

# *The Fioretti*

Spring 2025 Edition

# Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Thank you very much for picking up a copy of the 82<sup>nd</sup> edition of *The Fioretti*. Such a storied history brings with it something new and something to prove. With this journal, we have compiled pieces of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and visual arts across all walks of life from both students and alumni, including students from the Indiana Women's Prison. These ladies present us with a new perspective that echoes a powerful voice you are soon to enjoy. The students have brought their best and brightest to the forefront.

We've put significant effort into selecting and sorting the readings. We thank everyone who submitted a potential piece for this year's journal. Come join us through a journey of colorful poems, wondrous stories, and beautiful art and photography.

In addition to our printed pieces, we also have our website showcasing not only literary works from this year and years past, but also cinematography and photography that we were unable to publish in the traditional printed form.

We encourage you to explore these visual stories as they add another layer to our creative work. We ask, simply, that you, as the reader, immersed yourself in what we offer you, and take flight in the emotions garnered through the journal.

Thank you for reading and enjoy!

All the best,  
*The Fioretti's* Editorial Team

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# Irreplaceable

*Kaitlyn McNamee*

the rain reminds me of you in the worst way. i so desperately want to subside to its embrace and bask in its glory, but the sound and feeling no longer comfort me. instead, it provides warmth for just a second before turning into cold, hard dread.

the rain sounded lovely that day. i didn't mind driving in it, i never have. why is it that i can only so vividly remember the rain? usually, i don't note the weather, let alone care to remember it.

i wish i remembered more. i wish we did more together. i wish i wasn't growing older than you with every passing day. it scares me that i'll pass you in age soon, it doesn't feel right. you were supposed to be my older sister. i always loved it when you told me you cared for me like a little sister. i haven't felt that again.

i wish i cried more that day, screamed maybe, anything but sit there shocked as i did. i wish i wasn't so fucking stupid.

i wish i called you the day before instead of just texting, i wish i knew how much you were struggling. the devil couldn't reach me, so he killed you.

did you think of me at all before you did it? perhaps that is far too selfish to ask. did you see my text that morning? i'm sorry i didn't do more.

i don't know why the rain brings you to mind, you are so unlike it. i

remember you as warm and yellow. you were so much more like the sun. i miss listening to the rain with you.

when the rain is at its fullest, can you still hear it? does the sound permeate through the ground and into your casket?  
sometimes, i wonder how much is left of you. how long does it take for a body to decay? is there more of you left in my mind than beneath the earth?

i'm worried that one day the memories will fade for good. i can't remember it all like i used to, no matter how hard i try.

there are no replacements. who else will look at me so kindly, so genuinely? who else will know me so dearly and listen to me with such intent? who could?

please callie, come back. i need you.

who else will listen to the rain with me?

# The Last Frost before Spring

Bethany Worrell

Roaming fingers of frost encapsulated the windows like the vines that had formerly wandered here. Piercing icicles guarded the bricks that the leafy foliage once had, relieving their positions in a call of seasonal duty. Once enshrouded in splendor, then in decay, our mansion now stood frozen, silently stilled under the oppressive hand of winter.

*“Spring will come,”* I whisper to the shadows. Curled upon the faded red cushion of a window seat, my cheek hovers above the glass. It turns a faded red itself, humming with the stinging conundrum of cold burns. A quiet portion of me wishes to huddle against the window, to become frozen myself. The old house has been forgotten—why would that not extend to its occupants?

Or maybe I simply wish to forget. To wake up tomorrow and not think of you upon the first breath, not search for you in the vacancy beside me. Yes, maybe that is the true desire. It is so hard to think clearly when one is so cold. I attempt to button one higher layer of my knitted sweater, but my fingers refuse to flex, remaining stiff in a clutch of my own shoulders.

*Spring must come.* Releasing quick huffs of warm air onto my hands, I massage them against my legs until blood flow haltingly returns. The vacant fireplace across the bedroom yawns boredly, taunting me with its potential. I could visualize the room illuminated by the comforting glows of a roaring fire, practically feeling the flames reaching to my bones and restoring the former glory of warmth. But to achieve such a result would mean vacating my prime

position, my lookout tower of unrequited hope. I could not miss the signs. I must not doubt the signals.

*Spring would come.* And I could not miss it.

Turning again to the outdoors, I sought vaguely for signs of life. I could feel my eyelids growing heavy, my breaths becoming slow and laborious. What little grip I had left on life was softly slipping. It was essential I found something to focus on, something to keep my mind propelled by a hint of hope.

First I looked for footprints. Not human, I knew there had been none since the first snowfall days ago. Surely some woodland creature had ventured into the drifts, for it had unobtrusively transformed into quite the picturesque scene. I peered into the bright white mounds, looking for indentations to prove I was not alone. Compassionately, nature shooed her wardens, emitting signs of life in those hopeful hues that only she can provide.

A fox cheerfully trotting, meandering to its home somewhere within the hedges. A few birds chasing and calling, scouring the trees for anything left unfrozen. A gust of wind tenderly grazing the branches of a willow, encouraging lazy flakes to drift below. No, nothing human, but plenty of life.

I would give them all of what little I had left. Now completely curled into myself, I did not mind the spreading singe of cold as my forehead sagged onto the glass. I had no strength in my neck to hold myself up, no will even to find the strength.

*Spring would come?* I had never let myself doubt before. Noisy assurances had sustained me thus far, but the road had come to a grim conclusion. Lying is for community; the truth is proclaimed within solitude. And so I embraced it. I would die here, alone, a frosty demise of romance and pity.

With such a compromise, I felt no shame in imaginative wanderings.

Like always, they consisted of you. Coming back to the manor, coming back home. Nearly soaring up the grand staircase, desperately calling out my name, desperately seeking forgiveness. You would nearly ransack the house as you pushed through door after

door, paying no attention to the dust. You did not care about the state, you did not remember the former splendor, that splendor that we had shared. You only cared about the one you had shared it with.

And then you would find me, still sitting at the window you had walked away from, still surveying the drive you had so painfully vacated. Your arms would envelop me, lifting me from the seat of shame, the perch of perception that I had so dutifully been queen of. You would breathe life into my bones, warmth into this heart that had grown so cold, so lonely. Rejuvenation, revitalization, restoration, all by your touch.

*“Spring has come.”* You would whisper, and you would once again be mine. Together we would build a fire, then a home, then a future—the destination did not matter, only the accomplishment of being by your side.

With one last peer outside into the drifting winter’s morning, my eyes slid to a shut. Soon, the frost would encase this former beauty as well. One day, when the sun shone warmer and the wind caressed daffodils, they may find the girl still in the manor. Still waiting for you. Still waiting for Spring.

# Never Be

*Megan Bonfield*

It was finally sinking in,  
my mother's cold hands  
wrapped around mine  
As she lies lifeless in the hospital bed  
surrounded by flowers and "get well soon" cards.  
I didn't just feel her cold hands though.  
The air turned brisk when a mother's love vanished,  
and then,  
suddenly,  
my heart turned cold.  
My brain flooded with "I'll never" thoughts  
and all encouraging messages were wiped away from my memory.  
*I'll never get to have my mother walk me down the aisle.*  
*Ouch, that hurts.*  
*I'll never get to give her a "bun in the oven" t-shirt,*  
*I'll never get to buy another Mother's Day gift wrapped in newspaper*  
*because I don't own wrapping paper.*  
*Not everything is what it's wrapped up to be.*

# Blood on the Daisies

*Abby Meinhart*



# She Is Watching

*Zachary Casabella*

Sept 5, 1887

She can see me. She watches. Always, I feel her gaze on me. She stares down at me, her face taking on the same disapproving frown. Immovable, unchanging, the same exact expression on her face: that of rage and murder. The look of an animal about to catch its prey. Unchanging, save the eyes; the eyes are on me. Always.

Paintings truly are a strange thing. As I look now, into the halls of my ancestors, I see the paintings, staring down. Here is Uncle Hupert, and there lies Aunt Janine. On the left I see Great Grandfather, on the right, a distant cousin. All of them long dead, their likeness now only preserved in these pictures. Rigid. Cold. Their faces frozen in one blank expression for all eternity, but I digress. These of course are not my ancestors. They are mere depictions; memories of what once was.

I say the paintings are rigid, and yet they—all of them—have that strange quality so often found in portraits. That being, that many times, when turning my back, or gazing out the window, I find myself imagining they are watching me, or that their faces are changing. A mere fancy of course. When I look back, their faces are the same as ever. Caught in a frown or a smile. All save one.

At the end of the hall, there stood a woman. This painting was very unique in more ways than one, as I shall soon relate. However, even before the strange events that happened to me, I considered it unique; for no one could quite remember who it depicted. Some said it was a great matriarch, a founder of our long-standing house. Oth-

ers believed it to be merely a distant relative, her name forgotten to time. Still others (and I must clarify, these last I believed to be the most foolhardy and imaginative of people) recounted a legend that it was no mortal woman at all, but a cursed item, brought upon us by our family's dark past. As I said, I once believed this last theory to be nothing more than superstition and rumor. I was wrong.

Now, as I stare at this painting, this artifact of Hell, I can almost feel its malice. It wants something with me. What, I do not know, but something. Something it will not receive. It shall destroy me, or I it. And I will not be defeated!

Sept 15, 1887

I am a rational man. I knew that in reality all my fear and apprehension about the painting must be mere fancies—the wild thoughts of a restless mind. And thus, I made my great mistake. I let the matter rest. She is watching. She has never stopped watching since the day we hung her on the wall. Yet, I have endured her gaze, and know now that it is no mere fancy of mine.

Long has it been known to my family that some darkness or shadow hung long over us all. Little did we suspect that it hung in our very halls. I have searched this last month for signs of who or what this dark force might be. An old letter from my great grandfather to his brother is all that I found, yellowed and half turned to dust. What little was legible I did not understand. 'Our family is old, dear brother,' it read, 'and we were not always so reputable as we are now. Many there were—and are—who would do anything for anybody in order to gain wealth and power. Our ancestors were of such kind, though it shames me to say it. There is one tale of a distant forefather of ours, who once returned from a long journey, bringing back with him a most beautiful lady whom he called his wife. Yet strange things were told of her, and some doubted that she was a mortal woman at all. They would find her, awake, standing over her husband at the dead of night, or having conversations with others that no one could see. Yet, at the same time, the fortunes of our ancestor most certainly increased, both his wealth, and his fame. One

can easily see how the superstitious folk of yesterday could believe such a tale—though it is certainly not to be believed in this sensible age....’ I should certainly have thought the same as my father not long ago. But now, now I am not sure.

Sept 18, 1887

I set the accursed picture ablaze. I watched as it burned, surrounded by the demonic fires from whence it came. Yet even as it burned, its eyes still watched me, mocking, condescending. Long after they faded into smoke and ash, I still felt their gaze on me. But even more terrifying was its mouth. It smiled. Always, this woman had stared down from behind her frame; frowning in a rageful grimace of disapproval; looking like some vengeful fury after my blood. Yet as I saw the fires consume it, it changed. One moment it looked as always, the next, it was laughing, mocking, surrounded by the flames of Hell itself. Never have I seen something more unnerving than that image.

But I am a man of character, and no mere painting would bend my nerves. I knew that this painting was haunted by an evil presence, and now it was destroyed forever. It was gone. Turned to ash and smoke. I have triumphed over the great evil and put it to rest forever. I shall go to sleep tonight glad, and with a happy heart.

Sept 19, 1887

I was a fool. I cannot destroy this... this creature. It is beyond any human power. I had resolved to end this threat, but I cannot. I awoke this morning and entered the great hall. My ancestors still stood there. Uncles, aunts, grandparents, great grandparents, all of them lost to the sands of time. I lifted my gaze to the empty space, once occupied by that cursed painting, ready to gloat in triumph. My lips opened, and I cried out, but not in triumph. There on the wall, the painting looked on me, still, her eyes gazing upon me with the same intensity, following my every move. Yet it was not unchanged. The flesh of the woman was now charred and blackened—the skin peeling off from the bones, and her body was surrounded by fire.

And on her face, there lay that demonic smirk which had nearly destroyed my will when I first beheld it in the flames.

I know now. There is no escaping it. We used her, my family. She gave us wealth. Power. And now she wants us to repay our debt. And in the end, I can do nothing to—

*Here the journal ends, with a smudged line leading to the edge of the paper. General Gillian was found dead in his home on the morning of September the 20th, clutching a pencil in his hand, the journal overturned on the floor. The cause of death was, according to the professionals, a heart attack. The painting which he was so fearful of still hangs in the hall of his now empty house. It appears exactly as he first described it: an imposing matriarch staring down from the wall. All save one thing. He described her as having a terrible frown on her face. The painting as I see it, however, has a smug, almost mocking smile on her lips. A knowing smile. The smile of a predator, who knows her prey is within her grasp, and knows that she need only wait, and watch.*

# The Ladybug

*LaDonna Roudebush*

I feel the vibrations in the ground,  
God screaming, "TAKE SHELTER!!"  
in his deep, booming voice.  
Light turns to Darkness  
as the colossal gray and black  
billows above me grow closer,  
Crying  
drops, then waterfalls. I feel the  
Violent Movement  
of giant leaves and sticks  
all around me as I try to escape  
into my lofty wooden friend,  
with her long, inviting arms and  
outstretched feet firm in the ground.  
I Can't See-  
so much water, so much mud, so much debris.

We've all hidden; some of us have perished.  
My friend hugs me tightly, sheltering me  
as we wait for stillness together.  
The billows, all cried out, move on to  
Dry their eyes.  
I Can See  
the giant leaves with fresh teardrops  
on them, displaced from her arms  
and resting now. I feel the  
Gentle Movement

of Mother Breeze as she dries my wings.  
Darkness turns to Light  
as Father Sun pops his head in  
through the door of the sky,  
Renewing the colors of my world  
and my heart

# Sunset

*Megan Bonfield*



# Lemon Pulp

*Julianna Britt*

I don't remember my brother very well. I remember his hair was a long, sun-bleached blond that promised to darken with age. I remember his eyes were a pale, mischievous brown that hinted they understood more than they saw. I remember his knobby knees, forever scabbed, and his clothes that were always too big for him because we couldn't afford anything but my hand-me-downs.

I remember he hated lemon pulp, too. With a burning passion. He would gag if the stuff got within two feet of him. The stringy, floating mush did not appeal to him. For years, he refused to drink lemonade unless it came from a clear bottle and he could inspect it to make sure it was pulp-free. The labels on the bottles wouldn't convince him. Once, he took my lemonade from Chick-fil-A and chucked it on the floor, chiding me. It splashed a poor old lady's shoes.

We were separated just before his sixth birthday, when I was nine. All I understood at the time was that our mother was taken away by the police and we were split up. Now, of course, I understand that my brother's dad, who was not the same as mine, had elected to take him. But only him. Meanwhile, I was dumped into a foster home, new brothers and sisters whirling around me interchangeably, and having to leave just as I started to get to know them.

I became used to this routine, moving from place to place. It wasn't fun, but it was better than living out on the streets, I suppose. And I was certainly grateful to the people who watched over me, no matter how short the period was.

But when I turned seventeen, things changed.

“You’ll be an adult soon,” everyone told me. “You have to start preparing to live on your own.”

Damn. Nothing hurts more than basically being told that no one loved me enough to adopt me, and that my mom’s too crazy to take care of me. “Good luck, kid.”

“I’m lost,” I told my closest friend, Damien, after school one day. We both worked at a local fast food restaurant and we were walking down the street underneath sagging power lines to begin our shift. Even though beaten economy cars rattled past, spewing smoke and howling with age, he could somehow still hear me.

“Are you lost, or are you just wandering?” Damien asked, pushing his huge glasses up his small nose. His face was freckled with acne scars and framed by dark, stringy hair. “Because there’s a big difference. Maybe you’re just exploring.”

I shook my head. “I don’t think so. I’m gonna be living on the streets or something unless you let me hide out in your basement.” I tripped over a piece of the sidewalk that had been pushed up by an ancient tree, which totally helped me look more professional in my plea for living assistance. Damien rolled his eyes.

“You wouldn’t last a day with my mother. Besides, aren’t there programs you can do or something? Get yourself a scholarship?”

I snorted. “I’m not going to college, Damien.”

But it was a thought.

The next thing I knew, I was seated in a library, a mentor for some kind of shitty program for some shitty scholarship. Helping kids with autism, I guess. The scholarship Damien looked into for me was very insistent on service, so I figured I had to start somewhere. I tried to look like I actually wanted to be there, even though I was bored, had a million homework assignments, and the place smelled like a mix between a recycle bin and old lady perfume.

“Thank you guys for coming!” a librarian gushed, clapping her long, red nails together. “The participants are waiting. Come with me, and we’ll meet them in the community room.”

Several other volunteers groaned as they stood, mirroring my internal thoughts that I kept hidden. We followed the woman to a

room that was dimly lit, with the window shades pulled tight, and smelled vaguely of sweat. It was filled with kids; half of them with innocent grins on their faces, half of them crying. Everyone dove to sit across from the kids that looked the happiest, leaving me with one huddling in the corner. I looked behind me and saw that the woman who had led us here was busy engaging in conversation with a confused volunteer. Another adult loomed over the crying kid, but he looked like he was making it worse.

“Hey,” I said, approaching them. “What’s up?”

The adult sighed, but relief flickered in his eyes. I was relieving him of his duty, I guess. “Hello there,” he said, looking like he wanted to bolt to the nearest coffee shop. “This is Jack. You two want to be buddies?”

The boy shook his head, the pile of brown curls on his head swishing back and forth. He looked to be in junior high, and was wearing a nerdy graphic tee. Biting my lip, I bent over and tried to smile at him. It was then I realized that I’d never really had a one-on-one conversation with an autistic kid before.

“Hey, buddy,” I tried. As soon as the words left my mouth, the adult helper was halfway to the door. “You’re... Jack?”

The boy, Jack, nodded. His eyes looked puffy and red, like he had been crying, but his cheeks were dry now. He took a finger and started tracing the patterns of the carpet. I sat down next to him after a moment, sighing as my muscles relaxed. I tried asking him other questions, but he didn’t answer until I inquired about his shirt. *This is not a drill*, it read, showcasing a cartoon hammer.

“My dad likes to build,” he mumbled, curls falling into his eyes and shielding his face from my view. “He got me this shirt for my birthday.”

“That’s so cool.” I leaned against the wall next to him, but he didn’t flinch away. “When was your birthday? Was it recently?”

“Yeah. It was—it was last week.” He pushed himself up out of the tight ball he had curled into and brushed the hair from his eyes, but he still didn’t make eye contact. His honey-brown eyes continued darting all over the room and he breathed steadily through his

mouth, his breath smelling of peanut butter crackers.

"What's your name?" he suddenly asked me, peering at me through black-framed glasses.

"Benjamin," I said. He clapped his hands together once, like he thought of something.

"Benny," he said loudly, and I shook my head. Only one person had ever been allowed to call me Benny.

"Just Benjamin," I said, trying not to be too stern with the kid. He shook his head back and forth, lapsing into silence as he watched all the other kids playing and goofing off with their buddies.

"Got a game you wanted to play?" I asked him. "Or any crafts you wanted to make?"

Jack shook his head again, very adamant this time. I sighed and tried to think about my scholarship.

"Well...what *do* you like?"

Jack turned his gaze upward, his eyes glinting as though he understood something I didn't. "Vending machines," he said simply.

I gawked for a second, then laughed, "Ain't no way I'm buying you snacks."

Jack sighed at that and went back to drawing circles on the carpet.

I rolled my eyes. "Okay, fine. Whatever you want."

He was so excited, he jumped into the air, tattered blue converse skipping in place with anticipation. I grinned as he began telling me what types of snacks he liked, and it was hard for me to silence him so I could ask the librarian if we could venture outside to find the vending machines.

"You can," she said slowly, staring at Jack. "He just... he doesn't usually eat anything but his dad's peanut butter crackers. We have to bend over backwards just to feed him and make him drink."

I shrugged. "He seemed pretty excited about it."

Jack and I left the room and wandered through the looming shelves crammed with plastic-covered books we both would probably never read, keeping our eyes peeled for the vending machine. I kept a close eye on him, but that didn't stop the restless pound-

ing of my heartbeat in my ears or the jittery shaking of my hands. What was I supposed to do if he just ran out the door, hollering for freedom? Or started attacking some random snot-covered kid in between the shelves?

Jack slowed so suddenly in the middle of the aisle that I nearly bumped into him.

“Are you okay, Jack?” I asked. He crossed his arms over his chest as he walked, dragging out each and every step.

“I’m thirteen,” he grumbled. I blinked, confused, as we rounded the corner of a bookshelf and started walking through the kids’ area. Picture books, blocks, and half-colored pieces of paper were scattered everywhere like confetti. I half-wondered if Jack’s group of friends had come through here.

“What?”

“I said, ‘I’m thirteen.’ Remember? I’m older now. You don’t have to tail me anymore and keep watch over me like I’m still a baby.”

He started sprinting and my stomach leapt into my throat.

“Wait, Jack—”

The kid vanished behind a bookshelf, and when I rounded the corner, I saw the vending machine sitting at the end, crammed into a corner. He was standing in front of it, swaying back and forth and wringing his hands excitedly. With a few bounding footsteps, I stood next to him, taking in all the colorful candy, snacks, and drinks.

“Okay, buddy,” I said, still breathing hard from chasing him. “What snack do you want?”

Jack shook his head, pressing his fingers against the glass. “I want a lemonade,” he said, turning his face towards me. Something was familiar in his expression, but he still didn’t look me in the eyes. “I want a lemonade, but with no lemon pulp.”

# Glinda

*Cassie Mitchell*



# Turn North, O Weary Soul

*Bethany Worrell*

Turn north, oh weary soul  
Let your eyes gaze upon familiar sights  
While there is pain in knowledge  
There is comfort in being known

Turn north, oh wand'ring wit  
And remember your former joys  
Recollect your thoughts in traversed trails  
Perhaps oneself you'll find again

Turn north, oh stoic heart  
There you may cast off your might  
To carry is an admirable thing  
To be held is strongest of all

Turn north, oh anxious one  
Return to havens whose rest you'll meet  
Let brick or birch encase you  
And lead to plateaus of peace

Turn north, oh mourning mind  
Let your shadow fall on graves  
You hold more tread and trail  
Far from the south, so let them lie

Turn north, my sweet child  
Life lies before you, unknown, untested

Let not today refuse  
The joys tomorrow could hold

Turn north, oh weary soul

# Snow Day

*Mary Chittle*

“

**A**lright! Snow stuff on everyone!” calls my mom from down the hall.

Today is a snow day, and a snow day is not to be wasted indoors. A flurry of footsteps pound through the kitchen as my 8 siblings and I stampede towards the mudroom. I grab my boots, snow pants, and coat, snagging my favorite hat and gloves from the mitten tree where they have been drying in front of the heater. I bring them back to the living room where I will have more room to work. On the way there, I pass Mom wrestling Toby into his snowsuit, him urging her to hurry. It is always a race to see who can get dressed and out the door first.

Today, I want to win for once.

I stuff my pants into the tops of my socks—it helps you to not get snow in your feet— and pull my snow pants on. This year is the first year my snow pants didn’t have suspenders, I am finally a big kid (sure, this means that I get a lot more snow down my back that melts into my pants, but that is a small price to pay for big kid status).

Next to me, my older sister Abby already has one boot on. No way am I letting her beat me. I shove one boot on, then the second, yanking the elastic band at the bottom of my snow pants over the rubber tops of my bogs. Next my coat— “Grab your sleeve, Steve!” Mom always told us so our long sleeves didn’t get bunched up around our elbows. Finally, I don my sparkly purple hat and my blue mittens. I’m ready.

I run for the door to the garage, victory in sight.

But before I can grab the knob, Adam is there in front of me, smirking as he pulls the door open and saunters out (older brothers are the worst). I trudge out behind him and walk alongside our big blue van until I reach the edge of the garage and step onto the icy driveway (Dad snow-blown it before he left for work; I guess principals don't get snow days) and am immediately rendered blind by the brilliant sunlight, which is magnified by the freshly fallen snow.

The rest of my siblings stumble into the brightness, everyone squinting through one eye, struggling to adjust to the sunlight. Mom comes out last, making sure the door is shut to keep the cold from penetrating the house.

"Grab the sleds and let's head to The Circle. Everyone has to carry one."

The Circle is the cul-de-sac at the end of our neighborhood where the snowplow dumps all the snow, and therefore has the best snow piles, perfect for sledding when our little front yard slope isn't good enough and we don't want to go all the way to the Berta's hill (the big hill). It's also where we scooter in the summertime, the only place we can scooter without mom or dad (our neighborhood has no outlet to M-72, the busy highway through the woods, so there's never much traffic).

"Can you pull me, Mommy?" Toby asks. He's only three, so he isn't subject to the sled-carrying mandate, and he probably won't have to walk all the way either.

"Ask one of your brothers or sisters, I have to pull Iggy," Mom responds, buckling my one-year-old youngest brother into his light blue baby-sled with the extra wide base to prevent sharp turns and baby spills.

Toby turns to survey his options—who is the most likely to say yes? He knows better than to ask Adam, because he'd just dump Toby into a snowbank at the first chance. Abby would probably say yes—she's a suck-up sometimes.

I quickly volunteer: "I'll pull you Tobes, go grab the Torpedo" (the Torpedo is the best pulling sled, but also the fastest for downhill sledding). If I'm good and extra helpful, maybe Mom will let me

have hot cocoa when we get back (I guess I'm the suck-up today). With a grin, Toby runs to the porch to acquire his chariot. He scrambles up the icy steps and slip-slides his way back down, Torpedo in tow.

After settling an argument between Emma and Bella about who gets the blue saucer sled and who is stuck with the red one (somehow it's slower, despite being the same brand, both bought at the same Ace Hardware, right next to our Church), Mom starts pulling Iggy towards The Circle. Adam and Abby are already halfway there, sleds atop their heads, with Adam stopping every few feet to slide the next few on his knees, relishing the iciness of the road.

Gabi and Juju are waiting at the bottom of the driveway, Gabi already complaining that she's freezing. I roll my eyes and tell her to toughen up as I pass her, even though my nose is cold and there's a definite bite to the breeze. Torpedo rope around my waist, I step over the small bank left at the end of the driveway by the snowplow, Toby almost falling out as the Torpedo scrapes over a hardened chunk of snow.

By the time we get to The Circle, I'm no longer even a bit cold. Pulling a sled in big clunky boots while wrapped in layers of snow gear will warm you right up, I promise.

The snow piles are beautiful, pristine, nearly untouched by footprints. But not entirely, and not for long. My siblings have already begun their damage, and I quickly join the fray. Luckily, this isn't the first big snow of the year, so beneath the two-plus feet of pure fluff are hardened mountains of snow and ice. This new layer will make sledding down them even faster, like adding soap to a slip-slide.

The outer bank of The Circle, the ring around the outside, is the border wall, holding it all in, broken only by where the snowplow pushes inwards to clear the road. Then there's the central range, in the center. That's where the best sledding is.

But The Circle isn't all mountains. There's also no-man's land, the flat expanse behind the central range, between it and the border wall. That's where you end up if you're pushed off the pile during

King of the Mountain (which always ends in tears, but we always play it anyways—and Adam always wins).

I abandon Toby, even sacrificing my claim on the Torpedo when the game begins with Bella yelling (foolishly; she doesn't stand a chance, and she's typically the one who cries):

"I'm the King of the Hill!"

Chaos ensues.

After dumping and being dumped off the central range plenty of times, Abby and I head to the outer bank to see if we can walk along the edge. It's harder than it looks, and we keep slipping. So, we decide to fall off on purpose instead.

We stand straight as soldiers, back to no-man's land—which is still mostly untouched, at least where we are. On the count of three, we fall backward, keeping our legs locked and knees unbent. We sink immediately two feet deep into the fresh powder, and it plumes upward, burying us beneath the fluffy crystals. We both yelp in surprise; we weren't expecting to end up underneath so much snow. I can't see the sky anymore, and when I breathe in, all I get is snow and an instant brain freeze. Abby and I claw our way back up to standing, both sputtering and wiping our eyes.

That's when I realize how much snow has gotten into my coat and is slowly melting its way down my back and into my pants. By the disgruntled expression on Abby's face, she is experiencing the same thing.

It's time to go home.

Everyone else is ready too, tired out from sledding, snowball fights, and battles for the throne. We all trudge back home, wet and cold, but happy, glad to be home playing in the snow instead of sitting in school looking longingly out the window as the teacher drones on. When we get home, we hang up our sodden clothes ("No mittens left on the floor! They won't dry and then you'll be left with cold wet hands tomorrow!").

Red-faced and clear-eyed, we sit down at the table to watch some *Backyardigans* while Mom makes us chicken dinos and hot cocoa (I guess we were good; she even lets us have mini marshmallows!).

# Flower

*Megan Bonfield*



# Drown Me

*Zaneon Meinhart*

Drown me—

In liquid dopamine:

In my ears, in my eyes, in my nose and mouth and lungs.

Leave me—

Senseless, breathless, lifeless.

Wrap the cords around my throat so that I cannot scream,

Plug up my ears so I cannot hear the screams of others.

Feed me—

A happy ending, a storybook, a lullaby to help me sleep.

Fill me—

With more pleasure than I can stand,

With enough numbness to feel empty.

Curse my ears, my eyes, my nose and mouth and lungs

For they can take no more.

Numb me—

To pain,

But also to pleasure.

The feeling too good makes the feeling too bad

So. Much. Worse.

Caress me—

Every neuron soothed to feel the perfect amount of nothing,

With enough tenderness to never want to leave.

Leave my hands wanting nothing more than to hold You: chemical,  
mechanical lover,

You: antidote to every venom but only for a while,

You: my addiction but also my cure through connection,  
You: I wish You had never been.

I would rather be:

Drowned—

In the vivid suffering

Left—

To die without hope

Fed—

With toxins unknown than a toxin known too well

Filled—

With maggots after death than the ones you plant in my brain feast-  
ing on any crumb of life

Numbed—

By ether or alcohol or opium as I die a real death

Caressed—

By a real lover as I succumb to the darkness in their arms.

You are a curse for the ages, but one that I speak unto myself in  
Every second of every hour of every day of every year of my life—  
‘Til death do us part.

# Future Summer

*Summer Malicoat*

**T**o Future Summer,  
Your life has been one of the most bumpy paths, but you must let this give you the push to succeed. No using it as a crutch to find excuses not to push forward. Find a way to reconnect with your children and what few family members you have. This will allow you to find the identity achievements you have so aimlessly been searching for.

You took family into your own hands, creating your own family network when you married Michael and became Mrs. Ritchie. Love him with your whole heart and trust in it being enough.

All your life you have built up walls to avoid the hurt of finding friends and the convoy of such. I understand this fear fully, but it's time you find new trust in others and tear down those walls to create new friendships. Find the center and peace will follow.

The romantic relationship you have now ensures you will have closure in sharing everything with Michael. Never stop growing in that relationship, and let it be the proof you need to grow in all your relationships in life: family, friends, and all of the above.

I know you are in fear of no one remembering you, but this should not be a fear at all. You have already found the one thing that, no matter what, you'll leave behind as your legacy. I have seen it firsthand because every day you teach not only yourself but every youngster you come across: ask a question you didn't know the answer to the day before. So, I believe wholeheartedly that you have your aspirations set in stone. Good for you.

All that you have endured, good, bad, and indifferent, gives you the ability to impact lives by sharing and giving your wisdom as

freely as anyone will allow you to.

The education you have earned and worked so long and hard on shows. Even back in second grade, when you had teachers telling your caregivers you would never graduate, due to your learning disabilities. You'd only get a certificate of completion. You did it. Who cares you were almost twenty when you walked across the stage? You homeschooled yourself and got that high school diploma. And you didn't stop there. You continued that learning and got a college degree. You kept pushing and learning to become more educated every day.

You gave yourself all the tools for a career. You use that story to encourage younger generations with learning disabilities, and you showed them it is possible. You're a hero. Never forget that.

The biggest lifestyle change you made in your life was finding the confidence to overcome addiction and live sober. Learning that was scary, and it was one of the most rewarding things you ever did. It created what I like to think of as the butterfly effect: changing one major fault let the rest of life fall into place.

Now you can travel and see all the places you only ever dreamed about. Funny how finding peace in all these areas of life gave you the ability to give yourself the personal reward you always wanted in seeing the world.

So let's talk about personal growth. Go ahead and pat yourself on the back. No, really go ahead... I'll wait.... Never be ashamed that you are now able to say you're proud of yourself. The biggest thing you have done is learn to love yourself. Wow, that feels nice, yeah?

Spiritual understanding and the relationship you have built with God are the most important privileges you have ever given yourself. Growing in your faith is something that never has to stop. You can be at peace knowing your life here in this fleshly body is just the practice you need to live on in eternal Life in Heaven. No fearing death. You've shared the love God has taught and given you, so you don't have to be afraid for the ones you leave behind. You'll all one day be at home in the Kingdom of Heaven again. God bless you,

future me. I love you.

You have lived a healthy life, giving you your plan in extended life.

You'll always be remembered and never forgotten. Now, always, and forever. You're never alone when you are your own #1 fan.

You found the peace you deserve.

Love,  
Little ol' You, Summer Dawn

# Endless Possibilities

*Cassie Mitchell*



# Girls Night

*Kadin Gaviola*

The time it takes to warm up  
Is the moment I walk through the door.  
The validation of braless nights  
And talk of all the struggles that could take down this nation.  
Bring me cookies and I'll trade you my life force.  
Give me a hug and I'll give you all my love.

It's so simple to slip into this world;  
Piling worries to set ablaze in our chants of change  
And pleads of better things.  
Gasps of "how could they..." and "no way..."  
Fill the room and leak into the hallway.

Our voices crescendo into laughter  
That suckles fear out of bleeding hearts.  
How could this be the salve to my soul?  
It's sometimes so easy to heal like this.

As the quality of the life women lead  
Diminishes to dust under lock and key.  
Under guise of protection  
We are cut-off from our toiling fight.

Are we seen at eye level  
And can you hear me through the glass if I scream?  
I know they can; these girls have caught every tear  
And felt each mile lost in exchange for a step of progress.

I am armored with a hope  
That future women will see this space  
And give more weight to it.  
I hope they cherish it when their life depends on it.

# Cold Nostalgia

*Abby Meinhart*

I think about those days often. The ones where the sun shines perfectly through the clouds, the sprinkler is on, and I am wearing my jean shorts with Ariel on them and a rainbow mermaid scale tankini top. My hair is held down to my skin with a mixture of water droplets and sweat. I stop every so often to pull sand burrs out of my feet because I refuse to wear shoes. When you are young, there seems to be this filter surrounding you at all times. You know so little about the world and what is going on around you. All you know is the smell of the summer air and going to sleepovers where you eat too many sour gummy worms.

I was at a sleepover with my friend, Haylee. She was turning 12 and there were three of us that went over to her house to spend the night. Her mom set out gummy worms, skittles, M&M's, and basically any other candy a 12-year-old could dream of having at their party. We listened to Justin Bieber and had cake before she opened her presents. This is the first time I remember ever thinking about money. She got 3 tickets to see Justin Bieber. I knew Haylee's family had a lot and I knew we had much less. I watched Haylee's mom that night. She brushed her hair and asked her many times if she needed anything. She was so attentive. Later that night we went out to try and ride Haylee's skateboard, and I fell down and scraped my elbows. I didn't cry when I scraped them, but I did as Haylee's mother blew gently on them before covering my scrapes with bandaids.

When I was younger, many years before slumber parties with friends, at around seven years old, I stayed with my grandmother a lot. She wasn't old, only in her fifties. But she was sick. She had a drawer full of pill bottles that she kept by her bed and she took

them every morning and every night. I used to sit at her vanity as she put lipstick on me before church on Sunday mornings. As she leaned over me to click on her lamp, she smelled like a mixture of baby powder and insulin. I remember getting water at her house. The ice tasted like salt and the water was tinged with some kind of yellow color, but it was refreshing. In front of her house she had a big oak tree. Unfortunately, it was sick too and the tire swing held up by a rope the age of my father blew in the breeze taunting me to press my luck and climb onto it. I remember when she died. I was in fifth grade. For her funeral, I parted my hair to the side and wore a large white flower in my hair. The last time I saw her alive, she had an oxygen mask over her face, and she couldn't breathe, let alone speak. I looked at her, eyes closed, mouth agape begging for air. Just over a month later we burned down her house because it had a rat infestation. The tree went up in flames too.

Before my grandmother passed away, I remember sitting outside on the wooden floorboards of the porch in the middle of summer. It was hot and my dad told me to wait inside, but I was too excited to see my mother. I sat on the porch for hours waiting for her car to pull up in the driveway. I knew she would probably bring me a gift. When she stepped out of the passenger side of the car, sunglasses covering her eyes, her clothes hung off of her skinny body in a not quite unflattering way. She looked beautiful in my eyes; with honey gold highlights streaking through her hair and her collarbone peeking through her camisole. I didn't go with her that day. She stayed for less than an hour on the porch. We never even went inside, and we took a lot of pictures together and some of me by myself. I was elated to see her at the time, but looking back now I know she was in the height of her addiction. I know she just took the pictures to post on Facebook, but the sun was shining down on her that day and her arms wrapped around me, and I felt like the luckiest little girl alive.

I think the filter I mentioned is necessary. Reality is a hard pill to swallow, especially when you're so small and unassuming. Time is a monster. It eats away at all of the good things in your memory until the only thing left is exhausted hopefulness that someday the filter

will return and you will be able to live again in blissful ignorance. That you can love your mother despite her bony, drug-ridden body, that you can see your grandma plump and full of life, and that you never have to cry when someone blows on your elbows.

# Skeleton

*Kaitlyn McNamee*



# I CAN'T BREATHE

*Samantha Burris*

The weight of his boot  
cemented on my neck  
suffocating me

“mama...mama”

Even as a grown man  
the fear of a small child  
lost in the world alone and afraid  
resides in me  
calling out for mama  
longing to feel her warm home and  
her safe arms embracing me  
Timelapse memories of my life flashing by  
as my eyes flutter, fighting to stay alive  
as my world fades to white

I

can't

breathe

inhaling                                  exhaling

slowly feeling my life slip between concrete cracks  
How does his badge give him the power  
To take my life from me?

## He isn't God

## Speaking to God

“Why do I have to suffer like this?”

Suffocating beneath the foot of a man  
that feels superior to me  
stepping on me as if it the color of my skin

is the dirt of the earth's elements  
I am beneath him  
my skin color automatically convicting me of guilt  
my blackness armed me even though I was unarmed

“I didn't steal anything”

I struggle to say through aspirated breaths  
and clenched teeth as my face is pressed  
to the cold, gritty, and hard surface of the concrete.  
I've been enduring this pain for approximately

9 minutes and 29 seconds

minutes that feel like hours

like telling time on a broken clock  
my heartbeat fading into the shadow

I've been captured in my whole life

Thump...Thump...Thump

Bystanders watching as this man steals my life

He's the convict!

Now that my heart stops beating

They rise at my demise

Now they scream my name

Now Black lives matter.

Their voices echoing through megaphones

As they protest through the streets

The same street that claimed my life

Police brutality has been going on for years!

How does one badge

instill so much fear in us

The same badge worn to

Honor, Serve, and Protect

Kills, Destroys, and Neglects

My tragedy is my legacy

No Justice                      No Peace

I CAN'T BREATHE

*In memory of George Floyd*

# The Scream

*Raina Swopshire*

I pass the bottle of D'USSÉ to my husband, Juice, on my left. I cautiously watch him take two huge gulps. I shouldn't worry about if it will be a good night or not; he usually only turns abusive if he drinks something cheap like Christian Brothers. But still, I can't help but wait for the other proverbial shoe to drop on my goodnight. Juice's cousin, Bain, is here visiting us from Detroit. They're also best friends so it was only right we welcomed him with a bottle. Although Juice's excessive drinking usually turns me off from partaking tonight, I plan to let nothing ruin my night.

As we near the end of the bottle, I'm lost in the sounds coming from our speakers. Young Thug's 'Jeffery' album is playing, and I am in awe of his talent. He played every instrument himself used on every track of this album. As I sing to 'Ri-Ri', I know they are going to want to get another bottle to drink, and tonight I'm down. I don't want this good vibe to end, so I won't put up my usual protests. Sure enough, as soon as the thought ends in my head Juice says, "Aye, we need anotha one of these."

I look at the time. It's going on 3 AM but I'm in Vegas; a long way from Indiana, so the liquor store is still open. As we head outside to our Range Rover, we are all laughing and talking until the scream. It was the most blood-curdling scream I have ever heard. Soul shattering. Heart stopping. My hands shake as I try to pull the handle to the passenger side door. "What the fuck?" I question, with my eyes popping out of my head, looking frantically back and forth between Juice and Bain.

"Kids still running around at night?" Juice offers an answer. As we get in, I think about this. Must be teenagers running and playing.

Except we live in a quiet suburb. However, that is more likely to happen then where my crazy mind took me. I try to relax and get back in the mood since nobody else seemed to have the reaction that I did.

As bottle number two gets passed around and Young Thug continues to play, my body is stiff as I try to dance, and my voice becomes robotic like an automated message as I try to rap his lyrics. I can't ignore the scream. My mind keeps imagining all types of horrible reasons someone would scream like that. I try one more time to make sure I'm not tripping. I bring it up again, but Juice and Bain both tell me that to them, "it sounded like a young pre-teen girl screaming having fun as if she was playing tag. Chill out, you always thinking the worst have fun."

Sensing I was killing the mood, I let it go, but I had more questions. If she was playing tag, why was she the only one screaming? Where's the other kids? And at 3 AM? But true, I did know as a kid we did the worst at 3 AM. But we were unsupervised in the hood. Not in a gated community on Sunset Blvd. Not wanting to start an argument or be the one to ruin the night, I do my best to ignore my racing heart and how I seemed to jump at even the slightest sound. Eventually, we finished the bottle and all pass out, sleeping in the living room.

I wake with a start to someone stomping on my head. Wait, no, that's not right. My head is pounding, and I remember all the D'USSE I drank. Then I hear it. It sounds as if the ice cream truck is on my porch blasting its music. Wait, that's not right either. My phone is ringing over and over on the table. I grab it and read the screen: One One, my neighbor and best friend. Reluctantly, I answer, "What One One?"

"Did you see what happened?" He responds.

"What happened last night?"

"What you talking about?"

"About what happened last night."

“No, I just woke up when you called.”

“I’m sending it to you now. She stayed across the lot by Auntie JoJo. Call me back.”

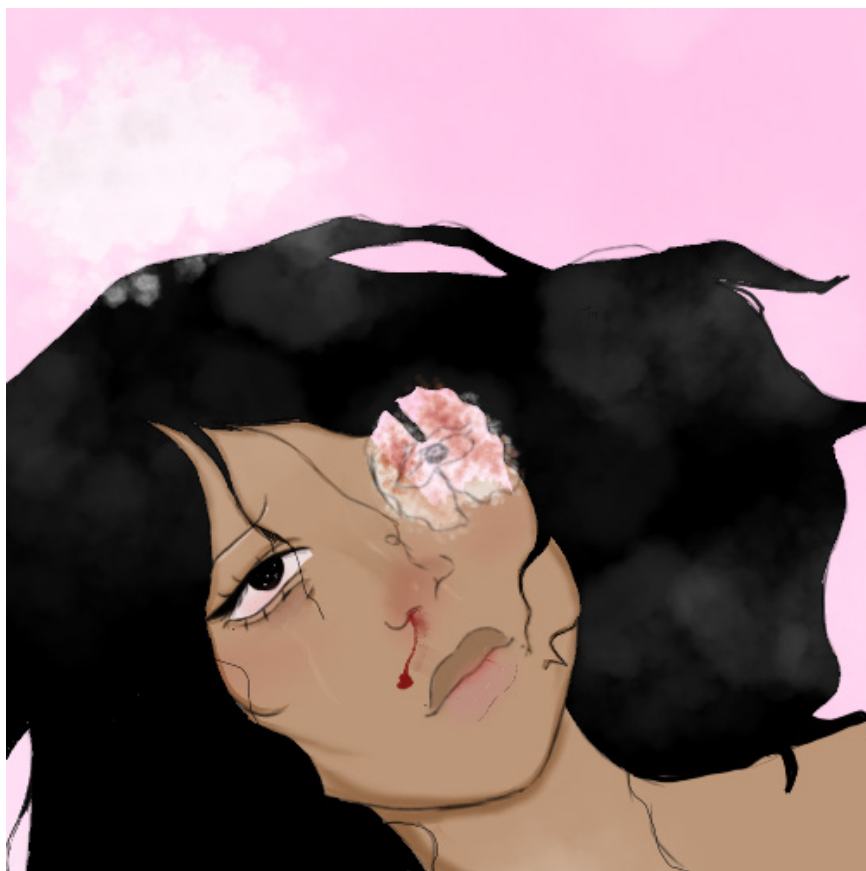
He hangs up and I instantly get a text from him. I open it up and my palms start to sweat immediately. I can’t believe what I’m reading: Woman in Henderson stabbed to death by husband. I scroll down and sure enough at 3:09 AM someone called the police to Sommerset Park reporting a scream they heard. Police found one of my neighbors stabbed to death outside her condo. Apparently, her husband started to stab her while she was in bed sleeping. Her three kids were asleep in their rooms. She managed to get away and run out of the house. He chased her, caught her, dragged her back to the front of their home and finished stabbing her to death. She was screaming as she tried to run away. At the same time, we were outside heading to the liquor store. That realization makes everything in my stomach come up all over the table. Juice laughs saying, “Dang, you can’t handle yo liquor now?”

I shove my phone in his face with the news report still pulled up and watch as his smile fades, eyebrows rise, and eyes go big.

I knew there was something else to the scream.

# Mourning Love

*T. H.*



# Sunday

*Thomas Barthauer*

First there came the sound of ringing bells.  
A tumult of glory.  
A rising sound of joy in the far, far echoing  
distance.

The slamming of fresh-cleaned car doors,  
gleaming,  
scaring the birds,  
waking the dogs from their lazy time in the sun.

Two kids on the bikes their grandparents bought,  
racing around a traffic cone.

A honk.  
Red lights gliding through a golden world.  
A buzzing streetlamp standing stoic and alone.

And through the dark, dark woods a man is whistling the tune his  
father taught him,  
while cold October blows in from the west.

# Featuring Works By

Thomas Barthauer

Megan Bonfield

Julianna Britt

Samantha Burris

Zachary Casabella

Mary Chittle

Kadin Gaviola

T. H.

Summer Malicoat

Kaitlyn McNamee

Abby Meinhart

Zaneon Meinhart

Cassie Mitchell

LaDonna Roudebush

Raina Swopshire

Bethany Worrell