



café shapiro

25TH ANNUAL ANTHOLOGY



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Café Shapiro Anthology

Café Shapiro Anthology

25th Annual

2022

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Introduction

Welcome to the 25th annual Café Shapiro anthology, featuring poems and short stories authored by University of Michigan students. We invite you to engage with these inspiring and thoughtful works. They will draw you into the creative process and connect you with students through their individual expressions. You will find a unique window into the Michigan learning experience.

When Café Shapiro first launched over twenty years ago, it was a bold experiment, a student coffee break designed as part of the University's Year of the Humanities and Arts (YoHA). Café Shapiro is an example of how past innovations become a part of current campus traditions. YoHA set out to explore the role of the arts and humanities in civic and community life through a variety of programs. Café Shapiro continues to celebrate the arts and humanities, with this tradition of featuring undergraduate student writers nominated by their professors to perform their works.

On the evenings of March 14 & 15, 2022, the contributing writers shared their short stories / poems during the virtual Cafe Shapiro event. The act of reading one's work out loud was a new experience for many of our students. With the support of friends, faculty, coaches, and family, the student writers demonstrated the power of speaking and performing. They participated in an authentic act of creation, speaking possibility, expressing beliefs, and imagining the future.

Café Shapiro has become an annual celebration of undergraduate student writers as they think creatively and critically, reason, ask questions, and develop the skills that help them understand and participate in our world. We also publish this anthology of their work, making it available in print and through U-M Deep Blue Repository, the University's institutional repository. Through this process, students have the opportunity to learn about copyright and related steps to publishing their scholarship.

Events such as Café Shapiro make visible the Library's commitment to learning. We provide an engaged space for students to practice, learn and grow their scholarship and advance their learning journey. We are enthusiastic partners with faculty and students, looking to enable the exploration of new ideas while capturing passions and self-expressions.

We hope you enjoy reading the work of these talented writers.

Laurie Alexander

Associate University Librarian for Learning and Teaching

U-M Library

ALAA AL-KAHALAH



Senior

Major: Psychology

Minor: Creative Writing

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: Cody Walker

Alaa Al-Kahalalah is a poet from Ann Arbor who grew up reading books in-between library shelves. She enjoys painting and embroidering, where she learned how to do so while living near her homeland, Palestine. She started writing poetry in Arabic when she was 10, then expanded to writing English poetry once she started college. She is eager to experience different forms of writing and aspires to publish a poetry collection one day! Her poetry is usually about her homeland, family, and love.

But I wanted to stay

The leafs traveled carelessly with the wind
I sit bound with the metal in me
I need to change the scene

Now I sit on fancy linen with buttons
Legs roaming, voices flying, faces fading
I give up on lying
I need to change the scene

My feet push down on the wood
Hands tight on leather
On the kitchen table
Meatful bones reach and wave
I need to change the scene

On my toes, standing
Trying to fly away
From plates, spoons, cologne
The ground under me
is gone

And

He was there
I turn my eyes through me
 head too many times
Yet, he was there

POV: a shitty person burning fossils for fashion

The dirt is in full view
the shirt that I bought new
a piece to wear
left to despair
I filled bags
to renew lives
I believed I was
giving, yes,
generous me.
A circular
economy,
Yet,
I walk away,
scared, leaving
the hot sound
in the air.
Another one
I beg
as if earth
will never
turn red
you exhale
The bullshit
into space,
but it can
not be erased

A political mirror

Lens shy away, pens become dry,
lights dim, and I just want to be seen,
you walked on my road and nodded when
you saw my face, but you walked on.
My story didn't make it into your notes,
you complain about not having words.
So let me give you another language;
that should help,
let me give you my broken glass
to help you see in my lens,
let me give you blood to help you
write on the dry paper.
Just *document*

Paint us in a pretty picture
but not too pretty,
just enough to show that our
language is worth it too,
when we say war is ugly,
please remember the difference.
Because

We

Are

Not

War

Our lives may seem political,
but it's worth it to say
not every story is an archive,
Some can be saved

The home I've missed

I couldn't pick a story
they were all so worthy

So I will tell you mine
but it's not one of a kind

I started off young chanting
then I drew a picture and a painting

At school I proudly pronounce
your name, that I would always announce

I was young, I didn't understand
the burns that were on your hand

From years of smoke and tear shed
I opened my eyes and shook my head

I was so close, but I was never allowed
to say hi and love you out loud

Life tore me apart from you
and seas made me further too

I was laughing over glasses
while you were cracking under the masses

On the screen, your life passes by
and all I can do is lay down and cry

So take my tears to cool your flame
I am sorry I'm living the same chain

GRACE ANDREASEN



Senior

Major: Creative Writing and Literature

Reading: Short Fiction

Nominated by: Laura Thomas

Grace Andreasen is a writer from Grosse Pointe, Michigan. She enjoys writing short fiction as well as personal essays. Much to her surprise, most of her short stories have to do with the unsettling, weird, and macabre. She is most happy when she is going for a walk in the woods in northern Michigan with her dog, Blue. She has been inspired the most in her writing by her grandma, Ruth, who seems to have all the answers.

Together

We weren't always like this, we knew that. We weren't always this close. This together. We knew that it made other people uncomfortable, but that was fine. We had been different before all this. There were large, patterned photo albums we could open to find faded pictures of us as infants sitting on opposite sides of our room, playing with different toys, completely disinterested in each other. Now we couldn't remember that. We couldn't even recognize ourselves in those pictures. But our names were written on the back in looping cursive so we knew those bald creatures must be us. We aren't twins. People assumed that though, and now we just let them. We were born 11 months apart, which meant we were in the same grade at school. Emmy is older, but it doesn't matter, not now anyway.

Things probably would've been different if we weren't in the same grade. We probably wouldn't have gotten so attached. We also agree that if we had gone to the elementary school down the road, we wouldn't have done what we did. That was the school we were supposed to go to, The Giving Tree Montessori. The one shaded by maples and elms, with the red apple painted on the faded sign out front. That's where our mother went when she was our age, something we couldn't fathom. We couldn't picture her short dark hair in long blonde braids down her back like ours. We couldn't even picture her smiling.

So we didn't go to the elementary school down the road like our mother had planned.

Things changed, she had told us. We went to the Catholic school by the lake, Our Lady of Sorrows. We weren't Catholic, at least our mother had never told us that we were. We would ask our dad, but we didn't seem to have one. Not one we knew about anyway. There were no trees around Our Lady of Sorrows. It was a sturdy brick building on a cold grey lake. We immediately held on to each other the first day we walked through the heavy wooden doors. No one talked to us, not the other girls, and especially not the nuns in long, black cloaks. We could not see their feet so we assumed they floated down the halls. We tried not to cry, but still, we trembled that first day. Emmy raised her hand in class and asked if she could go to the bathroom. She needed a tissue. The nun paused and looked at the space above her head and then kept on talking. The rest of the class did not turn their

heads to look at us. So we looked at each other. I gave her my sleeve to wipe her nose with. Then our hands were intertwined under our desks and we touched our ankles together. That's when our attachment began.

School terrified us. We did not understand the cold marble floors or the high peaked

ceilings. We did not like how the hallway echoed our footsteps. Our house had carpet so sounds at home were soft and muted. When our mary janes clicked against the shiny floor at school we would peer over our shoulders, looking for some unknown pursuant. Mass on Monday mornings was the worst thing we could think of. Kneeling on the hard wooden planks underneath the pews. Our backs would ache and our fingers would get clammy folded together like that. The incense that hung in the air nauseated us. We did not know the words to the prayers, so we would just mumble each other's names under our breath. The one thing we did like was the uniform. When we looked at each other, we were looking in a mirror.

We dreaded the sound of the bus rolling down our street every morning. We hated the sight of it even more. It smelled like sweat and vinyl and gasoline. There were no seatbelts. Worse than the smell was the presence of boys. We weren't familiar with them. The only man we ever saw was the priest who held mass on Mondays, but he wasn't real to us. Our Lady of Sorrows was a girls school, but the bus also picked up the boys who went to the school across from us. The boys on the bus would tug on our braids and squeal. They sounded like some unknown herd of animals.

On picture day our mother had starched and ironed our skirts so they fanned out in a ring of plaid around our skinny legs. We had finished off our braids with blue ribbons. We put vaseline on our lips so they gleamed like wet petals. On the bus that day a boy had decided to sneak his hand up Emmy's skirt and pinch her thigh. She froze. Everyone laughed. I spun around and punched the boy in the nose. He cried out and the bus went silent. Thick, red tendrils of blood began to pour from his nostrils. It seeped into his slobbering mouth and over his thin lips, slipping down his chin and staining his pressed khaki pants.

After school that day, Emmy threw her backpack down next to the front door and flew up

the stairs, crying. I followed. We huddled together on the floor of our room under a bedsheet. We knelt with our foreheads pressed together and our bony knees touching. Emmy's tears made little dark spots on the white carpet. Though we could not hear her, we could feel our mother's presence in

the doorway. We peeked out from under the sheet and could see her bare feet stepping towards us. She knelt down. Her face was tired. We stared blankly back at her. She did not look like us. She softly asked if she could come under the sheet with us. We did not understand the pain in her voice. She tried to lift it up, but we wouldn't let her in. We held the sheet down with our hands and feet like rocks. We stayed like that and waited for her to leave. But then we heard her let out one choked wail.

"I'm sorry you don't like your school," she said. "I thought it would be better."

Her watery eyes made us uncomfortable. Black tears flowed down her heavily powdered face. Her bright lipstick was smudged around the corners. Emmy spoke.

"Why can't we go to the other school," she asked, "The school with the trees out front."

Mother sat on the floor and put her face in her hands. Her fingers were long and her nails were sharp and red. She lifted her head up and she spoke with her eyes closed.

"I saw this story on the news," she said, wiping her nose on her sleeve. "These two little

girls, these sisters," she paused and looked at us, trying to figure out how to explain. "Someone took them when they were walking near that school over the summer."

"Took them?" Emmy asked.

"Someone stole them from their mother," she explained. We sat in silence waiting for her to make this story make sense to us. "And you should've seen these girls. They showed their pictures on the news," her voice broke, "they were so little, and so blonde, just like the two of you. I couldn't have you go there. I can't lose both of you, too." She leaned forward and wrapped us in her arms, trapping us inside the white bed sheet. We could not see her but we could smell her thick perfume.

From under the sheet, Emmy asked, "Did they find them?" Our mother's arms slowly dropped.

Her voice came muffled through the sheet. "I don't know," she said. Then, we heard the

door shut, and we were alone again, clutching at each other under our makeshift tent.

Ninth grade is when the girls' and boys' schools merged into one. The high school sat

right on the lake. It was a sturdy brick creation that was not built to be tall, but rather it sprawled out across the ground at one level. We had made no friends throughout our time at Our Lady of Sorrows, so we went into high school friendless and remained that way. We ate lunch on the slabs of concrete that served as the lakeshore. Nothing about us had changed very much, though our hair had faded from white blonde to a dull, mousy color. We no longer wore it in braids, but straight and long down our backs. Emmy had been given thick brown glasses. The doctor said that

I had perfect vision.

Ninth grade was also the year they found the little girls who had been kidnapped. We had

tried to forget about them, but our mother cut out every news story and update she could find. She would retreat into her room to do research every night, her desk filled with newspaper clippings and criminal psychology books she would never return to the library. We only ever saw her when we sat down for dinner. She would print out missing posters and post them around town, long after the girls' parents had stopped doing so. We came home from school one day in early September to find our mother standing mere inches from the tv. She had her arms wrapped around herself, one hand clutching her neck. A hiker had found them in the woods in a shallow grave. They had been strangled to death. The coroner estimated that their bodies had been there the entire time they had been missing. They had no suspects. Our mother turned from the tv and went into her office. She shut the door loudly. We stood, watching as the tv flashed pictures of the little blonde girls as they described their death in detail. Mother didn't come to the table for dinner that night.

We retreated even further into ourselves at school. We sat in the back row and hoped that the nuns would not call on us. They never did. Aside from being shoved in the hallway, the boys paid no attention to us. We were fine with that. This changed the day Will Moxley told Emmy he liked her glasses. He stopped her after our biology class. He had grabbed her forearm to get her attention. We both froze and stared. Just as I began to pull her away, Will asked Emmy to the homecoming dance. She dropped her books. I heard her small voice say yes, but I didn't believe it. Everyone in the crowded hallway turned and looked at her. Her answer seemed to echo off the walls. He smiled

and told her he would pick her up at seven. We watched him walk down the entire length of the hallway and then turn and disappear. Emmy reached up and touched her own cheek. She began to walk to our next class, leaving her books on the floor.

Will was twenty minutes late to pick her up. She waited by the front door in a pink satin dress we had found in the back of our mother's closet, looking out the window at our driveway. She had caked on makeup, the powder was too thick and the mascara clumped her eyelashes together. She looked almost pretty. I stood behind her in a black dress I had worn to a funeral the year before. It was the only formal dress I owned. I had asked her to do my makeup, but she said no. She wouldn't look back at me. I stared at the sash she had tied tightly around her waist. It cut into her ribs and made her body look cut in two.

Will was surprised when we both walked out to the car, He was even more surprised when we both got in the back seat. He opened his thin lips as if to say something, but Emmy quickly thanked him for taking both of us to the dance. He paused and looked back at me. I glared at him. He knew that I wasn't going to leave and that Emmy wasn't going to let me. He looked at me in the car mirror and there was something in his eyes that I couldn't figure out, but it made me feel strange. As we drove, I stared at a red pimple on the back of his neck. I wanted to pop it until it bled. I had to sit on my hands.

As we walked to the front lawn of the school, Will put his arm around Emmy's shoulders. It was freezing outside and neither of us had brought jackets. The school had set up games outside of the gymnasium. There was apple bobbing and cornhole and other games we had never been invited to play before. Emmy's eyes got bright as she took it all in. Will moved his hand to the small of her back. The music spilled out from the gym and onto the lawn. It pounded sharply in our ears. It was already dark out and there wasn't a single star in the sky. It had rained earlier and the grass was thick with mud. Every step we took made a heavy sloshing sound.

Emmy and Will bobbed for apples. She knelt down and positioned her face over the tub. She pushed her glasses onto the top of her head. Will held her hands behind her back and instructed her to dunk her face into the water. She did this over and over again. The water spilled out over the rim of the tub. Will placed one of his hands on the back of her head, keeping the other one holding her wrists together. He shoved her head further into the water. His eyes were gleeful, his lips peeled back in delight. Emmy came up with an apple between her lips, her makeup running down her face. Both she and Will

laughed. He kissed her on the cheek. I couldn't watch so I turned my head upwards, desperately trying to find a star in the sky. I caught Emmy's gaze as I looked down. She gave me a look she had never given me before. Her eyes said leave. This would be the worst decision we would make.

I don't know how long I sat by the water, but it was long enough. I could feel the lack of her presence like the pressure of the air changing when a storm is about to start. It got to be unbearable and I knew I needed her with me again. I walked back towards the gym but couldn't catch a glimpse of her pink dress. I searched the crowd but found nothing, only pairs of dates laughing and holding each other close. I ran inside the gym and scanned the crowd of dancers grabbing and pulling at each other. The gym was sweltering and the smell of sweat and perfume clung to me. I pressed myself against the wall of the gym, slinking towards the exit, not wanting to be touched.

Suddenly I was outside. I had gone through the doors at the back of the school by the parking lot. I breathed in the cool air and felt fine for a moment, but then I heard rustling. I froze. Then there was a grunt and a yelp like a dog that had gotten stepped on. I turned to find Emmy and Will lying in a bush. Will had pinned her hands above her head and was moving back and forth on top of her. Her face was covered in mud and wood chips. Her pink dress was hiked up above her waist, the satin covered in dirt. Black mascara pooled around her eyes as she cried. Her glasses were laying on the pavement next to them, broken in half. She was softly whispering, "help."

We were silent on the walk home. We did not speak of the blood that was slowly drying on the strands of our hair and under our fingernails. We did not look at each other, but our steps still fell in tandem, our heels clicking along the sidewalk. We approached our house, all the windows were dark. We did not breathe as we crept inside and silently padded up the carpeted stairs to our room. Our mother's door was shut and no light leaked out from the crack above the floor. Without a word, we laid down on the rug between our twin beds. We stared at the ceiling, refusing to look down at our dresses. We did not want to see. We knew what had happened. My hands had found a rock, a heavy, jagged rock. Then my hands threw it directly at Will Moxley's head. His skull made a dull cracking sound and then everything went silent. His body slumped forward onto Emmy, his blood draining onto her dress. I pushed his body off of her. His eyes were wide open, cast up towards the sky in a permanent expression of pain, unblinking. That is how we left him. We did not speak of it on the walk home, but we knew that soon we would have

to. Instead, that night we wrapped our arms around each other on our bedroom floor. We pressed our foreheads together. We breathed. We closed our eyes and didn't cry.

ALYSSA BONEBRIGHT



Senior

Major: History

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: Bridgette Brados

Alyssa is a senior from Commerce Township, Michigan and is a senior in LS&A pursuing a degree in History. She has always been fascinated with antiquity, and has found special interest in the history and culture of Bronze Age Mediterranean civilizations. Professionally, she has found her passion at the intersection of technology, entrepreneurship, and strategic marketing. After her graduation, she will join Microsoft as a Product Marketing Manager.

Sonnet of Cotopaxi



Gazing over creation wrought with ash,
The red eye of a savage, scarlet god
Oversees the destruction of the last
Exotic land fair Fortuna forgot.
As glittering Phaeton begins to rise,
An almighty bellow beyond compare,
Spells burning destruction to paradise:
An invocation of greatest despair.
A scene flush with amber, touched by no man
Smeared with brimstone, sulfur, and air made death,
Soft, luscious creation sweetly sighs and
Soaked in morning light, heaves her final breath.
Holy fire of Vulcan's molten plume,
Guides Lady Gaia to her ashen tomb.

Il Sognatore

...but void of care and crime,
Soft creation slept away their time.
-Metamorphoses, Ovid

Between the lofty vaults of midnight heavens and the horizon over the sea, the moon shyly rose from the ink blue womb of the Mediterranean. As stars wink into the sky, one by one, the candles illuminating the windows of the ancient city streets are snuffed out. The electric currents of daily life slow to a steady hum as the city prepares for the arrival of twilight. Checks are ordered at restaurants, window shutters gently clap closed and children are lovingly tucked to bed. A stray cat flits over the uneven cobblestone street, yowling its nocturnal melody- startling a streetsweeper, just beginning his evening chore.

He jumps. Almost. His sturdy frame never leaves the cobblestones, but rather surges upward with a nearly convincing velocity. His caterpillar eye-brows raise sharply in surprise, his warm brown eyes fully alert. The cat skitters away as the broom clatters to the gray stones, the sound reverberating across the weathered facades of nearby storefronts. The streetsweeper curses quietly under his breath, the sound gruff yet melodic in his lilting, rural Italian dialect. Pressing a hand to his corduroy-clad knee, he slowly stoops to retrieve his instrument.

His movements are slow and stiff, as if each individual motion has been preordained. His motions are punctuated by moments of hesitation, yet each carefully executed and stitched into corporeal stop-motion. While many people flow through life with an innate grace, the streetsweeper moves as if he were the conductor of an orchestra of bone, tendons and ligaments. Overture: sagittal bend of the spine, *lente*. Second Movement: fold the knees, *adagio*. Third Movement: extend arm, *crescendo*. Finale: return to erect stance, *enfatico*.

Once again with his broom in hand, he continues sweeping the detritus of the day from the cobbles. Its wooden handle is a natural extension of his body, its controlled strokes carefully guide bright scraps of confetti, rogue leaves and the occasional shard of glass into neat piles. He lovingly tends to

the streets as if they were a rose garden. Up and down them he sweeps, quietly humming as he goes.

He guides his broom through ancient, noble plazas, over canal bridges, and around the marble skirts of ornate fountains. By the time he reaches *la Fontana di Trevi*, the burly old man is well-winded. The edge of the fountain beckons. For a moment, he allows his weariness to battle with his renowned work ethic. Nobody has ever described Augustin de Duomo as a lazy man; But he is certainly no longer a young man. The hands he once used to thresh wheat from sunrise to sundown are now flecked with liver spots. Silver streaks his thinning hair. His knees protest the hours spent sweeping, stooping, and roving the streets of Rome. With a sigh of relief and defeat, he sits... just for a moment. As he relaxes, his eyelids slowly droop, fatigue settling on his frame like a thick cloak. He begrudgingly welcomes this brief moment of repose. His frame sinks and soars to the tempo of his slow, heavy breaths.

POLINA CHUIKOV



Junior

Major: Neuroscience

Reading: Fiction

Nominated by: Robert Laidler

Polina Chuikov is a writer from Ann Arbor, MI. While not formally pursuing writing, she strives to find time to write for herself. Particularly drawn to horror, she tries her hand at writing about gruesome broken things that can't sit still at night. Her goal as a writer is to get them to shuffle and get a good glimpse, if possible, before running away alongside her readers to the safety of reality.

Untitled

The roots of the fallen oak cast wide web-like shadows in the dusky light. The carving seemed to be rising from the loose soil under the oak, its inky hues ominously dark against the soil. Five men with spades and one afternoon of work had unearthed an object at least as tall as Ira. No, *taller*. He thought. *Because I end and it doesn't*. He suppressed a shiver and remembered how he had found it.

A fierce autumn storm had hit the village on the last night of an unseasonably hot week. It was the kind of blistering autumn that folks called a hag's summer. The livestock had gone silent hours before, lying huddled together under the trees. The chickens made no sounds as a greenish haze appeared on the horizon and the village bells tolled. Wooden shutters were closed and prayers spoken. Dark clouds had gathered quickly, and before long the wind started to wail. It battered their thatched roofs all night. His mother had stood vigilant and sleepless in the event that their roof did more than just threaten to blow away. Long hours later, the dawn came as a still calm, and the storm was done. But it had left its mark, as Ira soon discovered in the woods. It had been him who had found it. Or, as his mother worried, it had found him. The carving.

The storm had knocked over a century oak in the glade. He'd heard stories that their grandfather's grandfathers had played there when the oaks were young. It was the morrow after the storm and he had been the first of his party there. Andric was going to show them how to hunt cuckoos with a slingshot. As fate would have it, the nest he'd chosen was on the fallen oak. Ira had gone over to investigate, but before he reached the branches, he noticed something under the roots. It had been hard to tell what it was at first. His initial impression had been to confuse it with a rock. Crouching, he had inspected it further, brushing away soil from the smooth surface with the palm of his hand. He'd jerked his hand away. The thing had been warm, like fevered flesh. He remembered realizing he was alone in the forest and wishing Peter, Andric, and Rat — especially bulky Andric — would hurry up and come. He disliked the thing in the damp earth. He had considered waiting for them, but curiosity took hold of him again. He'd never seen anything like it before. It appeared to be a polished dark stone lying precisely in the center of where the oak used to stand. The realization that it wasn't stone,

but wood, had only added to his unease. He could tell by the darker accents that ran in rivulets through the ebony material. Carefully, he had avoided touching the wood, using his hands to scoop the soil around it instead. Initially, it had looked like something he could pick up by the fabric of his tunic, but his determination to bring it home quickly faded in the face of the impossible. The dark wood had extended down. It wouldn't end. He'd paused his digging when his fingers had hit a protrusion of the object. He'd recoiled. Warm again. This time he used a stick to push away the earth.

He had stopped and ran. The protrusion had been a nose.

He'd run into Peter on the path leading home. Peter had insisted on seeing it, so he had shown him. Similarly terrified, Peter decided to confide in his father. They had found him in the grain field by their house. It had taken the testimonies of two shaken boys and the promise of a beating if they were lying to coax the man into assessing the object after the day's work. From there the rumors spread, and soon enough, it seemed like half the village had gathered around the head in the earth.

Ira looked at it now, feeling ripples of disgust. When he looked at it, he felt uncomfortable. Like one of Andric's worms was touching his lips and trying to slither inside his mouth. *Eat me*, the carving seemed to say. The nose he'd found was among the less disturbing features meticulously carved. If he had to say, the carving was of a woman, due to the lumps on her chest which women had, but it felt wrong to name it so. It was no normal woman. Above the slim nose were cheekbones set oddly high, making the face appear gaunt. It was worsened by the fact that it was at least twice as long as a normal face, while seemingly as wide. Thankfully, her eyes were closed. Her brows were furrowed together and her head was inclined slightly forward. She had small lips. Cords of interwoven muscle were depicted in the wood, but no muscle could make up for her eerie slimness. Her spine was a curved comb of protruding bone. They had only dug up her upper body, stopping at the navel. She looked unnaturally under-fed, as skinny as himself, but longer. So much longer. Not only that, but her position was off. Ira imitated what her terribly long limbs were doing by placing his right fist at his breast, while his left arm extended straight down. That part was strange. Wasn't the left arm normally held straight up, two fingers extended? Once, he'd attended a burial for his neighbor's daughter and at the end, everyone had made the gesture, except pointing at the sky. His older sister had told him it was to point the dead girl's soul to the next world. He extended two fingers downward like this statue

was probably doing underneath the dirt below her navel. He wondered what world the opposite gesture could possibly point to.

ADELAIDE GORDON



Sophomore

Major: English

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: Urvi Kumbhat

Adelaide Gordon is an aspiring poet and creative fiction writer from Hamilton, Massachusetts. In addition to writing in her free time, she loves exploring Ann Arbor's food scene, venturing to new places, and practicing Spanish on Duolingo. She's not quite sure where she'll be in five years, but hopes to be in a field where she can combine her love of literature with her passion for travel and foreign language. Adelaide hopes you enjoy her reading!

Death By Florida

A Golden Shovel Poem inspired by Gwendolyn Brooks' "The Bean Eaters"

not like it was unexpected or a surprise or any words to make death sound
as
unnatural and disturbing as dante's monsters or in the depictions of war
where they
(the brave hard soldiers) fight dramatically constantly slumped in a lean
reaching gasping for one final breath choking over
whispers of tear gas and tears of fear. he knew and i knew and we all knew
too well the
bucket would be kicked to say it nonchalantly early one morning down in
florida sipping his coffee beans
at least he was doing something he enjoyed to the very end everyone said
but in
his words if you listened to him you would know death by bean was all their
sentiments, not his or mine or ours not a man of inaction who stayed home
no he rented
grand ballrooms for fantastic birthdays never a man to stand in the back
at his own party sometimes a hundred guests in the room
showing off children money babies chocolate desserts so caloric that
he would only eat them to prove not everyone is
so weak as to suffer heart attacks from stuffing themselves until they are full
of joy food and happiness like he was of
basking in the fortunes of progeny those receiving presents like he once gave
beads
of his salty sweat to the hospital where he spent hours in a dark room moni-
toring and
analyzing x-rays of people unknown and unworthy of his attention purely for
the checks and receipts
hard to say he liked his job difficult to recall now with the empty recliner still
imprinted and
waiting for his nightly handful of candy and observation of tiny granddaugh-
ters playing with dolls
shoved into the closet where they think he can't see them but he always

could and
always knew from the trimming and quiet snipping to make new outfits of
dish cloths
i remember cool autumn nights sitting in my car think of him smoking
expensive cigars first time tobacco
grandma sweeps up working again in her life tackling the abundance of
messy leftover cake crumbs
mother stands solemnly in her favorite kitchen position grabbing for reorga-
nizing his flowers in the vases
such an exact pain to be turned away and
cast off, left behind in living always having lived on his fringes

MIGUEL O'LEARY HERRERAS



First Year

Major: undecided

Reading: Fiction

Nominated by: Michael Zhai

Miguel is a writer from Oakland, California, and he is grateful to be here with you all. In his writing he aims to draw from personal experience while highlighting contemporary societal dilemmas. He looks forward to continuing to learn and grow at the University of Michigan. He cites his mother as his greatest inspiration.

Weeds

“You gonna buy me an eighth?” said Kyle to Luis. “Imma pay you back at the end of the week.”

Before it was a dispensary, the building on the corner two blocks from Luis’ home was Benny’s, the local convenience store. Now, standing outside High Priority, Luis was reminded of the smell of freshly baked conchas in the morning, a cool paleta in the Southern California afternoon sun and the sound of corridos pouring from the radio. As Luis grew older a lot of the neighborhood regulars moved away, fewer people came into the store and eventually Benny had to leave too.

“What do you want?” Luis asked his friend.

“Let’s celebrate. Wedding Cake?”

“Sounds good,” said Luis.

Luis knew the reason for Kyle’s festive attitude. Earlier that day he successfully convinced his parents that he hadn’t been smoking since their family moved into the neighborhood.

“Just be careful who you hang out with,” Luis had overheard Kyle’s mom instructing her teenage son. “We don’t want you getting mixed up into anything.”

Luis’ older brother Carlos had gotten to him before his Mom could, and he’d never really known his dad. So the two brothers would go out in Carlos’ troka together, their favorite banda music playing on the stereo, the troubles of the world melting away. Then, when he was 26, Carlos moved away to community college up north.

“I’m going back to school Luis,” Carlos had told him. “We won’t be able to smoke together for a while, but I want you to have my old ID.”

“Let’s use it at the dispensary,” Kyle said when Luis told him about the ID.

“Are you sure it will work?” Luis responded, uncertain. “It’s not my face.”

“It’s your brother’s you guys look pretty similar.”

Luis had to agree. Despite his discomfort with the idea of going to the dispensary, he was happy to have a new smoking buddy. Kyle was happy to have weed, so together they smoked like two middle-aged white men. This had been their routine for a couple weeks now.

“Okay see you in a minute.” Leaving his friend to wait on the sidewalk, Luis walked through the doorway and into High Priority. An electronic chime

sounded. The disturbance elicited a few hasty glances from shoppers and staff. Luis remembered the security cameras perched throughout the room and felt their lenses pointed at him but kept his eyes focused straight forward.

The building's exterior had more or less remained the same, but the inside was transformed entirely since it had belonged to Benny. Around the main room drug paraphernalia lined the shelves. Rolling papers, grinders, carts of THC and more. The dark-stained hardwood floors mirrored the midnight black of the roof. There had never been any windows in the place and the only illumination was provided by a few LED ceiling lights which stood out like stars against their backdrop.

"Good afternoon I can get you checked in over here," said the man behind the front desk. He was tall, had a neat beard and wore a dark green flannel shirt. Luis handed him the ID. He took it and scanned the barcode on the back.

"Beep."

Luis exhaled slowly. It worked, like always. The man, whose name tag read Benjamin, handed Luis back his brother's ID. Luis repeated to Benjamin what he had decided with Kyle, and Benjamin stepped away to a back room, hidden from view, to retrieve the order. Luis scanned the room around him. A handful of shoppers were scattered about, interacting with staff.

"What's the THC concentration of this one?" A man in tapered blue jeans and a grey down vest inquired about a vape cartridge. "I've been ready to go to something stronger ever since my boss has been giving me such a hard time at the office. Sometimes I wanna quit software and just smoke weed."

Luis couldn't help but listen as the man talked. Momentarily, he made eye contact with the staff member, but quickly looked away, pretending to mind his own business.

"Alright here you are," Benjamin returned with a sealed plastic bag that was decorated with a cartoonish graphic design of a wedding cake. Luis exchanged his cash for the bag and turned to go, ready to leave. He was almost out the door but maintained his leisurely pace, not about to give himself away.

"Wait! Hold on a minute!" Benjamin called after Luis, who froze in place, hand on door.

"I've been seeing you here quite often lately." Luis calmly turned to face his accuser, maintaining his innocence.

"Here, take this Rewards card. Ask us to stamp it each time you visit and

after 10 stamps you'll get a free half-gram pre roll of your choice!" Luis accepted the slip of paper with a polite "Thank you" and made his exit. He found Kyle waiting for him around the corner.

"Got it?"

"Got it."

As they strolled away, Luis couldn't help but feel that what he was doing was wrong. *Who am I doing this for?* He thought to himself. *And what would Benny think if he could see how his place has changed?*

Luis and Kyle continued on down the residential street, the weed now enclosed in Kyle's backpack. Admiring the pastel orange glow of the sunset, they stepped over folds and cracks in the sidewalk, out of which poked tufts of green, foreign invaders in a kingdom of pavement.

They continued down the street before turning left towards a local park where they knew they wouldn't be disturbed. Interspersed among the family homes of people Luis had known his whole life were newly renovated houses that looked as though they had been picked up from an entirely different neighborhood and dropped down on top of whatever had stood there before. There was fresh paint, modern aesthetics, neatly trimmed foliage, and the occasional wooden fence.

Reaching the smoke spot, Luis and Kyle slouched down onto their preferred park bench. The last sparkles of sunlight were fading behind the trees and there was not another person in sight. Kyle pulled his materials out of his backpack and began rolling a joint. Luis sat beside him waiting, thinking about how he would fall asleep tonight listening to his podcast.

"Okay we ready," Kyle said after a couple minutes had passed. He fumbled around in his backpack. "Holdon where did I put my lighter?"

"I got one," Luis reached for his pocket. He paused. "Wait my bad I think this is yours," Luis apologized.

"Psshhhh that's why you always gotta have multiple," Kyle laughed.

Luis returned the lighter to his friend, who sparked the joint. After a couple puffs he passed it to Luis. Kyle removed a speaker from his backpack, connected it to his phone, and began playing the playlist that the two of them had crafted together. Luis took a deep breath, observing for a moment the ethereal glow of the lit joint and then, raising it to his lips, inhaled.

As he lowered his arm, Luis sensed that the world around him had changed. He heard wind shaking leaves but saw only stationery branches. Even the thin trunks of the maples stood still, their roots firmly planted. The noise grew louder, reaching a crescendo of unnerving cackling that seemed

not to come from above but below. Then, from within the dry grass patches of the park lawn surrounding him Luis watched in disbelief as thick stalks of weeds sprouted, shooting upwards. A forest of weeds had grown to skyscraper heights in a matter of moments and now encircled the bench menacingly.

Luis turned to look at Kyle, who was scrolling through his phone unbothered. Looking back once more to confirm the sight before his eyes, a sense of paranoia began to grow in Luis. He was high, but weed wasn't a psychedelic drug. This felt too real. "I think we should head back soon," he said to Kyle, who looked up from his phone.

"You not looking good – you wanna go now?" Kyle responded.

"Yea... Yea I think we should," Luis stuttered, looking back and forth between his friend and the shoots of green surrounding him.

As they exited the park, Luis ducked and weaved between the thicket of weeds. Kyle watched him, confused. It was dark now. The night had settled in. As the two friends retraced their steps back towards Luis' home, Kyle finished off their joint, tossing it to the street when it was done. Luis cautiously watched the rows of houses as they passed. They watched him back. At his feet, weeds slithered out of the cracks in the pavement and tugged at his shoelaces.

They walked in silence, passing in and out of shadows. For a long time the only sound came from the rhythmic stepping of their shoes echoing off the sidewalk. Then, as they rounded a corner, the two friends came face to face with a private security guard. Luis knew that he had been hired by some of the neighborhood's residents to keep the neighborhood "safer."

"Howdy gents, how's your evening going?" He chirped.

"We're all good sir just heading home," Luis responded cautiously.

"Kyle is that you? I wasn't sure at first – how are your parents doing?" The security guard ignored Luis' response.

"Yea they good, busy like always you feel me?" Kyle answered. "You seen anything tonight?"

"No it's been pretty quiet so far, I'm just looking forward to the end of my shift." Said the man. "It's getting a lil' late so I do recommend you get home soon." The security guard shifted his gaze to Luis. "You know I don't think I've ever seen you around here, what's your name pal?"

"I'm Luis." Said the narcotrafficante before him.

"You live around here?"

"My whole life sir."

“Hey, no need for attitude I’m just askin’ you a question.” responded the security guard. It was clear that the man’s demeanor had changed.

“You have any identification on you, a U.S. passport perhaps?” He asked Luis.

“What are you a border patrol agent or something man?” Kyle inserted himself back into the conversation.

“Kyle with all due respect I’m the one in charge here.” He shot back.

Luis resented the man and his words, but knew he had to be smart. He would show the man his ID and then get home safe. He reached for his pocket and pulled out his wallet. However, looking down at the two IDs, it suddenly became impossible to discern which one was his own.

“Don’t play games with me son, lets see the ID.”

Now the paranoia was becoming unbearable all over again. It was as if everything was watching him. Even the houses on the street all peered at him suspiciously through their windows. Settling on a random card Luis slipped it from the wallet and handed it to the security guard, who studied it with a confused expression. At this point Luis could not hear himself think. So he ran. He felt himself fly across the pavement, not daring to look back. He did not stop, even as the houses continued to watch him, he pushed forward. He ran and ran and ran. *Corre pendejo* he told himself.

The next morning Luis rose from his bed. Then all at once he remembered the events of the night before, still unsure which parts had been real. Frantically, he opened his wallet. As he ripped the cards from their slots, he found that neither of the IDs, his or his brother’s, was missing. He emptied the wallet, taking inventory of the cards that remained. He passed over each one again and again, racking his brain for the one that he had given away. Then it hit him. The rewards card from the dispensary was gone.

As Luis realized what had occurred, his mom walked into his room.

“Estás bien mijo?” His mom asked. Luis nodded, relief washing through his blood stream. His mom walked over and took a seat next to him on the bed. She stared at the floor, clearly upset.

“What’s wrong mamá?” Luis asked, noticing his mother’s worry.

“There is something I need to tell you,” She began. “It’s about your brother.” Fear shot through Luis.

“He was pulled over yesterday with an ounce of weed in his troka.” His mom informed him, her voice breaking as she spoke. “They accused him with intent to sell.”

Luis did not want to believe what she was saying, but the tears streaming from his mother's eyes confirmed what he was hearing. Luis embraced her, his own eyes growing watery.

"He told me he had a job," his mom stuttered. "He wanted to help with the house..." She broke off into more tears. "Lo van a encarcelar...they're going to put him in San Quentin."

And they did.

EVA JI



First Year

Major: English

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: Urvi Kumbhat

Eva Ji is a student who is passionate about writing fiction and poetry from Saratoga, California. She is a freshman at the University of Michigan this year and is planning to major in English. In her free time, she likes to write poetry, sketch, and hang out with her cats. Her favorite coffee is matcha latte.

Unjaded

We are not the players who chose this game,
This history that will leave notorious fame,
This beast that is grueling to tame.

It subtly came
With a broken name,
Leaving shame
In shattered frame
That will never rewind the same.

But this is a new era,
The beginning of a new genre.
The invention of a new aura,
The new symphony in an orchestra.

Unjaded we always are,
Shower with care,
Undaunted by scare,
Face dare with stare.

We will ferment into better wine,
Raised jubilantly in the vine.
We will once more chat and dine,
Under where the starlights shine.
We will no more loathe and whine,
Hurt each other with sharpened tine.

We will align,
Online.

GEORGE KRIPPNER



Sophomore

Major: English and Political Science

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: Bridgette Brados

George Krippner is a English and Political Science major from Chicago, IL. He has particular interest in social advocacy, non-profits, as well as campaign strategy, and is planning on going to law school post undergrad. He recently picked up creative writing as a hobby, and has used it to explore mostly the various facets of yearning as an emotion, but also frequently writes about familial relationships.

Daydream

Leaning up against the wall,
I maintain our nauseating gaze.
As we passively talk,
Your eyes dart from mine to my frame, and back up again.
Watching you take a drag from our shared cigarette, I grin.
My smirk betrays my already known intentions,
and you laugh.

We get closer under the guise of a chill,
a shiver rolls down my spine—
my desire shakes into you from the place where our shoulders touch.
A snowflake on your lips pauses the already empty conversation,
Forcing my mind to focus on the almost ash cigarette butt in your
hand.

I extend mine in question, and you pass it to me.
Our fingers touch a second longer than they need to.

Silenced by the smoke that fills my lungs,
I have a second to marvel at you.
My stare turns your cheeks red.
Exhaling past your face, I see you watch my jaw,
Eyes lingering on the place where my head meets my neck.
I revel in your observation.

Discarding the excuse for an escape, the music from inside becomes
clearer.

Out of my control, my fingers touch your bare arm, and I look past
your pupils into you.

The tension I dream about actualizes into a reality,
Your eyes loiter on my lips.

Leaning in, my racing heart leaps from its human confines,
And I smile as our tongues touch.

Lacerates

Longing is my life.
It looms, lingers,
Lurks around corners: keeping me on its lusting path.

But, you long too.
It flickers around you.
Feel it, flex your fingers;
fight impulse.
Failing, you reek of it.

The scent sends me into a spiral.
Sparks fly, singe my senses.
Confused, I claw for clarity.
Only for you to grab my hand,
And drag me into obsession.

At the notion of intimacy,
Nausea rolls over me in a glorious wave.
Dominated by desire,
We plummet into a pit of passion:
Rejoicing.

A sonnet that shatters me—
You send me into shards of glistening ecstasy.
And in them I see you.

Pining

My eyes on yours for the first time,
a battle begins.

An intricate dance in which both parties are armed with the same
weapons.

Violent,
yet radiant in its beauty.

Reason is blinded by the gleam of your smile,
logic subdued by your laugh.

My body racks in response to the shock sent up my spine when our
fingers brush.

Witty remarks, razors, cut my resistance away.

Destruction donned with desire.
Willingly, I allow you past my defenses.

Like Troy, I fall.

My mind is sacked:
thoughts, feelings, and fantasies stolen.

Your grip hemorrhages my hesitation as you pull me towards you.
Terror of trust dragged to the forefront as you place your palm on the
small of my back.

A look of shared vulnerability spills venom into my shame.
Lacing your fingers into my hair,
my last scrap of fight fades away.

Your lips on mine become the gun in my mouth,
and I surrender.

KAILEY KUHLMAN



First Year

Major: EEB-Ecology, Evolution, & Biodiversity, Creative Writing & Literature

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: Laura Kasischke

Kailey is a current freshman at the LSA Residential College and is from the small town of Spring Lake, Michigan. She is the co-leader of the Creative Writing Forum and has a great appreciation for the literary arts. She loves nature, folk music, tie-dye, and sports. During her free time, you can find Kailey going on walks around Ann Arbor, doing yoga, drawing with oil pastels, and hanging out with friends.

Once

The wildflowers in my backyard were never what I expected.
The Smooth Aster didn't fit the flower crown,
Dandelions were always lonely,
Trillium drooped,
And the bouquet looked empty.

But on my first day of kindergarten,
I lined my crayons up anyways.
Chose Carnation pink and Fern green,
Wrote my name in Lilac,
Dotted my "I's with a Rose flourish.

And the field of faces that filled the classroom
Were bluebells waltzing through,
Curtseying Dewberries,
The towering Black-Eyed Susan.

Our teacher was the Blazing Star with her soft voice and picked at
guitar,
But you in the back,
Just beside the Dewberries and Blue Eyed Mary,
You were the Wild Geranium with face focused and pencil ready,
When I laughed, you smiled, Our conversations weaving themselves
together,
Your shy roots slowly reaching for the ends of mine.

And just Once,
As I drove past the cornfields, the usual turn to grandma's,
I found a field of wildflowers,
The Blazing Star
The centerpiece in this covered ground,
The Wild Geranium barely peeking
Over the Black-Eyed Susan

And I was reminded of you.

A Note in Sync with Breath

I have learned to count your motion. This posture of *In for four,*
hold for seven, out for eight.

The repetition of your words scratching at the back of my throat. An
itch to swallow *All*
This Empty Space.

I have begun to shape your presence to the poses of my body. The
scuff of a shoe,
Snap of a hand. *I am shrill in my sonnets, you say, Hear the space in*
my syllables.

I pay no mind to your existence. You are nothing but reassurance. I
move my mouth around your residence, positioning lips in the form
of T-H-A-N-K Y-O-U

Sparks

The nights that I walked to the Bayou,
The fireflies were a secret I
swore to you was magic

Have you ever tried to capture magic?

their once
waltzing rhythm, This muse in
a luminescent landscape

The way it squirms in the net, A slow blink
of acceptance, their wings flapping, legs battling,
intertwined in twine, its Life in the hands of a child.

*

Then a sudden stillness.

(A moment of silence)

I had not known the meaning
of silence. Had not learned the
beauty of letting go.

So I pray to the ground. Forgive me
for shattering this tranquility.

*

When the fireflies return,
I will walk just like I did before,
Scrape every bit of magic
out from the bottom of my mason jar

Release it back to the Earth,
Grab your hand and point
Towards these waltzing wonders:

Have you ever witnessed magic?

The Earth Beneath Us

The lilacs are my Grandmother's favorite.
Planted on the side of the road,
their violet shades a compass pointing home.

And when we dance we make posy
poses, Our roses reflected
In the mirror's glow.

We grow with the tulips in the front
yard, those Rembrandt colors, a gift
from her granddaughter.

And when the sun looks down
We laugh lilies, exchanging
daisy dialogue until the day fades
Into dusk.

MATTIE LEVY



Senior

Major: Oboe Performance

Minor: Creative Writing

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: Cody Walker

Mattie Levy is a writer, poet, oboist, and composer. At the University of Michigan, she is in her 4th year pursuing a BM in Oboe Performance and a minor in Creative Writing. Mattie also works as a student advisor for the University of Michigan School of Music Theatre and Dance (SMTD) Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, a musician for the SMTD Office of Engagement and Outreach, and as a contributor to the column arts, ink. where she publishes poetry weekly. She is also the co-founder and vice president of Black Leaders in Art Collective, an organization that works to support Black students in the School of Music Theater and Dance by providing a safe space along with performance and collaborative opportunities. Some of Mattie's compositions can be found on her YouTube channel, her latest piece "Daydreams" features oboe, voice, and over 40 software instruments. She is also currently writing a musical about 4 Black musicians in the classical music sphere. Mattie's poetry meditates on her experience as a Black woman, as a

musician, and as a human. She processes life and all its tangles and misconceptions in her poetry and uses it as a vehicle to determine how she sees the world. You can connect with Mattie by subscribing to her YouTube channel @Mattie Levy or following her on Instagram @mattie_tvc15.

Strange Fruit

After Billie Holiday

TW: Lynching

Your limbs are tendrils
Flailing in protest offbeat
to the beat of hearts
Working
to understand
your speech.

Seek the neverending sending of messages that
teach upstanding misunderstanding of

Your hair and why it crinkles
So early after water stipples hit
Freshly
Burned Skin
Cells that work against it
Turn you thick to sense it
Coming
Before The wind

Your reaction
Almost human
Flesh
always brazen to the thought of the world we're in.

Blue Noise

Background ache in the front of my head fades. My
eyes tremble under wanted weight
Of letters moving far ahead of a phrase
Across unprinted words turned to papered hate. I
feel the whispering surface through
Eardrums as two fingers swipe up and down.
Gurgles in the distance, artifice named, prove They
are trying to speak. (water trickles around) The
simple rhythm of crushed sugar cane
On spoons hitting the pitcher's side, crippled. Strings
swell during desperate tv scenes. The same, As stuck
keys on stand up pianos, lost tunes, fickle, Bare feet
sticking on stained laminate, moving Here, in this
house, "What are you doing?"

TW: Spiders

This will serve as a trigger warning for certain squeamish readers

8 legs brown legs black legs brown and black striped legs You
try to hit them

They're too repulsive to wipe away with your hands You
grab shoes

Kick them off your table, your walls, your glass ceiling
But no matter what they keep coming back

The numbers that are unaccounted for

Making homes in your mouths

And your corners

And your libraries

And your suburbs

Waiting

A meditation of our situation

After Odd Man Out by Michael Hall

Tell me the name of the music That
kept you awake for so long Sing it to
me slowly
Syllabically
Softly as I slip to sleep

Your words relish walls
They appreciate the appropriation Of
my rhythm
Tapping like your heart pounding In
pentameter with my raised voice

We are looking through thin slits
Wrapping on the surface
Of welded steel
The weight of our words
Willowing away wallowing
Yearning for lost speech

And even if you, my love
Come out of this un- Your
full self

I'll remember the silence In
your song

Talk to me.

Talk about it.
Tool for you,
Toil for me.
Tear it up.
Taste, Turbulent
taint, Towering
trust, Total lust,
Till listless whispers,
Turn tangled dust.
Tattered tongues.
Tempted mouths.
Take tired hands,
Turn them to touch.
Tick tock.
Top me off.
Taper,
Topple stupor stupid,
Tickle, tender.
Tit tactical
Toadyish
Tall

Summer Camp

I

The water is hard-boiled
Once cracked the pieces of the shell beat down on your back
Its rot putrefies your nose as it mingles with your skin
The pressure good on the stalls to the left
Weak on the ones to the right
We have meetings with these heads after
Breath strokes and Marco Polo and cords that mark the deep end
After
Circles around fire pits
They wash away earworms
Slithering in patterns spelling
Demonic rhymes of found peanuts
Tales of princesses and rikibamboos and wizards
Night-caps in evening snacks

II

We hear the sound of feet
Scraping bleached wood with
Green lake ripples
Oranges, yellows, and reds in life jackets
Were sized and distributed amongst tremoring fingers
We watched as pail water splashed against the blob
To cool rainbow rubber
“Blobber ready?”
“Blobbing!”
Certainly uncertain
Weighted then weightless
Life jacket something to hold on to-
But
Can't stop you from flying
Just barely keeps your feet
From grazing the sand

III

Walls to our shins create a pit

“Ga”

“Ga”

“Ga”

A ball in, tinny ping and hits pavement

The kids go

Hands reach for the ball

Feet jump to evade

Hands reach for the ball

Feet jump to evade

We bend to guard our shins

Fleeing aches in our backs

IV

Pamper pole

With brass handhelds

I ignore the wind to keep steady

As I hoist myself up to stand

On top

Fear falls

When I jump

Grasping for a dangling

Stuffed Carrot

PRINCESS-J'MARIA MBOUP



First Year

Major: Biology

Reading: Short Essay

Nominated by: Michael Zhai

Princess-J'Maria Mboup is a regional gold medalist for ACT-SO in poetry performance and an avid poet and songwriter. She is passionate about many things in life which, as she claims, makes her life “busy, yet fulfilling”. These passions include social justice, the arts, and the sciences. She aspires to be a wildlife veterinarian but plans to do many other things as she believes that life is a fluid experience and human beings are not tied to one sole purpose or duty. She enjoys philosophizing about life and the relationships people have with the physical and spiritual world. Her piece is an introduction to some of her daily pondering.

Auras and Energies

We live our lives from our point of view only. Many of us pass by people on the street and think about how they have their own storyline in which we are the extras. We all live as one version of ourselves and our existence, but there are actually many versions of every human being on Earth. We leave lasting impressions on others' lives that give us a new identity. However, we are blind to these other versions unless someone specifically tells us how we've been perceived. Even if such a thing were to occur, that every stranger told every other stranger how they perceive their identity, and then moved on, people would never be able to live that experience. They would never be able to mimic meeting themselves for the first time. These first impressions create characters in others' lives. The way we interact with the world tells a story about what kind of person we are. It is a reflection of our childhood, a reflection of our background and our experiences. Along with this is the reality that we consciously change certain aspects of our true nature in the public eye. We are then portraying a character in place of our most raw and authentic selves.

The distance between a person and their character varies from person to person, some more secure and at peace in their identity than others. This is why we cannot make an assumption about one's character as we observe them navigate the world in our own conscience. What we can do is make characters out of a person as we observe them navigate the world from our own conscience. We can create characters based on the energy they transfer to us and try to step out of our own reality to play the role of our new characters. We tend to describe the energy that we receive as a vibe or an aura. We say things like;

"Ooh, look at that man in that lambo! It's giving rich energy fasho'; he's gotta be rich. Girl, if I had a lambo, you wouldn't be able to catch me if you tried! I'd be throwing money out the window with a fine man right beside me. I would be the baddest woman on Earth, forreal. God knew better than to make me rich."

Moments like those typically end with laughter from you and those around you. However, in those short moments, we break free from the life our constant (and I say constant because we will always only be able to live from our point of view, not that we don't change) selves lead and become actors with

a new background and storyline. The characters we create for ourselves and others may or may not exist in “real life”, but they are characters that will exist in our story forever.

I leave my dorm with my friend to get some food. It's about 7 or 8pm. The closer it gets to nighttime, the more enthusiastic I am about walking, though I can't stay out too late on my own. Tonight was my chance while I had company. There's a man with a bulletproof vest on handing something out. I can feel his aura. It's friendly, so I approach him with my friend instead of acting like I didn't see him. I could have misread this and get into trouble now, but I figured it was pretty lit up in the area and there are enough people around. He hands me something. It's a flyer to go see a rap group perform in a week or so. He hands these flyers out with a smile and is very mannerable towards everyone he encounters. I call his character Tyrone. Tyrone is the typical huge, black pure unit of strength and danger. His build and the way his face looks at resting makes everyone scared to talk to him. He's used to it though. It's always been like that. People don't care to approach him out of fear and they only call on him if they need to lift something heavy or grab something high. He makes up for his appearance by acting overly nice and mannerable to everyone he sees. He realized long ago that his skin color is a target on his back already, nevermind his tall stature and muscular frame. He cursed his genes from time to time. He feels most comfortable around his people, who understand him and realize that he's not a danger or a threat or mean, but he's a good person who has the right to be mean sometimes or be angry or friendly and sociable because he's human.

Tyrone wants to be himself, but his longing for a decent quality of life outweighs his desire for security in his identity. Tyrone is a happy person, who likes people and wants to be a positive influence on everyone's life. He moves cautiously and anxiously to make others feel comfortable around him. Tyrone doesn't like this reality, but he's come to terms with it and has found happiness within this way of living. He continues to hand out flyers, never missing a “how are you doing” or a “thank you, have a great night” and always smiling. I am Tyrone.

After living as Tyrone, I get a little teary eyed and start adjusting back into myself.

The moment is short lived as I'm already laughing about how I'm not going to that concert because the men in the group look like they're trying to grasp

onto the last bit of youth they have. They could be really good, but I wasn't going to find out. I throw the flyer away and hear my friend go,

“Dang, you just gon' throw it away?”

I feel my heart clench a bit at her words, even though I know she was playing. I thought of Tyrone and how happy he looked that I took the flyer. However, I knew that my intention was not to make fun of or disrespect what looked like their security guard or manager. With that knowledge of my own intention, I let it go and continue on.

There's a white lady who rushes past us and bumps into us as she goes, without saying a word. She crosses the street with no attempt to look both ways even though the cross signal hadn't lit up yet. I get an aura of entitlement and insecurity from her. I'll call her character Becky. Becky has somewhere to be that is more important than anyone else's destination. She looks down on the people around her as she's been put on a pedestal all her life. She is God's greatest gift to mankind. She must be protected and catered to or there's a problem. Don't make Becky call her daddy or your life will be ruined. It's better to just stay silent and tolerate her childish actions. No one is going to check her, as it's never happened before in her 22 years of living. This is her world and we are just living in it. Her spoiled personality causes her to have no genuine friends or lovers. Her friends are a bunch of yes men and women who only praise her and refuse to say anything that could be perceived as negative about her or to her. Her lovers are there for the status and to take advantage of her money as well as use her for her body. They figure all they have to do is spoil her and then use her and when that gets old, they break up. Sometimes this makes her sad and she craves genuine affection, both platonically and romantically. She wants someone to get mad at her and tell her off. The problem is that no matter what she does, her parents clean up the mess and they praise her for existing. Becky's been taught directly and subtly that rich white people like her and her family are superior to others.

That's why she doesn't have to say “excuse me” or apologize for her mistakes. She makes no mistakes. She is the jewel of every town and it should be obvious to all that she has priority over them. Cars are expected to stop for her whenever she decides to make the road a crosswalk. People are expected to let her through when they hear the quick click of 4 inch stilettos on the ground. As she grows up, Becky realizes more and more that she has no friends or people to lean on and that her parents are getting older and won't be there forever. She realizes that her behavior is a problem. But she's never

had a problem so she ignores that reality and keeps displaying the same behavior, hoping that as her identity becomes more and more of a bluff, she can still convince herself that this is who she is and come to terms with that. I am Becky.

I become Princess-J'Maria once again as I feel disgusted, yet I pity Becky. That helps me calm down from the level of anger I felt when she pushed past me as if I was a tree branch in the way. My friend and I exchanged the look. She's lucky we were having a good time. I regret not saying anything but I didn't want to come off as the angry black woman. I usually don't care but I, like everyone, construct a character for the sake of the public eye to some degree more often than not.

We continue on our quest. We get to the food place, order to-go, and leave. We plan to eat outside. My friend wants to take pictures in front of the theatre that is beautifully lit this time of night. I don't hesitate to say yes. I'm taking her pictures and hyping her up as I see an older Chinese man, maybe in his 30's. He examines the Shang-Chi movie poster on the theatre wall. He starts examining other movies and comes back to Shang-Chi. His aura is relieving. He moves on along his way, probably making note of showtimes or something like that. I think about how good that movie was and how he won't be disappointed should he decide to see it. I'll call his character Jackie. That's not his real name, but it's what everyone calls him. Jackie comes from a wealthy enough background.

He's not rich but he's upper-middle class for sure. He grew up in a predominantly white area and lived in a particularly nice neighborhood. His parents always did what they could to make sure he lived as comfortably as possible. He'd go to school like any other kid and make friends and be a kid. One day, he heard some kids erupting in laughter. He wanders over there to have in on this seemingly spectacular show. Instead of laughing, he is stunned as they are laughing at him! Well, not him specifically, but his features. One student runs around pulling their eyes back into a slit going,

"Look at me! I'm Asian now!"

Everyone laughs and the joke never gets old. He then grows up dealing with incidents like this. Comments about how he's inherently good at math, questions about if he plays piano or violin, expectations to be this skinny, scrawny, nerdy man that has no sex appeal but knows some form of martial arts, and people calling him Bruce Lee or Liu Kang instead of his actual name. He's been infantilized as an adult by people and saw that some or a

mix of these qualities were how others saw Asian people/men. The media portrayed Asian men as being martial artists or scrawny nerds that had no game. No actual aspects of Asian culture were displayed, and like all minorities, Asian people were often accessories for white characters. He felt upset about these things but felt like it wasn't important enough to make a fuss over. Besides, any time he'd attempt to bring it up, it was shut down by telling him that Asian (meaning East Asian, but people just now started making the distinction) people are like white people and have good stereotypes. He was a part of the model minority and the reason why other minorities have no reason to be in the place that they're in. Jackie knows Asian people in poverty, rich Asian people, and Asian people in between, but the narrative is that Asian people are almost at the top of the pyramid. He gets older as he starts to accept that he should endure quietly, without making a fuss. During the progression of the "Stop Asian Hate" movement, he, along with other Asian people (East, South, West, etc.), found a sort of empowerment to speak their truth. People started caring more about Asian peoples' experiences with racism and they were finally gaining some representation as their own people and not an accessory to white characters or a caricature of an Asian person. Just as Black Panther was not only a fire movie, but an important movie for representation of black people, Shang-Chi is the same for him and other East Asians who think like him. He studies that poster with pride, smiling at it for a minute and then trying to hide his satisfaction when he zones back in.

He makes eye contact with a girl who's examining him, walking past her. He seems to be feeling caught as his eyes dart away from hers and he rushes off anxiously. I am Jackie.

By now, I am done visiting the lives of the characters in my life and my friend and I are at the spot where we will eat. I relate to Jackie, Becky, and Tyrone. We are all people who want to be looked at as people. Nothing more and nothing less. Our circumstances push us into these roles that we adopt and portray on the street. These auras are our truest nature. While I've been using aura and energy interchangeably, they are sort of different. I believe our auras are the part of us that cannot be changed or faked. They are the essence of our existence. The energy you give off can change and be molded to fit the persona you want to display. While they are separate, they work together. In my characters' stories, the energy they give to others fights with the aura that is received by others: others meaning me in this case. I will admit, I'm not great at reading auras. I can't see them like some people can

and I usually don't care to know the backstories of the extras in my life. This one time though, it was interesting to live outside myself and play the role of a fictional character based on real people. I don't know their real names, so I gave them each a stereotypical name to match their assumed background. These people in this story of mine are characters, so I found giving them the real names of the people inappropriate. They are separate from one another and should be kept that way. However, these stories are someone's backstory. Someone can relate. Someone gets to experience their life through a different person. Tyrone, Becky, and Jackie are all different versions of many people in this world. Like I mentioned earlier, I don't know the distance between Tyrone and the man with the bulletproof vest or Becky and the woman who I should've told off, or Jackie and the man admiring the poster. What I do know is that I've created another version of those people within my life. In this way, there is one more bulletproof man in an alternate reality, my reality. So while these characters don't exist, they are very real.

ELI NEUMANN



Senior

Major: English

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: John Buckley and Nick Harp

Eli is an English major in the Honors Program and loves creative writing, film, and narrative video games. He intends to go to graduate school for a PhD and MLIS, and hopes to become a librarian. He is also currently writing a novel, so he hopes he can continue working on creative projects after graduation.

In the stillness of Winter / life

A serene scene, January evening, as water
for the tea hisses somewhere from afar.

Snow falls ghostly in glow of streetlights,
the day shuttered behind the western wall

as lonely coats walk home with lowered heads
and make scraping sounds against the sidewalk.

The one voice heard exists solely upon
a solemn air, a hum of everything:

squirrels pounce on the white powder,
slight rattling of branches from a breeze,

a train siren sounds some miles off, unseen
but felt and known just the same.

Home, becoming

We lie in the low light of empty spaces
in our new apartment, nearly unfurnished
and unadorned except for some pictures
and two sand-colored lamps we found
the day before.

Noon to night the windows struggle
to usher enough light to make these rooms
feel like home, to help our faces be seen
for each other, but we are illuminated
from laptop and phone screens,
something like restitution.

Meanwhile, we cook and clean
the cheap countertops and plain carpet,
read emails, watch a movie. Forget
all else for a moment; sleep,
then dream.

When they feel far / from me, I'd like to ask

Where do you go
sailing through silence
like birds floating
in a windless blue?
Everywhere,

whether mountains approach
or houses shift or sidewalks
collapse,

a path remains
to where you are.

Where are you
except in these
stale spaces, unstable
roomscales, landscapes

where sometimes
only sunlight moves
across the floor,

or only shadows
manage to breathe

in deafening absence?

ARI ONTKO



First Year

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: John Buckley

Ari is a writer and poet from Canton, Michigan. She is a freshman with a passion for many things including environment, athletics, and animals. Her writing tends to be about the vibrancy of love and of life. The feelings that make and break us. She hopes to further develop her writing abilities and incorporate writing into her career somehow in the future whether it be journalism or a fun side hobby.

Bad Grapes

The wine tasted funny this summer.
With subtle, syrupy tangs that thickened
with the months
like air in the heat.

The first sips of June's glass were sweet
It's haze clinging to us like campfire smoke
Pitched tents kept warm-
dotted dark skies kept vast

July's tasted even sweeter.
Corks popped like fireworks,
a glorious shimmer bouncing
from the waves as we watched.

Then it was two bodies in a crowd, in those
early August festivals that drowned out the world.
But even the liquor couldn't make the music last longer.
We tasted it for the first time then.

By summer's end our bottles were drained.
We held them upside down over our mouths.
We licked the droplets from the glass-
Neotame.

Sweet enough to gag.
Thick smoke and crashing waves
and mosh pits now all stuck under the sap.
Must have been bad grapes from the start.

In Our Youth We Were Immortal

In old age
Naivety thickens to skepticism

Organized and
Unary mind
Reflect on grainy success

Yet in retrospect
Our vision clears by those
Untold secrets, known only by
The lost winds of the lost days
Hiraeth to those feelings

Woe eyed wonder
Endearment dipped joy

Were we breathed for more than breath
Every scent a
Revival
Exhaling *la vida de ayer*

Immersed completely by
Mistakes to grow out of and
Millennials ahead
Our sight rang true
Ripe and unplagued memories
Telling stories of
A world as
Lovely as the music says

Metaphor Boy

*Metaphors are used in communication to help illustrate or explain something
by comparing it to something else.
-Yourdictionary.com*

Help is the key word.

Because I could never drain the ocean with my hands,
but maybe with the help of a bucket. Describing
you how you'd explain what blue is
to a person who's never seen color.

By pressing ice against their skin,
making them listen to waves crash, by
detailing the flowers, butterflies, and the sky.
Touching on everything it's *like* but nothing it is.

So I've chucked all the metaphors I have into a pot
and simmered them down like soup. I've
reduced you down to the solace of a mid-summer breeze
and the shade. The organic beauty of a riverbed and
ivy climbing up a tree. The expansive feelings
of adrenaline and vivacity, and that odd *tug* in your stomach
when excitement meets fear.
Everything you are *like* but nothing you *are*.

But this tactic leaves gaps I cannot fill.

Because if, for a moment, we go back to describing blue,
you'll eventually have to describe the blue of fire
when blue was just described as cold and fire as red.
And you'll eventually have to explain how the sky is blue
but can also be grey and black and orangish-pink,
and you'll have to decide if teal is considered blue or green.
Now I can decide the color dilemma because
I've seen teal and blue and green,
but this is where you've trapped me because
I've never seen anything of the likes of you.

And the thought has crossed my mind that maybe
you were so much simpler than the color blue.
Maybe you weren't actually any of these lovely things.
Maybe I just saw pieces of you in them all,
and everything just reminded me of you.
But these comparisons are the closest I'll ever get to your entirety.
So I will keep using my metaphors,
and my bucket and sea of blue.
I'll piece you together the best I can,

 my beautiful metaphor boy,

one day I'll color in this sketch of you

CHELSEA PADILLA



Junior

Major: Political Science and Creative Writing & Literature

Reading: Fiction

Nominated by: Laura Thomas

Chelsea Padilla is a third year student from Grand Rapids, Michigan who has been writing for as long as she can remember. She has a passion for exploring the role of fantasy and magic in stories of otherness. When she isn't writing, she can be found watching movies or making food with friends. She also loves researching Filipino folklore and mythology, and she hopes to share elements of these stories with others in the future!

Shooting Star

On the first cold night of his first American winter, Isko watches a star fall out of the sky.

He'd been walking home from the campus library with two books tucked under his arm, carefully picking through snow-covered sidewalks on the way back to his dorm building. But he stops as soon as he notices the star, craning his neck up to look at the sky. For a moment, a thin line of bright, white-blue light streaks across the shadows above him before disappearing, fading into the dark horizon.

Back home, his father used to tell him little folktales before bed, a soft chorus of crickets and cicadas and warm night air wafting in from the window. Storytelling had been a strategic move on his father's part – he would change the language of the story each night, going from Bisaya to Spanish to English. The ones about the shooting stars had always been Isko's favorite.

"It's good luck to see a shooting star falling," his father had told him. "But it's even better luck if you meet the star yourself."

Each star, he'd said, has a body, heart, and soul – but even more importantly, an immense amount of magic ability, greater than any human magician.

"More powerful than you?" Isko had asked. "More powerful than you and Mama?"

His father laughed. Outside Isko's bedroom window, the molave tree next to their house laughed with him. Isko had been too young to understand what the tree was saying – his parents hadn't yet taught him how. But he could hear its branches swaying, as if an invisible gust of wind had moved them.

"Oh, yes," his father said. "Far more powerful than either of us. A star can grant any wish you want."

"Have you ever met one?"

His father shook his head. "I've only seen pictures in the paper. Stars fall, but it's very rare." He squeezed Isko's shoulder. "But maybe you'll get lucky."

The memory makes Isko smile. But then the wind blows, biting at his cheeks and hands, and he remembers where he is.

Isko glances up again. The other stars in the sky seem fixed to the black background of the night, distant and soundless. It's so quiet at night in win-

ter, he realizes. The streets around him are still, the trees silent. Asleep, like the blades of grass buried beneath the snow. He wouldn't be able to hear their thoughts even if he tried.

His fingers gripping the spines of his library books are beginning to feel too bare, almost raw in the bitter cold.

He thinks he would ask a fallen star for gloves if he could.

-

Adjusting to the cold is taking longer than Isko thought it would.

At home, he could never shake the feeling of heat, as if warmth had always been a part of him, soaked into his blood and threaded into his bones. The two monsoon seasons – the *amihan* and the *habagat* – and the breaks in between used to be all he'd ever known. Warm winds rustling against the pale green leaves of the narra trees, the leftover paper lanterns from Christmas hanging from the roof, swaying, the candles inside flickering. The breeze carrying the sweet smell of his mother's sampaguitas as the white blossoms whisper to him from their vines.

Even still, he'd enjoyed the fall semester and how summer had cooled into autumn. He'd watched as the trees slowly shifted to shades of red and orange and yellow, listening as their voices quieted to soft murmurs. The cold had been bearable, then.

Winter is an entirely different beast. Isko hates how the wind wraps around his body, bites at his skin. Whenever he steps outside, the air is cold, foreign. Sharp, like a knife slicing at his cheeks whenever he walks around campus. And the stillness – the silence. It makes him ache for home.

He's made a habit of lingering near the radiator in the common room every morning before he leaves the dorms for class. His roommate Charles gives him a look when he notices Isko standing by the radiator for the first time. He checks his wristwatch. "Don't you have class?"

Isko shrugs, opening his wool coat to usher in one final wave of heat. "Yes," he says, "and I don't need to leave for another minute."

Charles snorts. "Oh, come on. It's really not that bad if you layer up. And it'd be even better if you charmed your coat with a heating spell."

"I don't even think I know any heating spells, Charlie."

"Well," Charles says, then pauses. "I've got a book on heating spells up in our room I can give to you when you get back. You're a pensionado for a reason, so you'll get the hang of it eventually, right?"

The corners of Isko's mouth twitch upwards. He closes the buttons on his coat and lifts the strap of his school bag onto his shoulder. "Maybe."

As he leaves, a fern in the corner of the room parrots Charles's words. *You're a pensionado for a reason!*

—

Isko does not, in fact, get the hang of it.

That night, back in the common room, he starts out small. Charming an entire coat had seemed a little too ambitious, and if he messed up – what then? He'd end up without a functioning coat at all, and he'd rather not waste his scholarship money to buy a new one. So he settles on trying to cast a spell on a button. In the end, he casts the spell too hot. Isko almost burns a button-shaped hole into one of the wooden tables.

Isko brushes whatever's left of the button into the trash can. In its wake, it leaves a soot stain on the table's smooth brown surface.

"Hell," he mutters.

Across the room, Isko hears Charles laugh. "Things are sounding unsuccessful over there."

Isko looks over his shoulder, narrowing his eyes. Charles is sprawled across the couch, the latest issue of the campus newspaper in his hands. One of his friends from across the hall is sitting next to him, flipping through a thick red textbook titled *Theory of Magic*. Dirty blonde, glasses. Isko can't remember his name.

"You would've said the same thing if you stained a table with a burnt button," Isko says.

That earns him another laugh from Charles. "Maybe you should practice your heating spells on a non-flammable surface. You know, like – not something made of wood?"

"Maybe the book you gave Reyes should have said something about that," Dirty-blond-glasses says. For a split second, Isko's thoughts snag. Reyes. Some students – and professors – only ever call him by his last name, clearly avoiding his first name even though they'll say the first names of his white classmates. Like they're incapable of saying *Isko*, as if it's too Filipino for them. As if *Isko* didn't come from *Francisco*. "Come on, Charles. You should know better."

"What?" There's a frown on Charles's face. "I'm only trying to help. You can't fault me for that."

Dirty-blond-glasses raises an eyebrow. "The guy's not from here. Some things need to be stated explicitly for our little brown brothers."

Isko stiffens. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees that the potted fern is just slightly mirroring his posture. He can hear it hissing, its leaves shaking.

Little brown brothers. The phrase had first been used by an American politician, and Isko has wanted to rip that moment from existence ever since. Each time he hears it is a cruel reminder of home. Of war. The words are derogatory and paternalistic in the worst way possible.

If Charles notices Isko's change in demeanor, he doesn't say anything about it. "Maybe it should've," he agrees, his voice a little dismissive. "Listen, Isko, did you see the news today?"

Warily, Isko shakes his head. Charles flashes a headline at him: *Fallen Star Enrolls at 'U.'*

"Oh." Isko thinks back to the other night. The bitter cold and the shooting star. He glances down at the dark stain on the table. "I think I saw that star fall, actually."

"Did you really?" Charles grins. "I'd love to meet him. The paper says he's allegedly in the history department with you."

"I'll let you know if I see him in class, then." Isko runs his thumb over the soot mark, idly. "Maybe he'll grant my wish or something. My father used to say that stars could do that."

Dirty-blonde-glasses raises an eyebrow again, but he doesn't look up from his textbook. "How quaint."

"It is a nice thought," says Charles, pleasantly.

Again. Isko bites at his tongue. The fern in the corner lets out a scream, and for once, Isko wishes that the Americans could hear it too.

-

He goes outside, after that.

It's almost as cold as the night before. The wind is still harsh and biting. But Isko is willing to take the wind's company. Anything is better than the common room.

Back home, his father would say that the monsoon seasons happen every year because of two gods playing with the wind, separated from each other into two halves of the year. Together, the gods' games would be too much for the world to handle. They would have carved the islands of the Philippine archipelago into thin slivers a long time ago. Instead, at the beginning of creation, the gods had been told to take turns playing. One half of the year would go to the god of the *amihan*, the Northeast monsoon, while the other would go to the god of the *habagat*, the Southwest monsoon.

What would the Americans make of that folktale? Isko wonders. What would Dirty-blonde-glasses make of it? Maybe he'd laugh, or raise an eye-

brow. Or maybe he would say, *Silly Filipinos. Our poor, stupid, little brown brothers.*

Isko's first class on Wednesdays is a history class.

It's a larger lecture, but he's thankful for that because it's a morning class, placed at the godforsaken hour of eight in the morning. A larger class means a larger crowd that will allow him to easily slip into obscurity in case he needs the sleep.

At least, in theory. In a room of white people, he'll always stick out in some way.

Out of habit, Isko arrives a couple minutes early and slides into a seat in one of the middle rows of the lecture hall, lingering near the edge of the aisle but leaving the last seat in the row empty next to him. His fellow students trickle in slowly, faces red from the cold outside. To pass time, Isko takes out his notebook for class and turns to the most recent page. The latest heading he'd written reads "Magic in the American Revolution," but if he's being honest, he can't remember anything about the lecture outside of his notes.

"Excuse me," a voice says, "is it okay if I sit here?"

Isko glances up. A young man stands above him, and for a moment, Isko just stares. The man has dark hair and warm brown skin, which is already strange enough. But Isko's gaze catches on the way his eyes shift in the light, from brown to a strange, golden honey.

Then he realizes the man is pointing at the seat beside him.

"Uh," says Isko. "Yes. That's fine."

The man gives him a bright smile. "Thanks."

Isko tries not to watch as the man settles into his seat. His mother had taught him better manners than that. But then he notices the students around them are also staring, too. Whispering.

Somehow, the man doesn't seem to notice. He lays a pencil and notebook out in front of him, tapping his fingertips idly on the table as if he can't feel the entire lecture hall staring at him.

Isko can't take it at this point. He leans closer to the man, lowers his voice. "Sorry if this is rude, but – are you a star? The star who enrolled for classes?"

"Oh. Yes." The star blinks. "How did you guess?"

"It's, ah. Your eyes, I think. They have a certain quality to them."

The star hums. "That makes sense. I forget humans don't often see eyes like ours." He pauses, tilting his head, and suddenly Isko is very aware that the man is studying him.

“Could I get your name?” Isko blurts out.

“Leo.” He looks vaguely amused. “What about you?”

“Isko. Reyes.”

Leo nods slowly, like he’s very carefully committing Isko’s name to memory. He sticks his hand out. “Good to meet you, Isko.”

Isko stares. His mother really would be upset with how much blatant staring he’s done today, and it’s not even eight yet.

Leo’s hand falters. “This is what humans do, right? You shake hands?”

“Yes!” Isko says, quickly. Christ, get it together. “Yes, sorry about that.” He takes Leo’s hand. His grasp is warm, almost a degree warmer than normal. “It’s good to meet you too.”

—

As Isko’s packing his things into his school bag at the end of class, Leo taps him on the shoulder.

“Would I be able to borrow your notes?” he asks. “Just for a day. I can get it back to you tomorrow if you want to meet me somewhere. I just want to go over the material I missed.”

The material he missed. Because he’d been in the literal sky up until recently, which is bizarre to think about. Isko hands over his notebook. “Of course. Do you want to meet me at the library tomorrow evening? I’m usually on the first floor.”

“Sounds good to me,” says Leo, and his smile is so warm and bright that Isko almost feels like he should turn away.

—

Underneath the light of the gas lamps, Charles’s eyes are wide and owlish. “You actually met the star? I didn’t think you would.”

Isko shivers. Almost drops the new spare button he’s holding. He and Charles are sitting on the stairs leading up to their dorm building because Isko refuses to practice using heating spells inside again.

“I didn’t think so either, but here we are.”

“Did you end up finding out if stars actually grant wishes or not?”

“Didn’t ask.” Isko squints at the button and tries to imagine what warmth feels like. Project that imagined sensation onto the button. He feels the button humming, slightly, responding. Is he imagining the button getting warmer? God, it’s cold out.

“Was he nice?”

Isko’s fingertips are beginning to feel a little less numb. Maybe he’s not imagining it. “Seemed like it.”

“What’d he look like? Does he look human?”

“For the most part, except for his eyes. They kind of changed colors, like glowing, kind of.” Isko stops. Is he using the right words? Leo’s eyes had seemed more like looking through a piece of amber with a light, but saying that would make it seem like Isko’s waxing poetic.

“Isko – the button’s smoking.”

“Shit!” Immediately, Isko drops the button and inspects his fingers. They’re a little red. Not incredibly burnt. Probably fixable if he lets them sit in water, or he could probably ask one of the healers for ointment.

Charles leans into his space to look and winces. “You know I could just charm your coat for you,” he offers. “But knowing you, I have a feeling you’re going to say no.”

“No,” Isko says, firmly. “If I want a heating spell on my coat, I want to learn how to do it myself.” He stares down at the button, burning a hole into the snow on the sidewalk. “Either that, or I adapt.”

–

The next day, Isko settles into his favorite corner in the library, which happens to be next to a thriving, talkative ivy sitting in a windowsill. It whispers at him as he opens one of his books. *What are you reading today?*

“Nothing too exciting,” Isko whispers back. “Just a book for class.”

Sounds boring. I prefer when you have something interesting to read. Or an interesting story to tell. Gives me something to think about.

A woman at the next table over is looking up from her stack of books, staring at him. It’s not for talking, Isko knows, because talking on the first floor of the library is allowed, so it must be for the *talking-to-a-plant* thing. Or it could be for the Filipino thing. Isko can never tell.

Normally, Isko would indulge the ivy – mostly because the ivy loved listening to Isko recite his father’s stories from home. But today, Isko wants the woman to stop looking.

“Maybe another time,” Isko says under his breath. The ivy gives him a small, almost imperceptible shrug.

An hour later, when the sun is already setting, Leo walks into the library. His face breaks into a smile the moment he sees Isko in the corner, and he walks over with an unearthly amount of grace – so much that the woman at the table pulls her face out of her books again. Isko wonders if all celestial beings are like this.

Oh wow, the ivy remarks as Leo approaches. *Oh wow wow wow*.

“Thanks for letting me borrow this,” Leo says. He places his notebook

neatly on the table. “I’d hate to be behind so early in the semester. Mind if I join you for a bit?”

Isko gestures at the empty chair across from him. “Be my guest.”

Leo slides into the chair, takes his own notebook out of his bag. “It’s so interesting to see how humans tell their own history. Us stars have watched from the sky for so long, but we’re at such a distance. We’re bound to see things differently. Glaze over certain parts. Notice hidden pieces.”

That’s a real, genuine star. Oh wow.

Isko resists the urge to nudge the ivy. “What’s it like up there?” he asks, instead.

For a moment, Leo stares out the window at the sky. The sun has almost disappeared, leaving behind a thin strip of golden light at the horizon. Isko wonders if he finds comfort in the Sun, knowing that it’s the closest star to him.

“It’s a little empty,” he says, eventually. “There’s lots of space between me and my brothers and sisters, but it’s not really that lonely. And it’s cold up there, much colder than here.”

Isko glances at his slightly burnt fingertips. They’re already healing thanks to the healer-in-training who lives in the room next to his, but she hadn’t been able to prevent scarring completely. Now, there are tiny, pale scars on the pads of his index and middle fingers, and a slightly larger one on his thumb. “I can’t imagine a place colder than here.”

“You’re not from here, either, right?” Leo pulls his gaze away from the window. His eyes are uncharacteristically bright in the shadows of the corner they’re sitting in. “I mean – I know you’re of this earth, but you’re not from this country.”

Isko nods. “I’m here on a scholarship through the American government. My family lives in the Philippines, if you know where that is.”

Leo raises his eyebrows. “That’s so far from here. You must miss it.”

Isko almost laughs at how ridiculous that sounds, coming from a star. “Your home is much further away than mine. But yes, I do miss it.”

He doesn’t ask if Leo misses his home – his glance out the window had been enough to show that he did. From what Isko remembers of his first few days in America, he remembers grasping at anything that reminded him of what he’d left behind. He recognizes that early, painful longing for home.

–

They part ways outside the library. It turns out they live in dorms on opposite ends of campus.

“We’ll have to exchange stories another time,” Leo insists. “I want to hear your father’s folktales.”

Isko laughs. It feels a little different to hear a star ask for his father’s stories. “I’d be glad to.”

“See you in class on Monday, then?”

“Yeah.” Isko nods. He rubs his hands together – the cold is already getting to him. “See you soon.”

He’s only gone a couple steps before he hears Leo call out behind him. “Wait, Isko.”

Isko turns. Leo’s behind him, peeling off his gloves.

“You mentioned not liking the cold, earlier,” he says. “You should take these – I really don’t need them.”

Leo presses the gloves into Isko’s hands. They’re nice – nicer quality than gloves Isko would have bought for himself. They are warm, and made of smooth, dark leather. Isko stares at them, and then at Leo, unblinking.

“You’re sure?”

“Of course. I tend to run warm, anyway.”

When Isko walks to the dorms that night, he doesn’t feel as cold, and he minds the still silence of the trees and grass a little less.

NEIL PETERSON



Sophomore

Major: Creative Writing and Literature

Minor: Drama

Reading: Poetry

Nominated by: Laura Kasischke

Neil is a writer and poet from Tawas City, a small town on the Sunrise Side of Michigan with the pleasure of being located between the Huron National Forest and Lake Huron. Neil is glad he grew up somewhere where he could experience the natural beauty of Michigan, and is thankful for places like the Arboretum here in Ann Arbor. Aside from writing, Neil also enjoys acting, playing guitar, chasing for the Michigan Quidditch Team, and above all, spending time with his pets: Stella, Rocky, and Krusty (dog, cat, cat). His poetry often focuses on relationships with loved ones or nature and animals, topics that are amongst the closest to his heart. He dedicates these poems to, well, you know who you are. ;)

Warhorse

Born and led
From mother's straw bed
With a score of other foals
To the stables.

Rearing as men near
Haunches held staunch
Ready to launch
In fight or flight
But with reins
Tied down tight

Herded to be hurt.

Led to field's edge
For a moment, silence, then:
Ridden into cannons
Between booms and blasts
As loud as lead

Rider, only friend
Bitten by a bullet
Fallen, dying, dead.
In that moment, fled

Free to run, free to run, free to run,

Until gunshots cease
And battles end
Rearing as they neared
Exhausted haunches yielding
Captured again.

Held and bred
For years on end
As old as death and
Blind, broken, tired

But by a popped tire,
Reminded of the cannon fire.

When the Sun Begins to Rise

Remember in the summer?
All those times that we...
 Well,
Should we really share it?
Give it verse, and let them see?

Be with me, reminiscing,
About the stars, about the tree,
 And,
While we keep them guessing,
Let us sneak off quietly,

And know that we'll preserve it,
And let it safer be,
 Kept,
Not on paper marred by pen,
But instead, in memory.

Roadkill

After all these years,
The highway does what it does best,
And claims another life.

And though the river flows no longer,
The deer still come to die,
And wash away into the asphalt.

Caught between a semi-truck,
Turned over on its side,
And the gnashing fangs,
Of man's best friend,
Once more lonely and wild.

Sun will set on the concrete river,
As the wolf-dog wanders off,
And the ghost-deer follows suit,
Both finished with her bones.

The deer finds friends and joins the herd,
As they graze back toward the wilds,
The wolf however buckles down,
And finds a car to sleep inside of.

The next day she'll still lay in the sun,
And rot like all the rest,
Abandoned on the highway,
Fresh flesh in the unrest,
The maze of metal chassis,

Though in those modern monsters,
That condemned the deer to death,
Lay more bones and ghostly idols,
Picked clean by old best friends,

And left in the car to idle.

After-Life

After laughter, love, and hugs,
After tears, and shouts, and shoves,
After loving long left wanted,
After all we'd waited,

I'd take you by the hand again,
Electrified to touch once more,
And show you where I'd waited
Dreaming of your voice like honey,

On the way I'd comfort you,
And by your presence,
Feel comfort too,
With love leaking from our sweaty palms,

Here, where all things come to rest,
I'd take you to the garden,
And show you every flower,
Alive or dead, or long lost and forgotten,

A sea of color unknown to me,
Where for years I'd stood excited,
Knowing one day I'd bring you here,
And listen as you recited,

The names of flowers, and weeds, and bugs,
Or anything you wanted,
I had missed the way your lips let slip,
All the life within your head,

Without you here, I had only died,
Now I'd truly gone to heaven,

Then you'd take me by the hand,
And lead me, softly talking,
I'd hang on every word you said,
And live again after life.

LILY PRICE



Sophomore

Major: Film, Television, and Media

Reading: Fiction

Nominated by: John Buckley

Lily Price is a sophomore studying Film, Television, and Media. She enjoys writing fiction, creative nonfiction, and screenplays. In her free time, she enjoys going to the movie theater and spending time with her dog.

Twin Sized Bed

I.

One of the first times I was there, I had a fever. There was a cowboy hat, a black silk dress, a low-grade fever, and on top of it all was a twin-sized bed.

The shivering had started earlier that day but I wrote it off as a result of the shoddy heating system in my house, denial at its finest. It came back when we were trying to go to sleep far too late after losing track of time kissing. I couldn't fall asleep because of it, thinking I just couldn't get warm again. He didn't understand how I could be cold under the weight of blankets and another person. I didn't understand either.

I went to the bathroom, hoping that I could shake it off but it only got worse surrounded by cold light reflecting off white linoleum tiles. My teeth chattered and I huddled into myself to no success. I looked at myself in the warped mirror and saw my hair matted and my mascara smudged, barely recognizable as the girl who left my house just hours before.

I got back in bed with him and tried to warm up. He pulled the blanket under my chin and held me close, feigning domestic intimacy for the night. I tried burrowing into him and losing myself in the feeling of his chest against my back, as if that could fix a fever.

The next morning I went home and got into my own bed after a restless night. I fell asleep quickly at the familiarity of it all. When I woke up a couple of hours later, I was soaked with sweat and knew my fever had finally broken.

II.

November passed and I kept sleeping in that bed, weekend after weekend. The day I was flying home for Thanksgiving, I woke up in his arms. Kissing in the daylight is so much more intimate than in a pitch black room and it feels especially heavy in early morning sunlight. I remember he tried to convince me that I didn't need to be at the airport two whole hours before takeoff. He went on and on, all because he wanted me to stay, "just a little longer."

I remember that he held me close and whispered over my shoulder that he'd miss me when I was gone. I couldn't help but give a little smile, hold him a little tighter, and say that I felt the same. I said it even though I couldn't tell if the words were true because even hearing it in daylight can't stop doubt.

It all felt so nerve wracking and heart thumping and wringing my wrists

trying to find a way to understand. And I'd love to say that I was overthinking and that someone could never act that way but it's happened before so I started to calculate the odds that it could happen twice and maybe not just once or twice but every time.

III.

It was December by then and the semester was wrapping up letting finals and holidays take control and the feeling of timelessness fade away. The culmination of all the social events was the biggest party of the year, Alcoholic Christmas. I didn't eat enough that day on purpose. It was a way to get drunk faster and with less effort. My friends and I had crafted these wrapping paper tops to wear for the special occasion. The walls of the basement were similarly dressed, covered in I don't even know how many rolls of paper. All of it coming together for a collegiate holiday celebration.

The events of the night weren't important to me because like every weekend I was just waiting for the moment he'd come and ask me to go upstairs.

I think he came to the conclusion that we were too close that next morning, when he asked me to stay in his bed while he went to his class. Asked me to wait for him, that he'd only be an hour. And I did stay there and I did wait. I was there when he came back, just like a Christmas gift.

IV.

The last night we shared that bed, there was a space between us and he asked me if I was ok. I said yes.

If only I could have mustered the courage to tell him I wasn't ok. But maybe he asked because he knew something was wrong. He knew something was wrong when I turned away from him and covered my eyes to try and feel like I was somewhere else. Anywhere besides the bed where he made me feel loved and then took it all away. I think we both knew things weren't ok and he tried to hold me to make it all better even though he knew he was gonna break my heart tomorrow.

It was the last day of classes but it was the first time I didn't sleep over. He gave an excuse as to why I couldn't stay over, something about his roommate's finals. I accepted it, knowing that it was a lie. I knew he hated his roommate. He complained about him nearly every time I saw him. I knew his roommate slept on the couch every night because they couldn't find a way to get along.

I knew he just didn't want me to stay over and needed to find some reason

to take the blame off himself. He had to have a reason because I used to always sleep in with him on the weekends. I used to always wake up and feel him next to me and kiss him when he woke up and let him hold me for hours until I reluctantly got dressed and left.

It was pouring rain that last night and he had promised to walk me home. He borrowed his friend's car instead and I watched the puddles out the window. The intersection by my house was flooded and I told him to drive carefully. I kissed him one last time before running up the stairs to my house.

V.

Now I willfully sit here and believe someone could change who they are even though they probably never will. Wallowing in sadness I swore I'd get over in a couple of weeks. The kind of sadness that makes me want to bang my head into a wall until I pass out from exhaustion.

Now I live and breathe and walk in a city that reminds me of too many things and too many moments, laying in my own twin bed thinking of another.

KATHERINE RYBKIN



First Year

Reading: Prose, Poetry

Nominated by: John Buckley

Katherine Rybkin is a writer from Plymouth, Michigan. She is an avid reader, and loves everything from fantasy to theoretical physics. She enjoys reading and writing as an outlet for exploring all the unlive d dreams left over from childhood, and she often writes about space, love, youth, and adventure. This is her first public reading event.

Je non regrette rien

Je non regrette rien.

Washing up on the
beaches of jaded waters of
Japan. Chasing wasted

dreams, yet in a dream.
Waves crashing around,
cruel reminders
of reveries unfulfilled.

Je non regrette rien.

Crisp air as I hold
you tight against the surges
passing over us.

Wind, water, fire,
earth, soon gone for the
last time. A fighting chance
for the oceans of time
to cry out and save us

Je non regrette rien.

A small stream jets through
my hair. Indifferent, rushing
in and trickling out,

oblivious, and
soon shattered
into Pacific shards
of requited reality.

Swept away, washed ashore.
I remember, but
I do not regret.

Onwards to the past

Kennedy (July) 16, 3969

When we landed on the Moon, I was rather underwhelmed. Phoebe used to tell me about how all our great-great-great-great-great grandparents were just absolutely fascinated by this little slab of rock zooming around and around and around aimlessly in the void, in nothingness.

A lot of space is plain old black, I'll tell you. Not at all like all those pictures you see on the station stops. You look out the window, and all you see is darkness.

Not all of space, though. When we were at Europa, on our way here, let's just say it would be a crime to try to describe her in words. Beautiful mountains bathed in the serene light reflected off Jupiter, just like in the ancient space comics. Pa should really try to get an expedition going there sometime. He is the boss of Expeditions, Ltd., after all; I think he's supposed to get a contract with the Ministry of Astronomical Exploration. Legend has it that our

great-great-great-great-great grandparents were about to send a serious expedition to Europa before they all had to evacuate Earth. We haven't been able to go back since, for fear of any lingering nuclear or chemical signatures, but I have heard only endless stories about how simply lovely the place was. Lush, green forests, air that was filtered naturally, by a marvelous creature called a *tree*, and not our machine filters. Don't get me wrong, our filters are the most technologically innovative of all the clusters, but how different it would be to breathe tree air.

Earth was also supposed to have all sorts of beasts on the land and in the water. I've seen pictures of what people think they might have looked like, and I can safely say that it's one of my biggest life dreams to meet a real squirrel someday. Funny-sounding name, isn't it? All the pictures I've seen of squirrels have them looking like adorable little chubs of fur, but who knows what they really look like. What if they're actually three ton monsters full of teeth?

Anyways, that brings me back to the point of our journey in the first place. Like I said, Pa is supposed to get his contract, so he sent me and Phoebe and Atlas and Orion to go on a swing-by of the solar system. We were supposed to only take a week since his new reactors make our ships go really, really

fast. Pa's a wizard at that kind of stuff. I persuaded Pa and the rest of them to let us make a quick stop at Earth though. Rumor has it that some people have illegally visited it, so this is the first time anybody will have officially traveled to the Earth in something like 2000 years. It isn't everyday you get to make history.

Orion made us stop on the Moon, or what's left of her, because he wanted moon rocks. I couldn't see what was so special about pale gray hunks of rock the size of a small transceiver. People got over those five hundred years ago, and I told him that rocks from Orbitor or Dimidium (which can be iridescent purple or azure if you're lucky) are way far out and all the kids at school would be astronomically jealous of him, but he would have none of it.

Here we are, though, on the Moon. The Earth, or what I think is her (I've never actually seen her before), stares me right in the eye. Right in the soul. She is pale blue, like I expected, and so unbelievably beautiful. Even Europa couldn't compare. I could have sworn to Jupiter and Saturn that she whispered a quiet "Hello" to me, asked me how I was. When the Earth asks you how you're doing, you tell her. Astronism has some old myths that the planets of the solar system are the gods of the universe and that they can never be destroyed. Though the tides of time may erode them bit by bit, they fight back. Always holding on, never giving up. Right now, I could believe anything you told me about the Earth, magnificent as she is.

Tomorrow we're supposed to visit her, and I whisper a semblance of a prayer to her to welcome us. I wonder what we'll find there. Maybe I'll even see a squirrel.