Essence Fine Arts and Literary Magazine is a collaborative effort of Kutztown University students who share and express personal feelings, philosophies, and views through the artistic media of photography, illustration, life drawing, painting, fine metals, sculpture, crafts, poetry and short stories. The works contained within are considered, by the Essence staff members, to be some fine examples of creative art and literary expression. The Essence staff expresses appreciation to all its contributors and readers for sharing in this student publication.

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The Box
Katie Marrone

The small box remains where I deposited it earlier in the day, a subtle reminder of the life of one person. There is nothing remarkable about the outside of the box, but its contents are surprising. Probably more than a hundred recipes are stored in the box, some dating back to the 40’s and 60’s. I know for a fact that a particular relative of mine would love to have this collection. Yet here it is in my room, a final unexpected gift.

“I think you’re meant to have this. She wants you to have it, not Aunt Mary.” My mother said to me. Cooking has become a recent habit of mine, something I didn’t share with Grandma when she was alive. I’m surprised she wants me to have it and not Aunt Mary. My mother is usually right about these feelings that she gets and I’ve learned to accept them. Fine. So my grandmother wanted me to have her recipe collection. They’re just recipes, right?

But as I sift through them, I begin to understand her in a way I never have before. Grandma saved everything in her lifetime, even if it was something we saw as useless. Here is a recipe entitled “Loretta’s Lasagna.” Frankly I’m surprised she would keep a recipe of my mother’s, let alone acknowledged her ability to cook. Here is a recipe documenting a favorite food of my father’s. Here is another recipe detailing a relative’s “famous” pie, or pasta recipe. It’s the shortbread that kills me, though. Grandma kept a recipe for “Katie’s Favorite Shortbread” and now I finally understand. Is it possible not to grieve for someone until two years later?

I wish I had gone out of my way more to talk to my grandma. Yes she was difficult at times, but life has a way of being tough on people when all their friends and siblings have passed on. There is so much we can learn from our family members, especially the difficult ones or the ones we can’t relate to. Family members deserve more than politeness—they deserve our love and respect too.
Not So Hopeless After All...

Amanda Glenlast

Time has passed
and people have gone
and there have been times
where I thought I couldn’t move on.

There were times where
I thought each day would be
my last.
That I was worth
nothing.
That I didn’t deserve
this life.

Time has passed
and people have gone
but today, I’m
standing tall
head held high
saying that I deserve
to be here
to be alive
to be happy
to be me.

And today, I know
that it’s all worth it.
I’m worth it.
And that’s all that really matters.
Lamps
Patrick McGorrey

Sometimes at night when ears listen to pillows
And beds are unmade
I wander here and there
And these bright eyes watch
lights in windows fade.

Street lamps stoically refuse the night
Its rule of dark and shadow.
They make islands of canned daylight
Against the midnight tide and flow.

My iron legs lead me here and there
Watching the islands wash out fall
And erode into the night,
Undaunted unaware of it all.

The Pub
Brian Maboney

I sip my rum with a somber face,
Flush out this tawdry night.
The ceiling bursts out blue colors.
People are out of place.
My plush stool warms with caution, others
Are an incoming midnight tide—
Sardine-scented tongues
Toast their glasses together...empty pride.

A Message from the Gum on the Bottom of Your Shoe
Becky Kremm

I am the gum on the bottom of your shoe.

You picked me up outside your school.
For just a second, I kept you stuck in your place,
until you loosed yourself and me from the ground.

But I am still far too gross
for you to think about
picking me off with your fingers.

So I remain
just as a little resistance,
and that stare-ensnaring stick-POP!
every time you take a step,
forward or back.

But you'll get stuck again if you stay in place,
and the longer you put your weight on me
the more stuck you'll get.

So grow up and pick me off
(use a stick or a knife, I don't care)
or use the attention I bring to your advantage.

Just keep moving—forward, for your own sake.

Alicia Bonilla-Puig, Glow, Oil on Canvas
Guilt
*Amanda Glenlast*

memories haunt all my dreams
every moment that I can't speak of
every mistake I ever made
And many have already changed
but what's left never leaves

Overboard
*Amanda Glenlast*

tears fall to the sea
one by one
the river returns to ocean
and the current roars
while thoughts escape you
you no longer feel, no longer breathe
thoughts of letting go fill your sore, tired mind
finding an exit seems like giving up
but there's no other choice and
returning to the life that once was
solid safety feels useless now
one thing after another as you
feel anger, defeat, sorrow
because the only one who can save you
is the one who's already drowning

Stephanie Berry, *The Ultimate Language*, Film Double Exposure Photograph
Orange Soda, But He Prefers Grape

*Erica Smith*

He walks in the rain,
*a dark mask hooded figure slithers past him. But he doesn’t falter.*

The path that he is on is necessary.
*His survival depends on it.*

Deeper burial of clouds
*follow his footsteps.*

A puff of smoke filters from the tip of his cigarette.

Blinded by his eyes,
*Damaged by his mind He writes*

Writes images of treasures

Words of gold

That low graded sky merged itself
*with his chest Causing him grief.*

But he stood concrete,
*Grounded And humble.*

He once had a radiant smile,
*But now he has a radiant mind. His smile has retired to the bottom of his heart. But he did not lose the happiness Just buried it from sight.*

The drumming sound inside his head
*Beats to the melody of his pain He writes, Images of treasure words of gold.*

He speaks sly, smoothly.
*Through parted lips of sin, he speaks words of meaning. Listening for chance. A chance to redeem life.*

A dark mask hooded figure slithers past him
*But he doesn’t falter He stands grounded And concrete.*

The path that he is going is...
*Necessary. Cigarette smoke filters its way from his mouth To the atmosphere Revealing his pain.*

The low graded sky falls
*And fails. It never could capture his misery. All things that come from him were those of power.*

He never could be captured.
*Not even Van Gough could capture his essences, His royalty is made up of many mysteries and crowns.*

But he is a wonder
*that causes everything he touches to rethink, and breakdown to its simplest form.*

Nothing came before him
*Nothing comes after him: Orange Soda, BUT HE PREFERS GRAPE.*

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*Brian Shaw, The Mind of Albrecht Durer, Watercolor*
Better Than Candy
*Alexandra Ford*

Cooler than the grey of a new grave stone
Warmer than an altar's candlestick
Olive green like pine trees shining under
a moon that's nearly full
Your gaze is sweet as sin can be
Eyes of glimmering jade,
Intense and thick as oil paints
Flecks of pumpkin pie orange,
Brilliant like the last jack-o'-lantern
Mesmerizing like a gypsy's spell
Enticing as a siren's song
Smother than a vampire's charm
More colorful than the sky at dawn
I compare your eyes to All Hollow's Eve
Because of what they say to me
Mischievous and conspiring
Romantic, sticky, sweet
Cryptically they whisper,
"Trick or treat?"

The Perfect Gimlet
*Patrick McGorrey*

I make my gimlets
With 3 oz. of gin
1 oz. of regret
2 oz. of lost discipline
And garnish with indifference
How I Didn’t Kill Charlie Row

Kyle Yadlosky

Did you ever see a person and just know that you were going to be involved with his death? I mean, I know that you deal with dangerous people all day-every day and I respect that and all, but thinking it right before you gun a man down is—really it’s cheating. It’s just not what I’m getting at, sir. What I am getting at and what I know you want to know about is Charlie Row.

I want to make this clear so that you can’t twist my words around or do any magic with them: I did absolutely NOT kill him. I’m sheeplly a victim of circumstance, okay?

You don’t believe me.

Well, how it started is I was sitting down at my TV, you know same-shit and all that, and Charlie—Mr. Row was on that singing show and he was next to that little Asian woman—you remember her name? Well, it doesn’t matter. I was hunched forward, you know, waiting to see who was going to get the axe—no pun intended—and right when Mr. Row got it—god, I should’ve picked another word to describe it. I’m not trying to be funny—but right when he got it, the ice cream I was eating, you know, it hung on my tongue. I couldn’t swallow if I wanted to. He just stared at me, like right through the TV and through my soul and I knew it. I knew it right then. Don’t take this the wrong way, but I had the most powerful feeling that I was going to watch that man die.
You know, premonitions and all that.
So, a few weeks go by and I don’t really think about it, you know? It’s not like I’m running around screaming at everyone about this little feeling I had. It’s not like I was having nightmares of his flesh melting from his bones while he’s being eaten by— I don’t know—wolverines or something. I slept fine. I just kind of forgot about it. Until I get on the plane.
Then, flying out to this beautiful city of yours, it all comes rushing back. He sits next to me on the plane. Can you believe that? Business class. What is Charlie Row doing in business class? I mean, everyone knows he doesn’t even have a job! I’m sorry, that was a stupid joke. I know he’s not even cold yet—once again, no pun—it’s way too soon.
I’m in no position for levity anyway.
Yeah, so he’s sitting down next to me and, so I turn to him and say something. I’m just like, “Hey, too bad about that show,” to him. I didn’t know what else to say.
He does like this wan smile at me and says, you know, “It’s no big deal. I still got offers. I’m singing professionally.”
And I really couldn’t believe it. I mean, are we so hard-up for singers that we have to take reality television’s losers on stage just to fill the quota? I don’t say that, though. I don’t remember what I said, you know, but I know it wasn’t that.
So, I wasn’t jealous or anything, in case that’s what you’re trying to get at.
We had our flight and stuff. He takes off his shoes. I thought that was weird, but I didn’t say anything. But anyway, the whole time I’m like freaking out that he’s going to die right next to me, but he didn’t and that was cool.

So anyway, I get to this casino that I’m working at. They hired me in as head of security. They were having problems with people winning and they needed that to stop, so they brought me in. I know how to operate all that facial recognition software that’s used to spot-out card counters. I didn’t know Row was singing there.
And I swear the second I found out I ran to the bathroom and just puked everything out. My stomach was sinking with all this shit.
The guys were showing me around the back-area, the control room and all that, after I washed my face and got a stick of gum. They showed me this concrete sub-basement with a little tunnel leading outside they used to smuggle, you know, booze through back in the day. There was just a little chair with—and again, no pun—an interrogation room light hanging over it. The boys joked that they, you know, took cheaters down there and roughed them up. And there was also the axe, of course.
They called it Grimace, because they fished it out of a trashcan years ago. They had the McDonald’s mascot mixed up with Oscar the Grouch, but I didn’t have the heart to tell them that. It was rusted, locked like it would’ve busted if anyone tried to swing it. It was mounted on the wall by this little wooden door leading to the Prohibition tunnel that would take you into a back-alley outside. It had its blade pointing out menacingly at anyone standing in front of it. They said it was just another scare tactic—make sure cheaters don’t cheat again. I thought it was all fine.

I mean, how is a natural human being supposed to put all this shit together anyway?

So, Row finishes his show and I get told that we’re supposed to protect him while he leaves, you know, from rabid fans that’ll tear off his shirt and grab at his balls or something, and we’re laughing about it, you know? I mean, most of his fans are girls not even five feet tall.
I felt bad, though. I had to vomit again right before we got to him. And he smiled and pointed, was like, “You’re the guy on the plane with me.” And I was like, “Yeah, yeah.”
You know, it was all fine. These girls were worse than I could’ve thought, though. I mean, they just flowed in. They have us clinched so tightly in there; we had almost every single guy holding them back. Only one guy, Vince, was watching for anyone abusing the system and stealing from us. We just wanted to get Row out of there and get out of all this shit, so we take him into the basement. We’ll get him through the tunnel and out to his car without any fans blocking us. It seemed like a perfectly legitimate plan.

But, like I said, how is a human being supposed to put this shit together?

When we get down there, though, Vince has this young guy in the chair and you can just smell the gasoline. Vince is holding a lit match.
And so I’m like, “What the f**k is this?”
And he says, “What? I’m just scaring the kid,” looking at me like I’m stupid for thinking he was going to set a kid on fire. I don’t really know what he intended to do there if we didn’t walk in, though.
Right then a girl busts through the door— we forgot to lock it and I do take responsibility for that—and she pounces at Row, knocking him down against the young guy strapped up in the chair and into the puddle of gasoline at the guy’s feet. She also knocks Vince off-balance and he drops the match.
Row is screaming and burning like one of those behind-the-scenes stunt men, you know, and he’s just circling around the room. We can’t stop him or get to him. Evidently he never learned how to stop-drop-and-roll, you know. I’m not trying to be funny. It’s just the truth. It would’ve saved his life.
So we can’t stop him and he’s running. He’s going for the door and I think we’re all just watching at this point, don’t know what to do. He gets right up to the door and he turns, you know, right there and, when he turns, his face turns into a Grimace.
That time the pun was intended.
I mean, I don’t even know what you want me to say. How do you describe the sound of a man’s face being impaled on the blade of an axe? I don’t know, but he did stop and drop.
I’m sorry if I don’t seem sympathetic. It was a travesty—it really was—but you’re treating me like a killer and I didn’t do anything to this man. There was no way I could’ve known that this feeling, that my job, that the basement and the axe and all that were going to piece together the way they did. It’s a puzzle you can’t solve until it’s too late. But you should know all about that, given your line-of-work, detective.
But, man, I really fucking knew I was going to see Charlie Row die.
What Occupies My Dreams
Amy Patt

It was half past six
When we got to Zuccotti.
We were homeless
we were misfits,
like a soul without a body.

What we found was unlike any other:
we found community,
we found unity;
We found each other.

I felt the passion for change
spark and ignite in my blood
What occupies my dreams?
Peace hope and love,

That was the ballad we sang,
no, screamed
at the top of our collective voice,
because we’re sick,
because we’re tired,
because we’ve been left no other choice.
I felt my lungs strain.
I felt my heart,
100 big for its frame.
And I felt her hand in mine.
That night I slept between strangers,
who became two of my best friends.
Surrounded by strangers
who became my family over night.

Under a diamond studded sky.
Under the trees that stir and sigh,
with a gentle breeze.
With the gentle dreams
Of people who have come together.

Freedom.
Compassion.
The old giving way to the new world,
Bursting at the seams.
That is what this movement means.
That is what occupies my dreams.
When A Hearts Of No Use
Olive Pegler

I gave you my heart;
you took care of it so well,
so much better than anyone else has before,
better than me, even.
But then you gave it back because you didn’t think
you were fit to care for it anymore.
My chest feels too full with it inside of me again;
my ribcage threatens to burst
every second of every day.
The worst part is you didn’t even break it.
You handed it back to me unscathed and whole
because you were afraid of harming it.
How am I supposed to let you go,
to convince myself to hate you when you haven’t
given me a reason to do anything but love you
with every beat of this... this...
thing that I don’t want?
It’s yours; you might as well take it.
It’s of no use to me anymore.
The Trend
Janna Adams

I’m chasing the rainbows of
the things that I’ve felt
The days that pass by and
the thoughts that serve well
I hear all the things my mind tells me to think
But I feel my heart in control of the ink
Echoes in my mind of the mistakes I’ve made
On constant rewind and playback through the day
Sometimes I thank God for the
things I don’t know
The innocent gestures in secretive flow
As the past flies freely so close to my face
Deciding when to disappear at its own pace

Choosing when to matter and when not
Reminding me of all the things I forgot

Sometimes I marvel at the way that life works
How it can be such a blessing and curse
How the words come easy and the
thoughts come slow
Realization seeps heavy and actions hit home
And it continues.

The world keeps spinning without fail
Whether good or evil prevails
And I’m still standing in the middle of fate
With a failure to communicate
Waiting on the world to decide that it’s just
And finally come up with the definition of “us”
Floating by on the clouds of tomorrow

Love and lust mixed with fear and sorrow
It’s not a silly little moment that passes us by
This is the very essence of our very last try
To be everything I’ve ever wanted to be
So many more things than I have time to see
Expected to sit back and enjoy this ride
When the logical thing is to run and to hide
The miracle of being is easily shaken
With the mistakes we make and the
chances not taken
Impossibly calm in the middle of chaos
Inadvertently expected from every one of us
So where is the soul that wins the game
The one who dismisses the hurt and the pain
Whose wall of stone never even cracks
Whose heart and mind always stay intact

The human who isn’t a human at all
Because every single human falls

As I stare at the world with a generous gaze
I still wonder why we project this haze
Of perfection and simplicity, no emotion uninged
Handling life with a skip and a grin
But neck and neck with love and pain
How can we create this blame
Upon ourselves for being alive
For feeling the things as they bubble inside
Welcome to the world of the imperfections
Where we conceal and ignore our transgressions
Instead of allowing ourselves to be real
I’m breaking the trend. I’ll say what I feel.
Exhale
Caitlin Romascavage

Tendon on bone.
Flesh over muscles.
Stretching with movements,
A ripple of interconnected parts
Working together.
Indent on the pillow
As your head lies.
A sigh of contentment
Only I know.
Ten perfect fingers
Artsy, veins, long.
In my mind I can see you
Bent over a canvas.
Realistically, it’s plugged in,
Computer generated art.
Like water through a spring
Or blinking at the wind

It’s a natural reaction.
Twenty fingers now,
Interwoven.
Rough and calloused but gentle.
I can see you holding your future baby’s neck for support.
A grab for my knee
Kind but insisting
It’s the most comfortable.
I acquiesce, sling over my leg.
A bump of glass and metal on rock,
Rock softened by American Eagle.
Crick in my neck, I adjust.
Hear the red cells coursing
Comfort, life source.
Automatic movement.
Enwrap me in your vines,

Long but nimble.
The trunks where the fingers sprout.
Another breath, another sigh.
A clouded mind clears
Awashed of dirt and streaks
Baptism, cleansing.
Dark against light.
Hair against smooth.
Runner against dancer.
A pull closer
Eyes shut
Exhale.
Sacrifice
Nadia Saar

He had gone only six months ago.
Half way around the world.
She liked to think of him as a hero in his ACUs and combat boots.
She laughed at herself knowing he was perfectly human.
This thought made her feel better, a nice alternative to reality.
But he would be home soon for two weeks, the best two weeks.
She smoothed her gown and stood up
to look in the full length mirror.
A smile broke through her radiant face.
She marveled at herself, for once feeling beautiful
and a little relieved.
"It fits," she thought.
Her sister smiled at her in the mirror,
"You look stunning," she said breathlessly.
If only it could last.
She looked up into the mirror once more only to see them.
Two of them, walking toward her.
Why her?
The bringers of death and loss were gaining on her.
Both of her hands met her heart and
she whirled around to face them.
They reached her and she began shaking her head back and forth
slowly, "no," she whispered.
"No," her voice caught in her throat violently.
"I'm sorry," one of them said as he placed
his dented dogtag in her hand.
She fell to her knees sobbing with a loss for all words except 'no'.
They turned on their heels and walked out quietly
leaving her on the floor.
The exchange was so brief, a mere two minutes,
and it was all over.
Her whole life had come crashing down in an instant.
Love, Mary Jane: An Extended Metaphor

Amirh Brunson

If you put me to your lips
And inhale me into your senses
I can do what no bullet can to your
Frontal and Parietal lobes

Paralyze you,
Fill you with pensiveness
Evoke your Kundalini
Bust your Chakras wider
Than the distance from
L.A. to New Delhi
After I sink deep into your lungs—
Smothering your conscious
Choking your subconscious
Exhale me and watch me dance over you
Under a canopy of thoughts and ceiling fans

I consume you
When your high comes down
You will fall from Venus, fall from Mars
Fall from the Heavens
Into the lowest crack allies
Shaking,
Fiending
For my Opium
Scented
Touch,
Love, Mary Jane
What Am I Doing On Trash TV?
Kyle Yadlosky

It was a hot day. The mail lady was delivering, and I was expecting a check in the mail, so I met her at the door.

“Hi, it’s awfully hot,” she told me and I agreed with her. It was a hot day.

She was a good sixty-year-old black woman and she was the type that you could tell her age just from looking at her. Every time that I was expecting a check in the mail I came out and talked to her for a bit. She was kind, reminded me of my mother.

“I hate to be a bother,” she panted, “but could I get something to drink?”

I told her she did, that I would give her a drink. So she dropped her mailbag down next to the television and I made her some Kool-Aid. Ten minutes later, my wife came home. She saw the mailbag next to the TV and was just staring at it. I told her that the mail lady would be out in just a few minutes. I got her some Kool-Aid.

It was a hot day.

“And, so Rosie here believes that her husband of three years has been cheating on her every day with their local sixtytwo-year-old mail woman, Sandra Perkins!” a white-haired host announces to a gasping crowd while I sit backstage. I can’t believe what I’m hearing.

The crowd howls their disapproval.

“Ah, and it gets even better when she walked home in front of a work one afternoon and saw the woman’s mailbag sitting right next to her TV!”

The crowd starts cursing and flipping off at nothing.

“Isn’t that right, Rosie?” the host asks my wife.

“That’s right,” she agrees.

“And what was your husband’s defense when you confronted him?” he asks, sitting to look sympathetic.

“He said he was getting her some Kool-Aid,” my wife grunts with disgust to the crowd’s disbelieving howls. What the hell am I doing here?

“Well, let’s hear his side of the story,” the host announces, standing. “Let’s bring out the husband!” He points and a few guys in black shirts push me out onto the stage. I try waving, but the audience is just cursing and flipping me off like it’s some catharsis for them. I decide to look at my feet instead and walk over.

“Hello,” the host greets, shaking my hand and directing me to my seat, acting like my friend. “So, you’ve heard your wife’s half of the story. Now, what’s really going on here?” he asks, but I don’t understand what isn’t being understood.

“Well,” I sputter. “It’s like my wife said, you know—I mean, not like she said, or like what she implied by it—but I was just getting her some Kool-Aid,” I try explaining. I can’t believe I got dressed up for this. I was going to be on TV, a talk show. I didn’t know it was going to be like this.

The crowd roars and snarls at me over everything I’m saying. You expect us to f— believe that? What the hell’s wrong with you? Sick bastard! They just want to stop and listen.

“No one’s buying that,” the host tells me, pointing to the audience. “What really happened?”

“Like I said,” I try explaining to him again.

“It was a hot day.”

“Is that why you had sex with her?” he asks. “You were overheated?”


“No wait,” he puts up a finger at me. “I believe we have a question from the audience. Yeah, thank you, what kind of sick pervert are you?”

“That’s a good question,” the host says. “The technical term for this is a Granny Chaser. Did you know that?” he asks me.

“Well, no,” I say. “It’s—it’s just that I don’t need to have that. I’m not—I’m not like that. I don’t have that. It was a hot day.”

“I understand, and the heat overtook your senses,” the host replies.

“No, not like that,” I try to explain again.

“What the f— do you think of your mother with that mind?”

“Oh, the host begins, putting up his hand to quiet the audience. “We have a video taken backstage that I think might be of interest to you, Rosie,” the host tells my wife.

“What is it?” she asks, shifting forward in her seat. “What the hell? Does she believe what she’s seeing, or is it for the five thousand dollars she was telling me about to get me on here?”

“Well, we put one of our Secret Hotties backstage with your husband to see how he would act around an attractive girl, and I think you might be surprised with what our hidden camera recorded,” he tells her. What the hell is he talking about, Secret Hotty? “Now, listen very closely to what he says.”

A TV comes on, and I’m sitting in the greenroom reading a magazine across from a white brown-haired lady in a red dress. She’s staring at me. “You’re a very attractive man,” she tells me in this video and I reply with a “Thanks,” and the TV goes black again.

The crowd starts booing at me like there’s a sign somewhere telling them to, but I don’t see any. It’s like this is some cult and they’re just doing whatever they can to please their master. How the hell can anyone be pissed about that?

My wife’s looking at me like she wants to kill me. “What the hell are you doing accepting compliments from little, flat-chested bitches like that? Huh. What the hell are you doing flirting with every girl you see?” she screeches at me.

Seriously?

Why don’t you just f— every girl on Earth, you f— worthless piece of s—. F— you!”

“Oh, I think you may have done it now,” the host says to me, standing again. My wife stands up with him.

“What? What did I do? I didn’t do anything! All I did was say ‘thanks!’ I didn’t even look at her. I didn’t even look at the bitch!” I’m yelling, pleading. “I didn’t do anything!”
My wife grabs her chair to the cheers of the crowd. It's like some medieval coliseum and I'm not Russell Crowe. I'm just sitting there staring at her and she smashes me across the face with her chair.

F---! S---! F---! F---! D---! C---! F---! F---! ~---! ~---! ~---!

All I can hear is fuzz anymore, a long strip of beeps and chants. I don't know where they're coming from. I can feel the cut on my head bleeding out down my cheek. I slipped out of my chair and now my back's against the seat, my hands against its legs. The guys in black shirts are pretending to hold my wife back, but she just pushes them off and they act like they couldn't keep a hold of her. She looms over me with her chair. She raises it over my head like she's going to bring it down on me. This is the last time I'll ever let an elderly woman in from the heat and give her something to drink. I try to say something, but nothing comes out. The chair comes down.

It was a hot day.

Daniel Albright, (Right) Suppression, Oil on Canvas, (Bottom) Have Mercy, Oil on Canvas
Muse
Devin Shingle

You don't like it when I write sappy things. I don't like it either, but being sentimental is all I know how to do anymore. You just scuff and say I'm losing my touch. Still, I write nowhere romances and words brimming with butterfly-kisses and whirlwind summers.

I do this—or at least I think do because I am never sure these days—to please. To calm your tempest made heart. There was once upon a time that you liked the tales of sunshine and runaways. I fed you with them, remember? I wrote you gifts instead of buying them, stuffed those notes into lockers and envelopes and in-between the pages of your books.

I fear these trinkets of text were too sweet. Candied prose has soured you because it makes promises.

I wrote vows I could not keep. I never fetched you the moon, never gave you jewels of starlight, never made you my one and only, and never kissed your tears away. I'm deceptively human.

You don't like it when I write sappy thing. I don't either; still I send them to you. Little letters of true love and of bright futures wrapped up neatly in black and white lines. I do this for you because they have always been for you. I can't stop myself.

Here is to you my muse: may my love for you burn all my days and nights, may we never fall apart, and may we never say our farewells because I fear that we already have.

Forgotten Fruit
Chelsea Brink

Wrapped in bent fingers
sits round purple almost black skin
soft and giving, bruised beneath my grasp
bleeding when sliced with paring knife.
Sweet juices shocking, bright and dripping,
staining my palm. How have I missed you,
these twenty-some years?
With your plush insides:
delicate pink ridges in the middle,
filled with seeds.
To my tongue you are sweet synonyms
of flavors not yet tasted, though longed for.
They Called Me Ahyoka
Chelsea Brink

In the light of burning fire
brown skin glowing
lithe body twisting, dancing
in time with drums beating
thunder over green hills

they called you rushing water
with long black hair
that draped strong shoulders
like a dark silk curtain.

Together standing, glistening
this morning under water running
bending to embrace each other,
pale fingers pulling back chestnut hair
he called me rushing water.

So Small
Alyssa Robricht

I daydream
and imagine that the quiet tune that I am
whistling
floats upward.
Upward past the moon and past stars
to where angels dance at midnight
and star-dust lights the sky.
Do you ever try to speak,
and only a whisper comes out?
Stay Inside The Lines
Stephanie Retley

We want to regress
Slow the world
Relax, rewind

We want to distract ourselves
Prettify the paper, play
Pretend

We want to break the rules
Forget adult worries
Therapeutic Escape

They want us to stay inside the lines
Plan, predict, work
We prefer to digress
Even for a few minutes

...Coloring for college students

Status Update
Brian Mahoney

An accentuated opinion,
Mental hicups from the college mind,
Oh—wouldn't my friends find it funny?
Because we're all simpleton poets.
For Thomas McDowell Booth

Kate Quinlan

Bubble boy,
Your skin swells
from graphite pencils.
Your pants’ zipper is always down
from your indifference.

And in a way you are the Laughing Man
that J.D. Salinger wrote about.
Remember in the woods
you carried me on your shoulders
so that my precious calves
would meet no thorny harm.

You told me to let my baggage go
and I believed it was possible.
You said you like my brown shirt,
that no one wears brown anymore.
And after you died
I chain-smoked,
sitting on the curb at night
on the corner of my street.
I would talk to you often
and pray for your mother;
even though I don’t believe in God
I begged him
from beside the streetlight
to watch over your family.

And sometimes when I close my eyes
I see your sister’s curls
spilling over
your closed casket
kissing with wet tear lips.

And when I kissed you that last time
my lips against your wooden ones
I tried to give you life again.

I remember you always laughing,
with one hand covering your mouth.
Sunday
Devin Shingle

Although it's Sunday the pastor isn't holding the usual mass. For once, I want to go.

Today is Sunday and it's Peter's funeral. This has been the only time I've ever wanted to go to church. The only time my parents seemed nervous and not adamant about my attendance.

Peter died on a Friday, in a little gully that dips just below the outskirts of town. He died because he wanted to squish pennies on the train tracks. The funny thing about trains is that they're quiet. That's why they have that whistle on them. They move like an arrow; they're so fast. Cutting through the air the sound trails behind them, trying to catch up. Peter's friends say he didn't look up, not even when the train was on him. I believe them.

It isn't Friday anymore. Today is the day my brother gets buried. Today is Sunday. The pastor isn't holding mass, it's a funeral. It's a funeral because Peter didn't come back home with flattened pennies and a smile. I can't remember how to tie my laces. I've been trying, but the shoelaces keep slipping through my fingers.

My grandmother is at my feet suddenly, tying my shoes and smoothing my dress. I never heard her come in. She stands quickly, too quickly. She blurs as she moves. The whole room is so sharp and clear, in still cold focus. She blurs with life.

Warm hands are clutching my shoulders and lips are pressing against my forehead. My grandmother smiles, but it's not really a smile. It's some sad replacement for a smile because it tugs at her lips all wrong. My brother had a crooked smile, but it was always sincere. Today is Sunday and it's time to go to church.
Time is slipping by. A car door slams, an engine starts, and my feet touch the sidewalk. Like single snapshots, taken and then forgotten, time is becoming pictures, halting and flowing.

The red yawning doors of the church swallow me. The murmur of a hundred hushed voices greets me, rolling off the vaulted ceiling. Black clad and beady eyed, the churchgoers turn one by one, and their red rimmed eyes are staring.

They gaze, watching as I walk down the aisle. They stare and sniffle as I sit next to my parents in the front pew. We have never sat here before. I join them, sitting next to my mother. Today is Sunday and this isn’t our pew.

The casket is brown and polished to a shine. It is also closed. All I can hear is the sniffling. It’s stuffy and weeping and behind me I turn. Mrs. Thompson is crying. She is dabbing at her wrinkled old eyes with a silk handkerchief.

Peter broke her window a few months back, threw a rock right through the glass and into the living room. It wasn’t an accident, despite what my mother told her. The things Mrs. Thompson yelled after him weren’t an accident either. Now, she’s crying. She’s crying on a Sunday. The handkerchief isn’t even wet.

I’m staring or so my mother tells me. I can’t stop. There’s Mr. Baker, who owns a fruit stand, the same one Peter stole apples from. Ms. Williams, Peter’s teacher, who would whack the backs of his hands with a ruler until they were red. Mr. George, the neighborhood pharmacist, who Peter would play practical jokes on.


“Peter, was a good boy, with a decent, kind heart.” The pastor drones. For the first time I hear his dusty, old voice.

“No, he wasn’t,” I say.

It’s Friday and my brother is being hit by a train. He wanted to squish pennies on the train tracks. Stolen pennies from the grocer, he wanted to squish them. Instead, he got squished. It’s Sunday, and it’s Peter’s funeral, and the whole town came. The whole town came to be lied to.

My mother hushes me, her voice wavering. “No,” I say, louder, but she only puts a consoling hand on my head combing fingers through my hair.

Peter was a cunning little devil. Not some sainted boy, not some martyr to childhood innocence. My brother always had grass stains on his knees. He always had a smile on his face. He was always running so fast, but always toward trouble.

When Peter had been alive, he was just Peter. Now, he was the boy who’d been hit by a train, a victim of young and unfortunate death. He never looked up, even when the train was on him.

It’s Sunday and I can’t tie my shoes. My fingers are shaking and the laces keep slipping between them. It’s Sunday and I want to go to church. I want to go to Peter’s funeral. I want to remember him.

I push my mother away. He never heard the train coming. Suddenly I’m in front of the coffin, and everyone’s eyes are on me, staring with their false red rimmed eyes. They want to cry over a child that never was.

“Go home,” I say. “Just go home.”

It’s Sunday and I place a flattened penny on my brother’s headstone.
For My Mother

Kate Quinlan

There’s a place
where the elephants go
worn and gray
when the circus lights fade
to not die alone.

When I was little
you had a nightmare
screaming
and flailing your arms
you said you were drowning
with a cardboard box over your head
and sometimes now
while you are sleeping
I still think you’re dead.

Other times you screamed my name
over and over
mournfully
you dreamt I was raped
molested
kidnapped
and shakily you would call me on the phone
asking if I’m sure I’m alright.

That’s how much you love me.

And I never minded the telephone calls
or not riding in cars while it rained
or buckling my seatbelt
because that’s how much
I love you.

Highly Suited

Donna Morris

As held in a hand, two playing cards.
A king of spades and a queen of hearts.
Their eyes met as they’re placed together
Their devotion to each other will last forever.

The king wore his cloak, dressed for the game
As he held his sword, trapped, in a thin-lined frame.
His hair flipped out, like his mustache and beard.
He’s top dog, always to be feared.

The queen sat to his left, holding a flower
Never moving an inch, always second in power.
Her expressionless face, her empty eyes
A poker face is her only disguise.

Together they made a perfect team
Impossible to beat, so it would seem.
Feeling confident that they won first place,
The other player put down an Ace.
Shattered woman scared of her own sexuality paints a window with her promiscuity. Something was taken from her in a room of covers and no windows. Something was taken from her in a room of silent walls and muffled screams. They partied hard on the outside of the doors while something was being taken from her. The clicking glasses and smell of Corona beers filled the background of her brought to life nightmare. Merely a baby, merely a child, hardly a woman, she lays confused. Laughter boomed through her silent walls. She covers her ears. The sweat drips from his chin and lands of her forehead. Something was taken from her and nobody even noticed she was missing. War was being created in her body. The smell of bullets entered her nose, as he pulled up his pants and buckled the loud clamps to his belt and exited the door to join the fun. A whisper in her head confronted her yelling her, “Please get up. You’re going to be okay. He was just checking to see if you were sick.” Merely a baby, merely a child, hardly a woman, something was taken from her. A quiet thought talked to her in the dark, “Please don’t cry. You can’t tell anybody.

It was your fault. You were too beautiful, too small, your eyes are too hypnotic, your smile is too innocent, and your body is too fragile. You must get rid of them. Hide your smile. You must never smile again. You must hide your beauty. Give him no reason to notice you again. You must get rid of yourself.” The beautiful blue ocean water pushed its way up the shallow shores closing in on her bloody legs. She held back her tears and let the ocean sweep her away. She let the ocean hear her thoughts. Feel her pain. She let it grasp her whole till the point that she could taste its salt, hear its cry, and smell her missing childhood. A voice came to her, “Get Up! Get out of that water! Breathe. Feel life. Oh please you must get up. You must live your life. Oh please hurry, the shore has almost left. Breathe! Don’t let him take your life away.” She heard the ocean’s pleading cry and finally gave her body life once again. Merely a baby, merely a child, hardly a woman, something was taken from me in a room of silent walls, no windows, muffled screams, and a crooked smile.
Cockroach

Kelly Shirey

You call me your friend; I'd like to hear your definition,
Because I don't think ours is the same,
You break the rules say you're an exception,
But you're not playing a fair game,

I do something for you, get nothing back,
You act like it only works one way,
It won't be long until I steer off track,
Happy to finally stray away,
You're the devil in disguise, and I'm a saint,
A match not made in heaven,
You grow furious with each complaint,
I can already hear your heart harden,

And slowly turn to stone; as it turns cold and black,
You only ever cared about yourself,
My feelings never mattered;
- a puzzle you never tried to crack;
You put me on the highest, dusty shelf,

And I sat there waiting for you to come around,
To prove to me you can change,
I wish you would have hurled me to the ground,
But I was far out of your range,
You're never going to change,
No matter how hard you try,
You'll always stay the same,
You'll crash and burn instantly,
Keep asking yourself why,
And say I'm the one to blame,
Well let me tell you my friend,

I've finally had enough,
Don't come to me for help anymore,
I don't care if your life is going to be rough,
You're not my responsibility to look out for,

You promised you would be there for me,
But I'm better off alone,
You would end up stabbing me in the back,
It's no secret you're a tyrant, and a hypocrite.
I've always known,
You're a cockroach crawling in between the cracks,

And I hate you for putting me through this pain and misery,
What kind of friend are you?
Do you know all the mental damage you've done to me?
And all the shit you put me through?
The Ghost In Your Curtains
Joseph Edsall

My voice is echo
Clatter
Pitter patter
My feet are the rats in the walls
And I’m cold
And clothes won’t change that
The lights are off
I can still see
Why do I breathe?
Old habits die hard
You’re all alone
That makes two
Even though I still see you
You don’t see me
Now more than ever
I wish I could take it back
But scars are scars
And what’s dead is gone
Or so I was told
But I still linger
I extend my fingers and reach with no hand
You crawl into bed
You bathe in floral sheets
I’m at your bedside
But I might as well not be
If this transparency was two-way
All we’d have is this room
This bed, these sheets
And I would find some peace

It’s A Comedy Of Sorts
Caitlin Romascavage

I sit back, feet up,
Licking the salt off my fingers.
The empty bowl of popcorn next to me.
Another giggle erupts from my mouth.
As much as I try to suppress it,
It is impossible.
Like holding back a sneeze
Or groaning after a stubbed toe.
It’s your destruction I’m watching.
Your own self created evil ending.
Martin Scorsese would be proud.
Laughter rumbles out, much louder now.
Doubled over and my stomach hurting.
Tears streaking mascara down my cheeks.
Dripping onto my orange top.
It’s as though watching a choppy home movie.
Circa 1965.
As the pieces all slide into place,
Each clip makes me laugh.
Harder as each one slides past my vision.
As the film comes to a close, I’m just crying.
My voice box is tired,
And my abs are on fire.
The tears aren’t of sadness
But merely regret and frustration.
I truly do cackle at your fall.
The Roman Empire has nothing on you.
Nixon, Clinton, Bush.
I’m thirsty now.
I leave
For water.

Jessica Savard, Lovely Bones, Photograph
Crux and Crutches

Tyler Naples

Today was unlike yesterday. Yesterday was plagued with turmoil and disbelief; today, a period of cooling and temperance. He woke and yesterday's thoughts instantly flooded his mind. Temples pounding and eyes half sealed, the man weakly lifted his head from the pillow, shifted his weight, turned, threw his feet over the bed, and felt the cool floor on his bare soles. Now, noticing the severity of his headache, he gazed around the room, looking for some quick relief. A small ray of light protruded through the waving curtains which hung near a small window in the corner of the bedroom. Initially, the beam offered some comfort. However, as the light danced around the room it made brief contact with his half open eye. He reached out in an attempt to shield himself from the blaze of light. Eyes wide open now, he frantically looked around the room in hopes to find something that would ease and dull the pain.

A small, smooth, rectangular bedside table sat to the left of his upright, still body. He examined contents and articles which lay upon the table's surface. "Goddamn cigarettes." He noticed a small basin which housed an innumerable amount cigarette butts and dark gray ash filled to its brim. For a second, he connected his crippling headache to the pack he smoked last night and then dashed out the thought all together. His eyes then drifted to a small picture frame which lay face down. He picked up the frame and tossed it over in his hands. His eyes were instantly drawn to the picture's subject.

A small boy dressed in blue jean overalls sat, plopped in the middle of a dirty sandbox with a small toy shovel in one hand and a plastic bucket in the other. His countenance echoed bliss and happiness. He gazed at the camera with a massive, toothy smile. "You know," the man started as he analyzed the picture, "when you were a kid, you used to wake up at the crack of dawn. Believe me, you'd let us all know that you were awake. That right there is for sure." He stopped, paused, collected his thoughts and continued, "We'd hear you for miles, leaping off your bed, those two feet hittin' the ground then sprinting out of your room." He looked towards the doorway of his own room and noticed the closed, white plastered door which lay across the hall. "You'd run outta that room, into your mother and I's, and jump right on to our bed." He looked over and noticed his empty, desolate bed. "You know, those early mornings used to leave me with the biggest headaches," he placed his left hand to his temple, noticing the throbbing again. "But now, it's just these goddamn cigarettes that give me all the headaches." He returned the picture to its original position on the bedside table, lifted himself from his bed, and walked out of the room.
Dorm

*Kailey Tedesco*

My chamber is a little closet;
Neglected and boarded up; condemned,
Blanketed with dust and a
Mysterious stranger’s past.

My armoire is a well-visited morgue
Where spiders take their formaldehyde
And sting the common flies
Until they fall dead, into my flats

The bathroom is a waste basin
Where “ladies” purge their regrets
Their heaving wretches echo in the halls.
Yet, they continue to play pop-songs most crescendo

I guess, I wanted this after all.
Blue
Pat Zazzarino

It's not what I feel
Often, but more of a happy
Yellow, because blue is what I love
The color of the endless
Ocean, basking against the
Crimson horizon, the infinite sky
Howling with wind, joining the ocean
At the edge of the sun as well
The colors of her eyes, as she
Looks up at me, with tears
So deep I can hardly
See myself as whom
I want to be while her soul is just as blue,
But I want to lose
Myself in the beautiful
Cerulean, or some mysterious
Turquoise and bring that part
Of me to surface from
The tides within my own ocean and
Personally welcome my favorite color from
The rainbow which marks promises, and
In the end begin a
New one for myself, I
blew it in the past, but I
Will begin my new future
With something that I indeed have known
All along.

What He Left Behind
Philip Baily

CAUTION! CAUTION! CAUTION!

Break the tape
And step inside,
Of the four-walled room
Where my brother died.

(See)
The clothes on the floor
He neglected to wash,
They stink of his sweat
And remind of our loss.

(See)
The posters lined
All across the wall,
Musicians and models
He loved them all.

(See)
The wooden guitar
Where he poured out his heart,
Into his songs
Till he broke apart.

(See)
The broken mirror
Missing shards of glass,
A painful reminder
Of his panic attacks.

(See)
The bloodstained bed
Where his body lay,
Until the cops
Took him away.

(See)
The open drawer
Where he stored the gun,
That took his life
When depression won.
Jason Rowles, Disturbed, Pricetown, Pa 2011, Watercolor
From Her Eyes Of Beauty
Santiago Benbán

I.
I am from plants that coil across maroon mountains
Under the celestial sphere
From rivers and waterfalls that cascade
donw emerald marshlands
From rain droplets that glistan off the fragments of white sand
From the scent of mint that flows through
the halls of Ceiba trees
From the aroma of cocoa beans rising up through the earth
From dusk until twilight when the crimson lakes reflect the
visage of ominous weather
From lightning that radiates through the haze
hovering above turbulent waves
From the vastness of plants that ripple among the howling winds
From the voices of animals that echo across ancient ruins and
the never-ending landscape
I am from the sublime country draped in mystery and fantasy,
I am from Guatemala and her eyes of beauty

II.
I am from her velvety skin and her ease to enchant me
From her eyes of verdigris and chestnut that entice me
From her adroit ability to motivate and inspire me
From her jokes and gestures that amuse me
From her slender and suntan frame that excites me
From her rosy cheeks and pink lips that brush me
From her ethereal voice that moves and sings to me
From her gaze of trance and reverie that answers me
From her devoted heart and love that completes me
I am from the soul and body that perfects me
I am from Abbey and her eyes of beauty
The theme, essence as light, became apparent as the design staff explored all themes surrounding the word. Essence as light, captures the definition of essence as, the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something, especially something abstract, that determines its character. Light is the root of how we see, how we interpret, how we discover and most importantly how we experience life. The background photography is heavily influenced by the photographer Uta Barth. As our inspiration developed, we hoped to capture various environments that surround us by transforming them from the recognizable to the mere essence of the space. We’d like to thank all the artists who’ve submitted their work as well as our faculty advisors, Prof. Christina Galbiati and Prof. Kate Clair for making this possible. We hope that the love and work that we’ve put into this year’s Essence Fine Arts and Literary Magazine will be experienced by all.

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We would like to thank all the authors who submitted as well as honor those we accepted. There is a level of trust that an author must have with a publication in order to submit. His work is judged by a literary cabal lurking behind a locked door in the basement of the McFarland Student Union Building. It is not easy to let your personality lie in the hands of strangers. We understand the weight of that trust, and we believe we picked the very best of these works.