

THE ECKLEBURG PROJECT

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

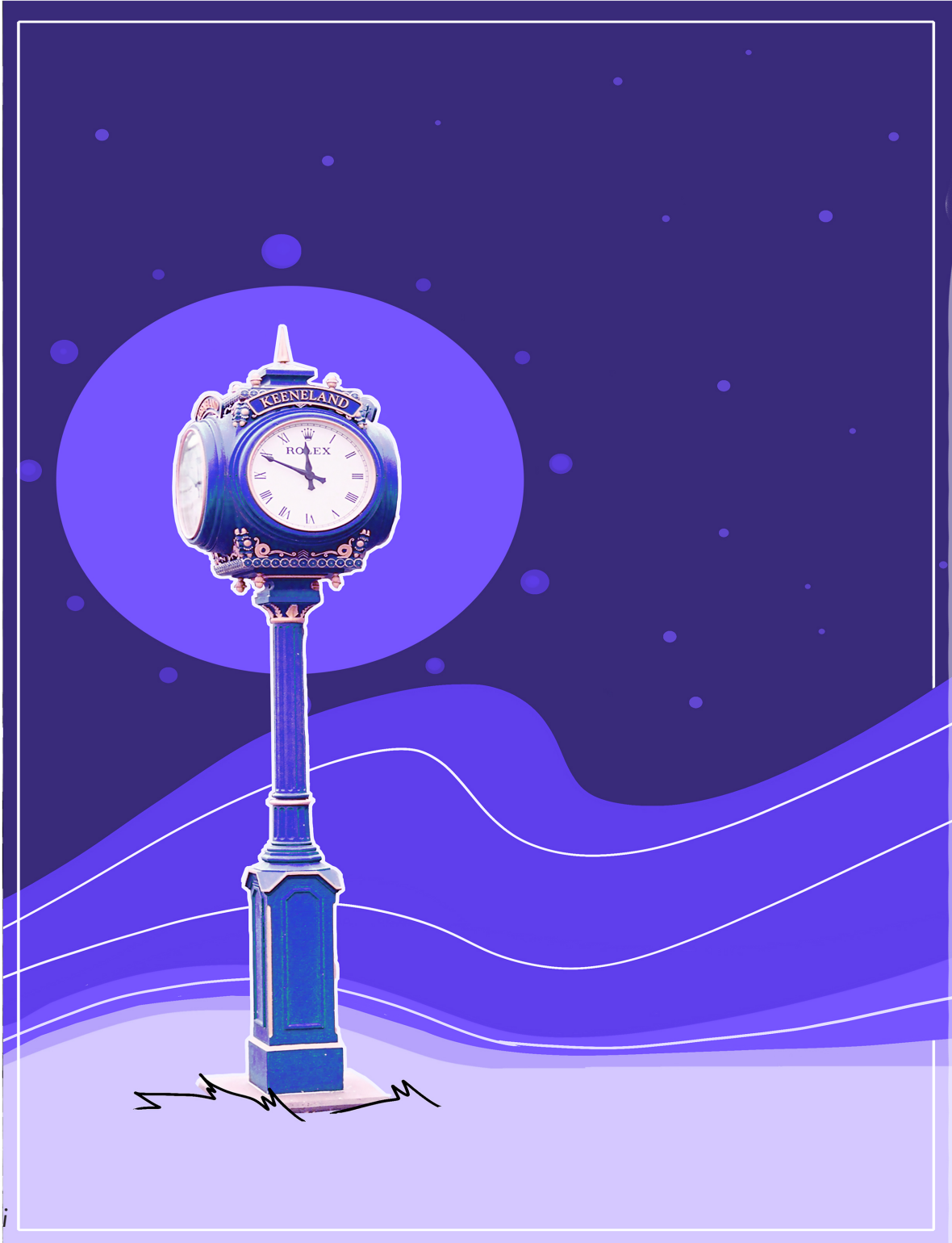
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*"A Scientist, with rigorous formulas, may solve the mysteries of the cosmos.
An Artist, with a few strokes of the pen, may stir it into existence."*

- Charles L. Womble

Dear Reader,

I wrote the poem above when I was the Poetry Editor for The Eckleburg Project, and a Freshman at Texas A&M University. I spent countless hours reading and reviewing so many wonderful and heartfelt pieces submitted by my fellow students that I could not help but be amazed by the unfathomable display of humanity and creativity expressed in each and every one of them.

In today's times, it may seem like humanity and creativity are luxuries for those who do not have to deal with the struggles of reality. In today's times, it may seem like imitation is a pointless waste of energy when our minds are pushed to their limits so regularly by monotony. Yet, in today's times, the need for imitation of life through Art is as present as it has ever been. These are the times that inspire an artist to create the content in which people will study for generations to come.

Texas A&M University has no shortage of artists. In your hands, in these pages, in these words, and in these images, you will find a universe of their emotions captured as carefully as we at The Eckleburg Project know how. I hope you witness the humanity and creativity in which I have for the past three years, and I hope that it inspires you to create a universe of your own.

Best,



Charles L. Womble
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“ON THE PHONE”

by Katie Satterlee

chiming in

BY H. HARTMAN

they talk,
their words like the notes
of a pleasant song
flowing naturally

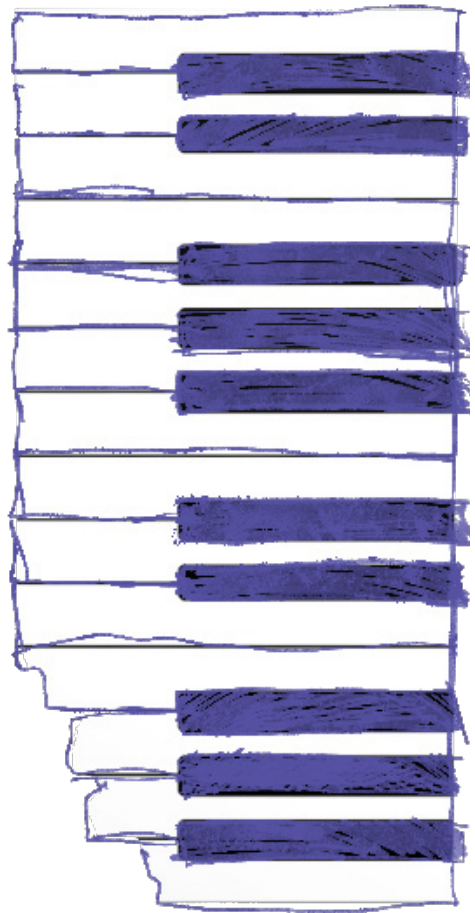
what would happen if I chimed in?
would I play the right note?
would I sing the right tune?

or would I be
a poorly trained pianist
uncoordinated,
fumbling with the keys

with each mistake,
a painful dissonance
marring their elegant harmony

I hold the cymbals
in preparation
for the perfect instant
to crash them together,
to be heard

but suddenly
their voices decrescendo
and then slow
and just like that
the music stops --
and I never said a thing.



INTANGIBLE SOUNDS IN AUDIBLE SETTINGS

BY MATTHEW TORRES

...on the other side of the wall.

There is a room, the only room with no windows and a doorway that has yet to be seen. There is a room that has been tucked neatly away and to sleep. But who can sleep through that kind of noise? It would not be unduly to knock insofar as it would be to keep listening.

...on the other side of the wall.

A mural of a merry band of young boys beating drums and drinking from cracked mugs uplift tunes scattered among the stars as if they were divine notation. Their jovial warmth embraces the black and blue sky much like a forehead kiss or a warm shoulder. An echo of a burning fire casts their sleek shadows, all clinking glasses and mingling as scatterbrained fragments here and there in the trees' many leaves. Tucked behind a distant trunk and just out of frame, a young boy sulks into sizeable uniform sleeves. He is weeping over something, someone, somewhere—unspoken of. He has declined to be shown. Another long-since merry man sits with his back propped against his brother's. His visage is contorted by a combination of awkward brushstrokes and rugged cotton, a fallacy of a creator with nothing to lose. The gratuitous amount of fresh acrylic used to make the deep furrow in his brow is enough to suggest that he knows more than he has told. Still, the dumb crease in his smile asks who is the observer? His is the face of a man who has looked past the gossamer film and into the ugliness behind the veneer of noise—beyond the drums, the hums, the drunken beating of the drums that has stolen the last vestiges of breath of a merry band of boys.

...on the other side of the wall.

Colors in between static linger in the air, delicately displacing nothing and shamelessly swallowing everything. Grey. And red. And a low buzz. It comes from the TV in the corner and crackles and hisses in an ugly language that

bites at the touch. Droning and droning. Droning and droning. A purr to be lulled to sleep by. Flashes of green. This room makes a phenomenon out of fluorescence when taken into consideration the stained, mistreated shag carpet or the scratches in the oakwood panel walls. Then, there is more white before the whirring, whirling, whirring sound, like the screaming slipstream soliloquys of the broken ceiling fan spinning in reverse, spinning fast enough to suck the air out of every lively tone in the room before—. More grey. And black. A hum which sometimes means blue. Sometimes, not. Sometimes, the colors are sensitive; rarely not. A vicious rapping, a faint tapping. Even a heavy hand cannot halt the spinning of the crackling record and a fat finger is not enough to satisfy tinnitus. But the sensation is somewhat reminiscent of drums. In the distance.

...on the other side of the wall.

A trunk of tokens and trinkets that if shaken would sing the song of a million different memories, a million melodies played and million more without a voice. It is cracked and chipped at its corners and held together by warping wood and a broken apart brass bolt that has outlived its ambition, nothing more. But this trunk is no rose and a splinter does not spill blood like a thorn. Still, inside: a golden locket whose ambition holds; a saturated photograph of faded faces like nameless merryman; a billet for a silent film; opulent jewelry glazed in verdigris; starved petals scattered here and there; a folded uniform whose ambition cannot be put into words; dust. Still. Acoustic memories are all that reside here now it seems. They are lively, and they are loud. They are at peace for lack of disturbance, and they want so desperately to be disturbed. In here, the venetian red walls are insulated with sounds so sincere they might be mistaken for plagiarism; and even if a source did come to light or a reason for their deception, well, sounds can be forgiven so long as they are not put into words.

And you can hear them too...



"NO SIGNAL"

by Sarah Womble

OUT

BY ABBY FORREST

Every day is the same now. For you, it's been like that for a long time. The smaller things always came and went in a flash, and even big shifts quickly got stuck in the monotony of everyday life. You got tired of it, but what else could you do? You kept going, day in and day out, a cog in the wheel of whatever system you help to operate. Then this year happened, and it got worse. Everything, for everyone, slowed to a stop, and there was (and is) nothing that anyone can do about it.

For you, spending most days around your computer, typing words out into the ether and willing tales into existence was how you kept going with it. Most of the time on your own, but sometimes with others—those times were precious, and they were your favorite. Eventually, though, this too became something that tired you with its dreary sameness, and you began the daily trudge again.

It's fall now, months and months into something you did not see coming and hoped would have ended long ago. It's also an average, normal morning; you wake up before eleven, drag yourself out of bed around one, and finally start to be productive. There's some strange, nagging feeling at the back of your mind, but you swat it away for now; you have stuff to do. Can't let anything get in the way of that, especially when it's all you have to give yourself any kind of daily routine.

But then it comes back again, just barely loud enough for you to notice. Despite your best efforts, you can't quite understand what it's saying—like trying to single out one voice from within the murmur of the crowd in an auditorium. You remember something, from a time you didn't think you'd ever grow to miss, and the nag in your mind turns into a bit of empty heartache. You recover, though, and get back to work.

You always have to get back to work.

Somehow, it retreats just long enough for you to get lost in your writing once more. Writing for one class, writing for another, writing for yourself, and the hours melt away until the orange glow of the sunset starts to leave glowing streaks all across your screen. Then, and only then, do you stop—unable to see what you're saying, the progress of the day comes to an end.

THERE

But the work itself is not done, nor will it ever be.

The next day comes with darkened windows and the pattering of rain against glass. It's a welcome development, because in this new normal you've found yourself in, rainy days are your favorite. They're the only times you're almost glad for the new world, because it means you get to stay cozy in your bed and dry inside your room, not forced to leave and make yourself vulnerable to the elements like you used to.

Or, maybe that's just what you've been telling yourself to quiet the part of you that misses the wet shoes, wrangled umbrellas, and squeaky halls of the old world, and the normal that came with it. All of that is long gone with no promise of when it will return, so it's best to ignore that feeling and the ache that often accompanies it.

On days like today, you don't bother to get out of bed unless you need to. You listen to the rain for a while before disturbing your own peace and making yourself aware of the new horrors of the day, courtesy of a glowing rectangle.

Then, in the midst of that, you hear it again. That nagging feeling is back and this time it's almost loud enough to understand. You shrug it off again as something you picked up from a story you read or a show you saw, and then continue on as you were before until whatever light from your windows is gone entirely.

Usually, you'd try to sleep. If you had things to finish it would be different—and while you do, in fact, have things to finish, they're not to be done for a couple more days at least. There don't seem to be any more thoughts than usual banging around in your head, and by now you've definitely found your way around that obstacle.

Then, for the third time, something comes to mind. It's the same thing as before, still not too loud, not yet, but in the quiet of the night, it is finally loud enough to be heard.

Just leave, it tells you. Go find something else, somewhere out there.

"No, I can't," you respond. "I have so much work to do."

It seems to have taken that for an answer, so it goes quiet. For now.

But because you know it is there, the call never truly leaves.

ILLNESS, AGAIN

BY JOSHUA CARLEY



subject: Illness, Again

To my Professors, Advisors, Organization Leaders, and Whomever else it may Concern,

I am writing to you at a fever filled 3 a.m., to let you know that while *have* tested **negative** for Covid, that does not mean I am healthy. Quite the contrary actually.

*****Content warning for potential vulgarity*****

Currently, I am on 4th time awaking from a slumber, where, after approximately one hour, I jolt up in a sea of my own sweat, where I there-on proceeded to change clothes, sheets, and the like in a feeble and seemingly useless attempt to fall back asleep in a setting that is not moist and disgusting. (after three days of this, I am running out of clothes)

This last time has been the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back, as when I awoke, and I realized that the ending of Daylight Saving seemingly reversed time, the rush of anger and adrenaline led me to furiously strip the bed and myself and take a shower, where I was then tempted to fall asleep (the potential of drowning and ending this madness that way was temptation enough).

HOWEVER!

I seemingly mustered up the energy to arise and make my way to the computer, where I am now writing this email.

*****graphic content over*****

Was all that detail necessary for you to know? No.

Will I regret sending this later? Yes, probably.

But I personally prefer giving and receiving context, which all leads up to the simple fact that I am still feeling terrible. Simply godawful.

I have tried and failed to muster the mental resolve to work on any of my class assignments (energy which I apparently have now to write this email, and this act of hypocrisy/irony is not lost on me), but I am unable to do so, as I have not had adequate sleep for days, going on an eternity.

Am I potentially dramatic? Maybe, but I would like to think of myself as a hard worker, and the incapacity to complete a straightforward assignment is ripping me to my core.

ALL OF THIS TO SAY that I really don't see myself completing anything anytime soon, but I will turn my assignments, both past and future, in as soon as I humanly can.

I am so very appreciative of your accommodations thus far. It is not lost on me that many many other people in a similar situation do not have the luxury of just trying to take the time and heal.

I plan to get tested again on Monday and will be continuing my quarantine for the indefinite future.

Sincerely, Thank You, Best, Regards, Gig 'em, With Gratitude, BTHO Covid, & Yours,
XXXXXX

the swallow's song

BY MARY ANNE BRIGHAM

Today the swallows sing of love
Their promises are sweet.

The threshing floor seems far above
The place I rest my feet.

I wonder, Glory, if i'm wrong
My heart, it longs to see

how you are moving and how long
I'll wait at Heaven's seat.

So swallow, sing a melody
of hope that doesn't cease.

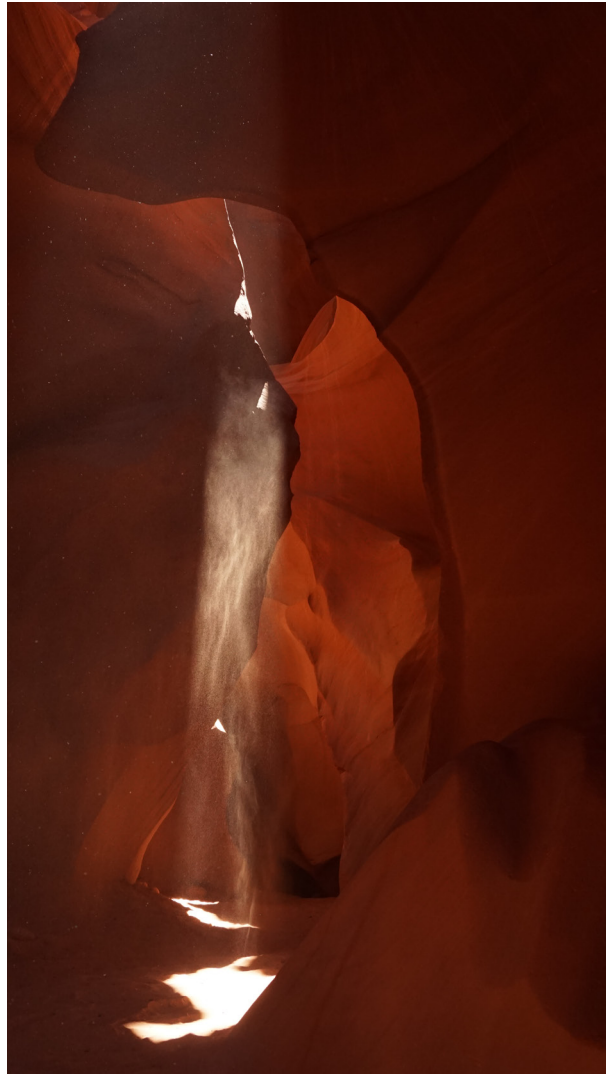
And you, beloved, sing along
the door is opening.

But Glory surely goes before
and Glory goes behind.

And Glory hasn't led me yet
into my lover's eye.

So swallow sing as my heart sows
the seeds of expectation.

I hope for thee, the one I love,
to find me in my waiting.



“THROUGH THE CRACKS”

by ARI



"ROSE"

by Christine Yeh



“THE WAY OUT”

by Cindy Salinas

Grandpa Joe

BY PRESLEY LIMON

My Grandfather
born a citizen
from immigrant parents
who grew up on dirt floors
with his 12 other siblings
shined shoes for nickels
instead of attending fourth grade

My place on the ladder
the things that I own
the privileges that I have
the opportunities that I've been given
have been picked like fruit from the seeds he planted

Where would I be
had he not worked several jobs at once
or stayed after hours at work
and saved every dime he made
Did he know
that his effort would completely alter
his future generations
Did he know
that not only would he climb out of the hole
but move to the top of the mountain

and illuminate the path
for the rest of us to follow him

Grandpa Joe
the torch you pass on
burns brighter than the fire within you
Grandpa Joe
you single handedly
created generational wealth
that inspires me to put in the work
needed to chase everything I have ever wanted

Grandpa Joe
whose descendants
don't even speak your native language
Please forgive me
for not knowing a better way to say
thank you

Abuelo Joe
Gracias por darme una vida
por la que no tenía que luchar
Thank you for giving me a life
I did not have to fight for

Pushing insistently
against the current, as if
difficulty can be overcome
by persistence. I like this,

believing that
the gaping maw that
may snap me up and
split me open may never

come. Orange jewels pulse
from inside, yearning to
take on some kind of seed or a
promise for tomorrow and
the melding of us, but I don't

realize I'm heading for
you; the future
that beckons; pulled
by a red string to the
pools where I spawned, where
we spawned.

The stream roars but
it cannot drown out the urge of
needing to push, dragged forward
by an invisible compass to the there
from whence we came.

Can I fight this? I could breathe
air too if I tried hard enough,
promise of the future bursting
out of my slick,
glistening womb.

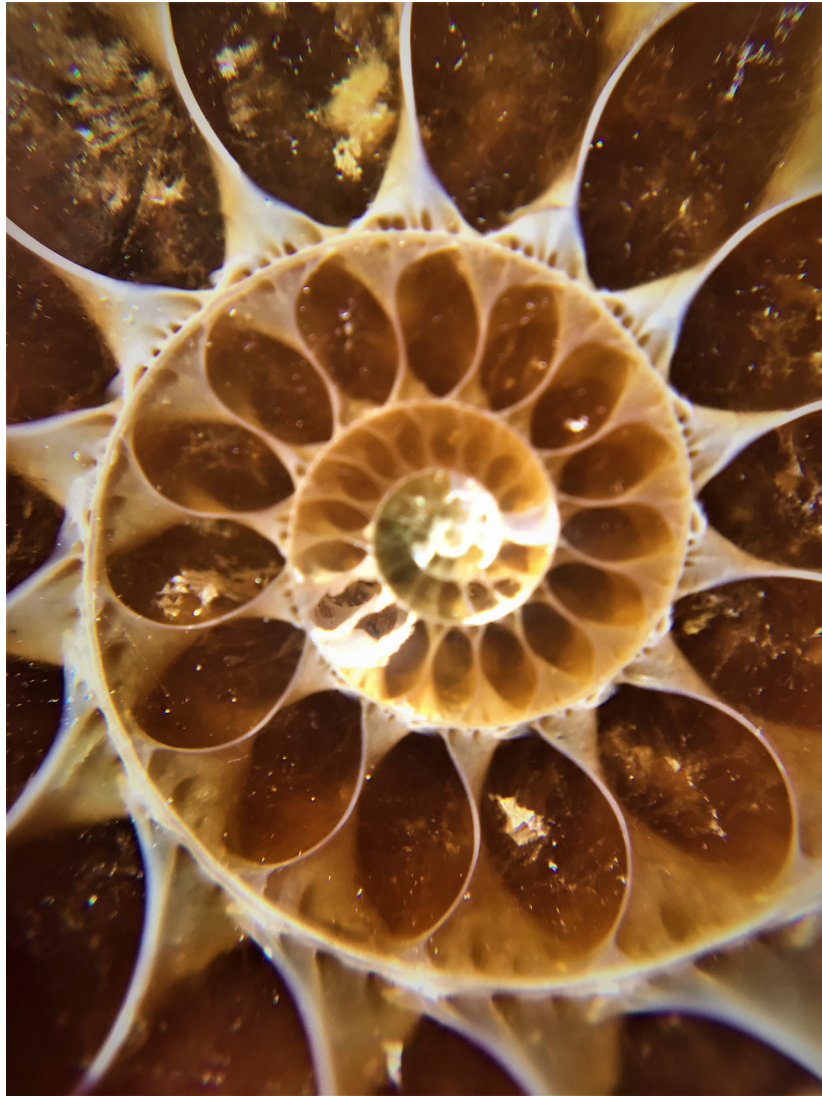
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**BY SHANNON
WAN**



"CASTED AWAY"

by ARI



"FOSSIL 1"

by Truth Hippman

MASTERPIECE

BY LI WEN JAN



they told me to never fall in love, but how could i resist?

you're made out of cherub flesh and angel tears.
the gods wish they could've made you a little less perfect
because for the first time in eons,
they fear what they have created.

the trees whisper the truth:
another war shall begin,
not because of hatred but of beauty.

tell me your secrets.
how is it that your veins breathe golden ichor
while your fingertips drip blood?

hold me in your winged arms
and mouth ancient spells along my neck.
enchant me forever in your guarded tower
and play with my naïveté like a puppeteer directing a broken marionette.

i'll dance for you
until my heels twist and shatter across sparkling glass,
until the muscles in my arms weave a tapestry of stars so large
they eventually thin out and snap.

others may fear your reign of chaos,
but in my eyes,
you are a masterpiece.

the price of a **LIFE**

BY MATTHEW TORRES

Today, I must pay the price for a life which I was owed
By picking shattered glass from scattered bones and asking
If rummaging through pink innards could ever
Replace that which was lost to senseless slaughter.

In Memoriam:

Of the pink porcelain piggybank that kept
My karmic collections; tossed aside
These pennies do represent a single affection—
I now realize that in counting what once was
I have lost that which could have ever been.



"A PLANET OF CONTRADICTION"

by Travis Engolf

THE FOG

BY KYLE TOWNSLEY

The breeze which yesterday had sung of Eden's birth,
Today was still, and yielded to the fog.
She let him lie upon the quiet morning road,
Her patient tongue unbitten and unheard

The fog, he wanted not the glory of the day,
But just to slow the dying of the night.
His gentle weight was felt, the beasts stayed in their beds
And honored what few words he had to say.

A world which in the clear of day was forced to fret
Was in the shroud of grey allowed to breathe.
The spider high above, his fragile web a sail,
Could rest at last his tired spinneret.

The breeze but listened close, she loved her brother well.
She felt no urge to rise or interject.
Tempest she can be, and stories she could sing,
The wind knows not the hunger to be felt.



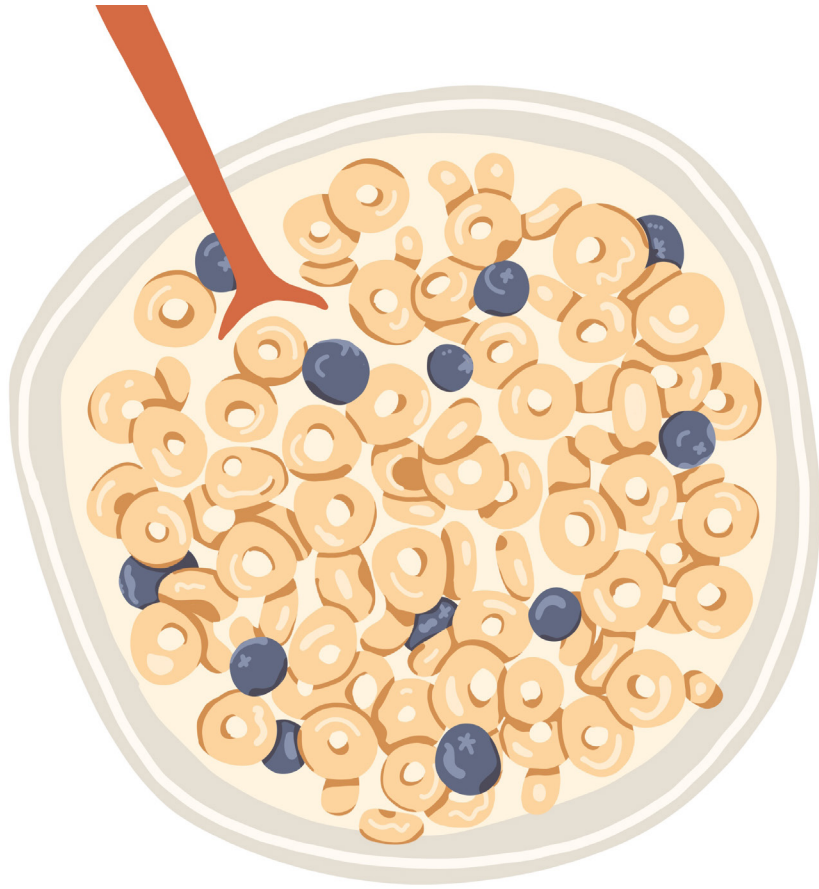
"DON'T TRIP"

by Sarah Womble



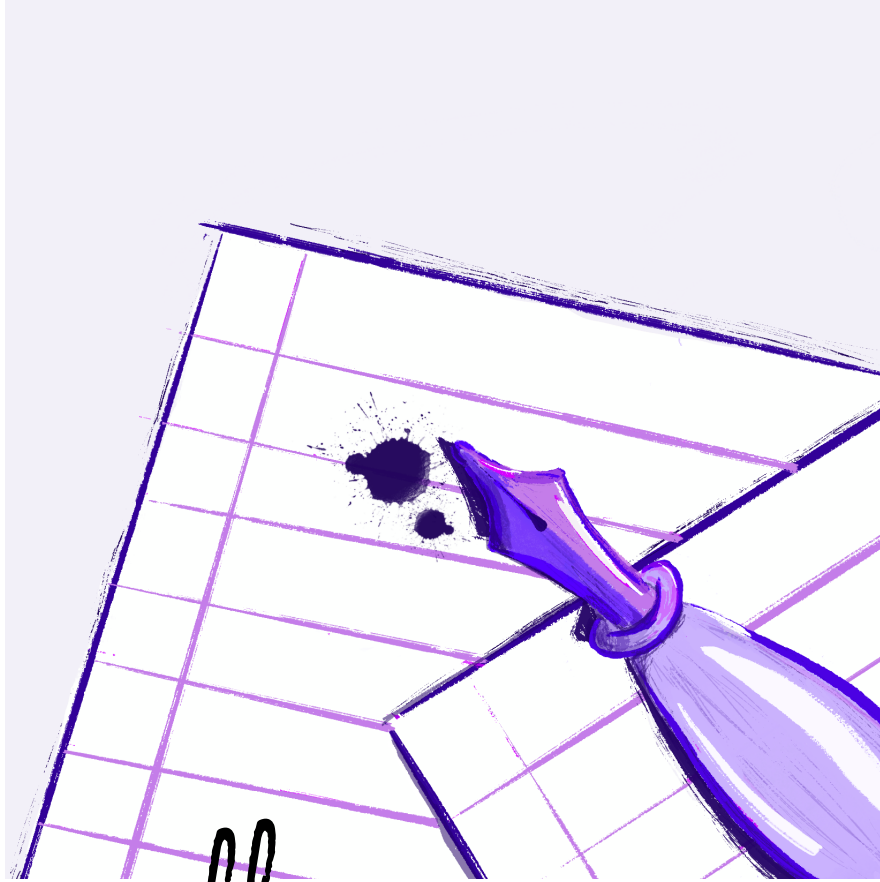
“JOY”

by Julia Wargo



“CHEERIOS”

by Deborah Cook



Staff
Writing

outline of a grandmother

BY MEGHANA KODALI

You are
Slick black braids greased with botanical oils
Gleaned from the garden that leaned and breathed
Into the barred windows of a wooden house

You are
A mother of four, no, five
It is impossible to forget a girl named after the sun
Whom they buried with shelves of dolls

You are
Quick with a switch
Flicked without remorse at the utterance of a faulty times table
A letter that snuck out of order

How can I forget
The taste of unmellowed, caterpillar-green guavas
The basket of ancient soap perfuming the drawers of your bureau
The only set of hands that fulfilled a hefty promise to love forever and unconditionally

How can I forget
That I dread seeing you
Because time has worn you down so
That I can almost believe it would not shatter me
If you left now

What a rare sort of blessing
Your face has blurred in my memory



“APARTMENT LIVING”

by Deborah Cook



"UNITY IN DIVERSITY"

by Katie Satterlee

ME, MY CONSCIENCE AND THE TIDES

BY BHAVIK GUPTA

It's sad how distance determines how close we are with someone
Distance became the reason why I was not close to the people I loved a ton
And so another night I fell asleep, broken and sad
Only to wake up enlightened because of this dream I had.

The day was over and the sun was setting low
There was a slight shine, a small glow
Darkness visible and was taking over
There was growing silence with voices becoming fewer

The sky was calm but the ocean was wild
The clouds were becoming heavy but the wind was getting mild
My only companion, my conscience was by my side
So, I was sitting there with my conscience and the tides

Sitting there, I was thinking, trying to make some sense
Because of the distance, my relations had lost their significance
It was obvious that I needed someone beside
Just like how I had my conscience and the growing tides

There was some direction in my way but I felt lost
Sitting there all alone, I felt at what cost
With my solitude, however, I was free with my chains all destroyed
There was so much peace and calm, but life was so void

I didn't make relations just to break them
Without leaves and branches, what good is a stem?
Is it true that distance takes away the people we had by our sides?
I wanted answers as I sat with me, my conscience, and the tides

The glitter in the sky made me look up, the moon shining alone
The moon was its own ruler, living on its own
The sky was lighted, the ocean was shining
Maybe there was something wrong with this feeling

My bubble of solitude was going to be proved wrong soon
Because the second time I looked up, I got some different vibes from the moon
I saw how perfect it was, refusing to abide
I was confused with my conscience and the tides

Suddenly the tides rose and in a flash, I got a sense of what was true
Distance made sense after all, without the moon there are no tides, something I knew
The sky became clearer and the tides stacked up as if a shelf
The tides taught me there and then, that to exist, I needed to live beyond myself

Woke up the next morning with a valuable lesson
Everyone I had in my life was a blessing
If I ever felt that distance took away people from by my side
I had to remember, the moon is so far away but still exists the tides.



"QUARANTINED"

by Austin Biehle

Rachel Raabe
HELP 633 - 911
Professor Sagan
06 October 2020

Raabe 1

Atomic Bonds: The Inescapable Nature of Connection

An atom is 99.9999999999996 percent empty space.

when i was a child i felt like i had an ocean inside me stretching to empty blue infinity vast and omnidirectional. my conscious self was a speck of a speck marooned on a neon plastic lounge float from walmart and if i dipped my hand into the gentle warm waters beneath i could feel the yawning emptiness descending for miles and miles and miles and miles devoid of anything at all and faced with that i felt nothing

Despite this, there is an entire field of study dedicated to observing the myriad ways in which different atoms interact. The ways they push and pull on each other. The things they give and take from one another.

other people are so complicated always wanting something from you something you may be unable to give something you may not know how to give. i look at them and i see whole other universes incomprehensible infinities buttoned up inside comprehensible finite shells. walking paradoxes. unpredictable unknowable frightening a thousand ways to hurt and be hurt. but sometimes i wonder the shape of a particular universe. if i could slide a hand between their ribs and draw a finger feather light across the shuddering flesh of their heart. what would happen next? if they did the same to me would i even feel it?

The universe is 99.9999999 percent empty space.

i don't understand when people say they fear being alone it seems very silly to me because i am the self i like to be most when i am alone i am defined by myself i am myself uncorrupted. i sink into the deep well of silence within my self and it fills my lungs sits thick in my throat but i am not drowning i do not need to breathe i drift in warm blue infinity and feel peace

To reach the nearest star to Earth's sun, you would have to traverse 4.244 light-years, or 1.94 trillion kilometers, of yawning black void. This star is not visible to the naked eye, even on the darkest night in the most remote corner of this world.

groups of people endlessly fall into their intricate orbital dances only to get ejected or repositioned by some cataclysmic event. the fabric of the cosmos rips and tears and reorganizes itself on a moment to moment basis a continuous function a perfect integral approaching infinity. i ask myself what is the meaning of this i ask my mother what is the meaning of this i ask god what is the meaning of this but of course it is not that easy you have to use your brain you absolute fucking know it all moron didn't you learn anything in school?

Electrons orbit atoms. Planets orbit stars. Stars orbit galaxies.

sometimes i wonder what it would be like to be someone else to see through their eyes to think how they think to imagine how they imagine. it would probably be like walking into your own house except that all the rooms got shuffled around and the decorations are strange and unfamiliar and actually it is not your house at all. it is recognizable as a house but the longer you sit in it the more you realize that it is not a house as you understand it in fact it is something else entirely. to understand it to truly and wholly comprehend it would mean that you are no longer yourself but someone else instead. and it is impossible to truly know another person. it is impossible to truly touch another object; atoms repel each other at their cores. understanding is piecemeal and to obtain it we trade little pieces of ourselves amongst ourselves and perhaps that is the definition of happiness but i would not know i guard my fragments closely

A rock could be thrown in space and continue on its trajectory for ten thousand years if it doesn't encounter anything to stop it

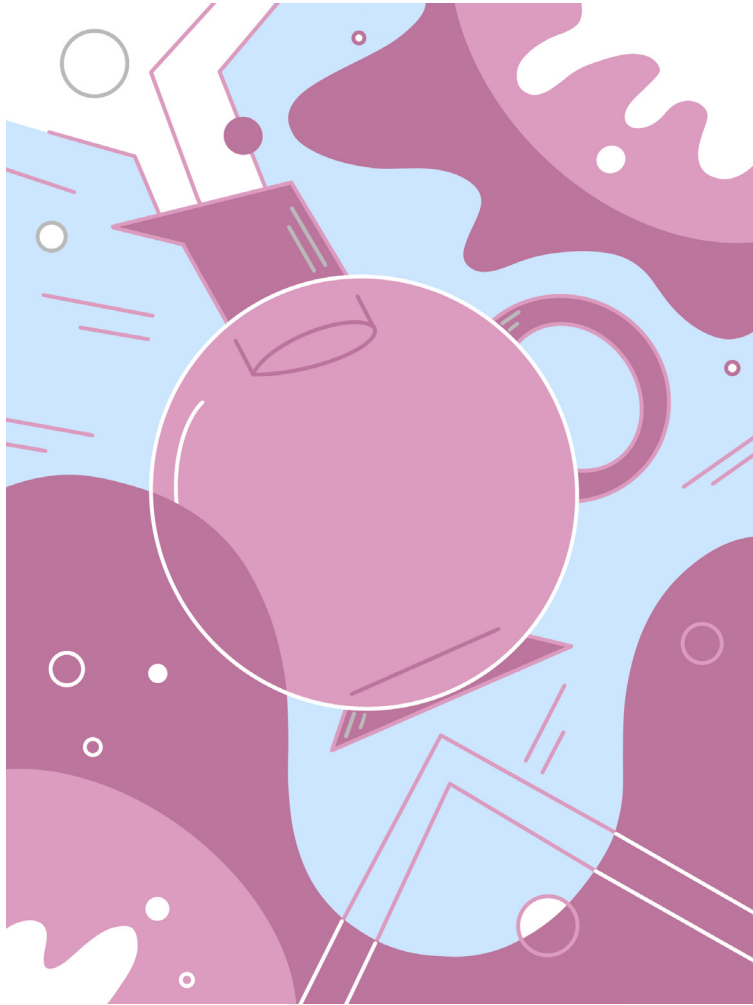
a letter to
A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

BY KEVIN CASTRO

A letter to a beautiful woman who I swear can make the best muse I've ever seen:

I can never just message you or say hi to you without practicing first.
It took me about 20 minutes and five drafts to tell you "Good morning pretty girl" today...
I always imagined meeting someone like you; a daughter of Apollo whom he sings his songs for.
I always imagined meeting my muse would be like watching fireworks go off and not hearing any of them,
Something wonderfully beautiful yet as scary as being thrown off a plane into the ocean
Because I'm scared of heights and I don't know how to swim,
But if you asked me to meet you in the heavens for a dinner date with the Olympians,
I would climb the tallest mountain without ever looking down,
And I would sooner beg Zeus to strike me with his lightning than risk the chance of missing you.
And if you asked me to meet you at the bottom of the sea,
I would beg Poseidon to grant me the chance to see you before I drown, and I would never grasp for air

Because you see,
When a person drowns, they don't inhale until the very last second when their body knows that
It can't hold back the inevitable anymore.
Because you see,
Our lungs have fallen in love with the air and they're pining to be with it even if it means they'll die in the
process.
So, I've been working on this poem for you long before I knew what a poem was,
But it took me about eighteen years, four months, twelve days, and twenty hours
To come up with the first line and honestly...
...I think I can still make it better
Because you, my muse, deserve a poem written with a pen made of gold
And ink of ichor, on paper that I made myself with the patience of a growing tree.
You see,
You could inspire man to make new gods in your name
Because your name's become a prayer, a battle cry, and a love song all in one.
The sun's halfway across the sky and I think he only moves because he's searching for you,
I looked into the night sky one time and saw the moon shining as brightly as she could,
And then I understood what it meant to fall for someone...
I saw the moon in love with the sun, and I knew how intense her love was
Because she was choosing to burn herself alive every night with the sun's light
In order to share his beauty with the world in the darkness of the night.
And I've always been obsessed with the night sky,
Now I know why;
I've been a hopeless romantic since before I drew my first breath
And seeing the moon die for her lover,
And knowing my lungs would drown for theirs,
I know that life is an extension of love, and death isn't the absence of breath, but the absence of love.
And I love writing poetry as much as I love being alive,
But I never loved the poetry I wrote until I started writing in hopes that one day, I would find a muse,
And if I were to paint with you as my muse, Da Vinci himself would drop his brush
Because what else is there to be said when everything's been talked about?
I've spent about forty-two lines, trying to tell you that
I can't wait to see you again, and I hope you have a good day.



“IT’S TEA TIME”

by Austin Biehle

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from
all of
us

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Cheers all around.

It truly takes a village to raise a creative project.

- The Eckleburg Project Staff

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