The works contained within are considered, by the Essence student staff members, some of the finest examples of creative art and literary expression. The Essence staff expresses appreciation to all its contributors and readers for sharing in this creative publication.
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Man And Child

The man took the child by the hand; pointed to the sun rising over the sand.

The child nodded affirmatively; unaware of the spirit of the child rising in the man.

-Karen Ann Concordia
Light and Glass

Liz sat on the edge of her bed and cried. In less than five hours, she'd be taking orders from the hurried businessmen who crammed into the Broad Street diner where she worked. All she wanted to do was sleep, just for an hour, but the heat wave that had gripped the city for the past week was born with a cruel sense of humor, and it had no intention of granting her wish. Her soles tumbled gently from her window and deteriorated in silence amidst overturned trashcans and fire escape ladders that dangled precariously above the macadam in a sweltering July night.

Peeling herself from damp sheets, she walked to the window, hoping to catch a stray breeze. The city lights pulsed through her nightshirt and bared a silhouette of sweeping sensuality. Everything about Liz was curved and lean - slender fingers, sculptured calves, and a supple, arching neck. She wore out loud at misery of the night as she caressed her temples and brushed her sweat soaked black curls from her forehead. A faint reflection played in the glass as one pair of hazel eyes looked out while another pair looked in.

This night, like all the other sleepless nights that had come before, found those eyes wide open as they beheld the view of the city that graced her window. Alone in the darkness of early morning, she'd sit transfixed by that pane of glass for hours at a time. The soft, twinkling lights of the skyscrapers towered above the abandoned buildings of her neighborhood, and on winter nights when the falling snow cast a heavenly gauze through the sky, they'd stand like a row of glittering Christmas trees in a little girl’s dream. Their windows winked knowingly, revealing their true essence to only her, and from them, she spun elaborate webs of fantasy that embodied her vision of what life downtown was really like. She knew that behind their faces of steel and glass, there lived a feathery world, far removed from her existence in the slums of the north end.

A streetlamp threw an indiscriminate light against her building and bathed the one large room she called home in a sea of anemic blue - a worn out couch, a dresser, a mattress on the floor, all masked in the blue of the city night. It was darker in the corners of the ceiling where the mildew grew in a musty patchwork between fields of peeling plaster and water stains. The walls were usually alive with the muffled cries of quarreling lovers, but this late hour found the scent of stale urine that permeated the ancient structure.

She walked to the dresser and grabbed a cigarette. A struck match illuminated the room and cast her giant shadow on the wall. In the second drawer, wrapped in a cradle of panties and socks, lay a French-cut crystal decanter of cheap bourbon. She unearthed it and carried it back to the windowsill.

Glowing soft, then bright, soft, then bright, her cigarette slushed through the darkness like a mutant orange firefly. She raised the bottle to her lips many times, and the alcohol in her stomach slowly worked its way into her bloodstream with warm, tickling fingers and sent fuzzy messages to her brain. She closed her eyes and thought back to the hot July nights of her youth.

When she was a little girl, she'd spend her summers on her grandparents' farm. Momma would pack her up and take the whole day to drive her deep into the backwoods of Kentucky, but the real thrill came later, when she was old enough to ride the train into Lexington all by herself. Grandpa would be waiting for her when she got off, and he'd always hug her tight with his big, wrinkled hands that smelled like the inside of his old corncob. After claiming her baggage, they'd climb in the cab of his pickup. She'd take the pouch of tobacco from the glove compartment and fill his pipe, and he'd listen to her stories about the trip and the people she talked to on the train and the cities she saw along the way. The farm was about an hour and a half south of Lexington, and on really hot days, they'd stop in Richmond for milkshakes that she'd ration on little sips so that she wouldn't be finished until they pulled down the dusty road that led to their house. Grandma would have lunch waiting, cold cuts on homemade bread, sweet potatoes, and tall, sweaty pitchers of lemonade, and after grace, Liz would tell the story of her trip again.

Grandma would hang on every word like she was watching television for the first time ever and say things like, "Oh my!" and "What happened next?" and "That sounds wonderful!" Grandpa never seemed to mind hearing the stories a second time; he'd just smile and eat. Outside, an ambulance screeched its passenger's torment, and its cries echoed off brickface garages and barred windows. Just as quickly, silence filled its wake.
Liz righted herself and grasped the neck of the bottle with numb fingertips. The solid matter of her life was gradually evolving into liquid as she shuffled to the corner of the room by the bed. She draped her arm around a standing mirror, an oval glass trimmed in dark walnut supported by a lilac frame. It was her grandmother’s mirror, a mirror she had played in front of many times as a child. She took another drink, threw her head back, and gazed deep into her own eyes...

Summers on the farm - her mind was full of stop action memories - still lifes, that once recalled, would flicker into motion, play out a scene, and fade into black.

During the afternoons, she’d help Grandma bake blueberry pies in the pantry or can vegetables in the cellar. When it wasn’t too hot, they’d work in the garden, picking tomatoes or trimming the lush hedges that hugged the side of the house. The yard was bordered by a white picket fence which, in places, had become overgrown by honeysuckle bushes. In the gray of twilight, swarms of fireflies would hang fat and lazy in the perfume of those honeysuckles, and she’d chase them along the edge of the tobacco fields until her feet were muddy red from the clay of the soil. Evening would find her, Grandma, and Grandpa at the kitchen table, playing games of Parchesi or Chinese Checkers and laughing over Grandpa’s hunting stories until well past her bedtime.

But more than anything else, she remembered her morning walks. After breakfast, before the sun beat down the heat of midday, she’d make her way to the ridge that swelled past the corner of the large field. Twenty feet below lay a stretch of Interstate 75, and the cars and trucks would barrel by in a rainbow of metallic blurs. She’d sit up on the ridge, invisible to the passing motorists and make up stories about each car that passed before her - whether they were rich folks heading to Florida for a long vacation or poor folks just looking to go somewhere and start anew - whether they were happily married or they fought all the time the way momma and daddy used to - whether they were from the city or they were lucky enough to live on a farm like Grandma and Grandpa.

And at night, in the large four poster oak bed Uncle Boyd had built, she’d prop her pillows up and pretend she was on that highway, driving her family far, far away...

She staggered back to the window. The skyscrapers loomed in the distance. Rows and stacks of windows lay illuminated in an erratic display like the smile of a veteran hockey player. A light came on, then another as they set blank slates ablaze. Another room came to life; then two dissolved to black. In the still of a humid night, she could hear them; she could see them. It was getting louder and clearer. They were dressed in black tie tuxedos and sequin gowns, laughing, placing limp hands over their chests and throwing their heads back, laughing right out loud...

“Oh God!” she wailed. “I Hate You!”

She pivoted one hundred eighty degrees and hurled the bottle through the heart of the room. The light caught the crystal and spread tiny prisms of rainbow colors across the floorboards. For a split second, it hung in mid-air, as if it were trying to decide whether or not to complete the arc of its flight. Its answer came in a shriek of breaking glass.

She covered her mouth with her small hands and made her way across the room with tip-toed half-steps. In the corner stood a broken mirror, and at its feet rested the decanter, still intact. The streetlamp played off the shards of reflective glass and cast hundreds of pillars of light onto the ceiling.

She slammed against the wall and eased her body onto the floor. Off to the west, a line of thunderstorms prepared to converge on the city, and they pushed the fresh aroma of impending rain through her window.

She rested her head on the floor and played with a piece of the mirror. Her eyes were heavy with sleep, and spoke wearily into the night, "I’m so sorry. Grandma. I’ll get it fixed... I’m so sorry." She smiled to fight off the tears, "You smell that? It smells like rain, the way it used to when we were down on the farm..."

-Kathleen McDonald

Ocean

The sun lowers as I make my approach.
The ocean seems very calm tonight.
I make my way closer and closer to the shore line
and the salt air engulfs me more and more.
The first wave to reach my timid toes is abrupt
but it sends an incredible tingle throughout my entire body.
The next couple of waves are the same.
Soon the in and out motion of the water is very pleasing and comforting.
I become entranced as the waves swell higher and higher.
I become one with the ocean taking in the smell, the sound,
the incredible feeling of this great body of water all around me.
I am fulfilled with immense pleasure when suddenly,
the tide reaches its peak and is ready to retreat.
The incredible feeling soon ends as the sea calms and quiets down.
I am as relaxed as one could ever imagine.
I lift my head and open my eyes.
Ahh...what the ocean does to me;
I revel in it every time.

-Joan Hart

-Curtis J. Smith
Sown

A single man,
A single soul,
A single life,
A seed to be sown.

It grows untended;
In the garden of humanity,
Starting off small;
but blossoming with time.

It climbs,
to its full height,
And looks down;
Contemplating the undergrowth.

A single man,
A life made only by itself
His life is one of beauty;
Ending up as a seed - to be sown.

-Timothy McClain
Kiss

Enraged...

Burning in a fire.

And fighting

Within and without.

How many more times?

This battle shall be forever.

This fight shall be

A beautiful memory

To us both.

I thank you for what you were in my life
Because of you, that is what I am now
Though you are not in my life today
My heart and mind were built on yesterdays
Not that I will deny the present and future
But from you I learned with strides that were long
So please hear what I have to say
I still have a need to cry with you another day

-Drew Cerria

-Amy L. Thruah

The Tree

In the afternoon when the sun was on its journey to the western horizon, and
the garden breathed easy in the warm summer air, she would come. The birds
would come to the garden and sing for her, and the leaves in the trees would
dance for her pleasure. She would sit under the great oak tree and laugh at the
squirrels as they performed their acrobatics. Then the crickets would gather
around and chirp her a symphony. The blushing flowers bent to her, each one
wanting to be the most beautiful, like a child at a circus, she clapped and
giggled in delight. Then in the evening as the sun disappeared and the cool air
crept up from unseen places, she would go. The garden slept peacefully, happy
that it had pleased her again today.

Then one day she did not come. The flowers drooped their sad faces to the
ground. The birds rustled uneasily in the trees, the crickets did not utter a
sound; and the leaves stood a motionless vigil. The next day she did not come,
or the day after, or the day after.

Weeds grew up in the flower beds as the flowers died away. The birds flew
off, never to return. Snakes invaded the garden, ate the crickets, and chased out
the squirrels. Vines grew up the trees and choked the life from their branches.
Only the old oak tree remained, weathered and bent, but strong enough to
hold itself upright against the shadows and cold that had claimed the garden.
Then one day, she came back to the garden and leaned on the tree that had
stood strong against the decadence.

Why didn't you change, tree? Why did you endure the winter? Why did you
wait?

I have waited, there is no reason why. I ask for nothing, but that you
remember me when you are in need. When you are wounded, cut off one of
my limbs and make yourself a crutch. When you are tired cut off another and
make a bed. And when the weather beats down on you, and the rain flattens
your hair, cut me down and make a shelter. Why did I wait? I waited so you
could return and make use of me. It is all a humble tree could hope for.

-Tom Sebastian

-Ed Bullinger
“Omaha? What for?” the woman asked.
“She’s a nature freak. You know, a fresh air... Oh, for Christ’s sake, I got cheese-wiz all over my blouse.” She rubbed at the cheese on her blue polyester shirt until it was a faint, green smear. “Is it gone?”
“Pretty much. Listen, can you help me do my hair tonight?”
“Oh, there’s my dog Jo-Jo.”
“I have the stuff all ready.”
“He’s a cocker spaniel, cute huh?” She turned to the woman.
“Well, the reason I ask is because Charlie is taking me to the Wagon Wheel on Saturday.”
“Oh,” she said. “You know I was engaged once...”
“You’ve said, ‘The woman interrupted.
“Engaged,” she said, pausing to light a cigarette. “His name was Phillip. He was tall, probably six foot four.”
“Really,” the woman said and forked coconut pie into her mouth.
“He had dark, curly hair and...”
“So what happened to him?” the woman asked.
“Oh well, he turned out to be a jerk. Don’t they all? I’m glad I never married, son of a bitch. Do you think these meatballs are still good?” She asked, reaching for the bowl.
“I don’t know. How long have you had them?”
“A week or two.”
“Here, let me smell them.” The woman set the pie plate on the floor and leaned forward. “I can’t tell, they might smell funny.”
“They’re probably okay,” she said, and bit one in half. She stared back at the screen. The light from the projector cast shadows over her, distorting her face.
“I haven’t looked at these in a long time,” she told the woman.
“Uh-huh,” the woman said, biting her nails. “Someone’s at the door.”
“Huh?” she asked.
“I said, there’s someone at the door.”
“Oh, I guess I better answer it,” she rose and brushed crumbs off herself. “I wonder who the hell...” She opened the door.
“Hello,” said two young men in suits. “Do you believe in evolution or God’s word?”
“I don’t know. Why, what do you want?” she asked.
“We’d like to offer you the comfort of knowing God. Here is some of our literature,” said one of the men. “May we come in?”
“No,” she said. “I have a friend here.”
“Oh,” said the other man. “We’d be happy to discuss the future of the world with both of you.”
“Please,” she said, rubbing her knuckles on the corner of her mouth. “I’m really not in the mood to discuss the future of the world.”
“I understand Mrs...,” the man trailed off.
“Miss Unger,” she supplied.
“Would you like a subscription to Watchtower, Miss Unger? This magazine can offer you answers to...”
“Mister, really I don’t...” Before she finished her sentence, her hand slammed the trailer door shut. “Jesus,” she screamed and walked to where her friend was sitting. It was dark, and the movie flickered black and white.
“Who was it?” The woman asked, cleaning under her nails with a toothpick.
“Damn religious people. Who do they think they are... making me feel guilty.”
“Why? What’d they say?”
“They wanted to talk about the goddamn future of the goddamn world.”
“What future?” the woman laughed.
“Yeah, for Christ’s sake, I hate that shit.” The movie reel ended and made a clicking sound. “Ruyn my day,” she said and walked out of the room. “I think I got some bologna in here, want some?” And the white light from the projector grew and filled the room.

-Super 8

She didn’t look at all like she thought she did. Her hair was so short. Was that when she had cut it herself? God, it looked awful. She squirted some cheese-wiz on a cracker and popped it into her mouth.
“Christ, I can’t believe I ever wore bell-bottoms,” she said. “What the hell are you doing in there? I told you it was on the top shelf.”
“I know,” a woman’s voice answered. “Is this a pie in the cupboard?”
“Yeah,” she yelled, wiping purple lips.
“What is it, lemon?”
“No, coconut. For Christ’s sake, you’re missing the whole movie.”
“Here I am,” said the woman, carrying the pie and plopping herself down in the Lazy-boy.
“See there, that’s me, the one with the short hair and next to me waving...”
“Boy, were you skinny,” the woman said.
“Yeah, practically a goddamn skeleton. That’s my sister Margie next to me. She lives in Omaha now.”

—Jennifer AMPTRAM
Unsure

I'm unsure...
(the world rotates)
...have I changed?
Everything seems the same
same street
same sky
same face
Is it?
Is that hair gray?
I feel...good
healthy
educated
It's all packed in...
the sights of the world.
My life has changed...
and so have I.
It's those that I love
They're the same...not unsure.
(my world rotates)
and I am scared.

-Andrea L. Boven
Strength

A young woman sits back,
Waiting for something to happen,
Waiting for fate to take her hand.

An old woman struggles,
Pushing, against the stone, cold and black.
She loses her footing,
Pebbles falling beneath her feet into empty sky.

Another woman runs after fate,
reaching, reaching ahead of herself, without looking back, she concentrates on what's ahead.
The ground passes beneath her feet.
Falling through holes and climbing up ridges.

-Keith E. Redding

Discovery

A fluttering of paper beneath a bush
stopped the girl’s game
arousing her curiosity.

Playmates voices faded from her range
as she reached past the branches to the magazine
that lay in the dirt
and blades of fresh cut grass.

Alone in her discovery
the thunder roared and
the breeze caressed her supple flesh.

-Mary C. Raymond

-Karen Ann Concordia
Lehigh River Coal Town

My city is a dusty place with sinkholes and cobwebbed ceilings slate sidewalks and grimy corners where the men stand in clumps of flannel and denim and workboots laced up high.

The women have left clothesline signatures out to dry boxers aprons towels and tableclothes tongue the breeze and mouth the words of long forgotten conversations in abandoned dialects.

Last call rounded men in drab green cigarette smoke and neon snakes in rainbow colors and Patsy Cline falling to pieces over and over amidst gruff words of old times more jobs coal mines and war stories from France, Korea and Vietnam.

And the river never ceases never stops never falters it just rolls on into the night...

-Curtis J. Smith

Seekers

Days...endless days.
Going...going by.
Endlessly going by. Sad, happy, laughing...
And crying.
Endlessly crying.

The rains have once again flooded the village.
"All is lost." says the plowman.
Once fecund
Now barren...sterile.

There is no hope
Anywhere.

"All is lost," says the urbanite.
Endlessly lost.
Endlessly going by.

-Sarah Hiebert

-Drew Cerri

-Heidi Hckenberry
Pen and Paper

This ghost town hypes my loneliness, as my heart aches—alone in emptiness. Missing you tests my inner strength(s), for I've never felt love like this!

As an outsider and militant loner, I wait— for your brief correspondence(s). On my star search for lifetime success; I only desire one to love this poetic prince?

My belief in my savior above grows, as my burning light—is fueled within. Caring love...is special to me; but, my personality...is of a positive chemical blend.

- Ernest Rasin

The Hunter

I remember your eyes flashed
When you saw the game.
I remember your smile,
And how you made the kill.

I remember, you sang,
Your voice ringing through the trees
As you cleaned the prey,
And started to tan the hide.

"This pelt is for you," you said,
"To keep you warm when winter comes.
And snow falls to make the earth white."
"I have you for that," I told you.

As you took my hand I remember your smile.
As you moved to kiss me,
And I remember the taste.

- Wayne Benza

Of the blood on your lips
From the feast of fresh meat.
Tis been a lifetime since then.
And I still have the pelt.

To keep me warm.
For you are gone now.
Taken from me.
By a warrior's blade.

- Heather Lawell
She led him into the kitchen, grabbing the over-turned chair as they went by. Nick thought he heard his father’s voice somewhere. His mother slid the chair across the tile floor and against the wall. Nick stepped over the cord on his way to sit down as his mother picked up the receiver. Nick pulled a towel off some drying dishes and wiped the blood off his arm. He could see the cut now, but only briefly, as new blood seeped out. Nick’s mother was saying, “John, I’ll call you later, I have to go. No, I, I’ll call later.” Nick realized he had heard his father’s voice. His mother moved to hang the phone on the wall above where Nick was sitting. The spiraling, flesh-colored cord dipped down onto his wound and became covered in blood. Nick thought it looked like intestines. She hung up the phone, then retrieved it and started dialing. Nick was starting to feel odd. He had a strange sensation behind his eyes, as though the hole that must be there to let vision get to his brain, had opened wider and was now letting in things he couldn’t see before. He began to understand. His mother’s voice became muffled and disappeared into the phone. He looked up and saw her hand moving in sync with her mouth, “I can’t drive.” Her hand dropped through the air emphasizing each word. She hung up the phone and dropped to her knees in front of him. “The ambulance is coming, Nick.” She used the towel to soak up more blood. When she removed it, Nick saw the blood in the shape of a U. He told his mother it was smiling at him, and she started to cry. Nick looked at her and said, “I found a new friend, mom.”

-Patrick K. Berkenstock

Sarah Siebert
The young child
Crying over a lost doll
Shedding tears of growing
In fits and tantrums.

The young girl
Crying over a lost boy
Shedding tears of adolescence
In phases and moods.

The young woman
Crying over a lost friend
Shedding tears of grief
In breakdowns and lapses.

The old woman
Crying over a lost dream
Shedding the final tear
In the remembrance of love.

- Clare Marie Klein

Adam

(inspired by Andrew Wyeth's painting "Adam")

weathered
soiled
sired
a face of character

surrounded by past and present
old wood boards
dented tubs
faded blues and browns

The Man of the Soil
with eyes closed
drifting
floating
far, far a-ways---a-y
way up high
sailing on
for all eternity

The Man of the Sky

- Elizabeth R. Jongebloed
You can criticize and criticize
But one day you’re gonna realize
You’re not always gonna mean so much in my eyes.
So don’t doubt my love and affection
And don’t question my motives
’Cause, baby, I Want you
              I Love you
              I Need you
Let’s just take what we got
And run with it
To see where it goes
So, baby, don’t doubt my love and affection
And don’t question my motives
’Cause one day you’re going to realize
You won’t always mean so much in my eyes.

-Brent A. Hoover

Souls alive and running about
Eternal dances with cosmic mists,
Like a ceremony of sacrifice or a roar of thunder
A junction of timelessness, death, the morning of forever.

Five days of terror and ceremony
Until the last moment, of tears, and conflagration
The smoldering cries of life, suffocate the natives’ freedom

-Michael O’Connell
-Kristen Prechocki

-Mary E. Fisher
Knowledge

Give me a beach - isolated and smooth.
Give me a beach whose tide is reaching,
Stretching out for more onto the sands of strength.
Give me a beach where I lie, surrounded by thousands of grains - rough and dry,
isolated, clean and thousands of years old yet undiscovered by the norms.
It sounds better than now and I have felt it.
It could be a strength in the right dimension, a place to go if the feeling is right.
I feel for the tide - reaching, stretching to stay in the tiny grains, but only being
pulled back into itself,
Like the child who wants to learn more about his undiscovered world which
surrounds him.
We never cease to learn. No matter how small the grain, some water is always
absorbed.

-Mary C. Raymond