." Finn looked to Martinez. "In the bushes."

Elliott leaned forward. "What were you doing in the woods that late?"

Finn squirmed. "Um, just taking a walk."

"All by yourself?"

"Hey, you don't think I had anything to do with this? I was the one who called the police!"

"I didn't say you did. This is just standard procedure." Elliott felt a headache coming on.

"It was horrible." Finn shuddered. "By the time I found him, it looked like some animals got to him first."

"I see." Elliott wrote that down. "Did you know Neil well?"

Finn glanced away. "Sort of. I've seen him around, but we never talked much."

If this was how all the interviews would go, he could only pray that he would solve this case quickly.

Back at the station, the detectives were waiting to get their search warrant approved. Elliott's head pounded. He did his best to ignore it and focused on the results of the autopsy and tox screen. Neil had copious amounts of midodrine in his system. According to the coroner, midodrine was a type of medication meant to treat low blood pressure.

Martinez furrowed his brow. "That's odd. Neil didn't take any meds, as far as I know."

"Let's head to his workplace and see what we can find."

The local newspaper's headquarters were easy enough to find. The couple from the diner worked in the back, laughing and chatting like before. As soon as the detectives stepped inside, a young woman with dirty blonde hair rose to meet them.

"Rowan, how are you?" Martinez greeted her warmly. "This is Detective Johnston, he's here to help with the investigation."

Hope filled her eyes. "Did you find Neil?"

Elliott sighed. "I'm afraid he's dead." Even after all his years on the force, breaking the bad news never got easier.

"Oh my God." She covered her mouth. She sank down in a nearby chair.

Elliott gave her a moment to process the news, before asking, "How long did you know him?"

"A few years." Her voice was barely louder than a whisper. "He never

missed a day of work."

Martinez glanced around. "You won't mind if we take a look in his office?"

"No! No, of course not. It should be unlocked."

As they went upstairs, the chatter below stopped.

Neil's study looked like it had been struck by a tornado. In the corner sat a file cabinet with half of its drawers open. More papers lay scattered on the floor and the desk. Coffee cups filled the wastebasket to the brim.

Martinez whistled. "Would you look at that?" He examined a corkboard on the wall. The corkboard was a mess of red string and newspaper clippings. Headlines jumped out at him in bold letters. In the center of the corkboard was a photo of a younger, thinner Finn. Half of Springford's residents had their photos pinned up, including the barista. He took note of the couple from the diner, labeled "Joy" and "Frankie" respectively. He could barely make sense of it.

Elliott searched through the mess that was Neil's desk. A small book poked out beneath the layer of papers. At first glance, it seemed like an ordinary book, but upon flipping through it, it was actually a journal. Neil's handwriting was barely legible, and what little he could make out was written in code. The initials J and F popped up more than once.

Elliott looked through the file cabinet. Neil had a couple drawers dedicated to the other residents of Springford. Their data was arranged in alphabetical order by last names. Some files appeared to be missing.

"You take Finn, I got the others. We'll meet back at the station when we're done."

Strangely enough, Elliott's headache didn't go away. He stopped by the grocery store to pick up some painkillers. There wasn't much variety.

"Is that all they got here?" he muttered.

After he bought some Tylenol, he spotted Joy and Frankie in one of the aisles.

"Oh, there you are. You guys will have to come with me."

Joy looked around. "Where's Sheriff Martinez?"

"Don't worry, you'll see him soon enough."

Elliott took them back to the station house. In the interrogation room, he opened his notebook. "Where were you on Tuesday night from seven to nine?"

"We were at the diner. You can ask Jane, she saw us."

"How well did you know Neil?"

“We didn’t know him very well.”

“No? Even though you all worked in the same place?”

The couple shared a glance. An unspoken conversation passed between them. Frankie raised his eyebrows, Joy shrugged.

Finally, Frankie turned back to him. “We didn’t know him because we didn’t want to. All he did was stir up trouble. Just last week, he thought someone stole one of his files, and he damn near tore the office apart.” He sighed. “Look, I hate to say it, but whatever happened to him, he probably brought it on himself.”

The next two weeks passed by in the same way. Elliott would get his coffee at the diner, go to the police station, and spend the day interviewing more people with Martinez. But his headache waxed and waned. He figured it was due to stress, so he didn’t think too much of it.

He stayed at a hotel for the duration of the case, although his wife wasn’t too happy about that.

“How long are you going to have to stay there?” she had asked on the fourth night.

“I don’t know, honey, as long as it takes to solve this.”

She sighed. “Stay safe, okay?”

“I will, don’t worry. I’ll try to come home as fast as I can.”

That answer seemed to satisfy her. To assuage Amelia’s worries, he called her every night.

In the morning, at the diner, he mulled over the facts of the case so far. Frankie was a dead end. So were most of the people on Neil’s corkboard. As he sipped his coffee, he became aware of his own rapid heartbeat. He blamed the coffee for his jitters.

To keep his mind off it, he spoke to Jane. “Jane, you said Neil mostly kept to himself, but do you know if he had problems with anyone in particular?”

Jane frowned, deep in thought. “I’m not sure. Then again, I’m not really the best person to ask. Like I said, I didn’t really know him that well.” Then, her eyes lit up in recognition. “Wait, I just remembered. Neil had a big fight with Finn about a week before he died. I don’t know what it was about, but it sounded pretty bad.”

“Did they say anything specific?”

She shook her head. “I thought I heard one of them say something about Finn’s wife, but I’m not really sure.”

He shrugged. “It was worth a shot. I just figured maybe you overheard something while he...”

He trailed off. His headache came back with a vengeance. It felt like someone had taken a sledgehammer to his skull. He could feel his pulse behind his eyes.

Jane frowned. “You okay?”

He waved his hand. “Just a headache.”

He paid for his coffee and left. His body screamed at him to lie down, but he popped some painkillers and headed to the station. Headache or not, there was still a murderer on the loose.

After meeting with Martinez at the station, Elliott found himself back in Neil’s office. After searching through the various newspaper clippings, one headline caught his eye. He skimmed the article. The medical jargon made it hard to follow, but he understood the basics. A couple years ago, a pharmacist had mixed up an old man’s medication. Normally, he took minoxidil to treat his hypertension. Instead of minoxidil, the old man had been given midodrine. The mix-up worsened his symptoms. He experienced headaches, dizziness, and worsening chest pain, until he died. The pharmacist responsible had lost their license. Before they could be arrested, they disappeared without a trace. Oddly enough, their name and pronouns had been blacked out.

Searching through other articles revealed a trail of old people dying. In the obituaries, Neil had highlighted where each person had lived before they passed. They all seemed to be from the same area. More importantly, they all had been on some sort of medication.

The door opened. Elliott jumped.

Rowan peeked her head in. “Oh, it’s you!” She went over to where he was. “I thought I heard someone up here. I thought you were Finn for a second there. He was here about three weeks ago, but he didn’t say what he was looking for.”

Elliott’s heart sank. “And you didn’t think to tell me earlier?”

She ducked her head. “I didn’t remember it until later.”

Dread filled him.

Before he left, he called Martinez to fill him in. Then, he made his way to the diner.

The diner was mostly empty. Jane was working behind the counter. In one

of the corner booths, Joy and Frankie held an animated conversation.

Finn sat by the window, eating his dinner. He wiped his mouth with a napkin.

“Finn?” he asked, voice carefully neutral. “What were you doing in Neil’s office?”

Finn paled. “Wh-What are you talking about?” He looked around. “Where’s Sheriff Martinez?”

“Martinez isn’t going to help you.” Elliott narrowed his eyes. “I’ve got to say, things don’t look good for you. You fight with Neil, you break into his office, steal his files, and just happen to stumble on his body? Explain that to me.”

Finn opened and closed his mouth. Sweat beaded on his forehead.

“Wh-What are you talking about? I haven’t stolen anything!” He twisted his napkin tightly. In the background, Joy shrieked with laughter, compounding his headache.

“We can do this the easy way, or the hard way.” Elliott leaned closer. “I’ll arrest you if you don’t cooperate.”

Finn’s lips quivered. His face went in and out of focus.

Elliott sighed. “Alright, here’s what we’re going to do. You’re coming down with me to the station, and you’re going to tell me everything you know.”

Finn’s mouth moved, but the detective couldn’t hear a word he said. Everything sounded muffled, like he was underwater.

The room spun like a top. Even though he was seated, he felt off kilter.

He blinked, and Jane was in front of him. Out of the corner of his eye, Joy and Frankie looked over. He tried to stand, but his legs shook like jelly.

A hand pushed him back down. His chest seized, compounding the pain in his head. It felt like a vice was squeezing his lungs. Jane’s face swam and doubled. It almost looked like she was glaring at him. He tried to stand again, but his limbs felt like they were made of lead.

Spots entered his vision. His heart felt like it was going to burst out of his chest. It was all he could do not to pass out.

Elliott braced himself on the table and threw up.

Someone led him outside. Whoever they were had a vice-like grip on his arm. He felt himself being led into a car. He hoped the driver was taking him to the doctor. In the back seat, he fought to keep his eyes open. It became harder with each passing minute.

The car stopped. Elliott unbuckled his seatbelt and stumbled out of the

vehicle. He tried to make sense of his surroundings. Trees towered over him. The driver led him further into the woods. He tried to protest, but a wave of dizziness cut him off.

He tripped over a tree root. Branches scratched his hands and face. He tried to push himself up, but his arms could not hold him up. The smell of dirt filled his nose.

As he slipped into unconsciousness, images of the diner ran through his mind. He thought of his wife, waiting for him at home.

And then, nothing.

Elliott woke up in the hospital. Beside him, Martinez sat in a hard plastic chair, reading a magazine. To his surprise, Amelia sat in a second chair, bouncing her leg. Her eyes snapped to Elliott as soon as he moved.

“Oh thank God, you’re awake!” She rushed to his bedside. “I came as soon as I heard.”

Elliott still felt disoriented. Sensing his confusion, Martinez set the magazine down. “Frankie called when you passed out. You scared everyone half to death back there.”

Elliott rubbed his eyes. “How long was I out for?”

“A few hours.” Martinez leaned forward.

“I knew something like this would happen, I just knew it.” Amelia wrung her hands.

Before she could say more, the doctor came in. “Hi, how are we feeling today?”

“Better.” Although he still felt lightheaded, he realized his headache was mostly gone. Elliott’s mind felt clear for the first time in weeks.

The doctor flipped through his chart. “It says here there was a lot of midodrine in your blood. Do you have a history of low blood pressure?”

Elliott shook his head. But something in the doctor’s words got his mind turning. Neil’s office flashed before him. The papers in disarray, the corkboard, the journal, the coffee cups—

The coffee cups. Everything clicked into place.

As soon as the doctor said he was good to go, Elliott sprung his plan into action. “Martinez, what do you say we head down to the diner?”

His wife stared at him incredulously. “Right now? Can’t you let Martinez handle this? You need to rest!”

“Honey, I need to do this.” He clasped her hand. “As soon as I catch Jane,

we can go home.”

It took a few hours, but Martinez got a warrant for Jane’s arrest.

Jane was making someone’s drink when they walked in.

Elliott showed her his badge. “Jane Kasabian, you’re under arrest for the murder of Neil Collins.”

Her eyes widened. “What? Wait, what’s going on?”

“You used to be a pharmacist. You mixed up someone’s medication and killed him. You lost your license, and moved to Springfield to start over. But Neil got too close to finding out the truth, so you started slipping midodrine in his coffee. You overheard his argument with Finn and made Finn your fall guy.”

An officer searched through her purse. Inside was a bottle of midodrine.

Martinez read her the Miranda rights. They took her back to the station to get processed into the system. A search warrant for her house turned up the missing files.

At long last, the case was closed. He felt like he could breathe again.

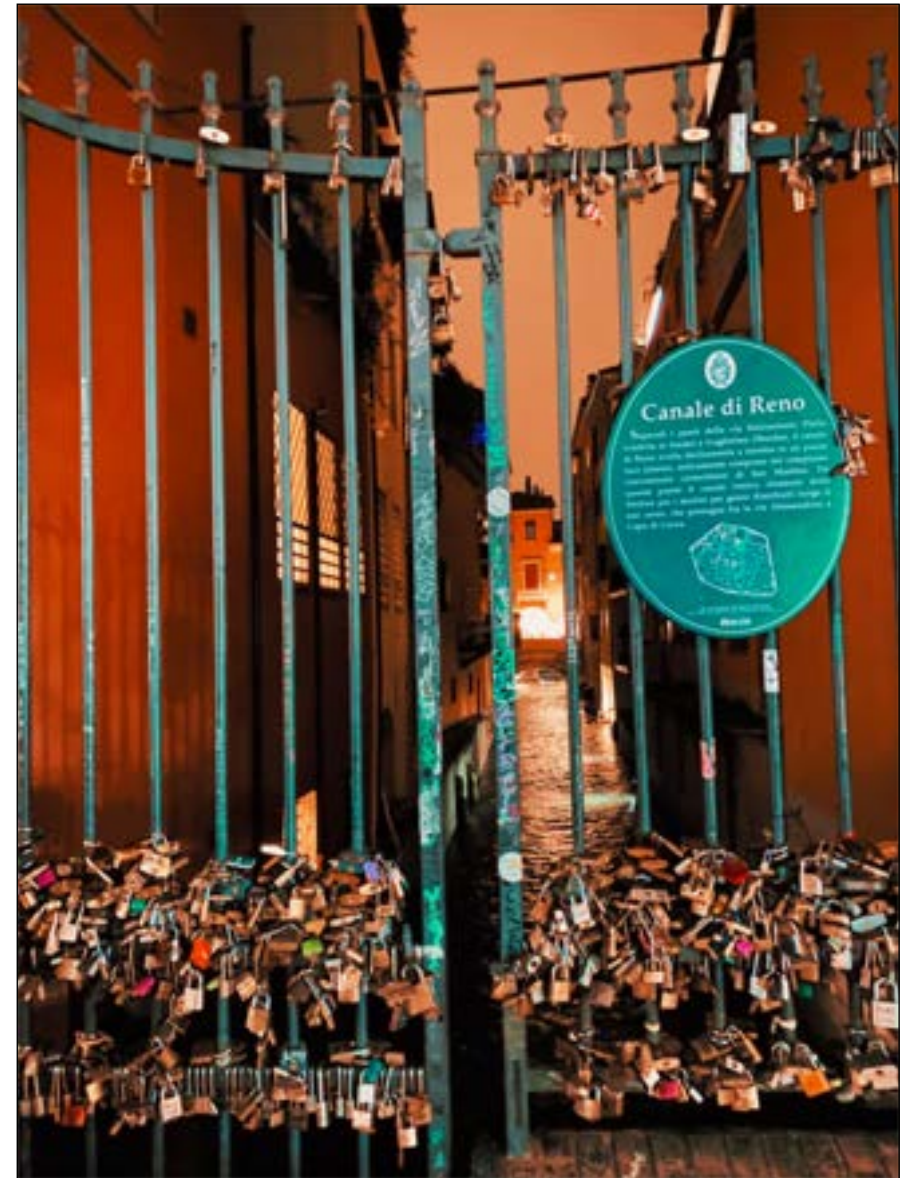
Martinez clapped his shoulder. “It was nice working with you. I’m going to miss you.”

“I’m sure we’ll run into each other again. I’ll see you around.”

Elliott said his goodbyes, and headed home. He and his wife took separate cars. He wanted to get back home before dark. But it was during the drive back that the gravity of his situation hit him. He’d had his fair share of close calls back in Chicago, but nothing like this. Long before he drove back through the winding roads, Elliott had made up his mind. He would never come back to this town again.

Georgi Feigley

Canale di Reno



Anya Giordano

Et Décadence

May I rip
your petals,
dead delicate flower?
Body soft, swathed in
daffodils and daisies,
pansies and poppies.
Oh God, these lungs ache with
the overbearing scent of
flowers
flowers.
I do not deserve to smell this beautiful
so long since you've spoiled me.
I deserve
to rot.

Sophia Behnke
belltower

i live in
the spaces in between windows

the cracked paint
and smoke stains around
missing picture frames

where the blind falls heavily,
blocking out a bittersweet burn

where the shadows have voices,
and the sunlight screams

the empty hours,
where teary eyes
get lost in the dark and
the windows
seem too far apart

Kayla Palliser

Almost Perfect



Janey Locander

Society's Bandaid

A martyr for change.

Something I would be, if the situation came to be.

As though I fear death, I desire more to let society live on. For the earth's heartbeat, I would meld myself into the deep earth—fill my lungs with compost if I knew there'd be people laughing, smiling, **living**.

Living for the hope of it all, the chill of the air and the quest for peace.

I cannot claim to know the answers, for I am just a young speck of a star in the constellation of people throughout the centuries, I barely know myself and how to tackle my problems.

I only know that I tire of seeing those I love cry—tired of this ever-present anxiety ache that fills my once naive heart with **disappointment**.

Disappointment is a bruised knee—it humbles you and suddenly you're back on the ground like a child told to brush it off after you sped down the road, no caution. I am that bruise that has not healed, despite the band-aid so carefully applied by society with antiseptic. The sting is resilient and pressing, as even when you feel healed it still pains to remove it—because it wants to stay attached, to feel **needed**.

Needed like everyone else in the world. I want to be the blanket that heals the hearts of the broken, at least for a moment of warmth because I want more to this life than listless nihilism. Until the oxygen leaves my form, I want my voice to sing praises to those who haven't heard encouragement; I want to use my arms to uplift like the trees and hold the hardened close. I pay no mind to the burning at the end times, my lungs filled with smoke and inferno, as my smile turns to ash.

"I made a difference, didn't I?" I whisper to the sky as my eyesight fades.

The sky doesn't answer, but the dirt does.

The Ancient Rock Ritual

In her *A Retelling of Ancient Civilizations's Rare and Sacred Practices*, anthropologist Gwendolyn Clugh spent years researching and compiling the most intriguing and peculiar practices done by civilizations thousands of years ago. The following passage covers the Anyalonian Civilization's (4,600-4,400 BCE) captivating rock stacking ceremony. Due to a printing error, the first page is missing.

—tural and or agricultural practices, but rather their civilization is rooted in an abstract ritual the Anyalonians followed with absolute devotion.

The ritual was simple in practice. The Anyalonian shaman would go to the designated hill in the middle of the village where one base rock called the Vittoran was already sitting. The rock was never once moved for their entire history. The shaman then placed the smaller rock lying beside the Vittoran, the Lassma, on top of the Vittoran and let it be for exactly 92 seconds. After the 92 seconds passed—not one more or one less—the shaman would pick the Lassma back up and once more place the smaller rock beside its larger counterpart. This ritual was completed every morning at dawn. The Anylonians committed their lives to the ritual, completing it every single day for hundreds of years. If they did not, their village would explode.

There are differing accounts of why the ritual was started, and more interestingly, why they were convinced their civilization would be destroyed if they stopped. One source coming from the Anyalonians recounts that the village's queen started the ceremony on the first night of the civilization's creation. She claimed that she saw the Gods in her dream, that they presented themselves to her in the form of frogs. The Gods then croaked to her that the village had to stack the same rocks for 92 seconds every morning once the sun came up to show their devotion to them. If they failed, the Gods would rain hell on the Anyalonians. Terrified of disrespecting the Gods and wanting to protect her new village, the young leader started the practice immediately.

However, another source from a neighboring civilization says that the Anyalonians started as a group of rebels that split off from their mother civilization. Shortly after they became independent, a general from the original

state came to Anyalonia to destroy them. Disguising himself as a prophet, he told the leaders of Anyalonia about the sacred practice, and, similarly to the story of the queen's dream, if they failed to complete the ritual at dawn, they would be blown up by the universe itself. But again, the prophet was a liar and made up a random ritual to distract the entire town at dawn so the prophet's army could burn and attack the village without disruption. However, too excited that his plan was working, the prophet's army got wildly drunk the night before and woke up unfit to fight. They retreated before any war was waged and told their own king that they were successful. Oblivious to the war in the first place, the Anyalonians continued the tradition. Although the origin of the ritual is unclear, their reaction was definite. There was no doubt in any citizens' minds that both themselves and their homes would explode if the ritual failed.

The rock ritual defined their lives until one young man, Shinna, did what humans have a natural predisposition to do—he questioned the ritual. Shinna lacked faith, especially when it came to the ritual, and also saw no logical reason to complete the practice. With no faith or reason supporting the ritual, Shinna knew that nothing would happen if the rocks were never stacked. No explosions, no death, nothing. He tried to express his feelings towards the community, encouraging them too to question the practice they dedicate themselves to. But instead of agreement, Shinna was faced with a beating and an order to obey the rocks.

Bitter that the community honored the rocks more than its citizens, Shinna wanted to prove how mindlessly obedient they were. So he stole the Lassma. Before dawn the next morning the Anyalonians realized they could not complete their practice. They were plunged into chaos. What resulted was violent and savage. Citizens were pitting themselves against one another, shouting and accusing each other of wanting to destroy humanity. Realizing just how devoted the citizens were to the rock, Shinna went to give himself up, wanting to stop the violence. The second he said he stole the rock, he was stoned to death. He was killed before he could tell the community where the Lassma was hidden.

Driven by a fear of the Gods, lack of trust in each other, and a dose of mass hysteria, the Anyalonias broke out into a civil war. They lit neighbors' houses on fire after they refused to open their homes in search of the rock, beat those who gave up looking, and even killed each other. When the sun rose on Anyalonia, there was no one left living to see if Shinna was correct.

Emmie Kulak

Beyond Sight



Anya Giordano

Oh, to be a deer!

Don't tell me that *I am* not the first
to be consumed by your *jaws*, that *I am* not the last.

Let me succumb to your *bowels*,
thinking *everything* I gave to *you* a worthy *sacrifice*.
I *will* be weak for you;
just don't leave.
I will *bleed* just for you;
rip out my throat.

Because, my dear, I'm not tired of being wounded.

I cannot help but *crave* the fear *you* give me,
that I mustn't flee.
You force *the prey* to bite the predator.
You force my blood to cease its flow *within* me.

So I will *kneel* at your feet,
be your *sacrifice*.

Here, wrap *my* hands and feel the pleasure
of sucking and swallowing. For your *hunger* is not *for* my flesh
but for my *fear and* fright.

Here, *you are* welcome. Devour me whole;
my soul is now empty, and you have *filled* me
with everything I *desire* to hate.

Charley Williams
UV Snake



Marker on Paper

Elia Murillo
Athena



Acrylic Painting

Lainey Terfruchte
Prairietown

I sit beside the lye-leaching barrel and listen for water dripping through the hay. Outside, the golden heat burns. The drops are difficult to hear, infrequent and irregular. The activity is perfect for wasting time.

The summertime is often quiet—most of our guests visit in September and October, big field trips with children in matching neon shirts or families attending our fall festival. Summertime is long and languid, with few visitors trailing in and out of the village buildings. But I enjoy talking to small groups, following their unusual interests and letting them participate in soap-making or mixing herbal remedies.

I check my pocket-watch. We close in fifteen minutes. At the side of the house, I begin to pull the sheets from the fence and fold them. Footsteps on the cobblestone turn my attention toward the new carpenter walking past. He shields his eyes from the sun as he waves. I nod. He walks up to the fence.

“Hannah, is it?”

I hug the folded sheet to my chest and walk over to him. “Yes.”

“William,” he responds, holding his hand over the fence. “Nice to meet another young person around here.”

I shake his hand with a smile. “I’m always around if you ever want to talk to someone else under fifty.”

“Thank you for your offer. I might take you up on that,” he says. “For now I’ll let you get back to it.”

“I’ll see you around!” I call as he begins to walk away.

“I hope so,” he replies.

On my way home, I stop at the store to pick up a bottle of wine. Miles told me exactly what to get, knowing I would be overwhelmed if I had to choose myself. I hate going to the store after work, people staring at me, asking stupid questions. I’ve told Miles this, but he usually stays late at work. Besides, he hates going to the store too.

When I bring the bottle to the cashier, she stares at me.

“Are you Amish?” She asks.

I hand her the bottle and leave.

“Shit. I completely forgot.” I pull off my cap. My hair is stuck to my forehead with sweat. “Do you have time to run out now? Before we go?”

“Not enough time to make it back here to pick you up,” Miles answers.

“Shit. I’m sorry. I have to get ready if we’re going to be there on time. Do we have anything we could give them?”

Miles sighs. “I’ll figure it out.”

I untie my apron as I rush to our room, only feeling a small prickle of guilt about lying. My cotton dress falls in a circle around me. I throw on dress pants and a satiny white blouse. After pulling apart my braided bun, I brush my hair into waves. I sweep eyeliner along my top lash line to bring my make-up from 1830s housewife to business casual.

In the kitchen, Miles is rummaging through a cabinet.

“An unused candle?” he asks, holding up a wood-wick candle in a glass jar.

“You’re the professional,” I answer.

“We only have beer, so gifting alcohol is out of the question.”

“The candle seems good. What scent is it? That feels important.”

“Pine.”

“Perfect. That’s totally neutral and boring.”

“Candle it is.”

Miles drives. One of his coworkers was promoted and they celebrate that stuff big time at his work. After all, advancement is everyone’s number one goal.

I stand beside him in the entryway of a nice home while he hands a beige gift bag to his coworker. In my heels, I’m only an inch shorter than him. Miles vaguely introduces me, “Nell, my girlfriend.” He doesn’t leave room for me to do anything other than shake the man’s hand and say “It’s nice to meet you.”

I wander to the kitchen for entertainment in the form of wine. I pour myself a glass and sit with the other girlfriends and wives. The few husbands who were forced to come are conversing with Miles and his coworkers.

I don’t contribute to the conversation, just nod and go “Mhm” when necessary. After a while, I sneak off to the bathroom to check my make-up. I reapply my lipstick then comb through my hair with my fingers. In the mirror, I look like a different person. I don’t remember buying the clothes I’m wearing. I stare into the dark eyes reflected back at me.

William finds me while I'm peeling apples. The sky is vaguely cloudy, enough shade that the sun doesn't blot everything out. I sit on the porch, in a wooden chair that squeaks when you sit down. I had visitors earlier, but it's been quiet for over an hour now.

"Hannah," he says. I like the way he says my name, the smile you can hear in his voice.

"Abandoning your shop?" I ask.

"Thomas took over so I could go on a walk. Not that he knows anything about running the shop, but...for twenty minutes, the kids can go without seeing me work on a chair."

For a moment I think he'll keep walking, but he comes through the gate to sit on the porch step.

"What is it that you do all day?" he asks.

"All kinds of things," I reply, continuing to peel an apple.

"Anything interesting?"

"I can show you how to make lye soap. Or I can make you a pretty little cap like mine," I say, grinning, and he laughs. "I'm working on apple butter now."

He takes an unpeeled apple from my basket. "Do you get these from the trees in the orchard?"

"Those apples won't be ready for harvesting for another month. Besides, we never really use those anyway. Those trees are just for people to pick from during the fall."

William puts the apple back then reaches into his pocket. "Here's what I've been working on. Hold out your hand."

I set my things aside. He places a little wooden fawn on my palm.

"Oh..." I say, touching the smooth curves of its back and ears. "It's wonderful."

I don't know if he means for me to keep it, so I try to hand it back to him.

"No, no. I made it for you."

"But I don't have anything to give you." I pull a spiraling apple peel out of the basket. "Would you like one of these?"

He laughs. "That's okay. I like making little things like that."

I pet the fawn's delicate head. "It's very beautiful."

William smiles at me. I smile back.

The glassy-skinned women on the ads stare at me with their pearly teeth and watery eyes. In a tiny mirror, I see the humid strands of my hair frizzing in an electric way.

"Nell," Miles says as he approaches, "I found what I needed."

I put my wrist next to my face. It's covered in red and pink slashes from lipstick testers. "Should I start wearing bright red lipstick?"

"If you'd like."

"Maybe another time. It's a big commitment, you know."

"Sure."

We walk along the aisles on our way to the check-out. Vibrant summer decor litters the shelves, flamingos and pineapples and seashells. A jungle of plastic plants occupies the next aisle.

I rub the lipstick smears on my arm. They stay in place, dry and stuck. I pick at one of the reds with my nail. My stomach flips in sudden nausea. Miles swings his basket next to me. Everything in the store is sickly bright. I dig my nail into my arm. The lights are oppressively fluorescent.

"I've gotta step outside," I choke out.

"Are you okay?" Miles asks, concerned.

I can't answer him, I'm already stumbling around other shoppers. Outside, I steady myself against the side of the building. The parking lot is a gray blur, people passing by just shades of color.

"Nell," Miles says.

I can't look up from the ground.

"Nell," he says again. He touches my shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"I...I'm sorry."

"Are you okay?"

I look at him, blinking as my eyes try to readjust. "I don't...I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Let's just get to the car, alright?"

I let him pull me to the car. In the passenger seat, I'm startled by a dampness on my arm. Blood trickles from a gash. One of my nails is red around the edge. I cradle my arm in my lap, trying not to get blood on anything else. Miles says he's glad I'm okay, and I don't say anything.

At home, I grab the wooden fawn from my work clothes and lock myself in the bathroom. I sit on the tile floor and trace the fawn's smooth

outline. I feel a pain in my chest, a desire to purge something deep, and I ignore it.

I pull heavy soap from a wooden mold and place it on the table beside the others. Making lye soap is an entirely unmarketable skill—the kind we make is much too harsh, only for show. But I like the show. I like that many parts of my near-daily routine are novelties to anyone else. It makes them feel more important.

I roll up my sleeves and begin to slice the soap into bars, which will be sold for a few dollars in the gift shop as souvenirs. The soap is dense and I have to use my whole arm to force the knife in. After the bars are cut, I fold on cardboard labels, securing them with tape.

William meets me outside after the village closes. We’ve made a habit of walking to the parking lot together.

“I have something for you,” I say. My hands slightly shake as I hand him a handkerchief I’ve embroidered with an oak tree. “It isn’t very useful, but I hope you like it anyway.”

William’s eyes light up as he studies the stitches. “Hannah, this is fantastic. I don’t even understand how you do this. Really, this is wonderful.”

He folds the handkerchief carefully and puts it in his pocket. He smiles at me before catching his fingers around mine and bringing my hand to his lips. My cheeks flush red.

His hand stays in mine as we walk.

Miles asks if I’d like to come on a business trip with him. He confesses that we wouldn’t have much time to spend together, but I could explore the city. I could shop or go on tours or whatever it is I’d like to do.

“I’d rather not take off work,” I say.

“It’s only a week. Besides, you never take off.”

“I can take care of the apartment while you’re gone. And it’ll be less money spent on plane tickets.”

“We can pay for the tickets. And there are some events we could attend together.”

The thought of becoming another girl in a nice black dress on the arm of a suited man, passing copies of myself and Miles in the hotel lobby, makes me nauseous. The trip would mean following Miles around as he charms and networks, tries to get us out of an apartment and into a home,

tries to afford a diamond and a wedding.

Miles takes my hands. “Nell, I love you. I want you there.”

“I’ll come,” I say quietly. “I’ll come.”

After work, William leads me past the historical buildings and into the woods that surround the village. Sunlight blurs the leaves. We step around the underbrush and duck under branches.

William finds a grassy patch amongst the dirt and weeds and we brush aside twigs to sit down. A bird calls somewhere, sharp but sweet.

We bask in the peacefulness, feeling the shifting warmth of the sun through the trees. I pull the pins from my hair and begin to untangle my braids. William leans against a tree.

“Do you ever wish you could escape?” I ask softly.

“What do you mean?”

A mosquito hovers beside my arm. “Do you ever wish you could leave everything behind and find a new way to live?”

He picks up a twig and examines it.

“Do you?” I repeat.

“Maybe sometimes.”

Tears suddenly ache behind my eyes. I brush them away before they gather and fall.

“Hannah?” William asks.

“We could fix it,” I say, sniffing. “We could just run away, live nowhere.”

“I don’t...I don’t know,” he says.

“You have to help me.” I grab his hands. “You have to save me.”

“I don’t understand.” He pulls at my fingers, trying to loosen my grip. I dig my nails in.

“William,” I plead.

My hands fall away as he rises. His face is shadowed as he stands above me.

“William, please.” Tears fall down my cheeks as I speak.

He leaves me there. I notice a gray shadow beyond the waning trees: the parking lot, only half a mile away.

Bethany Abrams

March

as I blow out my last candle,
I feel a pair of phantom hands
wrap around my neck;
sickly, sticky fingers cling to my skin
as everyone's breathing slows to sleep
I roam,
taking note of the new emptiness in the air -
the emptiness I put there -
I hear laughter from behind;
the ghosts of passing years mock and pity me
for ever thinking that I'd become fixed with time
I laugh, too.

Dash Crow

Sound Asleep



Olivia Fleming

At the Edge of the Sky

The dress looks like a piece of a cloud
That the sky willingly gave me.
The snow white was bright
Against the burnt gold of the sand.
I was whisked away from my front door
By darling Colette
Wearing a velvet-blue dress
While the cool breeze lifted the blonde hair from my shoulders
Towards the sky
Where it danced with the clouds
And played with the stars.
My expensive perfume
Carried the scent of roses
And surrounded me in a whimsical embrace.
It floated over with me to the boat on the ocean
Ready to sail away from home.
She'll never admit it
But my mom saw herself in me
As a young and energetic bride
With innocent eyes craving to see the world.
So when her hands began to shake
As the boat became smaller and smaller
Her tears caught a glimpse of a
Rainbow reflection
While sliding down her skin
As I floated off towards the setting sun
Disappearing with it at the edge of the sky.

Georgi Feigley

notte a Venezia



Lainey Terfruchte

Remembrance



Megan Yarusso

Dollar Store Soup for the Soul

If you are sick, I will give you the last sprite in the fridge,
Greener than you are, hissing like a rat in a cage,
And watch you nurse it from the drive through window
that protrudes from the side of our apartment building
I'll tell you about the time I lucked out, got the last
can of sweet tomato basil in the store, electing to edit
away how it stewed in my cabinet for a few months,
more,
and then to the raccoons out back, because
If you are sick you already know how time
can be a symptom of something worse
If you are sick, we'll get hot noodles after class
to loosen at the lump in your throat, and
I'll tell you that the quiz today went really well! Really,
Because I imagine that something will soon

Devyn Bande

N Williams Street, 8:16pm

The feeling of the gravel under my footsteps
Only the smallest of sounds filling my ears
Whether it's the wheels of a car inching over the damp pavement
Or the electrical buzz of the streetlights
The kinds that would only be heard if everything else in the world was to stop

I have always enjoyed that kind of silence
It made the runaway train that my brain became able to rest
The ability to take my focus away from the lengths of my breaths

The humidity in the air sticking to my skin
My vision drifting over the scene in front of me, analyzing each and every
detail
I wonder to myself now,
What is relaxation supposed to feel like?

The constant worry that each breath I take is becoming too short, that I
might hyperventilate
The way my eyes cannot seem to glaze smoothly over my surroundings
All gone
Replaced with those same small sounds
Those same feelings of the wind brushing across my skin
The unusual comfort something as small as walking down a street can bring

An Escape

Bethany Abrams

Nothing Left

Slowly, I bleed out in a blizzard
My feet sink into the damp snow
like quicksand. Imprints
Only for the wind to sweep away

Soon
I begin to fall, panicking
Packing ice in the wound
In death, I never thought
I'd crave decay

Soon
My lips stain blue, my lungs
Fill and fill and fill until
My corpse -
a corpse - remains

Karolina Rapa

mountains



Zach Blair

The Reality Is

You've taken me swiftly, dear muse,
to this spot rising like an eagle over the abyss.
Down below, soothing waters a milky
shade of green-white do dance, twirl,
jive, and still all the while toil.
Launching myself into them guarantees
a death so powerfully enigmatic it can't be
matched any other way, not even
by passing in a field of budding roses,
spring monstrosously approaching.
No, this would be simpler, the water
filling you as if you were a pitcher.
So jump, and die not;
so jump, and fret not;
so jump, and cry not, yes?—
for your journey, upon a splash, will only
just have started....
I suppose, then, this all comes down to Trust.
Will you fulfill her being with her own
essence, or will you continue to welcome
her to beat around your brain, showing
you nothing again?
The answer's never set.
What will it be, dear muse?

Jereme Carter

Intro-diction

This piece of diction is my intro to words.
I grabbed the shit that flies around in my head until it hurts.
So little food for thought my brain feels anorexic.
So many typos when I write, my words look dyslexic.
I got your opinions here, I put them in an envelope.
I'm going to set fire to it, hope you can read the smoke.
Most of you don't know me, and I like it.
Some of you don't like me and I know it.
They can't figure out my next move because
I move like spina bifida footprints.
If I say all lives matter, I'll get an honorable mention.
But if I say Black Lives Matter, with most there will be tension.
I find this interesting, because in the end they are just words.
You give them power when you cower though, it's so absurd.
Paralysis for analysis could stop me here,
but that's just an excuse, to write in fear.
So, I'll brandish the blandest man's anguish,
with a rammed fist.
Directed at the heart of any man who can withstand this.
I'm rarely speechless, but I speak less than you imagine.
Sometimes I stutter when I sputter like my words are catching.
I love to write about things most people won't discuss.
Sometimes my muses are too intrusive,
with their words and such.
You see a mousetrap, I see free cheese and a challenge.
But you stay quiet in fear of tipping the balance.
I've seen the world, the good and the shitty bits.
And all I see is a bunch of damn idiots.

Lainey Terfruchte

In Wonderland



Lauren Dickinson

Laundry

It's been awhile since I washed it.
It's been rolled in dirt and trodden on.
It smells of the must of tears.
So I rinse and scrub and rub the spots and speckles.
The teardrops like dew
And bloodstains spray.
Sudsy soapy
All washed clean.
Bleach it if I must, but not too harsh with its delicate frame.
Put it through the wringer
And when that's all said and done,
I'll hang my soul up to dry in the morning sun

Emmie Kulak

Self Portrait- Hands of Creation



Waterfall

It is breathtaking.

I stand, transfixed, watching thousands of colors glint across the ever-changing surface of the waterfall. The rushing water has a melody, cascading down onto white, almost opalescent rock. I follow a ledge leading up to the front of the falls; I need to hear the music better.

This beautiful slice of nature carries a divine quality, as if the gods had made peace just long enough to deliver a slice of the heavens to mortals, letting them see the majesty they are missing. It calls out to me.

I reach out to touch the waters, letting my fingers dance across the surface. The rest of the world recedes from my mind, slipping through my fingers like the surging crystal water.

A rush of certainty fills me. Yes. I belong here. I belong to the water. I wonder why it took me so long to see this. I have to go into the water.

I have to.

I take a deep breath and step under the streaming water. I lift my head as the falling current envelops me, soaking my shirt and racing down the ends of my fingers until I can't distinguish myself from the water anymore. I hear nothing but the crashing crescendo of the water's melody.

I feel the powerful pull of the water again and take another step forward through the curtain. My dripping eyelashes flutter as I catch my breath and gaze at what was hidden behind the water.

Every inch of the cave is made of more iridescent stone reflecting the white rocks below the waterfall. As I stare at the walls in front of me, the feeling of euphoric bliss fades away, replaced by a feeling of unease. For the first time since I glimpsed the waterfall, I feel uneasy.

My quickened breathing echoes off the walls as I run my fingers through my soaked hair. Wait. No, it couldn't be. The water's music is gone. What happened to —

I spin around and my heart drops. The waterfall is gone, replaced by solid sparkling rock.

No rushing water, no way out.

Wayward



Bethany Abrams

Observance

I wish I were good at grieving. I think that grief can be an opportunity to dig into your brain for every memory of someone's words, laughter, and touch. Yet, my mind is a labyrinth that changes every day, and I fear that no amount of digging and searching will be enough. There will always be something that I miss—I forget.

When I'm with you, I stare too long. I try to memorize each wrinkle that shows itself when you smile. Or how you blink too much before telling a lie.

I do know your laugh, and I've known it for years. It has always remained the same: loud, screeching, and yours. I have yet to memorize how it sounds when, after a joke has lingered in the air too long, your brain and mouth struggle to decide when to stop laughing. You breathe in deeply to recollect yourself, but sometimes you can't help it. Your voice barks out again.

Your touch is the hardest to memorize. When you touch me, I secretly hope that you will be the last person who does. When I'm away too long, I forget the way your hand becomes warm in mine, how the lines on our palms nearly match, and how your soft skin never dries. I wish I were good at grieving because I am scared. It scares me that there is always some part of you that only exists in the now—never to be remembered again.

Kayla Palliser

Days Past



Gaia Splendore

Leopard Watch

I want to go play with Isabelle's new swingset, and her I guess, but I can't. No one can. Mom can't go to the store for more strawberries either. We are not supposed to leave—we are on *Leopard Watch*.

A few days ago, Miss Spots went missing. The big lady at the zoo went to feed her pounds and pounds of meat, but she wasn't even there! The bars of her cage were bent. She slipped out in the middle of the night. Everyone got really scared and now we have to stay hiding in our houses until they find her and bring her back to the zoo.

Mom's reading me more stories about big cats. Mom reads from a book that tells me all sorts of facts about lions and jaguars and leopards and cheetahs and she shows me drawings of their huge paws. Mom tells me that Miss Spots and my kitty Domino are sisters, but I think she is lying—Domino doesn't come close to running thirty-seven miles per hour and has zero rosettes on her fur.

Dad thinks this whole situation is a "big fuckin' joke" and went out last night and didn't "see no cat." I wonder if Miss Spots ran far away or if she is hiding in Mr. Nelson's rose bushes. I wonder if she is scared.

Jacob, my older brother, hates Leopard Watch too. He says it is impossible for him to stay trapped in his room, even though he does that even if there is not a leopard outside. He sneaks girls into his room at night because he knows Mom would be too scared if he actually left. Last night I saw Kayleigh Konkowski in our kitchen getting a glass of water. I don't think anybody has seen her at all today. I wonder if she is scared.

Now I can't even use just one hand to count how long *Leopard Watch* has been going on. Mom ran out of books to read, Jacob ran out of girls, and Dad ran out of Bud Lights. Mom's been crying more recently; she is lying down right now. Dad is busy now too, he's watching men and footballs and screaming. I'm so, so, so, so bored. I really want to play on the monkey bars.

No one is here to stop me.

I tiptoe to the sliding door in the back, nervous about the click it makes when it unlocks, but Dad left it unlocked after his time being out on the porch. I don't even have to pull it open that much, I can slip right out of the bars. I tiptoe, then walk, then run to my playset. This is the most fun I've had in *at least* five days. I grab the monkey bars and swing. Mom's hydrangeas look really pretty right now. I only know that's what they are called because of the time we went to Lowe's and she let me pick out which flowers I thought were the prettiest. She helped me say high-drain-juhs and we disagreed after I said that I liked the pink more but she said that she liked the purple more. The bow in my hair loosens and my arms get wobbly so I just sit in the air for a second, holding the bars tighter and tighter and looking at the pink petals. I drop to the ground, I really couldn't take it anymore. I breathe on the ground for a second, scratching at the mulch. I climb the bars again, but this time climb them even more and just sit on top of them. The stars seem brighter than they have ever been and the air smells like the time my class went on a field trip to a taffy factory. Crickets chirp and I get to hear them sing for me.

Madeline Hutchinson

Fearing Dawn

The tall tree
Stands so strong
On the old hill

Wise in its years
In the secrets whispered into bark
In the quiet of the rioting dawn

No one asked how it survived
Too many years of
The hill's storms
The volatile winds
The shouts of the people
The hunger for fruit

Near dead, but barely alive
How did it survive?

Leaves grew over cracks and chips
Ax marks faded to scars and blamed on dogs
Broken branches made a game for children

The tall tree still hurts
Hopes the pain will vanish
Hopes no one ever understands

What happens if they see?
What happens if they are kind?
Fear is easy to justify in the dark
The dark that comes before dawn

awards

Poetry Awards

Judge: Gabriel Gudding

Gabriel Gudding is a professor of English at Illinois State University, where he teaches creative writing. He is the author of three poetry collections: A Defense of Poetry (2002), Rhode Island Notebook (2007), and Literature for Nonhumans (2015).

FIRST PLACE:

Phoebe Fuller: “a love poem to the male entity”

“The poem opens with a disarming confession that appears so bold it seems to adumbrate an irony (meaning it seems to suggest the confession will be undercut later in the poem), but the poem then goes on to convincingly underscore the speaker’s sincerity and their genuine wish to feel safe and secure and acknowledged as a full citizen in a patriarchal society. The poem then turns to articulate the toxic behavior licensed by a patriarchal culture. The poem’s clarity and simplicity (an anaphoric list of similes) is offset by its remarkable array of allusions and textures (Flannery O’Connor, CVS receipts, aspects of social media). It’s an affecting, unsettling, unpredictable, and powerful poem.”

SECOND PLACE:

Phoebe Fuller: “i am sex”

“This poem’s personification of sex—a politically, aesthetically, and biologically complex phenomenon—is a tender and profound technical solution to an unavoidable problem offered by sex: its experience is often clouded by mistrust, hurt, ignorance, sometimes violence and sometimes selfish disregard for the other. The use, thus, of prosopopoeia in this poem works as an organizational device that allows for a truly humane and expansive insight, one shared and experienced by its phenomenologically isolated participants: ‘i am not entirely ideal / but i am safe and / for the first time / i am in a bed / that they should be in. /’ In this way, the chief effect of the device (of prosopopoeia) allows the reader not to feel like a voyeur: it undercuts the kind of prurient and shame-filled attention often brought to sex. As such, this beautiful poem offers a meditation on consent, self-care, and care-in-general in a way that is not moralistic or tied to religiosity or shame or embarrassment, suggesting instead that care (care for the other, care for the self) is (or can be) a natural part of this deeply affecting act.”

THIRD PLACE:

Keela Sawyer: “I Hope”

“This is a profoundly moving, simple and elegant poem concerning a phenomenon all too common, yet one not written enough about: the deeply unsettling and tormenting feeling of not liking one’s very own body and, by extension, one’s self. What I love most about this poem is that the poet is giving advice to someone else (in this case their cousin): the poet is writing this for the benefit of someone else, even though they are clearly writing about their own pain. THIS is what poetry is all about: to assuage pain in another by offering one’s own struggle. My favorite line is, ‘I hope you never meet Ana or Mia, or anybody else’—I love this line because the poet does not explain, but let’s the reader do the work, and in this way they invite the reader into the poem as a co-maker: why should the reader not meet Ana or Mia? Are they mean? Have they been beaten down by this kind of self-doubt such that they are wounded and toxic? And why ‘or anyone else?’ The poet does not say and just moves on. The effect of this is that it makes the poem feel private and local, anchored in the here and now, and yet mysterious, like these matters are deep and complex.”

HONORABLE MENTION:

Anya Giordano: “*Oh, to be a deer*”

“This is two poems in one: The italicized message that runs through the poem is terrifying, and it seems to be the voice of a predator speaking to its prey; the second voice is the fully manifested poem itself, and it appears to be the voice of a prey animal speaking to its predator. It’s fascinating that the voice of the prey is more articulate, is careful, considerate, inviting, and even participatory in the devouring of itself, while the voice of the predator is hidden and seemingly silent (as suggested by the italics), and, though confessional, oddly uncaring. It’s like these two beings are speaking past one another in the act of devouring: one side taking nourishment; the other side offering extinguishment. Weirdly, because of this curious conversation, the poem reads allegorically (almost metaphysically) about sex, rape, the mindset of truly predatory people, or even domestic abuse... although that is I think an over-reading. I like that the poem invites over-reading while also seeming to speak somehow also of the way that the pleasures of dominating and devouring and consumption are bound up with the pleasures of submission and offering and providing. It’s an unsettling and oddly Freudian poem.”

Prose Awards

Judge: Eric Scot Tryon

Eric Scot Tryon is a writer and editor from San Francisco. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as Mid-American Review, Glimmer Train, Ninth Letter, Willow Springs, Los Angeles Review, The Florida Review, and has been selected for the Wingleaf Top 50, and the Best Small Fictions & Best Microfiction anthologies. Eric is represented by Carleen Geisler at ArtHouse Literary Agency. He is also the Founding Editor of Flash Frog. Find more information at www.ericscottryon.com.

FIRST PLACE:

Gaia Splendore: “Leopard Watch”

“*Leopard Watch* is really a story about a seemingly healthy family that we quickly learn is quite flawed, buzzing like a ticking time bomb. And yet, the lens we are given through which to view this family is a young and potentially unreliable narrator (brilliant!) and also through the veil of our frame story—a leopard has escaped the zoo and is on the prowl (even more brilliant!) The result is a rather straight forward story told in a very not straight forward manner. This adds tension and complexity, and yet it never feels forced. And I love that we finish with our young character feeling freedom and beauty for the first time in the story, yet there is still a palpable danger (the leopard is still out there!) lurking beneath the surface the whole time.”

SECOND PLACE:

Lainey Terfruchte: “In the Garden”

“The setting for in *In the Garden* is a wonderfully surreal mansion where our character loses objects, can’t find the kitchen, the front door, or even where they slept last night. The place feels so big that it’s claustrophobic, which is a fantastic effect! And really this all feels like a metaphor for an absentee father who has fallen into his new marriage so much so that he neglects his child. The layers here are many, and we are left contemplating the piece far after we finish reading.”

THIRD PLACE:

Lainey Terfruchte: “Prairietown”

“The parallel worlds in *Prairietown* and their inherent conflict are beautifully drawn here—never needing explanation, but rather the author just shows them to us and lets us feel the character’s struggle. This struggle escalates organically as we move through the story until it reaches its climatic end where it appears on the surface that she is left stranded and alone. But I love the final image which gives the story an ending full of hope, as I like to think ultimately she decides to save herself!”

HONORABLE MENTION:

Bethany Abrams: “Observance”

“The opening line of *Observance*—‘I wish I were good at grieving’—is such an interesting concept that we are immediately drawn in. And as the story progresses, we feel the longing and the sadness of loss until we realize—Wait! The loved one isn’t gone yet! And then it becomes this complex intersection, where the beauty lies in the question: is this a grief story or a love story?”

Art Awards

Judge: Melissa Mohr

Melissa Mohr has been at the Figge Art Museum for nearly 15 years, serving as the museum's Director of Education. Holding an M.A. in Art History from the University of Iowa, she brings to this role a rich background in art history, complemented by her distinguished leadership achievements. As a Museum Leadership Institute NextGen Fellow and a recurrent speaker at conferences hosted by prestigious organizations like the American Alliance of Museums, her thought leadership and expertise are widely acknowledged in the museum sector and by the Quad Cities community.

FIRST PLACE:

Dash Crow: "The Green Light"

"*The Green Light* celebrates the artist's skill at digital illustration. The featured 'green light' is masterfully executed, especially as it is reflected in the figure's hair and eyes. The composition itself adds intrigue to the artwork, asking the viewer to consider not only what is in the frame, but also what exists outside of it."

SECOND PLACE:

Kayla Palliser: "Almost Perfect"

"*Almost Perfect* is a celebration of texture and contrast. The artist has a strong eye for composition and the playful title encourages the viewer to look closely for signs of imperfection within the leaves. When this visual journey ends back at the artwork's center, one experiences feelings of resolution and reflection."

THIRD PLACE:

Marlene Cabada: "Deep in Thought"

"In *Deep in Thought*, the artist has realistically depicted the figure in a moment of raw emotion, which is not easy to do. The way the eyes and fingers are artistically rendered invites the viewer to share the depth of thoughtfulness experienced by the figure."

HONORABLE MENTION:

Emmie Kulak: "A Vivid Embrace"

"In *A Vivid Embrace*, the colors, lines, and shapes draw in the viewer immediately and create a sense of movement despite the solid, ceramic form. The design is well-executed and has a playful element to it."

OVERALL, these four artworks stood out to me for how skillfully they were conceived and created. The artists demonstrated their ability to communicate emotion and grace through a mastery of technique in each of their fields.

The Barbara Anderson Miller Award

In 1982, Dr. James E. Miller endowed *SAGA* in memory of his wife, Barbara Anderson Miller, who graduated from Augustana in 1943. While attending Augustana, she edited and wrote for *SAGA*. The award is given to the submission that is most competently crafted and most promising in imaginative power. The judge or judges for this award are traditionally previous editors of or standout contributors to *SAGA* who took it upon themselves to read and critique every piece of writing in this volume. This is *SAGA*'s most prestigious award.

Blake Traylor and Carly Davis graduated from Augustana College in 2023, having begun undergrad in the same First Year Honors orientation group. They were briefly nemeses, but became friends.

Blake and Carly majored in English, creative writing, and a third thing (Spanish; art) and minored in something else (linguistics; Spanish). Both graduated cum laude (summa; magna), are members of Phi Beta Kappa, were editors-in-chief of SAGA, and held other jobs (RWC; Observer and costume shop). Blake and Carly write things down and occasionally share them, are both partial to tea, cooking, and literature, and are working on developing lives for themselves post-grad. Blake is an amateur baker and professional kitchen assistant for cooking classes, and Carly works as a journalist and is pursuing her MA in English with a concentration in creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

JUDGE'S CHOICE:

Kobe West

“The Factory on 8th”

“*The Factory on 8th* recalls, certainly, the smokestack that shoots out of the subdivision where many Augustana students live next to campus. We chose to award this poem for, among other accomplishments, its strong shared symbolism in which an artist and factory are both removed and destroyed, leaving only their space and their output.

Ghosts populate the poem; artwork carries absence, and the factory floor hums. Even the narrator drifts like an empty overcoat, steeped in singer-songwriter sorrow. Dylan’s *Desolation Row* comes to mind, as do the elegies of Tom Waits.

Like the Mr. Rogers of a blighted neighborhood, the narrator gestures to its landmarks offhandedly—flickering street lights, a sick home and that evocative ‘black needle’ at the introduction—and in doing so, asks-without-asking ‘how does some place or someone maintain permanence without purpose?’”

contributors

Bethany Abrams is a senior studying English, Creative Writing, and Psychology with an Interdisciplinary Honors minor. She spends her time reading and writing stories, poems, and screenplays. She often writes as a way to understand the world and her place in it. This is her first time submitting to *SAGA*, and she is beyond grateful that her work was chosen.

Devyn Bande is a sophomore Psychology major with minors in Public Health and Flute Performance. They are also involved in the Augustana Symphonic Band, Augustana Symphony Orchestra, and UNYK Multicultural Dance Troupe here. Poems like these are a hobby and a creative outlet for them!

Paige Beggs is a sophomore with a Kinesiology major and minors in both Psychology and Art. She loves venturing to the national parks and taking pictures of everything she comes across. Paige is also the president of Pickleball Club and one of the co-presidents of Yarn Club.

Sophia Behnke is a sophomore studying English and Creative Writing. She works on campus as a peer tutor in the Reading/Writing Center, and in her free time she loves reading and writing poetry. She's very grateful to be included in this year's edition of *SAGA*.

Zach Blair is an emerging writer who resides in the Midwest. He has had his work published before. His writing is a constant in his life.

Marlene Cabada is a second year student from Sandwich, Illinois. Her major is Graphic Design. She loves to draw and create things whether it's on a screen or by hand. Honestly anything that has to do with expressing and being creative, she loves it. She doesn't necessarily like to display her artwork as she finds it scary, but she thought to why not give it a try and see what happens. This is her first drawing to be posted and hopes to continue to have more of her work featured in the future.

Jereme Carter: Hello again my fellow Augie classmates. I'm very honored and proud to have my writings accepted into *SAGA* magazine for a second year. As much as I love writing poetry, I never thought I was good at it. Being a sophomore in the Augustana Prison Education Program inspired me to be the best writer and poet I can be, given this unpredictable environment I happen to reside in. This one is for you Dr. Varallo. Thanks for believing in us when many others refuse to.

Hi my name is **Lauren Dickinson** and I'm a Creative Writing and Psychology major, and I am also on the water polo team here at Augie. Hope you enjoy my work as much as I do!

Abbey Ellis is majoring in Philosophy and Spanish Education.

Georgi Feigley is a sophomore triple majoring in Music, French, and History. She loves to express herself through her creativity and passions through performance, writing, whether that be lyrics for a song or a new idea for a story, photography, and especially photo editing. As well as the occasional Canva graphic. On campus she's involved in the Augustana Choir, Sigma Pi Delta Sorority, the American Choral Directors Association, Unyk Multicultural Dance Troupe, French Club, and tutors as an Academic Coach. She also enjoys reading, skiing, and traveling.

Olivia Fleming is a freshman at Augustana with a major in Psychology and minors in Creative Writing and English. This is her first year working with *SAGA* as a prose and poetry board member and copy editor, and she is very excited to see what the future holds with this literary magazine.

Phoebe Fuller is a sophomore who lives by one philosophy: "everything is just another thing."

Anya Giordano is doing very well, thank you.

Lexi Golab is a junior studying Creative Writing, Psychology, and WGSS. When she isn't scribbling stories or poems in her limited free time, she enjoys piña coladas and getting caught in the rain.

Madeline Hutchinson is an English and Creative Writing major as well as a Theatre and Spanish minor. She enjoys spending time reading fantasy, watching Dropout. tv, playing D&D, and staring wistfully out of windows. She hopes to publish more of her writing in the future.

Emmie Kulak is a senior double major in Studio Art and Environmental Studies. All she wants to do is create art and share it with the world. She is immensely grateful for being selected to be in this year's *SAGA* magazine. You can see more of her work on her Instagram: @Ekulart.

Janey Locander is a current junior who is always finding inspiration for her works in her day to day life on and off campus. You can find more of her works in past editions of Midwest Writing Centers Atlas (Volumes 14-17), Love Girls Magazine, and Augustana's Hercampus website among other publications across the Quad Cities Area. Her most recent project, RainbowpagesQC, is a website for Queer Writers in the Greater Quad Cities Area to promote and share their works with others within the community and beyond. Stay tuned for what coolness she has coming up next!

My pen name is **Binh Minh**, which means Dawn in my language. I'm a sophomore from Saigon, Vietnam and majoring in Data Analytics. I enjoy reading detective novels and studying history. I find it hard to evaluate or criticize a person, so I simply tell stories with multiple layers so the readers are the ones to judge the characters. All of my work is dedicated to the people around me.

My name is **Elia Murillo** and I'm an artist from the Southside of Chicago who likes to experiment with different mediums and art styles all the time. I let my imagination run wild and just let my hand react.

Kayla Palliser is a senior majoring in Communication Studies and Business Marketing. This year, she is serving as Production Editor for *SAGA*. She is the Managing Editor for the *Observer* and an intern at East Hall Press. She hopes to pursue a career in book publishing and immensely enjoys bringing the creativity of *SAGA* writers and artists to the page.

Karen Rizzo is a senior majoring in Art History with a minor in Art.

Keela Sawyer is a double major in WGSS and Public Health alongside double minors in Psychology and Disability Studies. In general they love to create, especially poetry and artwork.

"If I'm struggling with anything at all, chances are I have art to go with it." -Keela 2024 When they aren't busy with endless homework you can typically find them hanging out with friends, participating in clubs, providing resources to their community, running their radio show, or sleeping away the blues.

Gaia Splendore is a Poetry and Prose board member, which makes sense because she spends her time at Augustana studying English and Creative Writing. Nearly all of her day consists of writing: wake up—breakfast is writing a haiku, lunchtime—draft a new novel, before bed—write said novel, in her dreams—get visited by the spirit of Vonnegut to discuss short stories.

Lainey Terfruchte is a junior majoring in English and Creative Writing with minors in Music and History. She enjoys reading and writing strange stories, playing the harp, and making art.

Lily Thomas is a junior English and French double major. Writing has always been a big part of her life, and she's excited to share her work with others. When she's not writing, she's reading or watching horror movies.

Emma Watts is a (slightly/extremely) overworked junior studying Theater Performance and Film, with a minor in Scandinavian Studies. In her free time she enjoys making jewelry, reading, performing, and watching movies with her dogs Buddy, Cooper, and Arnold Palmer (yes, it's really Arnold Palmer). She hopes to continue creating things, and is avidly pursuing a career in Theater and Film while also running her own small business.

Sarah Welker is a sophomore majoring in graphic design, studio art, and women, gender, sexuality studies. Sarah primarily focuses on visual arts, but has recently dipped her toes into the world of writing in the past year. They love making art that taps into the nostalgic, heartbroken, and confusing feelings of being a young adult. She is so honored and excited to be featured in this year's edition of *SAGA* and be surrounded by so many amazing artists!

Kobe West is a transfer student from Muscatine Community College, studying English Education.

Charley Williams is an artist from the small town of Morrison, Illinois, hoping to travel the world to explore the world of fine arts.

Megan Yarusso is a sophomore at Augustana College majoring in English and Sociology/Anthropology. She enjoys playing the cello, ice skating, and crocheting sweaters.

Charlie Zielinski is a junior student double majoring in biology and creative writing with a minor in environmental studies. With sanguine disposition and a bubbly personality, he is passionate about ecology and writing fantasy. He loves going on adventures big or small and pushes himself to take risks whenever he writes. Charlie would like to encourage the reader to take a different path home after class today, "you never know what adventures or thrilling detours await!"

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