

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA BEAUFORT

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# THE PEN



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JOURNAL of STUDENT CREATIVE WRITING *and* ART

## *The Identity Issue*

CELEBRATING UNITY IN DIVERSITY

SPRING—SUMMER 2017



AMERICAN SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION

ASPA

1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE  
WINNER



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# THE PEN

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SPRING–SUMMER 2017

Department of English, Theater, and Liberal Studies

University of South Carolina Beaufort

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# MANIFESTO

Celebrating Unity in Diversity is the theme of the Spring/Summer 2017 issue of *The Pen*. Here at the University of South Carolina Beaufort we wish to embody—if you'll excuse the terrible, yet ineluctable, play on words—a University of Unity in Diversity. *The Pen* is a collaborative biannual publication of the Society of Creative Writers, who wish not only to circulate the work they have indefatigably poured their creative and intellectual energy into, but also in hopes of seeing what flowers of creativity are blossoming in the minds and hearts of *all* those who have the artistic spirit, a knack for the aesthetic craft.

Artists build sanctuaries; they bring in all; all are welcome. Literature is all and sundry, where we gather to better understand ourselves, to question, dream, and challenge. We, as one and many, must approach all things with doubt and skepticism *while respecting* that wholesome idea of union, for the end goal is to harmonize, to compose the collective song, to orchestrate the societal symphony. Literature lies within the mind of the individual wishing to permeate the song of life, tincture the tableau of the human landscape. Literature is why sanctuaries exist.

We here at the Society of Creative Writers are an institution of inclusiveness. We gather not because we are alike, but because we are so different, and we rejoice in those differences, encourage the absolutely singular individual voice to surface, join in the conversation, and express itself as freely as it wishes. There is love here. There is respect here. There is an eclectic mess of faults and idiosyncrasies that alchemize through supplementation.

Come join us. For us to build bridges, we must first build a network of communication.

Adam C. Trawick  
On behalf of the Editorial Board



Dear Reader,

Welcome to *The Pen's* Identity Issue: Celebrating Unity in Diversity. I am filled with admiration and appreciation for this year's editorial staff because they have taken a stand—declaring that our literary journal is a safe zone, a refuge, a sanctuary where free thought and artistic expression are encouraged and embraced.

Please consider, as you indulge your sensibilities in the words and visual art contained herein, the commitment it takes to create this publication. Alexis Henderson, the talented and dedicated Editor of *The Pen*, along with our rock solid Editorial Board—Jayme Brinson, Maddie Hayes, Chris Hunt, and Samantha Jones—have worked long and faithfully to bring you this volume. It is labor well realized.

And speaking of labor well realized, we are delighted to share with you the news that *The Pen* has recently been awarded First Place in the American Scholastic Press Association (ASPA) annual competition. We received outstanding marks in all five categories: content coverage, organization, design, presentation, and creativity. Hats off to every award winning Editorial Board member: Katie Hart, Alexis Henderson, Elizabeth Higginbotham, Brenda Hill, Bill Lisbon, Ciera Love, Taylor Piscitello, and Kat Trent. Bill Lisbon's graphic talents have been especially lauded.

Of course, were it not for the purposeful wordsmiths and evocative visual artists of our student body, there would be no *Pen*. We applaud you—keep it coming! We also owe gratitude to Dr. Lynn McGee and the USCB Development Staff—particularly Tim Devine, our gifted graphics guru, whose mark is on this issue. Lastly, we at *The Pen* are fortunate to have the constant support of Dr. Rob Kilgore and everyone in the Department of English, Theater, and Liberal Studies. We appreciate all of you.

Happy Reading!

Dr. Ellen Malphrus  
*Faculty Sponsor*

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# POETRY



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# Abuse

by Alexa Grimm

Shhh.

It's okay.

Hey, hey. Don't cry.

Shhh. Someone might hear you.

It'll only hurt for a second, okay? I promise it'll feel good.

Okay. That's enough.

Seriously.

Be quiet.

Shut the fuck up, okay?

Quit being a baby.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I love you.

I'll never do it again.

Let's just do this, okay? It'll make you feel better.

You'll forget I ever did that. It'll never happen again.

Here, let me take your bra off. It's too constricting.

And your underwear too.

Okay, I'm just gonna...

See? I told you it would feel nice.

Wipe your nose. That's disgusting.

You know what, fuck this.

You ruined the mood.

Get dressed, you whore.

## Who Am I?

by Alexa Grimm

I was the only black girl in my graduating class.

I was wishing every day I'd been born white, instead.

I was wondering why no one liked me.

I was told it was because my hair was nappy, and my skin dark.

I was told to hang myself from an apple tree.

Now,

I *am* one of many African American women to have been through this.

I *am* happy with the hue of my flesh.

I *am* married to the love of my life.

I *am* discovering how to care for my hair.

I *am* hanging, but from the edge of my seat to see what fate has in store for me.

## Message Delivered

by Alexa Grimm

(9:30 pm) Fkboi69: Pls bby?

(9:31 pm) Judetheprude: I'm sorry...I just don't feel comfortable doing that

(9:55 pm) Fkboi69: Ight

(9:55 pm) Judetheprude: Please don't be mad. I love you.

Read 10:30 PM

(10:01 pm) Judetheprude: Jared...

Read 10:02 PM

(10:15 pm) Judetheprude: Fine. Just don't show anyone please...

(10:20 pm) Judetheprude: [Image sent]

(10:20 pm) Fkboi69: Wuz tht so hrd?

(10:21 pm) Judetheprude: I guess not... I love you...

(10:32 pm) ☺

...

Group Message

(10:40 pm) Yo, check this out! FW: [Image sent]



*The Bus* by Ciera Love

## Mortality's Cusp

by Alexis Henderson

In the dark between two  
stars a girl swings  
by her throat. A chain, like  
a noose, ties her to the sky.  
She dangles, hangs.  
A sacrifice made.

No, rather a rendering made  
as an offering, to  
atone for all that hangs  
in the balance. The sins that swing.  
Prayers take to the sky,  
winged, free from the chain

of mortality. The chain  
of the the mistakes we made  
in attempt to fly sky  
high, off to  
the moon that swings  
& the stars that hang

idle. Still, the girl hangs  
You see her chain,  
glinting as it swings,  
as if she was made  
As an ornament for two  
gods that reign in the sky.

She is their delight. The sky  
splits when she sways, hangs  
like pendulum, too  
light to break her chain.  
Humankind made  
holy as she swings.

And she swings.  
Lifts her hands, fingers scraping sky.  
She knows she has made  
a mistake. The seconds hang.  
She tests her chain,  
wishing it would snap in two.

So she swings, slips, to her death.  
The sky cracks. The chain breaks.  
Gods, made mortal, hang.



## JonBenét

by Ashely Fernandez

Playing dress up, her favorite thing!  
Elbows resting, chin in hands  
Plush, with mirrored glass 'round  
Pink smears on dimples, mommy's lipstick  
Clacking noises, her boots too big

"I wanna be a cowboy's sweetheaaart!"  
Enchanting things in boxes!, dangling head to toe  
A glare in the mirror, eyes widening  
Gold metals upright, high and proud  
Mommy, "Don't touch, not for play!"

Only a child, acting adult  
Put on a show, others watching  
Daddy's little girl, rather perfect

Widened lenses

Childish glee, a stunning presence  
Beauty before us, dressed to kill  
Flaxen blonde, impeccably coiffed  
Poised in diamonds with a debonair fashion

A tilt of the head, a winsome grin  
Her eyes sparkling, lights ablaze  
The garnet train, trailing each pose  
A crown surmounting an angel's beam

All the world watching, an American sweetheart  
White light present, abruptly dimming

Gone.

Cold sweat and fluster, chaotic air  
Corner of an eye, balled up stiff stature  
A deafening bellow, choked in pain  
Solid yellow stained on white, a manic struggle  
Immeasurable angst, a depth and thickness easily sliced

Build up of hatred, thin ice cracking  
Weight on an angel, 'til justice found  
At the foot of gray stone, a grim shadow prowling  
Famished and craving, a deranged obsession  
Ruddy dents on nail beds, a delightful fight  
Euphoric feelings, just pondering the moment  
Smooth tips stroking, luscious blonde locks

Now gazing dreamily, a frame in the cemetery  
Revealing wholly, a menacing grimace curling each end

## Do Eyes Reveal

by Amanda Mazeika

To who stands before me,  
What is it you see  
When you gaze into these dark sunken pits  
That wreak nothing but death and worthlessness?  
Call to the forgotten and desolate  
Not I  
To my inmates of betrayal,  
What secrets do you divulge  
Without appreciating that you have revealed enough  
To save me, to expose?  
For this sin you have committed  
Not eye



## Chase

by Amanda Mazeika

I slow to shortly halt.  
Pleading to bargain for a rest,  
Before your hot breath graces my neck  
I continue running.  
My ears cry fear like my head of the pound in my chest  
I cannot ignore  
And my lungs choke down the oxygen in greed to steal what  
I cannot gasp.  
I am running out.  
Of breath.

I know if I stop, I will be caught,  
No matter the length between us  
While I run.  
So terrified I run,  
I do not know how far  
you are. Turning to look would be unwise.

The obscurity stalking near lingers in to raid  
My eyes are wide open, still  
I cannot tell  
My body once swearing never, cowers in collapse of the  
weight  
I cannot promise  
Broken to fall into submission.  
I am sorry, I cannot run,  
I am —

## Prisoners

by Amanda Mazeika

We are locked in the same prison.

We are called by different names,

We all feel so different.

But we all feel the same.

I feel what you have been through,

I have stared at the same four walls.

Confined to the same life-draining cell,

Sold and sworn to my criminal.

They trialed me too, in the heavy court room

Of the maddening questions provoking confessions

To admit ourselves to the shame

While we try to reason for our innocence,

But still believe the guilt.

We are locked in this prison.

We are called by different names,

We all feel so different.

But we are all defined the same.

Yet I do not, nor will I pretend,

To know your true identity.

## **A Body Against Itself**

by Amanda Mazeika

My mind and my heart are sworn enemies:  
My heart aches, while my mind provokes its pain.  
My mind declines my heart of what it desires  
And it devises to break it.

My mouth deceives my heart, to obey my mind:  
My heart screams for help, while my mouth refutes against it.  
My mouth lies that all is fine to cover for my mind  
And my heart is never heard.

My eyes try to follow my heart, to deny my mind:  
My heart clashes with my mind, while my eyes reflect the  
same.  
My eyes tell the honest but my mouth tells the trusted  
And the lies play the truth.

But my eyes feed my mind, too loyal too weak, to follow my  
heart:  
My heart bleeds to thrive, while traitors' shame poisons its  
veins.  
My eyes, my mouth, my mind align on the weighted side  
And my heart prophesies to lose again.

## Inhale, Exhale

by Christopher Hunt

Anxiety.  
Bugging me.  
Constricting my chest.  
Making my face hot.  
Analyzing everything in my sight.

Anxiety.  
Controlling me.  
Leading me wildly.  
Moving far too quickly.  
A cause for unwanted irritability.

Anxiety.  
Sensory overload.  
Shutting me down.  
Bringing tears to life.  
Summoning irrationality to my reality.

Anxiety!  
Demanding attention!  
Screaming at you!  
Needing to be heard!  
Wanting peace—wanting to die!

Breath.  
Often forgotten.  
Waiting to help.  
Held in a cage.  
Not used—causing further crippling.

And then I breathe.  
In through my nose,  
Out through my mouth,  
Lungs expanding into my back.  
And the chains loosen.



I breathe for life.  
Five counts in,  
Five counts out.  
Slow and meaningful.  
To slay my inner-beast.

My breath grants freedom.  
It is hard,  
Sometimes rugged,  
But the treasure it donates  
Is priceless.

The claws of negativity soften,  
Heat in my face recedes,  
My nerve endings cool,  
My shoulders drop and relax.  
A calming is washing over me.

With my experiences,  
I have only once piece of advice:  
Advice that could save you,  
Or the people and things you love.  
A practice that is powerful beyond reason:

Breathe.  
Don't' forget.  
Let peace win.  
Don't hold it back.  
Your breath is your friend.



## Momma's Boy

by Christopher Hunt

Mom

A three letter word  
Used to describe a multitalented  
Magical Angell.

Instead of me branding her  
With that tiny term  
Let me expand on the magic  
She brings to my life.

She is my love and my healing.  
My quick cure to a bad day  
The unyielding Band-Aid  
That stitches my heart.

She is the calm that battles my anxiety  
The light that scares my depression away.  
She instills me with adoration  
And pride.

She is strength personified—  
Leading the way  
Through life's darkest spells  
Always coming out victorious.

She is my laughter as  
I channel her through my humor,  
Our jokes creating tears  
And lasting memories.

She's who I aspire to mirror  
She inspires me to be me  
She gives me example of  
Unconditional love.

My love for my mother  
Is more than imagination can summon—  
It is more than the heat in my chest,  
It is immortal.

She deserves more  
Than that small word  
To describe her role  
In my life.

She is my entire world,  
My best friend.  
My hero.  
Mom.

She is this boy's momma,  
And I am her momma's boy.

## Dialogue

by Christopher Hunt

She sits  
not speaking,  
unblinking,  
quiet.

She speaks,  
though she remains unspoken,  
silence unbroken.  
She's screaming

through her posture  
and pleading eyes  
paired with not-so-secret cries.  
She's afraid

He wants to leave—  
she's poisoning him,  
his mind grows grim  
through this toxic love.

He misses her voice.  
Its absence kills  
its presence instills  
beauty.

Sometimes he finds strength.  
He stands to leave,  
preparing to grieve.  
He stops.

"Wait."  
It's her voice.  
He has no choice.  
He sits.

He holds her  
they embrace and exist,  
their love impossible to resist.  
This is their dialogue.



*Never Stop Shining* by Ciera Love

## My Name

by Christopher Hunt

C-h-r-i-s-t-o-p-h-e-r  
Eleven letters to tell you who I am.  
A name that means "bearing Christ"  
Even though I am agnostic.  
It is my personal identifier  
Which I must carry throughout my lifetime.

But, I am so much more  
Than a name.  
I want a name that speaks for my soul  
A name that can tell you who I am  
To me.

My name is Creator  
When I invent poems,  
Narrate scenes,  
And craft new ideas.

My name is Adventurer  
When I get lost in fantasy worlds,  
Explore new places with friends,  
Or wander in my imagination.

My name is Comedian  
When I crack a pun that makes my friends glare at me,  
Have those around me in laughing tears,  
And laugh at my own jokes.

My name is Musician  
When I sing at the top of my lungs,  
Play the piano like a child,  
And when I cry at beauty in songs.

My name is Bubba  
To my younger siblings when they need help,  
When my sisters want someone familiar to laugh with,  
When they need a shoulder to cry on.

My name is Son  
When I do things to make my parents proud,  
To my mom when I open up to her,  
To my step-father who took me in when he didn't have to.

My name is Nerd  
When I write fantasy,  
Play magic games,  
And fantasize about being able to fly.

My name is Lover  
When I dream about finding the love,  
Pursue my dreams,  
And when I hum love songs all throughout a day.

My name is Christopher  
The "Christ bearer"  
Even though that is not me—I am so much  
More.

## Brazen Sunflower

An "Exquisite Corpse" written collectively by the  
Spring 2017 Creative Writing across the Curriculum Class

The flower rejected the sun,  
Bright as copper, red as primal dawn,  
The tattoo my friend got on her ankle last summer,  
Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful  
Glared at me like a happy face,  
Showing her ruffled petticoat,  
What does brazen mean?





*Watercolor Painting* by Jessica Wells

## The Other Whom He Loved

by Jayme Brinson

He remembered the feelings.  
The tingling in his spine  
and the dryness in his mouth.  
He remembered wondering of the name.

He remembered learning the name  
One he never forgot, not even to this day  
He remembers the eyes, the bright blue iris'  
And he remembers the burning inside.

He remembered the first time they spoke,  
the first to his memory  
Though it wasn't the first ever.  
He learned of his impact on the other,  
the courage to embrace the attraction to the same sex.

He remembered the first time outside of school  
The dark dirt road and the cousin too.  
He remembered the laughing and the jokes  
The warmth within his heart remains.

He remembered meeting the others other  
The sharp pain in his heart  
He remembered hiding his feelings  
Just so he could stay close.

He remembered the weekend nights  
He, the other and the others other  
A trio matched by none  
Soon his heart swelled with mutual love.

He remembered the others other  
A jealousy, not his own  
That burned with vibrant flames  
And ruined the entire affair.

He remembered the other moving  
His other building a wall  
To separate them forever  
A pain the cut a hole.

He remembered the long nights wondering  
Where did it go wrong?  
How could this have happened?  
What should he do now?

He remembered the days, the weeks and months  
Roughly one year had passed between  
And still he thought of the other  
and still his heart continued to ache.

He remembered the day he was working  
When together they came through  
They spoke and he replied  
Something strange to the ear.

He remembered the invitation  
The other asked him to see a flick  
The other's other was on a trip  
And the other would be bored sick.

He remembered hearing the news  
The other's other's affair  
The heart break the other felt  
And the pain he felt too.

He remembered the days that followed  
The healing he helped to come  
The courage and strength he inspired  
In the other whom he loved.

He remembered the bonding they shared  
Without another other there  
He remembered the words they spoke  
The secretes that they told.

He remembered the growing  
He remembered the love too  
But never was there anything  
That separated the two.

To this day he remembers  
The love within his heart  
Though he doesn't speak to the other  
For reasons, they grew apart.

A flicker of a flame  
that still burns brighter than before  
For the other he mustn't name  
he'll love forever more.

## The Glass

by Jayme Brinson

Liquor poured from the bottle to the glass  
Another day he skipped the monotony  
Why get up and go to another class  
Like a monotone, tedious symphony

His brain lacked for what his heart ached  
Impatience bellowed in the caverns of his mind  
He knew that inspiration in his mind baked  
But no words for someone of his kind

He sipped the whiskey in his hand  
And thought of how to proceed  
It burned, like drinking hot sand  
But it killed the thoughts that precede

He picked up his pen  
Touched it to paper  
Wrote to men  
Or perhaps the grim reaper

"I've thought long and hard  
of what is to come  
now it's time to play my card  
and drink another glass of rum"

# Grey

by Spencer Fierszt

Darkness

Is not evil

Just as light is not good

Light and dark create shades of grey

Neutral



## Starlight

by Spencer Fierszt

The Stars

Frozen in time

Beacons in the night sky

Beautiful, bright and immortal

Shining



## Sound of joy

by Spencer Fierszt

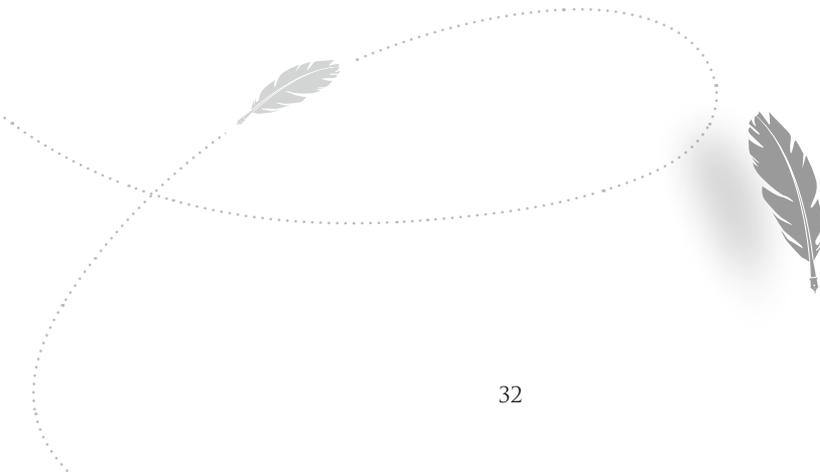
Music

Do you like jazz?

I prefer classic rock

But everyone has their own tastes

Awesome



## Rainfall Epiphany

by Tia Dobson

As I lie with nature all around me,  
Reminiscing my past sorrow and heartbreaks  
Suddenly, as though nature and I were one  
The sky wept as though it knew just as I did:  
That he and I would never be again  
I looked to the sky to see its gentle tears fall upon my shoulders  
But even as the rain fell and the sun set,  
I knew just like the sun all good things will once again  
Rise

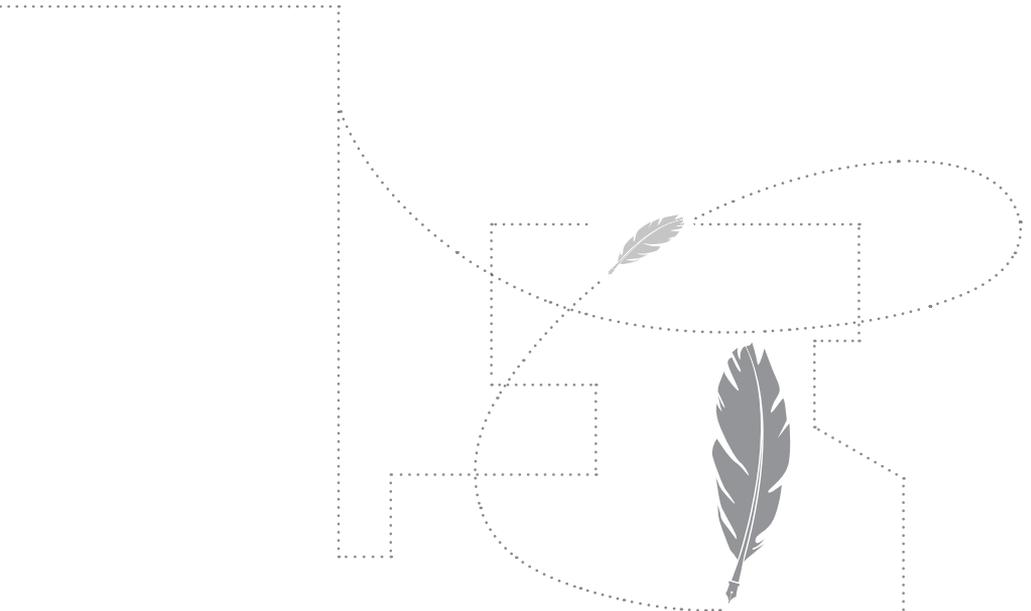


*Seashell* by Jayme Brinson

## Cognitive Dissonance

by Tia Dobson

Sitting atop my mountains of thoughts  
As I contemplate the path I dare to take  
Forked roads slowly intertwining causing more casualties  
Than casually pulling the trigger during Russian roulette  
Oh what dark irony it is that my will to live,  
Is the cause of me slowly dying inside



**[U]niver[s]e**  
by Christopher Hunt

When you feel alone, stop and take a moment to remember you, as well as all of us, are the universe.

Stop and remember:  
The **fire** in your chest  
When you feel love and passion  
The **earth** in your logic  
As you ground yourself  
The **water** in your blood  
It's vital essence coursing through you  
The **air** filling your lungs  
When you take that calming breath  
The **electricity** in your brain  
As you further the world with your ideas  
The **light** in your heart  
That beats back the darkness  
The **nature** in your friendships  
As you root yourself in others  
The **time** that marches you forth  
Filling you with experience

Your spirit  
That binds this magic together  
You are the universe.  
We are the universe.  
You are matter.  
You matter.  
You are not alone.  
We are with you.

# PROSE

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## My Flaming Vocation

by Christopher Hunt

I have to help them. I will help them. I will save them—I *have* to. They're in the greatest danger they have ever been in. They know not what comes. We're going to die. I tell them of our fate, the people passing by, of how we're all going to perish horribly, yet they continue to walk past me. Ignoring. Uncaring. Unhearing. Silly people. I have to help or they're going to die. The gods have abandoned us... the sun will soon snuff out and plunge us into eternal darkness. Death. But, I have the power to save them, some of them at least, it is my destiny. I grab one young man's attention. He is curious as to what books and movies I've been watching. I lie and ask him to come watch some with me. He agrees. Lying is wrong, but I'll do whatever it takes to have our story end happily. I must hurry they're waiting on me now.

I take the man to my home, which I located a few miles outside of city limits. We have pleasant small talk the entire way. He's a third year undergraduate at the local university. He studies psychology. He has dinner plans for Mother's Day tomorrow. I enjoy getting to know my new soon-to-be family member.

We make our way into the living room of the house, of which there is no television, and he looks at me questioningly. "Listen." I say. He hears the screaming, calling out, and banging now. He looks startled. I calm him down by telling him that is my new surround-sound. His concern morphs into an impressed expression. I lead him downstairs.

When I enter the room they begin to cry, curse me, and beg for me to let them go. Oh, why don't they understand that I'm going to give us a better chance? A better life? My new friend looks horrified, but it is too late, there is no turning back. He agreed to this... not that he knew what he was agreeing to.

He weakly and unimpressively attempts to make an attack. I move out of the way as he slows down to the speed of a falling piece of paper. His normal speed returns and I let him tumble down the stairs. It's easier to subdue when they are prone. His face contorts as my brow sweats and his muscles lock into place. I drag him to the cage with the other thirty-odd people and toss him in. His muscles relax and he begins to scream at me like a maniac. Before you go calling me monster

like the rest of them for the cage know this: I tried not using the cage before. I know it's uncouth, but the first few Chosen tried to escape, and I was forced to send them to the gods early. All are too afraid to attempt escape now. Nothing but silliness.

"Hush now," I say ignoring their sounds, "we will be the first to beg the god's forgiveness—they will have us in Paradise."

They sob broken cries or sit in deadly silence.

Silly people. They'll know soon enough when I save them. Us. For we were chosen by the gods themselves. They have sent me visions! I have seen the sun go away, and I know what we must do. We were meant to be the ones to convince the gods to take us back. We have to be the ones saved before the darkness takes the world. We have to persuade them to let the newly doomed people into Paradise, else their souls be consumed by Her. Their physical lives already are.

I walk to my essence holder. It's a beautiful large stone bowl with intricate drawings of trees and life on it. More crying. More of naming me 'monster' as I was and coat my hands in this year's children's blood. It was a necessary price. Just like they—we—are. Children are incredible sources of power. They are filled with light and energy and purity and joy and the cleansing fires. I've only had to use their blood once before, and that was what eventually led me to find out about the End. They gave me the visions.

After my hands are thoroughly coated with all of the gooey, warm power I begin to feel *it*. Them. The gods. Their power. The power of purity, of fire and energy, within me. My hands begin to glow a deep maroon, the glowing pulsation with the nervous pitter-patter of my heart. It's nearly time. Some of the crying stops when they notice the glowing of my hands. Some of it worsens. I am being called demon and other obscenities. Their begging is far more panicked now.

Silly.

"Tonight we meet the gods."

I walk to the cage that I have them in.

I raise my hands to the cage and grasp it with inhumanly strong force, the bars bend a little. I can see the thoughts racing in the minds of the braver ones. *Brake his hands. Do something!* That gallantry dies quickly when the cage glows the same color of my hands. My soon-to-be new family is completely silent for the first time. I think of the newest addition's dinner plans tomorrow with his mother. She shall know the

bravery of his sacrifice when she dies and is saved.

Heat begins to fill the room. The glowing grows to a blinding level. The pulsing of the energy increases like never before, for I am anxious to meet my makers. The silence is broken—they are screaming, the energy is screaming, I am screaming. These powers haven't been seen since the time of the ancients in Sumer. I'm doing it! I'm actually going to save us! We will meet our gods!

"This is our destiny!" I bellow at the top of my lungs, unsure if anyone hears me.

The energy climaxes and all I can see is amazing, beautiful light. I have done it. Our happily ever after begins.

# Instructions for a Snapping Quiet Evening

by Cody Solders

1. When moving into your new home make sure to sound proof your home. Can't have those pesky neighbors ease dropping on your business shall we?
2. When the neighbors come over to meet you for the first time always put on your sincerest act possible. Got to make sure you do this correctly or else the neighbors will want to meddle into your business.
3. Offer to watch those noisy pets that the neighbors own, while they go on a trip or vacation. If they keep on being noisy after the neighbors leave a quick SNAP will fix them right up.
4. When the neighbor's return, make sure to make the best cover story on how their animal ran away, even to the point of offering to buy a replacement for said neighbor to cover your tracks. If this does not work, go on to step nine.
5. To calm yourself after this I would recommend having "Entertainment" over for the night. (Make sure to get them from out of town so they don't know where they are at.) If the person decides to leave too early or thinks of you as too creepy and starts making a ruckus, a quick SNAP will fix them really quick. (Thankfully the sound proof walls help in this situation.) Go to step nine if this fails.
6. Now as to how to dispose the amounting corpses (i.e 3 and 5). I would recommend picking up the hobby of barbecuing and having all the neighbors over for dinner. The neighbors wont suspect the nice neighbor giving out free food and beers.
7. Since the neighbors are starting to really like you and now notice how much free time you have on your hands, they offer to pay you to watch their noisy brats while out having fun. Try to get and know these brats and their habits. It wouldn't be great when you went into their rooms at night to give them a quick SNAP, if they are wide awake and can easily alert their parents of danger. Go to step Nine if this fails.
8. Repeat steps 2 through 7 until you are content to the noise level around your house or until they start getting suspicious about the missing animals and people in the surrounding area. If you have to

I would recommend going off and doing step in various different cities far away from your house to lure the nice blue men away from you. Go to step nine if this fails.

9. Oh No! You have been found out by a neighbor or the blue men have caught up to you to the point you can no longer using SNAP to keep them away. You must go and escape from this town and go live in a remote area for a while until everything dies down. I recommend a highly forested mountainous area like a state park, where they can't find you easily to go hide out at for the time being.
10. With the blue men now giving up on finding you, it's time to change your identity once again (can't have them finding after you waited so long to evade them). I heard out west is nice at this time of year, why not go get a bus or train ticket and travel out there to find a new quiet home. Go back to step one and start over to make this home as quiet as your previously owned ones were.

## The Art of Practice

by Ja'Keris Porter

I think there is a flaw in the reality we've all accepted for such a long time. This is innate and not something deliberate or manufactured. There are those that take advantage of it, but for the most part it's background radiation. It's a hierarchy created through a cycle of social upheaval and reformation so it goes deep. Very deep. So deep that there's almost no discernible difference between this mindset and so-called common sense. I'll say it now so there is no confusion. I don't think this particular form of thinking is wrong. If used correctly it can be a boon to the reclaimant. It just needs a more thorough understanding.

These particular feelings stem from a maladaptive coping mechanism that has been ingrained and automated in our parents, our grandparents, and beyond. This failure of management skills can be traced to one central concept; competition. The auxiliary to this is the delusion that there is not enough stuff for everyone. The solution to this dilemma lies in the very same structure that created the conflict in the first place. For that reason I call this special kind of introspection mind control. I don't assert to know economics, psychology, or any form of logos that grants me this insight. I only know what I know. In some form and in some way most of us have been lead to believe that others wish to take from us and if they don't it's because their weak, naive, or just slow to the game.

Jealousy is something I'm not proud to admit I suffer from frequently. It normally stems from the smallest things bolstered by the most extrapolated comparisons I've ever concocted. This is where my English inclination to dissect, works against me. I can go on endlessly about how much better someone is than me in *one* particular way and I never feel satisfied after all that thinking. I just feel tired. And angry. And worthless. Most of this is because I think that people are out to get me. In my mind there's an end goal that they're beating me to and I'm falling further and further behind with each passing moment. And they know it. They're flaunting it.

This preoccupation with aggregates almost destroyed me until I realized it. So what did I do? Mind control. I changed my idea of self to a more accommodating viewpoint and now I understand that those traits I envied were, are, and cannot be static. They are simply manifestations in that place and time and will, inevitably, change. As a result I

see opportunity where I once saw failure, release where there was once tension. The impermanence did me good. So good that it caused a dissolution of that entity I knew to be Ja' Keris. He returns every now and again, but I'm prepared for him now. I assert power over my thoughts and not the other way around. I tell myself pleasant stories until I believe what I'm saying. The mind is malleable like that. It will believe anything I tell it and I chose to tell it that old systems inevitably die. I believe in the revolution and the fact that tomorrow I can do it again. I'm happy to be flawed. I'm happy to try, to fail, to cry, and wail at the empty soul of life that drives us down this endless path of death and rebirth. I enjoy the practice of repetition. I enjoy the game and all that it entails. The talks about nothing and the chasing of the helium balloons. Every part of it. Namaste.



*Sunset* by Ciera Love

## Together

by Ja'Keris Porter

"You want to make out?" I asked.

Ironically, this didn't come from a place of neediness. I really wanted to do it because I was feeling whole for one of the few times in my life and I thought it best to share that with someone. Her smile lit my heart ablaze and it shined through my eyes.

"Kinda." she said

I went in, placing my hand gently around her slim neck, and caressing it with the care I told myself I would always show since my tenth grade rejections started piling up. I remembered Chelsea, my first premature love, and how she may have liked me, but I was too messed up to envision someone liking me for me. When our lips finally met I felt like I was kissing Chelsea in a way too even though the kiss itself was a bit lackluster. We didn't really know each other. I think I was gentle and she was ravenous. Starving in very much the same way I was and it was because of that that I didn't mind her trying to suck my soul through her mouth. I wanted to give.

We finished and stared at one another--her face scrunched up indecisively.

"I don't know how I feel about that." she said.

Neither did I. It felt like happiness, but truthfully I'm not well-versed in the subject. It was up in the air so I agreed and we went back to staring into the darkness of the sky.

On the way out I tried it again. This time it was more passionate. She melted in my arms the way I never knew I wanted. Her light weight cast into my arms as I cradled her to prevent her falling onto the ground. Like a meteor aimed at the heart. We delved, gave, and passed our energies to the point where I couldn't tell the difference between she and I. At the climax I pulled away and stared into her eyes.

"You make me think of weird things."

"Like what?"

I looked to my right where a few lights from Hilton Head bounced off the water and into the mirror of the sky. I remembered walking on soft ground before and liking it.

"You wanna do it on the salt marsh?"

Her grin stretched from ear to ear.

"Kinda." she said

I led her to the site and she did the thing that I knew would destroy me. *She reached for me.* For once I wasn't the one crossing the distance and it felt like someone could actually care for me that wasn't obligated by familial ties. I was elated to lay that blanket down and undress under the cover of the shadows. I reached my hand behind her head and pulled her in for another kiss. This time I closed my eyes.

I had just finished writing a portion of my memoir and decided I needed a breath of nature. It was 11:30 and I had stayed awake to key in my word limit before I went to sleep. Unfortunately, I couldn't sleep. The trip into the vault of my mind left me anxious enough to consider riding onto 278 while listening to my favorite artist. Lupe Fiasco's 2011 album *LASERS* had come in that morning and I had nearly forgotten it's arrival. I asked a friend to join me, but no reply. *Damn, not good enough I guess.*

I resolved to listen to the CD alone and imaginary rejections aside I was excited. I grabbed the album and as I went for my car keys a memory resurfaced. Cody had told me earlier that day that a mutual friend was having a tough time. She'd just joined us back into the world of the almost sane and I had a sneaking suspicion that she was only acting one way. I could certainly relate to that type of play and knew where that road inevitably lead to. I wanted desperately to prevent such a morbid fate for her so I called her up. Thankfully whatever governing power that guides reality allowed her to still be awake at the time.

"So, I just got this...album and I, you don't have to if you don't want to, but I wanted to know if you just wanted to listen to it with me?"

*Please.* I wanted to add, but knew it was unnecessary.

"What time is it?," She was tired. *She doesn't want to hang out with me. This was stupid of me to ask.* "Sure, I'm just playing with my puppy, anyway."

"Alright! I'll see you in a little bit."

I grabbed my keys, the album, and darted towards the door--forgetting to lock it behind me. *LASERS* had the distinction of being something I could listen through entirely without stopping so "Letting Go" was a welcome sound. It was as if I had never lost the album, still remembered all the words, and got lost in the percussion as I pulled away.

*Things are getting out of control*

*Feels like I'm running out of soul (oh, woah oh, oh...)*

*You are getting heavy to hold*

*Think I'll be letting you go (oh, woah oh, oh...)*

I had been on some city roads before. None compare to the South. You can bleed on it. A jetstream of black, thin as a line, zipping from the west and bending like a limp elbow around then widening out in front into a tongue of flat asphalt. Segmented lines of yellow flew into glowing eyes as the car sped down a highway. I veered into the right lane and almost coughed up my lungs as a vision overcame me.

My body broken and battered...

A shift of red comes in the way. A floating crimson bulb encased inside a school bus yellow cylinder suspended by a horizontal wire. My foot slid to the brake so easily. It was a familiar scare that pushed my back into the cold, reptilian seats with my heart slamming into my spine. Every hair tingled at the root, igniting me by the fibers. My cheek felt wet though I knew it dry. This coolness traveled down the trail of my neck and spread across my shoulder into my conjoined pectoral. It started in the calves, warm then cool, as a stream wet my sock. I cursed and lifted the moist foot letting the car slide across the white line. The oafish left of mine struck the brake clumsily. A cardinal sin, perhaps. I stare up at the solid red sun as my right assumes its rightful place. I sat there staring at it.

A bright red ball that would engulf us all.

The green of my senses was as evident as the scent of my sock. The road was empty so I let down the window. The stench mixed with an itchy humidity that scratched at the roof of my nostrils. I ran my hand down my face to scratch it from the outside. My congestion manageable I ran my hand down my thigh to check for wetness. I wiped it off on my favorite khakis. The ones frazzled at the openings. The air was cooler now that I had settled. Three weeks and a day out from November was more lenient than the week of Thanksgiving. Maybe I needed that though. Maybe I needed a cold hard slap in the face. Maybe I'm a piece of shit for thinking such a thing. These are some of the things I tell myself at the red light. Green is the druid of colors. It's a lot more relaxed and civil. It wasn't demanding. The car crept along as the RPM toggled between 2 and 3. The engine was twisted like that though. It would push as another mechanism pulled causing a sputter of toxic proportions. A low growl at the bottom of my sternum playfully patted at my heart. The brrrr of the engine shook my bottom and thighs. Coming around the bend I saw them. Chariots of twin orbs racing towards me. It was a monorail of stampeding eyeballs glowing in the dark. Standing lanterns was what I called the street lights that sat

atop skinny necks. The pale halos surrounding their heads soothed the seared capillaries of my eyes. My chest ballooned as I was filled with a confidence I didn't know. The soft blend of whooshing air contrasted with the bite of a bullet cutting into space. My foot melded with the pedal and all anxiety left me as I was embraced by the leather.

She got into the car and I instantly thought about weed.

"Hey," she says.

A part of me believes she doesn't really want to go and this is a pity trip. This stems from our having slept together once. It was only for that brief time, but I had wanted to do it again to test out my feelings. Nothing ever formulated and I felt rejected. *It must not have meant anything to her.* So I dealt with that by cutting her out of my life for awhile. It was shitty and I'm ashamed of it, but when I hurt I hurt others. That's love. Right?

"If you're tired, ya know, you don't have to go. I'm just going to be listening to music and nothing else."

"No, it's fine."

I nodded feeling as if I should say something else and instantly knowing I would fall short so I kept my mouth closed. We pulled into a secluded area where the headlights illuminated the tree line. Verdant chips flaked in specks of yellow-gold light filtered through a thin veil of dust and ground rock. I kept the car running and stared at the point beyond where the light could reach. A wall of black obscured the forest and I felt like I was staring into a maw. With nothing else to do I started the album again from the beginning. As "Words I Never Said" ended she checked her phone several times and I was convinced she was uninterested so I stopped the album.

"Tell me about your time in the hospital."

It was code. She knew what I really meant when I said hospital. Hell. Or more appropriately Purgatory. My two trips to South Carolina's mental health facilities convinced me that they were just waiting rooms for the dead. A type of loading screen where the unstable were idly held until they're old life simply eroded away from disuse. Their mind too. Everything they are is put under a lense and examined, but never understood. The attempt is made, scientifically speaking, but there is a distinct lack of emotion inherent in Western medicine. There is concern only no care. That was what she related to me. The story I myself already knew. The other patients further on the spectrum of madness

than you expected and the unavoidable spats that humans have. Amplified because in there you don't really know if it's you acting up or your mental illness. Everyone is walking on eggshells already broken.

I told her about Buddhism and how it had helped.

"Now, I'm trying to quit smoking because it messes with my head."

Her eyes reacted naturally. Shining and then dying.

"Oh," she said, "I was going to ask if you wanted to smoke?"

The way of the Buddha calls for detachment from conditioned things. The first to normally go is the attachment to physical sensations. I had not reached this stage of enlightenment yet.

"I really do. You don't understand how much I really want to be because I'm twisted up inside."

She smiled and I smiled then I turned around to return to her apartment. Her boyfriend was there. The same one she had when we had been together that one night. There was her dog, there was shame, but there was also weed. I talked to him for a bit to soothe over my negative emotions. He was an oblivious sort of guy in a blissful kind of way. I envied him. His thoughts never went too deep in the membrane and that spared him from the vast emptiness of his own mind. The Buddha teaches that the idea of Self does not exist. You and I are simply the current state of an ever-changing slew of thoughts, emotions, and aggregates. In short, a bottomless pit. This is why I'm wary to talk about my faith to the oblivious. Anatta can lead to a slippery slope. Fast.

Perhaps this is a bias of mine, but nonetheless our conversation was short. She and I walked onto the patio with a freshly rolled blunt. Moments later the clouds in our heads were drifting out and beyond the box that holds them. We found our way back to the issue of mental health.

"Here's a tip," I said. "Disruption of the root chakra causes symptoms of fear and depression. Besides meditation you can try this technique. Push up from the ground, drawing energy from the soles of your feet. Press into all four corners gently. Breathe. Feel that there is always support beneath you. Wherever you go." I closed my eyes as I envisioned the deepest red I could imagine. As I felt the power of the Muladhara course through me I looked at her and said, "And you know the Universe loves you."

We were silent as we contemplated the big questions.

"Hey, man. I want you to know that I'm glad you didn't kill yourself,

"She looked at me, "Because if you did I'd be really sad and," I began to tear up, "I really don't want you to die and--and I just want you to know that I've felt alone, too and if you ever need *anything* I'm here for you." She was standing on one knee now with her lips slightly agape. I was using all of my willpower not to collapse into a fit of tears. Not because I was embarrassed. It was because I had one last thing to say. "I love you."

She hugged me and I hugged her as I buried my face into her neck. Now the tears came full force and I cried so hard that I started shaking. I squeezed her so hard that I couldn't tell the difference between us anymore and felt I was clutching at her soul. I cried, sniffled, and rubbed my wet nose into her hoodie for all of three minutes, but it felt like a blissful eternity.

I left after she walked her dog. Didn't want her walking alone in the dark. I was happy with my catharsis and was feeling a warmth that had seemed buried for most, if not all, my life. A hole had been filled with a contentment I thought would elude me for the rest of my existence. It only seemed natural to share it with someone else. That's why when I spotted the man bending over with his phone pointed at the ground I stopped to roll down my window.

"Hey, man you need help? What happened?"

"Ju--I just lost my wedding ring, is all!"

"Woah. I gotta help you find that."

I immediately got out of my car and approached him.

"So what happened?" I repeated

"Something stupid. We were arguing and I threw both our rings out of the window. I got mine back," He shined his light over his finger to show me the silver band, "by walking up and down this path."

He went in a straight line between the grassy divides that split 278. A car came from the north and I realized in my haste I had forgotten to move my car out of the way.

"Umm...maybe I should move my car."

I jogged back to my vehicle and pulled beside his which was parked in the grass. I made sure to turn my high beams on. The headlights of his truck combined with my car to create a cone of light that illuminated some good square feet of coverage. All that light in the darkness. It made me hopeful. I got back out and rejoined the man.

"What's your name?" I asked

"Terry." He responded with his eyes still on the ground.

"Ja'Keris." I said extending my hand.

After a short period of overhang he realized what I was doing and grasped my palm in his. We began the search going up and down a line of movement as our eyes scanned the ground. Up and down we went expanding the area as we came up short time and time again. I became familiar with his accent as we traverse through the night. It was definitely southern, but I felt it betrayed a deeper intelligence than any stereotype could parody.

"I wish my phone wasn't dead. I could bring in some more light. How about this? I have a flashlight at the house. I could come back and help you with it?"

I waited. Admittedly, I did want to go home. The night had taken a very surprising turn for the better and my cynicism ran deep. I was afraid the longer I was out the more likely it would end differently.

"That's up to you, man. Honestly, you don't even have to be here. You're just being kind."

I've always thought that genius often manifested itself as the ability to say what everyone else is already thinking even if you don't know what it is you're actually thinking. It's a natural insight into the condition of the human character and the skill needed to articulate it. It's the power of persuasion. Terry had this gift because he made me stay and just when I thought the darkness was too thick to penetrate he turned his light to the right and found his ring. He thanked me and I left him with a hand on his shoulder.

"You gotta keep that anger under control, man."

We parted ways and I returned home.

I was back at the salt marsh breathing heavy into the night with sweat sticking to me. We dressed in silence broken by giddy laughter. I glanced as she shook the sand from her hair. In the moonlight I couldn't stop looking at her and decided I had nothing to lose.

"So you wanna do this again?" I said hopefully.

She didn't look up as she put on her shoe.

"Maybe."

*Maybe? Not good enough, I guess.*

## Luminosity

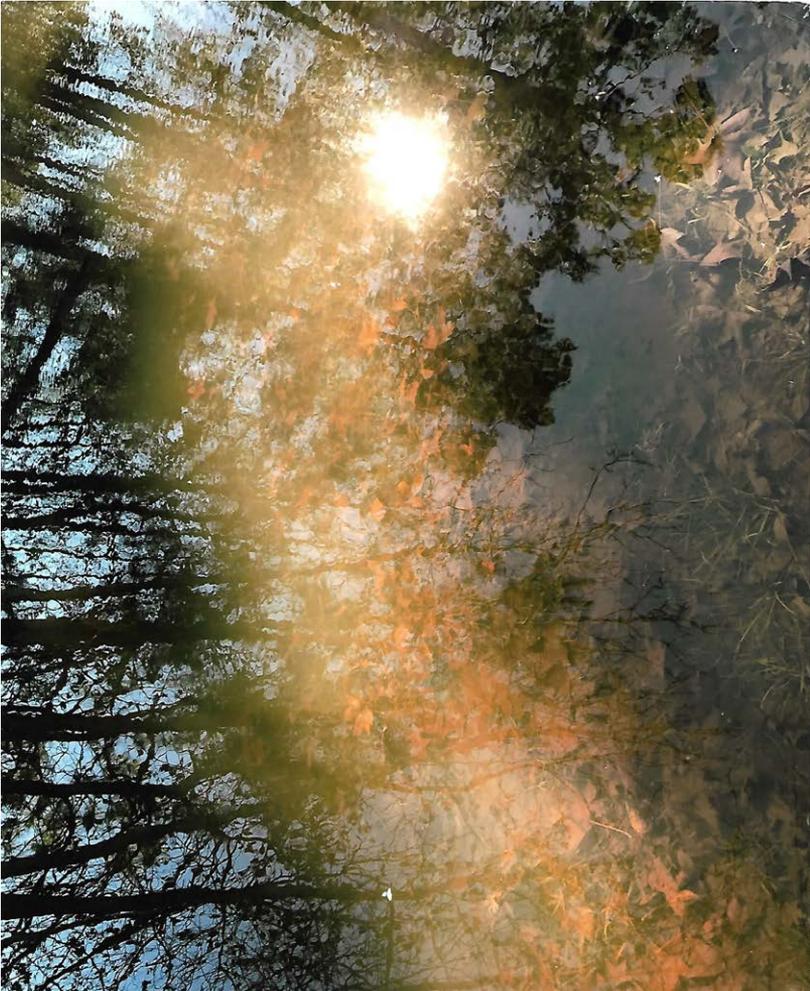
by Madison Hayes

When we are little, just learning to speak and to realize the world around us, we are infinitely curious about every little thing. We plague the ones we love with questions of “why?” and “how come?” because it is in the hearts of all mankind to be capricious little creatures. Every opportunity that is presented to us is a bright ingot of concentrated joy because it contains more secrets, more fun. This optimism is within our hearts. But as we learn, as we age and get to know the world better, this curiousness, this auspicious nature leaves us. We look at the world as “same old same old” and that it has no more great mysteries to discover. We lose our creative curiosity. Isn’t it strange that I have never lost mine?

To me, the world is still filled with ancient mystery. Every place has its own history, own people, and its land just rumbling with want to tell someone. I listen for its secrets. The same goes for my interests, great and small. Whenever a movie I like is announced or a book released or a person visiting, I am completely lost in excitement. I feel a wellspring of new energy every time something wonderful is thrown my way. My friends look at me with odd gazes, their eyebrows raised crookedly “why do you get so excited, it’s just a movie?” “How could you not?” I reply to them, a hint of laughter in my voice “it just holds so much possibility to be awesome.” “And what if it doesn’t turn out how you think it will?” They ask. “Then that will be a most pleasant surprise, won’t it?”

How can I not be so strange as to love the earth in all its glory? How can the sun, blazing in the sky, not inspire me to write an epic on its brightness? Every drop and wave in the great oceans contain within it lines of poetry that are so beautiful that they could break the hearts of all humanity. Every whisper of wind as delicate as the touch of a lover, if only one opens themselves to the excitement of *possibilities*. Every new technology, every new art, every new event excites my heart to bursting. I can see the good in every man, the purpose behind every decision. I feel so much. But what of the darkness? What of the horrors and atrocities that mankind inflicts on itself? What about the tsunamis and earthquakes and hurricanes that gnaw and tear at us? I feel for them too, we weep for what we can but the dark is needed to see the light, for me at least. The darkest hunk of coal can become the most glittering diamond. I find the optimism in the

pessimism. I have hardly ever felt stagnant and bored with our life. I do not see it as a dim old thing, covered in scars, mined of its originality by people before. I see reincarnation, I see history rediscovered, I see progressive movement, I see the smiles of mothers, and the unity of people beyond borders. I see the lantern in the dark. I can find happiness anywhere. But isn't that strange?



*Untitled* by Jade Wickwire

## Crusade

by Madison Hayes

Cracks spread the length of the glass like lines of spider web. Every little line a different possibility of what could have happened. In this line, you get to see your mother again. In this one, the bullet misses your heart and grazes your ribs instead. In the next, your daughter doesn't need therapy because she doesn't find your bleeding corpse on the floor. Your wife never remarries because she doesn't have to. But this line is not those. You are dead because someone couldn't stand you bowing on a rug in prayer instead of kneeling at a cross.

## Ghosts in the Attic

by Spencer Fierszt

I found it in the attic. We were about to have a yard sale and I was looking through the attic for things that we could sell. While I was looking through one of the boxes, I saw it; an envelope, with my name written on it in my father's handwriting. Seeing it filled my heart with dread. My father has been dead for almost 10 years, and we never saw eye to eye on things, with our discussions usually devolving into bitter arguments that would leave us angry with each other; even when he was on his deathbed, dying of cancer, we weren't able to make peace with each other. I always regretted how I left things with my father, and that regret continued to haunt me. With great trepidation, I opened the envelope to see what my father had given me from beyond the grave.

James,

*If you're reading this, then it means that I'm dead. I've known that this has been coming for a while, so I wanted to write this letter, to finally be able to say the things that I should have said while I was still with you.*

*I have seen you grow up, and I am so proud of the man that you have become; I wish I had told you this back when I was still amongst the living. You have become a good man, a great husband, and I know that you will be a better father than I ever was.*

*I also wanted to apologize and ask you for forgiveness for my sins; I'm sorry about all of the stupid arguments we had over the years. I'm sorry I was so emotionally distant when you were growing up; I was never there for any of your baseball games or plays, because I was always too busy with work, and that is something I never forgave myself for.*

*More than any of that, however, I'm sorry about my stubbornness; if I hadn't been so stubborn, I might have gone to the doctor before it was too late. If I had gone to the doctor, I might still be around to say these things in person, I might be able to meet my grandkids and be able to die without any regrets.*

*I'm not asking you to forgive me; God knows I don't deserve your forgiveness. All that I'm asking of you is that you know that I'm sorry that I wasn't a good father. I also hope that you learn from the mistakes I'd made so that you can be a better father than I ever was.*

*I love you,*

*Dad*

I stood there for what felt like hours, reading my Father's confession over and over again. I start to cry; not tears of sadness, but tears of anger. I go down stairs, tears still streaming down my face, grab a book of matches and set the letter on fire. My father could have said all of this while he was still alive, but instead he chose to argue with me over some trivial bullshit rather than tell me about how sorry he was for the mistakes he had made. Instead, he chose to let me know how sorry he was with a damned letter. With the letter burned, I feel a sense of peace wash over me; no longer would I be haunted by my past; now, I was able to look towards the future, and be the kind of man my father was never able to be.



*Come Home* by Ciera Love

## Looking for America

by Susan Baukhages

*"We are all on loan to each other. One way or another, nothing is permanent in life except the love that passed between us." -Anonymous*

Where are you, Liberty? I've looked for you in the lost and found, tried to track my way back to no avail.

I saw you vividly among the crowd when President Kennedy was inaugurated. I was too young to cast a ballot, but I voted for you in my heart with all the fervor of first love.

Liberty, you held my hand when the world watched little John John salute his daddy's coffin as it rolled by on its way to Arlington Cemetery. I cried inconsolably when The First Lady lit the eternal flame at his grave. Nothing is permanent in life except the love that passed between us.

You flickered during the unrest of the Vietnam War, the murders of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, the riots from Watts to Baltimore, the civil rights marches and the resignation of President Nixon.

You proudly took the first giant leap for Mankind on the moon with Neil Armstrong and you stood with President Reagan in Berlin when he said, "Mr. Gorbachev---tear down this wall!"\* Nothing is permanent in life.

I haven't seen you clearly since the fall of the Twin Towers on 9/11 when new fears tarnished freedom with the Patriot Act in exchange for a sense of safety. Nothing is permanent.

Equality, yes we can elect Barack Obama to be our first black president; an articulate man with integrity, intelligence and grace who battled the burdens of the Great Recession, high unemployment and unpopularity abroad with hope and a vision for America.

Where are you, Civility? Oratory and debate in political life have been usurped by vulgarity, personal attacks, bullying, and intransigence. Bob Dylan once said in a song, "When you ain't got nothing, you've got nothing to lose." \*\*

I choose to believe you are merely hiding, not gone from America forever. I see you in the sunrise; feel you in the constancy of the waves upon the shore; hear you in the laughter of an immigrant child...the love that passes between us.

\*Excerpted from a speech by President Reagan at the Berlin Wall in 1987

\*\*Excerpted from a song by Bob Dylan, "Like a Rolling Stone"

## The Elephant in the Hen House

by Susan Baukhages

One day, the elephant left his tower in Manhattan and flew five hundred miles to visit a farm in the heartland. He had seen it from the air as he flew from coast to coast across America in his private plane, but he had never been there before.

The elephant flapped his big ears and lumbered into the barnyard where he met a few chickens scratching the bare ground in search of food.

"Greetings!" the elephant said with the hint of a smile. "I will build you a big league hen house—the best in the world—only the best. Believe me. It will be really, really amazing! The hen house will have a grand entrance with golden chandeliers. You'll have fluffy pillows on which to lay your eggs, bottled water to drink, heat lamps in the winter and big fans to cool you in the summer. I will bring you prizewinning roosters—studdly stock for you to hook up with. Making eggs will be more fun than you can ever imagine. Let's make this barnyard great again."

The chickens gathered around. The elephant reached out his long trunk and waved it over the chickens...very briefly.

"Get me out of here," he muttered to his handlers. "These hens smell like shit. They're all so fat. I didn't want to touch any of them. At least they're white."

Soon the elephant said good bye and headed for a coal mine nearby where he would enjoy a chicken dinner.

The hens waved farewell and clucked among themselves. "Well, the elephant really likes us. He wants to give us fluffy pillows. What have we got to lose? Let's vote for him."

And they did.

## Nobody Eats by the Window in Mexico City

by Susan Baukhages

On our first day in Mexico City, my friend John and I chose a lovely table by the window at a restaurant in the trendy Zona Rosa district. We were surprised the table was vacant for the room was crowded. Patrons sat at tables along the solid walls eating eggs Mexican style and sipping chocolate. Glazed tile in intricate patterns of blue, red and ocher decorated the walls and floor. Lush green plants in large clay pots brought the outside in to the corners of this cheerful eatery.

After we ordered, I turned— to watch people out the window— and looked directly into the face of a three-foot tall girl, nose pressed against the glass, staring at the bountiful bread basket at my elbow. It seemed she was trying to press herself through the window, face squished out of shape, shoulders straining forward. I put my hand in front of the basket to get her attention and motioned for her to come inside. I saw fear replace desire in those wide eyes when she saw the waiter, arms folded across his chest, standing in the doorway moving his head emphatically from left to right, back and forth in my direction. That particular gesture means “no” in every language.

When the waiter wasn't looking, I broke a big chunk of bread off the loaf, walked outside, knelt down and gave it to her. She ate greedily. It didn't seem nearly enough to sate her. A whole truck load of bread couldn't fill that kind of hunger. Suddenly, more children appeared— five, then ten. I stood up, backed away and retreated to the restaurant.

Nobody eats by the window in Mexico City.



*Candy Apple* by Ciera Love

## Dead Flowers and Divorce

by Zoe Slingluff

It's amazing how much stuff piles up in a relationship, she thinks to herself, unpacking boxes in her new apartment. A carefully folded and fading newspaper jumps out and grabs her eye midway through digging in the U-Haul wrappings. July 14, 2007. The New York Times wedding section, front page.

Thomas Daniel Hansen and Grace Elizabeth Bishop are to be married August 11 at the Ritz Carlton. The bride, who is 24 and will be taking her husband's name, works as the executive vice president for Meridian Home Lending on 57th street, New York, New York. She graduated from the University of Georgia at Athens. The groom, who is 32, works in Brooklyn as a veterinarian at Smithfield Animal Hospital on Vermont Place. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The groom's first marriage ended in divorce.

"Damn, where did nine years of my life go?" she mutters to herself, folding the paper back into the box it inhabited. At 24, and freshly out of college thanks to taking the scenic route her senior year, she caught Thomas' eye at a midtown bar after she had just moved to the city. Thinking back, she doesn't know how it all developed other than through a mutual love for tequila and people watching. Thomas had just inherited a veterinary practice in Brooklyn. Grace had just landed an assistant manager position at a home lending firm. Grace was allergic to anything with fur, and Thomas was allergic to finance. They had nothing in common, but in a city of 8.4 million people, they had each other, which was enough.

Four months later, they were engaged, owned a shih Tzu, and rented a studio apartment above the bar that they had met in. Little hurts seeped into the relationship as the days and weeks rolled by. She wanted to carry pink peonies or blue hydrangeas on her wedding day, but all of the women in the Hansen family always carried blue roses. She didn't want a dog, but ended up with one anyway. She wanted a child, but couldn't conceive. Nine years of marriage, packed into 30 brown cardboard boxes and shipped to two different homes. They couldn't make it work. That was the day the blue roses died.

## Useless

by Zoe Slingsluff

For the final time, Greg turned off the lights, turned the shutters closed, and locked the door. He's an old man now, and this shop was his passion. In 1972, at the age of 22, he opened the business due to a strong passion for botany, and it had been a joy for 44 years now. Sadly, the expansion of the flower market down the street and the rapid growth of the internet sucked the life out of his tiny business. The remaining and unsold bouquets of flowers sit useless and wilt. That was the day the blue roses died.



## EDITOR'S LETTER

To the reader,

As I come to the end of my time at USCB, I've reflected a lot on the concept of growth, and the ways this journal has evolved over the years I've spent here. *The Pen* has, in many ways, shaped my college experience. Under the guidance of Dr. Malphrus, our inspirational faculty sponsor, and alongside my classmates and peers, I've learned so much and grown both as an editor and a person. When I flip through old issues of *The Pen*, I see my fingerprints and the fingerprints of the other diligent, passionate, and hardworking peers who I have had the privilege of working alongside.

I feel so lucky to have been a part of such a driven team of fellow artists and creators, and I can safely say that their legacy will be left in good hands as a new editorial team takes on the responsibility of creating future issues of *The Pen*.

I now look forward to watching this journal continue to grow and evolve as I move from becoming an editor, to a faithful reader.

Sincerely,  
Alexis Henderson



## ABOUT THE PEN

*The Pen* is a biannual publication of the Society of Creative Writers, produced under the supervision of the Department of English, Theater and Liberal Studies at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. *The Pen* features the original work of some of USCB's brightest students in the realm of creative writing, which includes primarily fiction, poetry and playwriting, as well as other creative arts, such as photography and painting. The aim of *The Pen* is to showcase commendable, creative talent and provide students a place where their work may be published with credit.



## ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF CREATIVE WRITERS

The Society of Creative Writers is a club of student creative writers that is responsible for the publication of *The Pen*. All members of the *The Pen*'s editorial board (in addition to students who engage in workshops or make the effort to attend meetings and participate in club activities) are honorary members of USCB's The Society of Creative Writers.

For as long as *The Pen* has existed The Society of Creative Writers has both funded and assisted in its creation and publication. The Society of Creative Writers is a vital part of preparing quality submissions for *The Pen* through the process of working with student writers and critiquing and workshopping their pieces, and aiding them through the submission and editorial process.

The Society of Creative Writers typically meets on a weekly or bi-weekly basis in the Lazy Lounge located in the Beaufort dorm building on USCB's Bluffton campus.

## SUBMITTING TO THE PEN

In order to be considered for publication in *The Pen*, writers must be current USCB students or prior students with no more than two years since their last active semester. Students need not be enrolled in an English or art course to submit work. All work submitted for publication must be original, unpublished and preferably produced while the writer/artist was a USCB student. Most types of creative writing, art and other expression will be happily considered. ("Fan fiction" will not be accepted.)

There is no limit to the amount of submissions per person, however, writers are expected to send only polished, college-level work. Writing pieces should not exceed 2,500 words each. All writing pieces must be sent via email, preferably in an attached Microsoft Word document. Ensure work is formatted as it is intended to appear on the page, especially poetry. Each piece should be sent in its own file, and each piece must include a title and the author's name.

While it is *The Pen's* goal to publish work exactly as it is submitted, the editorial staff does reserve the right to edit submissions for publication. Typically, this will include editing for spelling, punctuation, grammar and consistency. Writers should inform the editorial board of any intentional misspellings to avoid unintentional corrections.

All art and photography must be sent via email as a JPEG file no smaller than 5" x 7" at 300 dpi. Artists and photographers must include their name and a title for each entry as well as information on the medium (i.e., oil on canvas, charcoal on paper).

Published writers and artists will be provided with at least one free copy of *The Pen*.

Tentative deadline for the Fall 2017 edition is November 15th. To submit, or for more information, email the editorial board at [ThePenUSCB@gmail.com](mailto:ThePenUSCB@gmail.com).





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