

WRIT IN WATER



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Callan Clark
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Cover Art by Callan Clark

“This small watercolor was commissioned by some friends who wanted a painting of their daughters. I love the image because everything in it suggests life, growth, and a journey. The fresh green of new leaves, the stair-stepping ages of the girls, and the path stretching away before them all hint at the change inherent in the life journey. Even the British flag on the older girl’s satchel suggests travel and new experiences. It is a good reminder when we are feeling stagnant or overwhelmed by big decisions that we don’t need to figure out everything immediately. As long as we live, we will keep on changing and growing, and with our roots planted in the Fount of Life, that growth will ultimately be fruitful.”

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Editor's Note

“True life is lived when tiny
changes occur.” - Leo Tolstoy

Changes are a necessary part of life that help shape and define who we are. Sometimes, change can be frightening and unwanted instead of being welcomed and celebrated. How we choose to cope with change is done on an individual scale, where every person must make a choice whether or not to embrace it. When we have to face new challenges and transformations, it is often in those moments that we desire to remain the same. Yet, like flowers in a meadow, we must continue to grow with faith in God's plan. Without changes, we cannot continue to bloom and explore our identities, artistry, and creativity.

As I have spent the past few months reading and curating poems, photos, artworks, and short stories, I have begun to understand just how diverse everyone's views on this subject are. Some pieces take a light-hearted and hopeful approach to change, while others reflect an underlying fear or sense of uncertainty. Our student contributors have worked hard to pour their emotions and thoughts into their work to strive to answer the question of what change means to them.

While you read through our fourth issue of *Writ in Water*, I would like to challenge you as a reader to contemplate your own experience with change. You might relate to some of the works in this issue or sympathize with the emotions that emerge from the pages. Like the two girls on the cover, take a step forward with us and venture into exciting and unknown territory.

Sincerely,
Hannah Gentry
Editor-in-Chief

The Family Photo

Lucy McCoy

I.

Cleaning her house to Queen on a vinyl
grandma hands me the key
to the coffee table, the trunk
Lucille packed in Louisiana before grandma
was born, before the green truck
and the trek south through Texas,
before the then fetus signed the deed
to this two-bedroom
in an old-folks' community.

II.

It's a desert in South Texas
but they keep the grass green
over Lucille in the new cemetery,
where she can't tell me who
these four are in the oval frame
packed between unfinished quilts,
the man and wife frowning
without ghost smiles behind
their small adult children,
father's hand gripping son's shoulder.

III.

In the thirties this oval photo
and the Migrant Mother
were made and Lucille was a teen,
but this family of circles
aren't Wheelers: we're height
and angles and scattered
from this Valley to God's mountains
with no cohesion of four in a frame.

IV.

The fourth person outshines the son
and the sullen parents—those three
braided in a grim strand,
with a gripping hand and a glancing
face—the daughter is beauty un-held
and holds my eye as she stands
outside of her family's minds in the photo,
in Lucille's long-locked treasure trunk.

V.

Lucille herself is hung above the loveseat,
her face as long as the rifle she holds,
with baby grandma and the gun, her father;
she too has beauty—beauty woven in divorce,
disownment, a widower—and she kept this picture
with the last of her things:
the young woman untouched
by the hunger of the thirties in the South,
an angel in a dust-bowl trunk.

Changes

A.L. Sanchez

Life is lived to its fullest when one embraces what this world has to offer,
It is important to welcome change and adjust,
For every cell in each of our being is comprised of stardust.

Search and find your soul among nature,
The summer to autumn transition will guide you to gratitude's doorstep,
When the new air fills your lungs with hope.

Extend your feet and leap into the unknown,
Conscious that you are to grow as an individual.

One's true purpose in life is not to simply survive,
But to invite the unexpected, the unforeseen, the unanticipated,
With an open heart and mind.

First Step out the Nest

Caroline Gillapsy



The Color Orange

Lori Tischler

The place of dreams, of rising sun,
Burnt to orange when day is done.
There is a place far over there~
My soul's true light, well-lit her lair.
On dusty roads of rusty hue,
On tangerines where orange is new:
Long ago finding fare,
Out of darkness discovering truth~
“He looked, saw the lattice of my heart and spake it fair.”

Peace of Arson

Urick Moriah

When the sky caught fire
No one knew what to do.
They were much too deafened
By combustion of the stars.

Though the darkness was illuminated
But for a moment,
It was in this moment,
No fingers pointed blame
No tongues offered insult.

When the crackle died down,
The second canon soared.
Thousands of eyes glistened
In the green sea below.

Fingers, limp
Tongues, paralyzed
Eyes, transfixed
If, but for a moment.

Was it the helplessness of the grassy waves
Or the freedom offered by the sparks
That kept the sea from madness?
If, but for a moment.

Flourish

Alicia Hyslip



Raindrop

Jeeline Martinez

A rain drop

Creates fast ripples

Down it goes to a little pond

Changing the reflection of myself

I wish to be a rain drop

So simple and fast

It won't last

The Peabody House

Corrie McCloy

Every Friday afternoon I drive up out of the valley to Mrs. Marigold Leeks' mansion in Windhaven to play cribbage. From Windhaven, I can see miles of the Canadian river valley and my house, the Peabody house. Anymore, the river is clogged with wild plum thickets, dead cottonwoods, and the white tanks and pipes of the oil company. I don't know why I make the drive. I don't like cribbage, and I haven't decided whether or not I like Leeks.

The first time we met, she was holding up the line at the grocery store trying to decide between a honey-glazed and a hickory-smoked ham. When she finally let me bag her groceries, I asked her how she was.

She shook her head over her purse. "You know the Angel Tree Drive? At the Church of Christ? I'm organizing it, and it's running me into the ground! I've been calling, calling for sponsors, you know?" She stopped and tipped her head. "How are you?"

"Loved by the *Lord* so I'm doing just *wonderful*," I said. That's what I say to good church ladies to prove that I know God too.

Leeks wrote her phone number on the receipt and gave it back to me. "If you're interested in sponsoring, give me a ring." She leaned in to see my name-tag: "Marissa, have a good day."

I gave her a ring because Angel Tree drives are for children, and children can't help what kind of women raise money for them. When I brought her the check, she invited me in for iced tea.

"Mr. Leeks is out of town. Do you play any games—Forty-Two? Cribbage?"

"I'm a real snake at cribbage," I said. I just wanted to see inside her house.

I felt like I walked into a Crate and Barrel commercial. It smelled rich with conjugal happiness. When we played cribbage in her morning room, the new slipper cards stuck to the oiled table top; she seemed to own as many coasters as I own plates. She was delighted when I beat her cribbage. "Oh, all my other friends are so slow!"

All this to say, we are not women who should have been friends. Leeks is wife to a husband who makes bank as a chemical engineer for Phillips. I work at the grocery store and live in a one-bedroom house in the valley. But the more I visited her, the more I got the sense that Leeks needed me—as a confidant, whatever you want to call it. She needed someone who wasn't a church lady.

I guess I turned up at the right time. A couple months later, in March, Mr. Leeks left her for a younger woman. Leeks called me right away. I drove up right away and wandered around in that big house for a couple minutes.

I found her in the far corner of the morning room, sitting on the floor beside the shoe rack, dry-eyed and too scared still to even cuss about it. I only met Mr. Leeks once: he had chapped red cheeks and looked younger than her, and I knew he was a slimy. After he left, I took to visiting on Tuesdays and Sundays as well as Fridays.

So today, I parked my Ford pickup in the driveway and let myself into the house. Beside Mr. Leeks' large armchair with its electronic controls and cupholders, my friend sat in her leather armchair, watching the weather channel. She wore white capris and a sweatshirt with bluejays on it. Her faded salmon-colored hair showed grey at the roots.

I drew up a rocking chair and sat down. "Now then, how are we today?" I set down a Tupperware of haystack cookies and Leeks nervously groped for one. She loves them: chow mein noodles, pecans, and chocolate melts. For a woman like myself, who is single and has been a checker at the grocery store for thirty-five years, it feels good to be the one comforting and not the one in need of comfort. I always bring food, especially since I have so much. I keep a lot of food in bulk, just in case I can't go to town during a blizzard.

"Oh Marissa! I'm just miserable." She nibbled a cookie. "You?"

"Loved by the Lord! What's going on out there in the big world today?" I turned to the television to see Doplar Dave on the weather channel, gesturing at a green and yellow blotch. It arched like a dragon across the digitalized counties with a tail streaked orange and red.

"Bad weather. I haven't finished making up the packet for the Angel Tree drive. The liberals took over Congress. My husband left me." Her face twisted with irony.

"Oh, Marigold, come now. There's still some good in the world!"

She sat hunched in her armchair like a wet owl: small and abandoned. "Marissa, I just feel old. Dried out. Used-up. I think it would be better if I felt angry. Like the ladies in the movies. They look vengeful and sensual, like they know for sure there's someone better out there for them. I just feel tired. If he came through that door... I'd just fall in his arms."

"Oh, Marigold, don't talk like that!"

"Haven't you ever loved anyone?"

"Not me, Marissa doesn't fall in love!" I had been married but looking back it's difficult to say if I was in love. It was his family that owned the house. Cal Peabody grew up with a widowed mother strong as a live cottonwood, and a whole army of younger sisters and brothers. Mrs. Peabody and the kids moved into Electric City when Cal and I got married. She was always out visiting, asking to help. Mostly we canned together—beans, peaches, rhubarb, and the wild plums we picked out in the brakes. She called herself my "mother-in-love," which I always hated, especially after Cal left three years in.

He called me from a pay-phone in Stratford. I thought he had gone up to Stratford for a work meeting, but he admitted over the static phone that he had no meeting, but a mistress who he loved more than me.

They were moving to Trinidad, Colorado, keep the house.

"It's just awful for me," Leeks said, and I nodded. She liked that I didn't fawn over and pity her, and simply accepted her bad fate with her. Of course she didn't know the same thing happened to me, but she didn't need to know. It happened a long time ago.

"Let's play cribbage," I said.

Leeks followed me to the card table in the morning room and watched while I shuffled the deck. "It's this house, mainly, that upsets me. Nolan was so particular about how we arranged the furniture, and I haven't had the heart to move anything. For instance—that bench he moved against the window so that when you're taking on or off your boots you can watch the birds outside. He liked watching birds." She accepted the stack of six cards I slid across to her but didn't look at them. "I keep expecting him to walk in. Marissa, I have a neat idea. Why don't we take the cribbage game to *your* house today?"

To the Peabody house? "Why?" I said it more rudely than I meant to.

"I'm so sick of being cooped up in here with the TV and all his furniture. And I've never been to your house, it'll be fun!" She slapped her cards onto the rest of the deck.

"I'm not sure... my house doesn't look like these Windhaven houses, Marigold. It's not so nice." I said it brightly, but I felt cold inside. There hadn't been anybody in my house but me since Cal left. It was too far off from the main road for salesmen to prey on, although once the pastor of the Pentecostal church had showed up on my front porch to remind me that Christ was at the door of my heart, knocking. I told him Christ was inside my darn house already and I didn't need to get intimate with a snake to prove it.

"I'm through with nice," Leeks said, and raked her fingers through her hair. "I just need an outing, Marissa. Please? Please?"

I felt like her mother. "Of course, Mari. We can go drive around, at least."

Leeks buckled herself into my Ford. She peered, curious, at the sticky-notes littering my dashboard, reminders to take my medicine. We drove out of the brick, tree-lined streets of Windhaven and down Berg Road, which wound around the hill down into the Canadian River Valley.

We neared the entrance to my house, but I didn't brake. I kept imagining my flaking orange barn and the gutted lawnmowers that lined my yard. Leeks said she was through with nice, but she didn't know what that meant. I followed that road looping around for several miles, and finally drove back for a second try. Of course, Leeks sat up all perky, chattering on about the Church of Christ as if she had forgotten about Nolan and his twenty-something plaything.

I pulled up the lane to my Peabody house: the clapboards streaked with grey, the gaps in the asphalt roofing, the Texas flag hung in my front window as a curtain.

Usually when I got back from Windhaven I would tell myself that I was rich, richer than Leeks could ever be because I knew how to take care of myself. I didn't feel that way today.

"Aren't we going in?"

I didn't make a move to open my pickup door.

"Don't you want to go back to Windhaven?" I glanced at my hands on the steering wheel and saw blood smearing one of my fingers; I had been picking at my cuticles but hadn't realized how deep I went.

"No, I don't!" Leeks looked very determined. "I want to play cribbage in your house, with you." She looked again like an old woman with a chemical engineer for a husband and hundreds to spend on groceries. She looked like a shrunken Mrs. Peabody.

Mrs. Peabody showed up at the house forty-five minutes after I got that last call from Cal. He must have called her, too. She pounded on my door till it rattled. I was sitting on a rug in the middle of the floor, and I could see Mrs. Peabody's face in the long window at the top of the wooden door. There were tears on her angled face. "Marissa, you in there? Dear, it's your mother-in-love! Open the door, baby, I'm not on his side."

I wanted to open the door but I couldn't. There were so many dirty dishes out on the table, and a big wine stain on the carpet, and my thighs spread on the carpet like dimpled pudding.

"Open the door, Marissa! Cal's a coward, a big nasty coward, hear me? He doesn't know what he wants."

She pounded on the door again. I almost opened it but I couldn't stand up.

"But you gotta go be bold in this world, hear me?"

Mrs. Peabody loved Cal more, really, she had to. She was his mother, and any love she had for me was twice-removed; it was now the pitying kind you use on foreign missionaries and foster kids and women abandoned by their husbands. I lay flat on the rug, spread out my arms, and felt everything I ever wanted to retract inside.

I felt like if I let Leeks in my house now, she'd see that Marissa. But Leeks was already climbing out of the pickup. The seat of her white capris was dusty from my pick-up. In a moment she was rattling the horse-shoe latch of my waist-high, chain-link fence.

I bailed out of the pickup and followed. "Leeks—you can't just march onto my property like you own it!"

Apparently Leeks didn't notice my tone, and laughed. "You invited me over for a game, Marissa!" She had managed to open the gate. She walked right up the cement steps. My house was unlocked, like always, so I shoved her away and jammed my body between her gaze and the door. She stumbled backwards against the post that supported my porch roof, slipping in her pair of rubber sandals.

So long as I blocked the doorway, I could be the Marissa who helped her through her husband's infidelity, a spirited valley dweller, a woman with a strong work ethic but bad luck.

But I knew that I could not hold her on my porch forever. She was gazing at me like I had torn out her fingernails out of spite. “Marissa, what’s wrong? Why can’t I go inside?”

I had no answer for that, so I moved out of her way and opened the screen door for her. My body felt hot. I was afraid I had hurt her when I pushed her out of the way.

Warily, she took a step forward into the doorway. “Is—is this a warehouse?”

“I just keep some food in bulk.”

It’s cheaper in bulk, anyway. I filled up my pantry, consolidated space in my kitchen cabinets, and finally started making space in my dining room. Now my living room is full except for a narrow path carved between the cardboard boxes that led into my bedroom. It’s dark because most of the windows are blocked.

I keep all the dented canned items that the grocery can’t sell: gallon tins of peaches and water chestnuts; cans of tuna, soup, carrots, and Vienna sausages. I keep bags of chow mein noodles and cartons of candy canes left on sale after the Christmas season. There are bags of chips and pretzels. Somewhere up in my closet is the last jar of wild plum jelly that Mrs. Peabody and I made.

“It’s a lot of food,” Leeks said. She didn’t try to go in. I noticed now how it smelled musty from the crate of onions I kept in the dimmest corner, beside the radiator.

“I told you,” I said, although I didn’t know what I told her. I kept resisting the instinct to move around in front and block her from coming in further. “Let’s go back to Windhaven.”

She kept staring. “Why’s there so much food? Is it just you here?”

“I don’t want to run out during any winter shut-ins.” I heard how foolish the words sounded out loud. I was the one with problems again. “It’s pretty foolish, I know.”

“Now Marissa,” she said. She turned back to face me and hugged me around the waist. She barely comes up to my shoulder, she’s so tiny. “Can’t I come in?”

We sat on my couch in my bedroom, and I made her a cup of hot tea. It wasn’t till I saw her curled up on my own couch that I really thought Leeks could be my friend.

She nodded and stared out the window at the grey arms of a cottonwood outside. “Nolan probably won’t ever come back, will he?”

“My husband never did,” I said. Her eyes turned round and she kept the mug at her lips for a long moment.

“My husband was bad, maybe worse than yours. When he left, I was so scared. I was twenty-two years old. He emptied our savings. His, really, since I didn’t have any sense then to ask for a joint account. His mother—Mrs. Peabody—tried to help me but I couldn’t let her. It was months before I got the guts to go looking for a job. I couldn’t leave the house. For those months all

I ate was all the food I had canned with Miss Peabody, and I had just about run out before I started working at the grocery.”

She didn't say anything, she didn't even drink her tea.

After we finished our tea, I drove Marigold back to Windhaven. I installed her back in her little chair and watched Fox News with her for a while. While we sat there, she told me she was sorry my husband left and that she apologized if she acted awkward around my cluttered home. “I'm not used to hoarders,” she said, matter-of-factly.

I drove back down into the valley around sunset and went inside my house. I thought again about being twenty-two and alone. After I got my first check from the grocery store, the first thing I did was buy a lot of canned food. It was all I knew to do then.

I went into my kitchen and found a stool by the sink. I dragged it into far end of the pantry and climbed to look up into the highest shelf, past the canned beans and tomatoes. There at the back was the wild plum jelly with its floral fabric skirt, a cast-away from an old blouse of Mrs. Peabody.

I got a bag of white bread from the living room and toasted two pieces in the oven. When they were golden brown, I took them out and laid them on a plate. Then I unscrewed the jar and cracked it open. I used a spoon to skim off the top layer of jelly, which was dark from exposure to oxygen. I spread it thick on the toast and ate it. It was crunchy and sweet at once.

I remembered before; the long sweaty afternoons as you follow Mrs. Peabody's through the breaks, having to trust her steps through the bluestem. The skunk bushes look the same as the wild plum and deceive you, but finally you reach a shoal of wild plum trees sunning against the south face of the valley. Ignore the orange ones, and pluck the deep purple ones, the scarlet ones. Listen for rattlesnakes, brush sand off your calves. Fill your bucket.

Tomorrow I will go back to Windhaven and bring Marigold back and make her help me clean. Or perhaps we will rearrange her furniture tomorrow and clear out my house the day after that. Either way, I have made friends with a church lady and must accept the consequences.

Promising

Linh-Ly Vinh



Resolution

Linh-Ly Vinh



Quiet Mornings

Aria Dang

It was a quiet morning,
When I buried him in a bed of scarlet petals,
Beneath the agapanthus, awaiting spring for bloom.
Within the background of my mind played the Stabat Mater,
A silent requiem that sounded only within the depths of thought.
A quiet mourning.
Beside the lake,
I dug a hole some distance from the water's edge.
And within that grave,
Came down the floral bed amongst which he will find his rest,
Beneath the agapanthus,
Facing the waters that he would have called home upon release and livelihood.
I scraped the bits of dirt and moss in silent reverie,
Creating the ceiling, patting it down,
Marking it with those scarlet petals so carefully placed beneath.
The only land he will call his own.
His tomb, and memorial eternal,
Characterized by the red, the rolling hills of moss, the unbloomed agapanthus,
Awaiting, all, their spring.

Mortal America

Lucy McCoy

Carve a face in rock
to reach the everlasting
and watch the features fade
with quickly passing rain—
see the Sphinx
(blink and you'll miss it)
and then the presidents pass away.

Labor to stack stones
toward sky, to build a monolith,
broken backs more lasting
than the obelisk.
Whose prerogative anyway,
the president's? Either way,
it cracks and crumbles:
another erection undone by elements.

Dead stone turns to dust and
joins the sands of time
like New Mexican monuments
to the immortality of death.
Moving, changing, a white
landscape reflecting light,
mountains blowing with the wind.

Cole at the Shelter

Callan Clark



Artist Note: This large graphite drawing depicts a moment between my little brother and one of the dogs he worked with while volunteering at an animal shelter. I wanted to draw it because it so beautifully captures the more gentle and nurturing side of his frequently loud and mischievous personality. Furthermore, as I've watched him grow up, so many of his tastes and interests have changed, but his way with animals has been constant since he was catching lizards in the backyard at two.

Blue Winter High

Desmond White

Ms. Fountain parked her Camry before a cavalcade of snow, the glaze pushed by plows into mounds around faculty parking. She pulled her purse string over her shoulder, picked up her lunch bag, and nearly slipped on ice. The air was cold, the bone shiver kind. She strolled quickly over the pavement, only giving the mountains—purple beneath the sunrise—a glimpse in her periphery. She would appreciate their beauty on a warmer day.

Those early hours before school were devoted to Zero Hour, a psychological trick to add a class period. No one wanted periods one through nine. Zero through eight, however, was poetry. Fountain had to sneak soundlessly because classroom doors were open. Students reclined, their heads pointed at the ceiling, fingers playing invisible instruments. Each was engaged in a lesson, their eyes coated in degial plastic. The only movement was their hands. This was the latest trend in differentiated instruction. With pre-recorded lessons, students could pause or rewind with the twitch of a thumb. The teacher walked along the aisles, catching students when they leaned too far.

Ms. Fountain sped up in the English Hall, but it was no use. There was Mr. Tseng, standing by his door, greeting students as they sauntered by.

“Good morning,” Fountain said.

“I am fine. How are you?” Mr. Tseng replied so quickly it could have all been one word.

“Good,” Fountain said. She reached her door, opened it.

“Good, good,” Mr. Tseng repeated. His head was already scanning four boys down the hall. Possibly he was using facial recognition software to confirm their enrollment. Fountain eyed his hands anxiously. She knew he possessed the strength to rip her spine from her back.

65% of the teachers at Blue Winter High were automated. As machines emerged for nearly every task, teachers had hoped their profession was a bastion of human ingenuity. That *human* mentorship was necessary. Then Nagata Incorporated created an android that could teach *more* efficiently, if their research was to be trusted, than any person.

Mr. Tseng was a construct. A bipedal machine. Glass skin, its interior imprinted in friendly human colors. Mrs. Xu down the hall was an older model, her body like blue bones. Students would complain to Fountain: “When will you have our annotated bibliographies graded? It’s been five days.” But Mr. Tseng could grade 160 essays in ten minutes.

Each paper took a nod of his head. His cycloptic eye—really a glowing blue lens—scanning the words to calculate the frequency of errors, the mechanical flow of language. His comments would sound like this: *Your paper utilized 37% of vocabulary from Category 2, 48% of vocabulary from Category 3. Claim is at Proficiency 4.2, while Support [Analysis, 2.8, Text Evidence 1.3] remains In Development.*

Ms. Fountain had barely settled into her room when the bell rang and students filed to their seats. She pulled a jar from beneath her desk. *Eyesite* was curled in cursive on the side. Unlike her colleagues, Fountain collected contact lenses at the start of class. If students had a case, they could hand the case to her. Otherwise, everyone dropped their lenses into the jar of saline. Often her students groaned loudly and complained, and some tried to hide their oculars—purple irises giving them away eventually. Not to mention the blank stare, the whittling hands beneath the desk.

Of course, allowing the contacts meant ‘EdTech was being implemented in the classroom,’ which meant ‘students were developing real-world life skills.’ So, she always received a 2.1 on her teacher assessment in the category of ‘Classroom Technology.’ But the contacts were perverse. They killed interaction outside of degial space. Didn’t humans need to talk to each other once in a while? And certain apps let *her* appearance be replaced by a digital skin. She might not know it, but students could be giggling at a talking giraffe in front of the classroom. There was even an app that reskinned teachers with a prognosticated nude body. Wrinkles, rolls, everything. Perverse.

Each class was the same: *bellringer, agenda, objective, instruction, activity, exit ticket*. Every day was the same—the absurdities, failures, stresses, and frustrations. Ms. Fountain began class with “I’m happy to be here with you.” She ended with “Your mistakes today reset by tomorrow.”

Beside the serenity of colleagues’ classrooms was Fountain’s wilderness. Students, stressed to be pulled from degial space, *to be seen*, reacted either in stunned unfriendliness or highly-energetic mischief. But it was good stress, wasn’t it? One of those emotions like fear that people should experience from time to time.

This day was no different. The children were a ruckus. Her only consolation was the period after lunch usually chilled, digesting meal packets like snakes pumped full of rats.

Ryleigh Jewett was one of those kids who contributed very little noise. Every First Period, he sat in the far corner, by the blue marker someone had scribbled on the wall. Four letters: BRUH. The boy lacked the motivation to complete anything except his drawings, which he materialized on the backs of poetry analysis pamphlets and short answer response boxes. The Jewetts were too poor to afford holo-lenses, even a drawing tablet, so one of his *academic accommodations* was to have all assignments printed on paper.

This is what Ryleigh would return to her: bubbles unbubbled, fill-in-the-blanks left blank, and starships in greater detail than an artificer’s blueprint. Cruisers circling Jupiter. Pock-marked skiffs in the Belt. Warships docked with Luna.

All those great exploits of the solar system inscribed in black ink on white paper.

Ryleigh was not statistically attractive. Black hair, freckles that blended with acne, some plump in his rump. His reading comprehension, his writing ability—his total academic profile had a pessimistic prediction about Jewett’s future. A 45% probability of substance abuse, a 67% probability of committing four misdemeanors before eighteen. His most optimistic career path was as a laborer on a farming station out west.

But any conversation with Ryleigh inevitably blasted into space—to his desire to go up there someday, to draw warships not from docu-dramas but a satellite near Callisto.

When Fountain discovered the boy’s interest, she did her best to circle his attention back to work. A cosmonaut needed a foundation in math, science, basic communication. (They would need to be healthy, too.) But at some point, Ryleigh had incepted the idea that talent—unbridled, artistic talent—would be enough to land him among the stars.

Ryleigh was always late in leaving. Somehow the contents of his satchel would spill onto the floor, his paperwork assaulting neighbors’ tables. Then Ryleigh would linger by her, presenting his latest work, and she, with some chagrin at having her lessons ignored, would pretend to appreciate them. There was the Titanic III and its fateful journey through (but not totally through) Saturn’s rings. The U.S.S. Picard hovering by Ganymede, firing on pirates. Pill boats battling over Pluto. The drawings were good, which helped her smile through her frowns.

Today, however, Ryleigh had not drawn, and there were dark swellings beneath his eyes. Bruises? Fountain settled on sleepless contusions when he said, “I need you to approve this. I’ll be missing Friday and all of next week.”

Ryleigh held up a slip of ePaper requiring a fingerprint.

“Why?” Fountain asked, immediately worried. “Where will you be?”

“My mother died,” Ryleigh said. “I’ll be in Florida.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“It’s fine.” Ryleigh was looking at her desk. “I didn’t really know her.”

“Your parents weren’t together?”

“They split when I was ten. Dad came here for a fresh start. Mom was just—she was into bad things.”

“I kind of understand.”

Fountain stood up and hugged Ryleigh. Then she disengaged. They were alone in the room.

Anyone watching the cam-feeds might get the wrong idea. She sat and put her thumb in the appropriate box. A glowing blue print remained as she pulled away.

The rest of the day was a blur of children trying every conceivable means to coerce her into losing her temper. Someone in Fourth dropped gum on the carpet, which could never be fully removed, leaving a goopy black stain. A student covered a desk in sticky notes. Someone hid her laptop while she was in the hallway, greeting students as they entered for Sixth. And while she had long developed a proverbial preternatural sense when her back was turned (earning her that petrified description of having ‘eyes in the back of her head’), Fountain lacked the constant surveillance of her colleagues. Robots could catch, document, and assign Saturday School within a heartbeat.

Fountain had to tell herself that trouble-makers weren’t bad people. These prankers were merely ‘exploring the limits of possibility.’

Period Seven was a conference period, which meant Fountain met with her PLC, or Professional Learning Community. These were the teachers who taught the same subject, English III: American Literature. When she entered, Mr. Shields was sharing data on a module that reduced ignorance about the term *verisimilitude* by 73%. The teachers turned to Fountain, who’d arrived late, having stopped by the restroom on the way over. (None of the units needed to excrete any matter whatsoever.) She looked at shining faces.

“Your report?” Mr. Corocoan asked. He was a stout android, reminiscent of a gold-plated trash can.

“I—” Fountain pulled up her datapad. “I’ve noticed my students are having a hard time crafting thesis statements—”

“Your numbers?”

Fountain sent her report, and the constructs scanned the glow of graphs.

Mr. Shields leaned back in his chair. “This is less than ideal.”

“Let’s jump to today’s essential question,” Mr. Corcoran said, switching away. “What results do we want to see in the upcoming week?”

The teachers digitally shared their expectations, all of them except Fountain, who sat smiling vacantly at glass heads. She had forgot to put together an expectation plan, another useless chart in a slew of useless teaching tools. Her smile broadened and she swiped away from this cynical injunction. As Ambrosia Har in First Period might say, no need to grode. Then Mr. Corcoran (she’d always thought his head looked like a fire extinguisher) touched his pad, sending the accumulation to everyone’s screens.

“Looks like our weekly goals are an increase in Timeliness by .8%, and Collaboration by .47%. I hope to see some progress by next week, along with an efficacy review.” Then he shut down the pad and stood up. The others stood as well, collecting belongings.

They had noticed the absence of Fountain’s report, and said nothing.

“Don’t forget Breakfast of Champions in two weeks,” Mr. Shields croaked to the dispersal of glass skin and blue bones. “Make sure you nominate a Student of the Quarter. Someone who exhibits the values of Blue Winter High.”

According to the admins, no one exhibited the values of Blue Winter High quite as much as the mascot, known as The Rebel, an infantryman from the Revolutionary War.

The silver mannequin wore a blue coat, tricorn hat, and a non-gender-binary posture. Fountain remembered when he carried a musket, but a few years ago the weapon was calculated to be causing a 9% stress uptick. That was the year of the tragedy at Access High in Washington and everyone was nervous about the appearance of guns in school. The Rebel’s musket was replaced by a staff, converting the mascot from soldier to shepherd.

A *rebel*, according to administration, was not an anarcho-punk, but someone like the founding fathers. A person of society, political ambition, and (non-binary) strength. The Rebel endorsed every sports game with his presence, and advised students in tube feeds to complete their homework and be kind to teachers. Maybe try an eBook. His core values were *commitment, character, country*. His motto was “I will contribute effectively to my future employers and the community’s overall success.”

On Friday, someone slipped an unsealed envelope into Fountain’s mailbox. Within the envelope was an e-invitation to attend the upcoming breakfast. Fountain spent some of her conference period looking at student’s faces on her seating chart. The expectation was to invite academically-sound students like Ja Ha Soon, Alex Kamahl, or Remington Jen. Then Ryleigh Jewett appeared, a sloppy haircut and shy smile. He was flying to Florida today, his spot in the classroom empty. She typed his name on the letter.

A week passed. Students read excerpts of *Great Gatsby*—the book considered too long to be read in its entirety. Soon Ryleigh was back in his seat, his countenance dark.

Per tradition, in the rush between periods, Ryleigh hovered by her desk. He had no drawing to show her, had nothing to say. There was just an interim of time in which he seemed to want to be close.

“How did it go?”

“It was weird,” he said, looking at everything but her.

"I have something for you." Fountain produced the envelope.

Ryleigh smiled at the drawing on the front—a poorly rendered orbital drone. The unmanned kind that looked like squid.

"There's something inside," she said, realizing he wasn't too familiar with envelopes. Ryleigh opened the flap and pulled out the invitation. He read, then blushed, his skin matching the spots across his face.

"What is this?"

"I've nominated you for Student of the Quarter," Fountain said. "You might not be my most *productive* student, but you are kind and friendly and a joy to have in my class."

Ryleigh had a screwed-up expression on his face, so she wrapped him in more words. "You don't have to do anything. Just meet me before school by the cafeteria. They'll have a table full of eggs and muffins. We'll eat, the principal will talk, and we'll head to class."

"Why me?" he said quietly. Fountain realized there was something like fear radiating from his face.

Honesty, then. "Because I like you, Ryleigh, and there's no other student I'd rather eat with for twenty minutes."

Silence. Then Ryleigh gave her a long hug. At some point she patted his back awkwardly, exchanging looks with Second Period as they slunk into the classroom. Then Ryleigh released a whispered thanks and walked out.

But Tuesday he was chatting with his neighbor, an environmentally-concerned girl with dreams of hydroplaning the Pacific trash fields. There seemed to be an immense pressure lifted from Ryleigh's shoulders, from his eyes, from his hands. He also drew a NASA shuttle—a relic of ancient history. The boy lingered per usual. He wanted Fountain to pin the picture to her bulletin board. They talked about the man-made ring around Neso.

And there he was Wednesday before breakfast, waiting by the stair. Together they marched down the buffet and sat by other champions. Ryleigh grew excited about an eBook he was compiling. A sketch collection of planetary vehicles, like asteroid hoppers or the sedan designed exclusively for Martian freeways. The project was called 'Star-Crossed Rovers.'

The boy returned all aptitude tests with renderings of space battles. But he had a mind for design, for entrepreneurship, for the future. And she was the only one who saw it.

Then the time came for the principal to speak. Mr. Krulish, a man with a dazed smile, the sign of a competent but perfectly useless administrator. A datapad rested in the crook of his arm as he walked among the tables.

“Naomi Halls here,” he consulted his datapad, “has a GPA of seven-point-one. In November she sent applications to John Hopkins, UCSF, and Baylor to continue her studies in nano-medical radiology. Naomi was accepted to all three.” Polite clapping.

“We are blessed to have raised so many successful Rebels here at Blue Winter. Kaiser Czaplinksi (I hope-I’m-pronouncing-that-right) recently received a planetary defense scholarship to research missile feeds on Ganymede.” Applause. “Isabella Bakken will be an intern this summer with the Prime Minister of Luna.” Applause.

The principal swung by their table. “And Ryleigh Jewett here—” He checked his pad, gave Fountain an odd look, and kept walking. Ryleah, his mouth full of blueberry muffin, made no sign he’d noticed. “Fenny Charice here will be celebrating her acceptance to New Sol University.” Fenny was wearing a New Sol hoodie emblazoned with the university logo: *let there be light*. “Truly, the Rebellion continues.”

After breakfast, Mr. Krulish took Fountain aside. Ryleigh, she could see, was ambling up the grand stair slowly. Not one for athletics.

“Why did you bring Ryleigh here when—” he consulted his pad “—nearly 98.9% of his classmates are worthier candidates? I’m looking at his record here and we’ve got high forecasts for drug use, crime, and early death, unless we can get him stationed at one of the Utah plantations—”

“Ryleigh doesn’t fit into the system,” Fountain replied. “But sometimes we need that.”

“I’m not even sure he’s all there. Look at this psycho-profile.” He held up a pie chart, with small slices of yellow, green, blue, and one sweeping chunk of gray.

“Those tests are inaccurate. Ryleigh never completes them. He’s a bit of a rebel.”

“A Blue Winter *rebel* is someone who succeeds within the system.”

Fountain suddenly hissed, her face reddening with anger. “I invited Ryleigh because I wanted him to know that he’s *good enough*. I think we’ve become obsessed with predicting success and not allowing children to dream the impossible.”

“Dreaming the impossible was a fad. It had a success output of 48%.” Mr. Krulish pulled up a bar graph. “Prognostication is a more reliable system. 96% of students are assessed and projected with complete accuracy.”

The bell rang. Mr. Krulish started walking toward the central hall out of habit. Or, if Fountain were to use school-sanctioned terminology, *habitude*.

“Stay up-to-date, Ms. Fountain, and don’t be an enabler,” he said. His datapad, still in the crook of his arm, gleamed with her face, her info, her achievements based on student progress. “*Good enough* is not good enough.”

Outside, the wind rattled the long glass that barricaded the cafeteria. Without the chill to hurt her eyes, to sneak beneath her skin and freeze her bones, Ms. Kimberly Fountain could see the mountains with clarity. White plains, purple peaks. A world not to be trapped by percentages, predictions, or fake smiles.

Ms. Fountain seethed, then she straightened her blouse, smoothed her hair (she always prone to fly-away strands), and stormed to class.

During First, Ryleigh Jewett stuck to his corner, drawing absent-mindedly on a worksheet about West Egg and East Egg. A transport shuttle was blasting from a land dock, its black tip pointed to the sky. Was it headed for Luna? For Mars?

Ms. Fountain imagined there must be room aboard the shuttle for Chris—for his life, for his dreams. But the ship was not going anywhere—forever bound to black ink, white paper.

A Drop of Vermillion Jungle

Aria Dang

Vermillion are the tides that wash against the surf,
A deep and rusted hue colored like a war zone;
Like the blood of Moses's Nile,
Cursing the inhabitants of both coast and water.
But beyond the symbolism and religious imagery,
Lies a microscopic jungle of diatoms and dinoflagellates,
Collecting the light of day
To reflect in rust and umber.
From daylight's colors, these flagellates turn,
When disturbed and distraught they transform,
Into the light of midnight's thousand eyes:
A model of the universe in a single drop.
Two worlds, does the vermillion jungle reflect,
In burnt sienna and fluorescence of the algal bloom
A warning to abandon hope, they who enter there—
Of the plight of those who wandered too near.
Thus, is the danger of that wilderness,
Whose toxins are hidden well amongst its evening sky,
Amongst the bloody diamonds that devour
Amongst the beauty of the reddened tide.

Europe Pt. 1

Abigail Powell



Europe Pt. 2

Abigail Powell



Echoes of Possibility

Claire Jones

I stand alone,
poised
in the shatterpoint—
caught between silenced galaxies—
Suspended
for an eternal moment,
as my world
jerks to a halt.

I stare down
spun corridors of Time,
my fate solidifying ahead;
spiraling paths,
defined by choices,
close down,
one by one
till not even a window
remains open.

Now,
I am set irrevocably
on this road
I have chosen;
one path lies clear
before me.
Chosen of my will
alone –
my haunted, joyous road.

I can hear
the echoes of my lives;
the brothers I have cast aside,
fled from;
lovers I denied,
left at every choice,
ignored, forsaken,
turned away,
betrayed.

I said it was all
for their sakes,
claimed
to spare them,
but that was a lie.
Now, alone,
balanced outside Time,
I hear their voices –
my echoed possibilities –
and weep.

Contributors

Alicia Hyslip

is a sophomore pursuing a major in psychology with an art minor. Coming from an artistically inclined family, art has always been a part of her life; from being a kid who loved to finger paint to being a full time college student pursuing art as a passion in everyday life. Art is her mode of expression, an outlet for healing, and is her way of spreading the love of Christ through intentionality and thoughtfulness.

Anissa Sanchez

is a born and raised Texan and junior at HBU, who is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in English along with a Writing minor. She looks to Walt Whitman as a main source of inspiration. She loves reading, spending time with her family and her two dogs, and appreciating nature.

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Masthead & STAFF

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is a senior, majoring in English and Latin. After graduation, she plans to work at *The Imaginative Conservative*, an online journal where she has interned for two summers, and to apply to graduate school. She loves writing, the beauty of language, and tea.

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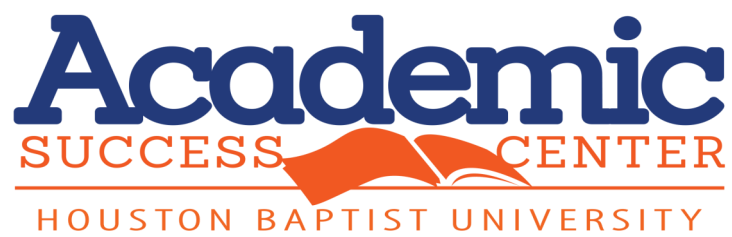
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