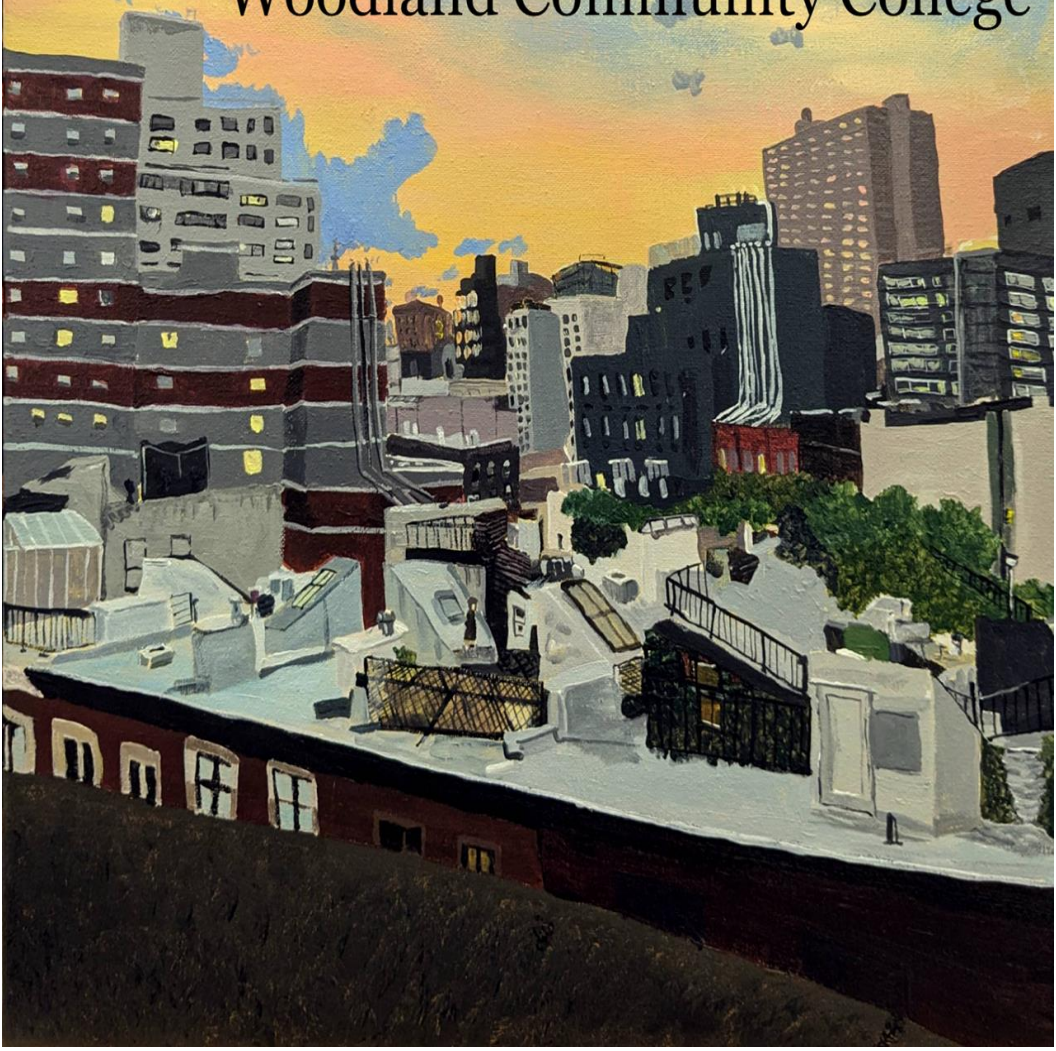


Ink

A Literary Arts Magazine

Issue 24, Fall 2024
Woodland Community College



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Submissions

If you are a current student of Woodland Community College, Colusa County Campus, or Lake County Campus and would like to contribute to future issues, please see wcc.yccd.edu/ink for submission guidelines and deadlines.

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California Waves

Fatima Regalado

Leaving me for the hollow fire of another sun
left the ocean for a warmth that will never replace the one we had
and here I stay,
shackled to these waves
where they still carry the echo of our memories
a sound now too distant to remember
like seashells broken by time, whispering lies I am too afraid of believing

This coast is still heavy with the weight of you—
in the salt that chokes the air,
in the sand that drags me down,
unsteady, drowning where you once stood.
I trace the places we never touched,
the horizon we promised would hold us,
but you are now lost in a new light,
while I am swallowed by old tides,
ripped apart by the very sea that once kept me whole.

The ocean does not forget,
and neither do I—
waiting, as waves crash for you,
for the one who abandoned me
for a fire I am yet to reach

Wet Leaves

Billy Barth

The wet leaves of autumn's bygone
Bring semblance to the nature of change —
Yet the nature of change,
Does not remember the sound
Of the leaves

To Be Continued

Shelley Love

She sat like a pebble stone for hours. Feet as planted
as an elephant's tusks dug into the desert plains of a place
that once was fertile.

Fertile, fertile, and it was, fertile

A life was livable. Yet now?

Now it lays in waves of a roadside, crispy opossum
and so, she sits stiller than the word inside distillery.

She listened to the sounds of a
house cockatiel's horn and unwelcomed mouse hill
fighting over who would get the last morsel of a squirreling mind's dusty
peanuts!

All playing on a repeating track with a loop of focus.

The air filled her fiery heartbeat with the moldy sickness of success
and the electric drive of win, win, and win.

Because she must win! And winning
she breathed out the first air of sweetness, a fool's errand.

She later falls with the singing zebra's
black and white pages of 'sorry you did not win'.
lose, lose, lose loser!

Off her tongue trickled the self-impelled rattlesnakes silent cry.

"You tried, you lost, are you trying to be a looser?"

Unable to unfreeze these moments of hell.

From the slap of the first breath in, to the next breath out
she concentrates unfocused like a statue.

A velvety soft touch hits her ears just right in between breaths
"that's not you, remember?", "It's just character building"

The soothing taste, lovers' words, cuts through to a thunderbolt in the
skies.

Stumbling down her eyes as if to quench the desert
and expel the tusk sword from a stone heart. Finally a few raindrops.

Maybe not quite the river flow one would suggest.

But just enough, as always enough, enough, and yes it was enough.

Bailing boiling water overboard for a chance to paddle the boat

Back up that ocean wave and just continue

To life. To life. Life to be continued...

Whispers in the Walls

Brittany Fickas

The house was quiet, and dark. The only light illuminating came from the brick fireplace, the embers of red and gold sparking as the flames died down to a mere inch in height. The smell of wine filled the air. It stained the white carpet. Tick. Tick. Tick. The sound was faint, like a desk clock, or watch. A watch.

The cat ran into the room, and jumped on to the edge of a velvet, burgundy sofa, its black tail flickering. Its eyes glistened, and darkened. The black cat's head tilted, and tail stopped. It stared for several seconds, then meowed, and jumped off the couch, disappearing somewhere in the big house. The ticking came from the hallway. It was cold in the hallway, without the warmth of the dying fire. A whisper came from the end of the hall. She sat on the edge of the stairs, patting her eyes with a white handkerchief.

“Please leave me alone,” she whispered.

The bags beneath her eyes were new, as was the bottle of whiskey sitting beside her. The bright blue oceans were dark seas of sorrow. Her pain scratched in the walls of the house, and it groaned back at her. Her skin crawled, and head twitched. The black cat walked into the hall, tail twitching, and ears shifting. It sat beside her, staring blankly ahead. The cat's eyes dilated, and it meowed, before running up the stairs. Maybe she was cold.

The fire crackled as the logs shifted, and the flames licked at the air, growing, and expanding. The beautiful dancing light licked the white carpet, inching across the material and sparking brighter at the touch of the red wine. The warmth expanded, drifting down the hall. She was gripping the bottle of alcohol when she felt the cold pricking at her cheeks shift to a warm red. The alcohol warmed her throat, and body, but her fingertips were still icy. She took another swig. Her hands were starting to feel warmer. Her whole body felt warmer. She looked up, and sniffed the air. Light out of the corner of her eye caught her attention. The fire danced out into the hall.

The woman screamed, and jumped to her feet. She could see movement in the flames. The flames crackled and hissed, whispering

deadly lies. She cried, and scooped up the black cat, who had just ran back downstairs.

“Leave us alone!” She screamed helplessly at the flames.

The flames grew, spreading across the walls of the hall, moving quickly towards her. In a fit of panic, and rage, the woman grabbed a photo off the wall, and threw it into the flames. She grabbed another. The photo made the flames recoil, and weaken. She picked up another photo, and risked looking at it. Her bright eyes reflected back at her, complemented by a beautiful white wedding dress, dazzled in pearls and lace. The man beside her wore a clean suit, and burgundy tie. His eyes were dark. His lips were flat. She threw the photo, causing the flames to roar. She turned, and ran outside, holding her cat tightly in her arms.

The flames reached the door as she staggered out onto her front lawn. She looked back at the large house, and breathed. The heavy breath lightened the tension on her shoulders. The flames shattered the front windows, and it was starting to spread upstairs. Neighbors called out to her, but their voices seemed far away, and mumbled. She finally looked at ease. It had been a while since she looked slightly happy. A fresh start. Sometimes to let go of the past, you have to start from scratch. A new scenery would be good for everyone. She looked so lovely in the glow of the flames. Her body looked less pale. She felt warmer.

The warmth faded in an instant, and she could feel a darkness around her. Her cat hissed. She felt the cold tap her shoulder. She would never escape the whispers in the walls.

Milky Way Diner

Matthew Crabbe

Lost tracks they laid, chasing feeling numb
Between the howling trees and city hum.
Beneath starry night, above endless black

Welcome Neon Sign: Milky Way Diner

Always open, always serving, always a chance to start again
Chipped tables and flaking leather booths

Wandering souls, patrons lost long ago
Children once, now worn-down Gorgon turned stone
Their eyes reminders, No one fails alone

The hostess and host tend to them all
Genuine smiles ends their rough road
Slowly they gather together full booths

They grow warm together, a fire anew
“It’s never too late.” The hosts promise them
The Diner feeds them hope, if they will it

The Diner is a stop, no one can stay
A choice must be made, each soul has their day
A burden is light, carried together

The Sunrise

Liz Ramirez

So Much Depends Upon
The Sunrise.
The beautiful orange kissed sky
The fresh crisp air
Seeing your face
First think when I wake up
Will I wake up again to see
The Sunrise.

The Forgotten

Brittany Fickas

Day 1,053 Morning,

Hey baby,

I lost my group today. A herd moved in, and I was front line defense. I saved Lorena again. She and the others were able to escape down the Hidden Path, but I had to escape a different route. I saw some other defenders escape into the forest, but I haven't run into any of them. I

managed to get back to the Hidden Path, but I lost their trail about a mile or two in. The trail wasn't blocked, but the group seemed to scatter. I hope everyone's okay. I hope you're okay. I miss you. I'm going to keep trying to find them.

Hello again,

There's something following me. I felt a presence moving in the woods an hour or two ago. I had to set up camp because the sun is almost set. I was able to find some empty cans, and used my fishing line to outline a small perimeter. The cans haven't made any noises, but I can still sense a presence. The moon is full tonight. I can see shadows dancing around me. I think it's a Forgotten, but I'm not sure. It's moving funny. Maybe they're evolving. I'm scared, but it's a really pretty night. Can you see the moon where you're at? I miss you.

3am?

I got bit. It was a Forgotten. It was smart, lurking around my camp. I woke up about an hour ago to use the restroom. I should've just stayed in the perimeter. It was quiet. I was careful, but it still snuck up on me. A crawler. It had legs, but he was military crawling when he snuck up behind me, and bit my ankle. I stomped it out. I was going to cut my foot off, but I don't have a big enough blade with me. I'm scared.

I'm sorry, my love. I wanted to find you. I hope you're not still looking for me. I hope you know I never stopped loving you.

Day 1,054,

I'm tired. My ankle is still bleeding through the gauze. I slept a little last night, I'm surprised I woke up this morning. It's nice today. The sun is bright, but it's not too warm, yet. The birds are chirping. There's a deer near the perimeter. It saw me a second ago, but didn't run. Maybe it knows I'm not a threat, at least not yet. I'm scared. I don't want to change, but I can't bring myself to stab myself in the head. There's blood in my eyes from jabbing the point of my blade into my forehead, but I couldn't do more than leave a small gash. I'm going to tie myself up, so I can't hurt anyone else.

For whoever finds this letter, my name is Melanie Jones. I have saved many, and killed a few. I have fought and bled for the kindest hearts. I have lost many, and have made many friends. Please do not give up the fight because we cannot be forgotten.

For my love, goodbye. I hope you are alive and well. I hope you have Bunny with you still, our sweet baby girl. I hope you found a beautiful woman to love, and survive with.

You will always be my everything. I love you.

Love, Melanie

Jeremy felt a knot in his stomach reading the journal entries. He found them in the pocket of the Forgotten he killed. He turned to Ares, and held out the letters.

“What’s that?” Ares questioned. Bunny, his shaggy, greying bloodhound, circled around his legs, as he walked over to grab the letters.

It was silent as he read, his lip beginning to tremble as he turned to the end of the last letter. He folded the papers gently, and slipped them into his pocket. He patted his leg, and Bunny followed him towards the Forgotten that Jeremy had just killed. She was decayed. It looked like she had been gone for at least a year. Despite no longer being her, he could see her face behind the terror. He knelt down, and whispered a short prayer, and touched her forehead lightly. Bunny sniffed at the Forgotten, and whimpered. A few tears escaped Ares’s eyes.

He stood up, wiped his tears away, and continued on. Jeremy followed behind, and motioned for the colony of wagons to continue following them now that the road was clear.

Afternoon Play

Matthew Crabbe

Shoes scattered at the door

Like footsteps left in the snow, I followed their track
Backpack on the table, Zipper wide, folded back
yawning like satisfied dragon
Its belly full of loose paper, trinkets, and glue

The old wooden chairs, slightly askew
Bent toward one another, in quiet conversation
well-worn crayons, scattered drawings, wild
Photos taken inside the mind of a child
Rainbows of color and conversation dipped in laughter

Car keys left on kitchen marble
Fresh dishes dry in the strainer
A half-eaten banana rests in its peel
A blue and white patterned plate
A dozen goldfish patiently wait

The soft hum of tv, to soothe

a tired child, four legs swallowed in a soft cocoon
A soft breeze plays with the window's curtain
There they rest together, one tired from the day
Another tired from their play

Sunday Morning

Natalie Grissom

A lukewarm day in September
An empty house, a perfect excuse
I knew something was brewing, not just because my insides were
bubbling with butterflies
You barely touched your food as we sat on the swing, watching
Community

And when our nerves filled the spaces in our half filled stomachs, we sat
on my couch
In silence
For a long time

The only sound were our hearts, beating from our chests
I asked the leading question
He answered, head down and hesitant

Our first kiss ensued, love growing with each rendezvous

A rainy night in November

The ride home after celebrating your birthday

Your mom and friend sitting in the front seat their conversation white noise

You and I in the back, hand in hand.

In silence

For a long time

I watched tears well up in your warm, soft eyes

I knew that's when you wanted to say I love you for the first time.

You looked at me so warmly that I think now I'll be cold forever

And as you walked me in my garage you said it outloud.

Tearful and beautiful.

A memory burned into my brain forever.

And that's how I'd like to remember it, because it's all so different now

There is no suffering like heartbreak, and the searing pain of being angry is so much worse.

So I won't

I'll consider it a dream, a technicolor one that if I close my eyes tight enough I can revisit.

A dream I wish I never had to wake up from, a dream taken from me, just like every other dream

I've dreamt.

Another sheep to count

Strange Creatures

Matthew Crabbe

Seeking monsters is an unusual goal.

But an address makes it easier.

The street was silent and dark.

Dead storefronts, with their eyes and mouths closed.

Save one

An open door. A welcome sign.

Smiling, stranger, usher us in.

A small crowd in a small room

Gathered to see a monster movie

Gathered to hear a live band

A silent projector begins to play.

The band members appear one by one

like hands rising from the grave

Two pieces of art, weaved into one

A horrible movie revived by freeform music

What strange creatures to attempt this ritual

This world needs more creatures

So Much Depends Upon Where You Have Been

Hargun Nijjar

So much depends upon where you have been,

the food you ate, the friends you made,

the risk you take, the choices you make,

the enemies you hate,

all lead to today.

Poker Friend Insomnia

Shelley Love

Pull up a seat friend, shuffle the deck
I'm certain we certainly have already met.
I came in after a tree knocked on your door,
you were settled and cozy just moments before.
It's ok for you to blink and think slow
I'm happy to be a friend you unwillingly know.
So... I must come clean and fully admit,
I could only think how utterly unfortunate.
For you to sleep another boring wink!
So, I kind of whispered some provocative things.
Just to see how you'd dance with some anxiety.
And of course, to remind you that you should've trimmed that tree.
And my friend, you're welcome!
I'll tell you, you flipped, tossed, and turned.
Thinking it was all a lesson you surely must learn.
"Too much sitting at work," you say, "you'll see!"
"I just have to exercise, to tire out me".
Ha! You're silly, A knee-slapper for sure!
I know my company's one you regret to endure.
But night after night we have such great big fun,
now buckle up buttercup, the games just begun.
You know, I know, you thought
you'd quelled me for a night or two.
Doing all that special, heavy lifting you do.
But soon as you bothered to lay in your bed,
I noticed, some of your muscles hurt more than you said.
So I decided then, what friend would I be
If I just stood around idle, letting you sleep.
In pain?
OH. So, silently.
So I screamed into all the aching little spots
till you sat up and stretched to work out those knots.
Now don't look at me, all shocked and surprised
Sincerely what friend would have let you just lie?

You could've died!
Think about it! Again, and again
You were feeling things 'cause you worry sweet friend
Sandman is cool, but he will bring you bad dreams
Remember, to worry, stay up playing poker with me!
Or maybe I'll inspire a bit of creativity?
No?
You refuse? You're closing your eyes?
Did you forget I said that you could have died?
Now don't be childish crying at three-quarters past three
You have worries, hopes, and my lovely company
My tolerance for your fatigue has no grace
And my kind of friendship can't be replaced
Adult, child, those days long gone, in the past
Napping's a phase that never does last
No lullaby could pull you away
From my deeply loving, troubled embrace
Stay forever in this hazy place
Awake, with me and my poker friend face

The Ocean Between Us

Fatima Regalado

I long for the ocean because it knows my ache,
its salt stings like tears I can't shed.
I stand at its edge,
aching with the weight of all I cannot touch—
your voice,
your warmth,
the way you used to breathe beside me.
And yet, I still stand here,
waiting,
letting the waves pull me closer to the idea of you,
the memory of you,
never quite reaching,
never quite enough.

I miss you—
more than breath itself,
more than the space between my ribs,
more than the endless pull of the ocean that calls my name
from the other side of the world.
We are an ocean apart,
but it feels like an abyss—
a chasm so vast,
so unforgiving,
that even the waves can't carry me to you.

Maybe if I stay long enough,
the ocean will bring you to me,
on the crest of its wave,
as it has whispered to me in the dark,

telling me you are waiting—
waiting on the other side,
just out of reach,
just far enough
to leave me longing.

But still, I stand.
Still, I wait.
I love this ocean for how it makes me feel you,
for how it stretches across the world like a dream I can never hold.
Maybe it's not the ocean I love,
but the way it keeps you just beyond my grasp,
the way it makes the waiting feel like something sacred,
something endless.

And when the waves break,
I am left with nothing but the ache of yearning—
knowing you are somewhere out there,
waiting,
and I am here—

always just a breath away
but never close enough.

Ode of an Ogre

Matthew Crabbe

All I want is peace and quiet on my land
I ask men for nought, I need no helping hand
And in return I am honored by thee knight
With clamor, and threats, and calls for a fight

Metal and fire, Fear draped in ire

Like children in their father's boots who long since retired
They cover their eyes, mouths and ear
So all that is heard is what they want to hear

To make me a beast they poke and invade
"An ogre must be a beast, see the anger it displayed."
But I know the truth, and hope they may learn too
I am only a beast, if that's what we call those different from you

And Suddenly It Was July Again

Fatima Regalado

And suddenly, it was July again—
The heat, once a burden, now feels warm and familiar.
Last July, it wrapped around me like a weight,
reminding me of the days I could barely breathe.
But now, the sky feels lighter,
and I can't remember when it became so heavy.
I forget why I cried last July—
the cold that cut deep,
the silence that felt like betrayal.

Maybe those tears were for things unsaid,
promises slipping away like frost.

But now, in July, I stand—
eyes turned toward the sun,
the shadows long forgotten.
The regret that once consumed me
is now just a distant echo,
fading in the warmth,
like a memory I've let go.

Love and Care

Matthew Crabbe

Yearning like calm waves, for moonlight's return
Your love unending, a promise long sought.
To make your days bright, and your calm nocturne
Together laughing, gasp air, like fish caught

Water a mirror, your boat is alone
Do not look away, hold your gaze anew
This love you claim, is the love you are owed
Secure your treasure, one man pirate crew

Be wary of beast, and 'what could have been'
They split you in two, or let your roots wilt
This task continuous there is no end
Only in now, can your vessel be filled

Know these claims are broad, and hold no close stakes
All this to say, worry less, and take breaks

An Offering
Matthew Crabbe

Your sweater on the floor
A wrinkled mound of blue on the hardwood
A piece of you, a sign, given to me in silence.
I accept it, and you have my blessing.

Or

Maybe I should have just seen it as it was.
Just forgotten laundry. Another mess to clean up.

You never knocked on my door
Like a spirit, you passed through unphased.
There was a comfort of hearing you come in.
Here to give me praise, my devout follower
Or, maybe I just didn't want to think
You already believed you owned the world.

You ask for more.
Your plate emptied.
My tools my mess my work my offering

Cover the white tile counter.
My body worn, my mask still in place.

I serve you.
I tried to trick myself again.
My faith stretched to a thin wire, should have snapped long ago
When did this mask appear?

My hands splintered and raw, from the box I helped build.
Trapped inside.
Wanting to believe you ever cared.
But not believing I can leave.



Eagle Mountain International Church by Debra Murray



O.L.O.P.E. by Isabel Lewis



Untitled by Esmeralda Velazquez



Birdverse by Jamie Seibel



Mushroom Forest by Ginny Ozelton



Spores by Ginny Ozelton



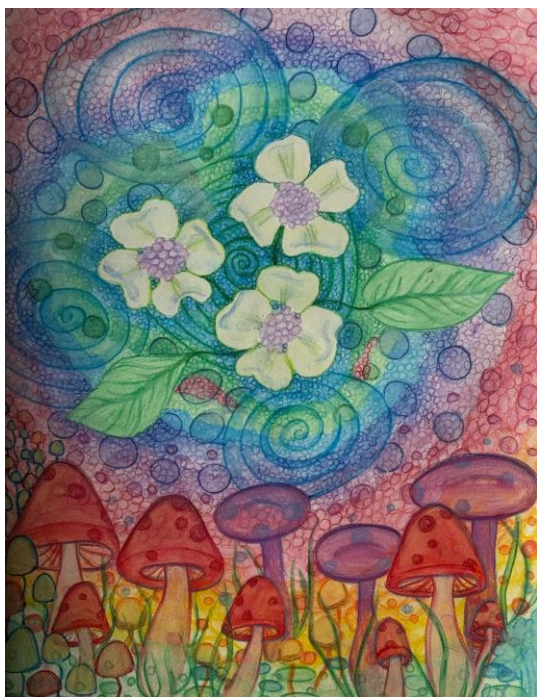
Summer Trail by Ginny Ozelton



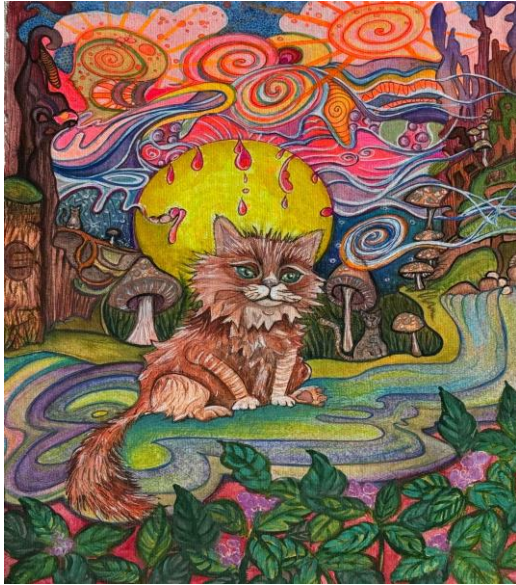
Hellbound Pirate by Neha Kanive



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Glowing Daisies by Ginny Ozelton



The Hallowed by Max Rothery



Untitled by Micah Silver



Untitled by Olivia Myatt



What He Wanted by Zei Sanabria

Kindred

Billy Barth

I had only stumbled upon this clearing a few weeks ago. I am not a hiker by nature, in fact, I do not consider myself to be a hiker at all. Through my striving for the picturesque, that is, the pursuit of all things melancholic—separate from the morose of a beaten dog as it instinctively crawls to its owner’s steel-toed boot for a third, and final, swift kick—I find my penchant towards solitude as debilitating as a deer that basks in the headlights of an inbound truck. The clearing I had found, while not a kept secret by any means, provided sanctity comparable to that of a little boy who finds respite in a treehouse; as no sensible person subjects themselves to grass stains and tree sap, immaturity was a given. The remnants of a cabin lay dormant on the property, private by no means; the structure, while upright, has seemingly sustained enough fire damage to destroy such a building twice over. The silhouette of the home has been eroded, not of time, but by water damage; while the architecture that could have been remains drawn up in my thoughts, the second story persists as oddments, long engulfed by the invasive wildflowers. I did not mind, however, that the structure lay spread out like a body waiting to be identified; the invasive nature of the wildflowers laments the all consuming solitude of the deprived.

Music

Shelley Love

*suggested background music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gel94sjJO0o>

Boom

Music!

Clash! Music!

Loud, pains, music.

Like that of a voice

of a mother bringing

forth a child who cries, rejoice

No one could deny that this is.....

It’s

music!
Soft music.
That lifts you up
when the world is down
because even love is.....
defined: a beautiful sound
Universally sought and found....
It's
Music!
Sweet music.
When the rain comes
down & hits the ground.
Whistles like a bird's howl.
When stumbles in my feet steps
On the untimed slippery streets....
Boom
Boom, boom!
Much like that
of a congo.....
beat. It's sad music,
that keeps you fully sane.
Loud, pains, soft and sweet music
It's in everything! Don't you see?.....

Familiar Song

Aiden Fox Hayes

Waking up, I wish my wife a good morning,
Before I leave, we eat breakfast with our children.
Food is given to us from the orchard I tend,
Eating, my wife hums a blissful song.

Walking to work, I smell the haste of the seaside breeze,
A hard day's work of labor, underneath the beating sun.
As I tend the land, I say hello to friends,
Sweat beading down my face, as we talk about the day.

Work has ended, and my friends and I wrap for the night.
Walking back home, a fallen tree blocks my path.
I cut through the dense coastal forest, with no end in view,
My heart racing, as I'm lost in the darkness.

It ought to be midnight now, moonlight cutting through the trees
I'm scared, there is no more trail for me to go along.
Just when that feeling of dread settles in,
I hear a distant sound, a hum that is hiding from me.

Between the trees and through the brush,
I follow as I try to make sense of where it's from.
Getting closer, I can hear it better now,
It sounds like a familiar song?

Waking up, I wish my wife a good morning,
We eat breakfast with our children.
Gathering my belongings, I head to work.
Eating, my wife hums a blissful song.
Entering town, I smell the haste of the sea-side breeze,
As I work, alone, my memory feels strange.
A curious person-sized hole is missing from my recollection,
Like drawing a blank on a recognizable face.

It feels like someone should fit,
I stress my mind trying to prolong.
I have to head home now, the sun is getting low.
And once again, I hear that familiar song?

Waking up, I wish my wife a good morning,
We eat breakfast.
Gathering my belongings, I head to work.
Cleaning, my wife hums a peculiar song.

It's night now, I don't remember how I got here,
I'm lost amongst the densely packed trees.
These memories I once had are now gone,

My brain beating in distress, like a heart struggling to unclog.

There's someone missing,
A distant memory, people, forever gone.
I shudder as I hear its sound,
The hymn of that familiar song.

I wake up,
I make breakfast for myself.
Gathering my belongings, I head to work,
Passing, The wind chimes whistle a decrepit song.

Entering town, I smell the haste of the sea-side breeze,
The cold twinge of sea air hits my lungs.
The town is empty, and I walk through it, in disbelief.
My steps echo amongst the road like a metronome coming to an end.

I rack my brain, attempting to remember what happened.
A blind spot where the past week? Month? Year? Is supposed to belong.
Coursing through my brain, I panic in silence.
I feel like a lost child, afraid everyone's left me abandoned.

Then I hear something, it's a sound I'm hearing for the first time,
But somehow recognize it as much as I would my name, lifelong.
Deep in my heart, I know this is the last thing I'll ever hear.
The allure of that familiar song.
Its sound is of anger and sweet sorrow,
The melodic hymn crescendos and ravages through me.
My ears spewing red as the light around me fades, I begin to remember,
It tells me I can bring them all back, if I just sing along.

Death and Undeath

Matthew Crabbe

When the kingdom was shattered, they still had each other.
He had a sister, and she had a brother.

Rumors came first, sounding like a child's story
Of cities purged after turning undead
But when the survivors found refugee in Port Naurry
The townsfolk felt a new sense of dread

A world soon engulfed in fire and death
Made each man and woman a warrior from first breath
Life was precious, and more precious now
To grow with another was sowing weakness to plow

And it was that weakness that now bore fruit.
As Francine watched undeath in her brother take root.
Through tears of love, he accepted her smother.
He died with a sister, and she cried for her brother.

Threshold

Fatima Regalado

Like a dog, waiting at the threshold of your mercy
with paws that have roamed the fields in search of you
left to carry the scent of rain serving as memory of you
yet your windows lie dark, and the doors are shut
and the wood as cold as old wounds
Yet if I listen closely,
through the shadows of promises long forgotten
there is a faint hum of something that has brought me back to you
Let me in, just once, to lie beneath your hand,
to be the warmth that remains when you wake

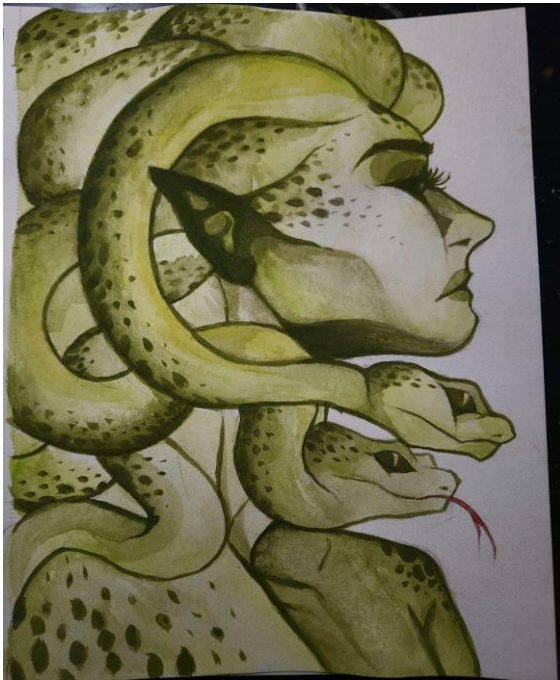
Jack

Brittany Fickas

Cut me open, and spill my guts
Give me eyes so I can see.
Make me smile in this gloomy season.
Even with eyes, the world is dark
So be my light,
and I'll protect you from the evils of the night.



Untitled by Esmeralda Velazquez



Untitled by Esmeralda Velazquez

There Was Something Here Once

Fatima Regalado

There was something here once,
soft as dawn, whispered between us,
a warmth that filled the space.
Now, the silence speaks louder,
and the air is heavy with what was left unsaid.
There was something here once,
but it has faded away,
like a tide that pulls away,
leaving only the ache
of what we can never hold again.

Life: Magic & Madness

Justin Bybee

So much depends upon our will, patience, and time.
The harshness of life can make us feel so alive.
This is evident through Turmoil,
the soul will survive.

Experience we falter,
We think we're dying inside,
Growth, expansion,
Both body and mind.

One day after another,
through our eyes our soul shines,
introspective awareness,
Will starve the ego combined.

We struggle yet prosper,
the two intertwined,
remain humble,
be steadfast,
and enjoy the climb.

Pride is ineffective,
it is not your best guide,
Intuition, or coincidence,
Pay attention to signs.

Wisdom can happen Unkindly,
So we try to defy,
Waging our own path That in turn,
still aligns.

Destiny the culprit,
Universe full of life,
Discipline and structure,
Progress not a linear line.
Take notice what happens,
reading between lines,

Magic and madness,
Makes living divine.

Letter

Billy Barth

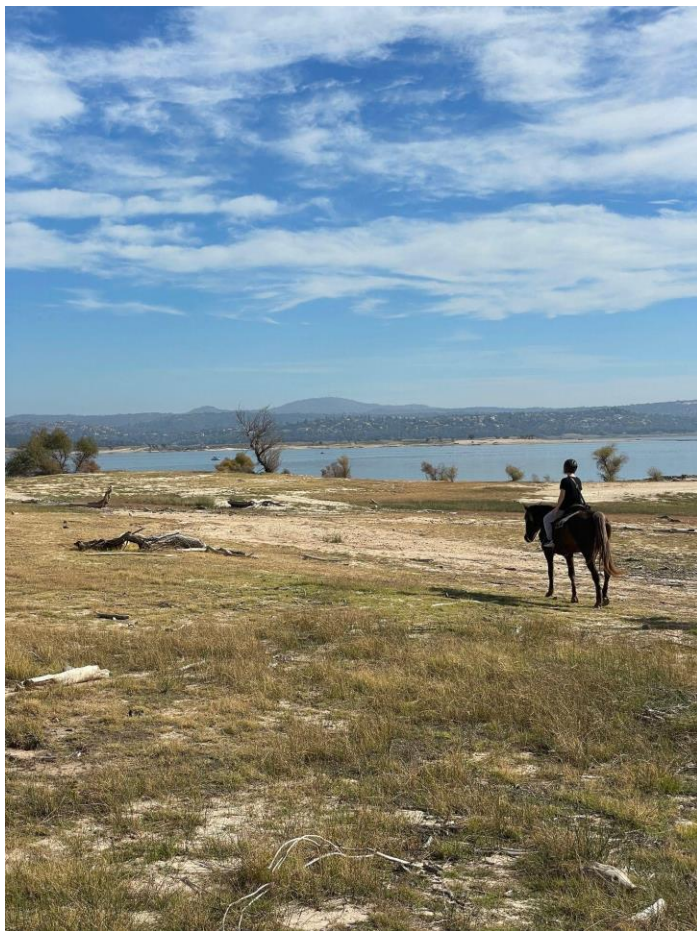
The weather has
Twenty missed calls
And I am nineteen;
I sent a letter in
An abandoned mailbox
And have yet to hear back.

Invader

Jamie Seibel

Upon a seal brown horse,
I sit longer than the yellow grass.
Passing waters already seen,

Cola whips his sheeny skirt;
his skirt of long hair reflects the flow
of waves and flies that circulate.
On this cloudy day and hour,
I recall the secret of this lake.
Secrets I've known since I could walk
and leave footprints on a dirt road.
I swam with my head beneath,
eyes paralyzed by its murky shell.
I knew it when it smelled blue to me
and blue to us against the rising light.
My horse leaves a hollowed crunch
as we trot across gray-touched stones.
I didn't need to tug his reins.
Cola knew the way.
The water used to move past shore
and abandoned logs of trees.
When the land flourished with
Southern Maidu or Nisenan,
a time before gold and the dam.
Waiting is a surprise near the rocks,
a hidden serpent, its dark skin
crossed with wavy lines.
Cola's ears flicker back and forth,
and he squeals as it unfolds.
A southern water snake crept its way
from the river, the marsh, and to the lake.
My horse tosses me and I fall
with a glimpse of cloudy skies.
One day, the waves will come back,
horses' legs will trudge and swim
across where they used to clop.
And I will taste the sun again,
and finally
learn the name of this water.



Invader by Jamie Seibel

It All Depends On

Briana Garcia Blanco

It all depends on
Bright blue skies
Absent thoughts, and a free mind
Above the flowing sea, and a heavy rolling tide
Ahead, blinding yellow in my eyes,

Flying high, with wings like a bird
Worldly bindings gone, they now seem absurd

Exodus

Jamie Seibel

dried grass & milk
thistle
who find us here.
Titled just east of suburbia
after our boss demands

We dare not speak
of creatures
Not until

hard hats, wearing yellow and gold,
The old field brought much
here:
Blueblack eyes of
mice,
guests grow.
Their bodies
swept
chatter,
under a door's
threshold,
re-spin their webs,
paws tucked tight, ears
twitching
pretend
to a security's guards
footsteps.
sing.

work brick by brick
as unhappy
Mice
spiders
& frogs & crickets
they can still

Sierran chorus frogs,
seduced by
lights
building stands
call for
water,
their former home.
lost around the
corridor.

A new
With all of

our cheers,
Green and silver bodies
drying, we dare not speak.
tarnishing
slowly, We
dare not speak as
never to return.
they scatter on by,
Wolf
Spiders, as
they see us coming,
hairy bodies with subdued
coloration as they know we are
here
under chairs &
desks. but they
are not.
Their spiderlings cling like us
when we are young and
babies,
wishing for mother's skin wander
Jerusalem
crickets
promise of milk & honey,
bodies flightless, pausing
before only remnants of
dried grass,
a warm storm in the
Hall, to point them
home.

The Cave

Jason Gamble

The black hole of the cave's opening emerged into view. Had the pair been anywhere else, they would have missed it, and that would have been the end. The wind and snow were biting them. Their fingers could only feel pain. "I'm freezing mama," the girl cried out clutching her mothers side. "I know," said the woman. "Let's rest in here for now." They shuffled into the cave. It was grey, damp, and only marginally less cold than the outside. The two laid out their packs and sat down huddling next to each other.

"How long are we going to stay here mama?"

"I don't know."

"When will the storm stop?"

"I don't know... soon I hope."

"Are we going to die?"

"No I won't let anything happen to you."

"What about you? Are you going to die?" The woman held the girl tighter. She felt the girl's bony ribs through her threadbare parka, leaned in, and whispered, "Nothing's going to happen to us. We're going to be okay." The woman repeated this a few times and kissed the girl's ear wincing as she could touched her lips through the girl's woolen hat. "Something happened to papa," the girl said. The woman held the girl tighter.

They took inventory of what they had. A cast iron pan, two cans of beans, a bag of unshelled almonds, flint, a deck of playing cards, gauze, and a bowie knife. The girl was shivering and her teeth were chattering. The woman took off the girl's gloves. Her hands were red and her fingers were stiff. They sat in the cave holding each other and the woman warmed the girls hands against her own skin under her clothes. Eventually, they slept.

The woman awoke to the girl's shivering. The storm had calmed, but it was still freezing outside. The woman stuck her hand outside the cave's entrance and scooped a big snow-ball off the ground. "Open," the woman said. The girl opened her mouth and the woman placed snow into the girl's mouth. "Eat it."

"It's cold, mama!"

“I know, but it’s the only water we have. Now, eat.”

“I’m hungry.” The woman pulled out the small bag of almonds.

“I want beans.” Said the girl.

“We’ll have beans later.”

The girl resigned. The woman began shelling the almonds between her teeth and handing them to the girl. They continued to do this for some time until the bag of almonds began to feel light. The girl took notice.

“You haven’t had any yet mama?”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Don’t do that.”

“Don’t do what?”

“If you won’t eat. I won’t eat.”

The woman looked down at the handful of almonds that remained in the bag.

“Okay,” she said.

She began to eat some of the almonds that were left and the girl held her tight as she did.

“What are we going to do today mama?”

“I am going to gather some wood to build a fire.” “I want to come with you.”

“No you’ve gotten far too cold.”

“Mama please don’t leave me here.” Tears began to well up in the girl’s eyes.

She cupped the girl’s face in her hands and said, “you have to be brave, okay. I will come back. I promise.” The girl’s head sank as she sucked air into her little red nose. “Okay, mama.”

The woman surveyed the entrance to the cave. The ground was icy and the snow was thick. She traveled some distance toward the dead trees they passed on the way to the cave. She gathered branches and twigs, whatever she could find to kindle the fire with, and the sky was grey and the air pierced her lungs with every breath. She thought of the girl’s father. She missed him and she feared for the girl. I wish things were different, but there was nothing I could do to save you, she thought. She then saw smoke rising in the distance. Fools, she whispered under her breath. What once would have been a symbol of refuge was now a beacon of danger or plunder if you were ruthless enough. The smoke was

far enough away not to alarm her, yet she gathered the remaining tinder a little quicker.

When she returned to the cave the girl was outside waiting for her. “Get back in the cave!” the woman sneered. “I’m sorry mama. I was just scared you weren’t gonna come back.” The girls scared face softened the woman. “Just c’mon, get inside. Let’s build a fire.” She placed what she had gathered onto the floor of the cave and built a fire with her flint. The fire came to life with a roar and lit up both their faces. They used the fire to warm themselves and then they heated one can of beans to share between themselves. “When we eat the last one we’ll have some meat to enjoy it with.” “Really! How?” said the girl. “I’m going to whittle this larger branch into a spear and try to catch a fish. There was a stream where I grabbed the branches. I think I saw fish swimming there.” A smile tore across the girl’s face. “Are fish yummy mama?” “They’re super yummy,” she said holding the girl closer. “Did papa like fish?” “Papa loved to eat fish.” “I wish we could get fish for him,” said the girl.

That night, while the woman whittled her spear she heard howls and shrieks coming from outside the cave. She feared that the light from the fire could be seen from the outside. Could they have closed the distance between them in just a day? She thought. The girl rested her head on the woman’s thighs. The girl was sound asleep and finally a little warm. Her back ached, but she would have died to give the girl any comfort. The sounds may have been a small animal maybe... perhaps. She hardly slept.

The next day the woman told the girl to wait for her again. She told her she would catch a fish for them to eat with their beans. The woman knew she couldn’t make promises, but she just couldn’t help herself. She still remembered what it was like to dream. Before she left she shelled the remaining almonds for the girl to eat.

By the riverbank the woman searched for any fish she could catch, but there was none. She walked up and down the river and began to get frantic. I saw fish here yesterday, she thought. Her stomach made a terrible noise. She felt herself beneath her clothes her abdomen felt hollow. She knew it was worse for the girl. It would destroy the girl to lose her, but in the end the girls survival was her priority. The woman sank to her knees clenching her chest and cried. Sniffling was when she caught the first scent of it. Smoke was in the air. She rose from her knees

and looked all around. There was no one, but she smelled fire in the air. The cave wasn't safe anymore and they couldn't leave without having some food to take with them. We could manage one more day, the woman thought. She would come back again tomorrow and try to catch a fish. She walked back to the cave slowly.

"It's okay that you didn't find any fish mama."

"Yeah?"

"Are we going to die?"

"We're starving. If we don't find food soon, yes we'll die."

The girl looked down for a while and then looked at the woman and said "I don't think it will be so bad to be with papa."

The woman just looked at her daughter gaunt and frail.

"Don't say that. I don't think papa would want to see us so soon."

"Why did he have to die?"

"He was sick."

"Are we sick?"

"No."

"How do you know?"

"I just do, okay," the woman said losing her patience. The girl turned away from her mother. The woman looked down and covered her own face. No one said anything for a while. Finally, the woman spoke.

"Hey do you want to see a magic trick?" "A what?" "I bet if you pick out a card from this deck and then put it back in I can pick out the exact card you chose after shuffling it." The girl looked doubtful, but intrigued. "Okay," said the girl. The woman fanned out the cards and asked the girl to pick one out. The girl picked out the queen of hearts. "Okay, now memorize your card real good, okay?" "Okay, I memorized it." "Now put it back in my hand and don't let me see." The girl put the card back in the woman's deck. She shuffled the deck well and made a real show of it. She used to do it all the time. The woman then pulled out the queen of hearts and asked the girl if it was her card, but before she could get the words out the girl had already snatched the card from her. The girl gazed at it with wild amazement. Meticulously, the girl inspected the card to see if she could make out how her mother had done it. "How did you do that mama?" "Maybe I'll teach you some day." "Someday?" the girl asked. "Yes, someday. I promise."

The next day the woman set out from the cave leaving the girl playing with the deck of cards. She had taught her a simple game to play by herself. Hopefully it would keep the girl from worrying too much she thought. The river bank was at the foot of a hill. At the top she surveyed the area and saw no signs of life. The smell of smoke she had sniffed the day prior was gone. Descending the hill she had the thought perhaps she had never seen a fish in the river. Maybe she had seen only what she wanted to see —the sight of a school of fish swimming free in a river, an image from a long-dead world. Her only reason now was the girl. The woman stared long into the empty river. The sound of rushing water hit almost as hard as the blizzard had just a couple of days ago. A voice broke through the sound of the river.

“Don’t be scared,” a man’s voice said. The woman flinched quickly in his direction.

“Now now, please don’t be scared.” The man’s clothes were tattered and dirty though he wore many layers that were likely concealing a hunger-pang frame.

“I just want to talk.”

“I don’t think we have anything to talk about.”

“What are you doing out here all alone?”

“I’m just passing through.”

“Passing through? Heading where?”

“Somewhere warmer.”

“Yeah that’s where I want to be too. Somewhere warmer with a full belly.” The woman didn’t say anything. She only looked at him.

“Look I know what you have,” the man said with a terrible smile cracking across his face.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You don’t have to lie. I know what you have up there past the hill.”

“What do you mean” said the woman trying to brace herself for anything.

“Look I ain’t no thief. We can split it. You can even have the half with more meat.”

The woman began to step back and further back until her boots touched the water of the river. She looked down for a moment only to catch the man lunging at her. He wrestled her to the ground until she was

prone and he shoved her face into the shallow water of the river. She flailed and tried to reach for whatever was in her grasp. Her palm finally met a rock, she flung it behind her, and hit the man in the face knocking him over. She got up and quickly mounted him and with all her weight dropped the rock onto his face again, again, and again. Each time the rock fell deeper into the man's face. If anyone came to look for him they would only be able to identify him by his clothes. She exhaled several plumes of hot breath into the cold air slowly hobbling to an uneven footing. She stared at the man splattered all over the river bank while gripping her bowie knife tightly.

When the woman returned to the cave she found the girl sleeping on a pile of playing cards. The woman nudged her awake. "Let's eat." She said.

The girl rubbing her eyes said "Did you catch any fish?"

"I found something better." The woman said.

"I found a dead deer and cut off some meat for us to eat."

The girl sat up straight. "I'll open the can o beans!" The girl flipped up the tab on the can of beans and exposed the beans swimming in water. The woman got a fire going and the girl said "What happened to your leg mama?" There was a crimson stain on her pant leg.

"Oh damn! I fell while I was out and cut myself. I tried dressing it but I guess its bleeding again. I'll be fine don't worry." The woman unwrapped the piece of meat she brought back to the cave and placed it on the pan. The sound of meat sizzling filled the cave.

"That looks like a really small piece mama?"

"Yes, there wasn't much left on the deer, sorry." The woman poured the can of beans into the pan mixing the meat and beans. Once the cooking was finished they ate it straight out of the pan. The woman watched as the girl ate the food.

"I'm really happy we got to make this mama."

"Me too. Hey, Papa didn't give up. You know that, right?"

"I know Mama." The girl kept shoveling the bean mixture into her mouth. The woman ate the food, but more slowly and without looking at it.

Meet Your Editor



In her second year at WCC studying English, Brittany Fickas plans on transferring to ASU online to pursue her Bachelor's degree in English. She has goals to become a high school English teacher and a published fiction author. She is currently a full time manager, as well as full time student at WCC. In her free time, she enjoys writing short stories and fiction novels, painting and tattooing, and playing video games with her husband. She is a proud mother of a four year old Belgian Malinois, and two adorable guinea pigs.



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Intro to American Literature I

Online
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To learn more about our class schedule, contact Professor Kevin Ferns at kferns@yccd.edu or schedule an appointment with a WCC Counselor

CLASSES AVAILABLE FOR SPRING 2025

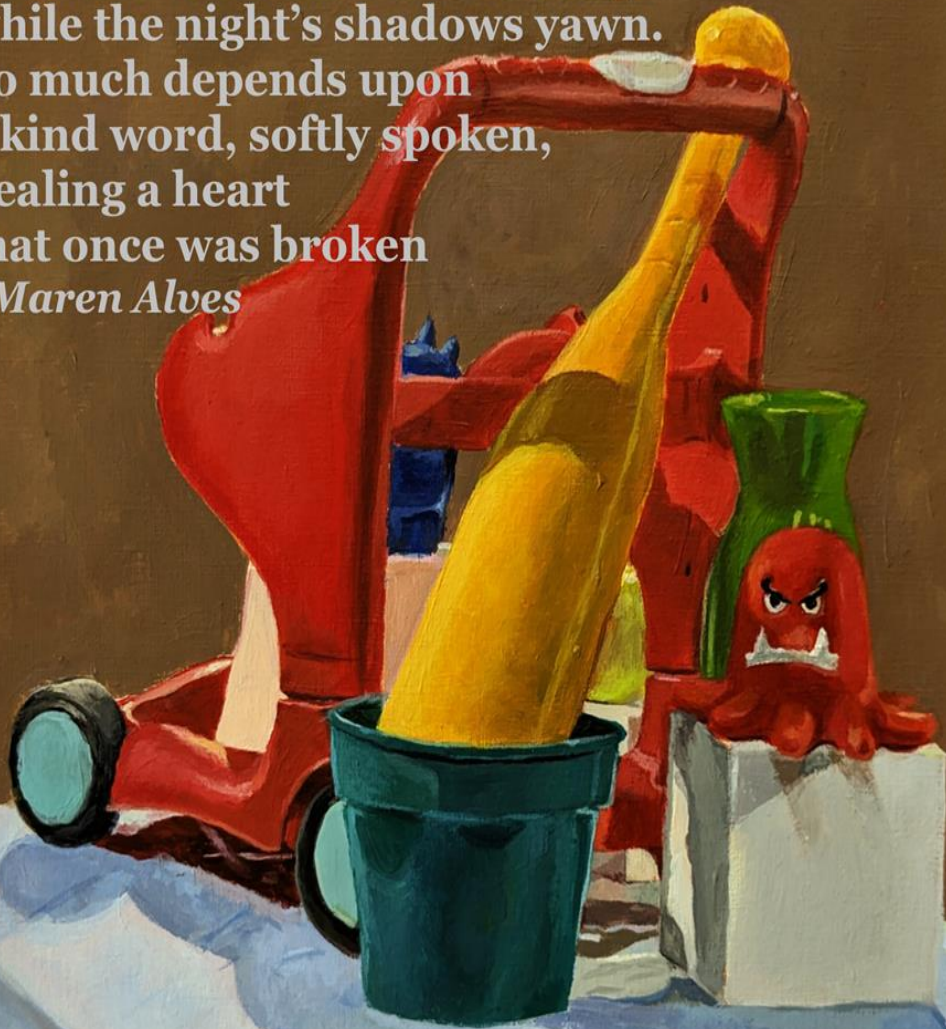


Not My Fault by Zei Sanabria



I See You by Zei Sanabria

So much depends upon
the first light of dawn,
its gentle warmth surrounding
while the night's shadows yawn.
So much depends upon
a kind word, softly spoken,
healing a heart
that once was broken
- *Maren Alves*



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