

A Star Trek Enterprise ship is shown flying through space. The ship is a sleek, dark-colored vessel with a prominent nacelle at the rear. The background features a large, bright blue planet on the left and a swirling nebula or galaxy structure on the right. The overall scene is set against a dark, star-filled sky.

Confluence

2018

Where Students and Creativity Converge

Three Rivers College

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

con·flu·ence \kən-**flü**-ən(t)s \ noun

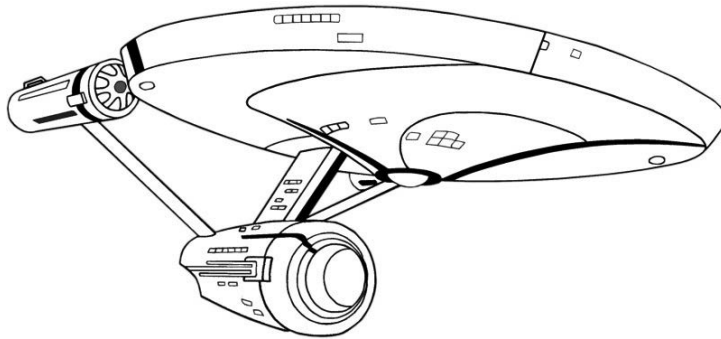
1: a coming or flowing together, meeting, or gathering at one point
<a happy confluence of weather and scenery>

2: the flowing together of two or more streams
<the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers>

3: the creative writing journal at Three Rivers College
<an issue of **Confluence** in your hands>

Confluence 2018

**Where students and
creativity converge**



The literary journal of

Three Rivers College

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

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1-877-879-8722 • www.trcc.edu

Volume Ten

Confluence 2018

Gordonia Award Winners

Prose

"Muse in the Stars" by Conner G. Terrill (p. 6)

Poetry

"I Am" by David K. Kearby (p. 40)

Acknowledgments

Writing is a kiss. It's two parts that meet... an idea meets paper, thumbs tap on a keypad, a dream meets reality, and writing meets an audience. When these connections occur, the results are greater than the two parts. There is a spark. It's magic. And sometimes it's controversial... like the first interracial kiss on network TV that occurred on *Star Trek* 50 years ago, which *Confluence 2018* commemorates.

Writers have an idea they love so much they have to express it. The selections in *Confluence 2018* reflect a campus-wide love for writing from students, staff, and faculty. This is not a contest where authors compete, instead *Confluence 2018* is a mirror of the diverse creative talent in our community. This year 24 authors submitted 50 poems, essays, and stories. Submissions are read by a student group whose scores select which pieces are published. The top ranked writings receive the **Gordonia Award**.

The award brings no prize or expensive trophy, instead it recognizes the merit of those who savor the craft of writing and know, like Henry Miller, that "writing is its own reward." This award is named after retired head librarian and English instructor, Gordon T. Johnston. In 1996, his vision and leadership created and organized an annual poetry reading to celebrate National Poetry Month. Look for "Muse in the Stars" by Conner G. Terrill and "I Am" by David K. Kearby, winners of the Gordonia Award for excellence in writing.

The authors in *Confluence 2018* are in love with writing. This kind of affair can take you "where no one has gone before." An author knows "I can't write without a reader. It is precisely like a kiss – you can't do it alone" (John Cheever). Hope it's as good for you as it is for us.

Gregory Snell

Editor

All students, staff, and faculty may submit essay, poetry, or fiction. Submissions are accepted each school year from November to February. Each entry must be 1,000 words or less, limited to three entries per author. Entries must be submitted digitally and can be emailed to the editor at gsnell@trcc.edu.

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Foreword

Mark J. Sanders



In 1966, American television viewers were introduced to a bold new vision in science-fiction narrative.

This world envisioned a future not scorched by nuclear war or ravaged by plagues or famines but rather one in which the entire planet was united in peace and prosperity.

The name of the series was *Star Trek*, and creator Gene Roddenberry portrayed the crew of the Starship Enterprise not as conquerors or warriors but rather as explorers. Their mission was to seek peaceful contact with new forms of life and new civilizations.

Their crew was also indicative of a positive vision of the future. The bridge crew included an alien (Spock), an African-American woman (Uhura), an Asian (Sulu), and a Russian (Chekhov), all at a time when the Civil Rights movement as well as the Cold War were at their apex. This was a future in which the surface-level prejudices that divide us today were put in their proper place: the dustbin of history.

Star Trek was groundbreaking in many ways, but in 2018, **Confluence** celebrates *Star Trek* in part for the 50th anniversary of the episode “Plato’s Stepchildren.” In this episode, Kirk and Uhura kiss, which is usually described as the first scripted interracial kiss on American television (even though it probably wasn’t!).

Although *Star Trek* only ran on television for three seasons encompassing 79 episodes, it would eventually spawn six other television series and, to date, 13 feature films. It can be argued that no other creative work has been as widely influential in American culture.

Modern-day fan conventions, which now attract thousands to various venues across the country, were started, in part, by *Star Trek* fans, who also pioneered “cosplay,” which is dressing up like a favorite character. *Star Trek* cosplay remains a staple of fan conventions everywhere.

Star Trek has also influenced scientific discovery and innovation. The cell phone and data tablet were sci-fi gizmos when they appeared on the show, but they are ubiquitous in our society now. The idea of a “talking computer” who would accept voice commands seemed purely imaginary in the late sixties, but Siri, Alexa, and Cortana are now familiar partners in our everyday lives.

Perhaps Three Rivers alum Damien Rivera says it best: “The *Star Trek* Universe, to me, [is] a huge melting pot of everything that the folks behind it wanted to see happen further on in mankind, as well as pointing out issues that we have today. It represented the hopes and wishes that the writers and staff themselves held onto, be that a thirst for adventure, wanting for love, an eagerness to broaden horizons, or simply being able to play the hero once in a blue moon. *Star Trek* is a fascinating pop culture phenomenon as a whole, and I really think that without that inspiration, many of the scientists, writers, heroes, and other hopefuls that we have today wouldn’t be here.”

Introduction

Steve L. Atwood



Star Trek was reflective of, or even ahead of its time in many ways, dealing with controversial societal issues such as the foolishness of racism (“Let That Be Your Last Battlefield”), Vietnam (“A Private Little War”), and even interracial kisses (“Plato’s Stepchildren”).

NBC was reluctant to film and air the interracial kiss scene and insisted that their (Shatner and Nichols) lips never touch; they had the actors turn their heads to conceal this, but there was actually little public outcry over this episode. Nichols said they received tons of positive mails about the episode.

It should be noted that there were two interracial kisses on that show, Kirk kissing Uhura, but also Spock kissing Chapel! And frankly, at the time, as a child, I was probably much more upset by Spock’s kissing Chapel! He’s a Vulcan for God’s sake! And many have forgotten, but neither kiss was voluntary, by either party.



But... life was so much simpler at 6. It is only in watching the series as an adult that I truly appreciate the complex issues that the series delved into. It’s hard to think that such an episode could be so controversial, especially by today’s standards, and it’s encouraging to be able to look back and see how we’ve grown as a society.

Yes, perhaps we still have a long way to go, but isn’t that what *Star Trek* did best, point us to a future where we can work together, all races, all people, for the greater good?

To pay homage to this ground breaking episode, the theme of this year’s **Confluence** is “Writing is a Kiss”, as we celebrate *Star Trek* (“Plato’s Stepchildren”) and Fandom. We sincerely hope you enjoy these writings! Welcome to **Confluence 2018!**



Authors' Biographies

Alex Jameson

Alex Jameson: the man, the myth, the exaggeration. Alex finds inspiration for his writings from songs on the radio while he's pretending to star in music videos. In his spare time, Alex finds enjoyment in theater, video games, reading, and generally any activity that isn't considered a sport. Alex hopes that one day he still has a job and is earning an income.

Bethany Colvin

I'm a simple girl who enjoys reading comic books, writing nonsense, and playing video games. Writing poetry is helping me to cope with the recent loss of my mother and the downward spiral that depression brings in its wake. It helps me feel empowered and feel like I can control something in my life.

Carol Swain Lewis

A Poplar Bluff native, Carol Swain Lewis is in her 30th year teaching writing and literature at Three Rivers College. Carol is an avid reader and herb gardener. She and husband Steve enjoy spending time with family and friends, traveling, being active in their church, and relaxing in the country with their rescue animals.

Conner Terrill

Conner Terrill is a sickly creature interested in getting people thinking about the world and the people in it. When he's not writing fluffy romances or cyberpunk thrillers, he's conversing with friendly artists and writers from around the globe, tinkering with technology, reading banned books, or simply spending time with his family.

Daniel Ybarra

My name is Daniel Ybarra. I write as a way to express emotions I hold inside. I started with dark feelings caged inside me and noticed the more I write, not only does the ending turn brighter, but also I learn to let go of the harmful feelings I casually cage in. I learned I can do all through Christ who strengthens me. I love to write to express my emotions to God and open a window to others of my life before and how it is now.

David Hearby

David Kearby studies psychology, enjoys Marvel comics, Renaissance Faires, and understands when Neil Diamond says "When I'm not writing, I'm dying."

Delaney Buie

My name is Delaney Buie. I am studying Middle School Education at Three Rivers College. I graduated from Twin Rivers High School and come from a family of hunters. I even have an uncle who has a taxidermy business in Salem, Missouri. I think most book series for young readers are geared toward young girls so I thought maybe young boys would enjoy a series of adventures about an ole huntin' dog.

Dillon Harper

My name is Dillon Harper and I am attending Three Rivers College with the goal of becoming an Elementary Teacher with a second major in Middle School Language Arts. I have written many songs, along with poems, and stories. None of the poems or stories have been published, but some of the songs have copy rights. Anyhow, this poem is a true story and I hope ya'll understand and enjoy it.

Gregory Snell

Gregory Snell enjoys escape rooms, snazzy socks, and listening to “Wait Wait... Don’t Tell Me!” on NPR.

Goldie Lynn Hendrix

Hello, I’m Goldie Lynn Hendrix. I am a mother of three. I have a daughter named Jessica, 15, a son named Chase, 13, and finally, a daughter named Willena, 18 months. I dedicate everything that I do to them. I am currently getting my Associate’s Degree in Business Administration. Eventually I want to earn my Bachelor’s Degree in Information Technology. I just want more from my life than what is currently. I have decided to write this poem for my mother in law, Wilma Hendrix. She has survived cancer three times and is still coming out on the winning side. She is my hero and I dedicate this poem to her.

Haley Cornett

My name is Haley Cornett. I am currently attending TRC in hopes to achieve my Associates in Pre-Engineering. I then plan to transfer to Missouri Science and Technology and receive a bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering. I had a major change take place two months before turning sixteen. I feel that it had a great impact on my life.

Jazzma Smith

Jazzma has been writing poetry for more than three years and earned a degree in general studies last May.

Jessica Foster

Jessica Foster is a first-year psychology undergrad with an affinity for people watching, traveling, and taking pictures. With a realistic but romantic view of the world around her, her writings reflect the confusion that comes with burgeoning adulthood.

Jessica Sawyer

Jessica Sawyer studies Environmental & Occupational Safety and supports the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

Hatie Liggera

I actually wrote the poem in Creative Writing class based off the prompt “War.” I decided to write about the internal “war” some people face with wanting to live and the challenge of overwhelming struggles in life.

Hendal Nolting

I am 18 years old, a Taurus, and am always learning something. I want to be a mechanical engineer. I love creative writing. It is my hobby and a great stress reliever.

Makenna Tipton

My name is Makenna Tipton. I’m finishing my general education AA, and planning to start a Marketing and Merchandise certificate in the fall. I hope to write awesome books in the future, so I practice my writing with short stories and fan-fiction. I also like to spend my time collecting stray cats; I’m up to five.

Mark J. Sanders

Mark Sanders is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and English at Three Rivers College. He writes fiction, screenplays, and blogs about sports and entertainment. He is the author of two novels, *Dylan’s Treasure* and *The Spring of Llanfyllin*. When he finds the time, Mr. Sanders also enjoys running and playing drums. He is also the graphic designer for *Confluence*.

Michelle Davidson

My name is Michelle Davidson. I am majoring in Business Administration with plans to become an accountant. This is my first attempt at writing fiction.

Shalynn R. Caldwell

I have been going to TRC for four semesters now. I am a Psychology major who just wants to make the world better with words and positivity. My main philosophy is to stop and smell the flowers and my main reason to write is to never forget that something beautiful can come out of something that isn’t.

Shelby R. Manis

My inspiration for my poems and stories are from movies and music. I fall down rabbit holes way too much when I like things. I like being creative no matter if it is trying to make art or writing. Most of what I write is poetry about how I feel or what I get from music. It can go from anywhere between depressing or happy and in love.

Steve L. Atwood

I like to write...kind of like Captain Kirk talks...with lots of...pauses. Growing up a Trekkie, I just had to try and write something that fit this year's theme.

Tabitha Lynn Robertson

Tabitha Lynn Robertson is a Freshman college student with a large family and a rough past who used writing as a coping mechanism for many years. She was born in Illinois but grew up in southern Missouri with her two brothers. She finds her love in the things she reads which inspire her to write more than just the daily thoughts in her head.

Tiechera Samuel

Tiechera Samuel lives in Poplar Bluff, Missouri with her husband, Chris, and her children, James and Emily. She teaches Composition and Literature at Three Rivers College and spends her free time reading and spending time with her family.

Tiffany Friday

My name is Tiffany Friday, but I go by Friday because there are too many Tiffanys in the world. I don't write frequently, inspiration doesn't hit me very often. Although when inspiration does, it means it is usually dark or doesn't make any sense. I am obsessed with panda bears, New Zealand, and different cultures, and if my wallet would ever allow me, I would travel to my heart's content.

Vicky Turner

Vicky Turner inherited her writing from her Daddy. He always wrote poems for others, just to lift them up. Vicky is a student at Three Rivers College. She hopes to graduate in 2019. She has been published in **Confluence** for the past five years. She has been married to her husband for 26 years. She has 34 grandchildren, 7 step-grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild. She enjoys writing and traveling.

Prose



I Hate Flat Tires

Alexander Jameson



I hate flat tires.

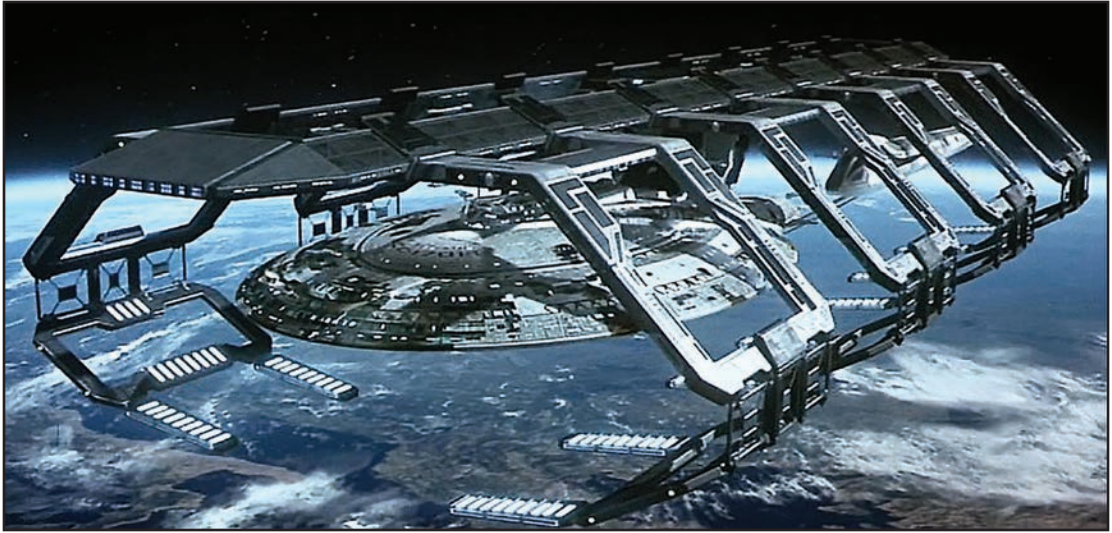
If you've existed long enough to be enraptured by the thrill of driving a motor vehicle you've probably also had the misfortune of encountering a flat tire. Flat tires are possibly the most excruciatingly frustrating and painful thing you could possibly endure. For one, flat tires never occur when you want them to (not that you would.) They always seem to pop up the moment everything else is going wrong. Whether you're behind on your student loan or perhaps you were looking forward to a delightful bowl of cereal that morning and the milk was one day past the expiration and it smelled "almost-alright" but you weren't quite sure so you didn't chance it and went without. THAT'S what having a flat tire is like. Like a bee in a bonnet it's a nasty surprise for all parties involved. One minute you're driving down the road perfectly content and listening to Lady Gaga on the highest volume and BAM, it hits you. Such a way to put a wonderful ride completely out of commission.

Addressing the issue is almost as painful (almost.) The process of replacing a flat tire is absolutely exhausting. After you're past the depressive state that occurs (what I refer to as the, "Why-Mes") you must go through the arduous task of getting the tire off the wheel. By the time you've managed to overcome the

removal you're at the point where you're having to psyche yourself up just to put the other tire on! And then what? Cross your fingers and pray that another tire doesn't go as well?!

Sometimes you find yourself incapable of replacing the tire and you must call in help. Someone replacing your tire for you is possibly one of the most beautiful feelings you could have. Just the right person comes along and happens to know just the right way to replace your tire. Could there ever be a better definition of godsend than that? And yet we can only hope that we end up in a position in which we are fortunate enough to encounter such angelic beings, rather than stuck in the godless hellhole nowhere that is the Kansas prairies.

But more often than not, flat tires occur slowly. Little by little the air is seeping out of your tire, sometimes completely outside your notice. Maybe it's one hole, perhaps more, but nevertheless you're losing the pressure that once made your tire bounce happily along the pavement. When it reaches the point at which you finally notice the difference, what do you do? How many of us drive just a little longer to see how far we can go? Perhaps we take this opportunity to force our own encounter with those heavenly beings and simply opt for a replacement.



However, there are sometimes in which that tire can be fixed. This is not to take away from the fact that a flat tire is aggravating beyond comprehension, but what if it just needed a quick patch? If you fill it full of air again maybe it will turn out to be a fluke. Taking the time and effort to inspect your tire and pay attention to its weaknesses may result in you finding that the tire is actually still quite good. Too many times do we simply throw away the tire and take our chances on a new one when it could be that our old was already perfect, if only we'd had the patience to give it the care it needed. Why must we throw a good thing away at the first sign of a

break? Why did you not take the time to examine the problems and think of a way to fix them first? Why didn't you tell me what was wrong? Why did you throw my heart away before seeing if we could fix our problems? Who knows how much longer we could have rode together if only you were willing to look for a solution rather than cast me out without a second thought, looking for a replacement that may not treat you with the love and affection that I desire to provide you.

I hate flat tires.

The Perfect Execution

Alexander Jameson



All of my training had led to this moment. My breath slipped out from between my lips, escaping from the prison that was my lungs. Sweat rolled down my forehead in impossible to predict patterns, obscuring my vision at times as I clung to the image of my prize. Thoughts raced through my head as I prepared to make my move. What would I do if I failed? I would truly be a shattered man, no longer able to pursue my goals, dreams crushed with no hope of realiza-

tion. But if I succeeded, the golden glow of victory would encompass my very being and leave me enraptured with the taste of a job well done. I was running out of time, it was now or never. I began to make my move...

I flipped the pancake.

It was burnt on the bottom.

I cried.



Muse in the Stars

Conner G. Terrill



he digital clock beeped 9:00 a.m. as I stared unflinchingly at the painting ahead of me. The cold astral greys, the sharp, crystalline structures jutting from the recently discovered planet. Frigid blues, nocturnal hues, angles so sharp they tore at my eyes.

I couldn't bear to look at my unfinished work any longer, turning to the window instead. Between the shutters, great neon signs for interstellar transportation services floated by.

I slowly glanced back down to the other unfinished paintings lining the walls of my studio apartment. Uncolored linework of the moon colony, sloppy watercolors of Station 16. No matter how much the new galleries offered for their finalization, something within blocked their completion. Some little piece of me begged to stop as soon as the brush met canvas, as soon as I even imagined returning to their biting, cold expanses. I died inside a little more each morning I'd wake, thinking about what new unimaginative sojourn the Intergalactic Artistry Commission would send their young Korean agent out on.

God, I need coffee.

With a breathy sigh, I shuffled my way into the attached kitchen and pulled down a black mug from the faux-cherry cabinet, setting it beneath the spout of the coffee maker. The nozzle simply sputtered, ejecting old, lukewarm coffee grounds into the cup.

"Please refill dispenser..." the machine spoke quietly. I glanced over at the trashcan, the empty coffee tin perched atop like a royal crown.

"The universe really is against me..." I mutter, collapsing onto the stool. I lean my chin on my hands, staring out of the wide kitchen window at the rest of the connected space station. A small butterfly-like creature—likely carried in on one of the shuttles—floated by the window, fluttering its strange pink wings, releasing some sort of pink-tinted propellant in the air to carry itself along. I watched it tap against the window, then flutter off towards the large red sign of the Mo Chroi coffee shop on the connected station just across the way.

"Why not." I huff, pushing myself off the counter. I grab my coat and in less than five minutes worth of a cold station walk, I'm at the door of the Mo Chroi.

As soon as I open the door, I'm greeted with a warm blast of mocha and muffin breeze, wrapping me up in a gentle cocoon of comfort.

"Welcome!" the cashier chirped, giving a friendly wave over the counter. "What can I get ya?"

"Oh, uh, just a medium coffee, please. Plain." I reply timidly.

"Coming right up, sir! Find a seat, we'll bring it right out to ya."

I smiled, payed, and took my seat near the back, at an empty table for two. Around me, couples chat, workers have their morning coffee in peace, technicians type away at projects. I rest my cheek against my palm and look out at the orbiting planet, the peaks of silver mountains jutting sharply above the misty atmosphere.

There's that word again: sharp. It cuts me, serrated symbols carving deep into my mind. Everywhere images of razor angles stinging and tearing, pulling my mind into some horrible frenzy. I close my eyes, yet I can still see them: they're there, behind my eyelids eternal, never yielding, always clawing and shredding and razing and-

Suddenly I heard a voice that sends my heart into a tremble. I glanced over, towards the kitchen, to witness the smiling face of what I can only assume is an angel in an apron, some magical being here to deliver me from the mundane. There he is, platter of mugs balanced carefully on one soft hand.

Soft... his benevolence threw me into a spiral. Everything about him implied gentle, from the way he laughed as he handed the orders to the waiting customers to the delicate roundness of his cheeks. The soft tones of his brown skin, the beauty in his serene green eyes... my heart was ready to burst, yet I remained there in my seat, paralyzed! He moved toward me, walking gentle too, onyx black hair smoothed elegantly across his head. Suddenly I felt so full of ideas, the sharpness gone and replaced with so much softness I wished then and there for him to come back with me and be my muse, if only for the day!

I remained transfixed of this gentle creature, even as a patron scooted their chair back, stumbling his careful stride. I remained elated, even as the mug flew across the room like a burning dove, splashing me across the front with magma-hot mocha. I remained enamored, even as the medical team whisked me away to the burn ward.

Even departing the hospital, coated in rose-colored burn cream and bandages, I was already making plans to return to that diner again, to speak to the glamorous barista who had stolen my heart.

Although, this time... I think I'll sit at the counter.



Out of Here:

or, The Prelude to the Absurd Romance of Oliver S. Fletcher Conner G. Terrill



ere... here? Where was here?

The party, oh right... I was meeting Francis for a quick tea at the behest of Elizabeth when... when what? Oh, my head! It's full of butterflies from the fall... oh yes, that's it, butterflies!

The rain started quick and heaped down in abundance, and I was just about to find it as an excuse to steal away back to my book when I saw them: butterflies! A dozen-dozen glorious little things, a stained-glass cloud of vibrant blues and yellows and reds all fluttering around beyond the weeping French doors without a care in the world. I immediately excused myself from the table and stole away to the loo, whereupon I thrust open the windows and leapt out into the rain, hurrying along to the site of the vibrant dream.

By the time I made it back to the front of the house, the butterflies were in the distance, climbing the hill aside a...

What was it?

Oh, a man, certainly! Surely? He was dressed like any young gent, slacks and suspenders, long linen shirt tucked in and rolled up to the elbows, but on either side of his curly, rain-matted brown

hair were two curious horns curling around the sides, like that of the rams I'd seen in the university books. Oh what a wondrous sight, I thought, a ram-horned man and a cloud of butterflies climbing the steep beyond the manor wherein a friend and disinterested suitor both treat me like a glass egg with pitiable promises. Golly, do I need the adventure.

So I ran and ran, throwing off my coat, loosening my bowtie, chucking my cufflinks in the soaked grass, clawing and stumbling up the muddy incline like a mind abandoned. I could scarcely hear the shouts behind me over the wind, no doubt the rest of the nobles coming out to call their mousey bookworm back to safety.

But I'd have none of it! I wanted to dance with the butterflies and joke with the faun, and so I would! Or so I thought.

The tender blonde hairs of my neck prickled as I reached the top of the hill where a single apple tree stood, the air thick with excitement. I huffed and stumbled over branches as I twisted and turned, looking for the butterflies and the strange boy, though I found nothing but rain-drops and bird-pecked apples. My heart nearly felt the bottom when, aha, a butterfly! The single pristine darling fluttered by my face, tickling my

pale cheek with silken wings, and flew down into a hollow at the base of the tree.

It was simply a hollow, wasn't it? No, a door! A door of polished applewood with a shiny silver doorknob. It was left open, quite possibly by the careless ram-boy. I had scarcely the chance to peer into the rain-battered darkness before a great flash overtook me, blowing me clean off my feet! I hurdled through the door and it shut quick behind me, leaving me here and now on the hardwood floor of what I can only describe as a sparsely-furnished sitting room.

Woe is me, I've gotten myself into a right pickle here... although, that's what I need, isn't it? No life worth living is without a jam and a pickle. I touch my feet, now clad in wingtips, and the backs of my hands, now with silken gloves, and sigh in relief. At least I've got my limbs, and no pain is felt a bit. One could do worse.

I push myself to my feet, give myself a dusting, and step lightly towards the door. Before I can reach it, a man dressed similarly to the first I witnessed materializes before my eyes. His rounded frame takes up the span of the door, and the grin

on his smug yet pretty face makes me feel he's right pleased about it.

"May I pass?" I ask calmly, and without pause.

"And what do you seek beyond? Secrets? Riches? Love and kisses?" he grinned, tugging his suspender strap with one hand, the other planted comfortably on his ponderous belly.

"I just want to see," I reply, staring up into his big, violet eyes. "I ran up here and exploded. I deserve this much at least."

"And see you shall, dear lad, all wonders and intricacies of our world. Do mind not to merely trust your eyes, however..." he chuckled heartily, disappearing in a glowing blue mist. "Do whistle if you'd like to speak again. I feel we'll become the best of friends..."

I simply give a little nod, not quite knowing yet if I wanted to avoid him like the plague or call him back for scones and tea, and reach for the door handle.

I wanted adventure, and adventure I'll have.



The Adventures of Old Spot

Delaney C. Buie

et me introduce myself. Spot Hill-billy is the name. I am a stray deer dog that got lost durin' a run. Me and the young pups were chasin' down this big whitetail. We chased em' to Farmer Joe, my old owner. While he was lifting his old Winchester to let him have it, I looked around with my famous deer spottin' eyes and standing 'bout 175 yards to my right was a big rack white-tail lookin' confused. I started to run. That old son of a gun sensed me though. He ran off but I didn't give up. I ran as fast as wind in a blizzard. I got closer, closer, closer, and BAM. That ole deer turned at the last second and I didn't have time to stop. I ran smack dab into the middle of a wide old oak. When I came to I was dizzy and there was no one around. Those young pups had forgot all about me. Off I wandered dizzy and lost. I didn't know where I was goin' but I didn't care. Soon I came to this old log cabin and here I made my new home with Farmer Pete.

Farmer Pete already had one deer dog named Scout. Anytime he could, Scout liked to laugh at me. Any mistake I made was a good time for him. I tried to stay away from him as much as I could. Today I was wandering the woods trying to pick up a trail but no luck. I decided it was

time to get back to the cabin and get me some grub. I went to my food bowl and looked down. Empty NOTHING in my bowl. It was that fool cat, Jubill. That cat had a big problem. He eats DOG FOOD. I had been after him for months tryin' to catch him at it, but he always gets my food when my back is turned. Oh well, I decided not to try to find him. I would just catch me some small game. I headed out to the big brush pile where I can usually find a rabbit. I jumped on the brush pile and barked and barked. A big juicy rabbit jumped out and I was on him like a squirrel on an acorn. I went as fast as I could go but boy was that old rabbit fast. All I could think 'bout was that good meal I was goin' to have. I soon got that rabbit cornered and I was growling and snarlin' while he tried to get away. Suddenly I heard the grass behind me rustlin' and when I turned around there was a big black bear.

That old bear came runnin' at me. I was now the big juicy meal in that bear's eyes. That bear moved like lightning. He hit me with his big claws. He hit me alright, throwin' me over a big tree. I hit face first. I just laid there for a while. Then I heard some yelpin' and some yelling. When I looked around the bear was nowhere to be seen. I thought of Farmer Pete and Scout.



Even though I didn't like Scout, I could not let them be killed. As hard as it was, I had to get up and find them to warn them about the bear. I ran toward the noise as hard as I could. There in the clearing was that old bear striking at Farmer Pete and Scout. I ran at the bear and bit into his neck. I pulled his neck back and his head went back too. Farmer Pete finally had time to put up his gun. I just hoped he would use it. Yep, he did. He took up his old 12 gauge and let that bear have it. Down he went givin' me just enough time to let go of his neck before he hit the ground with a big BANG. All I could think about was that bear meat we would be havin' for breakfast in the mornin'.

After all the excitement, we all headed up yonder to the cabin. Farmer Pete was constantly telling me what a good boy I was for coming to help him and Scout. Scout was walkin' along side me with his head down. That young pup

was jealous. When we got back to the cabin, we all hit the sack. I was plum tuckered out. Killin' a vicious black bear isn't a walk in the park you know. When I got up the next mornin', there in my food bowl was a big hunk of bear meat. Scout looked at me and I just knew he had kept that old cat away from my bowl. Maybe Scout wasn't as bad as I had thought, and maybe living here would work out okay. I think Scout saw yesterday that even old dogs could be useful and maybe, now I am saying maybe, there would be a few things he could learn from me.

After he finished his chores, Farmer Pete might want to go out on another whitetail hunt today. Give me and Scout a chance to work together. Maybe we could find that big ole buck I saw yesterday. I knew just the place for that twelve pointer, over the fireplace where me and Scout liked to lay. You know I think I will take a little nap before I start out on the next adventure.

Always Hope

Dillon L. Harper



ittin' on the couch starring at an empty glass, he knows within his mind he's goin' no where fast.

He's already left 3 kids and a loving wife, but now he's got nothing left but a wasted lonely life. Sulking in his living room throwin' doubles down, he thinks to himself there's no way out. But he sees a dusty Bible sitting on the shelf, and flips through the pages reading scriptures to himself.

There's always hope.

A working mom and she's got 3 kids on her own, the daddy left her to raise them all alone. Over the years she's grown bitter deep inside, at night she lays awake in bed alone and cries. She holds a pistol to the side of her head, almost squeezed the trigger but pulls away instead. At that moment she hears a knock on the door, the preacher decided they would make a round once more.

There's always hope.

The very next Sunday, sitting on the front row pew, sat the mom and kids not knowing what to do. All they knew was it was time to trust the Lord, the life they lived could not continue anymore. End of service she turned and saw a lonely face, the father of her kids was looking for God's grace. He heard the preacher preach of forgiveness and love, he fell to his face asking life from above.

There's always hope.

Daddy was different from that day on, and momma likes it better not being all alone. So if you're that someone sittin on the front row pew, or that lonely soul not knowin what to do...

There's always hope.



Letters to Home

Dillon L. Harper

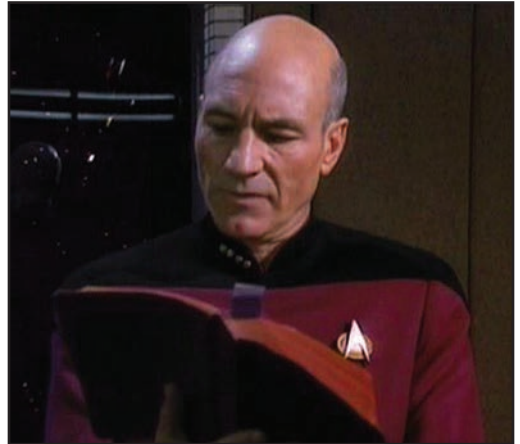
Little Pete,



I wish to begin my letter to you with an apology. I have missed your 16th birthday, but I send best wishes. Throughout this meager note of thought, I will require wisdom, charity, and understanding from you, brother.

The circumstances here are unspeakable, therefore, I will tell you of my regret during my times before. Our dearest mother has suffered enough, being alone in the hill country, and raising us boys. Draw near to her with comfort if my body return not again from this place. Also know, a farm like ours seems to be small compared to most, but cherish the possession with thankfulness. I would advise you to receive further education in the terms of cattle. I have spoken with many of these other bondsmen along side of me, and they speak of their parcels of ground. I have learned of much medicine that has developed in other regions, helping the cows progress through pregnancy and sickness.

Lastly, "what makes a man, a man?" A thirteen year old boy never knows how to respond to the last words of his dying father at the moments notice, but I have had much time to ponder upon this question often here. This war has given me perspective. The sight of fearful people within



these trenches sheds light on the characteristics of a man and the integrity that defines him. A man chooses the right choice, not just the easy made choice. A man provides for his family, farm, and neighbors when they are in need. Most of all, a Good man, keeps his faith in God, regardless of the intensity of the situation or persecution which lies before.

If a flag be handed to you in place of my corpse, be steadfast in the love which we have learned. Weep not, and be not angry, for we will be forever bonded by blood and soul. If we meet at the ship-port, I waving from aboard, or if it be standing before the Christ, know that God provides and I have been delivered.

With a heavy heart, but much love,

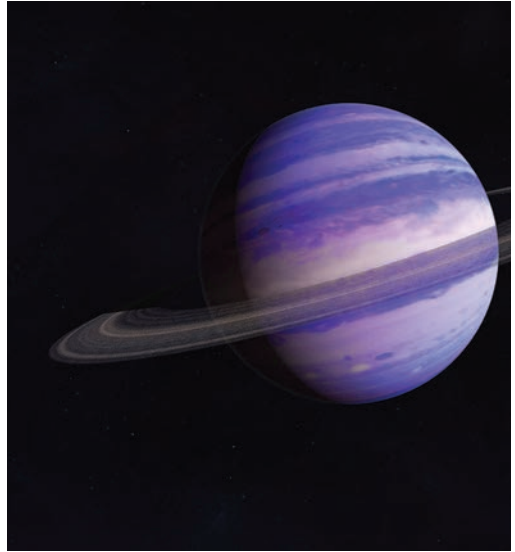
Thomas

Torture

Jessica L. Sawyer



he thought of even trying to make someone believe her, or even to explain what had happened. To make them understand the evidence of before and after, besides no one would believe her. Why would anyone believe in a constant battle of a horrible never-ending wanting agony, not understanding why it had control of every part of your being? It learned to weasel into the inner most precious parts of your life. Robbing her of the most delightful moments that only come once. The things that can not be placed at any other moment in the universe. The moments that come to be created just for her and just for that moment in life. Making no sense of how it managed to take and take into the most beautiful moments created just for her. As she cried out many times into all hours of the night, begging for change or relief of the enemy, for peace in the moments of trials, for the heart ache to turn into love, for the pain of not making her life hard, for the physical pain to stop so she did want to be numb anymore. The deepest hours into pleading for mercy because she believed. Giving many times, as though her whole heart to create an open door for change into the deepest parts of her soul. Knowing the truth of not being able to do it alone. Making her eyes closed to the amazing inner need of the breath that would be breathing life and cleansing into every corner of her soul. She could



not understand what more she had to give to reserve the mercy and grace that she so much needed. Why must the pain be tearing a her part? Why couldn't she just live a life like everyone else? Why did things have to make no sense sometimes, yet it had to be there and would not leave? She wanted badly to just be like everyone else, never having felt the harsh cruelty of agony, torture, an enemy against her destroying her deepest love for life. Every ounce of soul would bring that to the moment of an amazing change that only one could do. The one who she had cried for to help her in the events of renewing the very life in her soul. The corners of her spirit would come alive with the covering and bring into forgiveness and forgiving. It would take the life of light and pour it into to her very heart making it new and the relief of the darkness she had been battling. The believing of the cleansing had helped her before and she had finally reached out to it and it received her cries. It was the beginning of her life once again.

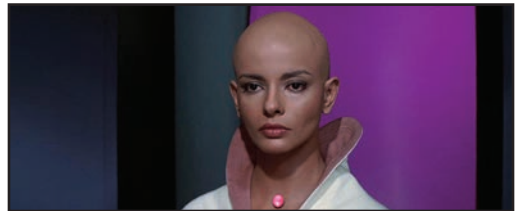
My Life as Told Through My Hair

Makenna E. Tipton



The best way to describe my younger years, the lovely, fun years before puberty makes things awkward and super confusing is with safety scissors. A pair of used, just shy of rusty, scissors with red handles that had my last name scribbled across in sharpie. They fit my small hand perfectly, and the edge was dull so I couldn't hurt myself. These were my justification for when my mother found me playing with my scissors. She'd just give me a funny look and leave me be. She really should have known better because I would, on occasion, use them to cut the hair in front of ears, my "sideburns" as I would later tell her when explaining this incident. I liked the way the hair felt fuzzy when it was cut close, and the rest of my hair hid them so no one noticed.

But this story isn't about my sideburns. No, it's about the day that I sat in my purple mushroom chair in my bedroom watching *Charmed* on my Bratz tv. I was ever so innocently playing with the hair on the peak of my forehead when an idea struck me. I had the scissors in no time at all, and was working on my defense as I started to cut. Unfortunately, my mother didn't accept my reasoning. While I had thought I'd been crafty by cutting underneath my hair, so that I could hide what I'd done, I forgot that hair doesn't stay on your head after you cut it off.





After my hair regrew, and a few more run-ins with the safety scissors, I had a whole new problem to deal with. Being a teenager brought with it a lot of insecurity. I was always worried about being pretty enough, or being liked enough, and my frizzy, out of control, curly hair didn't help. So, I straightened it. A lot. More accurately, my mother straightened it for me because it only took her about half an hour, and it took me about three hours. I would spend at least an hour sitting in the living room crying as I brushed the tangles from my hair, my arms cramping about ten minutes in, before moving to her bathroom. I would stare at myself in the mirror and make jokes about how I never needed a costume for Halloween because I could just brush my hair and go as Cousin Itt. I would watch the frizz turn

to smooth shine, and imagine all of the compliments people would give me the next day. There were always compliments, my hair was prettier straight.

One day, in the rather unfortunately recent past, I realized that that wasn't true. I embraced my curls, and learned how to take care of them. I decided to show my love for them to the world. Then, I decided that my curls should reflect me. So in honor of letting the past go, and not being trapped in a waist-length, heat conducting death trap, I cut my hair. Not with safety scissors. I sat in a salon for somewhere between four and five hours, paid around two hundred dollars, and dyed my hair blue. I emerged loud and proud, and shoulder-length.

Harriet's Lesson on Love

Michelle R. Davidson



The thunderstorm had just passed. The air was cool and silent. This was Harriet's favorite sort of weather. After a thunderstorm, she would go out and sit on the tiny wooden porch George built for her. She liked to use these rare moments of perfect peace to reflect on things. Tomorrow was her granddaughter's wedding. She, herself, had been married for 50 years, and with that she had learned a great deal about marriage.

"Elizabeth!" she called into the little house.

"Yes, Grandma," Elizabeth said as she closed the rickety screen door behind her.

"I've been thinking about your wedding tomorrow, and what present to give you. I have decided the best gift I can give you is my advice," said Harriet.

"That's perfect, Grandma. Who better to give advice on love than someone who has been happily married for 50 years?" said Elizabeth.

"First, it's fine to hate him sometimes."

"What, Grandma!" exclaimed Elizabeth.

"Hear me out. There will be times when you will look at him and wonder what on earth you were thinking when you married him. There will be times when you can't stand him. Those moments are normal. Two people can't be together that long without occasionally getting on each other's nerves. Just know, that isn't failure. That doesn't mean the love is gone. Marriage is not total bliss forever. That isn't sustainable.

"Okay, I suppose that makes sense. I know every couple has the occasional argument," said Elizabeth. "But our love is strong enough to get through anything."

"Strong enough to get through years of boredom?" questioned Harriet.

"What are you talking about?" Elizabeth asked with a look of mild confusion coming over her beautiful face.

"Marriage is safety and security. You will know that no matter what you will come home to someone who loves you. But, that security and peace of mind comes with monotony. Your days will start to look the same. You will hear the same stories from your dear husband over and over. You'll go to the same places. You watch the same shows together. You'll say 'I love you' casually and without much thought as you both leave in the morning. It is easy to get complacent and start to take one another for granted."

"Oh, how do you keep the romance alive?" Elizabeth asked.

"You work incredibly hard at it. Make no mistake, my dear granddaughter, tomorrow you sign up for a lifetime full-time job that will consume a tremendous amount of your time and energy. You will have to make endless compromises. You won't only have your feelings to consider anymore. You must know when to stand your ground, and when to admit defeat. You should be understanding when their problems seem trivial to you. You must make time to discuss your problems and concerns. Sometimes, you will lose sleep trying to figure out where you go from here. It is the start of an incredible balancing act that you embark on tomorrow."

"Grandma, you make it seem like the last 50 years have been nothing but a chore. Have you been unhappy all these years with Grandpa?" Elizabeth asked with grave concern.

Harriet looked at her granddaughter's expression and thought to herself that she had given

her the best wedding present. She had truly showed her how difficult marriage was. Everyone thinks marriage is just a matter of loving someone with all your heart. It is so much more than that.

"No, of course not. I wouldn't change a thing," Harriet laughed.

"My dear granddaughter, marriage is supposed to be hard. You are committing to love one person forever. You should be willing to put in the effort to do whatever it takes to have a strong relationship. If you are confident that you have a man who would do the same, then everything will be fine. So, are you positive that Ethan is willing to work with you to fix any problems that might be thrown your way?"

"Yes, I do. Thanks, Grandma. I feel better now," Elizabeth said as she rose to go back inside.

"Wait, I'm not finished. I've told you the truth about marriage, but there is one more secret I want to let you in on."

"What is that?" Elizabeth asked.

"Like I said, marriage is a long, monotonous journey. There will times when you just want to give up. I have felt that way a few times over the last 50 years. What got me though was this look your grandfather has given me a handful of times in our marriage."

"What look?" Elizabeth asked, once again looking puzzled.

"One time, after we had spent an entire afternoon fighting, we spent the entire evening having an honest, difficult conversation about our relationship. It was late into the night before we were finished. The house was quiet and peaceful. Your grandfather embraced me, and stared into my eyes. That look of complete contentment convinced me that I was truly loved. That moment was a fleeting one. But for that brief second, the two of us were all that existed in the world. I have never felt more loved, appreciated, and understood in my entire life. You and Ethan will have that moment too. Afterwards, any time you argue, think about that moment. Remind yourself that you both love each other more

than anything in this world. Go to one another and work out whatever differences you may be having. Now, my granddaughter, you know everything."

"Thank you, Grandma. That was beautiful." Elizabeth said with a tear coming to her eye.

Harriet danced with George at the reception. As they danced, they reminisced about their own wedding day. Then it happened, the crowded room disappeared. They were the only two dancing. She once again saw that look of complete contentment. She once again had a moment of perfect peace.



The Mask You Can't See

Michelle R. Davidson



look for it everywhere now – that deceitful little mask. I wonder how many people have this camouflage. Does he? Does she? Do they wear it all day or do they take it on and off?

I have just recently discovered this treacherous concealment device. My sister had one. Hers was perfect in construction. It blended in perfectly. Not an edge or shadow in sight. A second skin that completely matched the original. I hate that mask. If I had known, I could have ripped it off and seen the damage to the underlying skin. But, I didn't discover her secret until it was too late.

We found her overdosed on the kitchen floor last June.

Now, I look for it everywhere. Who else has one? For what other purposes are they using them? Surely, someone has decided to use this deceitful mask for more nefarious purposes than hiding one's own pain and shame. When he says he is working late, is that true? Or is he in his mistress's arms? When she says she got a raise, is that true? Maybe she took some money from the register. How can one tell who is using the mask?

Oh, how I hate this mask. It is so perfect; one cannot detect it. It hardly seems fair to those of us who don't have one. We, the unmasked, don't even know the strength of the enemy. Is it a rare few with access to this camouflage or are there millions all wearing it as we speak?





Surely, it is a just a few I reassure myself. The mask must be uncomfortable. It must be constricting. It must be difficult to wear. Surely, most shirk wearing such a lie. There can't be millions lying 24-7.

Although, I never thought my sister was lying. She was the happiest person ever. She was the gentlest creature ever created. She was selfless. I admired her; I wanted to be like her. Damn, that perfect mask. How did she create such a perfect disguise?

Maybe the truth is that she didn't.

Was the mask perfect? No, maybe it wasn't. Perhaps, I had perceived it from time to time. Perhaps, I had suspected the truth on a few occasions. No, the mask wasn't a second skin. I had just chosen to ignore it. I didn't want to see it. I wanted it to be the truth. I wonder if she was angry with me for not asking about it. I was her sister. If anyone should have seen past it, it should have been me. Why did I ignore that deceitful little mask?

Now, I look for it everywhere. It is not perfect. It is detectable. It can be ripped off. We, the unmasked, have a duty. We must be diligent. We must help unmask those who use their masks for evil purposes. And we must help those who use theirs to hide their pain.

Small Talk

Michelle R. Davidson



Small talk is easy," he said.

"Yeah, for you," I thought.

Idle chit chat had always come naturally for my husband. He was best friends with everyone within 15 minutes.

Me, not so much. Speaking was always one of those things that made me nervous. I avoided conversation as much as possible. I even went so far as to have my husband call the cable company so I wouldn't have to talk to the operator.

But, today that was going to change. I had decided it was time to get over my fear of small talk. I was going to have at least a 5-minute conversation with the first person I met.

My experiment didn't get off to a great start.

"How is your son doing?"

"He is in the hospital with the flu," Monica said.

"Oh, poor baby. I hope he feels better." What are you supposed to say to the parent of a sick child?

Okay, next person.

"What does your tattoo say?"

"It's the sobriety prayer," Dan said.

"Oh." What was the correct response to that, I wondered. "Congratulations?" No, maybe he was struggling with addiction. "Alcohol or drugs?" That's too personal. "I don't drink." That seems condescending.

Okay, just general chit chat.

"Are you enjoying the weather?"

"Yes," Jack said.

"I prefer winter."

"I don't care for the snow and the ice. Icy roads are dangerous," said Jack.

"Yeah, I know."

Well, that wasn't 5-minutes. Why is this so hard? I have often wished that there was a backspace button for real life. See, when I write, if I don't like what I have typed I can go back and change it. I wish real life worked like that.

If I could go back then I would say, "Are you enjoying the weather?"

"Yes," Jack would say.

"What are your plans for the weekend?"

"Going to have a barbecue with the family," he would say.

"Oh, I love barbecued hamburgers."

Wait a minute. What if he had no plans? What if he had unpleasant plans like a funeral? Never mind, backspace.

"Are you enjoying the weather?"

"Yes," Jack would say.

"Perfect swimming weather."

"Are you going to the river this weekend?" he would ask.

Wait a minute I don't like swimming. Why would I mention that? Okay, try again. Something different this time.

"What's your favorite sports team?"

"Kansas City Chiefs," he would probably say. We are in Missouri after all.

"Oh, I really like the New England Patriots."

"Patriots are cheaters!"

Wait a minute. This isn't going right. What if he doesn't even like football? Maybe he likes baseball. I hate baseball. Oh, why is this so complicated! How do you know what to talk about? How do you know what interests someone has? What if you offend them? What if you know nothing about what they want to talk about? How do people do this?

I don't want to give you the wrong impression. I can talk for hours with people I know well. I can talk about politics with my dad for hours. I have childhood friends who I stay up all night talking to. But striking up a conversation with new people is just a lot of work.

My conversation with Jack was less than five minutes. I have probably spent a good hour going over various fictitious scenarios of how that conversation could have gone in my head. There's no reason for it. Jack is off working. He hasn't given it a second thought. Neither have Monica or Dan. But here I am still trying to figure out what to say and how to say it.

But, "Small talk is easy," he said.



Soaring

Tabitha Lynn
Robertson



Being around friends. It was natural, safe. The laughter ringing in my ears while the ball hits the court over and over. Boys wrestling and being boys like any other day. It was healthy; to be around people you know in a safe environment other than school. Zoning in and out on my peers, noticing the way everyone was relaxed and free. It was comforting, to know we could be ourselves around one another. The basketball hitting the backboard and bouncing back off while two brothers wrestle around the court, trying to beat each other to the ball first.

The sun wasn't setting quite yet, but it was getting peaceful, quiet. Joining our peers and coming to the newly lit fire we laughed and goofed around. Roasting marshmallows and hotdogs to temporarily tame our hunger. We were teenagers after all. Things were relaxed, life was, she was. It was a side of her that hasn't shown in a long time. She was content, happy, being around all of her friends. This is all she's wanted; to be in a safe environment with friends she loved and peers she wanted to know better.

As a few of the guys got a hay bale ready, we laughed and cheered, running down the hill to our new entertainment. One camera, two,



three, the flare was lit. The bright, pinkish-red light sting our eyes if we stared too long as our friend began to ignite the kerosene soaked hay a section at a time. Everyone was smiling; she was smiling. The girl who cared about everyone, others a little too much. She wasn't ordinary, she was special. The kind of person who lightens anyone's mood. It was good, seeing her smile for once as the boys tried to decide who would jump over the flames. It was a bit dangerous but no one was worried, they were too happy, too distracted with their fun. It's moments like these we should live for, moments we should remember.

We deserve to fly, that's what she thought. Not through the air like a bird or on a plane, but a different kind of fly. We deserve to soar above and complete our goals, we deserve to succeed. That's what she thought, everyone deserves the chance to fly, to feel free, take chances. She was going to do just that, she saw a chance and took it, as all of her friends were lifting one another in the air, having fun. She took that chance, one step after another, she was up. It was scary but exhilarating. Trusting two of her classmates to hold her seven to eight feet up in the air. Life was a chance at something amazing if only we took that chance. We all deserve that right? The chance at something amazing.

It seemed simple or like something from a fairy tale, but it's not really. It's like reading a good book, you continue to read because you want to know what happens in the journey, but you're sad to think the farther you go the closer to the end you get. Even though you know you are getting closer to the end, you still keep reading anyway.

It's like life, everyone's life is their own book. It ends eventually. But the most important part is the middle, the part you make up. Everyone is an author to their own book, it's up to you whether you want to be a good one or not.

You can sit at home and ignore the party invitation you got or turn down a date you got asked on, even skip your chance of going to prom because you think it's dumb or because you don't want to go because you'd rather stay home and watch Netflix. But it's those moments, those are the ones we will regret not taking in the end. Those are the moments that will make up the center of one's own book.

And when we are gone and our great great grandkids are telling our story in the future, I don't want to be remembered as the one who never took chances. Do you? Wouldn't you want to be known or remembered as the person who made the most out of life?

Be that person. Be the story people want to read over and over; the story that inspires someone to leave their home and be more, do more. Make your life that kind of book: an inspiring one.



Temporary Insanity

Tiffany F. Friday



ou are insane," he stated.

"That just may, very well, be true," I said.

Given my position, on his lap facing him, it is a possibility. Straddling him is a better word. We were on a couch, not exactly comfy, but not enough to complain, like we could if we wanted. His elbow was propped on the arm of the couch, his chin in his palm. There was a slightly curious look on his otherwise indifferent face. If I didn't know better, I would say he was listening to the noise outside, but we could barely hear the party we were, forcefully, dragged from in this room.

"So, you admit you are insane?" He asked, arching an eyebrow while looking at me out of the corner of his eye.

"If I did I wouldn't be insane. To be insane would mean I can't think rationally, by admitting I'm insane I would need rational thought to think that meaning I had a rational thought. Thus, I'm not insane, because I thought rationally by admitting I'm insane! Do you see the problem?" I tilted my head while I rambled on. I looked him in the eye, admittedly a bit hard.

All he did was sigh.

"Who determines what is sane and what isn't?" I asked, at this point I leaned in, resting my arms on his shoulder. This forced him to face me. "It is society, you know? The status quo, if you will. Society deems what is appropriate and what isn't, the rules and regulations. Change the rules you change the society, and an all-new meaning of insanity comes with it. If more people forget the meaning of 'fitting in,' we wouldn't have this problem."

"You know you are basically saying 'forget the rules', right?" He kindly pointed out.

"No, I mean forget the social norms. Blame my rant on being locked in here for a while, if you must. I'm tired. I just hate how we are forced to blindly follow rules no one wants! You must be friends with these types of people; you must have this type of job to be successful; you can only do this when you date; date within your station; if you enjoy this you are uncultured; if you do that you are a prude; if you do this a slut. Nothing is right to this society! So, if I reject it I am insane! But am I really insane for wanting to be independent of some outdated rule created so long ago by people long dead and forgotten? Am I going temporarily insane from being locked in this room or am I temporarily sane?"

I pondered and then gave up. I rest my head on his chest, tired from my long rant.

"I'm sick of this society, with its gender roles and stereotypes. I know you do too. You are tired of acting strong all the time, I see it in your eyes. You don't want to be dominant or like all the masculine crap that's shoved down your throat and I hate being considered weak! I'm not timid and I hate being dominated! But at birth we are shoved into a box and told to play the role or be considered insane and shunned."

"You somehow make going insane appealing. Almost tempting." He whispered

"We are alone in this room, I doubt our friends have stayed this long, their attention spans aren't that long. We could do anything we want in here." I stated. "We could blame what ever happens on a lapse of sanity if you wish?" I look up at him, smirking.

By now his hands have rested on my hips. A slight blush gracing his cheeks.

"Will you go insane with me?" Purposely whispering in his ear.

"I guess temporary insanity wouldn't be so bad." Was his simple reply.



Poetry



Breaking Point

Bethany S. Colvin



My fingers raise to the glass in front of me,
Skating across the shell reflected.
Eyes dark and sunken in.
Skin pale and sickly.

Is this who I have become?

I never was a stranger to losing myself to loathing,
Self hatred,
Self destruction.

Loss does that to a person.
Mental illness does that to a person.
Anxiety.
Depression.
Obsessive disorders.

But now,
It has gone too far.

I don't know who that woman is.
The one staring back at me.
The one without laughing lines,
Or happiness,
Or worth.

She's broken.
Sad.
Lonely.



That's not me.
That's not who I was.
That's not who I will be.
This is not how my story ends.

I continue to stare in the hopes of seeing a glimmer of the past.

To a young woman full of determination,
Eloquence,
Strength.

The woman whose words could win the hearts of many when forced to wax poetic
about any given subject.
The woman whose competitive nature won her award after award throughout her life.
The woman whose heart was worn on her sleeve in a harsh world but still managed
to find the ability to love and see beauty in all things.

With the raise of an eyebrow, a spark ignites.
A fire suddenly envelopes my being,
Rippling through my eyes,
Flushing through my cheeks,
Sparking through my fingertips.

Instead of lying on the ground in defeat,
I will rise.
I will stand above and conquer.

I'm a writer, sitting at my desk.
My life is the blank piece of paper, scrunched within my fingers, cradled to my chest.
This pen in my hand?
It is beginning to yield at my will.
But only mine.
No one else has the ability to make me falter.

It's easy to want to place the blame on everything else,
But the truth will win.

Only I am in control of this narrative.

If I take a breath, I can lay out my life, my paper.
If I take a moment, I can smooth it out across my desk.
It's not wrinkle free, but it's a clean slate if I take it for what it is.
I will not heal over a fortnight,
Nor will it last forever.
But if I take this fleeting moment of confidence and clarity,
I can begin my long road to recovery.

It's hard to stand up and dust yourself off when the only constant you have been met with
is the cruel hand of fate continually shoving you down...
But it led me to a decision.

The next time I see that hand approaching my line of sight? I will grab it as I fall,
forcing fate to fall with me. I will not be its victim, I will be its combatant.

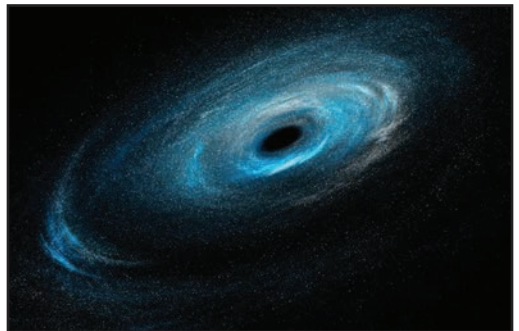
And when I rise,

And I promise you,
I will rise,

I will stand tall.

Staring into this mirror feels like I'm staring into a black hole.
I feel powerless, but I will not let it consume me any longer.
I will shatter this illusion.
This mirror is reflective of the prison in my soul,
But I will no longer let it hold me captive.

After all...
Glass shatters easily.



Mom

Bethany S. Colvin



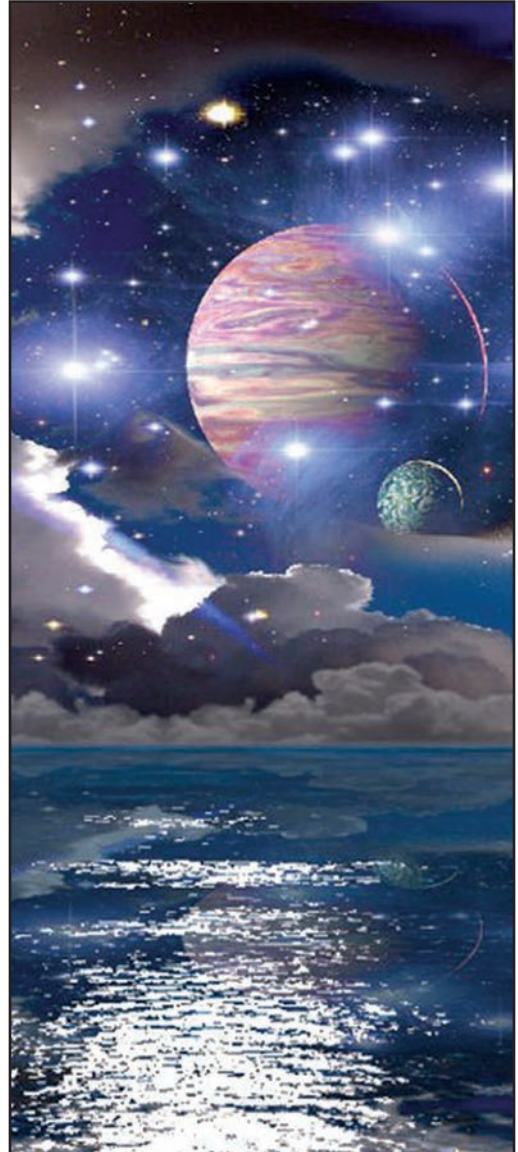
Loss is like nothing else,
It eats you at your core.
One day you sat next to me,
The next, you were nothing more.

I remember the feeling all too well,
Of my blood running cold.
Bargains and pleas at the tip of my tongue,
My soul would have been good as sold.

You were my first friend,
You taught me right from wrong.
Who knew that our last day,
Would end as your swan song?

Learning to cope is challenging,
And my life has become a mess.
Each day it might get easier,
But I don't miss you any less.

Thank you for all you gave me,
For who you taught me to be.
Just promise you're somewhere watching,
And silently missing me.



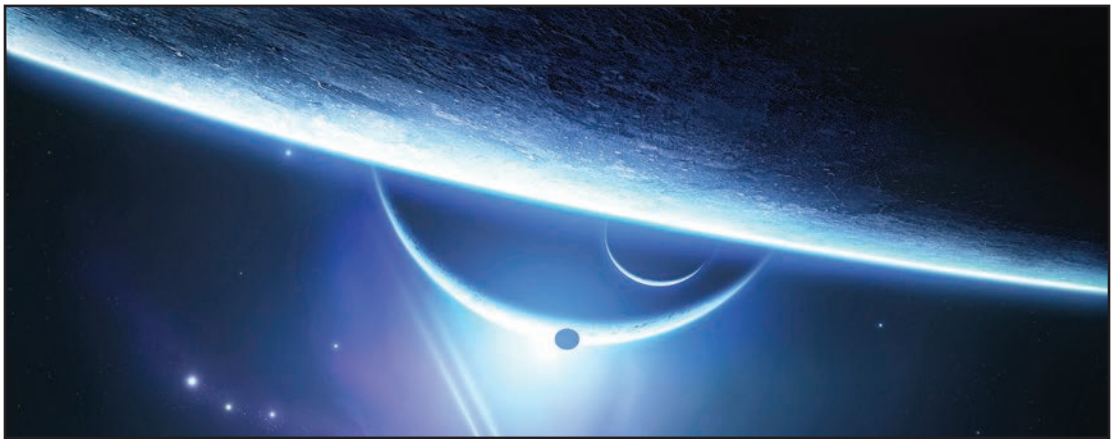
1991

Carol S. Lewis



he road melted into a
Smooth stream under the wheels
Of the big car.

Houses along the highway
Stood like men in unpressed suits.
A full summer moon hung overhead,
And we felt insulated,
Separate from the moment.
The ambiguity cut through us,
Center stage, and he placed
His hand on mine.



Matutinal Spring

Carol S. Lewis



I force my lips to move, to reconcile
the dome choked and tangled with topaz.

Great Sculptor must to have known this:

Some are like the finest violins

locked in dusty cases,

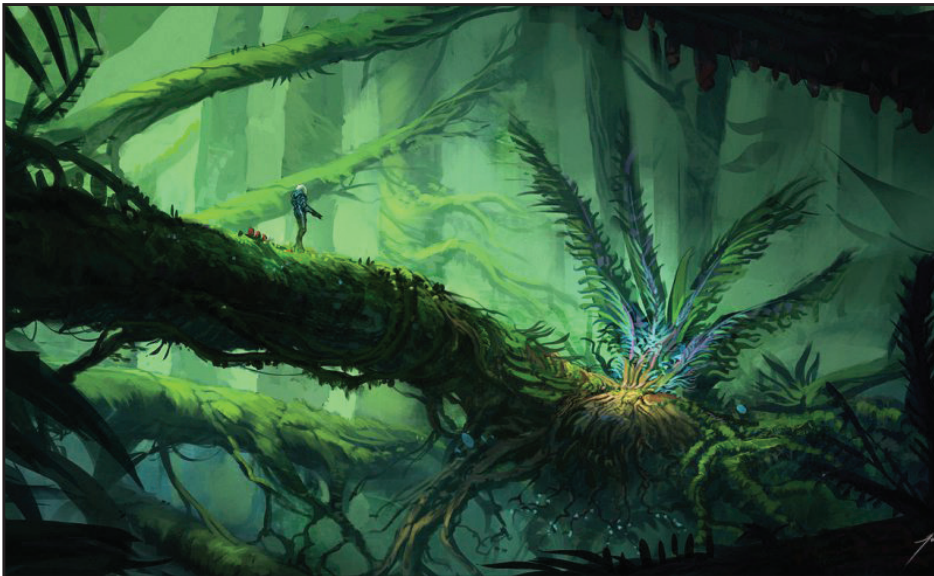
with only fools to play the notes

while those who explore the elite chord

content themselves with plywood imitations.

Flimsy at best,

Joy lingers, immeasurable.



Writers

Conner G. Terrill



Putting pen to paper, tapping at keys
Multiple ways to invoke a great pain
An agony in thought, rarely at ease
That relies on a well always in wane

A grand conflagration of creation
A gasoline ocean of emotion
Creating violent waves of sensation
Infernal riot, burning commotion
Yet how can one live, if never they die
Between the soothing lines of each sweet page?
Surrender to the call with calm reply.
A key to your mind, that dear gilded cage.
Though writing is strife, it grants great reward
Brandish that power: invention's accord.



I've Seen the Emptiness

Daniel Ybarra



I've seen the emptiness in the faces of my friends
My brothers and sisters
The lost ones walking together towards the darkness
Into the pit we fell, facing the dirt we cried

Screams of pain we yell into the dirt we lie
Yet lifting my head I saw
A flicker of hope reflecting in my blind eyes
A sight unworthy for my wretched self
A voice too loving for my hatred
A hand outstretched met with a bite of greed
A guide to my shaking legs
A breath of life in my resinous lungs
A piece of perfection in my flawed heart
A perfect direction to my lost self
A weight lifting from my hunched back
A healing touch to my sick soul
A drink of water selfishly gulping down my throat
A cheerful shepherd to a runaway sheep
A perfect father to a rebellious son
A forgiving voice to deaf ears
A new life to a dead man walking
An overwhelming never ending reckless love



Black Out

David K. Hearby



I am lonely.

Thriving in a world of

Arrogance, Ignorance

Abandonment,

Calamity, humiliation, violence, despair.

I started out like any child

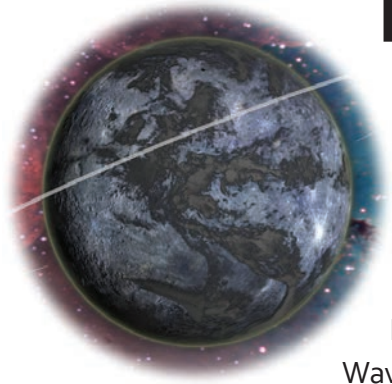
I did not understand

There is no fairy tale.



I Am

David K. Hearby



I am an ogre
Walking around
Thunder resounds
Each laden footstep I trudge
Waves ripple across, my weary flesh
I am a car accident
All who pass
Can't help but to stare
Taking in every unfortunate angle, bump, bruise, and blemishes too.
I am a bad audition
Being laughed at
Not because I am brilliant
But because inadequacy
Jeering my name
Failure is my fame
They pity my soul and yet
They laugh all the same
I am an ogre
I am a car accident
I am a bad audition
I am fat
I am ugly
I am inadequate
But yet, I am here

Life Like an Ocean

David K. Hearby



Life so sweet
From life's first breath
Laughter so sweet and innocent
Blissfully ignorant to the nature of life
Born for a moment and then gone again
As we grow we learn of life's wicked ways
So small and insignificant
When compared to the vast expanse of the world beyond
Full of sorrow and misery
Hopeless and desolate
Broken and alone
Death and darkness
Life so bitter
But still we hope when all hope seems to be lost
But still we slowly mend our wounds
We mourn when death knocks at our door.
Slowly we crawl out of the wilderness of despair
Once alone
And hidden by darkness
We crawl out for the world to see
We embrace those who surround us
Always there when we seem alone
Rising again we continue on
Trekking down the road of life
Through our ups and downs
We learn to love and mourn

Life so beautifully sweet and bitter
Like an ocean tossing us to and fro
Like the moon
Bending us to the will of God above



Strength

Goldie L. Hendrix



no matter what this world may bring
she gets up and takes on the day.

Days have not been too good for her,

but every issue that arises just makes this woman stronger.

Nothing can break her,

She keeps on fighting the good fight.

This woman has endured great battles in this life,

and the outcomes of this woman brings a winner.



She Finally Gave Up

Haley B. Cornett



he finally gave up, dropped the fake smile as a tear ran down her cheek.

She whispered to herself, I can't do this anymore. It hurts.

Nobody notices. Nobody understands.

How different it is. How different the people are.

They will never know the old me. The me who did not worry. The me who had it all.

The saying, "you never know what you have until it is gone" is far from an understatement.

It scares me to get attached to people.

They don't know me. I am not the same.

I eventually blew up. I had lost it.

Tears began to flood my face. Crying hysterically, what more could be done?

My insides became my outsides. My world turned upside down.

I am going insane. Depressed?

There is an emptiness, a void that can not be filled.

I look around. Wondering.

How are they happy?

How do people find joy in their mediocre lives, ignorant of anything beyond their superior society?

I feel trapped. In my own body.

I will be in a rage and not a single sound amounts from my mouth.

My words. They are locked in my mind. I want to pry it open but with everything I do I feel myself failing.

I just need someone. I just need a being to notice me, to wonder if I am okay.

Am I still mentally stable?

My soul is only as acceptable as my mind, and it races constantly.

Non-stop.

For eternity I am out of breath.

Sleep is difficult. Unless my anxiety grows tiresome.

I feel weary. I need energy. I need motivation. I need competition.

I need a spirit willing to push me. I need a reason to wake up in the morning.

Justification to get myself to look in the mirror.

See past the enormous bags under my eyes, accompanied by dark circles that match my vitality,

Forget the fake front.

So I can come to realize, someday it will be okay.

Unheard Cries

Jazzma Smith



If I could say my feelings

I would say I'm angry

I would say I'm sad

I would say I'm annoyed

I could not speak up

A ticking time bomb was my plea

I wanted my cries answered

In a way I knew how



On Growth

Jessica R. Foster

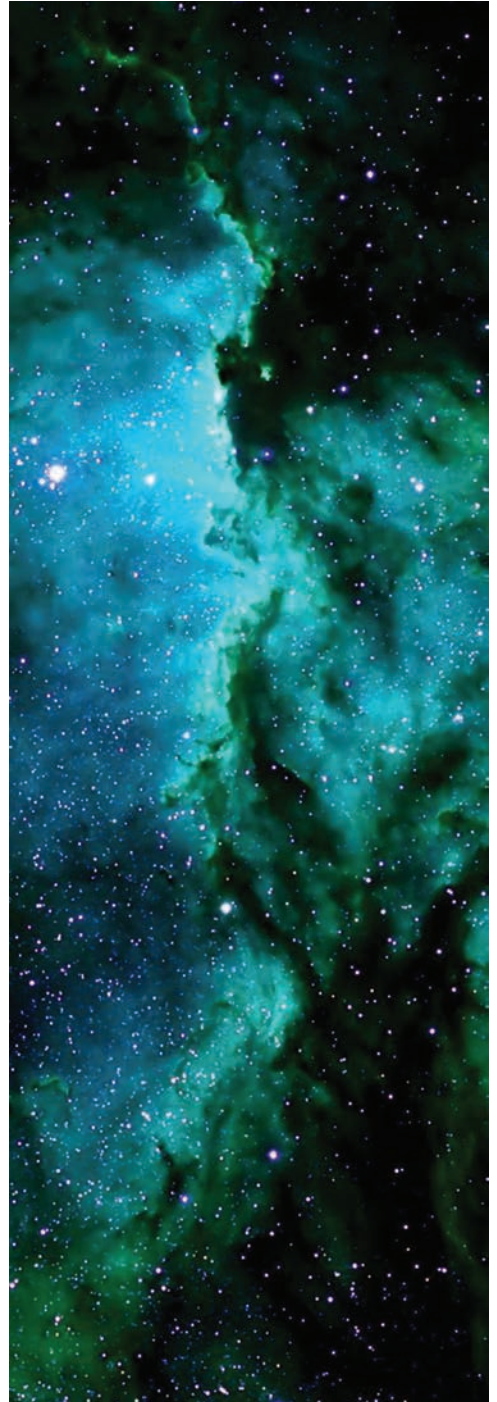


018 sounds like a year in the future
Much further away from now.
I will be nineteen this year
Nineteen

My last year of childhood
Although my childhood ended years ago.
Did it end with my first toy being tossed in the trash?
Did it end with my first bra?
The first time I was bullied?
The last time I was bullied?
My first experience with death?
My first kiss?
My first heartbreak?
When I ran away?
Surely when I turned 18,
And most definitely a piece of my childhood
Graduated when I threw my cap in the air

I think all of these were the end.
They are just highlights of a collection;
Pinpoints of yet a larger pinpoint
On the timeline of my life
I am not finished,
Nor will I ever be.
The end will never come because
I will always be gaining new experiences
Climbing the next rung.
In this way,
My whole life will be childhood,
And I will perpetually play in it.

In this way,
I will live infinitely.



Unrequited Love

Jessica R. Foster



He looks at her.
He pictures her pale shoulders;
quiet fabric slipping off them,
dancing to the floor and

softly colliding

like his lips with hers.

He encaptures her soft body

entangled into his.

His most prized possession

is her,

and hers is

her iPhone



Color Waves

Jessica L. Sawyer



unset

As the color catches at a glimpse
Changing as to make it seem
For there are no two the same
The light so bright how can it change
The color of the fairest streams
As to look into to a river of beams
Moments
Now it is growing across the sky
Showing the beautiful of never ending shines
Clouds come crashing making waves
Sending ripples of sun rays
Making now a new array of color
Everyday



masquerade

Katie Liggera



here is the face
I saw yesterday
and the day before?
now it has morphed:

new expressions
plastered, painted
a new carving
etched upon skin
your soft smile
transformed
into a devious smirk
inviting eyes
now creased
into snake-like slits
calculating, contracting,
ready to attack me;
you're not you
anymore
and tomorrow
I will wonder;
which mask
you will showcase
which character
you will portray
in this masquerade?



WAP

Katie Liggera



sitting on a lonely cliff
she thinks of leaping
off the edge

her converse shoes swing
back, forth, back, forth,
over black beyond

are there any skeletons
down in that cavern
she would meet?

does she want to
give the ground
her body?

she is losing will
to stay
above

she sees a bird
descend into
the unseen

but barely blinks
as it returns
to the sky

standing to her feet
she turns from
dark

today, she still
walks in
light



Better

Kendal F. Nolting



know there's a better way.
Instead of hitting the streets,
I'm hitting the book, come
on and look.

I'm making a better life for me.

May come as a surprise, but I ain't
believing these lies.

I was told I wouldn't be better,
but I knew better.

Trying to get higher, not seeing the liars,
Not seeing the haters.

Best be known they gonna hit me
up later.

When I'm on top, they try to hop.
I'm telling them to kick rocks!

If you weren't my fan from day one,
Be a man, get better by yourself.

Been through hell to be better.

Been doing wrong to do better.

Been put in the work to get better.

Got to be better to prove to myself
that I am not dirt.

That I'm worth more than what
I root from,

Better morals, starting no corals.

Plant myself in better soil, no snakes coil
Around my neck. What the heck?

All I'm doing it for me.

Been through hell to be better.

Been doing wrong to do better.

Been put in the work to get better.

Enemies stay on the lurk.

They trying to merk, trying to steal,
on my heels.

I'm always one step ahead. got to
keep up my head.

Always grind on my mind.

Money ain't sweet, but that honey
it brings is heat!

Money may be my obsession,
But it keeps me out of a depression.

Economy been hit the recession.

Hoping y'all can learn the lesson.

Do better!

Been through hell to be better.

Been doing wrong to do better.

Been put in the work to get better.

All I want is to be better.

Choices

Peyton Leonard



s I walk the path of adolescence
I realize that it's a blessin'
The anxiety is omnipresent,
Stressin' of testin' keepin' my mind ignescent.

My brain is aflame as it ponders and wonders
It contemplates, calculates, and increases of late.
I ask, where could I have been?
Could my previous years have been my premature end?

What if I had chosen the wrong path?
Chose to sell dope, make a quick buck then dash?
Dropped out of school, made the streets my domain,
Then be taken away, causin' my mother great pain.

I give glory to God, my Mother, Father, and friends
Forbearing me from making it easier to meet ends.
For keeping me inspired, confident, and assured
And ensuring I remain true to myself and secured.



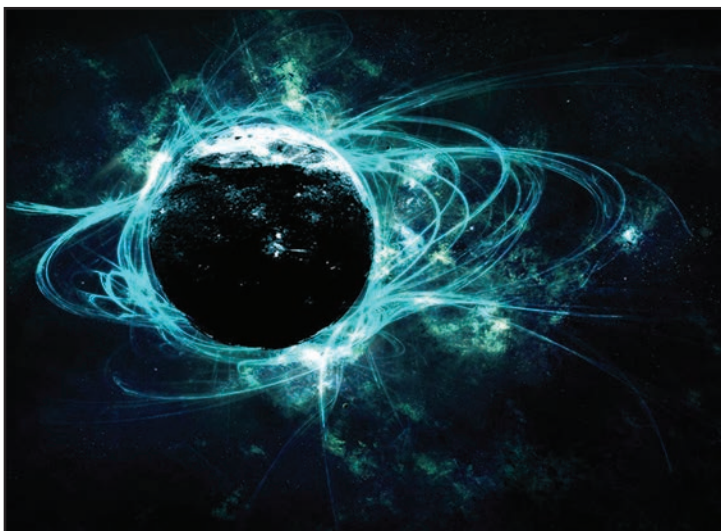
A Letter to the Outside: Bipolar Disorder's Rampage

Shalynn R. Caldwell



Did you know
my brain is a battery, Lithium
they call it. Another word for "be fit." I can't sit.
I'm thinking of the scars. Did you see them?

They are a testimony
of how
I wish
we could
be in
harmony. Me and
my brain won't quit,
did you know it hurts
when I hold back tears,
even though the reasons
for tears
are unclear.



To my best friend

Shalynn R. Caldwell



ou're my one true soulmate.

You receive so much hate.

That is why you don't know how much you mean to me.

Can't you see?

You hold my hand and I hold yours. Let's be strong together, we can do this.

There is better weather.

And this is my message to you: press play, my love, live your life, be yourself,
the you I love.



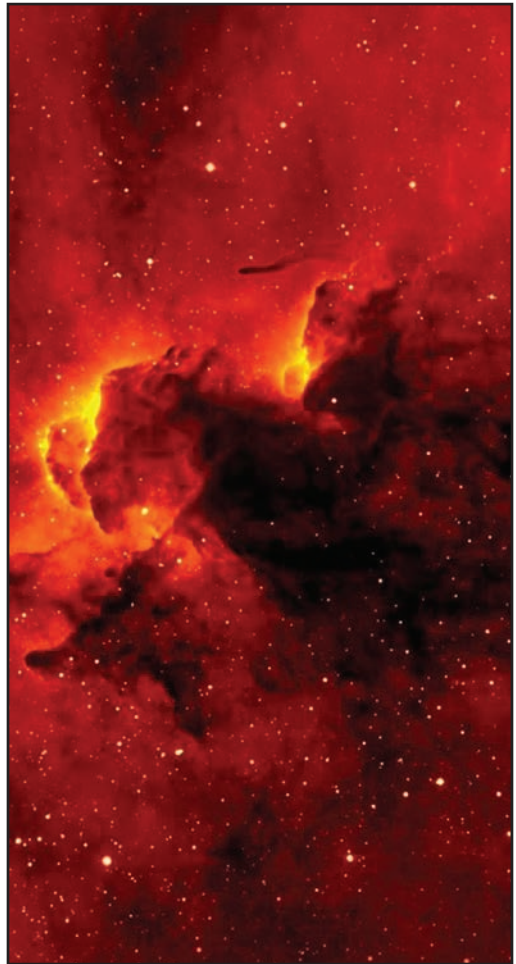
I'm ready to take your bones

Shelby R. Manis



'm ready to take your bones
Put them somewhere far away
Only where we know
Because baby

I am eternally yours
Let's put our blood in the ground
So we can be together
Never leaving
Always together
Because baby
I am eternally yours
I'll melt your heart enclosed in wax
Just never seal it back
Let's lay in this coffin
And tell our secrets
I promise not to tell
Because baby
I am eternally yours
In this dirt we call our bed
I see everything you mean to me



White Rabbit

Shelby R. Manis



'm in the rabbit hole
Not wanting to get out
You're all I think about
From sunrise

To sunset
I just keep getting deeper
The metaphysics you talk about
The art that you make
You're different from the rest
The one that I want
The artist
Someone to get me out of my slump
And happy again
To people this is all fake
But to me
This is real



What is the deal

Shelby R. Manis

What is the deal

With people

Thinking that suicidal people are funny

Thinking we are here for entertainment

Just to be looked at

And poked

And prodded

We are not the "suicide girls"

That you see on the internet

The ones that are pretty models

We are the ones that hurt

The true suicidal girls

The ones that wear their heart on their sleeve

The ones that fight

The ones in armor



The Kiss

Steve L. Atwood

It was after midnight.
He sat silently, ready to strike,
but his heart wasn't into it.
His parents had killed before,
but this was a first for him.
Bonnie would come out sooner or later.
He didn't want to kill her.
But he had to.
That kiss! It all started with that
damn kiss!
Captain Kirk actually kissed
Lieutenant Uhura!!!!
It shocked him...
Then...
It had made him wonder...about Bonnie.
He'd always thought she was
kind of cute.
Why did they have to be enemies?
So, last night they kissed
And then his mother found out...
And all hell broke loose.
His parents had raged at him all day....
He'd always knew they hated
Bonnie's kind,
He'd even seen them murder
Bonnie's kind,
They told him there was only one way
to make this right,

To put nature back on its natural course
And so, here he waited.
To Kill.
But...
Because his heart wasn't into it,
he gave up around 2 a.m.
He retracted his claws and...
As he padded away from the
mouse hole...
He glanced out the living room window.
Movement! There!
By the doghouse.
Why...it was mother!
Furtively slinking away from
the entrance...
What was that about, he wondered?
And the truth struck him.
That kiss! It all started with that
damn kiss!



Addiction

Tiffany F. Friday



I'm an addict.
Isn't it tragic?
I'm an addict in need of a fix.

I've lived with this addiction for so long.
Its grown and matured.
It learned to cause so much strife

I need a fix

I've learned to hide it
My acting skills so great even Shakespeare would be proud.
I hid the pain my needle cause
I know euphoria awaits.
In that moment time will pause.

I cling to my addiction, unhealthy I'm sure.
It has always been there, I fear the day it's gone.

Can I do better?

What if I end up alone?
What if this pain consumes me?
My addiction keeps me up
But the fall
Is
So
Far

Down

It brings me joy and pain.
I'm use to it.
Do I like it?

Could I deal with normal?

My addiction is unhealthy.
I tried to stop but it came back
In a new form.
I've known about it for so long.

I can't stop.

My addiction is unhealthy relationships
Those that make me unhappy and insecure.
Whether friend, family, or lover makes not one difference.
They always start out well....

Happy

But as time goes on it withers and crumbles...

Unanswered messages
Cancelled Plans
Broken Promises

I'm left clinging to the good, fleeting, moments.
It's the light I hold in the dark insecure times.

I push it down...
Ignore it
Hoping

I'm an Addict

Isn't it Tragic?
Am I happy?

I will be once the tide comes back around...



Watercolor

Tiechera Samuel



Heading home before dark with my lifeless
windshield wipers, the drizzle starts to fall.
At first I can still see, but squiggles mess

my perfect view; colors start to run. Tall
trees blur into muddy rivers trailing
south down to the frozen black wiper wall.

Distorted passing cars keep on sailing
by, spraying more paint on my canvas. Wet
wobbles of passing yellow unveiling,

revealing, a vague deluged route home, let
me know where the path is safe. Then, stoplight.
My window slides down. I reach to upset

the scene and to momentarily fight
my Picasso-like world into stark sight.



Kisses

Vicky L. Turner



What is a kiss?

Soft, sweet, butterfly, ...kisses,

Sympathetic, sorrowful, hurt, ...kisses.

Friendly, happy, joyful, ...kisses,

Passionate, loving, playful, ...kisses.

Kisses come in the form of all emotions,

They stand the test of time, it's true.

But of every single one of these, I've shared them all with you.

A kiss for health, a kiss that says hi,

A kiss for luck, a kiss good bye.



My Sister, My Friend

Vicky L. Turner



Once upon a time there was this woman so sweet,
She was happy and kind to all that she would meet.
She always had a smile on her lovely face,
Never showed her fear or pain, no, not a trace.

She lived her life for others, cause that's just who she was,
She always did for others, just because.

She lived, she loved, she gave every single day,
So naturally when she had to leave, it was Valentine's Day.

Five years ago, she left us with a gaping hole in our heart,
She will always be near, as she said we'd never part.

Sis, I just want to say,
I love you, I miss you, happy Valentine's Day.



Soul Mates

Vicky L. Turner



Love is walking hand in hand,
By the ocean through the sand.
Love is looking at the one you love,
While sitting by the fire.

Love is lightly touching, kissing,
While curbing your desire.

Love is two hearts thinking the very same way,
Love is what one thinks, and the other one will say.

Love is walking up the mountainside with the one you love,
It's the love you have been given, from the Lord above.



Confluence

Colophon

The cover stock is 12-point C1S gloss cover printed in full process color.

The text stock is 80# white gloss matte printed in full process color.

with full process color photographs.

Headlines are set in "Roddenberry Bold" typeface.

Author's Names are set in "Fontana Regular" typeface.

Text is set in "Corbel" typeface.

Initial Caps and Folios are set in "Trek Arrowcaps" typeface.

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Editing/Proofreading: Lisa Bliss, Pam Duckett, Matt Dowd, Sydney Clanahan

Confluence is funded annually by Three Rivers College.

Submissions

All students, staff, and faculty may submit essay, poetry, or fiction.

Submissions are accepted each school year from November to February.

Each entry may be 1,000 words or less, maximum three entries per author.

Entries must be submitted digitally and can be

emailed to the editor at gsnell@trcc.edu.



Three Rivers College

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI