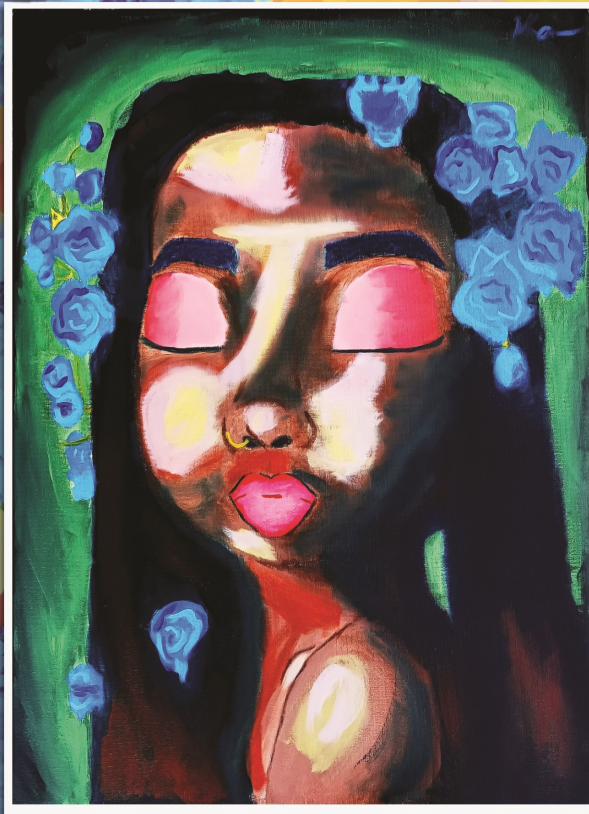


# CALLIOPE



University of Holy Cross  
Literary Magazine  
2022-2023

# *Calliope*

**A collection of artwork, poems, stories,  
and reflections by the students of  
University of Holy Cross**

**33rd Edition  
2022-2023**

**Calliope is the muse  
of heroic and epic poetry.**

**Cover Art by  
Karla Fisher**

**Cover design by  
Matthew Exnicios**

*The Department of Humanities*

**University of Holy Cross**

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*John deSilva*

## **A Wish for Sarah**

*Dedicated to the memory of Analyne Hartman Cummings*

Sarah Mitchell lay in her bed, staring at the ceiling. “So, this is what the end looks like. Me lying in this bed, never to see my home again. I won’t even make it to forty.” A tear rolled down her cheek.

The end of her life had been coming for some time, but she still had a hard time accepting it. Her greatest fear had come true. She would suffer the same fate her mother had many years earlier. She and her husband, Joe, had fought the good fight. Though she tried to find solace in that thought, it only made her feel worse.

Eight years ago, she was diagnosed with Stage III ovarian cancer. She had hoped the chemotherapy would stop the cancer from spreading and, for a while, it did. For three years, she was cancer free.

The support Sarah received from friends and family helped her through the pain and hair loss. Joe was a successful accountant with his own business, but the money he earned could only go so far. The local TV station she worked for set up a fund where people could donate money to help defray the costs. To her surprise, the response was phenomenal. People donated more than enough money to pay the medical bills. There was even a reserve in case the cancer recurred.

And it did. When her cancer came back six months ago, Sarah fought it once again, but this time, it spread to other parts of her body. The doctors could do nothing for her.

The support wasn’t the same as before. Where was everybody? Those frequent visitors from before had disappeared this time. Others trickled in at first, but even they stopped coming.

Other than Joe, her only visitor was her best friend and next-door neighbor, Claire McDonald. Claire’s husband, John, was an alcoholic and hated hospitals. That suited Sarah fine, because she didn’t like him anyway. She despised the way he made Claire suffer when he was drunk. Because of him, Claire had few friends. Sarah worried that after she died, Claire would have nobody.

Sarah’s brother, Mike, called every day. He lived four states away and couldn’t get off work to visit. Times were tough for him and his family, but she and Joe understood that.

Last week, the doctors recommended a hospice in town to make her last days easier. She and Joe resisted at first, but her doctors convinced them. Though it was the right thing to do, she couldn’t stop thinking about the pain her mother had endured before she died.

## *Jon deSilva*

Sarah's mother, Olivia, died twenty years before of ovarian cancer. Her cancer was as quick and aggressive as Sarah's in the end. Olivia's death ripped her father's heart out. He wasted away for the next two years until he died. Sarah tried everything she could to cheer him up and help him move on but without success. At his funeral, she wept, telling Joe how she failed him. His death still haunted her today.

Joe checked Sarah in the Grand Oaks Hospice that morning. It had a warm atmosphere and the doctors, nurses, and other staff seemed friendly enough.

Grand Oaks Hospice was founded forty years ago and became an industry leader in hospice care. Sarah had more than enough money in her cancer support fund to pay for her stay.

Her room had a view of the nearby woods. The nurse who checked her in, Debbie, said the sunsets were beautiful from that view. After he checked Sarah in, Joe went to work but said he would come straight back when he finished.

Sarah took a nap and woke up at 4:30. Joe would be returning soon. The doctor had given her morphine for the pain several hours before, which helped. She didn't like the way the morphine made her groggy, but at least it helped her sleep. The pain intensified somewhat, but now at least she was more alert. She looked out the window and saw why Debbie loved this room. A beautiful sunset was about to begin. She smiled. It was the first time she had smiled since arriving there.

"Oh, the sunset is going to be gorgeous this evening," a voice said from across the room.

Sarah jumped. She hadn't heard the nurse enter the room.

"I'm sorry, baby," the nurse said. "I didn't mean to scare you like that. I'm Ruby."

"That's okay. I'm Sarah."

"A place like this can be depressing if you let it." Ruby stood next to Sarah and pointed to the window. "Or it can be a place of joy. Either way, it's up to you."

"I'm going to die. What joy is in that?"

"We all die, baby. That's part of life. There's an old saying: how we approach life is how we approach death. Is your approach to life happy or sad?"

"Until I got cancer, I was happy."

"Good. Besides, I know about you. You were happy and when you worked, you tried to make other people's lives better. If you didn't work in television, you could have been a nurse. What better life is there?"

Sarah smiled.

## *Jon deSilva*

“Now that’s what I want to see.” Ruby nodded toward the door. “Well, it’s time for me to go. Your friend will be here in a couple of minutes. Enjoy the sunset.”

Sarah turned her head toward the window. “I will.”

A couple of minutes later, Claire entered the room. She appeared stressed. Her short, blonde hair was parted to one side. The right side of her dress had several small blue dry-erase marker stains.

Sarah pointed to the window. “Check out the sunset. It’s going to be awesome.”

Claire went to the window. “I see that. Joe got you a nice room.”

“Where’s John?”

“He went out after work. He’s off tomorrow.”

“I’m so sorry. I know how you have trouble making ends meet, and his drinking doesn’t help.”

“He wasn’t always like that.”

“Yes, he was, but you didn’t want to see it. You thought you could help him stop drinking, but he didn’t want to stop. Love is blind, I guess.” Sarah eyed her friend. “You deserve a lot better than him. You’re a beautiful woman. Hell, I wish I had your figure. I’m sorry to say this, but I think it’s good you two didn’t have any kids. John’s going to break your heart, you know that?”

Claire’s eyes welled with tears, but she didn’t respond.

“Hey, only one of us is allowed to be sad in here. Let’s watch the sunset.”

They watched the sun begin its journey to the horizon and continued their conversation.

Thirty minutes later, Joe arrived, showing fatigue from his day. His loose tie and mussed hair showed the toll her cancer had taken on him.

His fatigue vanished when he saw his wife. “Hello, honey. How are you feeling?”

“Peachy. I kicked Death’s butt to live another day.”

He held Sarah’s hand and said to Claire. “How are you feeling?”

“As tired as you look. Midterm exams are this week, and I have a lot of papers to grade. I finished today’s papers before coming here.”

“Of course, John the Drunk is doing what he does best,” Sarah said.

“Claire’s going through enough, and you don’t need to get worked up.” Joe stroked her hair.

“That’s okay,” Claire said. “Besides, I want to be here.”

“I admire you, you know,” Joe said.

Claire raised an eyebrow. “Why would you admire me?”



*Mary Gilson*





## *Jon deSilva*

“Simple. For the past ten years, you’ve seen nothing but tough times, and you hold everything together. John goes from job to job and thinks nothing of it, as long as he has the money to get drunk.”

“I don’t understand.”

“This evening’s a good example. John’s out drinking, and instead of staying at home feeling sorry for yourself, you came here to be with Sarah.”

“Sarah’s my best friend. Why wouldn’t I be here?”

“That’s the point and it says everything about the person you are,” Joe said. “John’s lucky to have you as his wife.”

Claire smiled again.

“Now that’s the smile I want to see,” Sarah said.

Claire lowered her head and raised it again. “Thank you, Joe.”

“Ruby’s right,” Sarah said. “This place can either be depressing or a place of joy, so let’s cheer up. Check out this sunset. Isn’t it beautiful? This is a great room.”

They watched the last few minutes of the sunset and talked until visiting hours were over.



The next morning, Sarah woke up feeling better. They must have given her morphine earlier. She tried to sit but didn’t have the strength. She saw Debbie tidying up.

“Good morning, Sarah,” Debbie said. “How are you feeling?”

“The pain’s better, but I still feel a little groggy.”

“That’s to be expected from your meds. I just finished giving you a sponge bath. I’ll get breakfast to you once I’m done here. Is there anything else you need?”

“No.”

Debbie brought Sarah her breakfast and left. Sarah tried to eat but didn’t have an appetite.

The doctor came in. “Good morning, Sarah. I’m Dr. White. How are you feeling?”

“I’m not dead yet.”

“Glad to see that. How’s the pain?”

“Better, but I don’t seem to have the strength to do anything. Is that from the meds?”

The doctor shook his head.

“How much longer do I have?”

“Two minutes, two hours, two days, two months, I don’t know. Each day you’re alive is a good day. Think of it that way.”

“Okay, Dr. White.”

He finished his examination. “If you need anything, Dr. Kaufman and I will be on duty today. I see Debbie’s your nurse. You’re in good hands.”

## *Jon deSilva*

“Okay, thanks.”

The doctor left. A few minutes later, Debbie picked up the breakfast tray, and Sarah went back to sleep.

A sharp pain woke her up, but she was more alert. Ruby stood by the window watching the scenery. Sarah noticed Ruby always had a smile on her face and seemed to know the right thing to say to cheer a person up.

Ruby turned. “Good morning, Sarah. Welcome back.”

“Good morning.”

“It’s another day and you’re still here. It must be a good day.”

Sarah smiled. “Yes, it is.”

“How are you feeling, baby?”

“Tired. They gave me morphine earlier this morning. It must be wearing off because the pain is coming back.”

“Did you want more?”

“At the moment, not really. I want to be alert.”

“Okay. How did the visit go last night?”

“Both Joe and Claire were here. You were right. The sunset was beautiful. I hope tonight’s sunset is as good.”

“I’m sure it will be.”

Sarah tried to sit up and found it even harder to move than yesterday. “Does the morphine make you weaker? I don’t seem to have the strength to sit up.”

“No. The dose of morphine they gave you isn’t strong enough to do that.”

Tears filled Sarah’s eyes. “Does it mean it’s time?”

“Not yet. But it will be soon enough.”

Sarah began to cry.

Ruby sat by her. “Don’t cry, honey. I’m sure you’ll see Joe again before you go.”

Sarah wiped her eyes. “You know, when I first saw Joe, it was love at first sight. He blames himself for not being able to help me beat the cancer. My dad did the same thing when my mom died. He gave up and wasted away. I don’t know what to do. I don’t want Joe to go through the same thing.”

Ruby smiled. “Have faith, sweetheart. Everything will be all right.”

Sarah tilted her head. “Why is your name tag different than everybody else’s?”

“It’s an old name tag and I like it. I’ve been here a long time.”

“How long have you been here?”

“I’ve been here since the place opened. A lot of people have come through here. Some took it well, and others took it pretty hard.”

“I must be one of the ones who took it hard.”

## *Jon deSilva*

Ruby shook her head. “No baby, you’re one of the better ones. You don’t want the end to come, but you’re accepting it. Accepting the end is the hardest part.”

The pain worsened, but Sarah wanted to talk more with Ruby.

“Hang in there, sweetie.”

Sarah nodded.

“Here’s something to take your mind off the pain. If you had a wish that could come true, what would you wish for?”

“Besides being cancer free and living to one hundred?”

“Yeah, there’s no getting around that.”

Sarah thought about it for a minute. “Actually, I would have two.”

“Okay, what are they?”

“If it were possible, I’d want to talk to my dad one last time. I know he’s gone, but it doesn’t hurt to wish.”

“That’s a good wish. What’s the second?”

“I would want Joe not to blame himself for my death and live a happy life. I know the first wish won’t happen, so this is my wish.”

“They’re both good wishes.” Ruby glanced at the clock. “Debbie will be here in a minute to check in on you. I’ll be back in a bit. Get some rest.”

“I am tired. Okay, Ruby.” Sarah closed her eyes and went to sleep.



Sarah woke up and saw the time. It was after three. She had been asleep for four hours. Debbie must have checked in on her once or twice. Over the next couple of hours, Sarah nodded in and out of sleep.

A voice by the window woke her. “Hello, Sarah-belle.”

She turned her head, saw the man standing by the window, and gasped. “Daddy?”

“Yes, sweetheart. It’s me.”

“I’m sorry, Daddy. I’m so sorry for letting you down. I should have tried harder to save you.”

Her father moved toward her bed. “Oh, no, no, no, Sarah-belle, it’s not your fault. You went above and beyond to help me. My death is my fault, not yours. I simply gave up.” He smiled. “Thank you for always being there.”

Tears rolled down Sarah’s face. “I love you, Daddy.” She sniffled and wiped her eyes.

“I love you, too, and don’t cry, darling. Everything will be all right.”

“Am I dead?”

## *Jon deSilva*

“No, but your time is coming. Momma and the whole family are waiting for you. They’re looking forward to seeing you.”

“Is there a Heaven?”

“Don’t you worry about that now. You’ll be all right. It’s time for me to go.”

“No, Daddy. Please don’t leave.”

“I must.”

“Will I see you again?”

Her father smiled again. “You bet. I love you, Sarah-belle.” He turned and disappeared.

She started to cry. “I love you, too, Daddy.”

Dr. White came in, put the doorstop down, and kept the door open. Sarah wiped the tears from her face.

During the examination, he said, “I don’t want it to get stuffy in here. Sometimes a little noise helps pass the time. How are you doing?”

“Hurting. Do you have anything that will stop the pain, but not make me so weak?”

He shook his head. “It’s not the morphine that’s making you weaker.”

She sniffled again. “My time must be coming.”

“Yes, it is.” He gave her a dose of morphine. “This is a smaller dose. It’ll help with the pain but shouldn’t knock you out.”

“Thank you,” Sarah said.

He gathered his materials and left.

The pain eased, and Sarah stared out the window.

“It never fails,” Ruby said, standing by the door. “No matter how the weather is, the scenery outside this window is always beautiful.”

Sarah tried to smile. “Hi, Ruby. You know, it is beautiful.”

“How’s the pain?”

“Better.” Sarah wanted to tell Ruby about seeing her father but decided against it. “I’m worried about Joe. I’m worried he’s going to do the same thing my dad did and give up. Just before he checked me in here, he cried and told me he couldn’t live without me. I don’t want him to suffer my dad’s fate.”

“Well, that’s up to you.”

“I tried to tell him, and it doesn’t work.”

“Did you write him?”

“What good would that do?”

“It would do a world of good. He’d have your words in your writing.”

“I’d need something to write with and write on.”



*Lily Gilson*





## *Jon deSilva*

Ruby pointed to Sarah's side. "Like the notebook and pen next to you?"

"Now how did that get there?"

"Maybe Dr. White left it. There's an envelope under the notebook."

"Yes, there is."

It took Sarah a lot of energy to pick up the notebook and write, but she was determined to put her wish for Joe into words.

As Sarah was about to finish, Ruby said, "There's one more thing I want you to put in it."

"What?"

"Tell Joe to go to Claire as soon as he leaves here. She needs him."

"Why?"

"John died in a car accident last night. He was drunk and ran head-on into another vehicle."

"Oh my God! Claire!" Sarah let out a cry.

"When you tell him to go to her, it's important that he knows that this is something you want."

Sarah regained her composure. "I don't understand."

"You see, Joe and Claire need each other to work through their pain. If they go to each other, neither will suffer your father's fate. Each will be strong for the other. They will be able to move on and find happiness in their lives. If they don't know this is what you want, then they will keep their pain to themselves and never be happy."

"Okay." Then she nodded. "I know exactly what to say."

She finished the note and read it aloud.

"That's a wonderful letter, baby," Ruby said. "You did good."

Sarah smiled. "I feel more at peace now."

"That's good, sweetie. Debbie will be here in a minute. I'll be back later."

"See you, Ruby."

"Goodbye, Sarah."

Sarah closed her eyes to the bustling in the hallway. A few minutes later, Debbie walked in.

"How are you feeling?" the nurse asked.

"Better. Dr. White told me my time is coming."

"I'm so sorry."

"After I'm gone, if I don't see her again, please thank Ruby for me."

"Ruby?" Debbie's face twisted. "No one by that name works here."

"Sure. She's older, a little taller than you, and wears an old name tag. She said she's been here since the place opened."

## *Jon deSilva*

“Oh, my God. Wait a minute.” Debbie left the room and a minute later, came in with a plaque. It had a picture of a woman on it. “Is this Ruby?”

“Yes, that’s her.”

The nurse’s face went white. “Her name was Ruby Williams. Ruby worked here when the hospice opened.”

“You see? I was right.”

“Ruby worked here for ten years until she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Like you did, she fought it for several years.”

“Then what happened?”

“When nothing more could be done, she spent her last days here. In fact, I think it was in this room. She died a short time after arriving here as a patient. That was twenty-five years ago.”

Sarah’s jaw dropped.

“You know, you’re not the first one to see her. You must be special because she only appears to certain patients.”

“We talked.” Sarah held up the note she wrote to her husband.

“Ruby helped me write this. I’m glad Dr. White left the notebook.”

“That’s not Dr. White’s. I don’t know whose notebook that is.”

Sarah smiled. “It must be Ruby’s.”

“You’re a lucky girl.”

“Writing it wore me out.” She folded the paper and tried to put it in the envelope.

“Here, let me.” Debbie put the note in the envelope and returned it to Sarah. Then she looked at the time. “I’m surprised your friend isn’t here.”

“Her husband was killed in an accident last night.”

Debbie held Sarah’s hand and stroked it. “Oh, I’m so sorry.”

The phone rang. Sarah struggled to reach it. It took much more effort to raise her arm than it had earlier. She must be getting weaker. Debbie picked up the handset and held it to Sarah’s ear.

“Hello?”

“Hey, sis,” the male voice on the other end said. “How are you feeling?”

“Hi, big brother. Not so good. I’m not sure how much longer I have.”

“Don’t say that. I was able to get the next two days off, and we’ll be there tomorrow to see you.”

“No, don’t come see me.”

“Why not?”

“You won’t make it in time.”

“No, sis.” His voice broke. “You’re a fighter. You’ll make it again.”

## *Jon deSilva*

Sarah sniffled. “No, I won’t. I’m already getting weaker. Even if you leave now, I’ll be gone before you arrive.” A tear rolled down her cheek, and she put her hand on her mouth.

“No, Sarah, no,” Mike cried. “You’re strong. You’ve always defied the odds.”

“Not this time.” She fought the urge to cry but failed. “Mikey, you have to be strong now.”

“I can’t. You’re all I have left.”

“That’s not true. You have Dawn and the kids. They’re your life. Be strong for them and tell them I love them.”

“I’m not strong like you.”

“No, you’re stronger. You were always stronger. You always protected me from those bullies when we were kids and then taught me how to defend myself. You introduced me to Joe when David broke my heart and I didn’t want to date anybody. You were there for me when Mom and Dad died. You and Joe gave me strength when I first fought cancer. You were always the strong one. You’re my hero, Mikey. Always remember that. Now be that hero for Dawn and the kids. That’s what I want for you.”

“I will, sis.”

“Come up this weekend. You’re off anyway and won’t lose any work time. Whether I make it or not, it would be a good time.”

“Okay. I can call my boss and get back on the schedule.”

Her handset got heavier. “It’s time for me to go, Mikey, my hero.”

“I’m going to miss you so much.”

They wept again.

“Bye, Mikey. I love you.”

“Bye, Sarah-belle. I love you, too.”

She pulled the phone from her ear and Debbie hung it up.

For the next few minutes, she wept. Debbie got a tissue and cleaned the tears from her face as she slowly regained her composure.

“Joe should be here soon,” Sarah said. “Am I presentable?”

Debbie did a few things with Sarah’s face and brushed her long blonde hair. Then she retrieved a handheld mirror. “You’re gorgeous.”

Sarah smiled. “Thank you.”

Debbie put the mirror in her pocket and went to the door. “I need to check on other patients, but I’ll be back to check on you in a bit. Goodbye, Sarah.”

“Goodbye, Debbie.”

Joe arrived a few minutes later. He appeared even more tired than he was yesterday.

“Hi, honey. How are you feeling today?”

“Weak. I don’t know how much longer I’ll last.”



*Amelia Singh*



## *Jon deSilva*

Joe started to say something but stopped. He held her hand and tears rolled down his face. "I love you, sweetheart. You're everything to me. I don't know what to do without you."

"You'll be in pain for a while, but you need to move on."

"Nobody can replace you."

"You have to let me go."

Joe broke down. "I can't."

She started to cry again. "You must." Sarah pointed to the nightstand by the bed. "I wrote you a letter. It's in the drawer."

Joe got the envelope out of the drawer of the nightstand. It read, *Joe, read this after I'm gone.*

He started to open the envelope and Sarah said, "no, not yet."

"Oh." He sniffled and got himself together. "I'm sorry." He put the envelope on the nightstand and held his wife's hand. "You're so beautiful."

A peaceful feeling washed over her. "I'm a lucky woman to have a wonderful man like you. You're the best husband a wife could have."

"You're the best wife a husband could ever have. I wish we would have had children."

"I do, too, but would you want them to suffer like this? Would you want them to lose their mother?"

"No." Joe saw Sarah struggling to breathe.

Sarah looked at the window. "Ruby was right. Another awesome sunset has begun." She gasped for breath. "We had a wonderful life together. Thank you for everything."

He held her hand tighter. "Please stay. Don't go."

She gasped more and could only take short breaths.

"Hello, Sarah-belle," a voice by the window said.

"Hi, Daddy. Is it time?"

Joe looked toward the empty window. "Sarah . . . oh no, Sarah."

Her father approached the bed. "Yes, it's time, sweetheart. Tell Joe goodbye."

Sarah said to Joe in almost a whisper, "Goodbye, honey. I love you."

"I love you, Sarah."

She turned her head to the other side of the bed. Her father extended his hand to her and gave a reassuring smile. "Take my hand, Sarah-belle. Your momma's waiting on you. We all are."

She struggled to raise her hand and weakly said, "Coming, Daddy."

Sarah gasped for a few more seconds, stopped breathing, and her body went limp.

"Sarah, no." Joe put her hand to his face and cried. A few minutes later, Debbie entered the room.



## *Jon deSilva*

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mitchell. Sarah was really sweet and a joy to take care of."

"Thank you, Debbie."

"We have to prepare her for the funeral home, so you have to go. You can come back tomorrow to pick up her things."

"Can I be with her a few more minutes?" Joe took the envelope off the nightstand.

"Okay." Debbie pointed toward the window. "It's another beautiful sunset, don't you think?"

"Yes, it is."

He opened the envelope and read the letter.

*Dear Joe,*

*By now, I'm gone, and you're wondering how you can live without me. The answer is, you must. I know if you were in my place, moving on would be the hardest thing for me to do. You're the best thing that ever happened to me. I'm blessed to have had you as my husband.*

*Remember our vows? We vowed to love, cherish, honor, and respect each other. We vowed to take each other in marriage until death do us part. Do you remember them? This is what matters most. We honored those vows, and now death has done us parted.*

*I know you're hurting right now, my love. You feel like you lost everything that's important to you. As painful as things are right now, you need to let me go. Don't do what Daddy did. Don't give up on life. You have a long, happy life ahead of you. Don't give that up because of me.*

*People sometimes do things on behalf of loved ones who have passed and say, "That's what he or she would have wanted." I'll save you from guessing. This is what I want. In fact, this is my last wish for you.*

*Live a happy life. You've suffered enough. Let me go and live your life to the fullest. Experience the joys life has to offer. Find somebody with whom you can share those joys. If you ever wonder, this is what I would have wanted.*

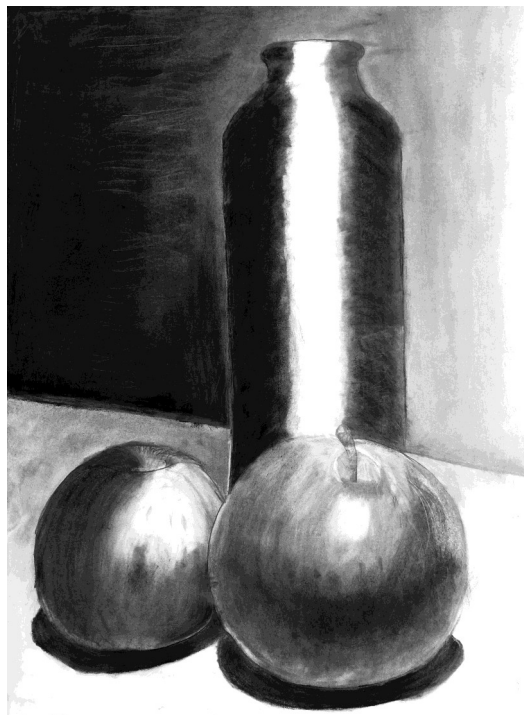
*There's one last thing. When you leave here tonight, go to Claire. She needs you. Don't ask how I know. I just do. She needs you as much as you need her right now. She's had a hard time all these years and deserves a better life. You both do. Tell her she was a great best friend. She was the greatest best friend a girl could have. Tell her I love her, and I'll miss her. Give her a hug and kiss for me.*

*Thank you, Joe, for the best fifteen years of my life. I love you and will miss you.*

*Love,  
Sarah*



*Hailey Barrow*



## *Jon deSilva*

Joe put the letter on his lap and broke down. His heart had been ripped out. What would he do now? The future seemed so bleak. He couldn't imagine life without Sarah. What now?

A short time later, Debbie returned. "I'm sorry, Mr. Mitchell. You have to go now."

He put the letter back in the envelope and put it in his suitcoat pocket. "Thank you, Debbie. Thank you for everything."

"You're welcome. Take care of yourself, Mr. Mitchell."

Joe left the hospice and went home. He parked in his driveway, turned the motor off, and cried again. After pulling himself together, he went next door to see Claire. He knocked on the door, and she opened it. Her red eyes showed she had been crying for some time. How did she find out about Sarah?

Claire ran to him, hugged him hard, and cried, "Joe! I'm so glad you're here."

He hugged her back. "So am I." They went into her house. "Where's John?"

She struggled to get herself together. "John's dead. He died last night in an accident. He ran head-on into a pickup truck."

"I'm so sorry."

"I spent all day making the arrangements for his funeral. His wake is on Friday. Will you be there?"

He nodded.

She wiped the tears from her face, and then her eyes widened. "Oh, my God! I forgot to visit Sarah. I hope she's not disappointed."

Tears welled in Joe's eyes. "No, she's not."

"Oh, no. What happened? Is she—?"

He nodded and started to cry. "She died a little while ago. Her last words were to, what I can best describe as, the ghost of her father."

"How do you know?"

"She said, 'Coming, Daddy.'"

They hugged and comforted each other as they wept. When they regained their composure, Joe said, "At least we got to say goodbye to each other."

"Is that why you're here?"

"Yes, but Sarah also wanted me to come here. I didn't even know about John." He pulled the envelope out of his coat pocket. "Sarah wrote me a note before she died and told me to come to you. She had a wish for me."

Joe handed Claire the note and she read it. She put her hand to her mouth. Joe hugged her again. He pulled back and gave her a kiss on the cheek. She pulled back and gave him a kiss on the lips. Then their emotions took over and they kissed passionately.

Realizing what they were doing, they pulled back.

## *Jon deSilva*

Realizing what they were doing, they pulled back.

"I'm sorry." Claire adjusted her hair. "We shouldn't have done that. I don't know what I was thinking."

"Yeah. I don't know what came over me. I wasn't trying to take advantage of you."

"I know. Maybe it's because of what Sarah said, about us needing each other."

"Maybe. Well, I'd better get home. I have to pick up her things tomorrow morning."

"I'm not going in to work tomorrow anyway. I'd like to go with you if it's okay."

Joe nodded. "I'd love for you to go."

Still holding hands, they headed for the door. They gave each other a peck on the cheek and Joe went home.



The next morning, Joe and Claire went to the hospice to get Sarah's things together. While they were there, Mike called and talked to Joe for a few minutes.

Joe arranged to have Sarah's funeral on Saturday, so he and Claire could attend both funerals. Also, Mike was able to take his family to Sarah's funeral without missing any work time.

They were almost finished when a woman said from the doorway, "Sarah was a good woman."

They turned and saw her name tag.

"You're Ruby," Joe said.

"Yes, I am."

"Thank you for everything you've done for Sarah. She mentioned you by name. She said you told her this room could be depressing or a place of joy. Thank you for making it a place of joy."

"Sarah made it a place of joy, baby. She really loved you. She loved both of you."

"Was it your idea for her to write the note?"

"I helped a little, but it was mostly Sarah. She was afraid you'd blame yourself for her death like her father did when her mother died. She didn't want you to give up on life. Sarah was worried about you, too, Claire. She was worried you would blame yourself for not being a good friend and deny yourself a good life."

"Was it your idea for me to see Claire?" Joe asked.

"Yes, but it was already something Sarah wanted. You were the two people closest to her. Both of you have suffered these past years and always remained strong. She knew you two would be good for each other. You may not feel that way right now, but after everything is said and done, you'll see."

## *Jon deSilva*

Claire and Joe looked at each other and blushed.

“I know both of you are hurting right now,” Ruby said. “Seek comfort and strength in each other. If you do, things will get better for both of you. I have faith that you two will be all right.”

Joe and Claire finished putting the last of Sarah’s things into the box.

“Ruby, would you like to go with us to the cafeteria for some coffee?” Joe asked. “We’d like to talk more with you.”

“I wish I could but thank you anyway.”

“I’d like to do something for you to thank you for taking good care of Sarah.”

Ruby smiled. “You already did, baby.”

Claire stood by Joe’s side. “Thank you again for everything.”

“You’re welcome, sweetheart. You two take care of each other.”

Joe picked up the box. “I think we have everything. We’d better go. Are you ready, Claire?”

“I’m ready.”

“It’s time for me to go home, too,” Ruby said. “My shift is over.”



*Emman Abukhalil*

***Kaicy Duckworth***

**Marriage**

To have,  
But are you really mine to own?  
Can I have you even when you don't want to be kept?  
Your inner man, your thoughts. Are they mine?  
Was that not a part of the deal or did you only vow to half?  
To hold,  
Will you pour out what your heart desires,  
Or do you believe men can't cry? Did your mom tell you that lie?  
Will you hold me when I need to be held?  
Grasping onto my never-ending love you swore to  
For better,  
On my best days as I float on cloud nine,  
Or will my confidence and intelligence intersect with your manhood  
That you can't even give a sista a high five?  
Or for worse,  
When my world has come crashing and darkness fills my mind,  
Can you drag me out of bed and assure me everything will be alright?  
Will you stick by my side as suicide lingers, clouding my judgment  
Possibly taking my issues out on you?  
Or was for worse just a pretty poem you decided to hum that day?  
For richer,  
As we build our dynasty conquering the world,  
Vacationing amongst our steeds, trampling through acres as I watch you glow.  
Or will the love for blue paper showcase who you really are?  
Or for poorer,  
Failure after failure, attempting to climb our way to the top.  
Do you excuse yourself for adultery,  
Claiming another episode of a weak man simply going through a lot?  
I'll stick by your side, mid storm. When it rains it pours. I'm aware.  
I vow to umbrella as you lead. Not stepping on your toes,  
as you get us back on our feet.

## *Kaicy Duckworth*

In sickness,  
If you forget who I am, I'll still love you.  
Can you hold up your end of the deal?  
Wheel-chairing through Paris as we take our last breaths.  
Or will my illness bother you?  
Will my old age not reconcile with you?  
Do you even know what you signed up for?  
And in health,  
Just how well do you think you know me?  
Can you recognize my triggers,  
Soothing my pain before I can even utter the thought of why?  
Will my well-being be at your forefront,  
'Cause I promise yours will be at mine.  
To love,  
Loving me on my best days, that's a given.  
But will you still show interest ten years from now?  
Can my aromatic voice light up your world  
As you remember what we were even put here for?  
Graciously walking through every room, will our intimacy smile their souls?  
Or will toxicity disgrace our very being,  
Causing every young child to stench even the thought of marriage.  
To cherish,  
Will you hold this commitment to a higher standard,  
Treasuring what's mine and yours?  
Will you hold your "I do" close to your heart,  
Or will this love fade amongst the ocean of women infatuated with tearing us  
    apart?  
Are you even capable of what you promised?  
Was it all just a lie?  
Until parted by death,  
But does it all really end there?

## *Kaicy Duckworth*

Will our rings vanish with the graves,  
Or do you pledge to find me on the other side?  
Send me flowers on Monday to my surprise,  
Please love me while I'm alive.  
I'll pray for you on this journey called life,  
I just hope you'll pray for me.

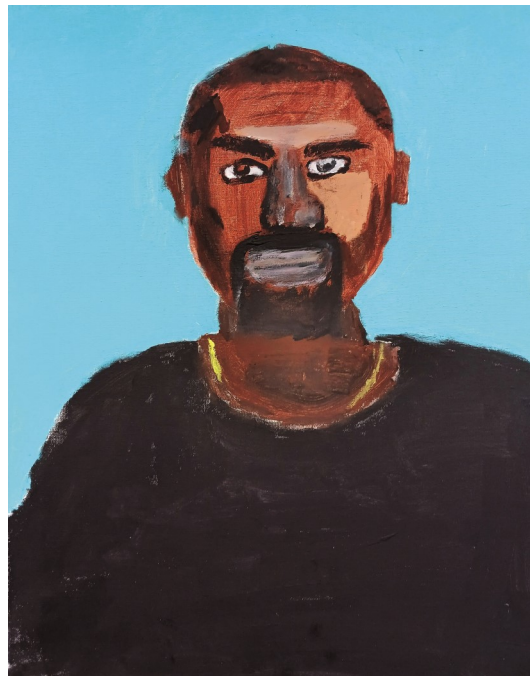


*Henry France*





*Alecia Barnes*



*Zachary  
Zuppardo*

## *Quintin Gustin*

### **This Old House**

As I turned off of Highway 190 onto LA 81, my apprehension began to build. It had been a long, tiring trip from Houston, made more so by my decision to stay the night in the house. People chuckled when I told them I had never spent a night alone in the house I grew up in and that I never would. I am 57 years old now, and my family moved in when I was five. It was not pleasant for me. As soon as we moved in, I started having nightmares; I became afraid of the dark. I had experienced neither before.

I drove past the old Cottonwood Cemetery, where Ruby May had been buried. I had never been able to find her grave, though I had looked carefully more than once. Now, whitewashed headstones peeked above the ground fog like rising ghosts. I slowed as I turned onto LA 77 just above the little town of Fordoche and then drove along the bayou for which it had been named. Off to the right, there were open fields with no crops. I could see the woods behind them, towering dark and foreboding. I was now driving through dense patches of fog, as LA 77 turned into LA 10, and I knew it would be worse closer to the river. *Twenty more minutes and then my reckoning.*

The house and I had a history. It was part of my family's history. It was a history of strange occurrences. First, the house was noisy. I don't mean the rare pop and crack of old wood. It was noisy in the way a graveyard might be noisy in your imagination. Quiet footfalls and barely audible and incomprehensible whispers might be heard, followed by complete silence and stillness. I could never decide which was worse. I was meeting my sister there in the morning. She wanted to hold onto the land and the old house on it; I wanted to sell.

As I drove, I recalled the time when an uncle had stayed the night and was given a room upstairs. When he came downstairs, bleary-eyed, in the morning, he recounted a tale of being choked in the night by some unseen hand. He had fought and struggled and slept no more that night.

## *Quintin Gustin*

The upstairs was finished after we moved there. Initially, it was just an attic, with only a single bedroom off to the left of the steep stairs. The right side was made into another bedroom, a sitting room, and a bath, leaving a full thirty percent still just attic. One night, my sister and her husband, who were visiting for Thanksgiving, went to sleep upstairs. In the morning, I found my brother-in-law sleeping on a downstairs sofa. My sister later told me that it had gotten so noisy behind the thin paneling that separated the room from the attic that he had taken a pillow and blanket and left. He never understood her seeming casualness about whatever might have been transpiring behind that wall. I have always seen him as a man who is afraid of nothing. Yet, that night, he had been afraid.

My mother died more than 25 years ago. Shortly after her death, I tried to convince my dad to sell the place and move into a smaller, more manageable home. But the house and the small farm on which it rested were where he wanted to live. I suggested to him that the house was very noisy and that he might not rest well there, living alone. He had heard my ghost stories, coupled with my refusal to sleep alone in the house, and just shook his head and said, “Boy, the dead can’t hurt you; only the living can hurt you.”

After my mother’s death, I visited him often. One day, I went into his bedroom looking for a book. What I found instead was his Belgium-made Browning automatic 12-gauge shotgun propped against the end table. It was loaded. I later asked him about it, and he said that the house had gotten so noisy some nights that he was sure someone had broken in. Of course, he would find no one. I didn’t tell him what I was thinking: a shotgun was useless for what he had been hunting on those dark nights. *The dead can’t hurt you; only the living can hurt you.*

The fog was thicker now as I neared LA 1. It swallowed the moss-laden oaks that stretched out on both sides of the two-lane blacktop. It was hard to tell if they were beckoning or attempting to grasp at whoever happened along. I slowed in the lowered visibility. As I did, my thoughts turned to my mother. I am pretty certain that these events were—in some way—related to her.



*Joe Lewis*





*Joe Lewis*



## *Quintin Gustin*

She had what she called the “gift.” She saw things. She knew things, the knowing of which defied logic or understanding, at least as most of us see it. When she was alive, people would come from other states to have her do a reading. She never charged anyone. “You don’t charge for a gift,” she would explain. One day she was visited by a couple from Mississippi whose 10-year-old son had died. His favorite possession had been a green pocketknife. It was nowhere to be found, and they wanted to give it to his cousin, his playmate, as a keepsake. My mother proceeded to describe their attic, where the boy had played. She told them of a hiding place he had in one of the eaves. They would find it there. And, by the way, he didn’t want his cousin to have the knife because his cousin often had been mean to him. Within a few hours, they called back. The knife had been found, exactly as she had described. Three months later, the boy’s parents returned. They were just interested in how he was doing. My mother closed her eyes and rocked gently back and forth. She opened her eyes and said, “He is doing fine. He is happy and says not to worry about him anymore. He has his dog with him now, and they play together.” The couple looked at one another. Two weeks before, the father had backed over the dog in the driveway. It had died instantly. Now it was with their son, wherever he was. I still get chills remembering this. I recall my father shrugging and shaking his head about this story. He had known it to be true, yet it made no sense to him.

It was not always a pretty story though. One night I sat on the sofa with her, as she pulled out a Ouija Board. I was visiting from college then, and I didn’t like the questions she was asking about the number and kinds of ghosts in the house. That night, just after we had all gone to bed, a loud clanging sound could be heard in the house. I jumped up and made it to my door, just as my father arrived at his bedroom door. He looked at me and pointed one way, and he went the other. The house was locked up tightly. No one could be seen. I shrugged at my father and headed to the bathroom before going back to bed. I stopped, frozen in midstep. The bathtub handle to the hot water had come loose and lay in the tub. Had it unscrewed itself?

## *Quintin Gustin*

There are other stories, but I didn't want to think about them. I planned to conquer a fear tonight, and conjuring these reminiscences of things past was not helping. It was time I defeated this fear that had held me for over 50 years. The best way to do that is exposure. If you fear heights, climb. If you fear public speaking, volunteer to speak. If you fear dogs, go to the pound. And, if you fear an old house, go there and spend the night. I turned south on LA 1, and, in a few minutes, pulled to the gate of the farm. It was dark now and a thick fog covered the ground. I could see the dim outline of the levee, the river no more than a half mile away. I keyed the padlock and opened the gate. I drove through and stopped again. I closed the gate but did not relock it. As I drove up the long drive, I saw the old house rise up two stories tall, dark and foreboding. I felt my hair prickle on the back of my neck. This was going to be hard.

I unlocked the back door and entered the kitchen. I turned on the lights and stood there. The house, for all its noisy possibilities, was eerily quiet and still, as if it were somehow holding its breath. At least, that was the thought that occurred to me. I walked to the living room, turning on lights as I went. It was a large room. To my left, I could see the edge of the staircase. I knew for certain I would not be going up there tonight. No chance. I hoped nothing would be coming down. I sat down in the middle of the room in my father's old chair. It was well upholstered and comfortable, and he had spent many hours in just this spot before he passed. I was weary from the long drive. Leaving Houston at rush hour had nearly done me in from the outset. I took three long, deep breaths to relax myself, to control my anxiety, and closed my eyes. They were not closed for very long. I slowly opened my eyes and turned to the right. No more than 15 feet away, in front of the antique buffet was a mass of white mist, stationary, yet moving within itself as if it were trying to materialize, to take on some shape. I watched as my heart and breathing raced. Then, I broke my gaze, closed my eyes, and shook my head. When I looked back, it was gone.

I bolted from the chair and moved quickly back into the kitchen. I sat at the table. At least it was close to the back door. I looked down at my hands and saw they were trembling. It was





*Aseel Hamed*



## *Quintin Gustin*

then that I heard the music. It sounded like a dirge played by an amateur, makeshift band. I knew what it was. I had seen them before. I rose and went to the window. They were there. The Union soldiers. In 1864, General Nathaniel Banks, Military Governor of New Orleans, decided to reap a bit of glory for himself and waged what was called the Red River Campaign. It failed. While deciding what to do, Banks bivouacked nearly 20,000 men on the Mississippi River at Morganza in Pointe Coupee Parish. Hundreds died when a Yellow Fever epidemic sliced through the encampment.

Many years before, after my family had bought this land, my father contracted to have a field near the levee plowed so he could plant corn. What lay under the surface were hundreds of bones from long buried Union soldiers. He had them recovered with soil and left them resting where they had lain all those long years. Professors from the Anthropology Department at LSU begged to be allowed to do a dig there, but my father would have none of it. *Let the dead be dead.*

Now, fifteen yards from the house, a group of soldiers were building a fire, placing twigs on burning leaves. One looked up and saw me at the window. He nudged his companion and motioned in my direction with his chin. The second soldier got the attention of others and indicated my presence by poking a finger in my direction in a back-and-forth gesture. I had seen these troops before. What was disconcerting was that they had never before indicated in any way that they were at all aware of me. I watched as they looked at me with unmoving, baleful stares. *The dead can't hurt you; only the living can hurt you.* And then I heard a loud boom, as if something had smashed against the front door. I ran to look. Nothing. The door was intact, and no more sounds came.

I returned to the kitchen and sat down, trembling. I was not sure I could do this, stay the whole night. But was it too late to leave? I was pretty sure I didn't want to be in the yard either. I looked down, trying to slow my breathing. I could see my belly going in and out like a bellows. Suddenly, I heard the kitchen door slowly open, its hinges creaking loudly, and in walked . . .

## *Quintin Gustin*

my mother. Or at least, it looked like my mother for the most part. She was paler than the Sicilian olive complexion that I remember. She was more supple than the frail, thin woman she had been before the cancer had taken her. She did not smile to see me. She was angry. “You need to have your head examined, coming here like this.” It was something she would say.

“Mom?” I asked, unsure. She just stared, brown eyes glowing. “But how do I know it’s you?”

Her voice was a whisper. “Do you remember when you were ten and you shot out Mr. Henri’s streetlight with that pellet gun? I made you take all your savings—thirteen dollars—to the town marshal. And how you cried. No one knew that but us. Now, we don’t have much time. I don’t have much time, and my words are limited. I need you to go into that cabinet and get five votives.” I heard the glass of the kitchen window crack. “Get St. Jude. You need him tonight. St. Cecilia, St. Ignatius, St. Theresa the Little Flower, and the Blessed Virgin. Set them on the floor surrounding us and light them.” I did as she said, as the house got noisier, starting to reverberate with knocking sounds and low booms. We looked up as we heard footsteps cross over us from the room above. They paused and then went back the way they had come.

“Mom, this old house . . .”

“Stop!” She interrupted, still angry, “It’s not the house. It’s you!” I frowned, confused. “I always told you that you had the gift, too. I encouraged you to develop it, but you refused. Look at them out there. They have their stories to tell. They still have kin that need to hear their stories—how they lived, how they died. You are their hope. They are stuck here, in this time. They need to move on. I know you are afraid, uncomfortable with it, but you do not turn down such a gift. Now I must work. My time is short.”

“Why are you back here?”

“I came for you. Your time is not done here. You still have work to do.”

## *Quintin Gustin*

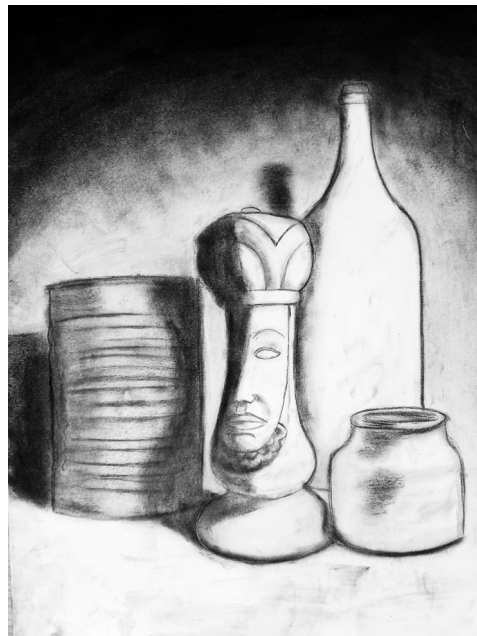
“Wait! Where will you go? I mean when you leave here.”

She paused, thoughtful, and then she smiled for the first time. “It’s really all about Time. I am no longer of this Time. Think of me as being just over the next hill. Now close your eyes while I work.”

I saw her close her eyes and begin mumbling or humming. I couldn’t be sure. And then I closed mine.

I awoke with a start. I looked across the table to see my mother gone. The room was bathed in morning light. The votive candles had burned out. The fog was slowly lifting, and the soldiers were nowhere to be seen. I went to the kitchen sink and splashed water on my face. I went outside to where the campfire had been. There were no signs of it. I knew I would be out here tonight, by that campfire in the thick river fog.

I still had work to do. *The dead can’t hurt you; only the living can hurt you.*



*Owen Connor*

## *Quintin Gustin*

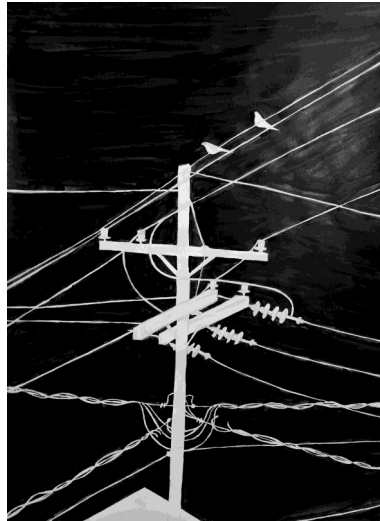
### **Time**

I think Einstein was right  
Even when we die  
Time goes on,  
For each of us;  
Like sound and light,  
It's some kind of wave;  
And we're still riding it  
Like some present day  
Silver Surfer

So, no one dies;  
We all ride those waves;  
And out there is a younger you,  
Taking first steps on awkward legs,  
Or parting your lips for a first kiss,  
Breathing in another's enticing scent.

Yet, surfing, gliding on time,  
As you might be,  
You are frozen in time to me,  
Young, eager, ready to blossom  
Into timeless beauty.

*Owen Connor*



## *Quintin Gustin*

### **Time (2)**

*~ for Isabel ~*

In my father's house  
there were many clocks;  
if I listen closely,  
I can hear their soft murmur,  
insistent, demanding, relentless, unforgiving.  
"Be on time."  
"Time waits on no one."  
"Don't waste time."  
"I don't have time."  
"It's not the right time."  
"Timing is everything."

Time is the enemy.  
Time is a slithering snake,  
relentless in its approach,  
whose poison you can't draw out;  
they said, "Be Mindful,  
live in the present,  
forget the snake";  
but the present left the moment  
I blinked,  
an illusion, now past,  
the future on a collision course;

Time makes us old and slow,  
until the silence comes;  
when we can speak but not be heard,  
reach out yet not be touched;

## *Quintin Gustin*

And then I see it coming,  
that long silver wave,  
coming right for me,  
and I hop on,  
like I've been trained,  
or it's in my genes  
to ride the wave of Time;

Time is now my friend;  
endless time, infinite time,  
always in the present,  
I ride that wave,  
a silver ball in a frictionless groove,  
speeding past the buttery moon,  
careening towards the beckoning stars,  
slowly rising over the next hill,  
never stopping;  
never doubling back,  
or looking back;

Yet, in the smallest particle of Time,  
when I know you need me,  
I am here,  
with you,  
    Just in time.

## *Quintin Gustin*

### **Different Wave**

We all know  
No one dies;  
We simply come to ride  
The wave of a different time;  
That Einstein fellow told me this  
As he surfed by not long ago;  
He was smiling when he said it,  
Pleased with himself;

So, yes, there are visitors,  
As we go about our business  
In this different time;  
Family and old friends embrace us, laughing, remembering;  
even the occasional saint,  
To whom we once prayed for intercession,  
Stops to provide a new benediction;

But there is another kind of wave,  
Like that lost highway Hank sang about,  
where no one visits,  
or warms with smiling embrace  
In the silence of its millennia;  
Einstein didn't have to tell me,  
This highway is called  
hell

## *Quintin Gustin*

### **Upstairs, Dancing**

My visitor, ever alert,  
Raises curious eyes to my ceiling;  
I know what he's thinking, wondering, imagining  
On hearing the bump and thump and slide  
Emanating other-worldly,  
Some primitive drum beat;

He gazes thoughtfully,  
Someone moving? Packing this box and that?  
Moving chair and couch and table  
Until it is just so?  
A poltergeist perhaps in this old building;

*Mais, non, mon ami;*  
It is Rebecca,  
Dancing,  
In her short skirt,  
Showing well-muscled legs;  
She starts with a pleasing *plié* and  
Ends with a soaring *sauté*;

Not even an eagle could fly  
With such grace;  
As she lands on toes more precise  
Than needles;

In my mind,  
I see her dip and twirl and spin until,  
Flying faster than the peregrine,  
Nothing is left  
But the green parabola of her eyes.



## *Cameron LeBlanc*

### **Nothing Grows There**

“Nothing grows there!”

Miss Betty had been watching Sasha for about ten minutes from her porch across the street before she felt compelled to let the girl know she had been wasting her time. A stout woman, aged and no longer concerned with her appearance or the opinions of others, she watched as Sasha tended to a 3-square foot patch of dirt on the corner of Mapelton and Jones Drive, a spot that, although surrounded by a lush garden of assorted flowers, was barren.

Miss Betty had not seen the girl before today, but she had observed the unchanging nature of that patch of dirt for the nearly 30 years she had been residing across the street. While the property belonged to several different owners throughout those years (it was a dentist’s office now), no matter what care was taken to beatify the garden, that little patch never became anything other than a pitiful patch of dirt.

Sasha acknowledged the elderly woman with a bright smile and a wave before returning her attention to the dirt. She poured the last drops of her water bottle over the dirt, stood in admiration of the space for a moment, and finally went on her way. “Kids these days,” Miss Betty muttered to herself, “doesn’t she have anything better to do?” The thought forced her to reflect on how infrequently people did what was better. She moved on to another task before she could apply the thought to herself.

Sasha was an exceptional young woman; she was a straight A student, poised to graduate from high school at the top of her class in just six weeks. Her work ethic was unmatched, but even more remarkable was her character. In particular, she had a keen sense of compassion towards others, always quick to defend weaker classmates from bullies, with a wit clever enough to avoid becoming the target herself. She always saw the good in others, and apparently in barren soil as



*Andrea Mejia Vargas*

## *Cameron LeBlanc*

well. Today, she decided to take a new route home from school, where she came across the poor patch. It appeared to her soulless amidst a sea of life. *This isn't right*, she thought to herself. She found a nearby flower shop, purchased some seeds, and returned to the spot, which was when Miss Betty noticed her.

For the next three weeks, Miss Betty observed as Sasha returned to the spot every day, sometimes bringing various tools to help with her cultivation. Although she wasn't known for it, Miss Betty held her tongue after that first day; however, she remained quite curious about the girl's motivations. Her curiosity only increased as she noticed that despite the girl's focused efforts, the patch showed no signs of sprouting any plant life.

Miss Betty couldn't take it anymore. She had to find out from the girl herself the meaning of this seemingly fruitless endeavor. The next day, she noticed the girl arriving around the usual time and made her way across the street to meet her. "Hi there," started Miss Betty. "I'm Betty, from across the street."

"Hi, Miss Betty," Sasha responded with a warm smile. "I'm Sasha."

"I noticed you've been working on this patch of dirt for the last few weeks, I imagine in the hopes of having some flowers grow?"

"Mmm, yes ma'am." Sasha went on to explain, "I had never come this way after school, but since I'm planning to go off to college not long from now, I felt compelled to discover new places near home before I left. This patch of dirt caught my eye a few weeks ago and, I don't know, I felt like I had been given a mission that day. I know that sounds weird."

"Hmm, yes that does sound weird." Miss Betty never meant for the things she said to come across as rude, and it seemed to be taken without offense, as Sasha simply laughed. "Well, dear, it appears your mission has been a failure," Miss Betty concluded, as gently as she could manage. "If you remember, I shouted to you on that first day from across the

## *Cameron LeBlanc*

street that nothing grows there. That's been the case for the last 30 years, and it seems that'll remain the case."

Sasha kept her warm smile throughout the exchange, seemingly unperturbed by Miss Betty's discouraging sentiment. "You know, ma'am, a week and a half ago, I would've been inclined to agree with you. And you were right in a way on that first day you saw me."

"In a way?" Miss Betty was confused.

"Well, sure," Sasha continued, "no flowers have grown in this little patch of dirt, for what reason I'll never know. But just as I was going to give up several days ago, I realized something had in fact grown here and would continue to grow for as long as I worked on this dirt."

"Oh yeah? What's that?"

"You see, I've never been more patient!" Sasha exclaimed, with a hearty laugh. "Anyway, with finals fast approaching, I think this little mission of mine has come to an end. And I must say, I consider it a success! It was a pleasure to meet you, Miss Betty. Take care!" With that, Sasha was on her way.

"Strange bird, that one," Miss Betty muttered to herself as she returned to her house, unchanged as that stubborn patch of dirt.

*Anthony Paul Perez*

**When the Masquerade Is Over**

We hallow at the sanctioned tradition  
A Late Summer, Late Morn so cloudy  
We sway amongst the mist of incoming rains  
Western formed, eastern bound  
They  
Impend in the nightmares of devils alike  
Does the hammock of decay invite the will of  
    omniscient, omnipotent eternity?  
Meaningless conversations flow by like the fluid falls  
    that flow into the rivers of such an Eden  
How must one perform a happiness as such an enigma?  
How must one consistently delay the impending  
    arbitrary, demonstrable smoking gun of human  
    existence?  
Yet, we masquerade the scent of loving deception  
We maintain the consistency of celebratory tradition  
The aging of one, the fatal variant of another  
In preparation for the grief bound to our souls  
We envisage the rustic time bomb that holds his soul imprisoned,  
    separated from glee by the thick iron bars of atrophy  
But, at last!  
When the masquerade is over, and the lights are  
    emerald bright  
We confront our privilege in the dead of raven cove's night  
Yet, we must not let our prerequisites of antonyms take hold of  
    our soft-hearted flights!  
For when the masquerade is over, we are  
    preconditioned to shatter tradition anguish of spite  
In hopes that one day, we as seraphs, under  
    omnipotence, will boundlessly reunite!



*Michaela Schock*



*Renee Sanchez*

**Give Me an Hour or Two**

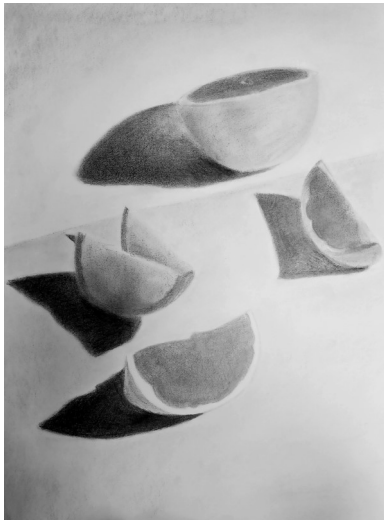
Did you ever stop to think what you would do  
If God left you in charge for an hour or two?  
Would you take away the hunger of that little child?  
Maybe make the winters a bit more mild?

What if the dictator could be replaced?  
In the entire world for the good of the human race  
No more crime, no more time  
Stop wasting time just to make a dime

I'd take away the pain of a homeless man,  
Woman, child in the far off land  
Keep our children safe, warm, and fed  
Tucked away in their own bed

The animals of the world would no longer fear  
Being eaten, slaughtered or abandoned here

Oh if only God gave me an hour  
I'd do everything I could to use my power



*Madison Valenti*

*Renee Sanchez*

**Disease**

They call it a disease  
Maybe so I don't know  
I just want to please  
My mother . . . my brother . . . sisters too  
But this damn thing gives me the blues  
Come on you can beat this thing  
Turn it around  
Shake it down  
Put your foot down  
Make some noise  
Take charge  
Of your life  
Put this behind you  
Start a new life  
One filled with hope and dreams  
No more schemes  
Life is passing you by  
Don't make me cry  
Be wise  
Be the person you know you can be  
And set yourself free!



*Renee Sanchez*

**Mom**

Dear Mom,  
I just wanted you to know  
How much I love you so!  
I'm that ray of sun that  
Shines upon your face.  
I know it can never take my place.  
And, oh ya, the rainbow in the sky,  
You guessed it, it's me  
With a twinkle in my eye.  
I'm watching over you, Mom.  
I'll be your angel in the sky.  
I know you must ask god, but why?  
We didn't even have a chance to say goodbye.  
But I'm never too far away.  
I will be by your side,  
Holding your hand  
When you cry  
Wiping that tear from your eye.  
It's not really goodbye.  
Think of it as until we meet again.  
Until then replace those tears of sorrow  
With tears of joy  
That's a request from your boy.  
Live, Mom, have no fears, hold me precious in your heart.  
Do it for me. Do it for the family.

*Renee Sanchez*

## **Don't Let Time Pass You By**

What do you say to all the people out there?  
Hustling and bustling to make a living  
Appointments throughout the day  
Eat on the run, leaves no time for fun  
This deadline, that deadline to make  
I've got to wake up and open my mind  
It's just finding the time

Chorus:

Do you ever notice the butterfly sitting on the branch?  
How about the hummingbird whistling by?  
Look at all the shells left behind after low tide  
Don't let time pass you by

The sounds of a busy life resonate in your mind  
Honking and shoving to get by  
Tied to your watch for the time  
Sounds like you're in a real darn bind  
So let me tell you one more time

Chorus:

Do you ever notice the butterfly sitting on the branch?  
How about the hummingbird whistling by?  
Look at all the shells left behind after low tide  
Don't let time pass you by

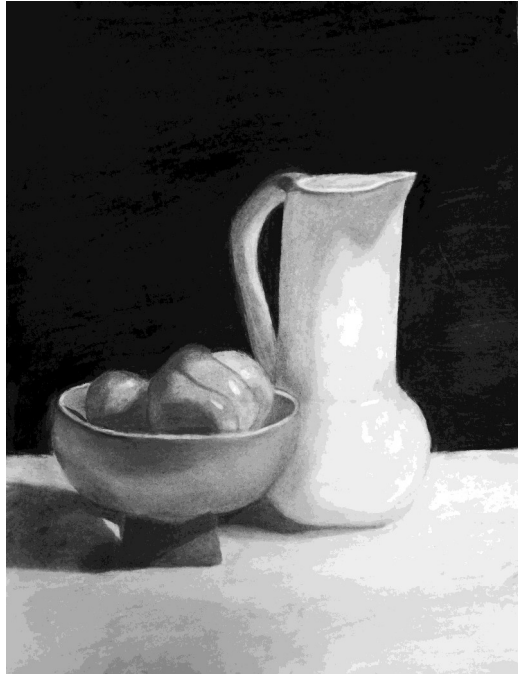
Your son's playing little league after school today  
You daughter's performing in the ballet  
Your wife says you've missed too much already  
They need to see your face in the crowd  
You walk out the door and say, "I'm sorry  
Corporate is calling me downtown  
Maybe next time I'll be around"

Chorus:

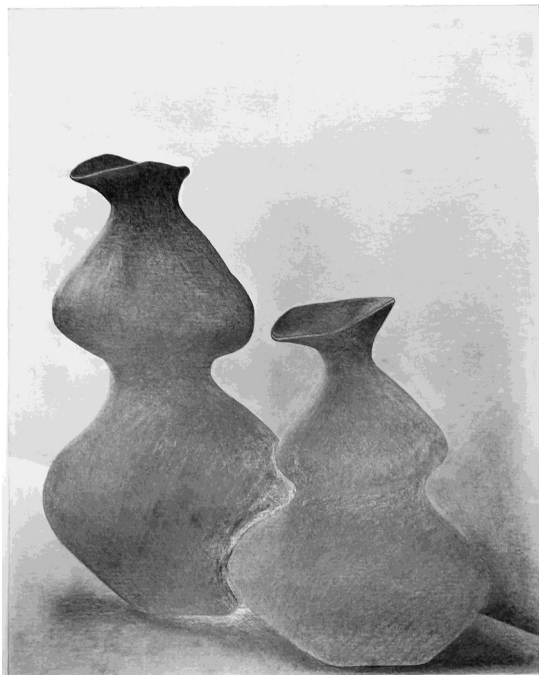
Do you ever notice the butterfly sitting on the branch?  
How about the hummingbird whistling by?  
Look at all the shells left behind after low tide  
Don't let time pass you by



***Karla Fisher (cover artist)***



*Natalie Rico*



*Chloé Williams*

**a flower in concrete**

They say dandelions can grow through a crack in the concrete,  
But I am nothing like that flower.  
I cannot grow through the very thing that weighs me down.  
I cannot push against the harsh nature of reality.  
I remain rooted,  
Stagnant in my own fear:  
Fear of rejection, fear of humiliation, fear of failure.  
I remain rooted in this ground that no longer nourishes me.  
The lack of sunlight, the lack of water, the lack of care—  
I struggle to give it to myself,  
Yet I never try to seek it from someone else.  
If I cannot provide,  
Who can?  
If I cannot fight,  
Who will?  
There's a crack in the concrete,  
Giving me an opportunity to rise.  
And still, I bend against it.  
I stay there,  
Rooted in my unhappiness and sorrow.  
I long for better  
But I never go after it.  
Who am I?  
How do I survive?

Day after endless day,  
I remain rooted.  
I remain malnourished.  
I remain *stuck*.  
The crack shifts and widens: another helping hand,  
Yet I bat it away.  
Why am I so rooted in this place?  
Why do I not allow myself to fight and grow and prosper?  
Even as the concrete is lifted away,  
Even as the sun peeks through,  
I remain rooted.  
There are no petals; there are no leaves.  
It's just me and my gangly roots.

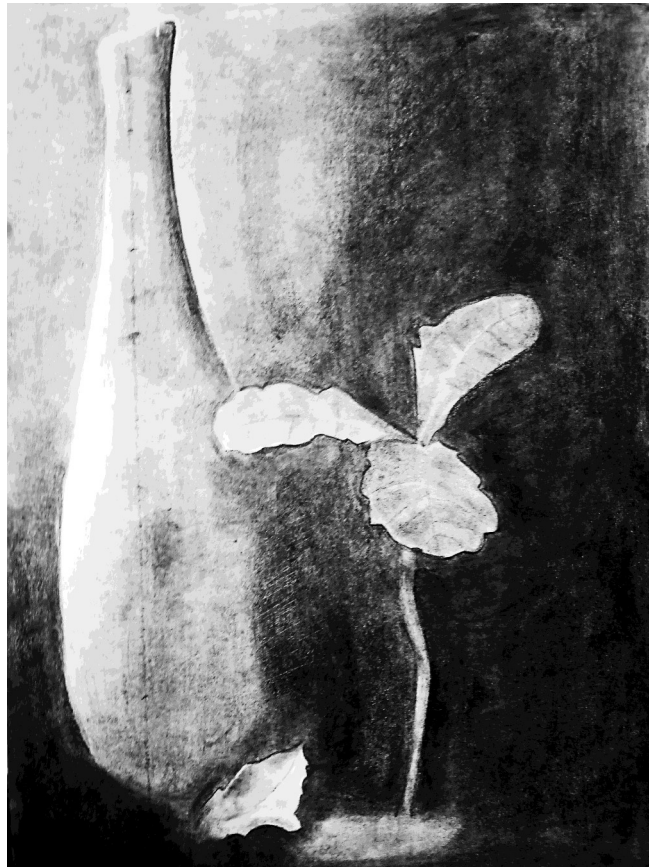
## *Chloé Williams*

What is it that grounds me?  
I wish to grow; I wish to blossom.  
And yet I'm stuck.  
I pull and tug against these weeds that hold me hostage.  
The concrete is gone;  
The sky is there;  
The world is *right there*.  
They're waiting for me,  
And yet—  
I'm rooted.  
I'm rooted, I'm rooted, *I'm rooted*.  
I go nowhere.  
For once in my life, can't I just fight?  
Can't I try?  
Just this once?  
No.  
*No!*  
Years—year after painstaking year,  
I allowed these roots to take hold; I allowed these weeds to tether me  
to the ground:  
This ground that has never nourished me, that *will never nourish me*.  
Stuck? No, this is different than being stuck.  
I'm not stuck here.  
I assist in my own captivity, choosing to be covered in the rubble of  
emotional debris.  
How do I get out from under here?  
How do I call out for help?  
The concrete is gone,  
And yet I'm still trapped.  
I have no one—I have nothing!  
It's just me—me and these stupid things that I should *just let go*  
*already*.  
The ghost of it still haunts me;  
The damage still lingers.  
As the sky opens its mighty mouth and pours its love into me;  
As the sun and moon give me their undivided attention;  
As the clouds whisper their sweet, soothing words of comfort—  
I remain withered.

*Chloé Williams*

Who can help you when you are unwilling to help yourself?  
Who can love you when you are incapable of loving yourself?  
Who can comfort you when everything else drowns it out?

How can I become unstuck  
If all I ever knew  
Was being stuck?



*Kaylynn Poublanc*

*Carol Petrone Wilson*

**Pretty Pastels**

Deep reds. Explosive purples. Painfully bright yellows.  
Muddy browns.  
Surviving in a world of black and white. No grays.  
Longing for blue serenity and green cooling.  
Better yet, for a delicious array of pretty pastels!  
Fluffy pink hugs and sweet kisses.  
Lavender calming breaths and security.  
Aqua serendipity and peach creativity.  
Marred. Broken. Ugly.  
Even when the canvas is covered and painted anew.  
Why do I still see the portrait 'neath it all?

**Silenced No More**

For too long a voice that was silenced.  
Made to feel unworthy, ineffective, useless.  
"Hold your tongue. Keep the peace at all costs."  
The price paid with silent screams of agony of the soul.  
They tried to stamp out all value and self-worth.  
Almost destroyed it completely. Yet—  
That spark of the Divine in all  
Would not be extinguished.  
The lullabies and ministrations of angels  
Assuring of value and precious worth.  
Until, out of the morass of abuse,  
Emerges a soul to be reckoned with.  
Silenced. No. More.





*Guided  
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Individuals  
Couples  
Families  
Groups



**Matt Exnicios**  
MA,PLPC,NCC

Anxiety  
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*Calliope*  
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