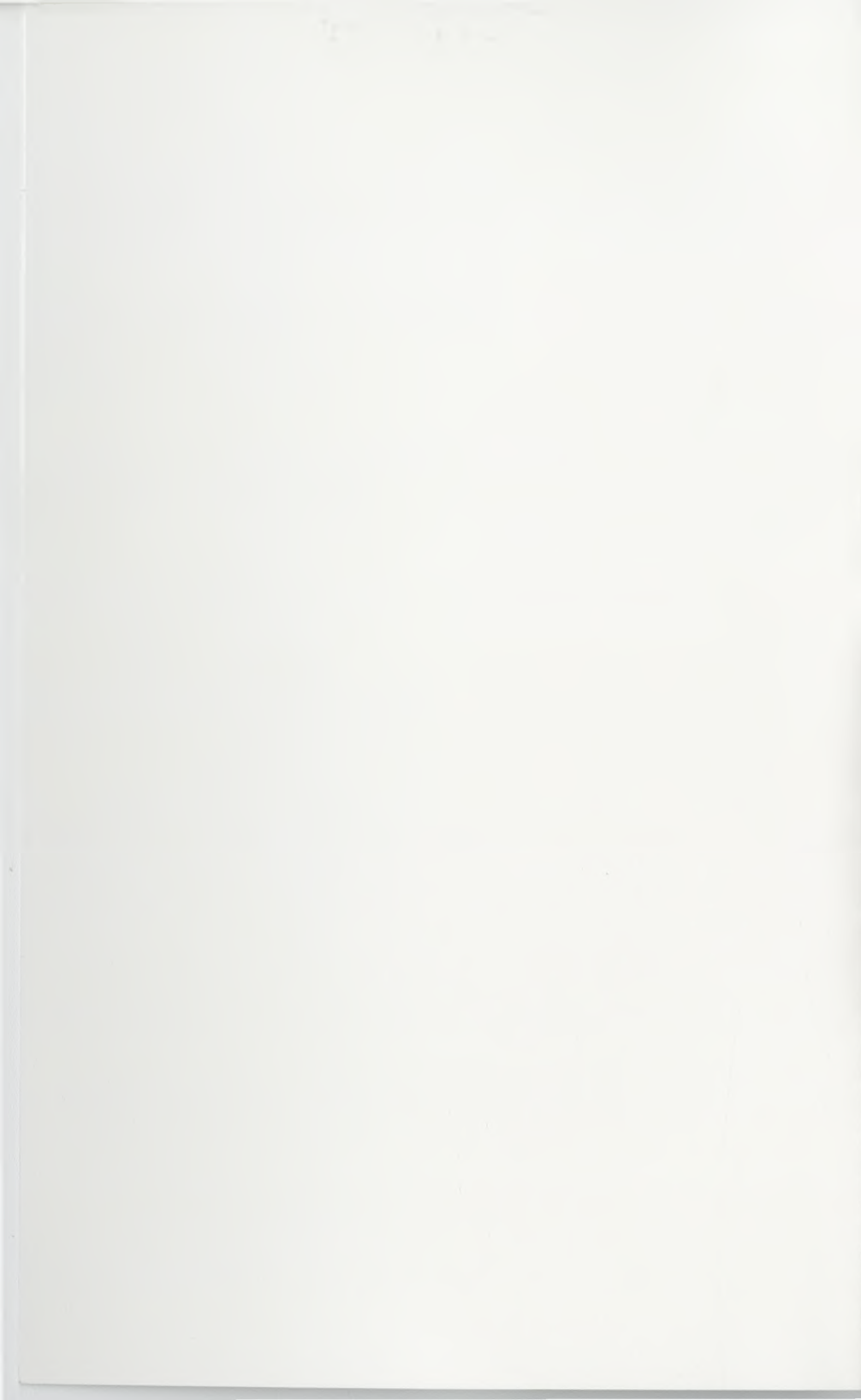


# Colors

## 2018





# Colors

Carroll College Literary Magazine  
2018

## **Editor in Chief**

*Kristina McGee*

## **Assistant Editors**

*Cassandra Offt*

*Samantha Reed*

## **Cover Art**

*Bret Charlton*

*Special thanks to Loren Graham and Patrick Harris*

*Dedicated to Most Reverend George Leo Thomas  
and Father Stephen C. Rowan*

## Legend of Colors

Anonymous

As in his shallow pan  
the prospector sifts the grey silt, filtering  
from the muddy sand and rubble  
the precious, golden  
flecks, the colors of his avid  
searching; so  
the authors of the following  
pages have aspired to distill  
from the drear and commonplace  
dross of raw reality and everyday  
experience of their colors, transmuted through  
literary experience into the gold of transcendent  
self-expression.

# Table of Contents

## Theatrical Play

The Room Where We Live	
- Brenna Kinsey .....	9

## Poetry

The Old Chevy	
- Aiko Bongolan .....	22

Together	
- Amber Griffin.....	23

Everything	
- Anonymous .....	23

Faith, Hope, and Love	
- Bret Charlton.....	25

The Dead White Guys Who Run My Life	
- Cassandra Offt.....	25

The Great Blue	
- Danielle Marietti.....	26

Life Changing	
- Danielle Marietti.....	27

Don't Be Mad	
- Ellie Hoosei.....	29
Falling Asleep Smiling... and Other Things I Do Regularly	
- Faith Eodice.....	30
Lime Green Ribbon	
- Gretchen Farkas.....	32
Sift	
- Isabella Minudri .....	33
Tell Me About Yourself	
- Isabella Minudri .....	33
To Him	
- Isabella Minudri .....	34
Woman's Legacy	
- Jessica Sekerak.....	36
Perception	
- Jessica Sekerak.....	37
I Want to Tell You About Balance	
- Libby Damon.....	38
Seattle Winds	
- Mallory Arbizzani .....	40

Summer Dreams	
- Mallory Arbizzani .....	41
eclipse	
- Theresa Trinh .....	42
Forest Fire	
- Tommy Le .....	42
Choice	
- Tommy Le .....	43
I Tried	
- Tommy Le .....	45
You Are the Rain	
- Tommy Le .....	45
Ode to Autumn	
- Whitney Bowditch.....	46
<u>Poetry and Photography</u>	
All	
- Kristina McGee .....	47
Photography	
- Bridgette Hughes.....	47

Short Stories

The Time it Takes to Boil Water

- Cassandra Offt..... 49

Much Ado About Frosting

- Isabella Minudri ..... 52

Faith, Family, Farmer

- Jessica Lewis..... 55

Chattahoochee

- Rhiannon Sturgess..... 57

Early Childhood

- Samantha Reed..... 59

Essay

The Perpetuation of Abuse in YA

- Samantha Reed..... 62



**The Room Where We Live**  
**A Play About Love and Survival**  
Brenna Kinsey

Characters: Molly Gray  
Aaron Chunev  
(Both are late 20's)

5 extras (3 doctors, 2 nurses) One nurse will double as Leah, Molly's friend.

Scene One

*Setting: A well-lived in, near claustrophobic room, totes filled with bits and bobs in one corner stacked precariously but will never fall. An overfilled bookshelf in the other corner; it has some trinkets on it, a teapot that is rarely used but well-loved. A queen-sized bed sits in the middle of the set, it is covered in pillows with mismatched pillowcases. The duvet cover doesn't really match anything but somehow brings the whole room together. The bed is messy and unmade. Past the totes filled with junk is a kitchenette area filled with dishes and boxes of cereal and uncooked pasta and lots of tea-boxes. From the looks of it, the dishes haven't been done in a week or so. Laundry piles up on the right side of the bed. Thongs and tee-shirts, and sweatpants with holes in them spillover of the laundry-basket. Past the bookshelf is a door that indicates a bathroom. It's a tiny studio apartment. There's a door on the far left, it's a door to the outside world.*

*Molly Gray enters from the door to the outside. She is a graduate student, and comes in with a heavy backpack slung over her shoulder which she drops by the bed and it makes an audible 'thud' as it hits the ground. She kicks off her shoes off and falls face-first onto the bed. She rolls over and sits up, grimacing. Something feels wrong, but she tries to ignore it. She locates a remote and presses a button towards the right side of the bed. It isn't shown but she's turning on a television, and soft music begins to play. She returns to her backpack and pulls a book out, then retrieves a pen-bag. Locates a highlighter and opens the book. She looks intently at the book, trying to decipher which words and phrases are important and which can be left alone. She flips pages and reads but doesn't highlight anything. She looks over at the laundry and sighs, sliding off the bed. Fiddling with the highlighter and uses it to pick up a discarded pair of men's boxers on the side of the bed. She drops them back into the pile of clothes on the floor disdainfully. She throws her highlighter on the bed and clambers off, making her way towards the kitchenette. She opens the refrigerator and stares at it, bleak and near-empty. They haven't had time to go food shopping in a while. She glances over at the dishes and sighs again. Picking up a plate covered in food-stuffs a week or so old. She stares at the overflowing sink, drops the dish loudly, and then put her head into her hands and screams into her palms.*

*The doorknob to the outside jiggles. She stares at it hatefully, as if she wants to scream, "Use your*

*fucking key!" but doesn't. Instead she crosses over and unlocks the door. She opens the door and stands out of the way as her boyfriend, Aaron Churney comes inside. He's wearing a uniform of some kind. Like a waiter or retail-worker. He kisses her cheek as he passes by. He tosses his day-bag next to hers and sits down to unlace his tennis shoes.*

Aaron: How was your day? How were classes?

Molly: They were okay. Dr. Lowe hasn't gotten back to me on my proposal.

Aaron: Well stop being bad at making thesis proposals. *(Laughs, Molly kind of laughs too.)*

Molly: I'm trying. But it's hard for me. Thesis is the hardest part.

Aaron: I know.

Molly: No, you don't. How was work?

Aaron: It was alright. Long day again. *(Molly nods and sits down.)*

Molly: Me too.

Aaron: You say that every day.

Molly: So do you. *(They look at each other for along moment. Aaron locates the remote and turns the music down.)*

Aaron *(He sounds hopeful)*: So, are you home for the night?

Molly *(looks at discarded book on the bed. Shrugs)*: I was going to try and study, but I don't think that's going to happen.

Aaron: Have you eaten?

Molly: No, I was waiting for you. Did you eat?

Aaron: I had a snack at work, but I could eat.

Molly: What do you want? And if you say, 'I don't know, what do you want? I'm going to hit you.'

Aaron: *(Pauses)* I don't know. *(Molly raises her hand to play slap him.)*

*Everything freezes. The light dims. Molly drops her hand and steps forward. Aaron is frozen on the bed.*

Molly: I want a lot of things. That's why I'm in school. I've been a student so long I don't know how to do anything else. I just started grad school and even that feels wrong. I have no idea what

I'm doing. My friend Leah says that's normal. She knows what she wants but she doesn't know how she's going to get there. I envy her because she at least has some idea for the end of her destination, she can imagine the light at the end of her tunnel. So, I'm going to get a M.F.A in poetry and literature. Unless I drop out or change my mind. I imagine myself in a labyrinth, or a dungeon deep in the earth. I feel like I see many flickers of light, illusions, ideas just out of my grasp. But I don't know which path to take. I feel like I walk down one path for a little, then back-track or see another flicker of light. I run myself ragged because I don't know any other way. And there's so much I want to learn. I want to learn how to dance, and to sing better, and work on watercolor painting. I want to have time to read the books I pick up then neglect for months. I want to sketch the things I see in my mind when I read Rumi or Joyce Carol Oats. I want everything, and I want nothing. I just want to sit down for a little and rest. But I don't know how.

*(She returns to her spot things unfreeze, she slaps him lightly on the arm, it's playful and he laughs.)*

Aaron: What do you want to have for dinner?

Molly: *(Looks at him)* I want you to make a decision.

Aaron: I just got home from work!

Molly: And I barely got home from school.

Aaron: And you haven't thought of anything?

Molly: I don't just sit around and think about food!

Aaron: Well, I don't want to think about it either.

Molly: .....

Aaron:.....pizza?

*Molly nods. Tired of pizza, but also tired of everything in general. Aaron dials up the pizza place on his cell phone, the music gets louder in volume but he doesn't notice. It's Molly's music. He continues to order the pizza, he puts the phone down and goes into the bathroom. He closes the door behind him. Molly stands up on the bed and begins to dance a waltz alone. The lights change to a blue color and it feels like crying, and being in a prison of one's own love and devices. The doorknob of the bathroom jiggles, and abruptly the music stops and the lights return to normal. Molly drops down on the bed and snatches up a book from her backpack. She opens it and Aaron comes in, leaving the bathroom door open.*

Aaron: What are you reading?

Molly: It's for my literature class. We're reading Sylvia Plath.

Aaron: So what is it?

Molly: Well it isn't a story. It's a collection of her poems. I like Plath, she was crazy and killed herself. We're doing an analysis of her mental state through her poetry.

Aaron: And you like her?

Molly: I think she was beautiful, like Alfonsina Storni who walked into the sea and drowned herself. Because she couldn't live with cancer killing her slowly. Some people say she was selfish, but others say that she took control of her death. Not many people get to do that.

Aaron: I don't know who that is.

Molly: She was an Argentinean poet.

Aaron: Do all poets off themselves?

Molly: No.

Aaron: Just the ones you like?

Molly: Apparently.

Aaron: That doesn't seem healthy.

Molly: It's probably not.

Aaron: I'm going to shower. (he pulls out his wallet) Can you tip the pizza guy four bucks when he gets here?

Molly: Sure.

*Aaron goes into the bathroom. You can hear him peeing loudly. Then the shower turns on. Molly turns on the music again. Molly sits on the bed, then an uncomfortable expression passes over her face. Slowly she reaches a hand up and presses a hand on her left breast. She thinks that she found a lump a few days ago, but she doesn't want to say anything to Aaron. She doesn't want to feed her own panic, but it's hard. She doesn't want to worry him. The music increases, and the lighting focuses in on Molly as she begins to shudder. Suddenly the lights return to normal and the doorbell rings. Molly stands up and takes a few dollars from a jar on the nearby table. On her way to the door she trips over one of the backpacks.*

## Scene Two

*About two weeks later. Aaron is pacing around the apartment and talking on the phone.*

Aaron: I don't know where she is—she's been really strange lately. She only had one class today. Usually she texts me at least if she's going to stay on campus past her classes. *(beat)* She's also been getting weird phone calls. Like—I don't know man, she'll get calls and then she goes outside to talk to them. She won't tell me who she's been talking to. *(beat)* You don't think? No! I mean. *(panicked)* I'll call you back man. *(Aaron hangs up. He sits on the bed, facing the door and rubs his face and looks at the door. After a few seconds there is a blackout. When the light comes back up Aaron is fiddling around in the kitchen-area. The door handle jiggles, then a key is inserted, and the door swings opens. Molly bustles in, she closes the door and puts her bag down. She meets eyes with Aaron, who has been glaring daggers at her.)*

Aaron: Where have you been?

Molly (stuttering then saying softly): --the library.

Aaron: Is that your final answer?

Molly: That's where I was.

Aaron: It's Friday.

Molly: So?

Aaron: The library closed two hours ago. You complain every Friday. I know you think I don't listen. And don't tell me you went to the public library because I know you don't go there ever.

Molly: Maybe I went to get coffee with Leah.

Aaron: Maybe? Did you or didn't you?

Molly: What is *up* with you right now?

Aaron: (*mocking*) What is *up* with you? Tell me the goddamn truth! Where have you been? (*Molly doesn't know what to say. She stands with her hands by her side and her mouth slightly agape.*) Who is he then?

Molly: What?

Aaron: (*explodes*) Tell me his name! (*Comes at her*) Who the fuck have you been seeing?

Molly: (*backing up against the door*) I haven't been seeing anyone. I swear.

Aaron: Swear to God Molly, don't fuck with me right now!

Molly: I'm not! I'm not!

Aaron: Then tell me what is going on right now! Fuck! (*Aaron backs off and kicks the bed. Molly looks at him, teary eyed. She opens her mouth. The lighting changes and Aaron freezes. Molly steps forward and sits on the edge of the bed facing the audience. She's sitting on the edge, like a patient on a chair in the doctors' office.*)

Doctor(*voiceover*): We must move quickly to keep it from spreading further. We've caught it pretty early, but we have to work hard to make sure it doesn't progress any further. Do you have any questions?

Molly: (*quietly*) Will it hurt? (*The lights begin to revert back to normalcy. Molly stands up and returns to her spot by the door. The lights change and Aaron unfreezes.*)

Molly: Don't be angry with me.

Aaron: Don't tell me how to feel.

Molly: Let me explain at least! (*beat*) You want to know? Then you have to be real with *me*. You have to be ready to *hurt* with *me*.

Aaron: What the fuck are you talking about?

Molly: Stagetwobee.

Aaron: What?

Molly: Aaron, I have breast cancer. The doctor called it Stage-Two-B.

Aaron: (*lost for words*) No you don't.

Molly: Aaron don't be thick. I got my diagnosis yesterday. I was at the doctors where they were trying to figure out what treatment plan they want to start me on. They took blood and all that good stuff I love.

Aaron: Why didn't you tell me. All the phone calls and being gone?

Molly: Doctors and tests. I didn't think it was real, so I didn't want to worry you. I thought it was just a fluke or something, like a bad cyst. So I would just go on with the tests and figure it out from there. (*Goes and sits on bed, pulls a pillow onto her lap.*)

Aaron: And you thought it was cool to not tell me that?

Molly: You always said I didn't have a good sense of common sense.

Aaron: Or common decency.

Molly: I'm sorry.

Aaron: I don't believe you.

Molly: I'm sorry. I think—

Aaron: You don't have cancer.

Molly: I—

Aaron: If you just found out yesterday you would still be fucked up still. I know how you get. You're fucking lying. (*Spits in sink. Molly grimaces and sighs.*)

Molly: (*Determined.*) Where was I yesterday?

Aaron: You were with Leah, that's what you *told* me anyway. (*Molly nods, she pulls her phone out of her pocket and holds it out to Aaron.*)

Molly: Here's the messages we sent about where we were going to meet for brunch after her first class. You know she doesn't eat if she has a morning class?

Aaron: (*Looks, verifies, nods.*) Okay, fine.

Molly: How late were you at work?

Aaron: I had inventory. So, I wasn't home 'til 2am.

Molly: And I was asleep by then. You want the truth I *was* with Leah. She went with me to the hospital after we had brunch. Then we went to get ice cream and cried and cried and then she came home with me for a bit and we watched television for a bit and then she went home at 1am-ish and I cried some more and went to sleep.

Aaron: And you didn't tell me in the morning?

Molly: What is today?

Aaron: Friday.

Molly: What do I have on Fridays?

Aaron: An 8am class.

Molly: Yes, and I didn't wake you up when I left. You were tired. So, I went to class. I got coffee and read some of my book, worked on my paper, and went to my doctors' appointment. If I don't keep some sense of normalcy, I'll go mad. I had my panic yesterday and now I need to move

forward. I have cancer and I can't panic about it anymore, I have to deal. If you want me to stay here and fight you have to deal too.

Aaron: Fine. Okay. Okay. So now what? *(Sits down on the bed next to her.)*

Molly: I don't know, what would you like for dinner?

Aaron: No, Molly, what now? What does this mean.

Molly: The doctors said my chances are really good. I'm young and healthy, healthy enough, so I'm *probably* not going to die. And the tumor itself is pretty small and the cancer itself hasn't spread very far, so they can cut it out and radiate it. I read that some people don't seek treatment, but I'm going to. I think if I leave it alone it'll get worse. I hate things like that, leaving things alone makes them harder to deal with when you do eventually deal with them. I also don't think I'll lose all my hair, but I might lose some, you know 'cuz of the chemo. But I don't know. *(She chokes up.)* I don't know. *(breaks down)*

Aaron: I got you babe, we're gonna figure this out. Haven't we always figured it out. *(Aaron holds her. Blackout.)*

### Scene Three

*About a month later.*

*Molly sits alone on the bed. The room is lit in a soft green color. Soft music begins to play, figures dressed in doctor's coats and long formalwear (save for one person who wears a longer lab-coat) sway into the room. One doctor with a top-hat offers her his hand. Molly takes their hand and gets off the bed. They begin to dance a waltz around the small room. Other doctors and people begin to dance too. One pair dances on the bed. This goes on for a few*

*minutes. Then things begin to turn sour. The dances become more erratic and the music turns into harsh static. The lights begin to flash. The doctors and nurses begin rushing around. Then there is a long harsh trill and a blackout. Then the lights spotlight on the bathroom. Molly is hunched over the toilet vomiting. Leah (who was wearing the long lab-coat) is holding her hair back. Molly between wretches is coughing and crying. Leah kneels behind her and holds her. Blackout*

#### Scene Four

*Lights up on the apartment. Aaron is stirring something in a pot in the kitchenette area. He looks down at it unapprovingly but keeps stirring. He walks over and pushes a button on the remote. A song begins to play softly. The door handle jiggles and swings open. Molly steps in. She looks tired and her hair is pulled back. She isn't wearing a skullcap and she still has all her hair, but it looks thinner somehow. Other than that she looks pretty much the same. She takes a step in and shucks her bag. She closes the door and puts her bag down. Aaron walks over and kisses her cheek. Molly laughs.*

Molly: Hey.

Aaron: How was class?

Molly: Good. Dr. Lowe finally got back to me about my thesis. (Molly sits down on the bed. Aaron returns to his cooking.)

Aaron: Yeah?

Molly: Yeah! He approved it, but I told her to her I was proud to get it in despite what was happening. She didn't know so I told her. And you know how she talks, she was like, "Oh my god. I didn't know."

Aaron: How did she not know?

Molly: Well I figured someone would have told her, but sometimes people just don't know things. Leah has a pretty big mouth sometimes, but I didn't tell any of the professors. Not like they would judge me or anything, but I'm so worried that they'll give me a special pass because of it. I don't want to be treated differently. I don't try and hide it, and I have told people who ask. But I don't bring it up.

Aaron: I mean I guess that's one way to go about it.

Molly: Yeah. *(She holds her stomach and grimaces. Aaron looks concerned.)* Ugh.

Aaron: Has it been bad today?

Molly: Kinda. I hate this bit the most. It's like feeling like you're going to throw up, but not wanting to because you know all it's going to be is bile.

Aaron: Well I'm making some mac n' cheese. You should try and have some. I know you only had a granola bar today. And don't tell me you ate something while you were on campus because I know you're lying.

Molly: Am I that predictable? Haha, jerk. I'll eat some, but it's a different story if I can keep it down.

Aaron: Well we'll just see, I can't eat it all on my own.

Molly: Now who's the liar?

Aaron: I mean I *can* eat it all on my own, but I don't *want* to.

Molly: That's fair. *(beat)* I've been thinking about my family a lot today.

Aaron: Yeah?

Molly: Yeah, I called my mom today. She's doing well. I don't like calling her anymore, she's such a depressing person. Like I tell her my treatment is going well and I guess what she hears is, "really I'm dying." So, it's hard to talk to her these days. But I was thinking about Ray.

Aaron: Who?

Molly: My cousin Ray. He died when I was like 12. He was mauled to death by a cougar while hiking. I didn't like Ray too much. He was always creepy. But that didn't mean he deserved it or anything. I tried to make a joke, that it wasn't so bad, see he died of natural causes...natural causes...because of the cougar...nature...I thought it was funny. So, I don't talk to that side of the family anymore. They think I'm some morbid sick fuck. My aunt still doesn't write me back. But whatever. And you know, they may just be right. I'm a sick fuck all right.

Aaron: Haha! Well that's a story.

Molly: I guess. Damn my stomach hurts. *(Molly tries to stand up from the bed to go to the bathroom, but she wobbles and falls back. Aaron rushes to her.)*

Aaron: Fuck! Are you okay?

Molly: Yeah-yeah I just stood up too fast. *(Aaron doesn't believe her)* I promise. I'm okay.

Aaron: Okay. *(Molly tries to stand again and stays steady for a few seconds but then she begins to fall. The lights shift to show another freeze. This time the lights are a soft yellow. Aaron freezes holding his arms out to catch Molly. She steps out of his grasp and comes center stage in front of the bed. She begins to recite "I am going to sleep," by Alfonsina Stroni. She reads like it's the last thing she is ever going to do.)*

Molly: "Teeth of flowers, hairnet of dew,  
Hands of herbs, you, perfect wet nurse,  
Prepare the earthy sheets for me  
And the down quilt of weeded moss.

I am going to sleep, my nurse, put me to bed,  
Set a lamp at my headboard;  
A constellation, whatever you like;  
All are good: lower it a bit.

Leave me alone: you hear the buds breaking through...  
A celestial foot rocks you from above  
And a bird traces a pattern for you

So you'll forget... Thank you. Oh, one request:  
If he telephones again  
Tell him not to keep trying for I have left...."

*(Molly turns back to Aaron, still frozen. She takes his hand and he breaks from his freeze and enters Molly's world. He stands up and they look at each other. The audience should be able to feel the fear and love between them. Aaron reaches out and touches Molly's cheek.)*

Aaron: I'm scared.

Molly: I know. Me too.

Aaron: I don't want to lose you. I don't know what I'd do.

Molly: I know. *(Sirens sound in the distance. They don't break eye contact. Blackout. Then the stage is lighted in violent rainbow colors. The doctors and nurses rush on and push their way between Aaron and Molly. They begin to pull a Molly and begin to lift and drag her off-stage. Aaron tries to follow but he is pushed back, and he begins to silent-scream at them. Trying to fight to get back to Molly. She is fighting too but in a different way. Aaron continues to scream without making actual noise. Voice-over of doctors and hospital sounds. Words like, 'kidney failure,' 'IV,' and 'blood pressure,' are thrown around. Blackout.)*

#### Scene Five

*Two weeks later.*

*Aaron is milling about the apartment. He seems lost. He pulls at the blankets on the bed in a sloppy attempt to straighten them. Maybe he tries to pick up some of the clothes and deal with the pile in some way, just getting some of it off the floor. He just needs to look like a stranger in his own home. The door-handle jiggles and he drops whatever he is holding and rushes forward.*

*The door swings open, nearly hitting Aaron in the face. He jumps back and makes a noise of surprises. Molly enters the apartment and closes the door.*

Molly: Geeze! Did I hit you?

Aaron: Almost, didn't though.

Molly: I'll swing faster next time! *(They both laugh)* How was your day?

Aaron: It was good. How were your classes?

Molly: My thesis is almost done. I'm hungry.

Aaron: Good, your appetite's coming back. What do you want to eat?

Molly: I don't know, what do you want to eat.

Aaron: I asked you first. *(They look at each other. Soft music begins to play. Molly freezes and Aaron steps forward.)* There's a lot of things I want. I want to have my own coffee shop and write a book, or two. I'm trying to re-focus, figure out how not to get so distracted by shit that doesn't matter. I want to have more time. And I want Molly to be okay. It's going to be okay. As long as we stick together. If we keep loving each other then we'll make it through. And yeah, it's going to be rough. But someday we'll have enough money to move out of this place *(gestures to the apartment)* get to somewhere that has a decent kitchen and more space for your clothes. But for now, this is our place. The room where we live. And if we're here together it's home. And that's all I want. *(Unfreeze.)*

Molly: Chinese then?

Aaron: Chinese it is then. *(They smile at each other. Blackout.)*

End of Play

### **The Old Chevy**

Aiko Bongolan

Sitting there used, beaten and dismayed,  
The 14 year old chevy  
Awaits to travel another day.

Dirt, grime and dust  
Blankets the maroon paint each year  
Accumulating into rust.

A score in the side  
Brought on by a raging doe  
Is tattooed for all to see.

A bumper grasping by zip ties,  
From an accident  
Of whom no one payed attention.

A line across the shield  
Waiting to reach the other side

To shatter forming crystals.

Sitting there used, beaten and dismayed,  
The 16 year old chevy  
Awaits to travel another day.

### **Together**

Amber Griffin

Tell me something new about coffee  
As a metaphor for waking up nicely,  
Because unfortunately I find that to be  
A tragedy. But wouldn't it be lovely

If we could stay asleep, but together?  
Just like otters who hold their hands  
In the ocean, regardless of the weather.  
Because they seem to better understand

That the best part of dreaming  
Is knowing you will have a friend  
To tell your revelations about living.  
Knowing that they will also lend

You their dreams and hopes and wishes  
As assuredly as otters sleep with the fishes.

### **Everything**

Anonymous

Day 1: It was September 17, 2017.  
A beginning of a relationship with mass love and misery.  
A love so strong but the depression sometimes stronger.

Right now, I blame myself for falling in love with the wrong woman.  
I question God like, "What the hell am I supposed to learn from it".  
And he ain't answer so I'm slipping deeper into depression now.  
Supposed to lift me up, but I just feel he let me down.  
Now I'm lying in my bed, all our memories like a pistol to my head.  
Thinking of every touch, BANG, another shot and once again my heart is dead.  
A dead heart laying in this hearse I call a bed.  
The death of a relationship lies here, man...  
Rest in peace.  
I don't smile, I permanently have a sad face.  
A fake smile can't reimburse my time I've invested into someone's heart.  
These past few weeks I've been nowhere but a bad place.  
Knowing that you were the only thing that made me happy,  
Leaving me seemed to be the only thing that made you smile, Sadly.  
I feel like I just lost a loved one at a funeral.  
Wish you safe travels in the promise land  
Falling to my knees man, get up and fucking stand,  
I just want to hold your...  
I want to chill...  
I just want to say...

Wait, no one's there.

Want to get back together more than anything.  
But you say disappointment and manipulation are my main thing to bring.  
Hours spent trying to pray my mistakes away;  
Try to fix them and forget about it, but you made sure they were here to stay.  
You say people don't change,  
Well It's amazing what love can do to people.  
If I could I'd take away all your evil.  
Instead I led you through the darkness into the light.  
I was always there even when the darkness had no end in sight.  
You say sadness makes you feel, It's one of the only things that's real  
But the only real thing to me is how you made me feel...  
Left behind a metal barrier, isolated in a grave of what once was,  
I trembled and fell to my knees begging you not to leave  
I love you...  
Please...  
Come back...

You were my everything.

**Faith, Hope, and Love**

Bret Charlton

I know You're here, You're in my presence day  
and night. But sometimes I lose hope, I'm blind  
I lose my path, I stumble, fall and find  
Your outstretched hand reaching for me.

I pray  
and still my life's a wreck. You say You'll stay  
and fix the broken things I try to hide,  
the darkest parts of me I hold inside.  
I want to trust and believe what You say

and love without the fear of loss. My head  
is slow to see the truth that lies within  
Your promises. You dwell not on my sins  
or past, but see me as I am. You said

You came to save through faith, our souls to free.  
Your unending love is enough for me.

So This is How it Feel to Fly

**The Dead White Guys Who Run My Life**

Cassandra Offt

I'm supposed to believe him  
When he quotes Shakespeare to me,

When he tells me, "Doubt thou  
the stars are fire, Doubt that the sun doth move,  
Doubt truth to be a liar, but never doubt  
That I love." But then I've got a Descartes apologist  
Who's telling me that to even be a person  
I've got to doubt. Oh no, "I think, therefore  
I am" don't cut it anymore. I've got to doubt,  
Too. *Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum.*  
So I doubt. That's Latin,  
I think. There's another dead guy who's running  
My life, who says *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*  
But I know from my humanities that correlation  
Is not causation. So when Marx tells me  
I've got to see it not to believe it, well  
Mister I see plenty. I see the way he  
Looks at her with those "gather ye rosebuds"  
Kind of eyes. So what am I? I guess  
I get Shakespeare and she only gets him,  
That guy whose name I can't remember, the one  
With an ever-fixed mark, or was that Shakespeare?

### **The Great Blue**

Danielle Marietti

The small boat zipped across the great blue  
and just as fast stopped moving  
all together. The waves were heavy

smashing against the side pulling it down.  
The sun was rising nice and bright. They shielded their eyes.  
As they looked over the edge to the sea, all they saw were bubbles.

They prepared their gear. All the salt, gunk, and bubbles  
remained from their last dive. That ocean wasn't as blue  
as the one they rocked on now. They couldn't believe their eyes  
how sharp and clear it was, and how calm they were moving.  
They were dressed and ready to go down.  
Their tanks still resting on the edge, full and heavy.

Down below far from their sight, swam heavy,  
grey skinned gentle giants. They opened their mouths and bubbles  
rose to the surface as little krill swim inside. Down,  
down they all went, tanks first into the deep blue.  
In unison they all sank to the bottom, moving  
towards no destination, their goggles clean for their eyes

To see all the hidden wonders. Zipping by a little fish eyes  
the intruders. As they sink to the right depth, the heavy  
ocean weighs on them. They give the ok sign and start moving.  
As they swim through the water their respirators release bubbles  
to keep stable pressure. All around creatures swim in the blue,  
unforgiving ocean. Fish swirl in circles, going up and down.

The divers see something peculiar sink down  
to the floor of the ocean. Resting before their eyes  
lies a magnificent, calm creature of the blue.  
She is a lonely sea turtle, resting heavy  
in the sand. She admires them and blows bubbles  
in greeting. The divers keep quiet, scarcely moving.

They don't want to scare off their gently moving  
friend. The green and brown turtle looks down  
into the soft squishy sand. Her fin shifts and bubbles  
Rise. With peaceful admiration their eyes  
blink at her beauty, their hearts heavy  
With love for the deep blue.

## Life Changing

Danielle Marietti

The once shimmering blue waters, crisp  
and refreshing, now glazed over with brittle  
sheets of white ice. Beneath the frozen cracked  
layer the dormant blue currents become stagnant. Restricted  
waves kiss at the bottom of the slippery  
transparent crystal crushing

it into sharp fragments. As the crushing  
waves spill over onto the barren crisp  
surface the newly exposed water freezes into a slippery,  
dangerous surface. The water breaths white clouds of defeat to the brittle  
siberian air and the surface closes once again. Restricted  
again the waves beg for freedom beneath the repeatedly cracked

sheets. No relief is given until the season changes, cracked  
by the warming weather the ice starts to separate. The crushing  
weight of the heavy shards dip into the once restricted  
waters. This time triumphant, the waves soar above the crisp  
and crumbling fragments left over from the brittle  
winter. The new intense warmth moves its slippery

fingers throughout the mountainous area. Clinging to the slippery  
surface, dew bubbles form on grass stems hidden in the cracked  
earth. New season, new growth, once brittle,  
now living and strong. Strong, tall, evergreens with crushing  
weight are still green after the tough, crisp  
winter. They breath new life no longer restricted

by the cumbersome powdery snow. Once restricted  
animals hidden below in tiny burrows peak out slippery  
pink noses, smelling fresh changes to the crisp  
spring air. Little paws race across the landscape, over cracked  
rocks and only stop to listen for the crushing

steps of nearby predators. Fragile lives with a bitter

inescapable end, strive to live day in and day out amongst the brittle,  
delicate environment. Be it the changing and restricted  
lake waters cut off by the dense crushing  
banks or the far off mountain peaks slippery  
with spring snow still falling. Everything cracked  
and imperfect. Constantly changing and new, and crisp.

### **Don't Be Mad**

Ellie Hoosei

You told me not to like you.  
I did that.  
You told me we couldn't be friends,  
If I did.

But what if I do,  
And you don't have a clue?  
Does it still mean the same thing?  
What if I can control what I feel?

What if you never find out?  
Will we still be friends?  
I doubt things will seriously change.  
I can keep secrets.

I just don't want to keep them from you.  
Not if I can help it.  
I tried not to,  
But I think I've come to a realization.

I still like you.  
After almost three years.  
You still make me smile,  
And make my heart stop.

Please don't be mad.  
I tried, I really tried.  
But the feelings can swirling back.  
Smacked me in the center of my heart.

### **Falling Asleep Smiling... and Other Things I Do Regularly**

Faith Eodice

Sometime  
This morning  
I woke up  
Rubbed the sleep  
Out of my eyes  
And practically  
Fell out of bed.

Then  
I sat through organic chemistry  
Drew lines and circles  
On my paper  
All connected  
By forces and charges  
That draw them  
To one another.

Like you and me,  
I thought  
As I drank my coffee  
Silently  
And clicked my pen  
Impatiently  
And not so silently.

Around noon  
I looked at my phone  
And saw a text

From you, thank God  
Everyone else annoys me.  
I don't think  
That I even read it  
I knew what it said.

All week  
I've been holding out  
For today  
Because these sorts of nights  
Are for movies  
Sweatpants  
And cheap wine  
That makes us fearless  
And our faces go numb.

I don't remember  
What we watch  
Probably a documentary  
Because you like  
That sort of thing  
And I watch it too  
Because  
I like you.

At some point  
You sneeze  
And itch your nose  
I breathe in  
When I breathe out  
Your fingers  
Are in between mine.

Tonight  
Or this morning  
Whichever it is  
I crawl into bed  
Close to 2 a.m.  
Trying not to wake my roommate

With a smile on my face.

Smiling  
Not thinking  
Of what was past  
But thinking  
Of what was to come  
And hoping  
There were many  
More smiling nights to come.

### **Lime Green Ribbon**

Gretchen Farkas

Palms sweaty inside of blue, rubber  
gloves. Fibers of the matching mask  
irritating her already quivering jaw.  
With the ward clerk's nod of approval, a step  
inside, into what she wished wasn't reality.  
The sterile air attacked her lungs,  
the aroma of disinfectant burned her nose,  
and bit at the corners of her eyes.  
Eyes that hid the tears—the pain.  
A statue, she looked on as shards of her  
heart lay scattered like glass  
on the cold, cold hospital tile.  
Helpless, her eyes darted while his  
fluttered. Ghostly pale, his body tremored.  
The whirring of machines filled the space  
with a sense of urgency, a sense of unease.  
A nurse danced around the room,  
checking vitals and IVs. Like molasses  
she forced another step, and as she crossed  
the imaginary threshold she swore  
she could taste the bitterness of his chemo  
disintegrate on her tongue.  
“Hey, it's me.” Her voice wavered.

Opened and ashy eyelids revealed exhaustion.  
Eyes that used to hold the shade of the sky  
and the ocean and every hue in between  
now clouded by a gray fog. Another step, his bald  
head lifted from the stiff pillow. Her pained  
eyes interlocked with his. In that moment  
she wished she could make it all go away:  
the diagnosis, the treatments, the lime green ribbon.  
Watching her best friend and better half  
shudder and strain, she whispered up to God,  
“Please just let him be okay.”

### **Sift**

Isabella Minudri

I am all I need to self-destruct. And yet,  
Here you are, trying to say it was you,  
It was your fault that I crumbled  
Like wet sand castle towers  
under a child's foot.

But I broke apart  
in my own two  
hands.

Words  
reach me now  
across the waves

Of your martyred ploy,  
and blur into meaningless  
sound as the child within begins  
to pack sand down, sift out your lies,  
and build me up once more to

Redestruct.

**“Tell me about yourself.”**

Isabella Minudri

I would, but how to begin?  
Do I have time to explain that I am scraps  
Of memory tied in a pretty bow  
With an old dog’s leash?

That the pink lines of raw tissue patterned  
Across my skin whisper tribute  
to childhood scrapes on gravel drives,  
to escaping cancer, that sometimes

I feel them pulsing momentarily  
as if to remind me of my humanity? Should I recite  
to you my insecurities, sweat-soaked  
anxieties that keep me awake at night?

Or should I tell you, quite simply,  
about vaguely titled passions or the number  
of stamps on my passport, maybe  
that old dog’s name,

The one that slept by my side for a week  
when I was sick? Do you want to know  
that I am entirely made up  
of words boiled softer in emotion,

wrapped tightly around  
bones, if only for some semblance  
of structure? If you ask me  
about myself, is that too much,

or is it far from enough?

## To Him

Isabella Minudri

Maybe I'm not her. Maybe  
I don't fit into the same size  
jeans, maybe my eyes don't contain  
the blue of the ocean, the night sky,  
and a bluejay's crest  
all at once.

Maybe I don't tilt my head  
the way she does, making you  
believe she has you memorized,  
and maybe her favorite 80s song  
is catchier  
than mine.

Maybe I don't laugh as easily, maybe  
I have too many faults  
and maybe she's perfectly flawed.  
Maybe she knows you better  
after six months than I did  
after four years.

But, maybe, I like my curves.  
Maybe I like that my eyes are brown  
and for that there are a hundred  
more comparisons to make  
than just the ocean  
and the sky.

And maybe I know all the words  
to every song I've heard, maybe  
I love the way I dance and the rhythm  
of words and the fact that I can write  
a (shitty) poem

in three minutes.

Maybe, the most important maybe, is  
that I like the fact that I am not her,  
and that I am not *you*, because maybe  
that would mean I would leave a girl like me  
behind, and,

maybe,

I'd regret it.

### **Woman's Legacy**

Jessica Sekerak

In the modest kitchen stands the woman,  
radiant, enveloped by gentle light  
from the curtained window. Atop the high chair  
perches the girl, happily sipping milk from her cup.  
The meticulously polished table displays a single yellow flower,  
immortalized in the child's earliest memory.

Older now, the girl recalls the distant memory  
of that morning and the gentle voice of the woman  
crooning, "I love you, my dear little flower,"  
with a smile so warm it indeed produced a light  
of its own. Never had her mother let the cup  
run empty. Never had she sat alone in her chair.

Smoothed by years of use, the chair  
resides in the corner, keeping close the memory  
of a sweet toothless smile and her full cup.  
Years slip through the fingers of the woman,  
her daughter now grown and ready to bring her own light  
to the world. She bloomed as a most exquisite flower.

Sparkling tears water a yellow flower;  
silent sobs are cradled in a rocking chair,  
softened by the setting sun's cool light.

A mother is both grieved and comforted by the memory  
of her little girl, knowing she is now a woman  
in her own kitchen, drinking from a new cup.

In her unfamiliar kitchen the young woman drinks a cup  
of milk, the taste of home. Tender for the flower  
budding inside her womb, she cries the tears of a woman  
overcome with joyous fear. Curled upon her chair,  
she is embraced by her mother in a memory,  
affection almost tangible in the evening light.  
A pure life enters into this world by the light  
of the dawning sun. The old woman brings a cup  
brimming with milk to the new mother, recreating the memory  
of childhood mornings past. The precious little flower  
sleeps in her cradle as grandmother rocks in the chair,  
filled with bittersweet pride known only to a woman.

Fresh morning light illuminates a yellow flower,  
as the tiny girl sips from her cup, high on the aged chair.  
An old memory new, to be treasured one day by a woman.

### **Perception**

Jessica Sekerak

We see what is, as our eyes behold, but not truly what is to see.  
A ray of light travelling for eons, reaching out greedily into the void,  
captured at last by our human eyes gazing heavenward,  
is but a luminous memory of a star long dead.  
That gaseous sphere in the remote depths of the universe:  
extinct, remaining only in the journey of its persistent light.  
Yet seeing that radiance in the vast sky, the star exists in our eyes.  
We see what once was.

We see what is, as our eyes behold, but not truly what is to see.  
Look in the reflection of a piece of glass, and it speaks.  
“Not smart enough; not pretty enough.”

“Not capable of being loved; not worth being respected.”

When did mirrors grow venomous tongues,  
their whispers cutting to the center of our being,  
exposing only the ugliness, only the shame?  
We see what we are told to see.

We see what is, as our eyes behold, but not truly what is to see.  
Like insects we scurry from here to there,  
like gods we plan each moment of the future,  
as if fate is a spineless coward, bowing to our every whim.  
Like ancient mapmakers we plan in most intricate detail,  
only for our flat plane of prediction to one day be rendered obsolete  
by the fullness, depth, breadth of the present.  
We see what will never be.

We see what is, as our eyes behold, but not truly what is to see.  
Open your eyes.

### **I Want to Tell You About Balance**

Libby Damon

I want to tell you about balance.  
It is hard to come by anymore. With everyone running,  
Always running but never stopping.  
There are some who keep everything in blissful harmony.  
I am one such person. I am just a strange woman,  
Nothing spectacular. Except that I can be like a tree.

I know what you are thinking, “Why a tree?”

Well, that is because of balance.

A tree is nothing like a woman,

Except it is. A river is always running,  
But a tree stands firm. It cannot sing with birds in harmony,  
Though, it sure can try. All that it takes for me, is stopping.

I always know where and why I am stopping.  
I know that I am not a real tree,  
So, I can't always be like one. I make my own harmony,  
By bending to the wind. I find my place of balance,  
And I make sure that only others are running.  
Some people think I am a crazy woman.

But no, I am just a woman.  
I always make sure that I am stopping,  
Only now and then. Sometimes I like running,  
But that is not always best. I must be like a tree,  
And bend in the wind. I must keep my balance,  
Or else, I will have no harmony.

I know not what would happen without harmony.  
I fear it's result. I am not a stupid woman,  
I know that would be horrid. One must keep their inner balance.  
One should be stopping,  
Only occasionally. Just like a tree,  
Let the river keep running.

Let others do all the running,  
Look for your own harmony.

Watch a tree,

As it bends with bad weather but comes back. "Woman,"

You must be saying, "what is all this stopping?"

You should stop to find balance.

Don't just keep running as a mad woman,

Find your harmony, when you find yourself stopping.

Always think of a tree, and how it keeps its balance.

### **Seattle Winds**

Mallory Arbizzani

The cars speed by,

Empty souls dragging to work.

The smell of the exhaust intertwines

With the salt of the sea,

The crying of the seagulls drowning the voices around.

The shops, usually welcoming,

Have now been shut,

Separating their guests from the wind.

I place my hand on the cold rail,

Slightly damp from the sea below.

As I look down, I see the barnacles,

Clinging to the pier.

They are desperate to stop the sea

From taking them away.

My body sways in time with the waves.

How easy it would be

To join them over the rail,

In the deep depths below.

But now is not my time.  
These great white beggars fly above,  
Narcissistic creatures demanding food.  
The chugging Ford, announcing its presence,  
Holds a face, leathered from Vietnam.  
I look to the shops, they beckon me to enter,  
Offering comfort and warmth.  
But I turn back to the sea,  
Letting the icy ocean spray  
awaken my soul.

### **Summer Dreams**

Mallory Arbizzani

These long summer days are of betrayal.  
I reach my lush branches  
To the warmth surrounding me.  
Only to find this heat not of the sun.

The flames lick at my legs,  
Ever stretching across the forest floor,  
Leaving blackened scars  
On my once bronze skin.

The flames begin their ascension up my body,  
Reaching their fingers across my scalp.  
The fire encompasses me,  
The heavy scent filling my nose.

I am a warning for life,  
This endless hunger never to be satisfied.  
I am being consumed,  
Taken within this prison.

The cracks and embers inform me  
This torture may soon end.

My smoking spine will be left bare,  
Staring up to the expansive sky.

The falling frost is soon to come.  
I will experience release,  
Only to repeat this hell  
That is the summer.

### **eclipse**

Theresa Trinh

the sun and the moon,  
two entities in the same universe,  
different though they may be,  
come together in one momentous passing,  
where both can see a glimpse of the other,  
face-to-face,  
and marvel at each other's beauty  
for just a single minute,  
until they are again  
hurtled back into the unknown galaxy.

the boy and the girl,  
two souls in the same world,  
oceans apart though they may be,  
come together in one climactic meeting,  
where both can see each other for the first time,  
face-to-face,  
and suddenly the words "you and me" don't exist  
but rather become a single "we,"  
until they are again  
forced back into the chaos of life.

## **Forest Fire**

Tommy Le

She was a forest.  
When fire did come, she did dance;  
the beauty of death.

## **Choice**

Tommy Le

What is choice?  
My mother once told me I had choices.  
"Which toys do you want?"  
It feels ridiculous now  
that I found out what real choice was.  
Let me correct myself.

My mother found out what real choice was.

All memory of my childhood put my mother as the villain.  
To this child, discipline was evil.  
She was always there,  
telling me what was right and what was wrong.  
Now I write about how I was so wrong.  
Yet how could my mind understand?  
I was so young and naive...

My mother found out what real choice was.

I remember seeing her scars.  
Two of them, both from the same time.  
I don't know why,  
but I never thought anything of it.  
That is what made me feel the worst.  
I knew they were there

but felt nothing for the longest time,  
because that was how everyone else treated her.  
It had even become part of my nature.

All of my life I tried to avoid choices.  
Responsibility is a terrifying thing.  
My mother believes that I am strong,  
but she doesn't realize I pale in comparison to her.  
But I have to fake it.  
I have to keep her happy.

My mother found out what real choice was.

Maybe one day I really will become strong,  
but until then,  
I just think.  
I think about my life and my future;  
my mother's life and her future;  
those scars on her wrists.  
We all have choices  
but not everyone chooses whether to die or not.  
She has told me about that time,  
but I never ask for details;  
it hurts too much.

My mother found out what real choice was.

I can only imagine.  
I picture her sitting on the steps  
in front of our house.  
Her right wrist has two bleeding slits.  
In front of her, she sees all of the cruelty  
she has and continues to go through,  
but then she sees her children.

At the time she had three kids.  
I was the youngest,  
being only about 6 months old.  
In that moment she was at her weakest,

but she realized that she could not leave.

My mother found out what real choice was.

She told me

"I was stupid"

But she doesn't understand.

It terrifies me when I wonder to myself  
if she still thinks about doing it again,  
but I suppose that is my weakness showing.

I have to be strong for you Mom.

I have to be strong so you don't suffer.

### **I Tried**

Tommy Le

I tried to tell myself again,  
but sometime along the way, I stuttered.  
The words seemed scrambled  
and I'm not sure if I heard what was uttered.  
It's not really a big deal though.  
I've been lying to myself so much  
That I'm surprised I still notice.  
I try to listen to what I touch.  
The echoes are still fading,  
But never quite disappear.  
Do they find it distasteful?  
Yes, I believe they are sincere.  
In my dream, I walked so far  
That my lies could not travel with me.  
Such a heavy burden had been lifted,  
But realty had no such mercy.

## **You Are the Rain**

Tommy Le

I miss hearing you;  
The rain always ends too soon.  
Nothing but silence...

## **Ode to Autumn**

Whitney Bowditch

Oh enchanting Autumn, your colors  
are inimitable. Deranged wind causes golds,  
oranges, greens, and reds to strike  
the ground in fury. Rosy noses drip  
as the first sign of polar temperatures  
consumes the last remnants  
of the summer heat.

Oh enchanting Autumn, you transform  
small pieces of fabric  
into wool and fleece, engulfing bodies  
in warmth. The tang of flips flops,  
now the clanking of boots on frozen,  
crunchy ground.

Oh enchanting Autumn, pungent smells of cider  
and pumpkin spice cause my nose  
to dance with excitement as warm soup  
and fresh apple pie pervade the room  
with a paralyzing aroma.

Oh enchanting Autumn, your brisk  
somber nights send glowing flames  
of fireplaces into an uproar as warm  
blankets emerge and bodies

cuddle close.

Oh enchanting Autumn, you display  
the first indications of a world  
blanketed in white. Smells fading  
taking on a new persona, clothes  
getting heavier, hearts  
content.

**All**

Kristina McGee

Art speaks for itself.  
It entangles you in its story.  
Words captivate.  
Images encase.  
Let it bring you to life.

**Photography**

Bridgette Hughes





### **The Time it Takes to Boil Water**

Cassandra Offt

Gilbert read somewhere that if you put a lid on the pot you were boiling water in, it boiled almost twice as fast. He read it on the Internet though, so take what you will of that.

When his wife announced she would be making spaghetti for dinner that night, Gilbert stood up off the couch and followed her into the kitchen. Lucille gave him a strange look.

“You should put a lid on the water when you boil it,” he told her.

She put her hands on her hips. They were wide hips, wider than when he’d met her. Her hands looked bigger too, somehow, but Gilbert thought that was unlikely – for her hands to actually be bigger, that is. They certainly looked bigger.

“Why should I do that Gilbert?” asked Lucille.

He shrugged one shoulder, the shoulder that wasn’t propping him up against the wall. “I read somewhere that it made the water boil faster.”

“That’s nonsense,” said his wife. “I’ve been boiling water all my life and I’ve never put a lid on my pot.”

Gilbert shrugged again. “Thought it’d help.”

“*You* want to make the spaghetti?” she demanded.

“Now don’t get hostile!” He raised his hands in defense. “I was just making a suggestion.”

Lucille pulled out her big pot and set it in the sink. “Well unless you’re making the meal, why don’t you try keeping your suggestions to yourself?” she cried. Then she turned on the water. “The recipe I use for spaghetti is the one my mother used, the one her mother gave her. We got it all the way from my great-great-great grandmother who came over here from Italy on a boat.”

Gilbert wasn’t really listening anymore. He knew Lucille’s mother and, moreover, he knew Lucille’s mother’s cooking. He didn’t think getting your cooking genes from Carmella Spinelli was anything to write home about. Gilbert didn’t know how someone ruined mashed potatoes – he’d never cooked a day in his life – but Carmella managed it every time Gilbert went there with his wife for dinner.

“Italians invented spaghetti, you know,” his wife went on. “We invented all those foods you like, the ones that gave you the spare tire hanging around your hips. Spaghetti, pizza, baked ziti...”

The Chinese had invented spaghetti, hadn’t they? Gilbert was pretty sure he read that on the Internet, too.

“Sorry I said anything,” Gilbert burst out.

He was aware by the look on Lucille’s face that he’d interrupted something she considered important. But there was no use apologizing now. She slammed the pot down on the red-hot burner and there was a little sizzle as the droplets of water along the bottom evaporated. Once, when Gilbert was a young boy, his mother hadn’t been watching when she stirred a pot of noodles. Water had sloshed over the side and doused the burner. The heat had made the water hiss and the pot start to bounce like a jumping bean. His mother had shrieked and he’d been afraid until his mother snatched it off the stove and laughed as the steam rose from the surface. Gilbert had laughed then, too.

Gilbert said no more to his wife as he turned and walked back to the living room. He sat down on the couch and found that the commercial had just ended and the football game was back on. It was college football, with a team in white playing a team in red. He’d never gotten into college football; Gilbert didn’t even really like football. But it was funny, Gilbert couldn’t remember a time when he didn’t watch football. It started when he watched it with his dad and his big brother, Richard. The three of them sat on the couch and watched “the game” while their mother cooked and Lorraine, his little sister, pouted that she wasn’t allowed in either world. Too young to be a domestic in the kitchen with Mom, too female to sit in the boys world of testosterone and full-contact sports. Lorraine was a teacher now.

The game clock ticked away the seconds on the bottom of the screen. 3:12 left in the game, score tied up at 21-21. But it wouldn’t be three minutes and twelve seconds before the game was over. No, football time ran differently than the rest of the world’s time. It would be five minutes, or ten, or a half an hour. They would call time-outs and run out of bounds to stop

the clock. And if nothing worked, if no one scored, the game still wouldn't be over. The clock would be made a liar, and overtime would commence.

There went the football, flying across Gilbert's television, from the quarterback to the receiver. But the pass missed. Maybe it was the quarterback's fault, maybe the receiver's, who could know? Maybe it was nobody's fault at all and sometimes passes just didn't make it to their destination. Gilbert figured that was more than likely the case.

The team got another chance. Second and ten. Maybe they'd run the ball this time.

They threw the ball again. Gilbert shrugged. What did he know? His wife banged a cabinet door in the kitchen. He wondered how close the water was to boiling, how much closer it would be if she'd put a lid on it. Maybe no closer. He didn't spend much time in the kitchen, after all.

Not even in college. He'd lived with a girl in college. Maureen. Boy, did she know how to cook! Shrimp fettuccine, real Southern fried chicken, strawberry crepes, fluffy pancakes with the Canadian maple syrup – Gilbert's stomach groaned. Maureen hadn't been much to look at, but she sure as hell could cook. She hadn't wanted to do much but cook, but Gilbert was okay with that. He'd gotten fat in those couple of years, fatter than he was now, no matter what his wife said about his expanding gut. Maureen decided though that she was going to get skinny and after she got skinny, she decided she wanted to do things. Gilbert had gotten used to not doing things, and they broke up. He'd already met Lucille by then.

The team in white was on the twenty-yard-line now. He bet they'd run it now. But they threw it. What did he know? Maybe they had a terrible time running the ball. Maybe they couldn't run a ball for shit. They passed the ball short and to the side and the kid caught it, but just barely. Gilbert shrugged. The clock was stilled at 2:44. First and ten again. Slow going, this college football, especially these kids who obviously weren't going to the pros.

His wife's audible footsteps marked her moving through the kitchen. Gilbert frowned. She sounded like she was stomping and when Lucille was angry, nobody got to be happy. Happy wife, happy life. He'd read that somewhere too. Maybe the Internet.

Lucille probably just needed some food; hungry people were never in their right mind. Once the water boiled, she could start really getting the food ready and she'd feel better, like she wasn't just biding her time and listening to her stomach grumble.

The red team had the ball now. Gilbert hadn't seen how they'd gotten it but from the cheering of the crowd it had been in dramatic fashion. He watched the guy run across the fifty, to the forty, and almost to the thirty before he was laid out by the kid running up behind him. Gilbert winced at the hit. It wasn't what the commentators would have called a big one. Nobody else probably winced but Gilbert.

The TV went to commercial. It was some crap about hair regrowth to cure male pattern baldness. Gilbert changed the channel. He'd taken an advertising class in college and he knew about how advertisers stuck specific commercials during specific programs, talking to the people they knew were watching. Gilbert didn't like the company those kinds of commercials put him

in: hair restoration, video games, fantasy leagues, erectile dysfunction, the lottery...He wanted no part of that crowd.

The news on the next channel was no better. A fire had broken out on Collard Street. Gilbert was pretty sure he knew someone who lived there. Nancy and Martha, perhaps? They were Lucille's lesbian friends. But no, they lived somewhere else, the other side of town. He was pretty sure they moved recently, but not from Collard Street. The lady on the TV told him that it was arson but police didn't know who had done it.

Gilbert switched back to the football game. The score was still the same but the teams had changed positions. The game clock read 2:11 left. The white team had the ball again.

"Run the ball," Gilbert snapped at the television. "Do something different for once!"

The quarterback threw a Hail Mary to a kid to heck and gone down the field. Gilbert tossed down the remote. The kid at the far end of the field caught the ball and got hit so hard Gilbert swore he could hear the crack of their colliding bodies. He felt a little sick. The receiver kept the ball. Gilbert shrugged. Sometimes doing the same thing over and over again worked. Then again, if this football team were any judge, most times it didn't.

There was a squeal from the kitchen. "Shit!" his wife cried.

Gilbert jumped out of his seat. It wasn't as though it sounded like she was dying but Gilbert wanted to know what had made her react. Lucille was dancing around the kitchen like a mad woman, a lid in one hand and a towel in the other. The water was bubbling over the edges of the pot.

"Your stupid lid," snapped his wife. "It made the water boil over. I don't know why I listened to you. I'll make it the way I always make it. No lid."

## **Much Ado About Frosting**

Isabella Minudri

The screen door hammered shut in the mudroom, the sound vibrating through the house. Marlene glanced up from the towel she was folding meticulously and smiled to herself, hearing her husband's muttered curses.

"Hi, honey," she called, setting the towel on top of the dryer.

"Hey, Mar."

She shuffled into the kitchen to see Henry, Dodgers baseball cap low over his eyes, piling overfilled grocery bags onto the counter. He immediately turned and went back into the mudroom to fidget with the door hinges, opening and closing the screen several times before throwing up his hands and letting it slam into the doorjamb once more.

“Damn that door,” Henry said as he walked back into the kitchen. “It rattles the windows of every house in the goddamn neighborhood.”

Marlene laughed and pulled a carton of milk from a bag. “Maybe you should actually do something about it, Henry. It’s not goi—”

“To fix itself, yeah, yeah, I know,” Henry finished, grinning at his wife. He took the milk from her and pulled open the refrigerator door. “You’ve said it before.”

“Well, I don’t know what else you want me to say, honey. You complain about the door every time you come into the house.” Marlene shrugged a little and reached for some cans of tomatoes. She placed them in a cupboard next to the oven, adjusting them so that all of the labels faced the same direction. She turned to see Henry still standing in the light of the refrigerator, the milk in his hand hovering awkwardly in the air like he couldn’t decide where to put it. Marlene gently pushed him aside and took the milk, set it on its designated shelf, and then moved away to unload more groceries.

“We have some WD-40 in the garage, don’t we?” Marlene asked over her shoulder. “Maybe that would help with the squeaking, at least.”

She paused, dug her hands into a few of the remaining bags, and said slowly, “Henry, I thought I asked you to get frosting.”

Hearing no response, she turned to see Henry sitting at the island in the middle of the kitchen, already absorbed in the front page of the newspaper.

“Henry.”

“Hmm.”

Marlene stepped forward and flattened her hands on the island. “I specifically asked you to get frosting. Did you leave it in the car?”

“Hmm?”

“Henry, would you look at me for one second?” Her voice began to rise.

Henry finally looked up from his paper and sighed. “What now, Mar?”

Her eyes narrowed. “Frosting, Henry. Where is the frosting.”

Henry met her gaze for a second, and then cleared his throat and tugged his ball cap lower over his eyes. “I didn’t buy any frosting. Gotta put it on the list, Marlene.”

He scratched his neck and went back to his paper, while his wife glared at him across the marble. After a minute, she went back to the grocery bags, emptying them of their contents. On the counter, she left a box of chocolate cake mix, a packet of candles, and a lighter, and then turned to look back at Henry.

“You look so much like him in that hat, Henry,” she murmured. “I thought maybe it would help you remember.” With that, she walked stiffly into the living room and out of Henry’s sight.

Henry sat still, staring after his wife with guilt clouding his vision. The paper in his hands fell limp, so he folded it up and set it in front of him to rest his elbows on while he pressed his

face into his palms. After a moment, he rose from the counter and approached the living room, holding his breath.

Two large, glass doors overlooking a small garden allowed sunlight to warm the carpeted floor where Marlene stood barefoot, watching birds in the yard and rolling an old baseball between her hands. If she heard Henry enter the room, she made no indication, except to rotate her hands a little faster.

Henry chose to stand near the doorway—comfortably, with his hands shoved into his pockets, but under the brim of his hat the skin around his eyes tightened.

“I’m not perfect, Marlene.”

Silence. The tension in Marlene’s arms was enough to pull her skin taut.

“You can’t expect me to remember every little thing that goes on around here—my brain’s

gonna fry.”

The baseball rolled around and around.

“I swear I’m trying—would you say somethin’ so I can stop feelin’ bad about this?”

Marlene whipped around, her jaw clenched and her nails digging into the ball’s stitching. Her arms began to shake.

“You aren’t. You aren’t trying, Henry.” She said carefully through gritted teeth. “I don’t care if you don’t remember every little thing, just as long as you remember the *big* things!”

“How the hell am I supposed to know the difference between the big things and the small things?”

“Oh, for Pete’s sake, Henry. Listen to yourself! The door is a small thing, because the only person it’s bothering is *you*!”

She suddenly stopped mid-rant, eyes glued to her husband like she would strangle him if he moved any closer. Then she pulled her arm back and launched the baseball at the wall near Henry’s head. Henry ducked, and the ball thudded into the paint, dropping to the floor in a flurry of white dust.

Henry looked at the ball and then at his wife, his mouth open. “What the he—”

“*You* only care about *you*, Henry! The stupid door could bang itself into the next century and I wouldn’t care! But you know what I *do* care about? You know what really matters to me *right now*?”

“Well, I think—”

“Don’t think, Henry! You *know* the answer!” Her voice rose by an octave as she moved toward Henry in her anger. “This day comes around every single goddamned year and you pretend to forget every single time! What, do you just *hope* that Bobby’s birthday will magically *not occur* if you don’t acknowledge it? Do you think maybe I’ll just *not* say anything about it?” She was so close to him their noses almost touched.

Henry gave up trying to answer her questions and kept his eyes on the floor. Marlene took a shaky breath and a step backward, settling her hands on her hips. She watched as her husband reached up to adjust his hat again, still not looking at her.

"That's it, isn't it," she said, her voice suddenly gentle. "You're hoping I'll forget too."

Defeated, Marlene dropped onto the couch as tears began to catch in her eyelashes. Before long, she was sobbing into her hands the way one does when tears have been evasive far too long.

Henry finally released the spot on the carpet from his gaze and sighed before moving to sit next to the blubbing woman on the couch and pull her into his chest.

"I'm sorry, Mar, I really am," he murmured, his hand stroking her hair. He didn't say anything more for a long while, allowing his shirt to soak with her tears until she had cried herself out. When she eventually sat up, the two of them looked at each other and smiled a little.

"I miss him too, honey. I miss him every day, you gotta believe me." Henry tucked a strand of Marlene's hair back and took off his hat for both of them to look at. "I only wear this stupid thing because it's how I feel closest to him." He fingered the fraying threads on the bill of the hat and chuckled. "The Dodgers. Of all the baseball teams our kid coulda picked..."

Marlene began to laugh a little too. "It really is strange, isn't it."

"We didn't even like baseball!"

"Never took him to a game, never put him in T-ball..."

"The Dodgers, Marlene!" Their laughter bubbled over, husband and wife letting out cries of mirth and wiping tears from their cheeks. Gasping for breath, Henry grabbed Marlene's hand and quickly sobered. "I promise not to forget Bobby's birthday again, okay? Maybe eight years of pretending it's just a regular day is long enough."

Marlene leaned in and pressed a kiss to his cheek, and then stood up from the couch, smoothing her skirt. "I think maybe we have some powdered sugar in the cupboard and a little food coloring. I'll just make frosting from scratch. Care to join?"

Henry rested his head on the back cushions and gave her a gentle smile. "I'll be there in a minute," he said, glancing at the hat in his hands. His wife nodded and made her way into the kitchen once more. Henry let out a long sigh.

In the pantry, Marlene found the last of her powdered sugar and blue dye, and as she mixed them together with the milk and butter that Henry had bought, she thought she heard the shudder of a glass door closing. Curious, Marlene wiped her hands and peeked around the corner into the living room.

Henry was no longer on the couch, so Marlene walked softly over to the double doors. Just outside, Henry sat on the wooden porch step, face in his hands. His shoulders heaved with sobs, and the old Dodgers hat was lying upside down on the lawn.

Marlene moved to open the door, but hesitated, watching her husband's pain. She splayed her fingers and pressed her palm into the glass, and the two of them stayed like that for a long while.

## **Faith, Family, Farmer**

Jessica Lewis

### Early Boyhood

I am from a long line of farmers, born into the Lewis line of stone, rough, country men. I am Willis Rollie Lewis, but known by Rollie. Edwin, Dad, wanted Willis after his brother, and Rose, Mom, wanted Rollie after hers, so mom compromised, but made sure everyone knew me as Rollie. I guess women always win in the end. I was born in September of 1939, fifteen days after the start of World War II. I am the fourth of nine children, if you count one of my triplet brothers who died a few days after birth. Growing up with six brothers and one sister on a farm was fun for us, but probably not for Winifred. Jumping up and down in the kitchen next to the oven to make sure Winifred's cake fell over was our favorite pastime. Grandma Nan always made sure we got what was comin' for us, though. She was never on our side: scolding us, spanking our behinds, spitting on her hanky and cleaning behind our ears while we were already miserable sitting in the back of the car on the way to church. It was a rough childhood looking back on it to what it is now, but I am forever thankful for it.

### Navy Days

When I graduated by the seat of my pants, I joined the Navy. I decided on this because I didn't think I was college material, and I knew Navy was the best cause I wasn't getting shot at and I had a bed to sleep in--unless they sank the ship. In October of 1957, my Montana farm kid self left for San Diego for boot camp. It was hot and miserable and that's all I have to say. This is where I began to miss my family and Montana. I knew I needed to stick with it though, and make something of myself. So after boot camp was prep school for six weeks in Norman, Oklahoma, and then Millington, Tennessee for four months after that for A school. This is where I learned how to be a structural mechanic on airplanes. I headed back to Alameda, California for squadron, then out on the ship for two weeks to train others on how to land planes. I finally got to head overseas on a CVA-61 Ranger.

Our home port was Japan, but we got to stop all over: Philippines, Okinawa, and later Hong Kong. We had to leave Hong Kong fast, though, because there was a huge hurricane headed there, so we went back to Yokosuka. You might think that tensions were high when the Americans were in town: nope. The Japanese were more than happy to take our money so we could get drunk, but they weren't so happy when we took their women. I loved my time in Japan: I climbed Mount Fuji, took all kinds of tours, and saw these amazing cities all sunken in by terraced rice paddies. I even got to see the base of Hiroshima. We were treated very nicely there.

I believe that the Japanese liked us Americans because they knew that there would have been more people killed if the atomic bombs weren't dropped, because of the way the war was going. We went to China a few times, but it was still under British control so we weren't supposed to go. We never stayed long. I liked Japan better anyways. By my fourth and final year in the Navy in 1961, I was on watch on Vietnam, because that war was starting. Thank god I was done with my four years though, because when they wanted to extend me longer in my role as First Class Petty Officer, I said no way, I'm getting out of here. I need to go see mom. I love my country, but I think I made the right decision there.

#### Destiny

I headed back to San Diego to live with my oldest brother Chuck and his wife Lorrie after the Navy. I was out getting the mail a couple weeks in when I spotted a girl in the house next to me watering flowers. I marched into that house, looked Lorrie straight in the eye, and said "introduce me to that girl across the street or I'm going to go get so drunk I pass out again." She shot out the door and ran across the street to get the girl, and when I asked her if she wanted to go to a movie, she said yes. Six weeks later, I asked her to marry me. Nilda Ruiz became Nilda Lewis in October of 1962. I worked construction for a while in downtown LA, supporting Nilda and my two children Kenneth and Jamie. I was working on the courthouse when a building blew up across the street from where I stood. This is known as the Watts riots. I will never forget sitting outside with a shotgun all night while these people that were rioting threw molotov cocktail bombs in white neighborhoods. I knew I needed to get my family back to Montana or we might not make it out alive. It took a few years to sell the house, but we got the hell out in 1971.

I found this farmhouse in beautiful Corvallis, Montana that held 81 acres of land and was a real fixer upper. Surrounded by the Rocky Mountains on the west and the Sapphire mountains to the east, I knew I was finally home and at peace. I promised Nilda I could fix it up though, and that's what I did. I wanted to get into the dairy business with my brother Phillip: then I realized Nilda would never get along with his wife Jeannie, because they smoked and swore in front of their children, so instead I built Phil his barn on the way home from working construction up in Missoula every day, and traded labor for dairy cows. I was also fortunate enough to get the jobs building the local schools: Corvallis, Florence, and Victor. However, when Jimmy Carter became president, interest rates went through the roof, and when the construction company I worked for decided to shut their doors for a year to try to save themselves, I decided to do the dairy full time. This happened in '79. I technically retired in 2005 when my son Jeff took over, but I will never fully give up my duties. It makes me happy to feel wanted and it's not a job: it's my way of life. I have gotten through life thanks to my grit and my faith. The farm kid in me up Ambrose on the homestead is alive every day that I'm doing the morning chores, and my faith is what I rely on. I'm often asked by my grandchildren what I think about the current political situation and all I tell them is that I wouldn't worry about it. The Lord says that things are gonna get tough, but if he brings us to it, he will bring us through it. That is what I told myself every

twenty seconds when my wife of fifty two years passed, and I'm still kickin' today at seventy eight. I love my home of Montana and I can look at the family and our faith that I built with beaming pride. I'm on a new chapter of my life now, and it's amazing where life takes us. For all of it, I am thankful for my faith.

## Chattahoochee

Rhiannon Sturgess

I was a water witch, stirring the dead cattail reeds and soggy strips of willow and grass with my long stick. I had to make little circles in the water, careful not to touch the bottom and I wasn't supposed to make big strokes, on account of Daddy telling me that all my grindin on the riverbed any farther out than I already was would scare off all the fish from here to high-heaven. "They can hear you tappin and scrapin on the rocks." But I ain't never seen a fish with ears. Don't even think fish have ears. In any case, I wasn't even touching the bottom with my stick cause that's just not the kind of careless water witch I am, all smooth and graceful—not the sort that carries on scrapin rocks with her stick, making dust puff up from the bottom of the river to ruin her potion.

Daddy was madder than a wet hen, though, seeing as he hadn't caught one single fish yet. I can tell when he starts gettin that way fishing cause all o' the sudden hell stop his happy whistlin and set his legs apart, all manly-like, so the fish will see who's boss and hook themselves. Wed been here at least an hour. A whole long hour and not one bite. "Pisspoor luck," Daddy said, facing downstream. His neon line zipped back and forth over his head a thousand times. If I had my druthers, wed have moved somewhere else along the river by now. Fresher fishing. The lack of action has got me worn slap out. So, I quite my potion and go back up the bank, so as to not make Daddy more bad-tempered than I knew he already was. I'm was sittin on one of the bigger rocks, pushing a strong piece of grass between cracks in the dried mud, wondering how deep it might go, when something straight out of a miracle happened. A big old lady fish comes slappin up the river bank at me—and I know she's a lady cause she looks at me with one big ruby eye and I just know. "Female intuition," Mama calls it. That, and I don't see what business a man fish would have with those beautiful bright-orange fins, cutting out his back and belly and end of his tail all fancy. Pretty lady-like, that's what I think.

She kept floppin toward me til she's right there in front o me, red gills flappin—openin and closin all quick and surprised-like, her mouth an "O," opening and closin too as if to say, "Hun, I think I'd done went and made a big mistake coming up here on this bank like I just did." Hell, it didn't make no sense for her to be leaving the water like that, seeing as the sun was just spittin in the sky, and it wouldn't take but a minute for her silky olive scales to get all shriveled up and wrinkly, for her fishy slime to burn off in the Georgia heat. I thought to share the broad

edge of my sunhat with her before thinking that she might rather just get herself back where she came from.

“Daddy,” I say. His back to me was broad, a dark wet “V” between his shoulder blades. Streams of sweat parade down the back of his neck, glistening in the sun. I wondered, suddenly, if I’d get in trouble,

catchin fish, seeing that I don’t have a license. But I sort of do, being that I’d have the sense to lie bout being the one who caught the fish if it ever came to it.

“What’s that?” he said, not looking.

“I caught a fish, I think.”

“Oh yeah? Stay out of the water for a bit Hun, don’t be making any noise tryin to scare em off. Pisspoor luck, today.”

“Okay Daddy.” I squinted at her, looking for ears and found none. She was large, and bout as long as the tips of my fingers to my elbow, maybe longer. Her citrus-tipped tail stroked at the split brown earth, leaving wet patches in its wake, like she was also tryin to get inside the cracks, like a strong blade of grass. Her shining ruby eye kept starin at me, never blinking, and her gills kept flappin and then sealin tight. I decided right then and there that I wanted no part in eatin this fish, not cause she scared me or nothin like that, but cause she seemed important, like something bout her was special. She must have thought I was darn important, too, being that she wouldn’t take that cherry eye off o’ me. So, I grabbed her round the middle of her slippery body with both hands and carried her back down the bank, gentle and careful not to let her wriggle out. When I slid her, face-first, back into the warm water, her plump body propelled forward and her thick tail slapped the surface with a *thwack*, splashin my face with greenish water.

I looked up, afraid Daddy heard the splash, but he was concentrating real hard on his fly floatin downstream—a sneaky pete popper. I looked back into the shallow water and saw my red-eyed lady gazin back up at me, her fins and tail all fanned out like a woman might curtsy with a skirt. I grin at her, at the strangeness of it. That’s when Daddy let outta yip and I see his fly has dipped under. A bite, finally! He reels and I grab the net, wading out to my bony knees, ready. After some time, he fights to bring the fish in close enough, and I’m able to swoop the net under a giant, dark-green twistin fella. I struggle to pull him up. Hes a rough-looker with notched, spiked fins and a gapin mouth. “At least 30, 32 inches long—he’s bigger n all get out!” Daddy says, now lookin at me, a big smile in his brown beard.

We load the old beater with Daddy’s fishing boxes and pole, my long stick, and the monster fish were fixin to have for supper tonight. Mama says Daddy’s fishin stories never amount to more than a hill o’ beans, well, wait till she gets a load of this giant! We three’ll be full as ticks! Daddy pulls the truck forward, away from the bank and I twist in my seat under my belt to look back at the river from the open window. A low sun bleaches the whole blue-green river, and I can’t believe what I think I see when I see it; a tiny red-gem eye, glintin sunlight off

its surface—a sore thumb in white water and just as hard to ignore. My lady fish, I think. I reach my arm out and wave goodbye at her.

“Who are you waving at shug?” Daddy asked.

“My fish, the one I caught,” I say.

“Well, ain’t that nice.”

## Early Childhood

Samantha Reed

I am called shrimp. Alligator. Runt. Hey you. Munchkin. I am named Samantha. Nicknames follow me everywhere I go. At school, it’s runt or shrimp and people like to pick me up and run until they get yelled at by the teacher. With family, it’s munchkin and alligator when my Grandma says goodbye. At home, I am Samantha of the Reed family and I am dying.

I fill my days with Disney films. *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Peter Pan*... they are my friends and my books are my company. My mother and father work full time, she at the hospital which I frequent, both as patient and as daughter, and my father at his company I hear of in whispers.

Most of my time is spent on the couch, in my bed, at my Grandparent’s home. I am too sick to go to school regularly, and my teachers are glad to supplement my education with take home sheets. The doctors do not know how to fix me... but am I something that needs to be fixed? I am asthma. I am pneumonia. I am an artery wrapped around my esophagus and born with an open chest cavity. I am me, isn’t that enough?





My grandma's living room is dark. I asked her to close the windows so I could see the movie screen. Belle has just arrived at the castle, and I feel as if I arrive with her. In Disney movies, I'm no longer myself. I'm in a magical library in France, I can fly, and I can be free. The couch is rough against my skin, the dark red plaid not as soft as the blanket I have cocooned myself into. I am always cold. My Papa sits in his blue chair beside me, reading an old National Geographic. Grandma is on the phone in the other room, I don't try to listen. I know what will be said. "But the doctor said..." "She's doing so well today." "She kept down lunch and didn't choke." "Alright, I'll let her know." The usual. Must be another appointment.

This is my life, and I am glad to live it because it is the only life I will ever have. So, I do the doctors visits, the hospitals, the tests. What else is there to do? I will fight to live and I will never stop fighting, but for now I'm going to watch Belle and hope that one day I can have a magical library and yellow gown of my own.

### The Loss

My sister's name was Katie. I was two years older than her and she was my world. We would get yelled at a lot – I fed her marshmallows (which she couldn't eat), I dragged her down the stairs because she couldn't walk and she laughed the entire time (which was bad), I had wheelchair races with her when we were both in the hospital. She was my partner in crime. She's gone now.

Katie had this laugh. It sounded like she was screaming, but you knew it was a laugh because her eyes held millions of stars fighting to break free. She would grin, and throw her arms up in the air. She couldn't speak, but every little sound she made or, if you watched, the way her eyes shifted, would tell you everything you needed to know.

The day Katie died my parents lied to me. They told me Katie had to go away, and I believed them. She did go away, but she left because they made her and she had no choice.

Katie was on life support, but it was no life. She didn't laugh or cry or shriek or make those crazy eyes I loved. I could see the pain in her face, the strain in her neck when she breathed and the gloss in her eyes. It was terrifying, but I didn't want her to leave me. I guess, being the older sibling is knowing when to let go. I had to let go, but I didn't release the guilt from my heart until now. I can see what happened now.

Katie was sick the way I had been as a child, only Katie never got better. She was in a wheelchair, and I learned to walk. Katie couldn't eat normal food, and I had finally moved passed PediaSure and onto cookies. She couldn't speak, and I never found a way to stop the words from falling past my lips. Together, we were the Reed sisters and we were unstoppable in our fun. Alone, I am myself and I am unstoppable with her watching over me. Not so alone, after all.

### The Found

Trevor Michael Reed was named Sunny Lowe the day I met him. The room was stale, the floor sticky. There were two nurses there and my mother. It was the day I got to meet my soon to be little brother. It had been four years since Katie died, and we were ready.

I had only seen Sunny in the little picture my mother showed. He was sweet looking, round and fat and baby like. There were these little dimples in his cheeks, and his lips were glossy because he drooled.

In person, Sunny was like the sun – maybe that's where he got his name. He was bright, and shining, and he almost hurt to look at because he couldn't possibly fill what Katie had left. But he could forge a new spot, and he did.

I helped him walk. I held his little hands in him, his finger gripping me so tightly my skin turned white and my fingertips sizzled numb. I held him up, supporting his weight as he



threatened to pull me over into something I wasn't quite ready for. I could be a sister again, and I vowed – as his sparkling eyes colored like beautiful fall grass met mine – to never let anything, sickness or man, hurt him.

## **The Perpetuation of Abuse in YA**

Samantha Reed

If he's mean to you, it's because he likes you. A saying I've heard time and time again. A saying most women have heard at least once in their lives. But, boys will be boys and we should smile, because it was a compliment.

Rape culture is everywhere. We see it on television shows like *Game of Thrones* and *Outlander*. We see it in advertisements that scream rape statistics but warn readers to mind what they are wearing. We see it when people come forward to speak of their abuse and experiences and are told they don't have enough evidence. We see it when those same individuals prove abuse or sexual harassment happened to them and are told they should have come forward sooner. We hear it in music, we read it in our books. It's inescapable. But, what happens when rape culture hides within thrives because abuse is romanticized in our literature?

Young Adult Literature has a wide audience, ranging from eleven-year-old first-time readers to middle-aged men and women who want to see what the fuss is all about. These books are written for, and marketed towards, teens. Through romanticizing abuse in Young Adult, teenagers are assuming that controlling and possessive relationships, like Bella and Edward's in *Twilight*, are the ideal without fully understanding the extent of the abuse taking place. The romanticizing of abuse as the height of romance is detrimental to all readers, who read books like *Twilight*. When compared with *A Court of Mist and Fury*, which highlights and critically examines different forms of abuse, *Twilight* can be seen as the problematic romance that it is, and therefore become educational rather than harmful. Unless the abuse present in *Twilight* is acknowledged, it can appear to teenagers as romance, and harm their perception and experience of relationships.

### **1. What is Abuse?**

According to *Domestic Violence and Abuse: Recognizing the Signs of an Abusive Relationship and Getting Help*, domestic abuse is “whenever one person in an intimate relationship or marriage tries to dominate and control the other person” (Smith and Segal). The forms of abuse, and its severity, vary. A universal sign of abuse, or being abused, is fear – which can be fear of a partner’s temper, of disagreeing, and of the partner themselves. Smith and Segal describe feeling “like you have to walk on eggshells around your partner – constantly watching what you say and do in order to avoid a blow up” as a tell-tale sign you are in an abusive relationship. Additionally, the Domestic Abuse Project’s “Red Flags” list highlights specific characteristics of abuse. Signs of abuse in a relationship include: blaming a partner for their treatment in that relationship, blaming a partner if something goes wrong, constant anger within one partner, forced isolation, controlling who goes where and when, forcing sex, physical roughness, disregard of a partner’s thoughts, feelings, and current emotions, and lying. Other signs include an attitude of “my way or the highway,” threats of self-harm if the relationship were to end, and extreme mood swings. These acts of dominance, isolation, humiliation, blaming, and threatening are tactics abusers use to exert power over their partners (Smith and Segal).

Violence is such an everyday occurrence that it sometimes appears as normal. According to a 2017 study by the CDC, approximately “10% of high school students reported physical victimization and 10% reported sexual victimization from a dating partner in the 12 months before they were surveyed”. Additionally, out of the total of students surveyed, “10.3% had been hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon on purpose by someone they were dating or going out with one or more times during the 12 months before the survey” (Violence Prevention). These statistics are from students who have reported the violence and abuse they experienced, but there are more who remain silent. The CDC also states that “teens receive messages about how to behave in relationships from peers, adults in their lives, and the media.” Furthermore, they explain that “all too often these examples [in media] suggest that violence in a relationship is normal” (Violence Prevention). The two novels I focus on both fall into the pattern of normalizing relationship violence and feature characters who do not recognize their abusive situations due to the normalization of violence itself. Throughout *Twilight* and *A Court of Mist and Fury*, each of these signs is displayed by the perpetrator of the abuse, yet in one of the novels it is passed off as the ultimate romance, while the other highlights the abuse and educates readers.

## **2. Abuse in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight***

Edward and Bella are the star-crossed lovers of my generation. Throughout elementary school and junior high, one could hardly go a single day without hearing about *Twilight*’s dynamic duo. Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* reached number five on the New York Times bestseller list within a month of its release in October, 2005, and eventually reached first place.

Additionally, the novel was named one of *Publishers Weekly's* Best Children's Books of 2005. The novel even went so far as to sell “one million copies in little over two and a half years – beating the previous record set by Harry Potter author JK Rowling” (Alexander). Bella and Edward's relationship, however, is not what it seems. Rather than a delicious romance, as it was marketed, *Twilight* features a relationship built upon foundations of fear and control.

Edward and Bella's first meeting in the novel is saturated with fear, which is problematic because Bella soon translates her fear into attraction. When Bella enters Biology, she finds herself face to face with the murderous glare of Edward Cullen. She looks up to find him “glaring at [her] again, his black eyes full of revulsion. As [she] flinched away from him, shrinking against [the chair] the phrase if looks could kill suddenly ran through [her] mind” (Meyer 24). Bella's first instinct is to flinch and try to hide, because, in that moment, she believes Edward wants to kill her. Her fear is repeated later in the same chapter, when she once more finds him glaring. He was staring at her “with piercing, hate-filled eyes. For an instant, [she] felt a thrill of genuine fear, raising the hair on [her] arms” (Meyer 27). Bella describes the fear she feels as chilling her “more than the freezing wind” (27). Despite her terror, Bella and Edward are soon an inseparable unit. Both the *Red Flags* list and Smith and Segal explicitly state that fearing an intimate partner is a sign of abuse or potential abuser. This is harmful to readers because Bella soon translates her fear of Edward into attraction. While she is terrified of him, she finds him irresistible because of her fear itself: it's thrilling. Readers, too, can begin to associate fear of their partner to be “thrilling.”

As their relationship progresses, Bella begins to internalize Edward's anger – willingly accepting the blame his words, attitude, and actions place on her. After their first meeting Edward doesn't come to school. Bella immediately blames herself for this, though she calls herself irrational. She claims her reaction to him was “ridiculous, and egotistical, to think that [she] could affect anyone that strongly. It was impossible. And yet [she] couldn't stop worrying that it was true” (Meyer 31). Edward's initial hate towards her has affected Bella so strongly that she believes it is her fault. According to Smith and Segal's list of signs you are being abused, wondering “if you're the one who is crazy” and believing you deserve what is happening are all signs of an abusive relationship. In addition, readers see Bella internalizing Edward's actions as her fault, and they themselves might do in their own relationships.

Furthermore, each time Edward reacts to Bella, she believes he is judging her. When he blindsides her upon his return, she states that, because he stops smiling, “he was obviously wondering if [she] was mentally competent” (44). Bella's self-doubt because of Edward's behavior never fades; it comes up over and over again throughout the series. She constantly experiences paranoia and fear that she is doing something to anger him or drive him away. At one point during a conversation about her theories of what he is, Edward goes so far as to verbally blame her for not being smart enough to figure it out: “it's not my fault if you are

exceptionally unobservant” (Meyer 81). He is blaming her for what he is while simultaneously disputing her intelligence. Later in the novel, when Bella agrees to meet Edward to see him in the sun, he yells at her because she has given him no incentive to bring her back safely. After explaining she hasn’t told anyone where she is, Edward snaps, “That’s very helpful, Bella” (Meyer 255). And, when she pretends not to listen, Edward accuses her of being “so depressed by Forks that it’s made [her] suicidal” (Meyer 255). Edward is blaming his desire to kill her, his lack of incentive to bring her home, on her. Although Bella repeatedly reminds herself she hasn’t done anything wrong, Edward never fails to make her feel inadequate. The *Red Flags* list, Smith and Segal, and the CDC all agree that a partner using insults or other verbal tactics to create feelings of inadequacy within the other partner is emotional abuse. Yet, in *Twilight*, these instances of emotional abuse are written off as Edward teasing Bella. Readers begin to associate teasing and taunting as a sign of attraction -- just like when we are told, as children, that a boy is mean because he likes you.

Edward experiences frequent mood swings which often both frighten Bella and leave her wondering what she did wrong. As the *Red Flags* list points out, frequent and extreme mood swings can be signs of abusive tendencies. After their first lunch date together, Edward tells Bella that she “really should stay away from [him],” but he instantly flips and says he will “see [her] in class” (Meyer 84). This is just one instance of him sliding between personalities. At one point, Bella tells Edward that his fast driving terrifies her, which causes this reaction: “Enough commentary on my driving,” he snapped. “I’m still waiting on your latest theory” (Meyer 182). Not only does he yell at her for asking him to slow down, he flips from angry to questioning in a nanosecond. Once he realizes he has made her cry, he appears “appalled” and suddenly reaches “toward [her] hesitantly with his right hand, but then he stop[s] and place[s] it slowly back on the steering wheel. ‘I’m sorry.’ His voice burn[s] with regret” (Meyer 190). Edward is displaying part of the abusive cycle here. He blows up, frightens Bella, and then instantly displays guilt, apologizes, and promises not to do it again. He repeats this cycle once more when she asks him about seeing him hunting. He responds with: “Absolutely not!” His face turned even whiter than usual, and his eyes were suddenly furious. [Bella] leaned back, stunned and – though [she’d] never admit it to him – frightened by his reaction” (Meyer 216). Edward’s violent outbursts frequent their conversations, leaving Bella fearing his reactions to her thoughts, comments, and actions. Teens, and all readers alike, may find themselves forgiving Edward for his behavior because of his apologies, much in the same way Bella does. This, however, may lead to them forgiving their own abusers when they are trapped in the abusive cycle.

Edward also exhibits extremely controlling behavior, and he often resorts to physical force or manipulation to keep Bella within his control. During the earlier stages of their relationship, Bella faints in Biology and Edward ‘heroically’ ignores her protests and carries her to the nurse’s office. He then demands to drive her home. He physically stops her: “Where do

you think you're going?' He asked, outraged. He was gripping a fistful of [her] jacket in one hand" (Meyer 103). She refuses to go with him, and he manhandles her into his car:

He was towing me toward his car now, pulling me by my jacket. It was all I could do to keep from falling backward. He'd probably just drag me along anyway if I did. "Let go!" I insisted. He ignored me. I staggered along sideways across the wet sidewalk until we reached the Volvo. Then he finally freed me — I stumbled against the passenger door. "You are so pushy!" I grumbled. "It's open," was all he responded. He got in the driver's side. "Get in, Bella." I didn't answer. I was mentally calculating my chances of reaching the truck before he could catch me. I had to admit, they weren't good. "I'll just drag you back," he threatened, guessing my plan. (103)

Not only does Edward threaten to drag her into his car, he ignores Bella's protests and drags her by her clothing across the parking lot. Readers are meant to see this as heroic, seeing as Edward is concerned about Bella's driving capabilities. However, he blatantly ignores her pleas. There are repeated mentions of Bella protesting Edward's physical behavior towards her, yet every time, she argues against her treatment, he ignores her. He throws her over his shoulder (Meyer 315), flings her into the backseat of his car (Meyer 380), and even has his brother, Emmet, pin her into her seat as she tries to fight him off (Meyer 381). In each instance, Edward is doing what he believes is best for Bella's safety, yet thinly veiled violence underlies each action.

Despite Edward's aggressive and controlling behavior, a majority of reader reviews proclaim Edward to be the ultimate heartthrob. I was among them, once. Prominent reviewers on *Goodreads.com* and within the Young Adult Book community positively highlight *Twilight* as the ultimate romance. Adita, whose review was posted in 2015, believes we "should be appreciating Stephanie Meyer's inspiration for giving the young adults a holy grail to revere and celebrate for centuries to come." Additionally, she declares Edward to be "so handsome, so breathtakingly, tantalizingly, enticingly beautiful that it would make any girl- even girls with a steely resolve or the disinterested ones break down and yearn for death at his hands" (Adita). Adita isn't the only reviewer who finds the relationship between Bella and Edward to be utterly irresistible. Daniella, a prominent blogger at *The Book Huntress*, finds the relationship to be "intimate and touching" (Danielle). She further exclaims that *Twilight* is "honestly one of the best romances I've ever read" and that this book has "everything there that a romance needs: the intensity, the emotion, the joy, and the edge of despair of knowing that one is in too deep." She admits that she "fell deeply in love with Edward" because "he is one of the most magnetic characters ever written" (Danielle). An echo of Danielle's review is found in Juliana Douglas when she states that *Twilight* "exhibited a surprising depth of emotion, intimacy, and even sensuality." Douglas also states that the "intimacy was owing in a large part to the amazing level of communication between Bella and Edward" (Douglas). The most troubling of Douglas'

statements is her declaration that *Twilight* “sends some positive family and relationship messages to teens.”

Readers are meant to fall head-over-heels in love with Edward. We are meant to be blinded by his good looks, wealth, and his complete disregard of his very nature. As Tori Benson perfectly sums up in her article “From *Wuthering Heights* to *Twilight*: The Appeal of the Abusive Hero” “Edward demands, threatens, and eventually forces Bella to do things she does not want to do and we all quietly sigh and exclaim, ‘Now THIS is love.’”

### 3. The Recognition of Abuse in *A Court of Mist and Fury*

*A Court of Mist and Fury* is the sequel to *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. This series follows a young woman named Feyre. The series is extremely popular among the YA community, but even more so now for the journey Feyre goes through in the second book. Not only did *A Court of Mist and Fury* hold the top spot on the New York Times best seller list for three months straight, it has been translated into over ten languages, optioned for a film, and sold over millions of copies in the past year. *A Court of Mist and Fury* is a slow unraveling of an abusive relationship and a personal journey for Feyre. Feyre is set to marry Tamlin, the High Lord of the Spring Court, after the events of the first book. However, throughout the first section of the novel, Feyre comes to realize Tamlin’s controlling, explosive, and unforgiving nature. In *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, readers root for Tamlin and Feyre’s relationship as he is the main love interest and the “hero” to her “heroine.” *A Court of Mist and Fury*, on the other hand, enlightens readers to Tamlin’s behavior, which has been there since he was first introduced. This is a romance which both acknowledges the abuse of its protagonist and shows her path of self-healing.

Tamlin controls most of Feyre’s daily life in the beginning of the novel, yet she doesn’t push back until she feels completely trapped. He buys her clothes and tells her what to wear, he tells her who she can see, and he keeps her confined to his property. Tamlin uses Feyre’s safety as an excuse to keep her in his manor. On more than one occasion, she suggests leaving to help the village, and he shoots her down with a sharp, resounding no (Maas 9). Each time she brings it up, Lucien, Tamlin’s friend, warns Feyre to not “push him” (9). Yet, Feyre does advocate for herself, and he explodes at her. Tamlin also refuses to let Feyre train her powers because he thinks it will send a bad message. He explains his reasoning by stating it would allow Feyre to have “an edge when [she] shouldn’t” and that she doesn’t need to train because he “can guard [her] from whatever comes [their] way” (Maas 86). However, it is later that Tamlin’s true motive becomes clear. Tamlin uses Feyre’s lack of training, which he forced upon her, to lock her in his house. He tells her that her “untrained abilities render [her] presence more of a liability than anything” (Maas 122). He has successfully manipulated Feyre into being helpless, just as he wished for her to be the entire time. Tamlin’s treatment of Feyre is emotional abuse according to

the Red Flags list; he forces her into dependency and simultaneously isolates her and dominates her life.

Tamlin also ignores Feyre's needs and wishes. Beyond her desire to train and help the village, Tamlin ignores her pleas for more freedom within the house. Feyre confronts him after he denies her a third time: "'Will I ever be able to roam where I wish to paint? Or will there be an escort, too?' Silence. A no - and a yes, then. I began shaking, but for me, for us, I made myself say, 'Tamlin - Tamlin, I can't... I can't live my life with guards around me day and night. I can't live with that... suffocation. Just let me help'" (Maas 99). She is begging him to give her some sort of freedom, and during her plea, she tells him that she is "drowning. And the more you do this, the more guards... you might as well be shoving my head under the water" (99). Feyre sees what Tamlin is doing to her. She sees him trying to suffocate and control her, and she is begging him to stop – yet he doesn't. As Feyre explains to readers later in the novel, Tamlin had "chosen to ignore it. Just as he'd ignored or rejected nearly all of my requests, acted out of his deluded sense of what he believed was right for my well-being and safety" (Maas 467). Tamlin is motivated by what *he* thought was best for Feyre rather than listen to her pleas. Tamlin seeks to control her, to keep her locked up for himself regardless of what it is doing to both her mental state and her physical health. As the Red Flags list highlights, a "my way or the highway" attitude is a prominent sign of a potential abuser. Tamlin falls into this category, and, just as it is difficult to distinguish in the real world, Tamlin's subtle emotional abuse is hard to visualize unless consciously recognized as abuse.

Tamlin disregards Feyre's thoughts, feelings, and current emotions – a behavior that identifies him as an abuser according to the Red Flags list. Feyre suffers from PTSD after her trials in the first novel of the series. From the first page of the second book, we are hurtled into her world of nightmares and vomiting and panic attacks. She can't see certain colors, be in a room without light, or stand to wear white. She was trapped beneath a mountain for months, forced to murder innocents, and she ended up giving her life in the process before being remade. One of her first panic attacks happens when she is walking down the aisle to marry Tamlin: "Help me, help me, help me, I begged someone, anyone... Save me - please, save me. Get me out. End this. Tamlin took a step toward me - concern shading those eyes. I retreated a step. No" (Maas 42). Tamlin deliberately ignored her request for no red at the wedding, and it triggers a break down, and her refusal, when she sees the altar surrounded by red roses. Despite Feyre's obvious trauma, however, Tamlin continuously and consciously denies Feyre's trauma because it doesn't fit into his idea of a perfect life. According to the Red Flags list, Tamlin's utter disregard for Feyre's emotional state marks him as emotionally abusive – yet teen readers might view his behavior as avoidance rather than abuse, leading to the same rationalization in their own lives.

Tamlin's disregard of Feyre's trauma is not a one-time event, it occurs regularly and therefore is problematic. Willfully ignoring a partner's emotional state, according to the Red

Flags list, is purposeful abuse. We are told that Tamlin “never woke when the nightmares dragged me from sleep; never woke when I vomited my guts up night after night. If he knew or heard, he said nothing about it” (Maas 8). Feyre knows he is awake, she hears him breathing and moving, yet he never gets up to help her or make sure she is alright. Tamlin ignores Ferye’s trauma in order to remain in his delusion of their perfect life. The final straw in their relationship is when Tamlin once again betrays her trust and disregards her trauma. He traps her in the house and seals her inside, though he knows what she went through in the first book – he was there, too. Feyre panics. She states “he locked me in. He’d sealed me inside his house. I hurtled for the nearest window in the foyer and shoved it open... Smooth, hard air pushed against my skin. Breathing became difficult. I was trapped... He’d trapped me in here; he’d locked me up” (Maas 123). She screams and begs to be let out, and eventually faints because she cannot breathe – but Tamlin left her there. When Rhys rescues her, she is told she is free. Free, not safe (Maas 125). That distinction makes all the difference to Feyre. Abusers, just as Tamlin does, will attempt control based on the idea that they are keeping their victims safe. This idea of ‘safety’ is how they force their partners to stay home, dictate who they can see and where they can go, how they can dress, etc. Teens, like Feyre, need to be aware of the distinction between safe and free and how abusers, like Tamlin, will use the ideas to their advantage.

Over time, Feyre begins to fear pushing back. She sees fighting for herself as useless and not worth the effort. Tamlin is slowly, effectively, wearing down her defenses until she becomes docile. She hates the “bright dresses that had become [her] daily uniform, but [doesn’t] have the heart to tell Tamlin - not when he’d bought so many, not when he looked so happy to see [her] wear them” (Maas 12). Feyre is afraid of disrupting the peace, even though wearing the gowns and pretending to be fine only triggers her nightmares and subsequent vomiting. Feyre is exhibiting the behavior of someone normalizing their abuse. She is, as the *Red Flags* list points out, afraid to fight back because she fears the subsequent confrontation. She tries to fight back on her wedding gown, she loathes it. Tamlin, however, though he laughs, forces her to wear it. Feyre tells readers that fighting back “took more energy than it was worth” because she would lose anyway (Maas 18). She gives up. Feyre comes to see fighting back as part of the problem, rather than the solution. Feyre feels tied down, she is afraid to make decisions on her own in fear of angering or upsetting Tamlin. She no longer sees herself as worthy of fighting for. Feyre has submitted to her situation, just as a lot of women in abusive situations do.

Feyre and Tamlin fall into the abusive cycle. Tamlin often flies into rages, and Feyre is terrified, yet he apologizes and promises to never do so again. There is a build up to the first time he attacks her, as Maas leaves hints at Tamlin’s frequent rages. The first hint is the first time Feyre leaves to fulfil her bargain with Rhysand, and when she returns she finds the study in ruins. Tamlin explains that he “trashed half the house” because Rhysand “took [her] away, he stole [her]” (Maas 82). Tamlin destroyed his office because his favorite object was stolen. On one occasion, he snaps at Feyre for demanding basic rights to roam the grounds. He later tries to

apologize through sex: "I'm sorry," He murmured... "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said those things," he breathed onto my skin. "To you or Lucien, I didn't mean any of them" (Maas 97). Feyre simply responds with "I know." It is not a day later that Tamlin violently erupts at her and throws her across a room. He then pleads for forgiveness: "I'll try to be better. I don't... I can't control it sometimes. The rage. Today was just... today was bad, With the Tithe, with all of it. Today - let's forget it, let's just move past it. Please" (Maas 102). Tamlin falls into the abuse pattern laid out by Smith and Segal – a man abuses his partner, apologizes, rationalizes the behavior, and promises to never do it again.

Until Rhysand helps Feyre to understand the abusive cycle she has fallen prey to with Tamlin, she does not fight for herself. In the first novel, she is forced to make a deal with Rhysand in order to save her life while being held prisoner: she must visit him one week every month in exchange for his help Under the Mountain. It is Rhysand who shows Feyre how terribly she is being treated by Tamlin. When he first calls in the bargain and saves her from having to refuse Tamlin at the altar, he tells her that Feyre "looks exactly like the doe-eyed damsel he wants her to be" (Maas 47). He is trying to show her how she is falling into Tamlin's trap before it snaps shut. During that same week, Rhys offers to teach Feyre to read, something Tamlin had previously teased her about. When asked why, Rhys responds that he resents "the idea of you letting those sycophants and war-mongering fools in the Spring Court making you feel inadequate" (Maas 62). Rhysand hates what Feyre is letting Tamlin do to her, and he does his best to help her through it. It is not until Rhys has his own explosion that she begins to fight back against Tamlin. Rhys gives her an ultimatum:

"I will say this once - and only once," Rhysand purred, stalking to the map on the wall. "You can be a pawn, be someone's reward, and spend the rest of your immortal life bowing and scraping and pretending to be less than him, than Ianthe, than any of us. If you want to pick that road, then fine. A shame, but it's your choice... But I know you - more than you realize, I think - and I don't believe for one damn minute that you're remotely fine with being a pretty trophy." (74)

Rhysand reminds Feyre of who she was before Tamlin sunk his claws into her. He is the one that reminds her of her agency and worth. Rhysand opens the door to Feyre's healing, yet she is the one that must choose to step over the threshold.

Feyre's slow realization of what Tamlin did to her is the core of this book. While Rhysand might have shown her the way, Feyre finds a way to heal herself for her own benefit, not for another relationship. Feyre reveals to Rhysand that she thinks she:

"must have been a fool to allow myself to be shown so little of the Spring Court. I'm thinking there's a great deal of territory I was never allowed to see or hear about and maybe I would have lived in ignorance forever like some pet. I'm thinking that I was a

lonely, hopeless person, and I might have fallen in love with the first thing that showed me a hint of kindness and safety. And I'm thinking maybe he knew that." (Maas 156)

Feyre is beginning to understand what Tamlin was trying to do to her. She sees the red flags for what they were. She sees his control and his attempts to make her weak and dependent on him. Throughout her healing, she acknowledges it more than once. She explains that she had "let them make [her] weak. Bent to it like some wild horse bent to the bit" (Maas 224). It is in these moments, however, that she declares to never be weak or dependent again. Feyre was able to recognize what was happening to her, and through her recognition she found her own way out – however, teens might not be so lucky. Despite that, Feyre's journey is both a guide for teens on how to recognize their situations and a reassurance they are not alone.

The ending of the book is the most profound. Feyre not only acknowledges the abuse she endured, she has found a way past it. Feyre's realization of Tamlin's behavior hits her after being shown friendship. When describing her relationship with Tamlin, she states:

I had been frightened by those fits of pure rage, cowed by them. And it had been love - I had loved him so deeply, so greatly. It had been love, and I'd meant it - the happiness, the lust, the peace... I'd felt all of those things. Once.... But maybe those things had blinded me, too. Maybe they'd been a blanket over my eyes about the temper. The need for control (Maas 296).

She sees Tamlin for what he is, and she refuses to let it happen again. She is stronger, bolder, and unapologetic about who she is. Unlike Bella, she recognized her situation and recaptured her agency. At the end of the book, Feyre explains that she "realized how badly [she'd] been treated before, if [her] standards had become so low. If the freedom [She'd] been granted felt like a privilege and not an inherent right" (Maas 577). Feyre's story leaves readers with a strong message: your freedom is important, and no one can take that away unless you let them.

Bloggers and regular readers alike have responded with an overwhelmingly positive, welcoming, and loving reaction to Feyre's transformation into an independent woman who fights back against her abuser. Tracy, a blogger with the prominent review site Cornerfolds, explains that *A Court of Mist and Fury* is "is a story about a girl learning to respect herself, finding out who she really is after a huge trauma, with a love story weaved in." Furthermore, she declares Feyre "an amazing, strong female character and the kind of role model I wish teens could read more about." Feyre is a role model because of how she learns to respect herself. This type of response is of paramount importance. Readers see Feyre as a role model, as someone who got herself out of a terrible relationship. They learn through Feyre, identify with her, and they see her become her best self. Unlike Bella, who is content to remain in Edward's constant control, Feyre fights back – and readers can see themselves fighting back just as she did.

Another well-known blogger in the YA community, Cait from PagewithaVeiw, paints *A Court of Mist and Fury* as a mode for change in how teens view relationships because of how the novel recognizes abuse. She loves the novel because it's about "consent in an empowering relationship for a change" and she has "seen SO many unhealthy relationships in YA books that romanticize abusive & controlling guys who are attractive because they're threatening." Cait describes Feyre as "a strong female character going after the life & relationship that's healthiest for her." She also explains that Tamlin never changed from book one to book two, "his behavior just stopped being romanticized by Feyre." Feyre fell into a trap a lot of real women and teens face and fought her way out without trivializing the experience. Lexie, a top page reviewer at Goodreads, states that ACOMAF "is a sort of fantasy that weaves subtext of such enormous importance into an utterly engaging plot. I cannot, cannot explain what the exploration of abuse, consent, agency, freedom, depression, captivity, trauma and anxiety has meant to me." Lexie is one of many who find Feyre's journey both inspiring and a comfort. Another reviewer, Andrea Pop, is "at a lack of words for describing how it truly made me feel -- because this book resonates with my soul and my heart and my mind so wonderfully." Feyre's journey in *A Court of Mist and Fury* is one readers identify with. Her journey is important because it is one readers take with her, in the literal sense. In the first book, we fall in love with Tamlin as she does. Readers see him as the hero, the knight in shining armor, just as Feyre does. We, too, have the blanket pulled down over our eyes until Feyre starts peeling it apart thread by thread.

*Twilight* puts its heroine in a dangerous position and takes away her agency. Bella falls prey to Edward's every whim, leaving her utterly dependent on him. Their relationship invites readers to fall into the same traps. However, *A Court of Mist and Fury* builds and fosters a better understanding of relationships for teens. It invites them to stand up for themselves and communicate. *A Court of Mist and Fury* enables readers to recognize the red flags of an abusive relationship, no matter how subtle. *Twilight*, on the other hand, buries them.

#### **4. The Importance of this Literature for Teens**

Young Adult Literature is important in the same way all literature is important: it is an opportunity for readers to see themselves, and their experiences, reflected in the pages. Michael Cart, an expert on Young Adult Literature, declares this genre to be invaluable because of "its relevance to the lives of its readers." According to Cart, YA compares seeing yourself in the pages of a book to being reassured "that one is not alone after all, not other, not alien but, instead, a viable part of a larger community of beings who share a common humanity." Furthermore, Cart states YA gives "a frame of reference [to readers], it also helps them to find role models, to make sense of the world they inhabit, to develop a personal philosophy of being, to determine what is right and, equally, what is wrong." If teens read books like *Twilight* and are using it as a 'frame of reference' and to 'find role models,' then their perceptions are formed based in a misconstrued notion of what a healthy relationship is meant to be.

Negative relationships in YA are epidemic. Teens look to books for an escape, education, and an experience, but when these experiences portray harmful relationships in a positive manner, teens are left reeling. Cheryl Dickson, a psychologist, explains that a “problem occurs when teens expect their lives to be like their favorite character. Just as violence on television is hypothesized to increase real-life violence, fictional romance can likely affect views of real-life romance.” When readers fantasize about these abusive male protagonists, they are more likely to consider similar behavior in real life romantic rather than abusive. A 2013 study focusing on teen dating violence and its relationship with exposure to media found that “...aggressive media increases the incidence of dating violence over 3 years and is mediated by its effect on adolescents’ attitudes about violence” (Friedlander et al. 310). In other words, exposure to normalized violence in the media changes teens perceptions of violence as well as increases the risk of violence in a relationship. Additionally, the increased violence “occurs because the media images serve as models for romantic behavior and increase adolescents’ beliefs that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict” (Friedlander et al. 311). By exposing teens to violent media, the study found that their perception of violence changed after a year. Not only did the study show that teens who witnessed normalized violence were more likely to become abusers, it also found that those teens are more likely to become victims. According to their results, the findings “suggest that victimization is heightened because these youths may disregard cues of potential threats and then do not prioritize safety over affiliation” (Friedlander et al. 312). Teens disregard red flags of an abusive relationship, just as both Bella and Feyre do.

Gretchen, a leading teen blogger in the YA community, sent out a cry for help and call to action:

I’m angry at YA literature that tells young girls that kind of relationship is okay when it really, really isn’t. Being a teen is hard enough. For a lot of us, books are supposed to be an escape. We see strong characters and we try to be like them. But if these books – if our little havens – are telling us that these kinds of relationships are okay, what are we supposed to think?

She illustrates the issue with books like *Twilight*. When the abuse and control are painted as romance, teens start to believe that to be the norm. As blogger and journalist Varaizdo points out:

The readers that YA fiction is aimed at are just that: young adults. They are teenagers, often younger, learning about what adulthood means. Like sponges, we soak up societies rules through the world around us, through television shows and books. So, when young people are consuming books that portray abusive relationships in a loving way, and these books are teaching them about relationships, then this warps the idea of what it should mean to be in love. They are buying into the love story before learning that the love story is abusive.

A real-life example of this cycle is within Bella Swan herself. Bella adores *Wuthering Heights*, and often declares it her favorite novel. Heathcliff, the “hero” of the story, is extremely cruel and abusive, but he’s attractive – and the love interest. Bella finds her own Heathcliff in Edward Cullen, the controlling, abusive hero of *Twilight* with whom she is madly in love.

When readers, specifically teens, read books like *Twilight* without understanding the extent of the relationship presented, they are more likely to experience that type of relationship for themselves. Through the normalization of violence in the media and with the constant lens of rape culture in our society, potential victims of abuse find it hard to recognize the signs for what they are. When teens are told they are overreacting, or that a boy is just teasing them, they begin to normalize the behavior, and soon expect it. When teens read books that focus on unhealthy relationships, they further internalize the assumptions of what behavior is considered “okay.” Books like *A Court of Mist and Fury* are an important contrast to the romanticized abuse of *Twilight*. Both stories are equally important in helping teens understand the insidious, subtle forms abusive can take and in enabling them to recognize and reject its romanticized appearance in YA and society.

#### Works Cited

- Adita. “Adita’s Review of Twilight.” *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 16 June 2015, [www.goodreads.com/review/show/1309979485?book\\_show\\_action=false&from\\_review\\_page=3](http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1309979485?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=3).
- Alexander, Harriet. “Twilight: Book Breaks Sales Records.” *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 17 Nov. 2009, [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/6590249/Twilight-book-breaks-sales-records.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/6590249/Twilight-book-breaks-sales-records.html).
- Benson, Tori. “From Wuthering Heights to Twilight: The Appeal of the Abusive Hero.” *HeroesandHeartbreakers.com*, 16 Mar. 2012.
- Bookshop. “Bad Romance (or, YA & Rape Culture).” *Bookshop*, Live Journal, 14 Mar. 2010.
- Cart, Michael. “The Value of Young Adult Literature.” *American Library Association*, Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), 15 Nov. 2011.
- Cornerfolds, Tracy. “Tracy’s Review of A Court of Mist and Fury.” *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 15 May 2015, [www.goodreads.com/review/show/1281116452?book\\_show\\_action=false&from\\_review\\_page=1](http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1281116452?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1).
- Danielle. “Danielle The Book Huntress’ Review of Twilight.” *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 7 Jan. 2009, [www.goodreads.com/review/show/42220525?book\\_show\\_action=false&from\\_review\\_page=1](http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/42220525?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1).
- Dickson, Cheryl L. “A Psychological Perspective of Teen Romances in Young Adult Literature.” *The ALAN Review* 28.3 (2001): n. pag. *Digital Library and Archives*. Virginia Tech, Spring 2001. Web.
- Douglas, Julianna. “Julianna’s Review of Twilight.” *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 14 Apr. 2008, [www.goodreads.com/review/show/20134609?book\\_show\\_action=true&from\\_review\\_page=1](http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/20134609?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1).
- Friedlander, Laura J., Jennifer A. Connolly, Debra J. Pepler, and Wendy M. Craig. “Extensiveness and Persistence of Aggressive Media Exposure as Longitudinal Risk Factors for Teen Dating Violence.” *Psychology of Violence* 3.4 (2013): 310-22. Web. 28 Oct. 2017.

- Lexie. "Lexie's Review of A Court of Mist and Fury." *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 12 June 2015, [www.goodreads.com/review/show/1306055249?book\\_show\\_action=true&from\\_review\\_page=1](http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1306055249?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1)
- Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Mist and Fury*. N.p.: Bloomsbury, 2016. Print. A Court of Thorns and Roses.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. N.p.: Little, Brown, 2005. Print.
- My Life is a Notebook, Gretchen. "On YA Books That Make Abusive, Stalkerish, Horrible Relationships Seem like They're Okay—HERE ME ROAR." *My Life Is a Notebook*, 27 Feb. 2012,
- Page with a View, Cait. "Cait's Review of A Court of Mist and Fury." *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 4 Jan. 2016, [www.goodreads.com/review/show/1495019799?book\\_show\\_action=false&from\\_review\\_page=1](http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1495019799?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1).
- Pop, Andreea. "Andreea Pop's Review of A Court of Mist and Fury." *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 9 Sept. 2013, [www.goodreads.com/review/show/715568845?book\\_show\\_action=true&from\\_review\\_page=1](http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/715568845?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1).
- "Red Flags for Abusive Relationships." (n.d.): n. pag. *Domestic Abuse Project*. Young Women's Christian Association of the United States of America. Web.
- Smith, Melinda, and Jeanne Segal. "Domestic Violence and Abuse." *Domestic Violence and Abuse: Recognizing the Signs of an Abusive Relationship and Getting Help*. Harvard Health Publications, May 2017. Web.
- Varaidzo. "Do #WeNeedFeministYA?" *Rife Magazine*, Watershed, 25 June 2015, [www.rifemagazine.co.uk/2015/06/do-weneedfeministya/](http://www.rifemagazine.co.uk/2015/06/do-weneedfeministya/).
- "Violence Prevention." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 03 Aug. 2017. Web. 28 Oct. 2017.





*"Who wants to become a writer? And why? Because it's the answer to everything... It's the streaming reason for living. To note, to pin down, to build up, to create, to be astonished at nothing, to cherish the oddities, to let nothing go down the drain, to make something, to make a great flower out of life, even if it's a cactus.."*

**- Enid Bagnold**