



Kings River Review



Fall 2025

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The *Kings River Review* is published each fall and spring semester by the students in English 15J, Literary Journal Publication. Our desire is to produce a journal that reflects the emerging voices and visions of community college students, designing a space for their creative expression. The journal is named for the Kings River which runs along the western boundary of Reedley College.

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Number 9
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Cover Art by Rosa Alvarado, “Intertwined” and “El Gato Negro Ambiente,” ceramics

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

To our dreamy readers, we have carefully selected stories and artworks that evoke the childlike wonder that seems to wither in our minds and hearts as we age. These pieces showcase the joys and sorrows of human experience, along with the maturity that ripens from these revelations. Amidst these experiences, we often find ourselves too engrossed in our present and future, overlooking that inner child's wonderment of life. We sincerely hope that this issue provides you with the chance to reflect on that past, to acknowledge your personal growth thus far, and of course, make that inner child smile once more.

"I don't want to grow a thick skin, I want my skin to stay as thin as it was made and everything outside of that to be softer." – Brianna Pastor, *Good Grief*

Sincerely,

Halenna Castillo and Daniela Gutierrez

Editors of the *Kings River Review*

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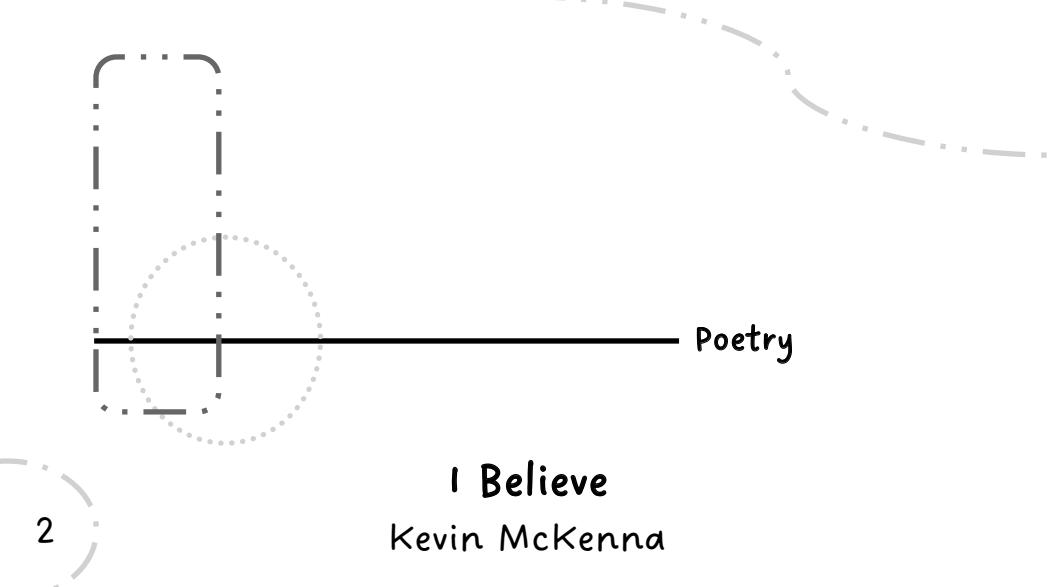
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Summer's Walk to Freedom, Heidy Albavera, watercolor



Poetry

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I Believe

Kevin McKenna

I believe in the artist's eye,
the fantasy in a small child's heart.
I believe a man must have faith,
in all the dreams he starts.

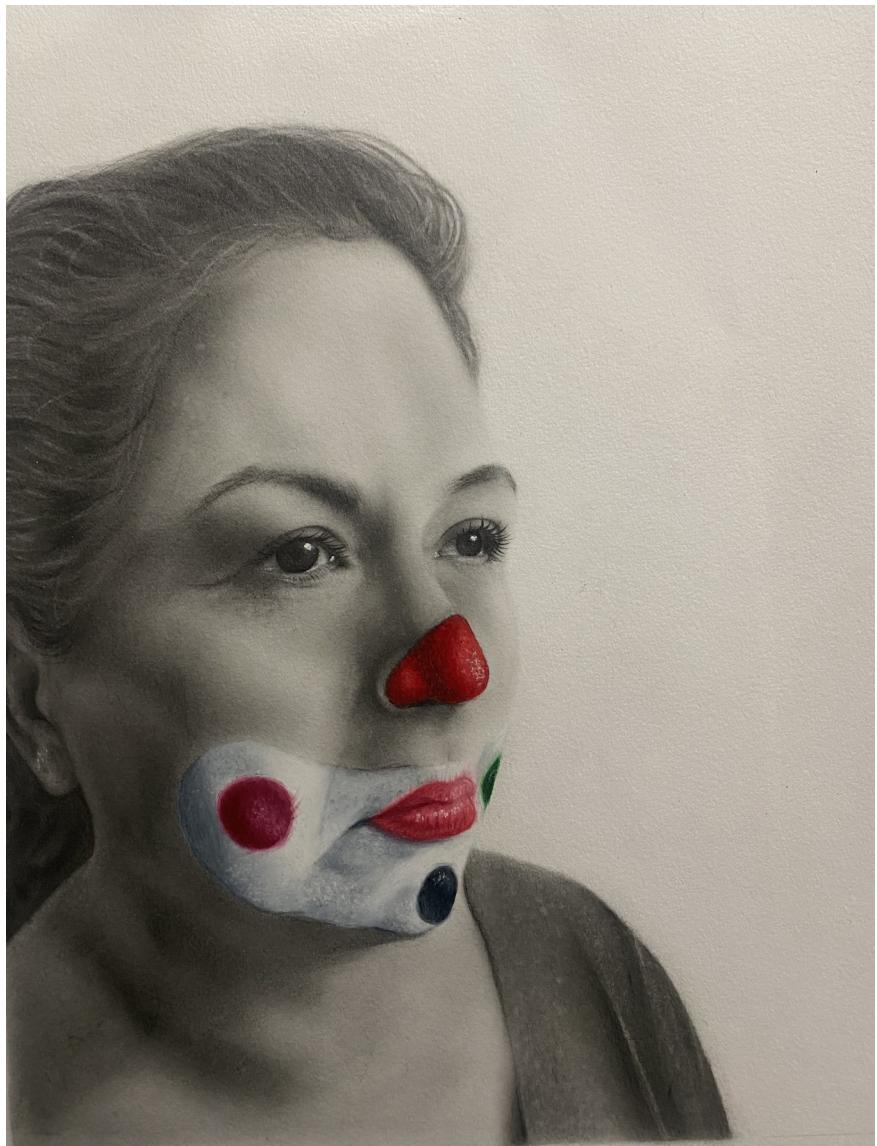
I believe in true romance.
I believe in lasting love.
I believe in fairy tales.
I believe there's more above.

I believe dreams are stories,
Told to me in my sleep.
I believe in fate and fortune,
For I've seen the wolf and sheep.

I believe faith's my mistress,
Holding tight her sister Hope.
I believe in shooting stars,
And staring into a telescope.

I believe in feeding children.
I believe in spreading wealth,
Putting a roof over the homeless,
I believe in mental health.

I believe in ending hatred.
I believe in living free.
I believe a man should be,
Exactly what he wants to be.



Ojitos Mentirosos, Monika Treviño,
graphite pencils with color pencils

In My Mother's Dementia

Karen Zea

“Querida madre,” oh, how I’ve missed the days watching you fight powdered dough delights from your morning highs. Warm golden “empanadas” emerge like silky caterpillars from their cocooned slumber, oozing sweet filling consumed by memories of running beside you, but now monsters chase you in my place. Dear long ornate table, you flirt with the thought of antiquated teacups and worn-out playing cards. “Querida hermana,” how I long to play “casitas” with you, knowing that mother would be alright and so would we. Dear tiny kitten’s breath buried deep beneath those beloved roses, I loved you like my own. Dear sand, you caressed my tiny toes and often kept me grounded; why not step in now and save me from my “tía loca?” Her sticky hands always willing to toss quiet girls into the sea as if to call the Gods with her “ofrendas.” “Querido hermano,” who bravely fights to bury each “monolito,” but knows he follows in her image. Dear garden, wilted and forgotten, apologies for my current absence. “Querido padre,” how I’ve missed your strong

embrace and kind words of wisdom. Dear childlike confusion, con cantos de “piña para la niña” and salty waves always pushing me back to shore. “Querido océano,” you silence my cries and bring tranquility. “Queridas tierras” with one leg here and the other there, I’ll never make it home again. Dear forgiveness, spare me from your guilty hands. “Querida hija, how I long to be with you once more.”

Doe's Eyes

McKenna Jones

I watch the fawn frolic through the fields behind my house.

She stops and locks eyes with mine, a ritual we've made. Her eyes pierce through my soul, and I let her in willingly.

There's a mutual agreement between the two of us.

She passes through often and uses our garden as a snack for the road.

My father curses her name, as if she's committed a crime. It's silly how man acts as if animals don't respect property when we're the ones who've settled our homes among their lands,

creating laws that they don't understand against the very things they're meant to do to survive.

Her secrets are safe with me; my father shall not know. I'll watch her from a distance, admiring her beautiful coat. When she trots along her way, I'll miss her when she goes, and pray I see her again, when my father isn't home.

Our Memory of Guadalupe

Naomie Amelia Bosman

8

Grandma, do you remember?
It's like eating pomegranate seeds.
One red bead at a time,
palm to pincer grasp
to chapped lips molded by murmured prayers—
the kiss that steals Persephone.

Grandma, do you remember
the rhythm of it? The steady crescendo?
Forehead to chest, shoulder to shoulder
—Grandma, you know this, left to right—
then bring the fruit to your lips.
Yes, a kiss for the son.

Grandma, do you remember?
It's like doing dishes.
We already walked into the kitchen.
I believe we need the sink, its holy drain.

Yes, I forgive the mess. Amen.

Our water is fine, it spills like art in your kitchen,

Yes, I forgive the wet sleeves and puddled floor. Amen.
Hail the soap down from the windowsill, full of Dawn,
you are still with me.

Yes, I'll pray for you. Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Grandma, I've forgotten.
How many Hail Marys?
It's Tuesday.
Do you remember my name?
It's in your bible...the book of Ruth.
Yes, I'm Cathy's daughter.

Grandma, it's Tuesday. Have you forgotten?

To Plum Flower

George Liu

Where all things lie hidden, shivering in the cold,
In the biting, lonely winter, she stands there all alone.
Out in the unnoticed wild—no warmth, no comfort, none
in sight.

Happy or sad, her only company was the elegant snow,
of her same color, the snow whiter than she,
Yet only her fragrance whispers of a closer spring.

Unlike the flowers that seek human praise,
She scatters her bloom for herself alone.
Only those who venture into the cold, six feet of snow,
Can catch a fleeting glimpse of her secret smile.
Still, she keeps herself hidden, only found by her fresh
and pure scent.

While other flowers envy her winter strength,
None of them understands her suffering.
Still, she smiles playfully, telling them,
“Beautiful spring is near.”
And when the garden again blooms in splendor,
She quietly hides behind the others,
happily watching them smile.

She didn’t have vibrant colors or a unique smell,
And no desire to compete with others.
When the men try to seek her after spring’s light,
She had already quietly drifted away with the breeze,
Leaving only her scent to linger for miles and miles.

Beneath the Yellow Streetlight

Danielle Ellis

12

Kathy pressed end on her phone. The call had gone unanswered as always. She couldn't blame Sean. He had twenty-five years' worth of reasons to ignore her.

Didn't mean she had to like it. She never knew if the boy was dead or alive. Contrary to his beliefs, it did matter to her.

The mistakes of a very young mom. A tired excuse, but very true. Back then, she had chased the approval of a friend rather than raising a child.

By the time she figured out being a good mother was more valuable, Sean decided he didn't want that anymore.

Kathy sighed as she lifted a chubby hand to her face, taking a puff of her cigarette. She wished something would happen tonight—a high-speed police chase or misbehaving teens. Anything to distract her from a sad little boy turned into a very angry man.

It was dark. A thick blanket of black lying over the two blocks that made downtown Glenville.

There was a single streetlight, and she stood under it.

The county bus was late as it was every night. For some reason, she could never get out of the habit of coming to the stop early.

Shoes crunched dirt behind her and Kathy jerked around. When she wished for something interesting, she didn't mean for it to happen to her.

A young man stepped into the sharp yellow glow of the streetlight. His clothes were too big with a tattered backpack slumping from his shoulders.

His face had foxlike features that should have been worn smugly but with the way he frowned, the boy just looked defeated. He was too young for that.

"This the bus stop?" His speech was fast with a lilt she didn't recognize. Definitely wasn't Midwestern. Maybe from the east coast.

"Yeah," she drawled slowly a bit caught off guard. She had never seen this man and she's seen everyone. One of the perks of being the only bartender in town.

He nodded and leaned against the light pole. Maybe going for suave but landing on timid.

"Who the hell are you?" she asked, wincing when he gave her a brow-pinched look. "I just meant you're new around here and we don't get new people."

"I'm Jacob." His tone was clipped. Maybe he wasn't feeling chatty.

Kathy took another puff of her cigarette. "How'd you end up here?"

"I was born here." He looked away, down the dark street. She followed his sight, hoping he saw something. "My mom is from here."

"Really?" Kathy faced him. "Who is she?"

“Clarice.”

“Clarice?” She echoed. “What’s the last name?”

“Jensen.”

“Doesn’t ring a bell.” She abandoned her cigarette butt on the ground. “Hard to find someone I don’t know around here.”

For some reason, this caught his attention. He turned to her; his eyes sparkled properly for a young man.

“She had a rough life here,” he spoke. “She had me when she was young and got involved with a lot of drugs. But once she left, everything got better.”

“Really?” Kathy said. It sounded flippant but she was sincere. She was always happy when someone escaped this hellhole. “Can’t believe I don’t remember her. She older than me?”

“No, I think she’s probably younger,” he spoke. “She’s forty.”

Kathy narrowed her eyes. “So am I.”

Jacob’s “oh” was bashful. He shoved his hands in his pockets.

Kathy saved him. “What’s she doing now?”

He perked right up. “She studied English and Business in college and owns a fashion company now. She doesn’t make the clothes; she just runs the place. My dad is a real estate agent. They’ve been married for about twenty years.”

He went on and on and Kathy listened intently. His dad ran an agency and owned several properties. Jacob was going to follow in their footsteps. He got accepted into Yale and Harvard and was on deciding which college

he wanted to go to.

Jacob was a strange little bastard, a weird clash of demeanor. He seemed weary and jaded yet fresh and optimistic all at once like an animal that was molting.

When she saw lights in the distance, she interrupted him. No one liked a bragger, and this old bird definitely wasn't jealous.

She shoved her words into the conversation. "But what are you doing here?"

"I wanted to see where my parents came from." Jacob stood straight now, bouncing on his heels.

"Your father from here, too?" Kathy asked. Jacob nodded.

She thought about it, determined to figure out who made this boy. There was one Jensen family in town. None of them attached to a Clarice. Unless.... "What's your mother's maiden name?"

Jacob hesitated; the bouncing stopped. "Steinbeck." "Clara?"

"Um..." Jacob's head tilted a little, "Yeah?"

Kathy's eyes widened, the dam broke, and memories flooded in. She squealed, "Oh, you're Clara's boy. I remember the day you were born. I was there!"

She reached over, pinching his cheeks. "Look at cha, all grown up now."

His eyes drifted towards her. "You know my mother?"

"Oh yeah, she was my best friend when we were growing up. Inseparable until we went our separate ways." Kathy decided he didn't need particulars.

"Don't know where Clarice came from though. She was good ol' Clara back here. So glad to hear she turned

her life around!" Kathy's definitely-not-jealousy morphed into awe. Clara had tons of potential and Kathy was happy she tapped it.

Jacob only gave a muted smile and leaned back against the pole, watching the bus get closer.

"Where is she now? Still in New York?" Kathy asked.

"She died," Jacob's voice was flat. It cut all the excitement out of her.

Kathy mumbled her apologies, but he didn't respond.

The bus creaked up. The doors jerked open in a hazardous fashion. Jacob rushed in first and Kathy tried to figure out what had changed. Had she said the wrong thing?

He went straight to the back of the dimly lit bus, sitting by the window. It finally dawned on Kathy that there was a strong possibility that not a single word had been true. That made far more sense and raising a son who would tell elaborate lies fit right into who Clara was.

For a moment, Kathy thought to leave it there and move on, but just before she sat in the torn, stained chair she reconsidered. Who was she to judge? She hadn't raised a son at all—couldn't catch him long enough to hear a lie about his life.

Kathy walked back and sat beside Jacob, trying to think of something to say. She didn't know what the truth had been or if he had lied at all. Clara had made her own clothes back in the day and planned on going to college.

Kathy dipped her toe in. "So which school do you plan on going to?"

Jacob exhaled, his brow furrowing, "I don't know. I

visited the campuses last month. Just a little gun-shy, I guess. College will be different from high school.”

Kathy nodded. The way he said it, she was guessing that was the truth. He was a complicated little weasel. Just like his mother.

“Maybe it’ll be different in a good way,” Kathy said. He shrugged and she felt uneasy. Her experience in reassuring was extremely limited.

“Well, there’s a community college around here somewhere.” Kathy said, “I thought about going myself. Why not start there and transfer? Sometimes starting small makes the bigger steps easier.” She couldn’t say she had learned that wisdom, but it sounded nice and likely.

Jacob smiled a bit as he thought it over. He met her eyes. “What’s your name?”

“Kathy.” She said, “I don’t know if your mother mentioned me much. We...” She sighed, “didn’t keep in contact.”

He nodded, jaw clenching. “She didn’t keep in contact with most people,”

That sounded exactly like Clara. Once she got what she needed, she booked.

“It’s good to meet you,” Jacob said. Kathy smiled.

Nothing else was said as the bus jerked and lurched down the road. Kathy figured she’d give Sean another call when she made it home. Hopefully this time he would answer.

Between Breaths

Ella Akers

Sometimes I think life is a stubborn tide
It keeps coming back
even when you've learned the rhythm
of letting go.

I wake,
and the world asks me to rise again,
to drink coffee,
to make meaning
out of the quiet hum of the refrigerator.

To keep trying,
even when I'm not sure what for.

Dying feels like a whisper
that never stopped echoing
a promise tucked into the folds
of every heartbeat:
one day, you'll rest.

Not punishment, not prize,
just the end of reaching.

Life, though

it pulls me by the sleeve,
says not yet,
there's still a sky to taste,
a name you haven't spoken aloud,
a moment you'll never see twice.

I wonder if dying is softer
than all this living
if it's like sinking into warm water,
where the noise dissolves,
where I stop measuring time
in failures and breaths.

But then
a bird cuts the morning open
with a single note,
and something inside me answers.

A pulse, a refusal.
I think: maybe I'm still curious.

Maybe that's enough.

Life says: stay.

Death says: come home.

And I, caught in the middle,
whisper back
I'm listening to both.

My Own Man

Nicolas Morales-Tapia

I told you the tide only pulls what it knows,
and you still walked into the sea.
Perfect plump lips deciding what they see—
you thought the only thing I knew was blue,
the only thing I felt was you,
pulling me u

n
d
e
r.

Unable to breathe,
I played the role too well—
a cold blue muse,
scripted for sorrow,
looking for arms to fall asleep in,
to lean on,
someone steady enough to be my anchor,
my man in the storm.

But I'm not a melancholic snooze.

I'm the storm that follows calm,
the salt that keeps the wound alive.

Looking due north with no bearing for you—
you thought I lived for men who were blue,
but I've always carried the ocean on my own back,
steady as a tide, half-god, half-man.

When really,
all I wanted was something bright to look forward to,
a perfect face to dissolve in,
somewhere soft enough to vanish inside.

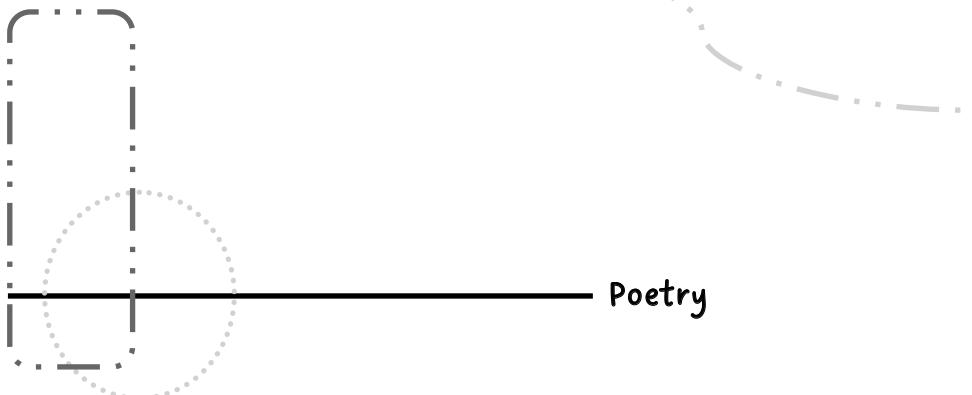
And after all of it,
I surface—
still mine,
still here,
my own man
—even after you.

Sketches of Us at the Jack in the Box

Naomie Amelia Bosman

Create a portrait of me. Let the pencil's graphite
turn your hands silver as you try to emulate
the angle of my brow on Italian-made paper. I'll wait,
stock-still, a breathing statue with her might
called to rest. Dear friend, offer me some insight
as to how you plan to capture the state
of my frizzy hair and loving gaze, how you calculate
the proportions of my face in the diminishing daylight.

If nightfall reaches us, will you continue to slave away?
How will you see the dulling tip of the Ticonderoga pencil?
Will you notice? Dear friend, when have we last spoke?
I remind you I am no real statue, nor silent display,
and am in no need of being your quintessential
muse. Friend, promise me you won't burn to smoke.



Where the Bed Ends

Christopher Klett

You sleep in the middle of the bed and I on the edge. Good thing we're on the bottom bunk.



Self-Portrait, Lizbeth Apolinar, mixed media

Bobarista

Lelani Vo

We would brew our tea in a blender. Somehow it did not violate any FDA violations. Probably because we didn't use blades that would have shredded the bags. My manager, cō Janice, trained me on how to do it so that I can always achieve supreme artisan flavor.

You first put the teabags, two at a time, into the pitcher along with a cup of hot water from the tap. You slap on the large silica lid to secure the contents and turn it on. Then you brace yourself. Turning it on will commence a loud jamming noise in which you will need to shield your ears for thirty seconds. I tap my foot, watch the count on the analog timer, and wait for it to be over. Five, ten, fifteen, sixteen.... Too often, I prayed for the forgiveness of customers beyond the bar whose conversation was cut off by the cacophony.

"It brings out the strongest flavor when we do it this way," cō Janice yelled over the noise while bearing the lid down on the blender.

“It brings out the strongest flavor when we do it this way,” I yelled over the noise while bearing the lid down on the blender.

A barista-in-training would be watching me in horror while I showed them how to do what I was doing on their own; how to choose options on the sweetener machine, how to follow the drink recipes, how to check supply, how to close properly in courtesy of the opening shift, and, of course, how to brew tea in a blender. It wasn’t just basic black or green tea either. We had more exotic blends: brown rice, matcha sencha, osmanthus oolong, even fruity-floral darjeeling imported from Sri Lanka. Boba is a kind of chewy black pearl extracted from cassava and slow cooked in brown sugar syrup. A scoopful of boba always pair well with tea unless you’re ordering it with fruit tea and that’s just strange. However odd our procedures were, we kept up the kind of quality that earned the cafe’s four-and-a-half stars on Yelp and still have regulars coming back for more. There were, sadly, a handful of negative reviews on Google, but who goes to Google to leave a good review if you weren’t planning on writing a bad one?

As to why I was training workers, it all started one month in when Janice bestowed upon me a copy of her shop key. *It couldn’t be.* I held in my hands this shiny new object, and it was right then and there that I evolved from a trainee to something strange and mystical called: a shift lead. “Cậu làm được mà, nhóc,” my manager smiled wistfully, her hand a gentle weight on my shoulder. Although I don’t speak Viet, the words sometimes click.

I...got this?

Next thing I knew, cô Janice's red Tesla was rolling out of the plaza.

From then on, my manager started leaving the shop early, and there I was—aproned, scared, and alone. She reassured me beforehand that she would be a phone call away if I needed help. “If you don’t know what to do con’, just use the work phone okay?” It’s not like I expected someone to hold my hand through all of this, but damn, she left me here...at the front lines! And for my own survival, what else could I do but my best? And so, I made a Bluetooth connection from my phone’s Spotify to the shop’s speakers. A culmination of bedroom pop and indie that often soothed my teenage anxieties managed to soothe any work anxieties while I ran around.

For a while, it felt like the tasks were coming in from all sides. I found myself in a kitchen where a fresh pot of boba was on the stove, sometimes at a storefront where customers would be waiting on a cashier or their drinks, and every so often a tablet that distracted me with Door-Dash orders.

I also made some mistakes along the way that may or may not still keep me up at night. Like a toy constantly being winded up, I had gotten so much into the motion of parroting orders back at customers to make sure I heard them right to the point where a customer once said, “milk tea please,” and I repeated, “milk tea please.”

It wasn’t like I was always doing all of this on my own though. The other part of my job was to train a new worker almost every week as the team slowly grew to its full size. Before I knew it, there were also other shift leads

properly hired and promoted in the course of one month. I recall being scheduled most often with a girl named Angelina who somehow always had tea to spill.

“Con đang làm tốt lắm,” Janice said one day, her hand still a gentle weight on my shoulder. *You’re doing good.*

I had a hard time believing her, but time and practice together worked in my favor when I gradually gained confidence at work. Before I knew it, I was no longer faking it until you make it.

I was in my junior year of high school and I was competent.

Not only competent, but *socially* competent too.

Maybe getting a part-time job—that-promoted-me-all-too-fast is *the* miracle for someone like me—a teen who all-too-often retreated to her sketchbooks and special interests that you could very likely find on a shirt at Hot Topic. Working in the hospitality industry changes a person. It is like a kind of wisdom you couldn’t have found otherwise. Because between being asked to make the customer a drink that isn’t on the menu, or to explicitly use no sugar in a drink for this customer that was minding her calorie intake (she then sent it back to the kitchen saying we used no sugar), I learned how to deal with people.

The best part was when I biked back home, wrung a towel from the kitchen, collapsed into the nearest chair, and wiped the sweat off my brow. And if my grandpa or my mom looked over to ask me, “what’s got you so tired,” I could give them the word that I was doing all right in life: “work.” You’d bet they would always nod in approval.

We were all doing all right in life. That was all that mattered to our families who wanted us to work hard. After all, what is school, but the very education that we put ourselves through the wringer for without something to sprint toward?

And so many of us—not just me—worked in that hurried way. I started keeping my paystubs from the boba shop inside my desk so I could cash them in all at once, but amidst it all, I hardly stopped to ask myself what I was sprinting so hard toward. Where did I plan to stop? What will I reach at the end of my race? Easily, it must be the predestined success that my family's simply waiting to see me get after. For alongside familial love, I exist to them as a mirror, a prospect, a linear-travelling vessel of untapped potential. Our parents and grandparents are counting on us always to make sure that their sacrifices weren't for naught.

They were counting on me, too. Knowing this, I couldn't stop.

Pausing even to catch my breath would feel like taking advantage of their hard work.

At times, there would also be those my age who would unfairly look on to the other racers and strain themselves to pass them up. If you dared to hand them a water or a bandage for the race, they would turn it away in haste and, or in spite. What we make of our own future seems to be a thing that we uphold to other people more than to ourselves.

“So, you’re finally free from high school,” my aunt chattered excitedly. “What are your plans looking like for college?”

I was sitting across from her in a red leather booth.

The Italian diner we were at was noisy like the cafe's rush hours but absent of all the sticky-sweet spilt boba and acrid bleach spills I dealt with the nights prior. I enjoyed the cleanliness of the dinner more than I enjoyed the sweet drinks that I didn't have to prepare. *Her treat—I'll take it.* On her Amex Gold, she wanted me to paint out a picture of my four-year plan.

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From the Strathmore sketchbooks gifted to me on more than half the holidays of my life, I recalled the work that didn't feel like work, the hours that didn't feel like hours spent drawing and writing in the studio on campus. Art. I know I prepared for how I'll get there. I'll embark on a transfer plan into a good school to save money and scrap together a worthy portfolio. It was my mistake in smiling in earnest when I said it.

A week later my younger brother told me my aunt said to him, "start thinking about your plans after school now, because your older sister doesn't know what to do."

Words said behind my back somehow managed to cut through the whole of me.

My aunt was right. Despite everything, I didn't know what to do but admitting that openly would fall as a moral failing upon the ears of any loved one. I will admit here where paper only suffers honest words: I don't know what to do. I should have known it, too.

I look back on that period of my life where we were all either high school or college age and half of us needed our parents to pick us up from work. Childishly, I did not have my license because I was very scared to learn how to drive. When I closed, I couldn't afford to bike late at night.

It was my mom who considered my safety out in these streets and who I was thankful for by picking me up at nine. Customers, let alone my manager, didn't rush me to close the cafe on time as much as seeing her CRV at the storefront did.

It's not like the cafe was always busy either. Rush is not a perpetual state. It came and went, and when it did, we were free to idle in that eye of the storm. All the baristas were allowed one free drink and the seats allotted to us by Janice. Mini black stainless-steel stools that we would set up alongside the fridge. Our drinks always tasted good too because we weren't rushed to make them.

I remember what it is like to be a customer once I am free to sip on fresh boba milk tea while sitting on a break stool, but maybe it wasn't me. Maybe, it was the space itself. Cafes, after all, are the kind of third place that encourages all our narratives, accounts, and confessions to spill forth over steaming tea.

"Did you know? In Vietnam, we have this district that only has boba shops just like this one," boasted Han while she sat in the stool across from me. I met her three months ago. She was a 24-year-old student who recently packed up her life from her home country and was here for college. She passed time by picking up hours at the cafe. She didn't seem like she was sprinting toward anything, but she gathered strength to herself in some other way. Despite her casual way of communicating with people across the board, I always had the sense Han was older than me mentally.

She recounted her day-by-day of what her life was like back in Vietnam. It was new, interesting, and despite hav-

ing little in common with her, I enjoyed anything she could give me when we had nothing to do.

I would nod to every word while I sipped on my boba. I mentally painted the picture she described to me. A district of cafes with the smell of sweet tapioca on every corner? It sounded like the kind of thing you would visit in Heaven.

“I can see that.” I stopped to swallow down my boba and glanced around the quaint shop. There was little sound to backdrop our conversation save for the calm music and the ice machine that rattled every so often when it made new ice. We were allowed to talk freely because we lucked out on finishing our current tasks and there were no customers. My mind was thus allowed to drift toward memories a few years old. “I’ve only been to Vietnam once to visit my relatives. They took us to all these different places to try coffee while we rode on the back of our mopeds,” I shared.

“That sounds nice,” she hummed. “What else did you do there?”

“Oh, let me think,” I tried to remember. “We went to the temples and tried a lot of different restaurants too.... We only had a month, but we did our best to see everything that was worth seeing. I am pretty sure me and my family will go back at some point when we have the time.”

Han smiled and paused to sip on her drink before resuming. “One month is good. I say you should see about the country at least once if you have never been,” she said reassuringly. “I would like to visit soon, but I have things to do here.”

Out of curiosity, I asked her, “What do you have to do

here?”

“College,” she said simply. “Right now, I am close to being done with my studies, and now I am passing time here by working, and, you know, applying to internships.” she then added, “My classmates often tell me I shouldn’t be at a job like this.”

I frowned at that, but she immediately carried on without a break. “They say that, but I’m not bothered by what they say about where I am. I feel like you learn new skills anywhere you go. The same goes for me being here. I get to learn a lot of things here that I can take with me for life. And you can always get to where you need to be so long as you learn.

Her words took some time to settle in me, but when I looked down at the product in my hands that was made unrushed and for my own fulfillment, the words left me. “You’re right.”

You can always get to where you need to be so long as you learn.

Beat Changes

Ava-Marie Esser

Power outage or break-up; spoiled birthday cake.
Growing out bangs, then cutting them; cowlick.
Being late to class again; the trolley.
Calling fair-weather friends; stormier days.
Pinball machine people; “Meet So and So!”
See them in everyone; unique face.
Having empathy; lack of sympathy.
Too late for sorry; take coffee to go.
Numb to the sad; crying for the happy.
Dead mouse in a scene shop; what places he's been!
Being born; crying for mom ever since.
A child's sandcastle; the incessant sea.
Stop staring at the ground; start looking up.
Picking at scabs; having them heal again.
Quit smoking, pick up soccer; runner's high.
Buying closed flower buds; watching them bloom.



The Shadow of Doubt, Rey Harden, charcoal

Dysmorphia

Ella Akers

If I could change anything,
it would be the way my stomach folds
when I sit,
how it softens beneath my hands
like proof I've failed to hold myself together.

It's not the skin I hate—
it's the way my mind measures it,
the way mirrors become judges,
the way light feels cruel
when it touches me there.

I count, I compare, I contort,
as if shrinking could save me,
as if bones could prove I'm worthy.
But the truth is quieter—
it lives in the damage unseen.

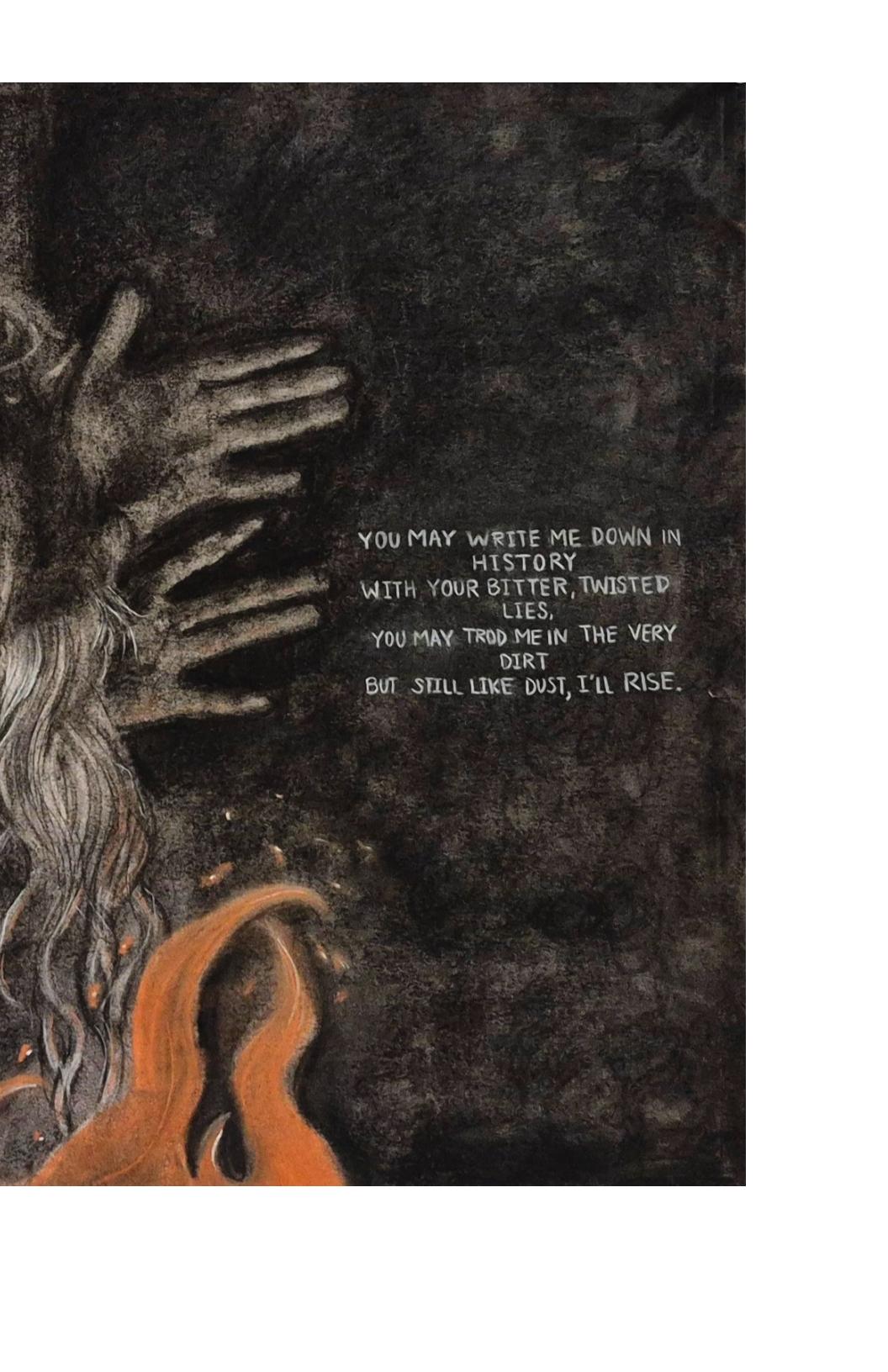


Body dysmorphia is a trick of the eye
that seeps into the soul.
It makes me a stranger to my own shape,
a sculptor carving herself down
and calling it control.

If I could change anything,
it wouldn't be my stomach—
it would be the voice
that tells me I have to.



Untitled, Lizbeth Apolinar, charcoal
Poetry attributed to Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise"



YOU MAY WRITE ME DOWN IN
HISTORY
WITH YOUR BITTER, TWISTED
LIES,
YOU MAY TROD ME IN THE VERY
DIRT
BUT STILL LIKE DUST, I'LL RISE.

Declaration of Normality

Corrinna Gaytan

Suppose

The eerie thump of a fallen body
Flesh splatters onto heated pavement.
The smell sickens the people around.
As families cover the younglings,
Terror fills the air.

No.

Flashes of light start to overshadow the dead
As if lightning was the cause of cooked flesh.

How damned are we?

From younglings shot down as though they were fawn,
to riots that battle as the tangerine ignites the
Constitution on fire.

No movement made, no sound heard, nothing but
Ash, floods, and quakes.

Santiago crashes the canyons like a surge hitting the tide.
Ice melts like butter on toast.
The world trembles, not from fear,
But the weight of sorrow shifts as time crawls.

Shame Fish

Tess Pacza



41

For as long as I can remember, I have gone fishing with my papa. In all my memories it's just us two, but I know there were times when my older brother would come with us. I don't remember the days that he was there. I only know that he ever was because of the one time I wasn't. They were going fishing after dark. I had never gotten to go fishing after dark. They were taking crickets as bait. I had never gotten to use anything but worms. I begged to go with them, but for some reason, it was just a boy's trip; I could go tomorrow. I know that there were times when the three of us went together only because I remember the rage I felt at being left behind.

Despite all the fishing I have done, I really know nothing about fishing. My papa rigged up the poles. My papa put my worms on my hook. My papa took the fish off my hook. I didn't know anything beyond watching my bobber sploosh under the surface of the water and reeling for my life when it did.

When I left for college, I didn't take any fishing poles,

but I made a few friends who had brought theirs. I bought a twelve-dollar Moana-themed kiddy pole so that I could go to the lake with them. They had rubber worms on their hooks, but I wanted to dig for worms. In my opinion, digging for worms is the best part of fishing, so a boy, who totally liked me, rigged up my pole for me. He put on one of his own hooks, helped me dig for worms using spoons, and squished it onto the hook for me even though he was convinced I could do it myself (and even though I was equally convinced I could do it myself). This boy, who I found loves fishing even more than I do, later became my boyfriend.

We started dating in winter, so we couldn't go fishing together at first, but when springtime rolled around, that's all we wanted to do. There were poles waiting for me back home, but I bought a brand new one. And instead of digging for worms, he rigged my new pole up with one of his rubber worms. The biggest fish I had ever caught was a catfish, but after just a few times fishing with him, I caught a big bass. It was the same size as the catfish I'd been so proud of or even bigger. Despite the big smile I had on my face, holding this fish up for the picture, all I really felt was guilt.

Just before I caught this bass, my papa had said that he wanted to take me somewhere where we could catch a big fish. I was all for it; we mostly just caught bluegill the size of my hand. Now, I felt ashamed at having caught that bass. I caught it with a new pole, with a rubber worm—without my papa. It was like I was saying everything I'd done with him wasn't good enough. When I was little, my papa was the first person I would have wanted to

talk about this fish to, but now, he was the last. I didn't want him to know about my big secret shame fish. I didn't want him to feel like he wasn't good enough. I didn't want him to feel like he was being left behind.

When I got home for the summer, my papa and I naturally made plans to fish. I brought my shameful brand-new pole on which my shameful rubber worm still hung. Lying doesn't come naturally to me, so when he asked me if I'd caught anything with it, my plans to spare his feelings came crashing down. I was forced to tell him about the bass. I was forced to show him the picture of me holding that fish in a way I had never done before—smiling big. My papa and I both pretended that this didn't make us sad.

“Did you clean him and eat him?”

“No, we threw him back.”

After that, we followed the normal routine. We dug for worms: two big ones and lots of little ones. Then, we packed the rods into the bed of the truck. Normally, we bring three buckets: two to sit on and one to keep fish in. This time, we brought two real chairs and when he forgot the bucket, I didn't break the silence to remind him. He might feel bad for forgetting. I might feel even worse remembering.

We climbed into the pickup truck and drove to Moorehead Lake. My papa brought his tackle box, too, which was rare. I thought this meant he really was determined to catch a big one, but when he flipped open the top, my heart broke just a little. His large two-tier tackle box held pliers, a couple of bobbers, and three rusty hooks. He brought the tackle box because he was really trying for

me, but in that moment, I could tell that he didn't feel enough.

I thought we'd have better luck on the other side of the lake, but my papa chose a dock surrounded by weeds. I thought I'd have better luck with my rubber worm, but I asked my papa to put a real worm on my hook anyway. He took the rubber worm off and put it in his barren tackle box. He switched out my big hook for one of his dinky rusty ones though I thought the bigger hook would catch a bigger fish. He put on a real worm and a bobber. I was already used to rubber worms, no bobber. I thought the water looked better off the left side of the dock, but he told me to try the right.

Once, when I heard a splash, I ran back off the dock to get closer to it from land. I was so desperate to catch something big. While I was on the bank, I looked over at my papa sitting by himself, watching his bobber do nothing but bob, I realized that for all these fishing trips I'd gone on with my papa, not one of them had I really spent fishing.

We didn't catch any big fish. My papa caught one bluegill the size of my palm. I didn't catch anything. And yet, I was happy, because fishing wasn't about the worms, or the pole, or even the fish; it was about being with my papa on that dock surrounded by weeds. It was about letting him put my worm on the hook even though I could have done it myself.

I love the break room (or) I love water cooler talk

— Mel Mancheno

1.

I made connections by the water cooler.

Real, 38-year-old to teenager, vocational connections
about domesticity and half-lives.

Pulling into red-bricked *St. Vick's School For Children*
the 31st of October,
seeing your mini Basquiat has won the day.

Realizing I've been Little Lincoln,
she's been my mother,
noticing smile lines pole-vaulting with furrowed brows
past oceans of sentiment.

How overdrawn on positives must she be
to overshadow
a boy's father.

I know exactly how that goes,
mother, I can feel it.
I'll tell you now.

2.

I make life through the coffee machine,
cup after cup swarming with hazelnut shells
coddling me with molasses beaches.

So nice, I make my second home next to
you, owner. Molding me a doctor-unionist,
explaining the prickling of caffeine
on the adenosine receptor,

46 the pleasant incidental that the coffee machine finds home
in every workplace in America.

For you. I mix milk into a soft caramel river,
swallow hot heaps at 7 in the morning
and become glad to be alive.

So Let the Forest Teach Him Still

Anthony Albright

The birch trees lean where maples grow,
Not like the first I used to know.
These lakes are wide, their voices strange,
The wild I loved has learned to change.
So let the forest teach him still...

I limp along the gravel shore.
My knees recall the desert's roar;
The sky I fell through, rifle tight,
Now haunts my bones in autumn light.
So let the forest teach him still...

The loons cry out across the bay,
Their echoes mock what I can't say;
I fear the years will close the door
Before I show him what I swore.
So let the forest teach him still...

My older kids know every sign—
The tracks, the wind, the weather's line;
They'll guide him when I'm gone, I pray,
And keep the dark of doubt away.
So let the forest teach him still...

Yet these are not the woods I knew—
No mossy giants dripping dew;
Here birch and aspen guard the trail,
And I, a stranger, feel I fail.
So let the forest teach him still...

And when my breath is thin and slow,
When duty calls me down below,
I'll trust the trees, the wind, the hill—
To keep my son, to guide his will.
So let the forest teach him still...

Finite's Road to Unknowing Peace

Eliot Hemingway

Finite's road wound upon the southern coastline, holding tight to the mountainous ledges which posed against the thick sea below. I sketched various birds which soared above the ledge and then dove down and below out of sight. The path began to gradually descend into thin gray rock and cove. There in the tide washed beach, I walked among the scattered. Bright to my eye were smooth sea glasses and polished wet rocks which bejeweled heaps of junk and kelp. A once gnarled wooden staff of forgotten sun bleach white, lay propped against the layered-slate wall.

The thin legs of a sandpiper glided upon the smooth sands of a still water tide pool, pecking every while or so. I slipped my feet into the baptizing saltwater cold and found the ocean's scent to be olden and brisk. Smooth stones roughed my tiring feet and moment by moment I felt myself slipping further into the winding yet linear ceaselessness of the ocean's infinite touch.

Memory was that of an old stone in the saltwater blue.

Finite's road haunted me like a moonlit night to the unrested creature. I walked the path backwards in my head. Each and every step tilting me into the sinking sense of lightless blue. I could not breathe or scramble in the blankets of tough leather green kelp. I was sinking and only my eyes could see through the stinging water; quick moving clouds and what must have been the moon like sun light from above.

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The waves swayed me slowly to shore. Inch by inch I went unbreathing. Both hands I held were clasped on the smoothest of dark ocean stones. It weighed my then pale body down to the kelp forest floor. I carefully watched the waves crest overhead. Their motion was dreamlike from beneath as if the world was crashing in every other instant.

The Neighborhood Cat

Michael Garrett



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When I was young, I bought my first house. I had worked hard to get to this point, of being on my own. I was alone and ready to be alive, and owning your own home was the most important part of that.

In my solitude, I came to learn of a stray cat that frequently found itself gliding through my yard or perched upon my mailbox. It didn't take long, in fact I think it was almost instant, but I fell in love with that cat. It was battered and scarred, intensely calico, but beautiful, nonetheless. It had missing patches of fur, a notch taken out of her left ear, and a single cut that ran from her belly up to her side and further up to the back of her neck. These scars and their stories only intensified her allure. Something about her was so impressively appealing. She had a sort of blithe confidence, completely independent, and entirely alone. She believed in herself enough to get up and keep moving forward—to lick her wounds. Maybe it wasn't that she had wounds to lick, but that she wasn't afraid of gaining new ones. She did not fear the jabs and the uppercuts that life will undoubtedly dish you. It had nothing to

do with a fear, or a lack of respect for death, but everything to do with the knowledge of her own fortitude. I came to name this cat *Scout*.

This cat was a sleuth, a gymnast, and a chameleon. I would often find her tight roping the fence line that separated the neighbors separate incessantly barking dogs that were eager to win a taste. She was unfazed. She was always unfazed. She wouldn't be bothered. In fact, it seemed she took her time riding from one corner of the yard to the other, 6 feet in the air. If she wasn't lazily perched in some precarious situation on the edge of a roof, corner of a fence, or high upon a tree branch, you'd find her lounging about next to the creek, enjoying the shade offered by the tickling willow tree. *Scout* was a permanent fixture within this neighborhood, owned and operated by no one, within nobody's jurisdiction—a new part of my reality that would come and go regardless of my desire.

Weeks went by and I had come to notice that *Scout* would grow and shrink as if she were constantly balancing back and forth on some kind of weight plan. When her health appeared more solid, her joints seemed to be well lubricated, her gymnastic abilities would continue to impress, and the frequency in which I would see her would lessen. When the ebb came back to the flow, she would grow rickety, frail, and thin, looking as if her bones had been rusted and her mind was a few seconds behind. I figured I'd set out food at night on the off chance that there was a mouse shortage. There wasn't a night where I didn't put out a fresh bowl of food and water. Whether I knew it or not, I was desperate to receive even an ounce

of affection or acceptance from this incredibly independent animal. I never had much to offer; in fact it was more of a pittance than an offering, but it was all I could give, and it came wholly from my heart.

Time went by, and she seemingly became more accustomed to my presence. In the morning before the sun rose, I would wake and find the little bowl of water and can of tuna both empty. She could be found sitting across my yard on the old tree stump staring at me almost paying me thanks. Her silhouette was deep blue and almost purple in the emerging, ambient sunlight. The second I would find her she would slowly turn away and hop over the fence off and away to whatever adventure awaited her. The blue wash that covered the scenery at this time of day would become her shroud, keeping her hidden as she navigated the neighborhood. I fought hard to keep my excitement from growing whenever this would happen as I knew it probably didn't mean much, but I couldn't help but feel like this cat saw me. I couldn't help but feel like she saw me as something different.

I would come to see a lot more of *Scout*. Every night before I went to bed, just as I had been, I would set out a fresh can of tuna and a little bowl of water. Every morning when I woke, I eagerly rushed to find that the food had been consumed, and *Scout* would be on her tree stump, waiting to acknowledge me. As my streak of successful nights continued, her comfortability and level of interaction with me grew. Time would go on, and I would find her waiting for me in the mornings at the end of the deck, then eventually a couple feet from the can and the bowl. I was giddy knowing that the cat that I loved—this beautiful

animal that was so mesmerizing, this creature that was the perfect embodiment of so many of the attributes I admired—was coming to me, was interested in me.

One morning I will never forget. I woke up without an alarm as I no longer needed one since this routine had started. I was alert, wired, ready to start off my day with my favorite exercise and ready to start off my day with dessert. I flew to the back door and slowly opened it to reveal *Scout* sitting there right outside the back door, waiting for me to come greet her. I paused, dumbfounded. She gently stood up, arched her back as if to yawn and say, “good morning, I’ve been waiting for you,” and tiptoed herself over to my feet, snaking around my legs. She pressed her peppered, unkempt fur up against my calves, wrapping around and through my legs. I was stunned. Had I won her over? I was completely enthralled. She was finally at my feet, reveling in my humble presence. I wasn’t special. I was just another guy. One of many to have moved in and out of this house. Who knew how many of me there had been, giving her the same treatment, finally receiving an embrace such as this. I didn’t care. I was too satisfied, too fulfilled, too full to care about any of that. Here she was right now, at this moment, at my feet. Almost non-plussed, but fully aware of my situation, I let her be. I didn’t reach down to pet her; I didn’t try to take more from her than she was willing to give. I was careful not to be eager and to not let it spoil.

This same ritual and dance in the baby blue light of the morning went on for one more week before I worked up the courage to try and pet this untamed, unownable thing. Finally, one morning as she slithered and coiled

around my legs, I ever so slowly reached down my hand. She paused before she even saw it, sensing my approach. Ever so slowly and patiently I held my hand down in front of her face, offering the same kind of comfort she had been offering me. She stared at it, tilting her head, studying the possible threat. Eventually, after what seemed to be years, she moved forward pressing her head into the cup of my palm, moving it down and against her back all the way to her tail as she moved forward and around my leg. For the next fifteen minutes I stood there finally petting her. Just like a wave she would arch her spine as she moved through my hand, working hard to press every bit of her into my hand. I kept my palm right where it was, needing not move it, as she moved through at her leisure. Was I the first? Was I the first to have ever bonded with this un-tamed entity? Am I original or am I one of many?

This beautiful part of my life only lasted twelve days. Twelve divine, awakening days. What I wouldn't give to be able to return to any one of those twelve days. I had never been so full. I hadn't ever been so awake. I was alive, and I knew it. Finally, I knew it.

Those twelve days came, and those twelve days went, and just like a phantom she was gone. Nothing had changed. I had kept to my regular schedule, and as far as I was aware, the neighborhood was still the same. I still left out my offering. I would change it out every night. I woke up earlier and earlier to see if I could catch even a glimpse of a stalking Scout, hopefully debating on coming back up to the deck. All my effort was for naught as I never saw her again. What was the neighborhood without this characteristic cat? What was this new home I had so

quickly settled into, and what was my place without the pleasure that came from being with her every morning? What was I to do now?

One evening, two weeks after I had last seen *Scout*, while on a neighborhood walk enjoying the sunset, I couldn't help but notice my neighbor's front porch. It was furnished with plates and bowls, settings better than what most people ate off. Milk, water, honey, tuna, chicken, and catnip, all in silver dishes and strewn about from her morning visit. Complete with a pillow to rest her weary self after having enjoyed her meal. Was this where she has been these last two weeks? It was already dusk, and this meal hadn't been cleaned up since she had been there early this morning. Surely these neighbors didn't care about *Scout* enough to even keep the space clean. It was nothing but a novelty to them. It was certainly more than I could offer, and it was served with an elegance I simply could not match, but none of that should matter. That's not who this cat is. That's not what I know her to be. *Scout* doesn't care about appearances. *Scout* isn't a glutton. She is regal, and tough. She is solo, hardened, unafraid, and wild. She doesn't care about these things; she doesn't care about that at all. So why, in all my observation and experience of this radically independent, unchanging being, had she decided to now forgo what I had been sharing with her for all this flamboyance?

Upset, and betrayed, I turned right around and went back home, finished with my sunset stroll. Maybe I had an incorrect idea of what she was. Maybe I really was just a rehearsal before the show, a sketch before the mural, a stretch before the jump. Maybe it was all fake. There's a

possibility that I misread everything, and that this cat didn't care for me. Maybe she had simply grown accustomed to me and appreciated the free meal. Was I fostering dishonesty and a shallow connection by offering my nightly gift? Either way, what's been done is done, and I haven't seen her in two weeks. She is no longer coming back, and why would she? She receives more than I ever gave her, in a more elegant manner than was ever possible on my back porch.

I sat alone in my empty house, with my empty yard, in this empty neighborhood full of homes belonging to empty people I did not know and would never come to learn. I was back to square one. Although this time I wasn't back to the beginning; it was before that. I had flown up, way above cloud nine, eventually floating back down past ground level. It was unfair. It would have been easier to have never grown attached to this mindless, selfish animal. After all, it was just a stray cat. She could have been toying with me all along. Maybe I had strung myself along and I am to blame.

Occasionally, I will see paw prints in the mud or at night I would see the silhouette of a cat underneath a streetlamp slipping across the street, but I have no real idea of knowing if it is her or not. She could be there till long after I leave and could have left on any random night weeks ago, and either way I'd still only have a passive paw print left in the mud.

Exes, Whys, & Zzzs

Ava-Marie Esser

A round of waters, hash
browns and runny eggs.

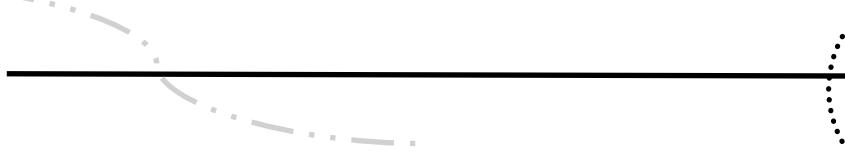
Clamor and racket, only settled by the question
“Do you think we’ll be friends forever?”

Everyone laughs, and orders a coffee; we
feel like it’s going to be another late night.

Getting stuck in bad weather means talking about
how we really feel. We tear up, talk more, and
I promise Josh he’s more than
just “The Funny Friend.”

Knight still claims he’s the funniest, and I
let him believe it, although I’m not sure
myself who I would give the title to.

Nathan’s driving has improved! We stopped grabbing
one another every time he
presses the brakes. Ask the
question, *“Bowling?”* then get really tipsy on
rum and cokes, or cheap wine. It’s



shooting pool and playing
tennis, and getting better at rallying with the boys.
Um's and uh's later on where to eat, eat to ache.
Very rarely I yearn for something else, only more.
We cry in the diner, laugh, and order more coffee.

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"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."

Audrey Hepburn



Mandy's Garden, Heidy Albavera, watercolor

Contributors

Ella Akers

Ella Akers is a debut author, writer, and creative visionary that attends Santa Rosa Junior College. She spends her time being a cat mom, drinking pumpkin spice lattes, and reading dark romance.

Heidy Albavera

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Raised by her single mother in California, Heidy Albavera discovered her love for art at the age of nineteen. After exploring many art mediums, she found her whimsical watercolor style at twenty-five. As an artist, her ultimate goal is to become a children's book illustrator and inspire children.

Anthony Albright

Anthony Albright is a veteran and Choctaw Poet living on the shores of the Mississippi River in Minnesota. His poetry focuses on lyrical impact with special attention to Choctaw and Veteran topics. He attends classes at his local community college, Anoka Ramsey Community College.

Rosa Alvarado

Rosa Alvarado is a self-taught artist attending Reedley College where she explores various mediums. She loves creating depth and texture through detailed marks, embracing the meticulous process that brings her intricate artwork to life.

Lizbeth Apolinar

Lizbeth Apolinar, a Studio Arts major at Madera Community College, is planning to transfer and earn her Masters in Art.

Naomie Amelia Bosman

Naomie Amelia Bosman is a multiracial American, second year Fresno City College student, and future high school English teacher. She lives in Kerman, California and writes poetry, short-form fiction, and long-form fiction, with her poetry and flash fiction having been published in *The FCC Review* (2025).

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Danielle Ellis

Danielle Ellis is a writer from the Quad Cities area and a reader for *The Colored Lens*, with an upcoming publication in *Ink in Thirds* magazine. She is currently a student at Kirkwood Community College in Iowa.

Ava-Marie Esser

Ava-Marie Esser is an art photography major at Grossmont College, and this is their fourth-year writing poetry. She is a San Diego local who loves going out to see live music and coming home to her cat, Penny.

Michael Garrett

Michael Garrett was born and raised in Utah, continues to reside there, and attends Utah Valley University, a dual mission university and community college.

Corrinna Gaytan

Corrinna Gaytan is a future early childhood educator with a passion for poetry and photography. Inspired by childhood experiences, she creates heartfelt art that reflects growth and emotion. Gaytan is dedicated to nurturing young minds with creativity, compassion, and a deep appreciation for beauty in everyday moments.

Rey Harden

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Rey Harden is a second-year student at Reedley College. Harden's submission resembles an overwhelming feeling of doubt and expresses that doubt is a hard thing to overcome in a judgmental world. Her hands on her face and her eyes looking away depict uncertainty.

Eliot Hemingway

Eliot Heminway is an undergraduate at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina where he majors in creative writing, environmental studies, and works for the forestry crew. He grew up in Vermont and became greatly inspired as a writer by the natural world and the small towns and their people.

McKenna Jones

McKenna Jones is a sophomore at Anoka-Ramsey Community College in Minnesota where she is completing her general education requirements for her bachelor's degree. She has a passion for all things art, but her love lies primarily in photography and poetry.

Christopher Klett

Christopher Klett is a student at Golden West Community College in California and is hoping to meet other inspired writers who can share their own creative journeys alongside him.

George Liu

George Liu studies English at Chaffey College and is majoring in English and literature. Liu loves writing.

Mel Mancheno

Mel Mancheno is an honors student at Middlesex College in New Jersey studying psychology, a Princeton Transfer Scholar, and a National Network for Youth Council Member. Mancheno is passionate about art and science. Mancheno is an aspiring poet-psychologist interested in exploring and redefining gendered human experience through research, storytelling, and community engagement.

Kevin McKenna

Kevin McKenna is currently studying creative writing at Los Angeles Valley College. He has recently finished his debut novel and is working on getting it published.

Nicolas Morales-Tapia

Nicolas Morales-Tapia is a student at Grossmont College who writes from the heart, turning moments of vulnerability into art. His poetry explores love, self-expression, and emotional resilience, offering readers a glimpse into the raw honesty that defines his creative world.

Tess Pacza

Tess Pacza is a sophomore at Marshalltown Community College in Iowa where she is captain of the Esports Mario Kart team. She is pursuing her degree in English and is planning to continue to a four-year university.

Monika Treviño

Monika Treviño is a self-taught artist currently studying Studio Arts at Reedley College. She works across a variety of mediums, including charcoal, graphite, and colored pencils. Driven by a deep passion for realism, Monika brings depth and striking likeness to each of her pieces, capturing emotion and detail with precision.

Lelani Vo

Lelani Vo is a Communications major at Golden West College who spends time writing and a little too much time perusing books she won't buy in Barnes & Noble. Currently, she is striving towards transferring to Cal State Fullerton next fall.

Karen Zea

Karen Zea was born in Guatemala in 1977 and migrated to the U.S. in 1980. She is currently majoring in Fine Art Photography at the College of the Canyons. She tells stories in multiple disciplines. Her work highlights the importance of maintaining ties with ancestral traditions to promote healing.

Editors

Halenna Katherine Castillo

Halenna Castillo is currently an English major at Reedley College who tutors fellow students in the art of writing. She has a deep love for reading, with her nose always stuck between pages. She also has an affinity for writing, creating her own worlds to get lost in, and one day for others to get lost in, too. As one of the editors for this Fall issue, she is blessed with the opportunity and will carry the experience with her as she ventures into the world.

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Daniela Gutierrez Garcia

Daniela is the proud daughter of Mexican immigrant parents. Currently, she is an English major at Reedley college where she also, tutors students through their writing woes. She has a deep love for writing in all its forms and its ability to touch others, build bridges, and inspire action. She never knows which adventure she will find herself in but stumbling into this year's Fall 2025 issue as one of its editors is an experience she will cherish for years to come.



The *Kings River Review* publishes artwork, creative nonfiction, short fiction, and poetry of community college students from across the country and features a Reedley College writer and artist in each edition.

Submission Deadlines:

March 15 for the spring and October 15 for the fall edition

Submission Requirements:

- ◆ Artwork & Photography: Up to 5 pieces sent as .JPEG files
- ◆ Creative Nonfiction: Up to 3,000 words
- ◆ Fiction: Up to 3,000 words
- ◆ Poetry: Up to 5 poems

All submissions must be:

- ◆ titled.
- ◆ formatted in Microsoft Word (.doc, .docx, or .rtf).
- ◆ formatted in 12 point, Times New Roman font.
- ◆ double spaced.
- ◆ free of mechanical and grammatical errors. The *Kings River Review* reserves the right to make any editing changes deemed necessary.
- ◆ original, previously unpublished work. Non-English submissions must include English translations.

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Cover Art by Rosa Alvarado "Intertwined" and "El Gato Negro Ambiente," ceramics