

# The Writers Block

2018







# **THE WRITERS' BLOCK**

The Ada Long Creative Writing Workshop Anthology

**2018**

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**Colophon**

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## Candle Light

David Hester

On a shady night, in a quiet street, there was a bright yellow window, which stood out from its black, five story apartment. In the window, a married couple's loud argument was heard from an abandoned apartment building that stood across the couple's resident. On the edge of the abandoned building's rooftop, there hunched a bat like critter. The monster's skin surface was thick like a leather jacket. On the bat-creature's back, its large wings were tucked diagonal into each other like two scabbards on a warrior's backside. The creature's dull gray face had the nose and eyes of a wolf, but it also had the facial shape of a human. The human-like animal had a muscular chest and a creepy smile that stretched past its cheekbones. As the fiery argument between the couple intensified, the creature laughed in a evil joy for the two's suffering. Then, the beast's muscles bulged in great size. With its mouth widening to a large smile and drooling black saliva, the monster stood tall on the edge of the rooftop and proudly said:

"Yes! Let your bad emotions consume you because the more you feel enraged, hurt, sadden, distrust-ed, hopeless, and empty; the more powerful I become.. Don't you feel my presence, humans? Don't you feel my presence float as a sentimental idea in your brain? When I pierce deep into your heart, do you think about the lovelessness that haunted your marriage for years? Don't you feel misled by the image of marriage that your silly movies have falsely painted for you to believe? Am I whispering in your ear when regret troubles your soul? Do you feel treated like an object for sex instead of a person of love? If so, let me take your harms away in order to ease your pain. Meet me in your courtrooms so I tear that painful bond. However, know that once you've broken that vow, I will pierce my fangs into you and suck all your joy, all of your pain and leave you as an empty shell. Then you'll come to question whether you should find a new lover or be alone. Either choice, you will just be nothing but a pitiful fool who'll forever be robbed of love. Ha! And how sad it is that through my many centuries of living, more and more of you humans seem to call out for me as time progresses. But how funny does it feel when I notice your lovelessness only separate you fools as one. Even I, an entity with no feeling of empathy, knows the weakness of you idiotic mortals. However, I favor your unintelligence and misery because it only makes my force stronger. And one day I shall truly make this world perfect from love and marriage while they fall under my dominance and power!"

Right at this moment, the wedded couple at the window began to make a sound of agonizing fury. The noises of objects being thrown is heard as shouts and screams sounds like one going through some sort of aggressive, physical punishment. The hectic orchestra of distortion, the lights flashing off and on with a violent repetition, the sick monster overdosing with his laughter; the chaos of the situation only escalated faster and faster. UNTIL...the window turned solid black. The voices from the window came to an immediate stop. There was a sudden quietness that filled the air. Even the ol' creature stayed quiet due to curiosity and confusion of the killing silence that took place.

The absence of sound and light would continue on for a while, until a candle light emerged from the window, replacing the bold light that once shined apart from the dark building. In the window, the pair are shown together again, except this time they have their arms around each other, hugging and warming each other like a mother bear to a bear cub. When a few people began to put their candle lights to their window, it seemed the candle's light touched the hearts of others. The once gloomy apartment now looked like a night sky full of illuminating lanterns. It was a peaceful moment, but not for the creature that stood on the building full of gloomy melancholy. His body began to slowly lose its muscular physique and his wings started to turn frail and stiff. Just as the critter disappeared from his previous position, he smiled, knowing that despite his current situation against him, he knew that there will be more lives to put in his collection and more human agony to feed on.

## “Fear”

*Samantha Walker*

“Fear” is shadow  
That follows us around,  
It reaches up with its sharp claws  
And pins us to the ground

“Fear” is the darkness  
That keeps us up at night,  
Filled with monsters, demons, or nothing’  
We can’t help but fight or flight

“Fear” is a creature  
That forms in our minds,  
Imagination and intuition,  
Wondering what we’ll find

“Fear” is a doll  
That uses its beautiful disguise,  
It hides where we can’t see it coming,  
It watches through glass eyes

## Anti-Ode to the Hot Comb

*Madison Prim*

A jar of green grease and a scorching stove  
Smoke emancipates the jive above the iron hot comb

My mom held the hot comb  
As its bare teeth gnawed through my hair

From the radio, Paul Hardcastle’s Jazz Masters album played  
And my mother beckoned me not to flinch

With every hiss of the hot comb against my scalp  
Every straightened strand of hair

I become a replica of “beauty”  
My hair becomes a taboo

But when I escape the hissing comb  
I run to the nearest pond

The water swallows me  
My curls are drenched in love

I decorate it with petals of pink lotus flowers  
I wrap it in lily pads

Because as they exist unbothered  
My hair shall do the same





## The Window Was Smashed

*Ben Lasseter*

Mary sat next to her white flowers, reading her favorite book while inhaling their familiar scent.

“CRASH”

The only window in the room, right next to the door, crashed inward, a white glowing man coming through it.

“Is this Mary’s home? It better be because I’ve been beaten one too many times in the head with a broom from crashing into the wrong house!”

“I am Mary,” said she as she raised an eyebrow at the white glowing man.

“Thank the Lord. My name is Gabriel.” the angel said as he stood proudly in front of the mess he’d made out of Mary’s window.

“Hi?” asked Mary.

An awkward silence.

“Oh, right. My apologies ma’am. Sorry for the window, it’s just that it’s the fastest way to fly in.” Gabriel said, “And I’ve several errands left to take care of before flying back up. I was sent by our Lord to inform you that you are to give birth to Jesus Christ, God’s son.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Gabriel! I am a virgin! I will not have a child.”

Gabriel gave a little wink along with a creep smirk.

“Why do you think he sent me? That’s what I’m here for.” His smile widening, then quickly fading. “I’m kidding, I’m kidding, but listen up: you will bore a child and name him Jesus. Alright, well... Any questions?”

“Uh.” Mary raised her eyebrow a bit higher.

“Great, then. My work is done.” And Gabriel shot back through the window he’d entered, the glass miraculously flying back into place. Everything was back to normal. Almost. Mary felt a kick.

June 5, 2018

*Hailey Sanderson*

There’s something about being in class with Adam, Grape, Lasagna, Chicken Parmesan, and Pizza. Today, the Bham shirt that Adam has on captures my attention. 1871 it says. I wonder “Is Birmingham really that old?”. His shoes and hat match the shirt. It’s the same gray and white. Even his hair matches his outfit. Today, Lasagna has on a gold necklace that displays a dog’s paw. It hangs, almost hidden behind her white jacket.



Grape has on a shirt that says “Grace Wins”. It doesn’t matter that it has a religious kind of meaning, because I can’t help but to think about Dahlia, whose middle name is Grace. Chicken Parmesan has on a vest that shows emotion and character. It is creative, but I notice that one of the pins say “Free all political prisoners.” What does that even mean? Pizza has on a blue headband, her hair is curled, and her afro is beautiful. Today, Pizza buys Chicken Parmesan a Pepsi, and she buys herself a Grapico, which causes me to buy a drink as well. I sit down, I am comfortable, I have settled in. Today is only day 2, but I already feel as if I know everyone in my poetry class.



## This Is A Poem

*J. Hosier*

an incision invited itself to a point  
at the dead of night, reaching for something  
to release a supply; drips of life turning red  
to the requirement of earth.

it remembered its specifics thoroughly, it had  
would listen sans listening and conversation gave  
way. ryan and jameice, that dynamic duo would  
burst into a single harmony; usually stir fry.  
jaina, in the garb of a miss harley quinn,  
muttering her white contempt for black panther.  
jordan was there, but only sometimes.

his presentation table was the fear of the incision,  
now pestering itself into an infection. under there stood a box,  
an apartment: fake skull, fake clavicle, fake tenant.  
an incomplete model stared into the complex.  
one hundred diseases; defined by the infection, and it became a thousand,  
it had been raised and taught by a million.  
the stigmata amputation floated across the class, waving and smiling  
in the promise that we too will be saved



## The Abandoned City

*Y'onna Hale*

Years of digging and mining to get to the cities heart  
It was buried along with everyone's troubles  
We thought it was nothing  
But the broken porcelain dolls and bones inside little church  
dresses  
Told you it was once an old home to vintage like character's  
The city is abandoned  
It's that shirt you grew out of  
Those toy's you no longer play with  
But everything works  
If you fix it  
Soon day hits and it pretends to be alive  
Like you do when you go outside  
But it's different  
This city is magical to some  
The stone took time but it fell  
And the plant's fought strangling each other to get to the sun  
When all everything wanted to do was run  
It isn't fun when everything you've worked so hard for  
They pretend like you didn't try at all  
Time stops then you just fall  
Your whole world just got put on recall

## E major, E minor *Surina Prabhu*

Until I was 15, I admired a guy that was an emotional person with eyes that you could get lost in. He never went to any lessons, but he taught me how to play a few chords on the guitar. My friends never knew why I liked those three chords, A, F7, and Em. They never understood how exactly the chords made me feel; it wasn't anything I could explain. But then he would step in, smile, and convey how the chords flowed through the ears and straight to the soul, and that's all that mattered. Then he'd play for me some more.

When I turned 18, Lucas went to college for his musical talent, leaving me 123 miles away. He became so obsessive over the technicalities of the positions of the fingers on the chords and specifics like that whenever I played with him.

"Like this?"

"No! That all wrong. You have to arch your fingers like this and make sure not to do..."

He went on to explain the specifics of how the chords were made and how exactly they were supposed to be played. I was happy for him, and ecstatic that he was learning so much, but none of that really mattered to me. I just wanted the gentle light that coursed through my body when I heard the music. I always messed up the positions of those three chords, as they were always a bit out of tune, and I didn't feel like playing them around him anymore.

When I was 20, he moved to California, and got a full-time gig. He wrote me every week, showing me autographs of famous singers and pictures of him with fans. While I was proud of him, I really missed him. He kept going with it for a couple of years. He even made up some new chords for another girl. My friends were happy to finally see his true colors, but I was broken and out of tune. He came back a couple months later, but never once played the chords A, F7, or Em. My soul ached for those chords. I honestly believed that they were too trivial for him to play anymore, with all that he had learned. But when we were 23, we went to a bar for him to play, and afterward I caught him strumming those three chords for someone else. It hurt like hell.

When I was 24, I didn't even know who he was anymore. He never played those chords like he used to when he was younger, and he always tossed me aside whenever I was with him. My friends said that I deserved better.

I broke up with him two months later, when I was 25. As I moved forward with my life, I never forgot those three chords. But whenever I heard those three chords, A, F7, and Em, they no longer soothed my soul. They were just noise.



**Just Let Go**  
*Elyie Basselin*

**The Annunciation Sonnet**  
*Tiffany Duong*

GABRIEL

Woman, tell me, are you not Mary?  
There are so many nuns around here  
Of flying and spying, I've become weary  
I am the angel Gabriel, have no fear

MARY

It is true you shine in your gold finery  
Although your enormous wings freak me out  
The Lord sent you, so Angel you must be  
Your message is important, I have no doubt

GABRIEL

The news I bring may be hard to believe  
But it won't matter anyways, if all goes well  
The son of God himself you will conceive  
As soon as I cast my pregnancy spell

MARY

I have no choice if it is His decree  
I never wanted kids, but oh well, we'll see

**Mugshot**

inspired by James Tate's "The Camel"

*David Hester*

I witnessed something  
Very peculiar on tv today.  
It's a mugshot of me  
with a very disturbing frown on my face. And yet  
I have never been arrested  
during any part of my life.  
In the mugshot,  
I'm wearing a dingy white shirt  
And my dreads look like they haven't been cared for in years  
And my face looks so dry and unclean.  
I have paused the news to intently look at the picture  
And it is definitely me.  
I'm just so obsessed with this photo.  
I never expected to ever get arrested  
Or become a stereotype of a black male.  
Through the photo,  
I recognized a person  
Who've been beaten up by this world  
To the point of  
Hopelessness,  
Anger,  
Resentment,  
Lost,  
Violence,  
And no care for life.  
I must change the tv channel  
Before my parents and friends  
See this photo.

They must not know about this.  
I must forget.



## Bluntly Living

Jamiah Stroud

All the day Ty received money- twenties, fives, fifties and occasionally the Benjamins. Late at night when the street lights flicked every 15 seconds in front of the apartment, TY would brush balls of lint off of his shoulder and close the bags of weed so none would fall out. Ty would go out around noon the next day. He was never late. Even when he had a sleepless night, he'd still muster up some energy to keep pushing. He'd be at the corner tying a bag, eyes low from lack of sleep, and his knees shaking under his pants. Weed was 4 dollars less on these sleepy nights instead of regular price.

He kept a bag of change on the sidewalk next to him. Teenagers of all ages and sex would sneak up to him, the money folded and peeking out of their pocket like a baby's head peeking out of his crib, and the sweat on their forehead making a dash for their cheeks.

"Do you have it?" the younger ones would stutter.

Or if the teenagers were older, their posture would be somewhat straight and they would say, "Give me."

Ty rested his fingers on the shoulders of the teenagers, and no matter how "tough" they'd try to act, their shoulders relaxed like a tired baby. The teenagers all smelled the same, all of them. Maybe it was something in the air of the city that made them smell that way, like stale lays potato chips. He gave his softest pat on the shoulder to the younger teenagers and a firm pat to the shoulders of the older teenagers thinking they would respect him more if he were more serious.

One rainy Thursday night when the gas station had been robbed, leaving the owners horrified and waiting for the police, the fathers in the neighborhood walked angrily and brows furrowed accompanied by the neighborhood "mom" with a gun in their hand. The stronger looking men had weaker personalities and the weaker men were the total opposite. Ty matched them up by faces and was shocked to find the strong men had guns and the weaker men didn't. The strongest man began to hit Ty profusely screaming about how the robbing was his fault and the safety of his children were at stake.

Ty slowly but surely made his way off the ground, swiftly wrapped his hand around the man's face, popped a blunt in his mouth, and lit it. The other men swearing under their breaths, the weaker men balling up their fist and the stronger ones clenching their gun even tighter. The neighborhood "mom" untied her apron, let it drop to the ground, and starting mumbling mouth fulls of nothing.

As they both smoked the blunt, the man's jaws clenched like a baby eating a lemon. His breath smelled of burning grass and fried Oreos. The dealer was not surprised when the man asked for another and for a moment let smoke fly from his nose. Only after the neighborhood "mom" stopped mumbling did Ty stopped smoking. The man gave Ty a hand shake and before they went in for a hug, the man whispered, "We will do this again."



## The Fig-Heart

*Elyie Basselin*

My brother's painting this: a tree, a platform That is cradled by a thick branch, and a wide canopy of leaves with a centred fig-heart.

He dips his brush through branches and purples the figs in careful flicks, glinting stretch marks of green. My brother's painting this: a tree, a platform.

Last year our tree died, as was nature's plan It's June and he has found his way. The centered fig-heart splashes the scene;

the surrounding ones are green pastels, though this one's blinding with a royal fold. My brother's painting this: a tree, a platform

Of oak, a splintering terrain of bursting fruits. My brother's painting this: a tree, a platform As if it were a goddess, a saint,

A perfection in the midpoint of the canopy. My brother's painting this: a tree, a platform, A leafy canopy, and one astounding heart.

## My Jade Pendent

*Anna Grace Dasher*

My Jade Pendent is a traditional beauty.

She wears bright floral kimonos.

Her face is painted a ghostly white.

She wraps her hair with loose green ribbons,

Her eyes a frosty blue and a red line for lips.

She takes strolls in town under parasols,

And lifts her skirts, barefoot on the beach.

She walks with grace in public,

But skips up the mountain behind her father's

home.

She fills her hair with pristine white lilies

And she holds her head high.

She plays the flute and lute and harp,

But notes have always just been muscle memory.

She flops on her bed every afternoon

And kicks off her tight shoes so they hit the wall

She takes pleasure in every bird that sings,

And she dances to their sporadic melody.

She walks in the gardens with a ghost for a mother,

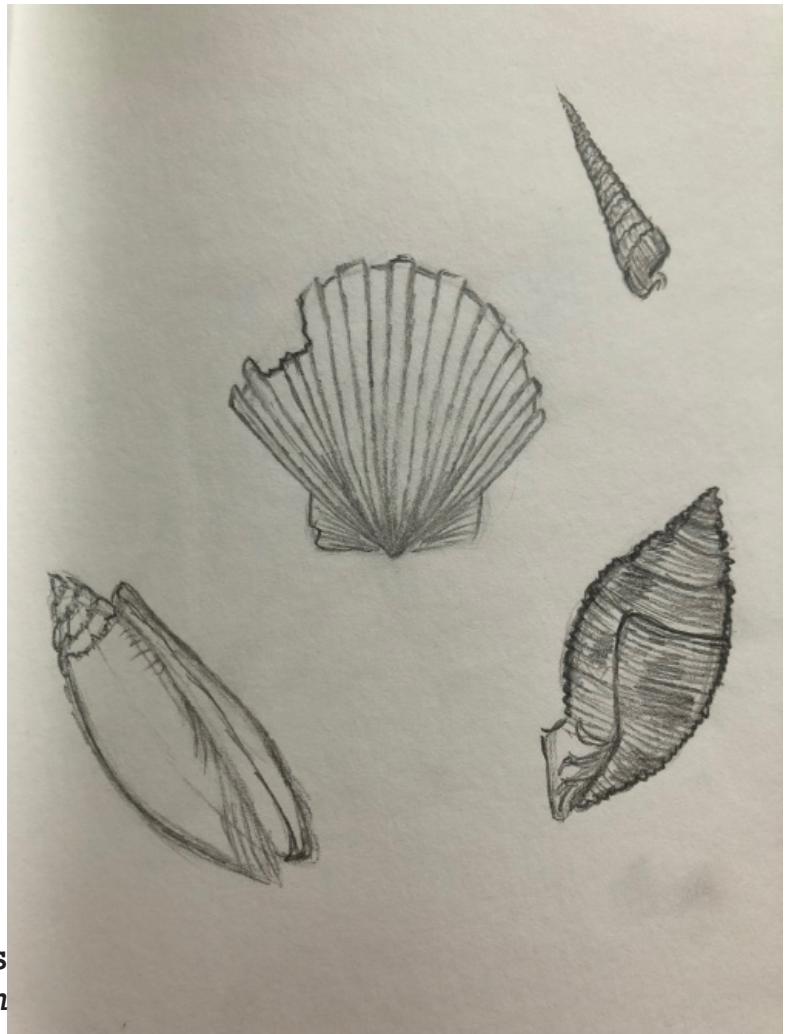
Where they plant marigolds and pink clover.

She sits in the garden beside the weeping willow,

Her albino peacock beside her.

She watches as butterflies land on the clover

And asks them all, "What secrets do you hide?"



Shells

*Elyie Basselin*

## Iris

### *Madison Prim*

The sun had come up and Iris emerged from the comforting sheets of her bed. Realizing the time and how close she was to being late for work, she ran to the bathroom to get ready. The steaming hot water coming from the shower head soothed her aching body from hours and hours of working each day. When she finished getting ready, she warmed a honey biscuit in the microwave for breakfast and walked towards the front door. But she heard a peculiar sound. Being the paranoid and jittery eighteen year old girl that she was, she quickly shut the front door and ran to her car.

Being a barista was not the easiest job in the world, but Iris had grown to love it. After countless times of pouring espresso shots into cups and failed attempts of creating the perfect swirl of whipped cream on top of a frappe, Iris had become a professional. The job was the only thing that kept Iris somewhat sane, and she focused less on the growing list of things for her to worry about. Not being able to pay the bills on time, home invasions in the middle of the night, getting an incurable disease-they all seemed rather tragic to her. After months and months of therapy and frequent visits to the doctor, she had been diagnosed with severe anxiety and paranoid personality disorder. This was a lot for Iris to handle, being eighteen years old and living alone with no family close by to comfort her. She didn't get out of the house very often, and when she did it was mainly for work. The medications prescribed to her allowed her anxiety to subside a little, but they weren't enough to keep the paranoid thoughts and panic attacks away.

After her shift was over, Iris drove back to her lonely apartment. Having nothing to do and no one to talk to, she went to bed early. Sleeping seemed to be her solution to everything. But after two hours of sleeping, Iris heard a whisper. But it wasn't just any whisper, it was her mother's voice. She remembered it so distinctly. Iris then slowly got out of her bed and followed the sound. It hypnotized her in such a way that her fear wasn't prominent enough to alarm her. As she walked down the hallway that led to the bathroom, the whispering stopped. Confused, Iris stood still to see if she could hear it again. The whispering sound suddenly came from her bedroom. When she arrived in her room, her heart beating rapidly and her hands covered in sweat, she noticed that the whispering came from the mirror. As she approached it, she didn't see herself, but an eighteen year old version of her mother in a ghastly white gown. Her mother mouthed her name.

"Iris."

Iris was frozen in fear, and could do nothing but stare at her mother. Her mother died of a pulmonary embolism when Iris was six. Iris watched the fear in her eyes as she was dying. That was the last memory she had of her. Staring at her mother in that moment reminded her of when she would brush Iris's dark, long, and cotton-like hair. Iris would sit on the counter in front of the mirror as her mother stood behind her. Each section of her hair would be lathered in castor as the soft bristles of the brush went through her hair. Now as Iris stood and looked at her mother, nothing about her seemed familiar. Her mother opened her mouth again, only to let a thousand black widow spiders crawl out and run down her gown.

"Mom!," Iris wailed.

She screamed uncontrollably as tears came from her eyes. Iris then saw her own reflection in the mirror as spiders crawled out from her ears. The tightening of her chest made it hard for her to breathe, and she eventually collapsed onto the cold carpet.

The next morning, Iris woke up to a throbbing headache and her clothes drenched in sweat. She couldn't think about what happened last night. Not without breaking down into tears again. She decided to call in sick for work and go to visit her psychiatrist. Iris refused to look at herself in the mirror. She was too afraid to see her mother staring back at her. As she drove to the clinic, Iris couldn't help but think about how much of a wreck she was.

When the psychiatrist called her back to his office, Iris felt empty. No fear was present, just a void.

"So what brings you here today Iris? I've looked at reports from your previous visits here and it seems that you have severe and debilitating anxiety and paranoia. Is that correct?," the psychiatrist asked. Iris had never met this psychiatrist before. The other one she knew had gone on vacation.



“So why are you here today?”

Iris hesitated.

“I had..I had an episode, I think. I saw my mother in the mirror last night. She had spiders crawling out of her mouth. And all I could do was scream. Spiders crawled out of my ears too. And all I could do was scream. I couldn't reach through the mirror and help her. I couldn't kill the spiders for her. I just stood there and screamed.”

“Is your mother still alive today, might I ask?”

“No, she died when I was six. I watched her die.”

“So you saw... everything?”

“Yes.”

“If you don't mind me asking, how did she die?”

“She died of a pulmonary embolism.”

“Iris, I am so sorry to hear about your mother. But have you thought about how you were only six when you witnessed this? That is a lot for any six year old to take in. I have seen cases of anxiety and paranoia such as yours. And I believe that you feel you are responsible for your mother's death. You felt helpless the day she passed. There was nothing you could do. And you felt the same way last night. You carry a burden such as that on your own child, and you simply cannot do that. It is not your fault that she had to leave this earth. It was never your fault, my dear.”

As the psychiatrist was saying all of this. Iris was looking down to stop tears from coming to her eyes. But when she looked up at the doctor, she saw her mother.

“It is not your fault,” she said.

### Three

#### *Jamiah Stroud*

The sisters thumbed their last scarlet goodbyes.  
His hand grew inside of me. By spring my mouth  
fell like a bundle of cardboard.

For weeks at home no one touched me. Here's the  
church his portrait under a dim light mother's  
closed eyes and open hands.

A hug. Here's the family. They wanted to leave I  
thought and the they left.

Rest mom said under her breath while kissing my  
forehead and tucking me in “silent nights” I said to  
myself “faints sighs”.



Raz

*Elyie Basselin*

## Who We Are *Elyie Basselin*

We studied the cloud creatures floating through the skies, slipped the children across the creek, skipping from stone to stone, and led them through the pines and gum trees our parents at home had warned us not to explore.

Lily pressed her face against a daffodil. It snapped that she should learn to watch how her actions affected others. She cried that she didn't mean to break it as she cradled it in her arms and stroked its yellow head.

Calyie claimed she'd only go "so far," but we only had an idea of what that meant. We pushed to find out. We loved to dare her to scale this tree or feel her way up that rock. She relished in the attention, the way our voices' pitch rose with excitement when we dared her. She stopped, though, after running across a fallen tree perched above a valley of leaves a few feet below.

Caleb was itching to show off. Our mother huffed that it would be his downfall. Even with his own siblings, he had to prove himself, but the attention would soon fade, leaving him thirsty for more. He wove between rotting branches overlooking the steep slope below, glancing back to assure himself that all eyes were on him. We watched with intense stares, pleading with him to return to the ground.

Before dinner, we check him for scratches and bruises.

None of us, of course, told our mother the true story of our adventures. It was our secret that boiled deep within us. It shaped our relationship with ourselves and each other. For the rest of our lives, we had each other's backs: pushing one another to pursue our dreams and face the hardships. No one had the power to break the bonds formed in those woods.



Two Birds  
*Eleanor Roth*

## Romantic but Fierce

*Ben Lasseter*

knuckles of brass and glory  
creased  
hard  
my hands my lovmakers  
my street fighters  
my pencil flippers  
they

soar

like a hawk  
claw  
down onto a trout

calluses  
like wet  
sand  
encrusted with pebbles and gravel

glimmering rings  
like a fisherman's tackle box

glistening  
with confidence

romantic as a night  
out  
under  
the screen  
the void

a needle  
piercing

depths of infinite light  
shining through

infinite  
supernovae

explosions  
and black holes  
Collapsing

romantic  
fierce

## Ode to My Necklace

*Aislinn Bellew*

My necklace has no home. This is my necklace: Filled with starlight and opal glow, she holds her head high to the fading sun. she laughs to fill her silence. Bees land on her skin. She talks to them about the sky. Her soft brown eyes hide an ocean of ambition. My necklace eats lemons and drinks Earl Gray at four thirty in the morning. She finds the best in everyone even when she can't find it in herself. My necklace wears leather in the summer. She is dressed in combat boots and a loose smirk. She has a tattoo on her hand with the words "Beautiful Reflections" in cursive. Her favorite scar is the one on her ring finger that was printed by her grandfather's cigarette. My necklace smells of lavender and midnight sweat. Though she is lined with rust and coated in super glue, she holds her head held high with her heavy mascara and raspberry chap stick.



## The Rose

Hannah Bray

Today is Adam's day to run the morning session. He sends us back out into the heat with a mission: find something from nature that interests us.

I am one of the first ones out, not because I am particularly eager, but because I happen to be close to the door. I watch as my classmates go around me, two or three branching off to look at the magnolia, others heading directly for the roses.

I meander. I look at the leaves I could never pick, up high in a tree, scraping the sky. Oh, it'd be fun to be lodged halfway up a tree when he finally comes out to herd us back in, but it's too hot to stay out that long. No, for now I will be contented with what I can reach. Still, my eyes wander up.

I force them to look at the ground; More people have found the roses and debate with themselves what color they want. I am maybe halfway there, maybe less. I've never particularly cared for roses.

I think about picking up one of the leaves from a bush. I should know what they're called, but I don't. All I know is that I am fascinated by the pure variety of them. For one in every twenty, I would estimate, there is a red leaf stuck among the green. They're what catch your eye, or mine, at least. And yet, when I look, I have no desire to pick one up, or to touch it. It is incredibly plain, despite its vibrant color. I enjoy much more the look of the green leaves. Now that I am close I can see the individual veins threaded throughout. Each one would have been a light green without that tangle that spread across them; they would have been almost lime in their brilliance. But a cobweb is stretched around and saps that potential away. To seal the deal is a waxy covering, eliminating the wondrous texture of the veins that you would find in a maple leaf. I turn from the bush and continue my walk without deciding on anything.

I end up at the rose bushes. Some of the people who were originally there have already gone back in with their prizes. I can see the freshly snapped stems of those near the path. I find beautifully coiled buds on some of the bushes, their leaves and petals forming a tight cone. These are prettier, though less abundant, than those in full bloom. The bugs don't seem to think so. I find a small beetle in one of the more opened ones.

I do not want a rose. Yet it is there that I keep looking. My eyes alight upon a dead one, small and curled, like a bud, as if trying to still protect something valuable inside. It has petals of a dusty brown, but I can still see hints of pink within the folds, tracing along the edges of the petals, mingling with a darker brown every now and again. Five beautiful sepals emerge from beneath it. Two are a darker green, long and pointed, with protrusions that look like they should be sharp emerging every now and again, barbs. These gradually darken and turn into a brown at the end, just a small coat at the tip. Above each one of these sepals is a lighter one. If they were larger, I would equate them to lamb's ear, or, when taken together, to the ears of Yoda. They are paler than the others and come to gradual, but rounder, points with no change in color. There is a white highlight along the edge, where they have begun to curl up. The top of the sepal star is the oddest. It's body consists of the same coloration and texture as Yoda's ears, but, instead of white along the edges, there is dark green. From this sprout barbs, and this comes to the end in a brown point. There is something about it that appeals to me. Maybe it's the idea that no one else will pick a dead flower. After all, if someone is going to risk the rose's thorns, they want a beautiful reward. But I don't mind the thorns. I know it is this flower that I want, not any other. It is worth the two thorns that lodge into my thumb as I'm twisting it off. I like the idea of someone wanting a withered rose, even if it's only me.

It

*Eleanor Roth*

Where does it linger?  
For everything around me has  
Resting emotions and experiences.  
It surrounds me,  
Carved into the wood grain,  
Into the worn-down painted stools,  
Into the green fabric of the chairs,  
Into the bits of yarn strewn over  
the wooden floors,  
Into the warped-glass windows,  
their imperfections like waves,  
In moments of serenity,  
Watching the candles drift on the  
water.  
It lingers in feelings of being loved  
while spiraling to sleep,  
In lingers in walking through the  
grass, bees humming,  
Or in hearing the sound of music,  
distant, but constant.  
Everything whispers of years and  
moments,  
Mixing with the present that melts  
into the past.  
How simply does the world believe  
It is just in our minds.  
Every scuff on our shoes,  
Every line on our hands,  
Every ounce of our being,  
Tells stories,  
Of love,  
Of patience,  
Of people.

Eight

*Surina Prabhu*

The children wrote their last crumbling goodbyes,  
numbness settling inside me. By fall,  
my breath fell like a marble  
filled with sand;  
For "friends" at my school, nothing stopped.  
Here is the school: a building  
beneath a vivacious sky.  
Mother's bedroom was a scatter of chip clips,  
open books, a puzzle. Here lies the first piece:  
She yearned to work more  
from home. She lied,  
and continued to lie. "No",  
I whispered. But I was alone,  
while walking on a dirt path behind the school,  
that circles in on itself,  
sapphire water droplets, spiky pinecones, feathers on  
the ground.



## Dog Days

*Dana Aldeeb*

I was seven years old when me and my best friend spent the year being curious outdoors. Drinking Strawberry Fanta, her dog jumping on us at any chance he got to get our drinks to knock over.

When I was ten, my best friend moved in next door, but we still spent time at her old home being care-free, jumping on the trampoline. The dog licking our knees as we sat and drank cool lemonade.

At twelve, my best friend and I sat quietly on the curb. Murmuring the worst of things with tired eyes wondering when our lives got so crazy. Letting the birds vigorous chatter fill in for our voices when we didn't have much to say. The dog was gone, stolen by her cruel and crude uncle. Two cold cokes being downed to the last drop.

When we were fourteen, my friend and I were both lovestruck by two boys who moved down the street. Memories carved in our bones and swelled in our hearts. My mind sometimes spacing out as I dreamed of first dates, milkshakes, and double dates. The dog sleeping soundly at our feet as we drank her aunt's most expensive bottle of red wine, laughing carelessly.

At eighteen, we were driving off to college, grinning from ear to ear as we left town. Her dog was left back at home. A six pack of beer was near her feet with one cracked open in her hand.

At twenty two, I woke up in a cold, colorless room alone and surrounded by Jamie's family as well as my own. Delirious from the night before, I asked, "Where's Jamie?". Her mother convulsed into sobs. Before I turned twenty three, after having time to heal and coming to the understanding that I was alive, I had gained enough strength and courage to face the rawest truth I had ever known: her grave. Being too scarred and thoughtful of my own life and slowly piecing back that dreadful night so long ago, I had missed the funeral. Sobbing softly to the empty air, I let go a weight in me right then and there.

At twenty six, I was phoned by my best friend's mother and later that day had walked out of that empty house with a nineteen year-old short haired, brown eyed mutt. Memories of my friendship, the moments spent enjoying the car rides singing to the latest songs on the radio and having our hangouts after school, ranting about what was happening in our latest friend groups, a simpler time was brought by him who barked and licked my face as I put him in the car and took him home.



Yellow  
*Jamiah Stroud*

My little cousin asked what is a yellow knock out rose?

The flower is the soothing voice of the eldest women in the church.

The inside of the flower is the calming sound of a pick gliding over the G cord on a guitar.

The petals are two dragon flies chasing after each other in a cool breeze.

Under the flower is a P; prosperity, peace, purpose, and passionate.

**Beheading of the Forerunner**

*J. Hosier*

My Salome's painting this: a scar, a plate!  
She dances through the night, into a wide kingdom  
of the crux, with a centered idiot-king.  
She presents her trophy through red and kisses his  
flesh

in lustful flicks, glinting cuts of disgust  
My Salome's painting this: a scar, a plate.  
"Last night, John the Baptist died, as was my plan.  
It's easier to kill a priest when  
no one hears the bloody sermon.

The centered idiot-king  
entered his domain, the surrounding servants were  
rainbow-robed  
while John's head was lit with a silver ring."  
My Salome's painting this: a scar, a plate,  
a feverish dance of seizure limbs.

Her movement, elsewhere stigmatized  
flared out and flayed within the idiot-king  
as if it were a mea culpa, or a trickle  
a head in the midpoint of his conquers.  
My Salome put down her brush: the scar, the plate  
rested by her bedside, turning his cross towards a  
linen sheet.

## *Excerpt from Growth*

*Tiffany Duong*

Strawberry Sommer is just getting started. The kids are lining up by the stalls to get their baskets. The adults are already nursing bottles of beer, loose and good-natured. The strawberries in the field are so full and ripe that they catch the light from the lamps swinging on their lines.

When he sees her again, he freezes.

He had almost given up on finding her. Maybe The Fates wouldn't let them cross paths more than once, and she would slip away like everyone before her who he'd thought could remain in his future. But when Atlas sees her again, glowing that same shade of gold, all the doubt dissipates. He knows it. Something about her, something about the idea of being with her, just feels right. Like his whole galaxy has fallen into place, and leaving her would knock the planets out of balance and leave room for things to go wrong again. He just watches her for another minute, a mix of anxiety and anticipation churning in his gut.

When she sees him again, she barely pauses.

Maybe that's what prompts him to approach her: the way her eyes skipped past his like a butterfly batting against a flower and then flitting away. Atlas is tall and broad, and the crowd parts for him as he strides to her. She looks up at him, eyes wide and mouth open in a little o. The face that he had tried to commit to memory is so much more beautiful than his feeble brain could imagine. She shimmers like some kind of faerie creature, an effect that is exaggerated by the crown of deep red carnations on her head.

"Hi Leilani," Atlas says. He's embarrassed by his own breathless voice.

"Hi." She blinks.

"Um, how are you?"

"Good... Sorry, but have we met?" He pretends the words don't punch him in the chest.

"Yeah, I own that bookstore on Nordvej. You bought *The Life of Pi*?" He's prepared to keep going, could have recounted their whole conversation in the store if he had to, but the light of recognition flashes in her eyes.

"Oh right! Wow, I'm surprised you remembered me." As if he could ever forget. "How is business?"

"Great, it's great." Not great. People have been complaining about him leaving the store too often. "And I haven't seen you in Grønborg before?"

"I came for the Strawberry Sommer, just like everyone else."

Their conversation goes as well as Atlas had hoped and lasts for a while, too. They talk about how she liked *The Life of Pi* and their favorite movies – Amélie comes up, and Atlas is thrilled to have another common interest. He learns that her family is from Hawaii and that she's a florist in the next town over.

"You look exactly like the kind of guy who would own a bookstore and live right next door to it," she says at one point, gesturing to the top of her head. Atlas reaches up until his fingers brush against his hair, which is tied into its usual small bun.

"What's that supposed to mean?" He laughs as she pokes fun at his leather satchel and ripped blue jeans, the small scars on his cheeks that he sheepishly admits are just from being clumsy and not from wrestling bears. They keep talking even as it gets late enough for the parents to start herding their kids home.

It's not much later when she goes quiet, probably out of things to say, but he doesn't mind the easy silence. Leilani is easily distracted, it seems, something that he finds terribly endearing. She'll drift away after some food stall or drink stand, leaving him to trail behind her. They actually do get separated at one point, and when he finds her, she's texting someone in an alleyway.

"Oh," she says when she looks up and sees him, "sorry, I had to go to the bathroom." She tucks her phone into the pocket of her overalls and smiles. The dim lighting in the alley steals the sparkle out of her eyes, but his heart beats a little faster nonetheless. They walk together for a few minutes longer until Leilani's phone rings. She stands off to the side and speaks to someone in an urgent tone while Atlas tries his best to not hover or eavesdrop. When she comes back, her face is apologetic.

"Sorry, I have to go. My friend is having an emergency." She takes her flower crown off of her head and tucks it under her arm.

“Oh, no problem, you go on. I hope your friend is okay!” Atlas calls after her, since she’s already turned around and walking away. He checks his watch and is startled to see that three hours have passed. The festival is still ongoing around him, most people fully intoxicated now, but he doesn’t see the point of staying out now that Leilani has left. He misses her already.

Atlas feels fine right up until he crosses the threshold into his apartment. The familiar acrid feeling rises up in his throat, but this time it’s ten times as painful. It feels like something is tearing his throat apart. He sprints to the bathroom and retches over the sink, the burning spreading up and up until he can’t swallow or even breathe –

He hacks until it feels like something gives, maybe. There’s definitely something in there, and he reaches in, grabs something soft and round and pulls until it snaps and he can hold it up to the light. It’s a flower. Half of its petals are missing, the rest of them covered in phlegm and blood, but it’s definitely a flower. The thing inside of him pushes again, and he lurches, his body convulsing as he coughs and tries to force it out. The growth hits his uvula, and he gags. Atlas shoves his hand into his mouth and this time, when his fingers hit the growth, he grabs it and yanks.

He can feel his esophagus being wrenched upwards. It’s like there are wires cutting into the flesh, and for a moment, he’s convinced the inside of his neck will be sliced to strips. He screams and snatches his hand out of his mouth. The flower in the sink mocks him, the deep red of its bloody petals glaring against the porcelain. Atlas hunches over the counter and tries to breathe through his nose. He can feel the blood from the back of his mouth making its way slowly to the front and watches it drip out from between his lips. It stains the sink even further. The contrast is beautiful in a way, reminds him of the red carnations in Leilani’s hair.

Atlas goes to the kitchen, stirs a tablespoon of salt into a cup of water, tilts his head back and gargles and spits into the sink. A few petals and leaves swirl in the pink water before getting caught in the strainer. He closes the front door, which he had left wide open. Then he goes to his room, changes, and goes to bed.



## The Grasshopper

*Hannah Bray*

He peeks over a leaf at me,  
This grasshopper with big, black eyes.  
Do not worry, little friend;  
I am not like those despised.

My feet I tread on carefully,  
From my tongue escapes no sound;  
I know I am a visitor here  
And walk on sacred ground.

You need not hide behind the kudzu  
Leaf and study me in fear.  
Just let me sit and watch a while;  
You won't know I am here.



## Thirteen

*Aislinn Bellew*

The winds wrote their last swift notes.  
Yesterday eroded inside her. At dawn,  
her foot fell like a slab  
of cold still granite  
For days she opened and closed her eyes.  
Here is her mind: A hollow  
Sense of being,  
Mother's open bedroom closet,

A life. Here is her company.  
She struggled to breathe,  
she bit the inside of her mouth,  
and she'd let herself. "Fall,"

she whispered in the silence,  
while clenching her shirt  
collar, coaxing it to spread:  
Pale skin, bony fingers, feathers.



## Fool

*David Hester*

If I jumped off this cliff,  
Are you willing to catch me?  
'Cause I'm on my heels  
As love's pushing me over.  
I might be doomed,  
But what do I have to lose?  
-My simple pride over you?  
A precious love always rule.

To tell you the truth,  
I doubt you'll never be mine.  
To tell you the truth,  
I still hope in love fantasies.  
To tell you the truth,  
I'm just a boy underneath,  
But you're a woman with plans  
And hopes in reality.

But I hope you save me  
From my stupidious fall.  
The truth's that it's a dream  
And not to be guaranteed.  
Through these blue-toned words  
There's a reddish compassion.  
So the truth of the matter  
is I'm a sucker for you.

## LCH

*Elyie Basselin*

Her eyes close to block the pounding  
Caused by bright, all-seeing lights.  
She wipes the sweat from her cold  
Hands; she'd soon be cleaning blood stains.  
Opening her eyes, she sees the menacing  
hole  
Consuming the head of her baby.  
She cries and gently strokes her baby  
When someone starts pounding  
At the door. The doctor touches the hole  
As the baby tries to steal his special lights.  
On her head, his finger's touch leaves stains  
And causes a feeling of endless cold.  
Outside, the breeze breathes chills of cold;  
The mother holds her warm baby.  
The needle clips the vein, splattering stains  
On the gauze, and the rubber band sends a  
pounding  
Feeling through the baby's arm. Lights  
Sparkle in her eyes - she's unaware of the  
hole.  
The mother places her finger in the hole,  
Her body's reaction is immediate, cold.  
Fingers lick her spine and colorful lights  
Fill her vision. She admires her baby,  
Whose innocent smile, in the midst of  
pounding  
Emotions, courses through both bodies like  
the blood before it stains.  
The baby watches a single tear as it stains  
Her mother's face and reaches up to touch  
her hole.  
Two sets of eyes now watering, two heads  
now pounding.  
The doctor's interrupting voice is cold,  
But he speaks softly to the baby  
Who giggles and blinks up at the lights.  
At the thought of "cancer," the lights  
Burn her skin. They wash the blood away  
and the stains  
Become scars. The mother holds her baby  
Tight, trying in vain to forget the hole,  
But it looms above her daughter, whispering  
in the cold.  
The mother cradles her and each feels the  
other's heart pounding.

Jake  
Ben Lasseter

Sarah woke up in a fluster, her alarm clock was blaring. She sat up in bed and took a deep breath, closing her eyes and running her fingers through her strawberry blonde hair. She looked over at her alarm clock. "9:00"

"Uh oh..." she laughs nervously.

She jumped up and threw on yesterday's outfit, not wanting to go through picking another one out.

"I doubt anyone that will see me will care enough to notice," she said to herself.

She threw her MacBook and all her school books into her bag, swinging it over her shoulder and running out the door. Sarah took her keys out in a hurry and struggled to find the little silver one that fit into her door lock.

"Ahhhh. Not good, not good, not good!"

Reving the engine of her Prius, she sped to the library. She hoped that Jake would show. He hadn't before, and his excuses were always the same.

He would say, "Sorry babe, I was caught up with work."

Ugh.

She stumbled up the stairs of the library across from UAB, about to push open the doors...

"Wait," she thought.

She took a deep breath and held it, sighing with relief that she had gotten there on time. She put a huge smile on her face trying to radiate some happiness. To make herself feel better, Sarah walked into the library casually. Sarah shot questions at herself as she scanned the library, looking for Jake. "He's not here. What did I do wrong?" Sarah threw her MacBook out onto the table in the corner of the library, making sure she could keep a lookout.

She saw a teenage boy with a beanie looking in her direction. He seemed to be writing something while inspecting her.

"Mk... just smile Sarah and he will smile back, end of story." She told herself.

She breathed and put on the biggest smile that she could make.

The boy kindly smiled back, giving a little head nod in her direction, before putting his attention back to his writing.

~ 30 minutes later ~

"He'll never show up... Maybe I'm really not worth his time," she thought to herself.

The boy that smiled earlier, left, with a small group.

"AHHHH. NO STOP!" someone yelled from across the library.

Sarah's head shot up, looking towards the yelling.

It was Jake! He was half naked! Was that a bloody needle in his hand? It was! He was wearing a yellow Polo, and a pink pair of socks. Everything was exposed. His hair on his head perfectly combed.

"BLA DOO BAH! SHHH BOOBA!"

"Oh my god... of course. Bath salts! That's why he never showed? Fuck!" Sarah said to herself in disappointment for putting her trust into the hands of a crazy druggie. She should of known.

"BLAH LA." Jake screamed as he ran across the library, knocking books and laptops off of tables to crash onto the ground.

He stopped in front of Sarah and stared, quieting down. She tried not to look down, but into his eyes, a deep shade of brown and a tint of blue. His pupils dilated to a full extend, filling most of his eye.

"S...s...Sarah?" He managed to stutter.

Jake was quickly tackled by a huge black security guard, getting toppled over onto onto the ground. The security guard was knocked out from a nearby table he had hit his head against while falling. Jake sat there moaning in pain. The needle had gone through his hand! He sat up and looked at it curiously, slowly pulling at the syringe, his skin starting to tear and stretch. It came out with a pop.

Sarah stood angrily with her arms tensed at her side, her fists flexed.

**Modern Art**  
*Hannah Bray*

I'm told art is subjective  
And of that I am now sure  
For the art I see can hardly  
Be called that anymore.

The giant clothespin in the room  
Seems more a bench to me,  
But the others think it comments  
On some strange philosophy.

A square composed of tally  
Marks and framed upon the wall  
makes me wonder when these  
"Artists" decided not to try at all.

Oh, come look at these squiggles  
Here. Say how they're sublime.  
Look at how this basic shading  
makes it worth your dime.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder,  
Someone must have poked out mine  
Because the works I see on these walls  
Can hardly be called divine.



## I Scream for Ice Cream!

*Samantha Walker*

White rose sometimes bleed. The crimson liquid stains them and they are still exquisite, beautiful, ravishing. No one stops them from changing into something different. The midnight sky couldn't even scrutinize this natural flower.

A man in black stood at the back of the ice cream truck, blocking the boys path. "Come on, man," he complained, still holding a bucket of cinnamon ice cream. "I gotta go. I got a job to do." The man lifted a suitcase and opened it, turning it around for the boy to see. It would've been less ridiculous if this kid hadn't been wearing a pink polo shirt and an apron stained colorfully. But, it was worth it. The boy began to smile, looking up at the man. "Ya got a deal." He said as he grabbed the man's hand, shaking it enthusiastically. "Trust me, I won't let you down."

\*\*\*\*

Maxwell Harrison sat on a park bench, grinding his teeth in frustration as children ran around, screaming, laughing, and just being the awfully disgusting kids they were. He never was a mourning person, Maxwell- an unemployed 34-year-old man with barely enough money to make it through the day. He was always grumpy, especially around kids.

A little boy ran to the woman on the other side of the bench, who Max hadn't notice until now. The little boy was crying and screaming, pointing down at his knee. He'd scrapped it on the ground after some kid pushed him off the slide. The woman, who Max noted was most likely his mother, spoke in a soft voice, trying to calm him down. Max hated when people did that. He was trying his best to block everything out when the woman's voice rose a bit. "Sir? Um, sorry to bother you, but, do you have any band aids, or maybe some Neosporin?" Max looked at her, his eyes showing a hint of annoyance.

"Oh," he started, "sure. Doesn't every lonesome, childless guy at the park Have band aids for their non-existent kids?"

The woman just stared at him in shock. Suddenly, she turned pale, wide eyed, and screamed. Max turned around to see what she could've been screaming at. There, about three feet away, stood a young man wearing a pink polo shirt, khaki shorts, and an apron with a few colorful stains on it. He was standing by an ice cream truck, and in his hand was a knife. Some kids were crying, some were screaming, some were even hiding behind their parents. The boy with the knife kept yelling, calling names that even Max thought weren't at all appropriate for such a place. Max was suddenly so peeved he decided to leave. As he stood from his seat, the boy shot his gaze to him.

"Hey," he shouted "where da ya think you're goin Geeze?" This ticked Max to his last tock. He turned and started walking towards the boy.

"You'd better watch yourself, bumhead!"

"Who ya callin bumhead-" he paused, "bumhead?" Max chuckled a bit.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize how frightening you were. I'm scared now." He laughed as the boy's face grew hot red with anger. He couldn't help but laugh because to him this furious boy in a pink polo shirt was just too adorable to truly be afraid of.

Then, Max saw a glinting flash. He started to cough, then gag. He dropped to his knees and held his throat. A metallic taste rose from the back and pushed its way passed his teeth, and through the split of his lips. He looked down at his now bloody hand, then up at the boy. Dark red stains not only on his apron, but everywhere. The last thing Max saw before his vision blurred was the boys smirk, and the glint of a carefully sharpened, blood coated knife. As he faded out, he could hear the familiar song that the ice cream truck always played. Then, everything went dark, and silent.

Nothing. That was it for a few seconds. Suddenly, something. Memories came flooding in like a wave on a stormy night out on the ocean, yet, they weren't all special to Max. He didn't care about their events.

He didn't care about the day he found a stray dog, naming it Shelly. Not even when Shelly darted across the street and was flattened to the solid tar. He didn't care about all the times his dad lied, telling him that he'd come home soon. Or the time his mom finally told him that they divorced and that dad would not be



home.

Max didn't care about the time his older brother got shot on his way to his car after a late shift at The Burger House. He turned away from the day he and his mom stayed by his side in the hospital. He pushed away from the night his dad came rushing in the room too late to say goodbye. And the day his house burnt down because his mom was too drunk to realize she had left the stove on before walking over to a friend's house to cry about everything. He didn't care about any of that.

He only cared about the night He lost everything, really just the last thing he had left. The day his life permanently changed.

The park was empty but for the teens that flipped and flopped over puddles and other obstacles. The smell of fresh approaching summer hung in the air, the stars danced across the midnight blanket that covered the city with a tranquil warmth.

"Hey, man," one boy called out over the all too familiar song playing in the background. "What this fool doing out so late?" the song continued.

"I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream!"

The kids turned to the street where an ice cream truck had parked parallel to them. They all stood there, waiting. Suddenly, the door opened, but no one stepped out. Instead, the river of silence was met with a sudden splash, or rather bang of a gunshot. Max turned around to run, then froze in his tracks. Donnie, his best friend, other brother, fell to his knees. There was a new mixture in the air.

Time slowed to a halt.

The blood finally stopped dripping, as the grumpy man that everyone knew as Maxwell Harrison, fell into the dark red puddle that stained the pavement. A hint of a fresh summer sent hung in the air, now tainted with the eye watering sent of death. Such a strange mix that This man, drenched in his own blood had had the unfortunate pleasure of smelling for the second and last time.



## Benefits of Teaching

*Surina Prabhu*

All day, she saw and taught students- nerds, jocks, goths, and ones she couldn't quite figure out with just one class. Every afternoon, as the overwhelming stench of students filled her nose, she walked into the jam-packed hallway and made her way out of the school and into the refreshing outdoors. The day would just repeat itself, but with a new school and new students. She was ever present. Even when the students were overly sophomoric, she'd dismiss it, lean over her podium and continue the lesson for those that had half a mind to pay attention. Then again, there were those days where absolutely no one paid attention, and those were fine too; it gave her a break from the overbearing pressures of being a substitute teacher. People were probably saying that she was too lenient with the children, but she preferred to look at it as letting them live freely if only for a moment-who knew when they would be able to do it again?

She kept a notebook on the edge of her desk for documenting bad behavior of the seventh graders for the original teacher. The students, unaware of the notebook, scribbled notes that they passed to each other like unruly wind, and the careful look on their face turned into a different emotion when they realized that they had been caught.

"I... I'm so sorry. I'll pay attention now!" the naïve ones nervously rambled.

Or, if the student was more confident against the substitute when told to put it up, looked her in the eye and dared, "Make me."

The substitute walked down the aisles of chairs to the note passers and, no matter how ambitious they acted, their faces faltered and fell as quick as rain when she stopped next to them. They all acted this way, all of them. Maybe it was her height, towering over them, that made them respond this way. One thing she couldn't say was "you're in trouble" or "no". As a child she had learned to take advantage of the small pleasures in life, and to reap their benefits to the fullest. So, to the naïve ones, she showed them how to discretely hide it, while with the confident ones, she took up the note and read it to herself while laughing, then gave it back when she was finished.

One dwindling afternoon, when there were no children's names written down in the journal on the edge of the substitutes desk, the original teacher snaked up the rows of chairs with an unreadable look on her face. Something seemed different about this teacher than the previous ones she'd encountered. Her posture was rigid and stiff, her lips pressed into a thin line as she entered the room. Normally, the teacher would have a smile upon



his/ her face and a child-like joy upon coming into the classroom and seeing her, but not this one. The teacher's face slowly curved into a degrading look as her eyes slithered up and down the substitute's appearance and desk. In response, the sub studied her as well, her arms tightly crossed. She took note of the teacher's suit. It looked as if the last time she'd worn it was just yesterday, with a polished gleam and a faint aroma of Tide soap. The teacher lightly ran her fingers over the journal's blank pages. Upon noticing the lack of ink, she slammed the journal shut.

The teacher suspected that the substitute had not been paying attention to the children, as she knew how badly

**Pink Flowers**

*Dahlia*

they behaved, and the anger slowly built up in her body. She began to ask the substitute about why there were no names in the journal and how there were always names in her own.

The substitute did not think of the consequences of not answering, as she always did her own thing, nor of the way her mother scolded her when she forgot a chore. She thought of the rush of adrenaline she gained when she jumped into the freezing lake on vacation when told not to as an eleven-year old. Her mother always warned her of how people sometimes wouldn't understand her lust for life, her thirst for an adventure. Those thoughts in mind, the substitute only drew open the drawer that contained paper and began to construct a paper airplane with a note stuck between its wings. The teacher was appalled at the fact that the substitute ignored what she wanted to talk about. She had the idea to tell the dean about the rudeness of the substitute and turned to walk out the door.

Suddenly, the substitute threw the airplane straight in the direction of the teacher and immediately, the teacher's hands flew up to catch it, as quick as lightning striking the ground. The smell of faint spit to create the creases in the plane whizzing through the air brought back the memory of her childhood, along with the stunts she'd never participated in. The teacher's attitude lifted instantly as she let out a breath of satisfaction from not letting the plane hit the floor. She looked up at the substitute with a look of happiness but also confusion. Her eyes lit up with understanding when she glanced at the note dangling on the side, and then not to the substitute's surprise, she smiled. Her eyes scanned the handwritten note with admiration, and the note read "Live and let live. Life is about having fun."







Bird Study  
*Elyie Basselin*



## Never Forget *Dahlia Henderson*

The teacher who works even after midnight  
The teacher with the sensible shoes  
The most patient teacher  
The teacher who never forgets a student  
The teacher who has almost no time for themself  
The teacher who is the topic of the gossip  
The teacher who is underestimated  
The teacher who is underappreciated  
The teacher who is underpaid  
The teacher with the endless stack of papers to grade  
The teacher who is always exhausted  
The teacher from out of the country  
The teacher who has to be repetitive  
The teacher who is always critiqued  
The teacher who tries to be a good role model  
The teacher who hides their real emotions  
The teacher who has to be a parent  
The teacher who loves her students  
The teacher who tries

## Anti-Ode to "It's Fine" *Kimberly Allred*

In the morning he clothes himself in regret. For breakfast he consumes the waffles his mother made, "they're fine."  
Though he makes no attempt to smile. He thinks to himself "Today is going to be fine."  
In school he keeps his elbows covered, warding off human interaction "I'll be fine" he whispers.  
Keeping his shirt sleeves balled in his palms, he finds a sense of relief. He watches the seconds drip by like molasses "It will be fine" he repeats to himself.  
When asked how he is doing he mechanically replies, "I'm fine" he lying through his coffee stained teeth.  
His books plunge to the ground as a result of Dylan. He just whispers to himself "it's fine."  
"I hate you!" cries a mysterious voice. Only later does he realize it was himself, remember Cody "you're fine."  
Though he tells himself "it's fine" regularly, he has yet to believe it.  
"It's Fine" - a phrase said by Mrs.Cox at least fifty times a day.

## My Dear Franklin

*Anna Grace Dasher*

When I was five, my mother took me to the library where she worked, and set me free to read. I roamed through the bookshelves, and quickly worked my way up from picture books to mythology, and then the books beyond. The library became my sanctuary; its books the key to my freedom from reality.

As I turned six, I began school, and quickly became friends with all my teachers. The other children were mysteries, because they rarely spoke to me. I didn't really mind, because I had the characters in the books I read to keep me company; my favorite friend was "Peter Pan" and we often flew to "Neverland." My teachers became worried that I'd never make a real friend.

At age seven, I made a real friend; he was a shy boy by the name of Franklin. We met among the bookshelves, and because we shared the same love of reading, we rarely left each other's sides. Every day we would find a new place to hide among the bookshelves and tables in every corner of the library and dive into another story. At thirteen, Franklin moved to my school, so my teachers had no reason to worry. We found our favorite book at that time to be *Fahrenheit 451*, and we talked about its characters and plotline for hours on end.

When we were fifteen, we began to be bullied, but we hoped it wouldn't last. My dear friend Franklin got the worst of their so-called "jokes." He was beaten, teased, and harassed. His tormentors had become the firemen, and they'd sent their mechanical hounds to destroy him. With metal claws and clicking paws always close behind him. I watched as my friend became a sullen mess as he told he was fine, and when they came out of the shadows I ran from him to hide.

At age seventeen, my friend lay dead, a smoking gun in hand. I hadn't done anything to keep their metal jaws at bay, and now their jaws had found him, and my dear Franklin lay limp on the floor, his skin not yet pale, like it was still full of life. I knew it was those awful firemen who'd caused my friend to do this, but I was the mindless watcher who watched as they caught hold and killed him.

Now my dear Franklin is gone, but my memory of him still holds true, of that shy, smiling reader who became my only friend. I now run the library where he and I met, and will make sure it is a safe haven for those like you and me.



## Faded Yellow Knockout Rose

*Surina Prabhu*

My father asked me, What is the yellow faded rose?

.... I didn't know how to respond.

I guess it could be the way a chipmunk hurriedly crosses a busy and fast paced street,  
worrying for its life,

but more concerned with if it makes it to wherever it needs to get to.

Or perhaps it is the hole to produce the highest note on a flute,  
its sweet sound coursing through the air.

It looks like the sound of icicles dropping,  
clinking against the mouth of a limestone cave's ground.

Maybe it is a kitchen aid,  
churning its seeds and giving life to ingredients, turning it to something new.

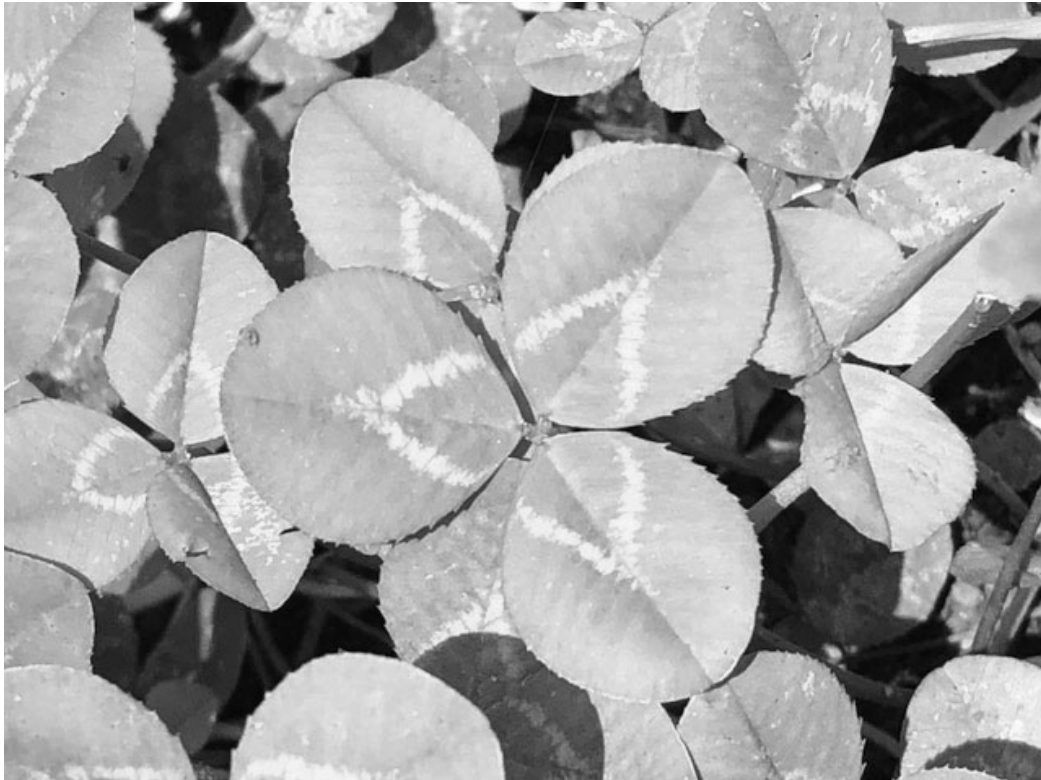
The flower is perhaps the cross on the stained glass,  
A natural beauty that even though has been around for many centuries, its wonder still rings true.

Maybe it is a double rainbow,  
gleaming presently after a sun shower, disappearing only after bringing a smile to a child's  
round face.

Or a pair of cracked spectacles,  
allowing the general images of the world to be seen,  
but hiding the men planning a mass murder,  
so that the person could live in peace.

Perhaps it is a first white pawn moved in a chess game,  
Pushing the game forward but dying the quickest- unless  
the strategy holds out through the seasons of the game.

It is the letter W: water, woo, wake, wonder, and wither.



## Puncture

*J. Hosier*

We gathered our bettings, concealed our straps, and cruised through the neighborhood, settling into an untouched alley.

Javier dug into the rolls left there by the imam. His number was 8, as he had predicted; a collective groan passed as the few, war-torn bills reached his worker's hands. A sly cackle passed his lips as he gathered his dice; his intent was unjust.

Joni was desperate, betting the cigarette she kept in her ear. She was determined to not lose to that man, who she once loved. Once. Her ragged yet musical voice tugged on Javier's shoulder. "Come on, baby, you know I need that money for smokes. Why you always gotta pick on me?"

Jesus was quiet but anxious, sweat running down his brow, jittering to himself, keeping his hand near his waist. Penniless became his stack, and reasonable was his fear. He could see a rotation of red and blue light in his eyes, a siren wailing within the confines of his id, and he was determined to never be caged again.

The punctures from Javier's butterfly knife to his waist formed a star if you squinted the right way.

We left the dice there, and they seemed to melt gently with the pool of blood, luck transposing with foolishness, like we were the example from a sermon's lesson. The crickets sang in conspiracy with the local bar. It was a singular experience.

## Christianity

*Hannah Bray*

Emilia's mother has just returned from dinner, and her face is as red as the wine she has consumed. Emilia is at the phase in her book where she ignores the outside world in favor of fiction.

That evening the two sit together and Emilia half-listens to her mother complain about her dinner companions. She heard how they supposedly hogged the bottle of wine and how some man or other had done the same with the conversation.

"And you should hear the things he talks about," her mother says. She looks at her daughter as if debating whether or not to venture into specifics. After a moment, she continues. "He's not going to heaven; that's for sure."

Emilia yawns and says, offhandedly, "If there is a heaven."

They are both shocked by the statement. A silence falls that is only interrupted by the turning of pages, as Emilia turns her attention back to her book and works her way toward the end of a chapter. She tries not to think of what she has just told her mother. This was not the way she wanted to question religion, nor was it the time or place.

The woman is likely drunk, anyway, she tells herself. The conversation will not be remembered in the morning. Still, it was best to try to clean up her mess on the off-chance this memory lasted the night. "I meant-" She peeks over the book cover, afraid to meet the stare. "I meant that, you know, maybe it's metaphorical." Her mother nods, trying to look thoughtful, though she seems to sway a bit with the movement. Emilia closes her book and asks to hear more of how the dinner went. They avoid religion as they talk. Emilia eventually turns on the television and they both relax on the couch.

They listen to the tinny laughter of *Frasier's* laughtrack. To the sirens of a police car that carry from the city. The flicker of a lamp and its dying bulb, trying to last through the night.



## The Lie

*Precious Sturdivant*

Mom getting home from work, so stressed and tired. She always tells us “DO NOT EAT HER FAVORITE CHIPS”. Mom called me into the den, I knew I was in trouble because she had look. She asked me did I eat her chips?,

I mumbled under my breath “YES”

She said “HUH”

I said no ma'am with a serious look.

Then she called my sister and asked her the same question “Did you eat my chips?”

She said “No” then giggled

Mom said “you a lie”

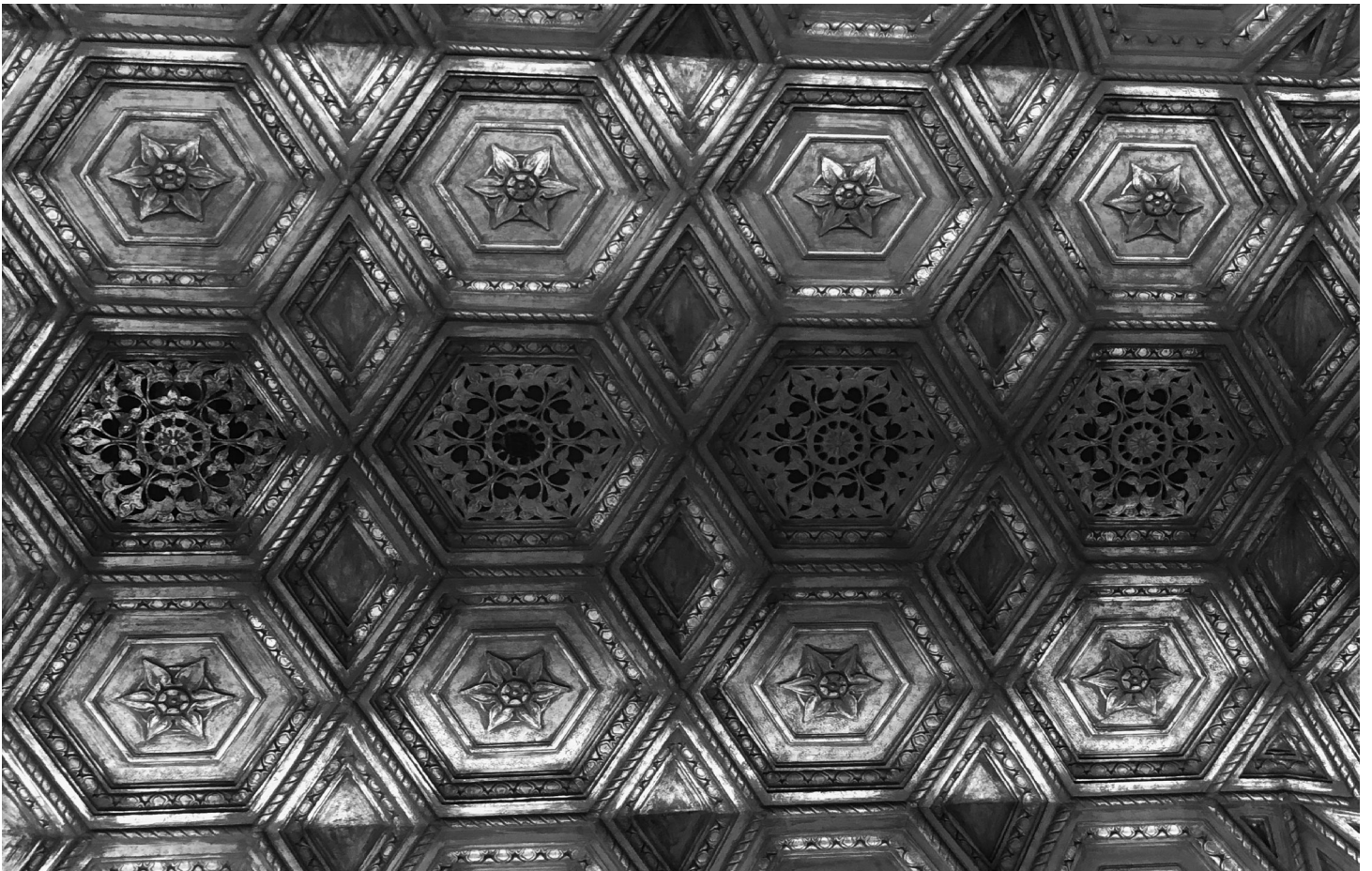
Sister said “No, I'm not”

I was just sitting there with my serious face like “no I didn't”

And so on me and my sister said both, “Tony ate those chips” and we kept going on and on.

Mom just said “mhhh bye.”

So when my step dad got home he got fussed at even though I ate those chips.



The Ghost of her Past  
Aislinn Bellew

Delilah saw the light of the morning peeking through the curtains to kiss the faces of her favorite purple flowers. She longingly looked at a photo of her husband in his air force uniform. His face was decorated with pride yet riddled with fear. His jaw was held high, but there was a tension that Delilah could spot immediately. She could almost hear his voice telling her he would be home soon. Of course, that wasn't possible though. He was far away and she knew her imagination was wild. Her knees creaked as she stood, and her body ached from the day before in the garden. She pulled on her sweater and began to walk out of her pale bedroom. She journeyed to the door. The outside world hit her with a wave of content and warmth. She remembered her husband again. She remembered the days in the garden when he would balance a paint brush between his fingers and sing an old hymn as he portrayed Delilah in his own beautiful perspective.

"Good morning my love," a strong voice said. A gust of cold air hit her.

"I couldn't leave you here alone," the voice whispered. Tears came to the woman's eyes without warning.

"I really have gone crazy." Delilah ran to her Volkswagen beetle. It was a depressing gray color. She didn't mind it especially in that moment. Her fingers furiously fiddled with door until it popped open. She fell in and jammed the key into the ignition. She started down the driveway and made a sharp left turn.

"Marie, I'm serious." The phone shook wildly in Delilah's hand.

"I'm trying to work, hon. It is not a good time," Marie said trying to hide the coldness. She failed.

"Then we can meet in the library." Delilah's heart was heavy. Her only friend was a workaholic who most likely wouldn't care about the situation.

"No, Delilah." She slammed on the breaks in the middle of the old road. Delilah hung up the phone and made a harsh turn back towards her home. The air around her turned cold.

"It's alright," The voice from before coaxed.

"You don't know that. You're just a figure of my imagination."

"Please..." Delilah felt a cold sting on her shoulder. She turned to the passenger seat to see a smoky figure. The eyes were beautiful in the dark face. The car swerved with an ear-piercing scream. Delilah swung her door open and tumbled onto the cool prickly grass of summer. She steadied herself on the ground with a trembling hand. The large figure dipped down to reveal it had no appropriate form of legs. Their faces were just inches apart. Delilah breathed in his chilly air and snapped her head away in disbelief.

"I'll prove it to you," the figure pleaded. A beautiful noise came from the being. An old hymn that was carved in her heart.

"You are my sunshine

my only sunshine

You make me happy

When skies are grey..." it sang.

"Marcus..." She raised her sweaty palm to the figures painfully cold face.

"It's you."

## Playtime with the Kangaroo Mates

*Dahlia Henderson*

I don't know how much  
kangaroo mates like  
to live their lives,  
but I wish I could do  
loads of exciting things with them.  
I hope it would be like  
having fun on the playground  
in kindergarten.  
We wouldn't discuss  
real life issues because  
we knew none. I would simply say,  
"Look how high I can jump!"  
They would reply,  
"Ripper mate, but I think I can jump higher, ay?"  
They would leap  
and leap  
which would lead to  
long-jumps  
and speed hopping,  
until eventually,  
I would be left behind, panting.  
"We should stop, she don't look so good."  
one would say.  
"Ah, she'll be right,"  
another would say.  
But I wouldn't be.  
How strange it must be  
to leave all cares behind  
and become one of the kangaroo dudes.  
Their life would be  
amazing, but let's face it,  
I can't keep up  
with a lifestyle like that anymore.  
I'm where I'm supposed to be-  
almost an adult,  
college bound,  
my future ahead





Dana Aldeeb is a rising sophomore at Vestavia Hills High School. She is a very upbeat and happy person, and enjoys swimming, hiking, and playing volleyball with her friends. When she gets older, Dana wants to go to UAB to become an orthodontist but have writing and photography as hobbies.



Anna Grace Dasher is a rising junior at Gadsden City High School. Her favorite classes are Chemistry and English. She is part of the Gadsden City Color Guard, she plays trumpet, and she is also part of the choir at her school. She hopes to study in order to become a hydroponic scientist. She has had two of her poems published.



Elyie Brooke Basselin is a rising senior at Evangel homeschool. She is the social media coordinator for her class, a member of Beta club, Key club, and the Latin Honor Society. She has participated in drama and choir. Elyie enjoys writing her novel *Chasing Dreams*, sketching and painting.



Tiffany Duong is a rising senior at Hoover High School, where she sings in the Chamber Choir and GraceNote, the 12-member female acapella group. She has performed in five AllState choirs and will perform at the Sydney Opera House in July of 2018.



Aislinn Bellew is a rising eighth grader at Morgan County Middle School. She is an enrichment writing student and has committed to the art of literature. She writes songs, poetry, and short stories. She determined to follow her music and writing passion through high school and on into college.



Kimberly Frazier is a rising college freshmen who reluctantly had to become an adult. Kimberly is set on going to Wallace State Community College to chase her dreams. In the 11th grade she won a writing award. Her hobbies include entertaining her old soul and hanging out.



Hannah Bray is a rising junior who will be attending ASFA next year. While she does not have a plethora of piñatas, she has a plethora of interests which are too numerous to include here. Among them are knitting, reading, writing, casual gaming of a Destiny 2 variety, and sporadically re-watching Galavant.



Y'onna Hale is a rising freshman at Carver High School. She has been in the Junior Honors Society at her middle school and she has gotten promoted as number five out of eleven students for Valedictorian and Salutatorian. She is here to expand her poetry and story skills.





David Hester IV is an upcoming junior at Ramsay High School. In his last year at Phillips Academy, he participated in the school's art fair and drama department. During a drama show, he did his first poem performances. The compliments he received helped encourage him to pursue a passion in music.



Gemma Mwenja is a rising junior at Shades Valley High School, in the Theatre and Dance Academy. This is her first year at the workshop, and she is interested in exploring creative writing in a new way. Gemma enjoys traveling because it allows her to experience new things.



Dahlia Henderson is a rising senior at Ephesus Academy. During her years, she has received many awards for her academic and athletic achievements. Her hobbies include drawing, basketball, and playing piano. When Dahlia graduates, she strives to become a hairstylist, but most of all, a pediatrician.



Madison Prim has recently graduated from Home-wood High School. She will be attending UAB as a freshman this fall and is planning to major in English. She would like to follow her passion for writing and work for a magazine, while also writing novels of her own someday.



J. Hosier is a rising senior in Gardendale High School. They plan to major in political science or music composition in either UAB, Montevallo, or a big ol' hole in the ground. They are a writing contributor for the web magazine Play Underground! They are also a multi-instrumentalist, painter, archivist, Mets fan, and vinyl collector.



Surina Prabhu is a rising junior at the Altamont School. Throughout her years there, she has won a silver key through the Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards. She enjoys writing, acting, and singing, and participates in cross country and soccer.



Ben is an rising freshman, going into Alabama School of Fine Arts for creative writing. He is hard working, but an easy going guy. He enjoys writing poetry, meditation, and hanging out with friends. He plans to go to California for college, and major in creative writing and/or entrepreneurship.



Eleanor Roth is a rising sophomore at the Altamont School. She studies French and Mandarin and Japanese. She has played flute with the Birmingham Youth Wind Symphony and earned honors at the Solo & Ensemble festival. Two of her photos earned Gold

Keys in the Scholastic Photography Competition.



Hailey Sanderson is an upcoming senior at Ephesus Academy. She enjoys eating, sleeping, and reading. She is not sure what college she would like to attend, but she does plan on going. She wants to pursue a career where she can be happy and help others. Hailey did not enjoy writing at first, but gave it a shot. So far, she likes it.



Tayla Willis is an upcoming sophomore at McAdory High School, where she plays the clarinet. In 2014, she won the “Best Writer” award and was submitted to the Literary Arts Magazine. She spends her time writing movies and short stories, but is currently working on a book.



Jamiah Stroud is an upcoming sophomore at Moody High School. She likes playing basketball and volleyball, as well as running track. She really enjoys going to parties and hanging out with her friends. She doesn't have many academic achievements but go add her on Snapchat (@pinnacle\_315).



Precious Sturdivant is an upcoming freshman and will be attending George Washington Carver High School. She was in the (National Junior Honor Society). Her dream is to become an anesthesiologist. But if that doesn't work out she wants to become a veterinarian. She plays volleyball, basketball, softball, and track.



Samantha Walker is a rising junior at Leeds High School. Her work can be found in Accomplished, a book of poetry. She enjoys walking, sleeping, eating, writing, listening to music, playing the marimba, and loves scary stories and movies. But over all, she likes to be herself. She writes some pretty dark stuff, and talks about a lot of weird things.





The Jaybird



Color of Luck  
*Eleanor Roth*



Eye  
*Elyie Basselin*



