



2022-
2023

Tapestries

2022-2023

Each year the School of STEAM hosts the Gunard B. Carlson Creative Writing and Visual Arts Contest, a competition open to all Saint Francis University undergraduates. Students may submit written entries of up to 3,000 words in the following categories: (1) fiction, (2) creative nonfiction, including personal narratives and memoirs, (3) essay writing, and (4) poetry, with a minimum of five poems per submission. Students also may submit works of visual art, such as photographs, sculptures, paintings (oil, water, and acrylic), sketches, and collages.

The Department of English and World Languages also hosts the annual Father Callan Poetry Contest, which aims to celebrate Father Thomas Callan's love of literature. This contest, funded by the generous donations of SFU alumnus and published poet Paul Martin, is open to all undergraduate and graduate students.

The winners and honorable mentions of each contest are published in our annual edition of *Tapestries*, Saint Francis University's literary and visual arts magazine. This edition includes the winning entries and honorable mentions of our 2022-2023 contests. Opinions expressed in this magazine do not reflect those of the contest judges and magazine editor or those of the Saint Francis University community.

For more information about the Gunard B. Carlson and Fr. Callan Poetry contests, please contact:

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Tapestries

Weaving the Threads of Creativity and Innovation

Faculty Editor

Brennan Thomas

Cover Artwork by Cassidy Bezek

“Mountain with a View” (1st Place Winner in the Visual Arts Category)

Acknowledgements

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Mr. Paul Martin, for his establishment and sponsorship of the Fr. Callan Poetry Contest, for which he also judged all submitted entries;

Drs. Patrick Farabaugh, Theresa Horner, Art Remillard, and Kent Tonkin, who judged all writing submissions for the Gunard B. Carlson Contest and selected the winners and honorable mention recipients in this category;

Ms. Carol Stoltz, for judging all visual art entries for the Gunard B. Carlson Contest and selecting the overall visual arts winner and honorable mention recipients;

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Ms. Marie Young and other members of the Marketing and IT teams, who published our magazine on the university's site for all students, faculty, and staff to access; and

All students who submitted writing and artwork for the Gunard B. Carlson and Fr. Callan Poetry contests. Your stories, poetry, essays, creative nonfiction pieces, and visual creations were imaginative, incisive, and inspiring.

Gunard B. Carlson Writing Judges

Dr. Patrick Farabaugh, Professor of Communication Arts

Dr. Theresa Horner, Assistant Professor of Public Health

Dr. Art Remillard, Professor of Philosophy

Dr. Kent Tonkin, Associate Professor of Business

Gunard B. Carlson Visual Arts Judge

Ms. Carol Stoltz, Head of Library Access Services

Fr. Callan Poetry Judge

Mr. Paul Martin, SFU Alumnus and Published Poet

Contest Coordinator & Magazine Editor

Dr. Brennan Thomas, Professor of English and Writing Center Director

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slap-in-the-face writing

by Ava Dzurenda

4th Place Winner, Gunard Carlson Contest

i don't want to be a writer.

i don't want to be a girl that can spit out word-for-word the MLA guidelines.

i
want
to
be
powerful.

i see the same girls day after day on social media sitting pretty in front of a camera reading what they have composed.

the effortless flow of words coming straight off of their tongues from places that seem like the highest of angelic heavens and the deepest of satanic hells from below.

words that i resonate with so deeply that they must have peeked inside of the areas I once deemed as nonpermissive in my soul

i want to write like this, too.

yet every time I sit in front of my laptop screen in the darkest depths of the night,
nothing meaningful seems to formulate in my brain.

it's sometimes hard to feel anything but entirely insane.

ideas are all around me and trickle throughout my thought process like that of a branching stream,

but for some reason whenever i actually want to put these thoughts on paper,
it makes the butterflies in my stomach ruthless—you probably know what i mean.

i want nothing more but to routinely obliterate my laptop keyboard with all of my strength.

i don't want to be good,
i don't want to be great,

i want to write something so powerful that the intensity and quality of the words that I choose would be enough to slap someone

straight
in
the
face.

what feels like every inch of my soul is covered in tightly wrapped chains.
all of my words are locked inside a vault.
my body nearly implodes from the everyday strain

i really don't like to share what i write,
but sometimes it's the only thing that keeps my brain from starting a self-inflicted fight.

writing keeps me grounded on this earth,
but it does make me ponder on the what ifs.

writing acts as a leash,
pulling me back from a place of insanity that would be unhealthy for me to reach.

writing keeps me safe from the monsters that reside in the crevices of my brain,
and quite honestly, writing makes me feel just a tad bit less strange.

i don't want to be a writer.
i really don't.

i want to be someone who brings about a sense of transformative, mighty power.

slap-in-the-face type of writing,
as some would say.

i want to write *powerfully*.

i want to do this so well that people stay up at night.

can't sleep.

all so that they can think about how that piece *seriously* resonated with them.

Poem 3

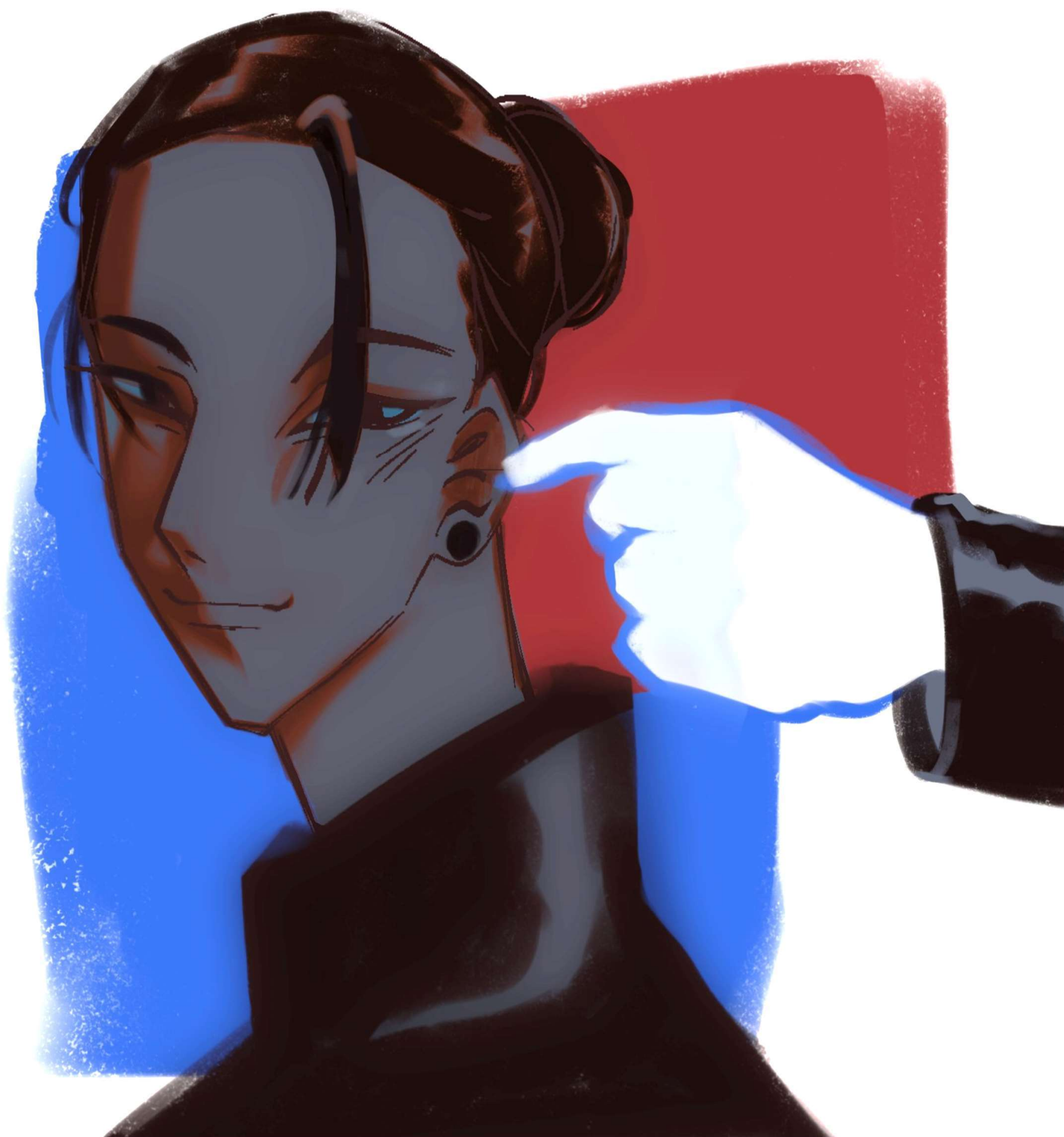
by Connor Clarke

2nd Place Winner, Father Callan Poetry Contest

Elusive A plus

Minnow through a child's fingers

Study more they say



Flower for the Damned by Hayun Park

Growing Up

by Rory Schaeffer

“I Want To Be 5 Again!”

When I was 5 years old,
I remember how badly I wanted to be 10
How impatient I was for my age to become two digits and to hold up my 10 little fingers
when someone asked my age.
When I turned 10,
I couldn't wait until I was 13.
To become a teenager, to be considered “grown-up.”
When I reached 13,
I realized I wasn't treated like a grown up,
and so I did everything I could to act older than I was.
I wanted to be taken seriously.
Then my 18th birthday came around.
Everything had changed.
I guess I was kind of an adult?
My friends and family were different,
I was different.
I was never home anymore and I had my own new life.
I turn 21 next year
And honestly no one really prepared me for the guilt that comes with growing up—
realizing that you wasted your childhood,
because you always wished to be something you weren't.
No one ever prepared me for this.
This broken world, that my younger self so desperately wanted to become a part of.
Now I am 20 years old,
And I just want to be 5 again.

My Coffee Cup

I would say that my childhood is much like the fresh cut flowers that line my windowsill.
The flowers have long since lost their color, their sweet scent, and grow gray with mold.
And I know that they've died,
But yet here I am,
Still trying to keep them alive just a little bit longer.
Adding more water to the vases
As if a little bit of love can save them.
And here I am itching to keep my childhood alive just a little bit longer.

Thinking that maybe looking through the old photo albums
And watching my favorite home movies from years ago where I learn how to ride a bike
Will somehow stretch out my disappearing childhood memories.
Now there's a mug of coffee that sits beside my computer with the endless tabs of college
notes and my doctorate school schedule.
And I know that the coffee has long since gone cold in my cup,
But yet here I am
Still sipping at the dregs of my youth.
Hoping that I can make the taste of childhood last just a little bit longer

Just a Child.

You loved walking home from school
Walking through the two stop signs that you and your sisters referred to as the "portal"
You loved the lunch time chats
Bartering for a better snack with your classmates.
You loved your razor scooter
Caring for the little scraps and scratches it gave you.
But now your homework is late.
You have missed the deadline.
That lump in your throat
It's not for the playful playground tears,
It's your future fears.
And life decisions you have to make before you turn 21.
You have to know who you are
Before you even know
Who you are.
You'll pick one life,
And say it so fast
With no room for regret.
Because how can you decide,
When you're just a child?

Enough Time

The leaves are falling.
My mother's hair has gotten longer and greyer
I think she dyes it more often now.
And the bags under my eyes have gotten heavier.
I am never going to be this young again, I am growing older.
I drive around this city wondering where in the world I am going to be in a year.
Will my childhood room still feel like home or just like a temporary stay in a hotel room?
Will my father's arms still offer the same comfort as they did when I was 8 years old?

I want to remember it all, but I don't think I will have enough time to.
My childhood is fading. I need more time. I don't think I will ever have
Enough time.

A Love Letter To My Childhood

I visited our childhood home today.
The nostalgia is building as I turn onto the brick road just a block away from our old
house,
Flooding my senses until I am 6 again,
Face pressed to the car window
To count the number of houses until
I see the numbers 22 that signal mine.
When I see that old brick house I can't help but wonder if little me would be proud of
who've I become
I remember what we hoped for
But I am nothing like that.
I love myself now, but would little me like me?
Little me, are you happy that our life is different from what we planned?
I promise we're getting the hang of this
We do different things from the things we once loved doing.
We no longer dance and draw for hours and hours on end.
Instead, we play soccer and withdraw at the end of the day, instead.
We no longer wish to grow up like we once did
I just want to preserve this moment and stay a kid.
I wonder if they'll ever invent a time machine,
So I can come back and give you a squeeze.
Reassure it will all be okay
Because as time goes on you are meant to change
Even though it might feel *strange*

Do You Know What Makes a Good Garden?

by Alyssa Baxter

Do you know what makes a good garden?

My grandma always says that a good garden makes you happy. It doesn't have to be something that other people think is pretty, or something that grows fruits and vegetables. It just has to make you happy. Grandma's garden makes me happy. She has little fountains where birds like to sit, and those little garden gnome statues that you see in the store but we can't buy because our apartment doesn't have a yard. Her garden has a big apple tree in it with a wooden swing where I like to sit in the summertime. Pappy made the swing for Grandma as a wedding present when they got married a long time ago.

I like that swing a lot. In the springtime, even when it's all rainy and gross out and mud gets all over my boots, the tree has these pretty flowers all over, and then in the fall, when all of the flowers are gone, there are apples that Grandma and me make pies out of. I get sad when all of the pretty flowers are gone because they make Grandma's whole garden smell like springtime, but Grandma always cheered me up by reminding me that they have to go away for us to get the apples to have pies, which are better than flowers anyway.

Do you know what makes a good apple pie?

My grandma always says that a good apple pie has lots of love in it. Other things, too, but mostly love. I'm not always sure how you put love in a pie, but Grandma's pies are the best, so we must do it right when we make them. I love Grandma's pies, just like I love her garden and the swing hanging on the apple tree. We put those cinnamon crunchy things in the pies and drink tall glasses of milk when we eat them. Grandma always has those cool straws that twist all over the place and you can watch the milk go up the straw while you drink before it gets to your mouth. We always race to see who can get the milk into our mouths faster. We only have them at Grandma's house because Mom says they are a special Grandma house thing. I like special Grandma house things.

Do you know what makes a house special?

My grandma always says that a special house has love in it, just like a good pie. Even though Pappy isn't at Grandma's house anymore, she says there is lots of love there. She says that I bring love into her house when Mom drops me off to go to work at the store on the weekends, and when Mom drops me off after school to go to work at the restaurant I can't go to until I'm older, and even when she drops me off when she has to go to work cleaning at night. I don't always understand that because sometimes I'm really tired and cranky when I come to Grandma's house, but it makes me happy when she says that. She also says that Pappy is still in the house even though he isn't. I haven't met him, because

he left before I was born, but lots of the stuff he made Gramma is still there, like the swing on the apple tree and the big dresser in Gramma's room and the rocking horse he made for Mom when she was a little girl. I'm too big for that now, which makes me sad, but Gramma always says that you never lose the memories that make you happy and I still have those.

Do you know what makes a good memory?

My gramma always says that a good memory is one that you want to keep safe and sound, like the pretty flowers we put in between pages of books. I love finding flowers with Gramma. I get to spend a lot of time with Gramma in the summertime when Mom works since I don't have school, which is super fun because we work in her garden and make milkshakes and read on the swing hanging from the apple tree. We make lots of good memories on those days. I like helping Gramma in her garden when Mom works because there are lots of pretty flowers, and I get all dirty and at the end of summer I get to pick the blackberries that come through the fence from the neighbor lady's garden. Her name is Susan, and she comes over to have lunch with us sometimes and then Gramma and Susan drink coffee, which is gross, and I drink orange juice and we play Scrabble or Mahjong or Gramma and Susan watch their stories while I color in the kitchen.

Do you know what makes a good story?

My gramma says a good story is one that you don't want to end, which makes sense, because the stories that she and Susan watch go on and on and on and on every day. I think the stories that Gramma watches are boring, but I really like the ones that she reads to me before bed when I stay with her or outside on the swing hanging from the apple tree. Those stories are all about princesses and dragons and sometimes a dog named Biscuit. I like that name. We don't have a dog because Mom says dogs are messy and too expensive, but I have a stuffed dog and his name is Biscuit. Biscuit loves the stories that Gramma tells, too. Sometimes, I make up my own stories to tell Gramma and Biscuit. In my stories, I'm never a princess, because princesses have to wear dresses and those stupid pinchy shoes Mom makes me wear on Christmas and they can't go out in gardens in the summertime and get all dirty. I think I'd want to be a dragon sometimes, because they can fly superfast and I could bake so many pies with my fire breath, but other times I don't want to be a dragon because what if I accidentally squished someone? Gramma always laughs real hard when I say that, but I think it's something that dragons must worry about a lot and maybe that's why they live alone in caves.

Do you know what it's like to live alone?

My gramma says that it can be sad living alone sometimes, but I think it would be nice. I could have a whole room to myself instead of having to sleep in Mom's room and I wouldn't get woken up in the middle of the night when the people living in the apartment beside us yell at each other. I like how Gramma's house is always quiet, even when the TV or the radio is on. You can hear all the birds chirping outside in the garden and the wind makes such a pretty sound when it blows through the branches on the apple tree.

Sometimes I think it's *too* quiet at night at Gramma's because you can't hear the birds and the wind can sound like a monster that wants to eat your toes, but I have Biscuit to keep me safe and Gramma's room is right down the hall if Biscuit and I get too scared. Gramma could come visit me if I ever get too lonely one day, and Mom, too, if she isn't working. We could all bake pies and play Scrabble and Gramma could watch her stories while she drinks coffee with Mom and I could go outside and get all dirty taking care of my garden. It's going to be just like Gramma's garden, except maybe I'd have blackberry bushes on my side of the fence so I wouldn't have to worry about taking them from some neighbor lady that might not be as nice as Susan. I think that that would make me really happy, except for not having a neighbor lady that's as nice as Susan.

Do you know what makes you happy?

My grandma says that I make her happy and my grandma makes me happy, too. I was real excited to come to Gramma's house today because it's almost time to make pies and maybe some of the apples will be ready by now, but Mom said Gramma wasn't home today. She said that she was with Pappy, which makes me happy because she hasn't gotten to see Pappy in a long time, but I'm also sad because Gramma is always home when Mom drops me off. I think Mom is sad that Gramma isn't home either, but she smiled when she told me to go play in the garden and got me a cup of orange juice with one of the special Gramma's house straws, even though Gramma only uses them for milk. I asked Mom when Gramma would be back after I'd gotten tired of being outside, and she said that she wouldn't be coming back because she was living with Pappy now and that made me more sad because she said that I couldn't go see them because it was too far away. She said that the place Gramma went to was called Heaven and that she was happy because she was there with Pappy and she had a garden that was even nicer than the one at her house and that Pappy had gotten it ready for her while he was gone so that she would have a nice place to go to.

Do you know what Heaven is?

My grandma never talked much about it, but my mom said it's a happy place where people go sometimes, but they can't go until they are ready so I can't go there to see Gramma. I'm going to miss my grandma a whole lot, but Mom said I'll get to see her one day when I'm older and ready, so I guess it's just like the flowers on the apple tree. They have to go away so that we can have something better later on. And, it's just like my grandma always says, I'll always have the memories that make me happy and that's all that matters.



Fukarashi Village: Named After the God of Time (Novel Preview)

by Taylor Kennedy

The crackling sound of shattered glass echoed through the deep forest, and each step he took sounded like that of a bone snapping in half. As he looked around the desolate forest, he felt an unwavering shiver slither down his spine. Tomo knew he was close, as the distasteful scent of what smelled like burnt flesh wafted through the cold, stale, and silent air. This was the place, the place carrying the evil aura that he had sensed since he began on the path to God knows what. A demon? A spirit? Throughout his thoughts, the only things that Tomo could conjure up in his frantic mind were things that were not human or even remotely close.

The constant crackling sound of the ground beneath him as he walked angered him, the sound echoing louder and louder each time he took a step. All he wanted it to do was stop. Then suddenly, he froze. His legs locked together and trembled, as if a random ghost had drifted its way into his vision. What the hell was happening? He stood there struggling to move, each bit of effort sapping half of his strength. All he could do was hope that this was just pure paranoia that caused this strange incident to occur....and not something else.

* * *

It had been exceptionally sunny that day on November 25, about the sunniest it had been in a very long time for Fukarashi village. The sounds of birds chirping filled the air, and the colors were so warming to the eyes. The sun shone brightly through Tomo's window, practically blinding him with its glorious rays as he sat up in bed trying to eliminate those pesky sleepies from his eyes. Shielding his vision from the light of the sun, Tomo looked outside and smiled warmly. Sun meant warmth and good weather; most of all, sun meant no sign of sadness.

He sat up and changed into his navy-blue fighting gear and grabbed his weapons of choice. He decided to do some morning training since he'd been quite rusty and figured his skills could use a bit of a touch up. He walked outside his door to see a basket sitting upon the first step. There, the mellow colored basket had a note, gently pinned onto a pearl white blanket covering whatever was inside. Tomo curiously opened the note to see that only two long sentences were sloppily printed on it, stating, "You were chosen to protect and wield this powerful creature. Give it a name, and it shall be forever endearing to you for decades to come." Tomo looked at the note, then at the colored basket and pondered. He didn't know what to do with it, or, more importantly, what it was. He gently picked up the basket and brought it into his bedroom, being sure to remember to check on it after he finished his training.

When he came in sweating and panting as if he were a pup just finishing up a game of fetch, he ate a quick light snack, then wandered into his room to check on the mysterious basket. It was still sitting in the same place it was before and seemed to be surrounding Tomo with the feeling that he was destined and required to see what was inside. He slowly walked over to the basket and began to unravel the pearl-white blanket as it flashed his eyes with bright light when the sun's rays penetrated through his curtains and onto its white surface. He stumbled back as if God himself was about to enter the room. Once he gained his bearings and closed his curtains, he turned to look back at the blanket, which he could now see had a bright reddish-orange egg inside. The egg, covered in strange yet beautiful markings that Tomo had never seen before, was the color of the rarest ruby and it shimmered brightly even though no light was striking it. He looked at it with severe confusion and interest. What was in an egg this gorgeous that he had the power to possess and control? Surely, it could only be an ordinary bird.... or could it? Tomo could feel a sudden headache approaching as the blood began to roughly pulsate against his skull.

He wrapped the egg back up and decided to go out for some fresh air and maybe to train with his friend Miaka, a kind and strong-headed girl of seventeen. At five and a half feet tall, Miaka had the ability to talk to animals as well as control nature itself. Tomo had always looked up to her as a kind and helpful role model since the day they became friends around seven years ago.

They both had so much in common; many children around the village constantly teased the friends that they would be the "perfect couple" because of their similar backgrounds. He began to walk along the path that led directly to Miaka's house when he heard a soft and sudden whisper coming from the direction of his home. "Come back," the strange voice demanded in a soft and light tone. "Come back." Tomo rubbed his head as the headache finally had reached its peak. This was all too sudden for a random eighteen-year-old boy to endure, and Tomo was becoming infuriated. He glanced around looking for any sign of a person, creature, or anything that could be talking to him in the distance but saw.... nothing.

Suddenly, he started to feel dizzy; he cradled back and forth on the narrow path, feeling more nauseous than he had ever felt before. He stumbled over to the nearest tree and gripped onto it tightly, digging his nails deep into the rough, textured tree bark to maintain his balance. The voice echoed more and more inside his head so that his brain could barely function. "SHUT UP!!!" Tomo yelled, scaring away the several birds perching in the tree before him. Tomo, who could barely walk or see clearly, stood there, feeling more and more queasy each second that passed by. He knelt down, trying so hard not to let the feeling of dizziness get the better of him. Within seconds, he felt his eyes suddenly start to close and then all surrounding him went black.

* * *

The feeling of something pinching his arm startled him awake. “W-what the...? W-where am I....?” he asked, still in a daze. As he looked around, he could already tell he wasn’t in the real world. This place was nothing more than what seemed to be a black hole to him or an infinite ominous void. He sighed and put his head in his hands. His feeling of being nauseous had not subsided any more than it had when he fell unconscious, and he felt as though at any moment every organ in his body would soon succumb to this severe nausea and migraine.

He groaned, trying to stand up, but couldn’t seem to find the strength to do so. He laid back down and stared into the dark abyss he wondered was a ceiling. Whatever was going on, it had to stop. Tomo had never experienced any physical pain this severe in his life. Perhaps this was because no one had ever managed to put a single scratch on him since he was little. This pain was all mental...so why was it so strong and vigorous? He made the decision to try to get the hell out of that place, whether he fell to his knees in pain or not, and began to trudge around, gripping tightly onto his abdomen as his eyes continued scanning around for any signs of an exit.

Then in the distance was a boy. He had cocoa bean colored hair and wore turquoise fighting gear, much like the garb Tomo was wearing. Tomo realized that this might be his only chance to escape from this painful desolate abyss, so he called out to him, flailing his one hand high in the air as the other one stayed placed on his churning stomach. “H-HELP....HELP ME PLEASE...! I-I DON’T KNOW WHERE I AM AND I’M IN GREAT PAIN....P-PLEASE HELP ME...!” he yelled, coughing. The boy just stood there as if he were totally oblivious to Tomo’s cries of agony.

He then felt another great pain in his stomach, like someone had just pierced a knife directly into his lower abdomen. “A-ACK....! W-what the hell....is happening...?” Tomo said as he looked and noticed the boy holding out his hand.

The boy looked into Tomo’s eyes and stated, “I will bring you out of this nightmare, if you swear to pledge your life to raising that egg you were graciously delivered this morning.”

Tomo nodded as he shakily raised his hand close enough to grab his. “W-what about this pain....? Make it stop.... please...” Tomo whispered weakly.

“That I cannot do, for I am not the reason why you are going through this extreme discomfort. But I am sure once you get out of this place, you’ll feel slightly better,” the boy continued. There was a shroud of bright light and then all went dark again.

Tomo leaped from his bed, practically giving himself whiplash as he sat up panting and shaking. He rubbed his head and looked over at the egg, still sitting in the basket. His stomachache was mostly gone, but he could still feel it present within his body. His headache, on the other hand, had remained just the same. He sighed angrily and crouched in his bed. The thoughts of how he had returned home had not concerned him. He simply wanted the pain to cease. This was all just a bunch of madness. He sat there barely being

able to trust what his eyes were seeing and looked outside, soon realizing that a day had passed since he fell unconscious. Tomo's eyes grew wide as he continued staring outside. What in the world was going on? Everything pointed to that egg, the voice, the abyss he was stuck in for a day, and his recent aches and pains throughout his body.

Tomo stood up and went into the kitchen and mixed up a batch of herbs to cure his massive and draining headache. He sat on his hammock in the corner of the living room and opened a scroll he had written long ago. "Man, wish you guys were here right now...." he muttered to himself as he continued to read the scroll. His eyes grew cold as a faint memory flooded into his mind. The memory.... of his parents' death.

* * *

"ATTACK ON ALL SIDES, MEN! THIS ENTIRE VILLAGE NEEDS TO BE WIPED OUT BEFORE SUNRISE! DO YOU HEAR ME!?" yelled a man who appeared to be a general of some type of the army near the north. Little Tomo, about four years old, was cowering in the arms of his mother as chaos unfolded outside their living room window. They heard shouting and screams in the distance. "MEN, CHECK THAT HOUSE THERE! MAKE SURE NO ONE COMES OUT ALIVE! UNDERSTOOD!?" the man yelled again as Tomo heard footsteps like that of a fierce and angry dragon approaching.

His parents knew what was going to happen, and they knew they had to protect the last member of their clan with their lives. His mother picked up the little four-year-old, who now had his eyes squinted shut, and carried him to the closet in the attic, his father following right behind.

"Listen, here my little angel," his mother said. "Mommy and Daddy probably won't be alive when you open your eyes, but we want you to know that you must live for us, for the entire clan. We both love you so much, and we hope you live an amazing life, my little Ninja-in-training."

She and his father kissed and patted his head. The footsteps were getting close, and they both knew if they didn't leave while they could, their son would be in great danger. They rushed down the stairs where they were cornered by men with large, massive weapons with only one purpose to fulfill. Just like that, they were both murdered, as other men kept searching the house for any other signs of people. Even with his hands firmly clasping over his ears, Tomo could still hear and remember their cries for help echoing throughout the house.

Tomo, who awoke in the morning days after the men had evacuated the village, sat up crying. The poor child had nowhere to go and had not eaten or drunk much of anything in days. Suddenly, he heard someone coming up the steps and began to cry louder in fear. A young teenage woman, with milk chocolate hair who was sent to look for any survivors, opened the closet and picked up the child.

"My goodness! Who left this poor helpless boy in here all by himself?" she said as Tomo continued crying. She then noticed the tattoo on his small arm...the mark of the

Fukara clan. She gasped and realized that he must be the only one left who had survived the massacre. "Oh dear, let's get you fed and hydrated, little one." She wrapped the little boy up in a blanket and grabbed any supplies she could find around the house. As she walked down the creaky stairs tainted in dried blood, she came to the bottom, where she saw the bodies of what she assumed to be his parents lying motionless on the floor, their eyes lifeless and filled with despair and regret.

Tomo's eyes widened as he leaned over, reaching his tiny hand towards them and got no response. The faint words "mama" and "dada" had left the young child's lips as the woman teared up slightly. "Oh god.....it seems your parents were assassinated in order to protect you." The woman covered her mouth, feeling ill with the stench of blood. "Come on, we need to get you out of here." She carried him out and tried to calm him down.

All Tomo remembered after that were the faces of his murdered parents and that once taken in by that young woman, he was fed, loved, and cared for until he was seven years old. She then had to send him to a cottage that cared for children with no parents or guardians, and by the time he was ten years of age, he went to live his life on his own. He has been living that way since, which posed quite a challenge, especially with his lack of knowledge, experience, and guidance. But when he figured out his parents were gone forever, he wrote all that he wanted to do with them on that scroll wishing that one day, they would return.

* * *

He sighed again, leaning his head next to the window ledge and smiling a bit. "Man, I was only four years old when that all went down. Seems like yesterday when I was crying, sleeping, and having no responsibilities at all." He let out a light chuckle. "Now look what I have to go through these days: headaches, stomach pains, strange voices, and an egg which I'm *supposed* to be destined to raise." He continued lying on the hammock.

He started to doze off when he heard a knock on the door. He looked out the window and saw Miaka smiling, looking eager to see him. He stumbled to the door and opened it. "Oh, hey, what's up?" he said, smiling and scratching his head nervously.

"Nothing much. Just wanted to see how my favorite friend was doing."

Tomo stared at her gorgeous dirty blonde locks.

"Ummmm....whatcha doing?" Miaka said, laughing and looking a bit puzzled. Tomo pulled himself from his daze and glanced back over to her. "Oh n-nothing! I'm okay. So, do you wanna do something fun today?" Tomo asked, his headache slowly slipping away as a happy grin spread across his face.

At this point, he couldn't even hear her response. Every time Tomo was with Miaka, he could feel all his sadness and pain just slip away. He always loved the way she was so kind to him and how her gorgeous hair shone brightly in the sun as if it were made of gold. She was all that he could ever want or need in a perfect friend, or even... a perfect

girlfriend. Tomo shook his head vigorously, trying to snap himself out of his fantasy when he heard Miaka say that she wanted to go hang out near the river with him.

“Is that okay Tomo?” She continued smiling.

“Yeah, I would love that.” Tomo responded, trying to ignore his blushing face.

While looking at her, he could feel all the struggles and anguish he had ever experienced disappear in a cloud of smoke. Tomo grabbed all his necessary belongings and motioned for Miaka to follow. *Perhaps this will be the day, the day I tell her everything,* Tomo thought to himself as his face began to flush once more, his heart beating rapidly like that of a hummingbird’s wings. All he could do was hope that he would gain a lifelong companion to help guide him through the life he had always lived alone.

A Eulogy, Revised Threefold

by Annah Lovette

1st Place Winner, Father Callan Poetry Contest

It is snowing today.
My eyes pierce the rippling sea.
I long to see you rise from within it,
spiraling through wisps of bubbling seafoam, parting its surface like a dagger all too dull.

O' sweet creature of laurels,
how long has it truly been?
Time has stretched with the horizon, unfathomable to mortal minds,
long and unending in spite of itself.

I am staring into the water again.
Inky and impenetrable,
cruel and indiscriminate.
I dreamt of leaping in not too long ago.
I had edged the shore and spoke aloud,
"This skin is no longer mine.
I am not home here in a world without you."

Again, I step away from the water.
Again, I feel myself begin to tremble.
For I know that I cannot meet you there.
Not yet.

Melted snow falls down my temples
and pools into droplets at the edge of my chin.

My beloved,
I beg thee to return—even as a shadow, even as a dream.

Sin of Desire and Other Poetry

by Hayun Park

Sin of Desire

O fruit of scarlet crimson
Pray stain my unworthy lips
a bloody red.
Chain me into a willing prison
bring my morals to an eclipse then
fall as lead.

Why oh why we cry
as we descend into null
arms stretched heavenward
spoken tearful goodbye
then realize this was but a cull
meant for misfits.

Home

Jump on the bed
Rub face into sheets
Make sure the dog is fed
Make sure to wipe feet

Turn on the television
Laugh at the movie
Make sure of financial decision
Make sure comb is toothy

Watch the fish float
Coo at the fish
Make sure to hang coat
Make sure to clean the dish

Confessions of a lover

If Death himself claimed me in this day
I would be blessed in knowing thee will grieve for me

And remember me thou shall, our days colored in grey
And with those memories bound to thee, thee will never be free
Though do not cry in my absence
For that would bring forth great raging floods
As God Himself is angered for his Angel feeling sadness
There would be no life reborn as the flower buds
So lover, wipe thy tears quick;
Before eternal punishment is fallen from the heavens
Smile in the stead, though inside thee may be sick
For a pitiful sinner like me, thou must control thy expressions
Know that if I were to die in this moment, I will love thy for all eternity
Hades will scoff at my absurdity.

Of Dogs & Deep Waters: A Collection of Poems

by Annah Lovette

Canidae in Cicatrice

I was 18 years old when I was first bitten.
He'd sunk his teeth in, that greedy foxhound,
and pried back the skin with apt precision,
stamping the underside of my left forearm
with a vermillion crescent moon.

A year later, an informative presentation on dog bites
reflected against the wall with garish light
casting imagery of fresh punctures onto my face.

*"I was bitten once, you know," I'd admitted.
"I felt innumerable stitches stake claim to the wound,
to close what had been so rudely opened."*

Nodding heads furthered my suspicions
that others had been bitten too.
"How long has it been?" they asked,
peering with squinted eyes,
stealing a glimpse of the pitted scar.

*"This wound has aged and is heavy with purpose,
having wept for a year and then some—
yet time has not allowed it respite."*
I rolled up my left sleeve
and they got what they wanted.
*"Perhaps it still weeps
for fear of being bitten once more."*

I was 19 years old when I first disclosed my fear of dogs
and the steps I'd taken to avoid their furry paths,
to duck at the sight of a wagging tail or hackled nape.
Their perceptions of my testimony were quiet.
Whether they be of valor or selfishness,
I was thankful for the silence
as the clock struck a quarter til' noon.

Tail between my legs,
I fled.

I was 20 years old when I realized that there was no dog in this poem.
Only an old clothing iron,
a bare arm,
and the need to take control.

Leucadian Leap

Do you think it was there on the pale cliffside—
intertwined with the sprawling violet and
lavender that brushed her tentative bare calves,
keen to leap into something cavernous and
all-encompassing?

Or was it trapped within the fragments that they
forgot to burn, muddied with soot and ash and
the filth of man—reviled and spat upon
by ignorance plain?

“Even in another time,” it had been said
with wanting lips, “someone will remember us.”
Was it spoken in those words with hope that the
heart of someone, I tell you, would ring the same?

It remains in that wretched place, certainly
blooming in flowers on the Lefkadan ridge
churning in the swell’s open, gluttonous maw—
thundering in your heart as you realize you’ve
made it halfway down.

When the time comes to be swallowed by your art,
when you hit the sea and shatter against stone,
it spills, incarnadine, into milky sea foam—
the blood of creation: dripping with honey,
soaked with vitriol.

How can you bring yourself to find it again
and where did it go

Ichor

Do you think they saw it
as I padded down the steps,
that my hands were stained
like a butcher's instruments?
As is a beast's maw?

Do you think they smelled it—
the copper that wafted
from under my nails,
like a rotting coin purse
or a sacrificial blade?

Do you think they heard it—
the shattering sound of
disbelief?
The gasping, choking noise
when I did not recognize
my body among the wreckage.

Do you think they felt it
as they touched my skin?
the bad and worse nights,
bound in rough collagen,
tightened coils of skin
that signified
an invisible war.

Do you think they taste it?
Even now, in this moment,
the thick, lingering guilt.
The thoughts, visceral—
they chase me.
They are rabid hounds,
clamping onto limbs
with spikes of ivory;
hard on the nose,
heavy on the tongue.
Iron.

I am all too aware of them,
memories cemented
in the structure
of a fallen temple,
while worshippers of a tortured
divinity,
masochistic in virtue,
howl and scream.

“Lo, ichor,
it runs fast
and never stops,”
they cry out,
pleading for the source
to dry

Cowardly and lame,
these echoes of promises
not kept,
they mark me
as I once marked myself.

Today,
my ears open.
I hear their pleas
and I feel fate's cruel hands
on
my throat,
But.

I will fight this war,
I will reconstruct the temple,
I will rebuild god.

For I do not intend to die
without first trying to live

Hymn for the Great Ones

The pressure is like none other,
shattering bones
and turning carbon to diamonds,
in the graveyard of the consecrated dead.

Beyond the crashing surf,
beyond the fronds of grasping seaweed,
languish the corpses of a deserted pantheon.
Their bones,
picked clean and swarming with worms,
act as scaffolding for a new age—
one that is both benthic and magnanimous.

In their old lives, they were cantors.
Their songs hung in the air like spirits.
Those who feast upon them,
those sustained by century-old fat and oil,
take not only their flesh
but the notes of their music.

That is how it goes, the fate of the behemoths,
melting myriad leagues under the sea
As their ghosts hum melodies that once were.
They will sit until they turn to dust,
and they are consumed by all:
three dead gods at the bottom of the Marianas trench

chocolate

by Ava Dzurenda

3rd Place Winner, Gunard Carlson Contest

as a child i was taught to *savor* my chocolate.
put the singular piece in your mouth and let it sit.

be mindful.

embrace the feeling of the chocolate within your mouth.
feel the sweet coldness on your tongue.
feel the sensation of the piece slowly melting into your saliva.
savor that singular piece.
savor it and embrace it.
before you know it, it'll be gone.

i never did.
i never knew what it really meant to savor.
even though my mom and grandma over enunciated every single syllable,
it meant absolutely nothing to me.

i wanted that chocolate,
and i wanted more than one piece.
i wanted to enjoy it immediately.
when chocolate was in front of me, i felt nothing but greed.

looking back, i don't think i was being taught to savor the chocolate, necessarily.
chocolate is a metaphor.

it's life.
savor it.
you only get one shot.
i wish i would have savored certain aspects of the past.
i was in a constant rush.
a rush to taste the sweetness.
a rush to enjoy it all at once.
greedy for more.

now i look back.
shake my head in a way.
the dissolved chocolate is nothing what i thought it would have turned out to be.
the slow rush of chocolate would have been a better option for me.



Female Gaze by Hayun Park

This I Believe: Save Them with Kindness

by Sophia Fusaro

2nd Place Winner, Gunard Carlson Contest

Despite what you and everyone else may think, you do not know what goes on in the minds of others. This is not some light-hearted curiosity of wondering what someone is currently thinking. This is the “you have no idea what kind of demons and intrusive thoughts are haunting her every move.” You do not understand anyone’s internal battles. You cannot ever truly know what they see, hear, feel, or go through. You do not know how they will act in certain situations, nor what situations they have been put in. There is no way of guaranteeing that you ever will. I believe that mental health is important, and not knowing anyone else’s story makes it one hundred times more important. Pay attention to the ones around you and care for the ones who need extra love. Take the time to show kindness, even if it is to a complete stranger. Take it from me.

You show up to a party on a random Friday night. You see a beautiful, smiling, blonde-haired girl. You see her excelling at school, with tons of friends surrounding her. You see her joking around, laughing, and running laps at the park. You see her on the basketball team, volleyball team, and cross-country team. You see her singing in the car alongside her sisters with the windows down, and her golden hair is blowing out the top of the sunroof. You may even envy her. It seems that she can have everything, but she also never makes anyone feel less for it.

What you did not see was the hurt that she felt inside. You didn’t hear the constant voice in her head that told her she wasn’t enough. You didn’t notice she was losing weight. You didn’t realize that her runner’s body hadn’t just been made that way from running or that she was running for a reason other than staying in shape. You didn’t catch when she missed dinner because she “already ate” or how many times she was going to “just grab food at the game.” Evidently, you missed the fact that she wasn’t eating at all. How could someone so perfect on the outside be so lost and hurt on the inside? How could a girl with so much regard for others have so little regard for herself? You didn’t notice that she took down all of the things in her room that made it hers. You couldn’t avoid the fact that she was shutting out you and everyone around her. You didn’t notice that she was suffering—really suffering—in her own skin. All the signs were right in front of you, but you didn’t notice. You missed it all. You saw exactly what she wanted you to see. You couldn’t help what you didn’t see.

But in the end, it wasn’t you. It wasn’t you who missed all the horrible, heart-wrenching signs. It wasn’t you who let down the one you loved most. That was me. It wasn’t you who quietly watched as your other half slowly faded away. That was me. I

didn't see all of those things when my loving, sweet, caring, twin sister stopped taking care of herself. I didn't notice how skinny she got, how her clothes got baggy, and her hair got thinner. I didn't catch that she skipped lunch at school. I missed it all. Blame it on the fact that I saw her every day. Blame it on the fact that I, too, was busy with school and sports and my own social life. Blame it on my naïve wish that she actually was eating at a friend's house or grabbing dinner at the game. Blame it on whatever you want: I will always blame it on me.

I didn't know the hurt she was in. I didn't notice the way that she was slowly trying to erase herself. I didn't find any of it out until she started to have irregular heartbeats due to what she had been doing to her body. It took a trip to the emergency room, a heart monitor, and many visits to the doctor to open my eyes to what my sister was putting herself through. A twin is supposed to know the other twin like the back of her hand. How could it be that I couldn't even notice when all that the back of her hand looked like was skin and bones? How could this slide right past? Where was that fabled twin telepathy? My best friend, my roommate, my built-in partner for everything, and I still didn't see it. I almost lost all of that just because of my ignorance.

I am not saying that it is entirely my fault that it got that far, but it certainly felt like the weight that she had lost had been placed on my shoulders in the form of guilt. No one else had noticed it until it was too late either, but I promise you, they felt the same guilt. It is for this reason that I encourage everyone to pay attention to those around them, whether it be a stranger or someone you love. Invite that person to dinner. Compliment that girl on her sweatshirt. Tell someone you love them. Give a random hug. Call a stranger beautiful. Text that special friend. Tell that person that they mean something. Make the time for those around you.

To many, eating disorders are something you hear about but don't think of unless they affect you directly. I promise you that eating disorders affect you directly. Someone you know right now is struggling to convince themselves that they are worthy of the food they are putting into their bodies. They are skipping meals, avoiding friends, and mentally abusing themselves into thinking that they are not enough. No one should ever feel like they have to work for their food or that their bodies need to be changed in unhealthy ways that involve over-exercising and starving themselves. Size does not measure the value of a person. Read that again.

Maybe the people around you seem happy and perfectly okay. Maybe they are popular and athletic and smart and funny. Maybe they seem like they have it all figured out, but remember that it is easy to look past the warning signs. Take the time to ask someone how they are doing. Stop your busy life to hear what they have to say. The few seconds that it takes to check in on someone have the power to make an impact so big that you could alter or even save someone's life.

Showing someone that you care about them could be enough to help them feel like they belong. You could be the reason that someone has a purpose. Take the time to look

past yourself and your phone. Please, if for no one else, do it for me. I will never look past those “small” things again.

Kindness goes an extremely long way. This I believe!

If you or anyone you know is struggling with an eating disorder, here are some resources:

- **(800) 931-2237** – You can call or text this hotline number for support.
- <https://www.healthyplace.com/eating-disorders/binge-eating-disorder/binge-eating-disorder-support-groups>. – This site can inform you about support groups, and there are links on how to contact a group near you.

You are not alone. You are enough. And you deserve to treat your body with love and respect. This I also believe!



Mountain with a View

by Cassidy Bezek

1st Place Winner, Gunard Carlson Contest

Three Words to Save a Life

by Connor Clarke

3rd Place Winner, Gunard Carlson Contest

It took every ounce of strength I had left to heave myself out of my chair and start my journey. I wobbled slightly before finding my balance, and when stable, I concentrated on making each foot moot. The trip was a mere thirty-second walk, but it felt as if I were climbing Mount Everest. Reaching my destination, I thought my heart would beat out of my chest as I sunk into the couch cushion between my parents. My mind was clouded, but somehow the words that had eluded me for so long became clear.

“I need help.”

It all began nine months prior when I left my hometown to pursue a college education. Following the traditional college cliché, my parents tried and failed to maintain their composure as they saw me off, and I followed suit by letting a few tears slip out. Memories assaulted me as I drove past the streets that my friends and I used to roam, the fields we played on, the movie theater I had my first date in, and so much more.

The melancholy mood was swept away in the wind as I pulled onto the highway. My high school experience had been extremely regimented and limiting; I was constantly engaged with my studies, three sports, multiple clubs, volunteer organizations, and social events. College seemed to be the perfect chance to smash that mold. The moment had finally arrived to remake myself, to experience freedom for the first time.

That excitement faded almost as quickly as it had arrived. In high school, I defined myself by the activities that packed my schedule. Without those things, who was I? It seemed that the price of freedom had been my identity. Popular media makes it seem easy to redefine oneself, but there was a gap in my soul. A gap that demanded attention.

To fill the void, I desperately searched for the perfect friend group, club, or study habit. Nothing worked, until I returned to my love for fitness. I threw myself into strength training. Weights, workouts, and cardio—lots of cardio. The routine was incessant. Before long, my abdominals were perfectly picturesque. Striations visibly rippled through my muscles when I moved. My arm and leg veins protruded through my skin with clarity. As my fat cells shrunk, my reliance on physical progress grew; I had finally found something to make me whole again. My body image became king. The goal to be fit had been usurped.

I turned into a weight loss addict. The situation escalated when I targeted food. I cut out breakfast, stopped snacking, and reduced my plate portions. Initially slow progress grew at an exponential rate. Soon, I was eating next to nothing. I couldn't focus in class because of pain radiating through my lower half; a loss of cushioning left my tailbone

exposed to hard, wooden chairs. That stopped being a problem when I found myself without the energy to go to class. I stopped showering daily. Brushing my teeth was exhausting. Under a constant, mental fog, I was too numb to care.

I had spiraled out of control. My saving grace came in the form of winter break. It had been months since my parents had truly seen me, so they were shocked by the husk of their once lively son. After only two days, they called me for an intervention. I knew the time had finally come. Within fifteen minutes, I was headed to the emergency room. The visit was a blur of nurses, psychologists, and blood tests. Yet, one thing was clear: I had to seek professional help.

I took a medical leave of absence from school and booked a one-way ticket to an in-patient treatment facility in Colorado. My new life was therapists, dieticians, and never-ending medical tests. For the second time in less than a year, I left my home behind for an institution of learning. This time, though, I learned to heal my relationship with myself and form a healthy identity. After months, I came home for the second time. This time, though, I returned with the identity I had fought so hard to remold.

The recovery process never truly ends, but I have utmost confidence in my current trajectory. The hole that caused me so much pain has been filled with an unshakable core of people and principles. That strength allowed me to enroll in college, find a new friend group, change majors (twice), and complete a great semester. I still fight the urge to fixate on my body image, and my life is far from perfect. Regardless, I have the tools and foundation to survive those trials. It all started with three simple words.

“I need help.”

Famine or a Lack Thereof

by Annah Lovette

1st Place Winner, Gunard Carlson Contest

It was a sudden feeling, the frigid temperature of the water. The cold prickled across my black skin, funneling into the deepest reaches of my bones. It shook off the drowsiness that weighed down my back, heavy on the rib cage that stirred with the faintest signs of held breath. Sunlight flooded my tired eyes as they peeled open. It was white and refracted as it breached through the surface—warm in spite of its surroundings.

The dark had passed.

Occupying the upper-right corner of my sight was Mother, still asleep. She was gliding, a typical behavior during her resting hours, though instinct still compelled her flippers to veer and twitch. I glanced up to stare at her.

There was a slight squint to her eye, blue and glittering, though distant. Her freckles—tiny marks that smattered the pale flesh of her lower jaw—fell upon her skin like raindrops. Most brilliant of all was the patch of whiteness that stretched along the side of her head. It was a false eyespot, she had told me—something that had little use in a place like this one, but it was perfect. On quiet mornings, I found myself dwelling on her beauty, though I knew that she would disapprove. She was not a vain woman and, frankly, preferred that I ignored such frivolous things.

As if summoned by my thoughts, she blinked to consciousness. Her tail, muscled and fine, rose and fell with great strength as she angled her flukes to turn.

Mother had almost bumped into the far barrier.

It was one of many that surrounded our home basin. Others joined it, static and immutable, not shifting even once in the star cycles that I had lived to witness. A select few were less permanent, frequently opened and closed at the behest of the two-legged and their incomprehensible schedules. *Those* barriers were partly see-through, formed of thin bars of reflective material.

A low creak pierced the silence. Mother snapped her jaws together, teeth clacking against teeth. The two-legged must have made their first appearance of the day, hearing as Fat Fin had already begun his morning tirade. Even from this depth, I could hear their peculiar vocalizations, so quick to fawn over that old man—him and his insistent requests for tactile affection.

“It is too early for such noise.” Mother’s voice was quiet, conveyed through a shrill whine. “I never understood his desperation for the two-legged.”

I tilted my body sideways, searching for the security of her slipstream. “Do we not also seek attention from them?” My lungs had started to burn for air, but here I would stay. “I enjoy their affection—and you do, too!”

“Hah! While I may enjoy a rubdown from time to time, we cannot let them know these things. Understand?” Mother squealed. “*They* are to seek attention from *us*.”

At that, her head pitched upwards. The rest of her body followed as she began to rise to the surface, the will of her slipstream dragging me along. We turned again to avoid another wall, passing the barrier that Fat Fin rested behind.

Irritated, Mother lobbed her flukes against the surface, producing a loud smack and prompting a flurry of reactions from the two-legged. I took a breath, releasing the old air from my chest in a puff of mist. Down we both dove, speeding away from where Fat Fin rested.

Gliding past the far barrier, I broke from Mother’s side with a burst of speed. This barrier—the longest of them all—possessed the peculiar quality of being partially transparent. There, on the opposite side of the transparency, stood one of the two-legged. This individual was smaller, with brown skin and a tangled mess of spindly seaweed upon its head. In its skinny, many-digited “flippers”—if one could even refer to them as such—was a wide disc.

I tilted my own flippers forward to bring myself to a halt. The two-legged angled the disc towards me, holding it flush against the translucent barrier, and waited. Unsure, I glanced at Mother, who had disappeared. With strange, blunt teeth, the two-legged grinned, as if anticipating some sort of response. I waited for a few moments, expecting a string of scolding words from Mother, but all that could be heard was the distant tweeting of Fat Fin.

Slowly, I drifted towards it.

In the disc, I saw myself. It was reflective, much like the water’s interior surface, neatly mimicking all aspects of my shape. I turned my streamlined face to and fro, examining each black-and-white intricacy that my being had been composed of. Freckles fell along my lower jaw—a select few dappled the corners of my false eyespots like tiny constellations. For the first time, I became aware of my resemblance to Mother.

Smaller, frailer, but beautiful. If, even without the reflection, it was plain to her.

A cloud of bubbles escaped through my blowhole as I edged closer to the disc—the mirror, as I now recognized it. The two-legged was attempting to communicate through its mouth, as it often did, producing discordant syllables and squeals that even a child could trump in speech. Disinterested, I directed my attention back to the mirror—to my reflection.

I wondered if Mother saw herself in me, too.

A great mass suddenly appeared at my side—the woman in question. With profound gentleness, she nudged me away from the two-legged and its disc, back to her slipstream where I belonged.

“You may mingle with the two-legged later.”

I nodded. It was too early to challenge her authority.

For a while, we resigned to silently dwell in each other’s presence. Every few moments, we’d up to breathe or peer at the busy clusters of two-legged that mulled around the edges of the barrier. I flitted about and twitched, snapping my jaw as anxiety gnawed at my tendons.

The tension urged me to speak. “Mother?”

“Yes?”

“All morning I have wondered something.”

“And what would that be?”

“Do you wonder if there’s more to this place—somewhere beyond the barriers?”

She hesitated. “Whatever do you mean?” Mother kept her gaze angled forward.

“The endless basin,” I trilled. “You told me of its existence many cycles ago.”

Again, the silence returned—guilt-plagued silence that made my muscles stiffen. I stole another breath at the surface, hoping to shed some stress. Bubbles trailed the edge of my dorsal fin as I dove to enter Mother’s slipstream once more.

“Do you think that that place—this basin you speak of—is better than here?”

“You told me that it was better.” The thought filled me with energy. I spun onto my back. My eyes met the floor’s blue coloration. “That there were no barriers. Endless sights to see. Other people like us—a family that I’ve never known—and lots of food. Different food.”

“Tell me more about the food.”

“Ah, the *food*.” I wiggled my way beneath her, entering her shadow. “Food that struggles as it’s pursued. Food that wriggles in your jaws—that crunches in your teeth or is covered in thick hair! Food that is saturated in iron and rich sea salt—”

“But you have pursued such wriggling food. The two-legged gift us with the living capelin and herring every so often. It is the same.”

“But the capelin and herring do not crunch nor bear waterlogged pelts.”

“That is true.”

“Then why do you act as if it’s not?”

“Because I believe that I have misled you and I am sorry for it.” Mother took another breath, chuffing as she did so. Again, she dove, veering to let her side scrape along the closest barrier. Perhaps she was itchy. “It is true that there is another place—one that is blue and deep and full of life. I was born in it, raised by Grandmother in that vastness. Surrounded by countless relatives whose names I have long since forgotten.”

“Right. Then the two-legged brought you here.”

“Yes. They did,” she mumbled.

“Then why don’t you wish to return? Is it not your birthplace?”

“There was a time before I was taken.” Mother tilted her head. “Then, the two-legged had made a point to spread their filth and foul disease. To harm us with their tools and inventions. To *poison* the very fish that filled our bellies. The basin cried out as famine afflicted every living being, from the smelt, to the seal, to the seaweed.”

I flipped right side up. My head nuzzled into the soft underside of her belly.

“Cycles passed,” she continued. “The state of our home waters only continued to worsen. The salmon, once plentiful, disappeared—and from then, so did all else. Many suffered. Many more died. In time, even Mother was reduced to skin and bones. Without her, there would be no leadership. When her time came, we were so stricken with grief that our very minds became clouded.”

“Grandmother waned?” I whispered the question.

Mother nodded. “She waned until she was nothing.”

She dove sharply, passing by the transparent barrier that now swarmed with countless two-legged, all dressed in bright pelts that hung loosely from their bodies. Our two-legged were different—their black pelts were tight against their bodies. I yearned to part from Mother’s side. To dash and play with the two-legged offspring and the alien objects they’d present to me—the things that spun and flashed with vibrant light. I resisted the urge, led by heartache that told me that Mother’s words were more important.

“The two-legged that split our family came cycles later,” Mother added. “They arrived atop beasts of metal that floated upon the sea’s surface as if weightless—and from these beasts, they created noise louder than one could fathom. Our minds were thick as mud. In a panic, we lost track of one another. Before long, they’d torn me from the arms of the endless basin.”

“Did they harm you then?”

“No. I expected them to, but they did not. They wanted me as I am now.” She set her jaw, considering her next phrase for a great deal of time. “I soon arrived here and here I must stay—to guide you, Fat Fin, and the others.” From above, her eye peered down to meet my own. Her gaze was sharp like the teeth that clenched in my mouth. “We are fed.

We are entertained. We are kept healthy and safe. The two-legged, as clueless as they are, care for our every whim. It is not perfect, but it is home.”

“But—”

“This is a place without famine.” She snapped her jaws. The clack resonated throughout the basin, bouncing from barrier to barrier. “It is what Grandmother would have wanted and that is all I will say on the matter.”

“A place without famine,” I mimicked.

“It is *home*,” she repeated, body posture with aggravated stiffness. “Do you understand, Little Star?”

I shivered at the sound of my name. “Of course.” In my heart, I knew that she wished to say more—that she was burying the desire to speak of darker things—but my curiosity was not enough to justify an intrusion of that nature. I kept quiet, for her sake and mine.

A loud smack echoed through the water. I spied the ripples that branched from it near the basin’s edge—the two-legged requested our attention.

“Do not bring this up again. Ever.” As Mother uttered that last word, her great booming voice softened, barely threatening a whisper. At that, she abandoned my side with a few kicks of her flukes. Her head erupted from the water near the edge of the basin, earning her a squeal from an excited two-legged.

I did the same.

Eager to be fed, I likewise floated before a two-legged. It was the same individual that had presented the mirror moments prior. It was excited, rubbing my face with eager enthusiasm, scratching that itchy spot beneath my chin. I yearned to enjoy these sensations and, although Mother may chide me for it, the presence of the two-legged—but the tug of sorrow in my gut numbed all else. Above all else, I wanted to be left alone. Even if I was hungry.

I thought of the endless basin.

My mouth opened to receive the breakfast that the two-legged tossed—a salmon. Its belly had been slit, allowing the familiar taste of its to spread across my tongue.

I thought of Grandmother and the poisoned fish and starvation.

Within seconds, I swallowed and the salmon was gone. There was no crunch, struggle, or additional unnamed novelty. The fish that followed, too, were the same.

But at least it was food.

Tapestries

2022-2023

Weaving the Threads of
Creativity & Innovation

