

# the SLIGO Journal of Arts & Letters

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## Poetry

# Invasive Grace

Constance Sutter

First Place Winner, *Sligo Journal* Student Poetry Contest, 2024-2025

Alive the vine along the chain link fence  
strewn in our 'hood. It peered its head as dusk  
drew near, and slipped outside our grasp. It slid  
below the grass between, our house and the  
fencing. The dark green leaf, rose to leer, through  
panes of drip-smeared glass. I stood aghast  
as time had passed, quite slowly now I feared,  
my voice unspared, and as I stared, the vine  
stretched high and near. Against the glass, it slapped  
too fast, the leaves spread twice the size. Tendrils  
twisted eagerly, long spindles crissed and crossed  
it flailed, this mass, and spilled through cracks,  
then burst glass all around. Beneath the mass,  
on crackling glass, in shadow I was found.

# Rapture

Silas Stutz



Tired  
Silas Stutz



# A Foreign Student's Tale

Vanesa Vargas

Second Place Winner, *Sligo Journal* Student Poetry Contest, 2024-2025

I remember the first months,  
A place where every corner whispered “new.”  
Unfamiliar faces, potential friends.  
It was an empty canvas, waiting to be painted.  
“This is where my future begins,”  
I believed.

But time does not wait—  
It shifts, quietly,  
Pulling me with an unimaginable strength.  
Time is rude.

A year has almost passed, and joy is gone.  
I stand in the middle of everything,  
While people laugh in a language I barely understand—  
They belong.

“I no longer have a place to call home,”  
I think every day.  
The echoes of my old life have disappeared,  
I faded with them.

What happens when I do not fit anywhere?  
A presence that does not belong.  
I am a shadow, drifting lost in this limbo.  
A guest.

The colors are foreign,  
I cannot paint.  
My canvas is empty.  
But time is leaving me,  
A ticking clock—  
I am late.

# what i am

Margo Contreras Amaya

\*dzt\* \*dzt\*

(throw me an apple and)

\*dzt\* \*dzt\* \*d-\*

(wedge it between my wings and)

\*dzt\* \*dzt\* \*dzt\*

(tell me that

i am an insect.)

\*dzt\* \*dzt\* \*dz-\*

(i scurry about,

happily)

\*dzt\* \*dzt\* \*dzt\*

(until you march into my prison)

\*dzt\* \*dz-\*

(and

remind me )

\*dzt\* \*dzt\*

(of who i never was.)

\*dzt\*

(i'm sorry)

\*dzt\*

(that i can't)

\*dzt\* \*dzt\*

(be the son you wanted.)

\*dzt\* \*d-\*

(you could tell me)

\*dzt\* \*dzt\*

(that i am human too.)

\*dzt\* \*dzt\*

(i will believe you

and)

Are You Dead?  
Zee FitzHugh



# Oedipus

Romula Hawthorne



\*dzt\* \*dzt\*  
(i won't deny it  
and)  
\*dzt\* \*d-\*  
(you will love me—)  
\*dzt\* \*dzt\* \*dz-\*  
(that is if you love me at all—)  
\*dzt\* \*d-\*  
(ever the same.)

\*dzt\* \*dzt\*  
(as the apple rots and)  
\*dzt\* \*dzt\* \*dzt\*  
(seeps its juices into my body)  
\*dzt\* \*dzt\*  
(my wings still unfold and)  
\*dzt\* \*dzt\* \*d-\*  
(i'll say  
"I am human too.")

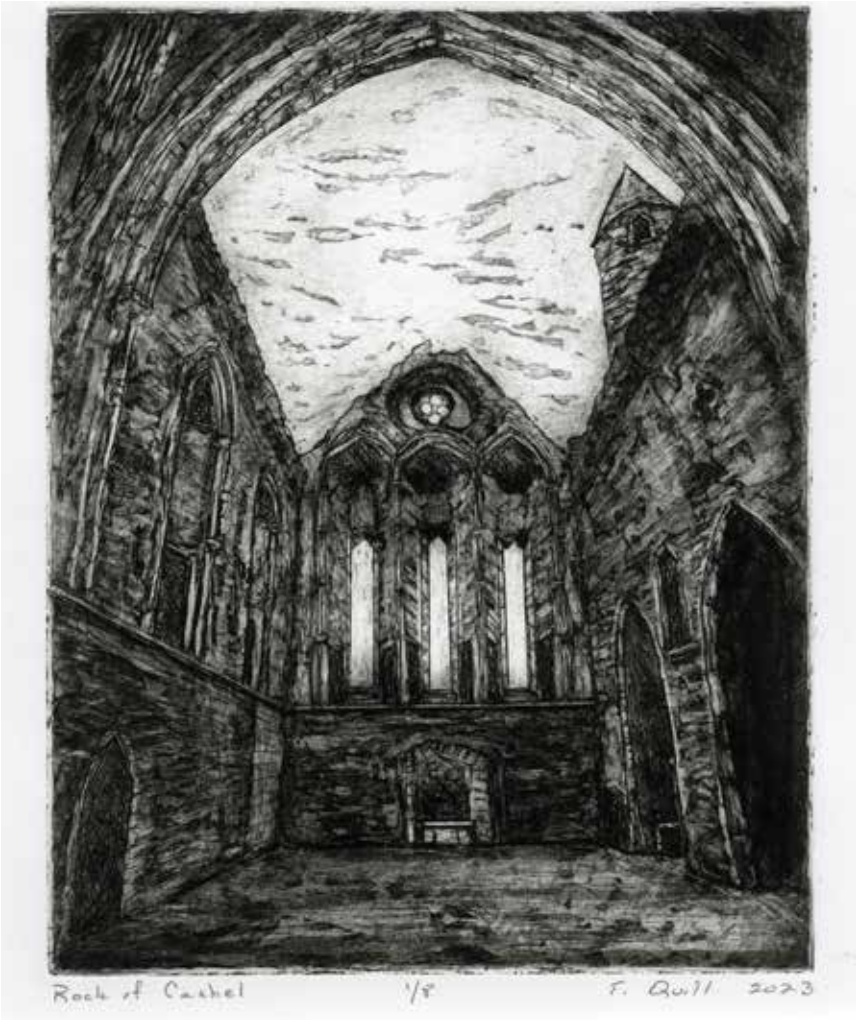
# On Your Birthday, An Eclipse

Heather Levine

(For S)

I'd tell you the sky looks the same as  
any other, but the eclipse is casting  
crescents as darkness falls not quite,  
a notable shift to still while my daughter sleeps  
upstairs and my son stands in a soccer field  
with his classmates, half a mile away.  
I want to tell you you'd love them,  
but I don't know if you'd love this path  
that I chose, once upon a time,  
when possibilities seemed endless,  
when I didn't know you'd never grow older.  
Do you remember Hocking Hills,  
my dad's telescope, the night so clear  
we could see it all? Today, the sky  
darkens, but the light will shift. I will  
meet my son at the bus, his long hair  
tangled in the wind, and we'll walk  
home, the sun casting shadows,  
our bodies stretched before us.

Rock of Cashel  
Terry Quill



Yellow  
James Loll



# Bigfoot Hunting

Mac McKinzie

You bet your ass I'm going to find you, you big hairy motherfucker.  
You just bet your ass,  
Slap your bookie on the shoulder and  
Grin and show a whole bunch of your broad grinding teeth,  
Make him say, *holy shit, it's bigfoot,*  
*And he's handing me a mad of cash.*  
I'm going to find you, you belligerent dick.  
I'm going to get lost in your woods, get  
Sick of campfire dinners and wear down my soles  
I'm going to stand on downed logs looking through my  
Stupid little binoculars for hours, hours,  
Looking for you.

Last winter I found a few bones I thought might have been yours.  
And I wept, I did, I wept for you,  
I got down on my busted knees and howled for hours,  
Till a pack of wolves came and  
Got confused and  
Left.  
I thought about burying them, but it turns out they were just  
A bunch of big old bears  
That lived a long time ago and died,  
Unlike you,  
You ass.

Then in Spring I was drunk in a bar and some guy  
With straw falling out of his pockets beckoned me over  
And I gave him fifty bucks and followed him to a set of footprints that I  
thought were yours.  
I measured them, photographed them  
Ashamedly, I glanced around  
Over my shoulder to make  
Sure I was alone  
And then  
Stepped my boot

Gingerly into  
The most perfect one.  
I felt small. And well contained.  
Then I found out that bastard had a set of six foot stilts and  
A pair of fake feet he'd bought buck 70 when the  
Halloween store closed. God DAMN!

I just miss you, I guess. When I was barely three feet tall I went out walking  
And my god, the sun was so bright  
And the sky was so blue  
I caught a glimpse of you  
You were singing something quietly to yourself  
And I thought it was beautiful, that sweet song of contentment  
Seeping into the patch carpets of moss and  
Leaning into divots in the trees and everything.  
Then you saw me looking, and you smiled kindly at me  
Stood up on two feet, with great effort,  
Like you had been sitting a while at your task  
Letting an ache settle in. (I'm still not quite sure what it is  
I caught you doing. Was it  
Could it have been  
Prayer?)  
And walked away.

I'm tired. And I know, everyone's tired.  
But I can only feel mine.  
Even so, it's summer, and I will, I will.  
I'll strap on those shoes  
Pack up some cans of beans  
And go out, god help me, into the woods,  
To look for you,  
You ephemeral son of a bitch.  
Because I want to hear that song again.

# Untitled

Carly Schamber



# The First Time I Lied

Ellie Orzulak

And packing slowly, I realized then – I've nowhere left to run  
The band's set up to play a dirge and they have just begun

Still children tend to chew on things,  
Especially moral matters  
I sat criss-cross there, grew some wings,  
And bent perception, shatter

My first attempt, corroded, and bent:  
A successful coordination  
Did infect, connect, and stay to rest,  
Moral abdication

And as all fathers sow their pain,  
Your ways are ours to gather  
And though you phrase things carefully,  
We'll let all meaning lather

# Happy Father

Bryan Xicara José Lopez



# Wonderful Things: An ode to my culture

LaTonya Pinkard

Being a Southern Black Woman is a song,  
A melody of what's lost and what lingers.  
Some things, thank God, are no longer,  
But others, I'll miss forever:

(To the reader, make it come to life.)

Collard Greens, fried corn and chicken wings  
lickin' my fingers to the sounds of Al Green & *Dancing Machine*,  
floating, rhyming and singing,  
laughing to jokes, joogin' and the dozens,  
"Yo Momma so fat, she's not on a diet, she's on a try-it."

Red light, green light  
Cinderella dressed in yellow  
Mother May I take 5 Giant steps to the corner market filling my pockets with  
caramel coated sticks, square sweet candies, with a bag of chips so when I  
walk, they can see the swerve of my beautiful black hips, up to my beautiful  
black lips,  
shoutin,

POOKAY!!! Whatchu doin?

You know you gone get in trouble. Imma tell yo Momma on you – are part  
of this village, building funny memories with gospels of rights, wrongs and  
go'ons.

Hallelujah! Praise God!

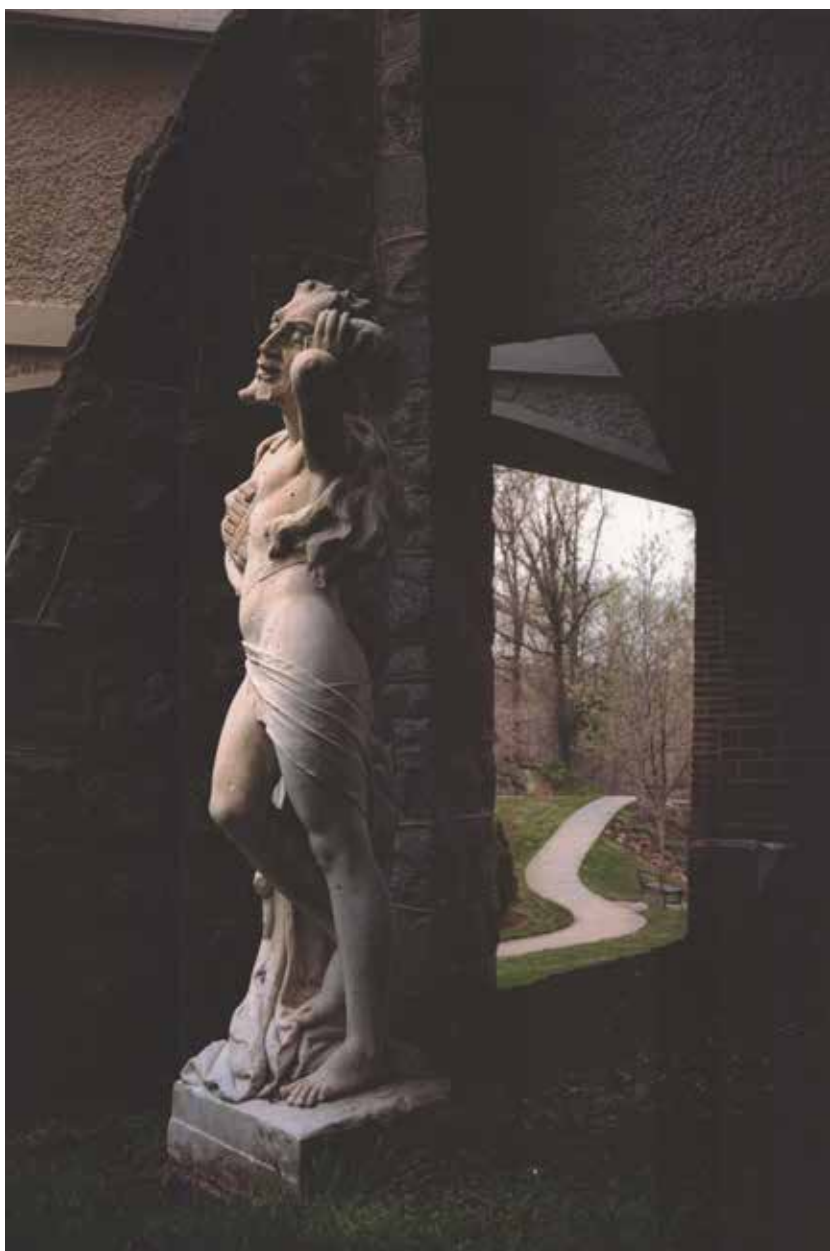
My Sunday best is up to the test as I listen to the foot tappin,' hand clappin,'  
soul wrenchin' devotions. Let the church say Yes and Amen; filling my spirit  
yet wondering the notion if,  
collard greens, fried corn and grandma's famous chicken is being fried in that  
Big Ol' Black Skillet is what idiots called my melanin  
BUT

I shout it LOUD, "I'm Black and I'm Proud."

Even though you think, I have a few cents to my  
name,

you still can't touch my swag nor my game,  
you "silly rabbit, tricks are for kids,"  
so I will never forbid myself from the collard greens, fried corn and Grand-  
ma's fried chicken and all those wonderful things.

Untitled  
James Loll



# Now Is the Right Time

Kimberly Roberson

Now is the right time to write,  
When dawn tiptoes across the sky,  
And the world stirs from its slumber,  
A canvas waiting for your words.

When the coffee steams in your cup,  
Its aroma mingling with inspiration,  
And the pen rests, eager in your hand,  
Ready to dance across the paper.

Now is the right time to write,  
When memories whisper at the edges,  
And dreams linger like morning mist,  
Begging to be captured in ink.

When the heart beats its rhythm,  
A symphony of longing and wonder,  
And the silence hums with secrets,  
Yearning to spill onto the page.

Now is the right time to write,  
When doubts retreat to shadowed corners,  
And courage unfurls its wings,  
Lifting you beyond hesitation.

So, seize this fleeting moment,  
Let your thoughts flow like a river,  
For now, is the right time to write,  
And the universe awaits your voice.

# The Oak Tree Speaks

Isabelle Soden

In ancient soil, my roots entwine,  
Through years and storms, in sun and brine.  
I stand, a silent sentinel,  
Witness to the tales time tells.  
My branches reach to skies above,  
A home for birds, a symbol of love.  
Through seasons' turn and decades' pass,  
I hold the wisdom of the grass.  
Whispers in the wind I hear,  
Stories carried far and near.  
Of lovers' vows and children's play,  
And those who've wept beneath my sway.  
Beneath my bark, life pulses slow,  
In rings that mark the time's soft flow.  
I offer shade and steady ground,  
A steadfast friend, so true, profound.  
In autumn's gold or winter's frost,  
Through each renewal, through each loss,  
I stand, enduring, ancient, free,  
I am the oak, and this is me.

Avian Stream  
Romula Hawthorne



# Tornado Boy

Rachel Sonenshine

Brown hair cloaked the side of his face.  
Crimson marks and clothes dingy dark.  
His blue eyes looked to me.  
Pleaded to me.  
I nodded.  
It was time.

Trembling hands reached towards me,  
Gripping like a pair faced with despair,  
Yanking me up hastily from under the tree.  
And I ran.  
And so did he.  
But did we look back?

My breath overcame me  
In the warm summer air.  
But I didn't stop there.  
Perturbation threatened to capture us.  
His hand in mine,  
Like interlocked chains of trust,  
A sole force amidst the heat,  
Driving my feet  
To escape the spiral.  
But was it enough?  
Almost.

Grey smoke rose from the building.  
A woman ran to her car.  
Sirens blared through the air.  
Screams of horror, saying "flee!"  
Crows sifted through the debris.

And it was loud.  
Messy.  
Terrifying.

And it kept going,  
On  
And on  
And on.  
I ran with him, fearful.

And then it was silent.  
Destruction littered the dawn.  
The trees stood frozen, soft hues of July.  
The wind was gone.  
The smoke merely a painting in the sky.  
We were safe.

# Untitled

Jada Hoffman



# Innocence

Chelsea Tanner

The story of a fire  
Does not start  
with raging infernos  
It starts with crisp timber  
that used to be healthy trees  
kindling, fragile as cold bones  
that used to embrace the wind  
With open arms  
A lonely gust of a breeze  
Screaming for its dancers  
To dance again  
It starts with dead grass  
a vengeful rainstorm  
Lightening that slashes the ground  
a punishment for all it fails to be  
a flash of light  
golden grass  
that was tired of being told  
It was useless to be beautiful  
Flame: The resurrection  
of a feral disobedience  
ignited by death and despair  
The living embodiment  
of what it means  
to be completely and utterly  
Alive.

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Journal

## Fiction

# Can You See My Outline

Annabelle Wyrick

First Place Winner, 2024 *Sligo Journal* Fiction Contest

It was a Monday when I disappeared. I was nineteen then, fresh in college and struggling with all the same issues every other college student had. I believe it was September, nearly October, and I had woken up to the buzzing of my alarm clock. The sky was a ghostly white, beaming a grey glow through the slightly tilted blinds of my bedroom window. Though all my energy told me to pull the covers over my head, I forced myself from the bed and into clothes decent enough to be outside with.

Today was different from other days in nearly no way besides how I felt; that's what I thought at the time anyway. A sickening paranoia had weighed itself heavy on my shoulders, causing my eyes to flick around corners and my appetite to spoil. Additionally, there was the added dread of having to see myself in the mirror. I had never liked my appearance, though my family would refuse to understand why. The shape of my face and the texture of my hair and skin sent sickening shivers down my spine. My body hair over my rough arms did nothing but further cement my internal disgust for myself.

I couldn't afford myself the time to think about it. I had been moving through this cycle for years at that point, stomping down my hatred for myself by convincing myself that nobody else cared, so therefore, I shouldn't either. This was encouraged by my parents and peers, essentially everyone around me aside from my best friend, Angela, whom I hadn't seen in quite some time. Angela had been there for me since early childhood, when no one else was. We had always promised to be there for each other, or at the very least I had promised. She had done so much for me it seemed unfair not to repay the favor. We got each other through middle and high school, times that to plenty of people were the worst of their lives. Though now she was gone, off to Virginia in her red Toyota, to study astronomy with a scholarship she had received for her astounding academic achievements. I would expect nothing less from her, though I couldn't dare to follow, and so I was left alone.

The strange events of what would soon become my life only started once I left the solitary confinement of my house and went into the greater world. I had left early that day, the empty halls of my home only giving more opportunities for some unseen nightmare to jump out at me from the silent nothing. It was drizzling, that monochrome sky showing a dull glow above me as the cool air of autumn clutched against my skin. Raindrops fell against my hands and hair, just sparse enough that I couldn't be bothered to get my

Untitled  
Suzanne Maggi



umbrella from my bag, and in those raindrops, I walked to the bus stop.

The bus stop felt quieter than usual, my anxious eyes wandering aloft to the things I would have usually ignored. I nearly missed the bus rolling by; however, the glowing number of my route, sixteen to be specific, caught my eye just in time. That was when it all began. I stepped forward, waving my hand to signal the bus to stop for me, but to my surprise, it did no such thing. The bus drove right by me, the driver within staring straight forward as if I wasn't there at all. After my initial confusion my brain was filled with a far louder sense of annoyance. I had to get to school, and the bus was my only way of doing that. It was ridiculous for it to just pass me by when I had been so animated with my gesture. I looked to see if anyone was around me, anyone at all to witness that injustice. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, another person stood right next to me. He was a young man, about as young as me, with dark skin and a green beanie wrapped around his shaved head. I stared at him, attempting to make eye contact to accentuate my bewilderment, but he made no attempt to return it, almost as if he was avoiding my gaze. Though there was no tension in his sight, no active effort not to look at me but instead, a gently observing the distance as if no one was looking at him at all. People are often able to sense when another is looking at them, enough that they will likely give some reaction, even if the reaction is pretending they aren't being looked at. There is a stark difference between a person who truly feels as if they are at ease, and one who is pretending to be at ease to silently communicate to another that they refuse interaction; that difference had never been important to me until now, where it suddenly became the epicenter of my mind.

*Was I dead?* I thought to myself. The man continued with his morning, seemingly oblivious to the person standing now directly in front of him, staring him down. Had something secretly caught me in the empty white halls of my house, annihilating me with such efficiency that my ghost continued to walk after my body was destroyed? Or perhaps I wasn't dead but simply invisible. But then, how could I have seen myself in the mirror so clearly only a couple of minutes ago? My mind had always been the type to linger on things like this, I could never help it; Angela would tell me that it made me a better writer, though she would also tell me to not let it eat me alive.

Eventually, others arrived and my bus, having completed an entire cycle, came back around and opened its doors, letting me quickly slip inside. I always arrived early in case I missed my bus anyway, so of all my worries, I wasn't actually too plagued with thoughts about being late for class. Not that it mattered, because no one in my class seemed to see me either. I raised my hand, eventually calling out directly to the professor, though he didn't raise his head or stop his speech. I stood up, spun around the classroom like an idiot, attempting to get anyone or anything to look at me. That acknowledgement never came.

It was clear to me then that something was spectacularly wrong, though I hadn't yet processed the scope of that mounting horror, nor had I figured out how much my life would soon be derailed. I headed home, but soon realized that I wouldn't be able to stomach staying there for long. My mother sobbed in the living room, distraught with the complete radio silence and disappearance of her favorite and only son; my sister paced with a heightened panic, chewing on her fingernails until they bled; and my father called every person he could, every station he could. Everything to find me though I was standing right in front of them. I couldn't bear to watch them suffer, tears welled in my eyes as if this was something I had done, something I had brought upon myself. I looked in the mirror again and only saw the person I was at the beginning of the day, what about me was so different now? I didn't talk differently or walk differently; however, now I was someone else that no one could see or recognize.

It was the next day that I left my home and began to wander. I deleted my messaging apps after realizing that no message I typed would ever be fully sent again. Seemingly, my erasure from public existence spread into the internet as well. I took my backpack, hollowing it out and abandoning my books and school papers; I wouldn't be needing them anymore anyway. I filled the bag with everything I could carry, and everything that I could use to survive, and then bid goodbye to my grieving family one more time in words that would never reach them. I opened my umbrella which my father had bought for me only a few days before, shielding me from the thin mists of rain which fogged my vision, and began to walk.

There were many things I learned over this journey and many places I ended up. Most places in the world are locked, hidden behind private access and keywords and items. However, slipping into an elevator can reveal many interesting conversations, though elevators are a lot scarier when you know the doors won't stay open for you.

I saw private meetings where men in suits discussed the ways to make as much money with the least ethics possible using pharmaceuticals and preying on the desperate and miserable. I saw clubs I never would have been let into, filled with people preying on those same desperate and miserable people, though in a far more intimate and uncomfortable manner. I listened to private meetings of poets in the basements of households, walking through the door or climbing through an open window, knowing it would never matter anyway. Seemingly any item I touch ceases to exist or something because nobody notices when I steal, which has become a common event. In my defense I didn't really have a choice; it wasn't like I had the money to pay for anything even if I did feel like going through the pointless endeavor of ringing myself up.

Being invisible didn't seem to suppress my hatred for public bathrooms. There was a time, however, where after stealing a boatload of makeup,

I practiced on myself in the bathroom of a grocery store after closing time. I was no professional, going only off what I had always thought was pretty on other women. It was messy, and I didn't look like any supermodel, but it was the first time I can remember that I looked in the mirror and smiled. My skin was clearer, the color on my lips giving way to an emotion I didn't know I could feel. It was nice to exist that way for a time, even though come morning I washed it all off. As ridiculous as it seemed, I was afraid that someone might see me in that state. Funnily enough, after I was stricken with this strange affliction, my fear of being seen in the wrong state by the wrong person only increased. Thoughts that I would be caught eating or shaving or otherwise existing incorrectly in public plagued me constantly.

This came to a head in a grocery store where I was slouched on the floor eating deli meat I had grabbed an aisle over. This had become a routine of mine across a variety of supermarkets, eating all I could and then stocking up on whatever was most nourishing—and at times most satisfying—to keep me alive for the journey to my next source of food. A couple of times I had the pleasure of slipping onto a bus, or into someone's car; most of the time I had to walk. I was sitting on the floor of this grocery store, when a person spun the corner and after walking a few steps appeared to stare directly at me. This is when my senses kicked in, that sense of someone staring that no one had felt for me, and I hadn't felt in turn, for quite a long time. He was the type of man I tried to avoid, bulky with a bald head and oily skin, a creased brow that always showed rage, in a white wifebeater that I can't imagine he ever took off. He walked toward me, a determined stride which sent a spiral of ever-escalating horror running through my bloodstream. I scrambled backward, though I was barely able to get away in time before he was upon me, the heavy sounds of his footsteps ringing in my ears as he closed the distance until there was no distance to close.

But he took no action toward me. In fact, quickly he walked directly past me, and as my eyes followed his feet, I noticed the twenty-dollar bill that lay on the ground just beyond my head, which he snatched up before disappearing out of my life. What followed my initial horror was an immense sorrow that pierced me to my very core. I would rather he had assaulted me if only to feel myself seen for what I was for even a moment. Hell, I would have been happy if he had killed me.

No matter where I walked, I was always alone, I was barely able to consider how the loneliness would cripple me at the beginning of my journey, though it eventually would eat me alive. I slipped into concerts but stayed away from the mosh pit, knowing that if I fell, nobody would pick me back up. Staring at the crowd, I conceptualized the feet of strangers pounding me into a bruised and swollen thing. Would they not feel my flesh beneath their shoes? Would they not slip on the uneven surface of my chest or head? Perhaps it was

only pain which could prove me as real. Maybe if I put myself in danger, they would all be forced to finally see me as I am. Despite my growing urges I shied away from the crowd that night, that was a place too hot and bright to risk my life.

The days dragged on, and as they did, I continued to walk. I walked farther and farther, becoming more disconnected with my surroundings following every step. I stopped looking at road signs, trekking down boulevards and highways I had never seen before. Oh my god, are there so many highways. When I lived a normal life, I had never thought about it, but most of my time in that unseen state was spent walking across highways. So much of America is highways stretching across miles and miles of nothing to connect to the next metropolis, though to most that would seem like a normal and unimpressive thing to cause terror, but once you had to walk one you would understand the horror.

Those moments were when my thoughts became the worst, the speeding cars screaming by willing me to submerge myself in that metal river and let my misery be taken away from me.

Eventually I let myself fall from the concrete speedway I stood on, down into a big blue river which spiraled on into the few places in America untouched by commercialism. It was a foolish mistake, which I knew all too well, but didn't care enough to prevent. My backpack was soaking, the only thing keeping all that which I needed to live a relatively normal life. When I hit the river and began to sink, I let it slip from my shoulders and submerge down into the deep, never to be seen again. When I washed ashore, I let myself lie on the barren rocks of this untouched valley for however long suited me before rising to walk again: there was no point in hiding when I couldn't be seen and there was no one to see me.

The woods stripped me of not only my equipment but my vision of myself. I never looked in the reflection of the pools I drank from. I avoided even looking down, knowing that if I did, I would only see the one thing I despised most. Ironically, though I used it to escape the highway, the woods gave me no comfort or relief. The forest ate my mentality alive, its flicking shadows and tall trunks corroding away at me until all I was looking for was a release. Knowing I was in a place where no one would see me even if they could only dragged me deeper into mental darkness.

Eventually, I once again found myself by a concrete road. The moon hung over my head, but I had no idea what time it was: maybe it didn't matter, maybe the sun wouldn't rise anyway. I suppose no matter how hard I tried I could never escape those vile strips of asphalt, those roaring monsters, the continuous reminders that I was unseen, unfelt, and unknown. Bright headlights pierced my vision from the west, like an artificial sun rising over a black horizon. I gave into the compulsion to step into the road; maybe I thought

# MAIZE

Derrick B. Douglass



those lights would bring me to salvation, bring me home. Deep down, however, I knew that wasn't the case. I understood that I would soon be reduced to a bag of wobbling blood jelly, left on the side of the road to corrode without even the fungus decomposing me. I fooled myself into thinking that was what I wanted, to be erased from my own mind as well as everyone else's, and I spread my arms wide as if to accept my passage.

But instead, the car came to a screeching halt, causing my eyes to widen and pulse to quicken. Only when the car was a couple of feet from me could I make out its detail; it was a Toyota in deep red, one that filled me with memory even before I saw the face of the driver. I already knew who it was, but even so my eyes began to stream as Angela's face came into view. She was as beautiful as she had always been, her worried eyes glittering with life as she jumped out of the car, running over to me as if I was on the brink of death, and only moments before I had been.

Her words came so effortlessly to her, her care for me so pure. "Bethany?" she posed as a question, though she knew it was me, "What the hell happened?! Are you okay?" Those were all the words she could say, so many more complicated questions no doubt swimming in her head but silenced by the urgency of my situation. Wordlessly I stumbled toward her, melting into her embrace and weeping the tears I had been holding for so long. The knowledge that one person could see me was all that I needed. Angela promised that in time the world would see me too.

# Our American Cousin

Daniel Lazo Romero

Second Place Winner, 2024 *Sligo Journal* Fiction Contest

Red. We were again at the theater. Tonight, it was red. We had visited at least a dozen times, but none seemed to bore him. Ford's Theatre was just under a mile from our home. The perfect place for a night out. Tonight we were to watch a comedy, *Our American Cousin*, with Henry and Clara joining us for this special night. Abraham was celebrating the Union's victory at one of our favorite spots. Abraham said he loved spending time with his people, even if he couldn't be directly next to them.

We sat in the Presidential box. It was a small seating area, an elevated booth to the right of the stage. Two red velvet chairs, and two other chairs behind us, one for Henry, and the other for Clara. Around the booth were US flags. Two mounted to the wall, and two more hanging from the booth's railing.

The theater filled quickly, both with people, and the noise of their heels clicking against the wooden floor. Men dragged chairs across the theater, everyone trying to get the seat closest to the President. Abraham was delighted by this attention, waving to the men and women who called his name.

Actors took the stage, signaling the beginning of the play. Tonight was Clara and Henry's first time seeing *Our American Cousin*, but Abraham's and my third. Nonetheless, we were excited to share this moment with our friends, spending time together without worry over the war. The cast was made of both men and women, short and tall. Some had physical disabilities, others thick accents and speech impediments, but I couldn't think of a better cast.

The first act was full of puns and jokes that had been repeated hundreds of times, but the crowd erupted in laughter each time. It was calming, seeing the smile on Abraham's face, the worries of war long gone. Some people in the crowd began moving as the actors prepared for the next act. Henry and Clara also moved, pushing their chairs to the left of Abraham.

The second act began, but did not receive as much laughter as the first. Abraham was a little displeased, but Henry and Clara were very hooked on the story. There was even more movement in the crowd at the end of the second act, some trying to move upstairs to get a better view. Some men began walking through the hallway outside the booth. I heard the hallway door open, but nobody came through the second door. Clara heard the door as well, suggesting Henry go to check who entered.

"Abraham's messenger was outside, so there shouldn't be a worry,"

# Curiosity

Harry Hines



-Curiosity

5/16

Harry Hines 23

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Henry said.

The third act caused the most laughter yet. It seemed like every line was followed by the crowd's laughs and applause. I felt a gust of cold air coming from the door.

"Sic semper tyrannis!" I heard.

It was followed by a loud boom. I screamed, but didn't hear sound come out. I looked around, my dress splattered in blood, and Abraham slumped over. A man stood behind us, holding a gun and dagger. He slashed Henry's shoulder, pushing through and leaping down onto the stage.

I could see Clara's lips moving but couldn't hear what she said. Henry's shouts were muffled, but loud enough for me to make out some of it.

"Stop ... man ... president ... doctor," was all I heard him say.

Blood gushed onto the floor from his shoulder, pooling under the chairs. Abraham's blood wasn't as abundant, but there was enough to cover parts of my dress and his shirt. Two surgeons rushed in. Henry pulled Clara and me aside. We walked with him to the exit as soldiers began to empty the theater.

Outside, more soldiers filled the street. Abraham was carried outside, I heard they were taking him to the Petersen's house.

"He's in too critical a condition to carry by carriage," I heard one of the surgeons say.

"We must be very gentle. The bullet could move around and cause more damage. The only way is to walk him," the other surgeon replied.

Crowds followed as the soldiers carried Abraham through the street. We walked for what felt like hours, my legs trembling, ready to give up. At the house, only Abraham, the surgeons, and some soldiers were allowed to remain inside. I was allowed inside for only a few minutes per turn; each time Abraham seemed to be getting worse.

As morning approached, the smell of blood from my dress and the house were unbearable. My head spun and throbbed, my eyes dry from all the tears I had shed. It was approximately seven a.m., and the surgeons brought me inside in a rush.

"We've done all we could. Mr. Lincoln has not shown any signs of recovery," said one of the surgeons, removing the last of his tools from Abraham's side.

There were a million things I wanted to say, but I couldn't find a way to open my mouth and let them out. I stood there frozen, watching as the surgeon signaled a loss of pulse. I had lost my husband, and the nation, their president. What are we to do now?

# Do Not Forget Me

Certitude J. Lembion

Published in the 29th edition of Phi Theta Kappa's *Nota Bene*

"You live next door, yet you somehow always take forever to get here." Oasis was lying in bed in a pink oversized shirt when he snuck through her window.

"Sorry, I was looking for my crayons." Blue's hands were empty, "Couldn't find them. Can I use yours?" He plastered a large smile on his face because who could say no to such a cute face?

"This was your idea, you know. How are you going to propose that we draw each other and have no supplies at all?" she said as she walked to the bookcase that stood in the back of her room. The third shelf was riddled with paintbrushes, sharpies, and crayons. She had meant to clean it last week but never found the time. Maybe she'll get to it next week.

"Because I knew my good friend, Oasis, would have my back." He jumped on her bed and took off his green sneakers before grabbing Bimbo.

Bimbo—with its missing eye, matted fur, and eternal brown stains—was as old as their friendship. Oasis had received the yellow teddy bear on her fifth birthday, the same day he knocked down her birthday cake because he was running recklessly. She clung on to Bimbo as she cried herself to sleep that night and swore to hate him for as long as she lived.

There was a cake on the table when she went downstairs the next morning. Blue's mom made it as a way of saying sorry about what happened yesterday. Oasis's mother cut her a slice and gave it to her. It was better than she could have ever imagined. The chocolate cake covered in pink fondant danced in her mouth as the richness of the chocolate chips exploded. She hugged Bimbo tight while devouring the cake, deciding that maybe the little boy wasn't as bad as she thought.

Oasis dumped the supplies on her bed and sat across from Blue, her legs crossed, sketchbook in hand, "My drawing is going to be better than yours."

"Doubt it. I'm a genius." And he was. Straight A student since middle school, Blue was the smartest boy in their junior class. Honor roll every semester, national math champion; name an accolade, Blue had it.

They both got to work, each with a different method: she lightly drew an outline; he began working on her left eye. The sounds of the TV downstairs leaked into her bedroom. The Property Brothers were debating over which color they should paint the kitchen of a Nashville home they were

# Cocoa Hues

Fatmata Kanu



working on. "I think the kitchen should be white," Blue mumbled, eyes not leaving the paper. He had committed her face to memory.

"What?" asked Oasis as she looked up from her sketch.

"Nothing. Where are your speakers? I wanna play some music." She pointed to the bookcase, second shelf.

"Don't play anything stupid."

"Why? Are your parents home?"

"No, I just don't want to listen to anything stupid."

He chuckled. Bringing the speaker onto the bed and connecting it to his phone, "I Wanna be Yours" by Arctic Monkeys enveloped them. They both began bobbing their heads.

This song marked her first time sneaking out of the house. She listened to it as she got dressed. One earbud in, the volume low, ears peaked in case anyone had woken up. Once her jeans, shirt, and Converse were on, Oasis tumbled out her window. Blue was waiting for her down the street, amused that she was running so fast towards him. The party they went to was shut down after only twenty minutes. Refusing to let the night spoil, they bought 7-11 snacks and sat on the swings at the nearby park. Connected by a pair of wire earbuds, they talked and listened to the song together. The empty park, the music, and moonlight shining down on her face, that was the one and only time Blue ever saw her as more than a friend.

"You have a really sharp jawline," Oasis stated. She had finally finished with the outline of his face. He looked at her and grinned, taking it as a compliment rather than an observation.

"Thank you, sugarplum." Nothing got under her skin more than that nickname. They fell silent again, a silence she was comfortable with, but he wasn't. As he drew her nose, his mind dizzied with topics that would not sound forced.

"Have you seen the new house yet?" she asked, raising the one topic he did not know how to answer. There was no use in lying, but he knew the truth would upset her.

"Yeah, we did," he began, trying to keep his tone neutral. Her eyes met his. "My room is bigger and so is the backyard." Should he say more? He stared at her, hoping to find the answer in her brown eyes. Oasis offered him a small smile, a sign that he should tell her more. If he kept talking, maybe his voice would give way to how he really felt moving so far away from her. Blue said nothing.

"That sounds exciting. More space and all," Oasis said, her gaze reverting back to the page. Her emotions were always so plainly displayed on her face. But she prayed he did not notice. Just this once.

"I'll miss you," Blue spoke softly, barely above a whisper.

She added another hair stroke to his thick, straight eyebrows and

refused to look up. She could almost feel his eyes piercing through her soul.

"I just think it's stupid to move the summer before your senior year," she said, shrugging. "Oasis." The tip of her ears became red as her name escaped from his lips. Shame?

Embarrassment? Sadness? The feelings all muddled together, inseparable.

The last time he had called her by her first name was two weeks ago. She had snuck into his room after he incessantly texted her, insisting that it was urgent. Each time he had told her that it was urgent, it never was. She hopped through his window to find him at his desk, two Surfer Cooler Capri Suns in front of him. He handed her one. "Oasis, I'm moving in three weeks." She stopped mid-sip. She searched his face, scanning it for any sign that could give away this cruel joke. There was no sign. He was serious. Blue was leaving their town.

It was not fair to be mad at him for moving. He could not say no. But she had to be mad at someone. "I'm not upset," she said.

"Liar."

His parents were getting a divorce. They sold the house, and his mother got custody, so he had to move with her. His father was staying in town, but Oasis would never ask Blue to stay with his dad. Their relationship was marked with strife, always butting heads. This led to screaming matches that the whole neighborhood could hear. And whenever things would become too unbearable at home, he would slam their front door—duffle bag in hand—and knock on the house across the street asking if Oasis was home. After a while, every time he knocked, her parents just let him in. He patiently waited for her, sitting at the corner of her bed or talking to her little sister. And when she finally came home, he already had the rest of their evening planned. Video games, a movie, drawing, or whatever he could think of to get his mind off his father. She would ask him if he was okay and that he should not bottle things up. She was there for him. But Blue would always say he was fine and slither to another topic. After a while she stopped prodding, against her better judgment. Forcing him would only push him away.

"The move would be good for him. The city life will suit him," she thought. He was meant for big things, and a part of her—one she tried to suppress—knew that they were not going to be together forever. Unfortunately, the reality of the moment was much more sour than she could bear. But she had to put on a brave front. This was hard enough as is; why make things more difficult for him?

"I'm not abandoning you. You know that, right? We can still Facetime and text every day," he said, placing his hand on hers. The warmth of his fingers quelled her heart for a moment. But then she remembered this might be the last time she will ever feel this warmth ever again.

Vector Portrait  
Sara Mayman



"You know it won't be the same." He did know that. His hope lay in the fact that if they never said it out loud, then it would not be true. She slipped her hand out from under his and went back to the drawing. The highlights were easier to color in than the shadows. They worked quietly until she asked, "Can I come visit during the summer?"

His face lit up, "Yes, of course! I'll have so much to show you!" She smiled because his was contagious.

He added the finishing touches to her face: the scar on her chin that she got after he pushed her a little too hard and she fell, the beauty mark right above her lip, the curl at the top of her hair which she complained never behaved like the rest.

"Finished," she said. Oasis ripped the page from her notebook and walked to the bookcase once more. She grabbed two sheet protectors that were tucked between stacks of books and slipped the drawing inside. He did the same. She stared at her image of Blue, afraid that if she did not memorize the details of his face, he would walk out of her room, and she would forget him. Forget the memories they created together. That it would all vanish, having meant nothing.

He handed her his drawing and as she saw how he had captured her beauty with nothing but her colored pencils, she hugged him. Blue--caught by surprise--instinctively wrapped his arms around her as he had done a million times before.

"Don't forget me." The words were muttered in the fabric of his sweater.

"How could I? You have my heart."

Figure 1  
Kelvin Nguyen



# Contributors

Margo Contreras Amaya is a native to the Silver Spring area. Born into a Hispanic, Latino family, she learned early that her experiences were not universal, but nor were they exclusive. This drives her to create stories and poems that analyze and sympathize with the world that surrounds her.

Derrick Douglass is a sculptor and graphic designer whose work bridges the physical and digital worlds. He specializes in designing unique masks using discarded, upcycled materials, transforming detritus into art. By incorporating VR and 3D technology into his design process, Derrick explores new forms and structures that push the boundaries of traditional mask-making. His art reflects a deep respect for craftsmanship, blending old-world techniques with futuristic tools. Each piece tells a story of transformation, both of materials and imagination. Through his work, Derrick hopes to excite and delight all viewers, sparking curiosity and wonder.

Zee FitzHugh is a general humanities student at MC, currently on her 4th year of study—but after taking things a little slowly, she is ready to graduate this year and ultimately plans to pursue further education in the field of museology. She is primarily a digital artist and focuses on trying to mimic the look of traditional techniques and mediums on the screen.

Romula Hawthorne a.k.a. RHaw Creations is a Silver Spring, Maryland native, graduating from John F. Kennedy High School, Gannon University with a Bachelors in Psychology, and Montgomery College with an Associates in Fine Arts and General Studies. Romula has always been in the arts since a child and has focused on Ceramics throughout her journey. She allows the art materials to speak in terms of what they wish to become. Using her diverse background, being part Cherokee, Black Mohawk, Seminole, African American, and some European, as well as being raised with her Caribbean step father from Dominica, her work

exudes a mysterious, indigenous, and unique style whether with ceramics, pottery, paintings, screen prints, figure drawing, and metal work.

Harry Hines is a freshman at the Rhode Island School of Design who grew up in the Silver Spring/Takoma Park area as a homeschooler. Visual art has been a hobby and an important form of expression for him since a young age, but throughout high school he began to study art more strenuously and develop a creative voice. With help from the amazing staff at Montgomery College, especially Professors Katherine Knight and Kevin Bowman, he formed a desire to continue his artistic journey and pursue a degree in illustration.

Jada Hoffman, after taking an introduction to drawing course in the Fall of 2023, has taken a deeper interest in art. With special thanks to Professor Kathleen Kretz, her first art teacher, she has continued to express herself through various mediums. In addition, she shouts out to Montgomery College's student newspaper, *The Excalibur*, advised by Professor Lisa Nevans-Locke, for encouraging a space for writing and visual art. Jada Hoffman is currently a student pursuing a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering, who now has art as a creative outlet.

Fatmata Kanu, as a sophomore at Montgomery College, embraces a multifaceted artistic journey that encompasses singing, drawing, painting, and portrait photography. Her passion for art blossomed early, and she finds joy in expressing herself across various mediums. Each form of creativity allows her to explore different emotions and perspectives, making her artistic life a vibrant tapestry of experiences. Fatmata is excited to share her journey and connect with others through art!

Certitude J. Lembion is a Montgomery College alum and current senior at Smith College majoring in Biochemistry with an African Studies minor. She is often inspired by her friends, family, and the many places she calls home. When she is not writing, Certitude enjoys making decorative flower arrangements, long walks, and warm cups of tea.

Heather Levine, a member of the Department of English and Reading, received her MFA in Poetry from West Virginia University. Her poems and essays have been published in *[PANK]*, *Flatmancrooked's Slim Volume*

*of Contemporary Poetics, Tygerburning Literary Journal, The Wanderlust Review,* and others. She lives in Maryland with her family.

James Loll is a multidisciplinary artist with over two decades of experience as well as a returning student seeking to complete his formal education in fine art. Loll's current work seeks to highlight and explore the quiet moments of life which, while easily looked over, are often the most emotionally profound in their way.

Brian Xicara José Lopez's artwork was on display at the 2024 Montgomery College student art exhibit.

Suzanne Maggi's artwork was on display at the 2024 Montgomery College student art exhibit.

Sara Mayman is an artist and educator based in the DC area, holding a degree in Studio Art from UC Davis. Specializing in printmaking, she loves to explore a wide range of artistic mediums.

Mac McKinzie is an unlicensed cryptozoologist and poet who has been published under bridges, in postcards from fun cities and sticky notes reading "kick me" among other things.

Kelvin Nguyen, a native of New Hampshire, is currently an art student at Montgomery College. He has been drawing for most of his life but paused during high school. In the spring of 2023, he enrolled in his first drawing class, reigniting his passion for art. Kelvin aims to become a skilled artist and is dedicated to improving his abilities each day.

Nmesomachukwu Nweke is an 11th year student at Montgomery College, majoring in Nursing. Her artwork speaks to her personal interpretations of self. She examined and defined her own sense of self using charcoal and a piece of paper.

Ellie Orzulak is a graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and is currently working towards an associate degree at Montgomery College. Ellie still likes to look at birds, clouds, and fossils, like her kindergarten bio stated. She looks forward to becoming a high school

history teacher.

LaTonya Pinkard is an English professor at Montgomery College with a lifelong passion for creative expression. She has explored writing across genres, from screenplays to poetry to children's books. Through teaching and founding the Fun and Fellowship Writer's Workshop, she nurtures this love for storytelling, inspiring others to embrace the power of language and imagination in their own lives.

Terry Quill is a retired toxicologist and D.C. attorney who has always had an interest in the arts. Having a little more time to spend on new pursuits, he is enjoying visual arts with the help of Montgomery College. In the past few years, Terry has taken advantage of a number of the College's art classes, including printing, drawing and painting.

Kimberly Roberson is a second year General Studies major specializing in SSAH, who loves to read and write. A self-published author, she thrives on helping others tell their unique stories with passion and creativity as a healing technique.

Daniel Lazo Romero submitted a fiction story to the 2024 Sligo Journal Fiction Contest and won second place. He is a P-TECH Student from Clarksburg High School class of 2026.

Carly Schamber has enjoyed introductory art classes, which allow all students, regardless of major, to get in touch with their creativity. Students are able to put their learned knowledge into action and produce inspired works.

Isabelle Soden is an English Major at Montgomery College. After Montgomery College, she plans to continue her education and then career in English and Creative Writing.

Rachel Sonenshine is a poet, karate instructor, and mother of three from Cabin John, Maryland. She recently graduated from Montgomery College and plans to continue exploring her passion for poetry.

Silas Stutz is an artist studying at Montgomery College. He is an illustra-

tor, photographer, and writer.

Constance Sutter enjoys playing ukulele and electric bass, birdwatching, and hiking. She regards poetry as being magical like music, given its powerful ability to bring experiences to life and to cultivate awareness and surrender in its writers.

Chelsea Tanner is an 18-year-old poet learning to map the mazes of the mind while bleeding her heart out onto these pages you now read. Chelsea hopes these words can make you feel something.

Vanesa Vargas is an international student from Bolivia majoring in business. Vanesa loves to bake and listen to music during free time.

Annabelle Wyrick is a teenager from Silver Spring who has been thinking of stories since she was a toddler. In the time she spent alone throughout her childhood, she dreamt of worlds larger than she could ever bring into existence, and it took her until she was nearly sixteen to ever put pen to paper. Since then, she hasn't been able to stop. Now Ms. Wyrick is nineteen, and ever eager to share her work, feelings, dreams, and ramblings with the world and anyone willing to listen.





