



INK

A Literary Arts Magazine

Issue 27

Spring 2026

Woodland Community College

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Æfre on Gemynde by Noah Moore

Spring 2026

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From Denmark to Dinosaur Land

By: Kelley Collins

A brave warrior arrives in a foreign land poisoned by curses and monsters. His reputation precedes him, having rid other lands of monsters before, but this new land promises to contain the most challenging beasts and landscapes yet. He'll fight armorless; he'll fight underwater; and he'll eventually have to fight a fire-breathing monstrosity to save this world. This summary describes one of the oldest recorded epic poems from the Middle Ages: Beowulf. It also describes the 1990 Super Nintendo game: Super Mario World. By introducing the ultimate lone hero who engages in epic battles of escalating difficulty to gain glory and magical items while cleansing a world of monsters, Beowulf provided the framework for the modern-day video game masterpiece: Super Mario World.

When Beowulf lands in Denmark to save its population from the monstrous curse that plagues it, he speaks to King Hrothgar of why he should be trusted to succeed in his mission:

*“When I battled and bound five beasts,
Raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea
Slaughtered sea-brutes. I have suffered extremes
And avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it
Upon themselves, I devastated them).
Now I mean to be a match for Grendel”*

(Beowulf, lines 420-5).

Thus, Beowulf introduces himself by listing his previous accomplishments of single-handedly conquering other-worldly beasts and promising to likewise cleanse this land of Grendel, the monster who is terrorizing its inhabitants. Heorot was meant to be a hall of celebration for the Danes, but Grendel's attacks had left it to stand empty. This is also the case in Dinosaur Land of Super Mario World. Preceded by his reputation of victories in previous Super Mario games (Super Mario Bros. 3), Mario arrives in Dinosaur Land to find it devoid of its friendly

inhabitants; they've been captured by Bowser, and Mario must defeat the evil Bowser and his minions to save this world.

Golden items play an important role in both stories. Beowulf enters his first fight against Grendel armorless:

*“I hereby renounce
Sword and the shelter of the broad shield,
The heavy war-board: hand-to-hand
Is how it will be, a life-and-death
Fight with the fiend” (Beowulf, lines 436-440).*

By fighting Grendel without any weapons or armor, Beowulf displays his superior strength and agility. Similarly, Mario's greatest “weapon” is also his strength and agility- he uses his jump action to incapacitate and kill enemies by jumping on their heads. Mario finds his best battle advantage after defeating the first of Bowser's children when he enters a land with magical feathers which give him the power to fly. This event mirrors when Beowulf receives golden mail of superior strength from King Hrothgar after defeating Grendel, who he also learns to be the offspring of a more formidable foe he will fight later. In Super Mario World, just as in Beowulf's world, these special items can not only impart a special power, they also act as a shield, absorbing an enemy's first attack. Even underwater, Mario's golden cape can stave off an attack, just as Beowulf is saved in his underwater battle against Grendel's mother by his new golden mail:

*“So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch him
In her brutal grip; but his body, for all that,
Remained unscathed: the mesh of the chain-mail
Saved him on the outside.” (Beowulf, 1501-4)*

Another similarity in the fighting for rewards formula between both storylines is the collection of gold throughout both journeys. After having already rewarded Beowulf with golden treasures for defeating Grendel, King Hrothgar promises more golden treasure if Beowulf will fight Grendel's mother:

*“I will compensate you for settling the feud
As I did last time with lavish wealth,
Coffers of coiled gold, if you come back.”*

(Beowulf, 1380-82)

In Beowulf, golden items are earned through feats of strength and bravery in the form of rewards bestowed upon him by the kings he helps. In Super Mario World, Mario collects gold coins along his journey that add up to gain him an extra life for each one hundred small coins - which are easy to come by- and for each set of five giant gold coins, which require taking on more risk to achieve. In both worlds, gold is used as a reward, and the amount earned is equal to the measure of the feat being accomplished.

Beowulf’s story ends with his final battle against the dragon that has been terrorizing his land:

*“as king of this people I shall pursue this fight
For the glory of winning, if the evil one will only
Abandon his earth-fort and face me in the open.”*

(Beowulf, 2513-15)

Likewise, the story of Super Mario World ends with Mario facing Bowser, who also happens to be a horned, fire-breathing creature who has been terrorizing Dinosaur Land. In both storylines, a victory for the hero will achieve a restoration of peace for all the land. Beowulf meets the dragon in its cavernous lair; Mario meets Bowser in his cave-bound castle. In both battles, fire rains down upon the heroes, and their deaths have never seemed more imminent. In both battles, the monster is slain after receiving three blows. Now, here is where the stories finally diverge. In a successful playthrough of Super Mario World, Mario defeats Bowser, saves Dinosaur Land, and lives to fight another day (or in his case, another installment in his video game series). For Beowulf, however, slaying the dragon costs him his life.

Except for the hero’s fates, the storylines of Beowulf and Super Mario World run parallel. Though Super Mario World is a modern-day video game, its legendary roots cannot be denied. These are both epic

stories of great warriors who enter a world wrought with monsters, eagerly risking their lives for gold, glory, and the protection of vulnerable souls against forces of evil. I wonder what the Beowulf poet would have to say about the adventures of this monster-slaying plumber following in Beowulf's heroic footsteps- more than a thousand years after he thought his story had ended.

Stay A While

By: Dalia Marisol Barragan

The darker the night sky
The brighter the stars shine out in space
Oh, it is so warm in this darkness
So quiet here in its embrace

Before our light there was nothing
As our own sky was not created by day
No, there is nothing to fear in this darkness
How I wish you'd try harder to stay

To comfort its trembling hand
Just a little while longer
To see that everything has, in itself, found peace
That even such darkness
Had not a voice before it was given a name

The Last Departure

By: Jessie Gulotta

The lights were dim inside the waiting area of the airport, people were seated, texting, or mingling with family and friends until their flight was called. Joshua kept checking his phone, with his boyfriend Kent sitting beside him, clinging to his carry-ons, their tickets crushed in his hands. Kent has been looking forward to finally meeting Joshua's parents, he's been asking for months since their 4-year anniversary.

Departure time: 10:30AM

Joshua's wristwatch: 9:30AM

"Do you think your parents will like me, Josh?" Kent was visibly nervous, shoulders tense and eyes darting around. He was viewing other couples hanging with family members, wanting everything to work out when he finally shook hands with the ones who raised the man of his dreams.

"Don't you worry babe," Josh set his phone aside, "they are going to love feeding you authentic Betrug cuisine."

"You know what I mean, Mr. Betrug," Kent rolled his eyes, "I want them to approve of our relationship." He looked at the tickets, almost longingly.

"They'll approve, dollface," Joshua placed a hand on Kent's, "You're so beautiful."

Kent looked into Joshua's eyes, chocolate brown meeting ocean blue. Kent had put on his best outfit: a white top with ruffles on the sleeves, solid black jeans, and simple sneakers for comfortability. Joshua on the other hand was wearing a tattered polo shirt, baggy, stained jeans, and socks with sandals.

"Thank you Josh," gently gripping his hand in response, "and as handsome as you are, I wish you'd put on a more distinguished set of clothes."

Joshua groaned, making Kent let out a soft chuckle, "You've been saying that all morning, trust me babe, they're more chill than you think."

The overhead speaker roared to life, only to state:

*Departure 40B, your flight has been delayed,
please be patient as we figure out the issue.
Once again, Departure 40B has been delayed.*

Kent checked his tickets and sighed, “You might want to text your parents, that’s our flight.”

Joshua opened his phone, “I’m on it.” As he was typing, a message appeared on the top of his screen. Joshua quickly turned his phone away from Kent’s view, any color draining from his face.

“Who was that, Josh?” Kent asked, raising an eyebrow at Joshua’s strange behavior.

“Nobody important, work.” Josh’s eyes averted Kent’s gaze, but flew wide open as something, or someone was heading towards them, stomping with every step.

“You snake!” An effeminate, petite man, wearing a crop-top, short shorts, and lace-up boots stands directly in front of Joshua with his hands on his hips. “This is why you’ve been ignoring my texts? When I tracked your phone’s location, I wasn’t expecting you to be with some fancy floozie!” People nearby were turning heads, murmuring between themselves.

“Gregory? What are you doing here?!” Joshua shot up, face pale as snow, “I told you I was heading out of town for a while!” He claimed through seething teeth.

“Yeah, you forgot to mention this *puta de lujo* you were going to take with you.” He pointed at Kent with his 6-inch nails while eyeing him up and down.

“Joshua, who the hell is this?” Kent finally stood up, glaring at Gregory, then at Joshua. People were staring at all of them intensely, hiding their comments behind their hands.

“Oh, I’ll tell you who I am,” Gregory pulled up pictures on his phone, it was a series of him and Josh kissing for selfies. “I’ve been dating Joshua for 6 months now, and have never seen you with him.” Gasps were heard around them.

Kent was shaking with anger, “Well I’ve been dating Joshua for 4 years, when on Earth did you join the picture?” Some onlookers were clutching their pearls, most of them however were recording the fiasco.

Gregory's eyes widened, his brows furrowed, teeth grinding together. "You *baboso!*" He slapped Joshua so hard he fell back into his seat, causing the first silence from the crowd. "When we met you told me you never even kissed another guy before!" He looked at Kent, still seething, "I'm no destructor de hogares, I swear I don't go after taken men." Shifting back to Joshua, "I still don't." He spat on Joshua, turned on his heels, and left.

The crowd was back to soft murmurs, "Explain yourself." Kent was fighting back tears, his hands balled into fists. "Why, Joshua?"

Joshua, still red in the face where he was smacked, stood up without meeting Kent's foreboding stare. "I... I met Gregory while you were visiting your sister last December."

"While she was in the hospital for surgery?" Kent's chest tightened, his voice cracking under pressure, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"It wasn't supposed to be this way! I was going to end things with Gregory after taking you to meet my parents!" Joshua stated, reaching out to Kent only to get punched in the eye, and fell onto the floor.

"You think I'm going to go anywhere with you now?" Kent tossed the tickets aside, letting them fall beside Joshua's body. "We're through Joshua, don't bother coming home." Kent grabbed his things and left, not letting Joshua stop him. The people around them were either looking Kent's way with pity or glaring and shaking their head at Joshua.

"What have I done?" Joshua stared at the tickets.

*Departure 40B, your flight is ready for takeoff.
I repeat, Departure 40B is ready for takeoff.*

Forest of Red

By: Zoey Vistalli-Alvarado

Trees taller than God and reach further
than any sea.

Their bark menacing and red,
Is soft as silk under gentle hands.

The ground molds under my feet,
Damp and dirty, as all of nature can be.
The water in the air clings to my skin,
And cleans my soul when I breathe it in.
This clear air helps clear the away the
scares and fears of the everyday.

I can't describe all the ways I love these
trees.

Beautiful and great in ways people
could never be.

Their size is not only great in height,
but the way they take up space is such a
sight.

Their stumps thick and great, my
fingers can barely reach around, a feat
too great.

I'm brought back by the water in my

hair and how it freshens my skin.

Today I leave my treasured home, and
don't know when I will return.

The ache in my heart is hard to ignore,
I will always have a love in my heart for
this place and what it gave me in full.

My forest of Redwood.

The home I long for.



For This Bird, I Will... by Jamie Seibel

Lost Hills, Found Memories

By: *Sophia Zinat Khoshcar*

our mom hates driving through
the stretch of I-5
between Sacramento and Los Angeles
it *is* rather barren
miles of “nothing”
and, of course, cows

he always preferred it
it is the quicker route, after all
and I never minded
sitting comfortably in the passenger seat
of my brother’s brand-new car
the one he bought on Christmas Eve morning
and proudly announced to me, before anyone else
oh, how I wish he hadn’t loved the
“fun” of a stick-shift...
I would have looked after it for him
driven for as long as the engine still ran

on the way to his favorite place
which, by default, is also mine
snacks waiting in the cupholder
his 300-hour playlist flowing from the speakers
“it’s Bowling For Soup,”
he pointed out happily,
knowing I would recognize the band
who performed our favorite cartoon’s theme song

he doesn’t even know
that last October I saw them live
maybe he *does* know
does he check in periodically,

*like a family newsletter dropped eagerly into his inbox?
or does he always hover?*

...and does he ever interfere?

whenever I take the Lost Hills exit,
the one we always stopped at
to open our ice chest
full of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
and cheese sticks—
two for him, one for me—
I feel my heart clench
just the slightest bit
in the same way it does when I hear
the whistle of the Disneyland Railroad
or laugh at the dumbest joke imaginable

not exactly happy, not fully sad
not fully here, either

I miss my brother more than sunlight
in the darkest winter
but one thing is certain:
I will record and protect our memories
in the best way I know how;
words set in ink and
typed on a screen
words shared aloud,
and buried deep in tear-stained journals
his memory will withstand the test of time

“Just Another Shift”

By: Faith McLeod

Beneath the buzzing glow
I already know
My shift has started,
And my wellbeing has parted.

I tend the amber bottles holding captive wells
And yet they don't tell
If there is a remedy for me
Or maybe I just can't see

The bottles arranged in careful rows
Promises to assist people's sorrows
It's so strange to spend the daylight selling strength
While mine is going out of length

I tire of going there
It is a constant despair
Of helping others out
But all I can do is pout.

At last, I finally leave
With my mind finally at ease
I can now drive away
And just pray

That my bed is made
Where weary thoughts can now fade.

“I Brought You Back Khaleh’s Albaloo Jam”

By: *Sophia Zinat Khoshcar*

striking red
deep and sticky
drip drip
onto my plate
the hue of it suddenly sickening
in the context of images
slipping through the cracks of Iran
but the taste—
nostalgia and comfort
just as I imagine my grandma
would have made

contradictions crash through my aching mind

sour cherry jam
albaloo
from the old tree in her backyard
miles away but
safe
safe in the way that the place
where all our stories began
hasn’t been for 47 years
“you’re Swedish?”
no
it’s simply one of the places my family fled to
took refuge and put down roots
some there
some here

smudged Farsi writing is scratched into the lid
I cannot decipher it

my dad tells me it says my name
and I wonder if, as she wrote it
she recalled the night last summer
when I asked someone to translate a message
as I stood with a grateful smile
and tears rolling down my cheek
drip drip

the sister of my grandma,
who was the mysterious woman
with whom I share a name
yet my only memories are of her ghost

but the sister of my grandma
would be the closest thing
to knowing her,
as the sister of mine
would be the closest thing
to knowing me

more tears
drip drip
more jam
drip drip

I blink at the stain on my napkin
and quietly finish my breakfast

The Space We Keep

By: Esme Velazquez

I fell in affection before I could even dip my fingers into the pool of your breath

Your sweet, sweet shell that I have only began to peel through the pixels of my phone screen and the glitchy signal of your network connection

In that first moment of virtual contact, you gazed at me as if I was Aphrodite herself sprouting forth from the dwelling of the Gods

Communicating to me in a language now that only I can speak with you
One full of ancient secrets and silent dreams that caress my mind through all tick tocks of the hour and invade our logged chats with the whisper of your being

From the moment I caught sight, you've brought in peace in a lifetime of war that has only left harsh, jagged, red lines as proof I was unvanquished

Lines that you've adorned with the tracings of your words and the hundreds amount of phone calls connecting your music to mine

A sound that I drown in so often, pairs of gills and fins have sprouted in me so that I may swim a moment longer

I could draw in the water that comes forth your chords and the fresh breeze that is your twinkling pitch

For just a fragment of time, I could feel the flush of your nonexistent shoulder next to mine

Near as the soil we stand on, is my star to yours

Disembodied

By: Mia Mendoza

You saw closed doors as an invitation,
a warm welcome to come in as you please.
Losing touch with my every sensation,
it went faster when I gave in with ease.

You wanted more, I held onto my fear.
We didn't say much, our normal routine.
"Be quiet, don't let anyone else hear."
Washing up after, I never felt clean.

To be held by you, too much of an ask.
Conditional, a love based on your wants.
I should have known better, it's not your task.
My sincerity, perfect for your taunts.

But who am I to keep it all from you?
Just young kids, this is what we're meant to do.

My Brown-eyed Comfort Tea

By: Dalia Marisol Barragan

My mind rests eternally inside
Your warm brown eyes
Do not pull me awake this time
I am selfish and full of dreams

But you are too
Because you planted a kiss upon my cheek
This very morning

As though taking my heart from its chest
And steeping it into the palms of your own
Was not satisfying enough

You have filled my solitude with toothpaste kisses
Cradled my prayers to be
Here, now, and always -I do hope

That you remain -much as this fated realization, before me
A type of love that whispers, still, pure and with ease
Because yes, I do; want it to always be you
That wakes me up with perfect cups of tea

Elegy for a Wallet

By: Zoey Vistalli-Alvarado

Economy crashes.

News spreads, Miss Graphics,
pulled away under the waters of
inflation.

Running to my computer with
quicken steps, she yells.

Desperate for a powerful part,
To fill the hole in her heart.

My fingers quake, but out my
wallet comes with a shake.

Miss Graphics a Lady of respect,
deserves no other than my
entire check.

When she finally comes home,
rescued,

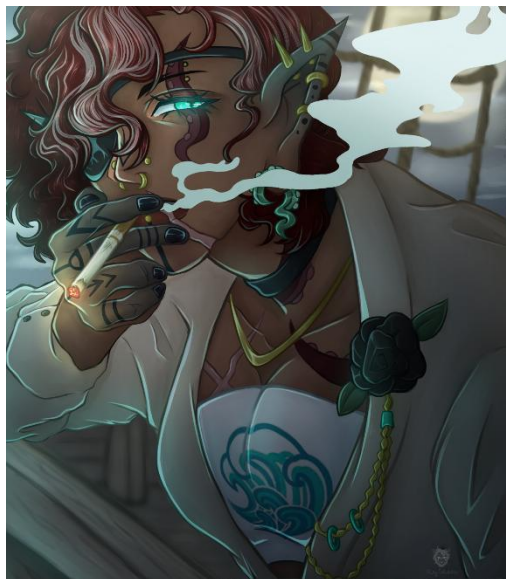
A Card like no other.

She is wrapped pristine, in a
box — not a home.

I lead her inside, display her in
a beautiful case.

She is finally here, blessedly.

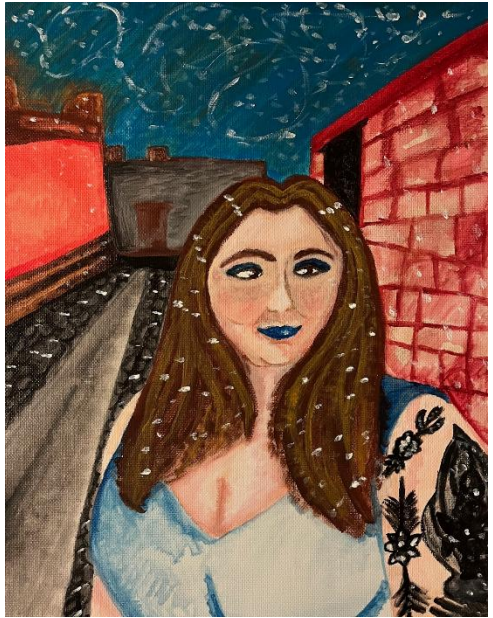
Thank you Miss Graphics,
otherwise called 5070.



Black Rose by Kai G Jocson



Backstabber by Kai G Jocson



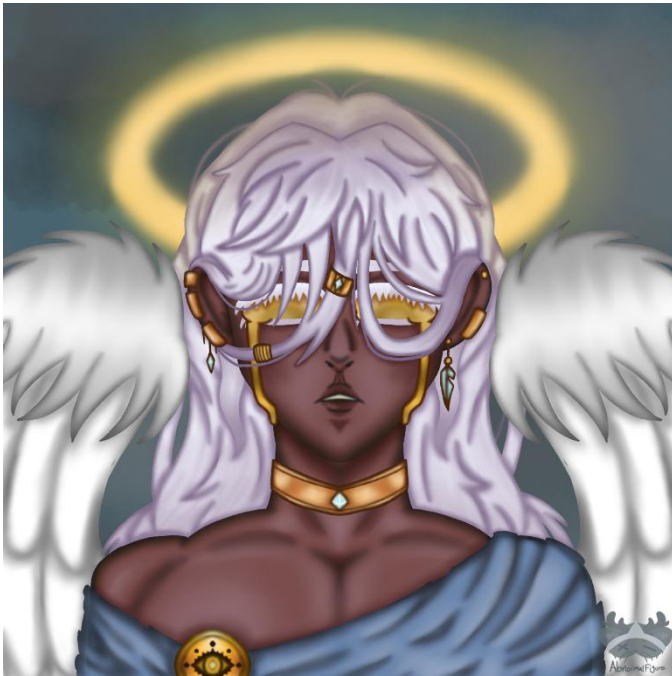
Like a CRUZ by Jamie Seibel



Shiza, The Fairy Queen by Jamie Seibel



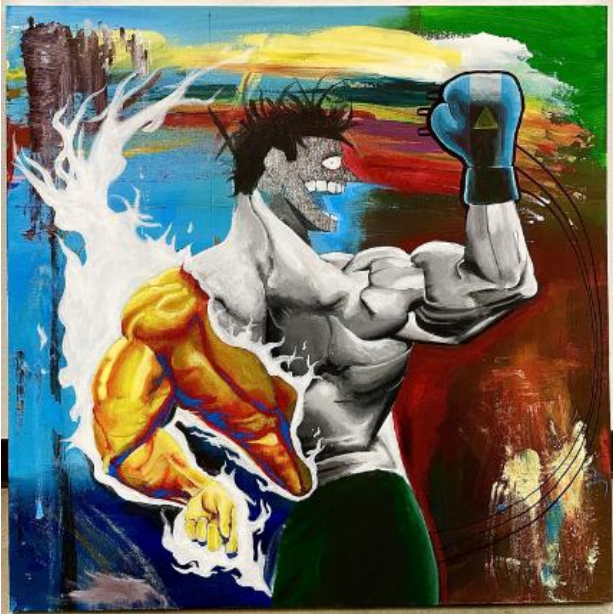
Mirrored by Kai G. Jocson



Tears of an Angel by Cat Goehry-Jocson



Bidep by Noah Moore



Boxer by Daniel Zapata-Kraft



Just for fun by Kelley Collins



Entre Agua y Cielo by Noah Moore



Untitled 2 by Maria Ruiz



Untitled 1 by Maria Ruiz



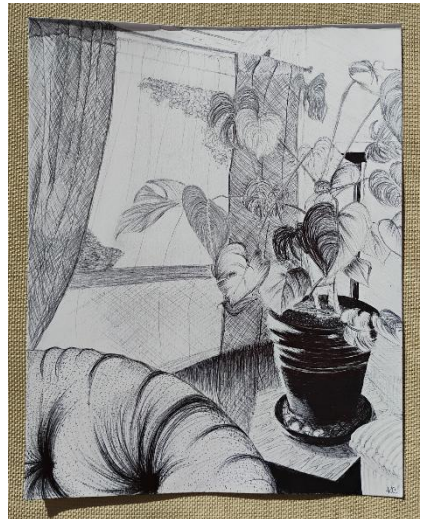
Night Lights by Kelley Collins



Mōnalēoht by Noah Moore



Gasoline Gorilla by Michael Murray



Monster by Kelley Collins

To: Andrew

By: Sophia Zinat Khoshcar

I write about you often

when I share our stories,

I try to smile in the way

you could always make me smile

and I think it was my happiness that

made you smile, too

faint lines in the corners of your eyes

lightly sketched on your skin as evidence:

your 32 years were filled with

mostly good times

times we sat at the kitchen table

tossing slippery Uno cards into a pile,

waking up way too early for a fun adventure,

listening to crunchy pop-punk music in your car,

and laughing at memories,

recalling the days of my early life when my

teenaged brother was never too cool to babysit me

to think that I have to keep going

iving without your laugh

the way it shook your shoulders

made the colors on your plaid shirts dance
and the too-many throw pillows on our couch tremble
hearing it once more;
would it heal me?
Or open the wound?
I fear I'll never feel whole again

I worry about the future
the cold reality that I'll have to do life
without your guidance
I worry about the present
how you'll never again be on the other end of the phone
I've never had to face things so alone
I even worry about the past
about your last six months
should I have done anything different?

Then I remember some of those creases
on your familiar face,
forever etched into my memory,
were lines of worry
you worried about the past
your demons, all the things you didn't share
you worried about the present
the endless treatments and answerless questions

you worried about the future:

what if it doesn't work?

You worried all your life and
in the end you worried for naught
you worried and planned
prepped and predicted
played all your cards right
and still—

I worry less now, but
I write about you often

Lost After You

By: Jessie Gulotta

It took 18 years to finally lose all contact of you
From infant to teen, finally an adult that can say “adieu”
I could never truly tell who had more of the blame
All I knew is cause of you I hate my middle name

You drained my spirit like an overheated lake
Your booming voice would make my bones shake
Trough every smack upon my face, just hard enough to leave no mark
Or every flick on my forehead, that made my thoughts go dark

I wasn't to cry or giggle, “be a boy” he would scream
I couldn't even escape his wrath within a dream
So I branded a smile, one meant to last
Through every day of my corrupted past

I smiled through pain, it eased every blow
Pressured with violence, answering questions I pretended to know
Every answer wrong brought anger and fear
I wonder to this day if he knew I was queer

I couldn't speak up before about every swat and spank
Or even the bruises formed upon the arms you'd yank
Vocally I feel lost, afraid to even bother
Because of the scars, portrayed by my father

Fool's Day

By: Kelley Collins

Characters

APRIL: 30s, wearing business casual attire.

MADAME TAROT: 50s, wearing loose, flowing, colorful attire.

MAN ON PHONE: Voice only.

Setting

In the center of the stage, a cloth-covered table with two chairs facing each other. Walls covered with colorful curtains and tapestries. An exit door on the right side wall.

[Scene Start]

(APRIL enters through the door in a rush, she's on speakerphone with a man and we can hear his voice. She stands near the door while finishing up her phone call.)

MAN. What do you mean you aren't coming? What are we supposed to do for lunch? Brenda and I are STARVING and you know we're going to be stuck here working on this project all night—

APRIL. Again?

MAN. Don't start with me, April! Now we won't have time to eat! You know what traffic is like around the tower. You could have told me an hour ago that you weren't going to make it!

APRIL. I DID try to tell you.... No, you know what, never mind. I'm sorry! I don't know how many times I have to say it! Can't you just grab something in the food court?

MAN. It's Taco Tuesday April! I can't get within 3 floors of the lobby without getting heartburn! Whatever

APRIL. I hope it's worth it—whatever you're doing that's soooooo much more important than me!

(Hang up/Dial tone noise)

APRIL. (Under her breath and with great irritation) Oh, how could anything be more important than bringing lunch to my boyfriend and his coworker, who I'm pretty sure he's cheating on me with, on the 30th floor of the busiest building in town during peak traffic?

(APRIL closes her eyes, takes a deep breath to "reset," walks further into the room and looks around for somebody.)

Hello?

(MADAME TAROT enters through curtain wall on the left.)

MADAME. You must be April. Come dear, have a seat. (Sits in the left chair.)

APRIL. Yes, hello! Wait, how did you know my name? I don't remember giving it when I called to see if you were open.

MADAME. (Looking sly towards the audience) I know many things, dear. Come.

(APRIL sits in the right chair, looking nervous.)

MADAME. Now, you've come for answers.

APRIL. Yes.

MADAME. You want to know what to do.

APRIL. Yes.

MADAME. About a man.

APRIL. Yes!

MADAME. I take payment up front please.

APRIL. Oh! Yes, sorry. (Reaches into purse) Here! (Gives cash to MADAME.)

MADAME. (Grabs cash lustily) Okay then! Let's ask the universe. (Cards appear from

MADAME'S sleeve and she sets three of them upon the table and examines them.)

APRIL. What does it mean? (Stares wide-eyed at the cards, transfixed.)

MADAME. This first card: The Lovers. I believe this is the man you are coming to ask about, but I don't believe this woman with him is you. You think he may be cheating on you (looks slyly at the audience again), and you are right!

APRIL. (Nodding) Yes.

MADAME. This second card: The Tower. It symbolizes the end of something that you believed was of great importance in your life, and have now learned wasn't ever real: your relationship with this fraud of a man.

APRIL. (Nodding) Yes.

MADAME. And this third card: Death!

(APRIL startles/gasps, still staring at the cards, transfixed.)

MADAME. Relax, dear. It's not an actual death we are looking at here, but the death of this doomed relationship, so that there can be rebirth. A new chance for you to find love, dear, and true happiness. (Winks, nods at the audience.)

APRIL. (Without emotion) Yes, I understand. Thank you. (Rises from chair, expressionless.)

MADAME. Listen to the cards. Listen to the universe. You know what you need to do, dear.

(APRIL exits through door.)

MADAME. (Waits for door to close behind April, then, to the audience) Eh, don't worry about her! She's gonna be way better off without that jerk. I mean, what kind of a psycho doesn't like

TACOS?!

(Stage goes dark, hold for implied ending. In the darkness, the following sounds are heard: traffic, elevator dinging, and a woman's scream.)

MAN. Hey! What are you doing here?! It's not what it looks li—

(Two gunshots)

[END OF PLAY]

Metal Irony

By: Michael Murray

Ironically,
My lukewarm cup of black coffee
Brightens my day more
Than the long rectangle of light
That only makes the darkness more pronounced
As it gives dimension
To the symptoms of my sickness
Cold metal toilet, cold metal sink
Concrete cold on my feet
The feeling of having no feeling
Swallows me from the ground up
It's better this way,
Pain far away
Because it's hard to stick a landing
In a world with no soft edges
The birds of my feather
Are flightless and caged
In this paradox box
Where the treasure is on the outside
I am a numb sore thumb
In a world where men
Are reduced to digits

The Body of Theseus

By: Sean Mulligan

Each part that lays within me now may find new influence and take to some new shape.

My components replaced by my life's very design; I find myself to possess a body that has never matched my mind.

In seven years when that body is renewed in each and every cell, shall I come to find that my hands no longer remember you?

When my fingertips no longer feel your spirit beneath them, I fear I will lose the one that made me feel whole.

The sunlit golden glow of you, replaced by the weight of your absence.

Is it best, then, to sculpt you now with feeble skill and shaking hands?

Guided by memory alone, could I craft you from mud with your ashes as heart so you can come again and be by my side as you should be?

If children are born of love, shouldn't mine be enough to raise you again?

And again

and again

My love in magnitude and depth does surely exceed that shared between two who mash together in clumsy mass.

Why should their carelessness lead to life, but my monument be left to cold unjoyful clay?

Now I know why the gods crafted men so imperfectly.

Desperate to materialize the shape of their love, they failed to make it durable.

Classical Hell

By: Michael Murray

I've been on hold since Friday at 2,
It's Wednesday now.
The same four bars of classical grace
Have slowly melted off my face.
The voice of Satan—
“Your call is important to us.”
Of course it is, I'm sure that's true.
That's why I've aged a year or two.
I'm the victim of a system
Designed to prevent victims
Identity theft protocols made,
Yours truly, a casualty of Student Aid.
I've paced the room. I've scrubbed the floor.
Prepared a questionable dinner for 4.
Holding the phone began to bore me
So I wrote this horror story
The music stops I hear a ring
A human voice- such a lovely thing
But the news is bittersweet
A single teardrop down my cheek
Nothing can be done today
Oh, and Monday's MLK Day
Now I know the Devil's at play
Only that evil could make me stay
Home on a three-day holiday

Contrarian

By: Max Scott

I was as tired as a whale
fighting the subtle push and pull of the tide,
to stray me from my swaying journey home.

Currents rippling across me,
crashing over my body.
Midnight moonlight scattered and returned by silver fish.

Listening to the distant din of horns
and fog

legs forgotten, vestigial.
I swim through the dark,
just focused on not drowning,

And sing a tune only I know.

Gravity

By: Michael Murray

My thoughts line up like commuters, waiting for an idea that keeps changing platforms. Even my name feels borrowed, like something I forgot to return to its owner a long time ago, when my life was built on nothing but other people and their expectations. Not knowing who you're supposed to be, this late in the game, is almost the same as being nobody. Still, there's a pulse in the chaos, a small electric army pacing beneath my ribs, waiting for a spark of hope. Like a bumper sticker reminding me that fear is just energy that hasn't learned its purpose yet. Me and my fear will learn our fate together as the world rearranges itself, with us or against us. Not in malice, just gravity doing what it does.



The Pageant by Michael Murray

Growing Up on a Diet of Silence

By: Zoey Vistalli-Alvarado

A child of God, you, I had my questions.
You love me, but I don't know you. See you.
Hold me, but give me flaws for confession.
To you I am true; you let me see through.

I quiet with age, but still feel alone.
Where are you? Why will you not answer me?
You can't call me? Not even on my phone?
Did you care when my brother split my knee?

You're not there, are you? Imaginary.
A false reality with fantasies.
Did not judge actions ungodly, very.
Adult now, I can't trust fallacies.

A fool I used to be, and they still are.
They don't know me; they dream of phony stars.

“Staying Stuck”

By: Esme Velazquez

“Speak” I beg

My brain screaming at my mouth to form any word, but my tongue and mind can't seem to interlock their fingers together

Actively losing touch as my peers sit as waiting onlookers, witnessing a sheep sheer itself bare

Instructor staring at me expectantly, instructing me to share my grapes of knowledge that seem to be tangled up in a frenzy of green

The beige despondent walls close in, filling my chest with unceasing waters spurting out from their eyes

My lungs capsize under the weight of their watch, with no lifeguard on duty to flush out the reservoir flowing down my throat

Organ of sight burning hot, straining, pulling at my scarlet saltwater veins

Liberation so easily obtained if I could just drive against the raging waters and propel my bones against the dense shackles bound to my feet

Yet my will stays down, motionless

Immobile inside the traps so carefully curated by my own disposition

Icebound like a sheet of glass

Novice

By: Jamie Seibel

2025 Central Valley Birding Symposium

Destination: Colusa Wildlife Refuge

Meet-Up Location: Granzella's Restaurant, 8:00 am

Our edge of November;
dark clouds, a hidden blue sky,
ground wet from the previous morning's rain.

A WCC library birding kit
attracts others around me.

Retired folks and their soft voices
float through the cold breeze.

I went to Colusa Campus once before,
never this refuge.

An older red-faced man,
glasses, a little space between his teeth,
introduces himself as "Jon Dunn,"
co-author of the 6th and 7th edition
of National Geographic,
and our field trip guide.



Novice 1 by Jamie Seibel

I'm the girl with a million questions.
Notebook in hand, a student again.
Cars go one by one against the fog
to Highway 20, O'Hair Road.
I'm told the refuge has Cackling Geese,

Northern Pintail, and Shoveler, all in a pond.

Upon arrival, my fingers fumble
on the unfocused binoculars.

My head nods with the group
in agreement,

pretending I know these birds.

My untrained ears hear a noise, not a call.

Jon exclaims, “The Bushtits are wild!”

The group stays left. I go right
before returning.

Using their scope,

all I see is a black hole.

I confess my sin, and they begin

to see me as I am: bare and exposed.

They teach me how to focus the image.

Like them, I want to know why the Bushtits are twittering,

to recognize a thunder of Pintail wings taking flight

before sunlight cracks through gloomy clouds.

Instead, I hear a snap and clutter.

Forgotten tags, from new hiking pants,

fall to the ground.

Jon, squinting his eyes, asks,

“Did someone lose their hotel keys?”

The group points to my pant tags.

A Great Egret watches all the madness

from a distant pond,

watchful eye like an old sage.



Never Forget, Bird Moon Paradise
by Jamie Seibel

Time passes as the other birders observe,
taking photos whenever they can.
We must walk a little before driving.
A blonde woman tells me
to pick up my feet, “Don’t scare the birds!”
Our cars move slowly across the gravelly road.
Everyone’s eyes move from left to right, up and down
to find that one subspecies:
the Tule Goose.
A darker neck and larger body,
its presence different than
the typical Greater White-Fronted Goose.
All cars stop.
Watch and listen.
I find myself half-asleep, hungry,
and ready to go home—
Yet, I spot this different goose,
and tell everyone through the walkie-
talkie,
as it begins to take off alone into clouds.
Leaving us;
the ponds, the roads, the other birders, and me
still breathing for more.



Novice 2 by Jamie Seibel

Dark Matter

By: Michael Murray

You were exciting,
like someone knocking on my window
instead of my door.
A sultry whisper instead of an empty promise.

A roaring fire that warmed my face,
while I turned my back to the frigid world.

You sang a lusty lullaby
to the parts of me that wouldn't sleep,
shaped the parts that were misshapen,
and I mistook that for care.

You didn't ask for much at first,
just a little more time,
a little more room,
a little more of me.

Soon you were everywhere
in my pockets, in my breath, in my veins.
In the spaces between my thoughts.

I knew your reputation,
but I thought I was different.

I kept telling myself
we were good together,
that you understood me
in ways no one else did.

That I would just leave you
If things went south.

They did.

I couldn't.

Besides, where would I go?
But that was part of your plan,
Wasn't it?

You held me how I needed to be held,
but you were only learning
how to hold me down,
make sure I couldn't move.

An empty promise instead of a sultry whisper
A raging fire that burned me
If I turned my back on you
When I tried to stand up to you
I was already reshaped
by the weight of you
And letting go
felt like prying my own fingers
off a hand I thought was mine.

I know you wasted me
and that life isn't supposed
to hollow you out.

I know that blame is found
in every reflection.
Whether a mirror, a puddle,
or the way people from a past life
can't look me in the eyes
without searching for traces of you.

And I know healing isn't loud.
There will not be trumpets
as I climb out of the grave
my addiction almost buried me in.
I am climbing out alone
but I am climbing out sober.

Buster

By: Zoey Vistalli-Alvarado

He came to me as an angel.
Wrapped in a bow and covered in beige
yellow fur,
His eyes shine like beads but their
darkness gave me anxiety,
but then he did something no one else
did.
He gave a bow and stayed on Earth for
me.

He held my heart and let me handle his
ears,
and saved my soul, let it free.
When stitches ripped, and cotton
spilled for all the world to see,
My voice went raw and red with agony.
I gave him a voice that echoed mine,
and he used it to fight the monsters in
the darkness.
His bark, which scared the shadows
away with its sharpness.
He was hurt but still was there,
And he still let me hold him and
treated me with such care.

Many years have passed, and his songs
have long since gone silent,
But his presence in my life will
continue to be giant.
Despite the long years, his collar
remains a vivid scarlet;
even now, he still wears that same
fabric smile,
As his cotton stays with me on my
carpet.

Meet Your Editors



Zoey Vistalli-Alvarado (Managing Editor) is an Animation major who aspires to make her own animated film and video game. She loves being creative and hopes that this issue of Ink Magazine inspires readers to pursue their own artistic ventures.



Max Scott (Managing Editor) is a creative who has far too many outlets to express herself. They are aiming to transfer to a 4-year college where they will work towards a degree in either Film & Media or Comparative Literature.



Mia Mendoza (Managing Editor) is an English and Psychology major who plans on transferring to a 4-year college where she will pursue a career in teaching at a secondary level. Outside of lectures, she enjoys reading and attending live music.



Michael Murray (Managing Editor) is an English major. He arrived here from the future just in time to help with the latest issue of Ink Magazine. In his words, this publication will be important for the future. The revolution starts now.



Jessie Gulotta (Formatting/Graphics/Content Coordinator) is a writer and lover of nature who has little time for either. They encourage everyone who submitted work to this publication to keep creating beautiful and soulful art.

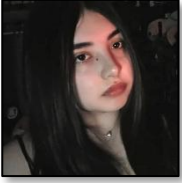


Faith McLeod (Formatting/Graphics/Content Coordinator) is an English and Education major. She is particularly interested in literature and helping others develop their voice through reading and writing.



Luke Atwood (Formatting/Graphics/Content Coordinator) is an English major who hopes to transfer to UC Davis. He is working towards a career as a technical writer and is currently considering becoming an author or screenwriter as well.

Meet Your Editors



Esme Velazquez (Copyeditor) is an English major graduating this spring with an associate in English, having already earned her associate in Arts and Humanities. She will be transferring to CSUS and strive to work in the world of publishing books.



Sophia Khoshcar (Copyeditor) is an English major with plans to transfer to UC Irvine in 2027. She loves reading, as well as writing her own stories, and aspires to one day become a published author.



John Gallegos (Copyeditor) is an aspiring musician transferring to a 4-year college for Mathematics.

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Spring 2026



**Jessie Gulotta, Max Scott, Faith McLeod, Luke Atwood,
Michael Murray, Mia Mendoza, Zoey Vistalli-Alvarado,
Sophia Khoshcar**



**When my fingertips no longer feel your
spirit beneath them, I fear I lose the one that
made me feel whole.**

**The sunlit golden glow of you, replaced by
the weight of your absence.**

-Sean Mulligan

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