

# Leonardo

Student Fine Arts and Literary Journal  
Central New Mexico Community College



2020

# Leonardo

Student Fine Arts and Literary Journal

Central New Mexico Community College

Albuquerque, New Mexico

**2020**

## **Editorial Staff**

Steven Archuleta

Benjamin Fowler

Elaine Bryan

Joshuah Gurule-Duran

Mariah Martinez

## **Faculty Advisors**

Chris Prentice

Carly Harschlip

Brian Hudson

Cover Image: "Liquidator" by Sebastian Duke, Acrylic Paint on Canvas

## Acknowledgments

*Leonardo* is a display of diversity of culture and ideas. It is also an opportunity to show-off unabashedly who we are—a tight-knit community who values art for what it is and for how we may use it to redefine ourselves. We want to thank everyone who submitted work for review. Although we have had to narrow down the submissions to suit the vision of this year's issue, we applaud the learning and creativity of all of this year's submissions. To those we have included in this issue, we hope you find your work properly celebrated and presented.

The Editorial Staff

*Leonardo* 2020

Not to sell, not to preach, not to win, but to share, to communicate, to create: that is why the artist makes, the writer writes, and it is why the whole CNM community--faculty, staff, and students--comes together to make *Leonardo*, year by year. Our part in the process is a privilege and a joy. We thank, first and foremost, the CNM Executive Council of Students, which has elected each year to generously fund this magazine, never mind the trend in this country to cut the arts. Rare sagacity, indeed. We thank, too, our student editors, who have been energetic, purposeful, dedicated, and collaborative. It shows in these pages.

Carly Harschlip

Chris Prentice

*Leonardo* Faculty Advisors

## Table of Contents

### Fiction

How to Play the Harp Strings	<i>Gavin Barrera</i>	4
A Good Cowboy	<i>M.M. Olguin</i>	22
Koi	<i>Junko Featherston</i>	34

### Poetry

Herencia	<i>Lara Acosta</i>	12
Introspection	<i>Kaitlynn Lynch</i>	13
Lake Shrine	<i>Matthew Sanchez</i>	20
Autumn in Albuquerque	<i>Venkat R Nagaswami</i>	20
Gravity	<i>Skyler Brown</i>	21
Cain	<i>Rayanne Whatley</i>	30
Infamous Iscariot	<i>Melanie Woods</i>	31
Mouth	<i>Em Beckley</i>	33
A Dream Pantoum	<i>Jené Montaño</i>	41
Ghosts	<i>David Rojas</i>	42
Sushi	<i>Emily Stäke</i>	43

### Creative Non-Fiction

Selling Popsicles	<i>Linglan Yu</i>	14
My First Cell Phone	<i>Noelle Rightley</i>	44

### Artwork

Untitled	<i>Eleya Morris</i>	11
Neo-Heritage	<i>Andrew Roibal</i>	13
The Splendor of Autumn	<i>Siv Limary</i>	19
Beyond the Post	<i>Abraham Assed</i>	30
Fear of the Unknown	<i>Noell Aldaba</i>	32
Unheard and Unseen	<i>Zachary Smith</i>	33
The Phoenix	<i>Eileen Renee Moya</i>	39
Stormy Night	<i>Samantha Hoffman</i>	40
Believe Me...	<i>Haruhian Sakurai</i>	42
Thetans...	<i>Billy Mahoney</i>	43
The Corvus	<i>Sarah Goldberg</i>	49

# How to Play the Harp Strings

Gavin Barrera

## 1. Betting on Kings

The heart is a soft gambler, and it chooses who to bet on. My heart is the kind that bets for a pair of Kings; in other words: It's gay and by association, so am I.

For the past few months, my newly-healed gambler has been betting on Karter. A bet that both warms and terrifies me. Karter is just as much of a dork as I. That nerd is taking my chips. Karter and I are both involved in theater, and our interests lie in the same nerdy activities. Karter is why Atlas bothers to hold the world; Karter is why the sun warms the air; Karter is a daily Christmas, but for a while I didn't know if he played at the same table. This riddled me with the termites of anxiety, for I was only 250% sure he was bisexual; I could only be bold at 1000% certainty. Then came the weekly occurrence of his shining presence, and the endearing words of my friends came to me.

"Just go for it!"

"I can totally see it!"

"I bet he likes you back!"

After blowing up my balloon of courage with these words, I decided to ask him if he would join me in a night of glances and flirts. It was a sunless Wednesday when I saw him again at the school. He stood outside a classroom: beautiful as a golden rose. I made my way, shakily,

up to him, but before I could open the rubber lips of bravery, he asked me a question I did not expect.

"What are you doing on Saturday?"

This wasn't part of the plan. *I* was destined to be the one asking about his weekend plans. My mouth managed to squeeze out a surprisingly stable:

"Nothing. What are *you* doing on Saturday?"

He looked me in the eye, making my heart hold its breath, and with a confident nod he created the second-best creation of the English language:

"Seeing a movie with *you*."

And my heart screamed to the casino of my ribs that drinks were on him.

## 2. Eros' Agenda

Saturday came both too fast yet not fast enough. The few days between were drenched in overthinking and anxiety but warmed with my heart's gentle glow and dreams of his smile. During those days we agreed to have a dinner before the movie. I awoke with the sun and felt like a mountain troll, both in grogginess and unpolished appearance.

My heart faxed my brain today's agenda: Wake Up, Laundry, Shower, Calm Your Nerves.

I got out of bed, completely mute to the siren song of my blankets and

pillow. I started picking my clothes off the floor and into the laundry machine (Whilst including the outfit that was given the honor of being worn tonight). As they tumbled and tossed so did my expectation.

What was going to happen? Will I be so bold as to hold his hand? Oh god what if it was a mere hangout between friends? He never said it was a date...

Friends... a word once beautiful is demonized by context and hisses like a heart eating serpent. Though I hope it's a date, I shudder and my bones go cold with the idea that it's not.

Laundry and the termites of anxiety that come with it.

My next task was afoot and thus I showered. The hot water ran down my body forming small rivers that eroded my fears. The steam rose up in a swirling dance; twirling into my lungs and warming my soul. The shower is where all melts away: dirt, agitation, sweat, panic, odor, and sorrow. In this cleansing of mind and body, most of the dread of rejection went into the drain. I emerged as a calmed boy whose heart beat for another.

Shower and the drowning of doubt

I'm a mere student in the art of dating, yet the importance of the first wasn't lost on me. I sat at my faithful computer and I started reading up on this foreign concept:

"Dress in a manner that presents you like the rose curtains of a readied theater" I believe my outfit will do well enough; A melding of class and cute.

"Carry a delightful scent so embrace becomes the inception of desire" I pray lemon will have such an effect.

"Be the only thing you can be: You" Though we both loved theatre, I had no intention to be an actor tonight. I felt good, I had my dominoes in a straight line. But then:

"Do not, and I repeat, do *not* go to the *movies*" Crack! I was shattered.

The evening is doomed, my heart is on death row, and I'm going to throw myself upon a sword I got from the ren fair. I felt the pests creep back into me and gnaw at my bones with their sharp pinchers. They must have found their way out of the shower drain.

But then, I thought about the way he looked at me when he asked me that blessed inquiry. How his pearls shined into mine. I felt the skeletal termites inside me metamorphosize into crimson butterflies that fluttered into my stomach. My heart has now regained control over my body.

Turn the clicking on pinchers into the flapping of wings

I looked at myself in the mirror, perfected my hair and teeth. I then exited my apartment and left stress at the door.

### 3. Love's Warmth in Night's Bitter Cold

I pulled my car up to the restaurant: Red Robins. Through study, I concluded he liked burgers and so I chose this place. It also didn't hurt that it was so close to the theater. I stared out of my windshield in contemplation.

Is this all really happening? How have I been deemed worthy enough to share a meal with Karter? What a cruel joke it will be to wake up from this dream.

Then my phone vibrated. I looked into its screen and saw the name of my heart's target: Karter.

He's calling off the date! He died and is texting me from the afterlife! He's messaging to tell me he hates me! He turned into a bat and flew to Germany!

My face twisted in fear as I read the words:

"Just got out of work! I'll be there by 6:00!"

I felt both relief and disbelief of my paranoia. I was more mad at myself than I was at it being 4:55.

After wasting my newfound time scrolling through Reddit, taking in words and not reading a single one, I saw his car drive up. That white chariot of world-destroying fuel, that snowy vessel of angels, that car that carried Karter. Suddenly I started freaking out:

Don't park next to me!

*He didn't park next to me.*

Why did I feel as if him parking next to me will kill me: I had not the slightest idea. But I did know that the game has begun. I looked at my car's convenient clock: 4:35. I thought about my first move: I was going to get out of my car at 4:40 and act as if I just got here.

As it counted down to 4:40, I wondered what he was doing. Is he getting as ready as he can be after just getting out of work? If so, then I'm amazed he can do quickly what took me all day to do.

The time came, but I felt myself freeze. I knew he'd see me but not what seeing me will make him do. There's no way I can get out right now in such a solid state! I pushed the dive to 4:45. The time of 4:45 came too quickly, my muscles only just figured out their job again. It wasn't until 4:47 that I began to move, my mind was blank so as not to scare my body into a coma.

Grab the handle; I grabbed the handle.

Pull the handle; I pulled the handle.

Open the door, I opened the door and was met with a cold slap of air.

I knew there was no turning back now. I started walking to the restaurant, my neck never felt so stiff as I dared not look back. I went up to the front of the restaurant and sat at a bench. Though I had no

source, I knew I had to meet him out here and not inside. Tonight happened to be a night where Autumn flirted with Winter, and so it was bitter cold. I held back shivering, if he saw me shivering out here then he'd know how much he means to me and I'd have no more cards to play.

I unsheathed my phone to distract myself from how cold I was. The jokes and pictures, that usually humored me, shined through my eyes and bounced back out; leaving nothing behind but at least I looked occupied.

I sat in frigid anticipation on the establishment's porch for 15 minutes. My body was aching from fighting the urge to shiver. What felt like the precipice of hypothermia teased the idea of impatience. What is taking him so long? But I shut that thought down as soon as I conjured it. Impatience isn't going to get me anywhere.

Every time someone walked up to the restaurant my heart skipped a beat. Is this him? No. Is this him? No. Until finally, it was him. Karter's hair was like a curly cloud of brown. Oh, how my fingers itched to go run through it like a field of wheat. His beard was a magnificent continuation of his scalp's creation. The beard had a clearing where his summer smile stood. He was wearing a lovely grey sweater with a geometric design of diamonds. He walked up with his

hands in his pockets, and with an earth quaking chuckle he said:

"Hey! What's up!"

I was so happy to see him. I wasn't nervous nor was I anxious. I felt like I've known him for my entire life yet I only just met him this summer.

We walked towards each other, and my heart usurped control of my arms and opened them for an embrace. He opened his and we hugged. I forgot what feeling bad was like. My fears, anxieties, and insecurities were suffocated. I felt as if flowers bloomed from my chest. In the cold of night I never felt warmer.

#### 4. A Dance of Elbows

The dinner was the best kind of stupid. We talked about all kinds of things from Magic the Gathering to whatever Campfire Ranch was. I was so shocked by how natural it all felt, it didn't feel like a game of chess with pawns of flirtation and bishops of eye contact. There isn't much to be said besides the ending.

Karter, that son of a bitch, paid for our food. I vowed revenge; if we go on another date I'm going to pay the hell out of our food. But I remembered that I had a card up my sleeve:

"I already pre bought out tickets"

During the week, I selected the best seats in the theater: the middle and then slightly forward. He showed just as much enthusiasm for

the seat choice as I had. We have many similarities like that:

We like the same breath mint. We have the same favorite Studio Ghibli film. We both collect Blu Rays of movies we love. We both loved the Campfire Ranch.

We decided that instead of driving to the theater, we should walk there together. Our conversations continued as we walked across the large parking lot. Side by side, and it felt perfect. The night's cold didn't faze me, my mind could only think about talking to him.

We sat down in the theater and started watching the film. The film was one of the best movies of the year but my mind was on my elbow. For his and mine shared the same rest.

I pictured our elbows touching, then our wrists, and then our hands will hold. That was the new plan.

Our elbows walked the line of touching and not touching and every time they weren't touching my mind would scream:

"Oh shit, this *is* just a hangout between friends! Get the sword!"

Our elbows touched: Yes. Our elbows parted a few minutes later: No. Our elbows reunited: Yes! Our elbows separated: No!

Yes!

No!

Yes!

N- Yes!

Then the movie ended. During it we laughed together, almost cried

together, but alas our hands never joined and the leather never felt so cold. But I got to hear him laugh. His laugh is so unique and though it might be loud for some, it has to be that way to go through me and swaddle my heart.

#### 5. The Disintegration of Red Robin's Parking Lot

On our journey through the parking lot, we talked about the movie but I never wanted the walk to end. I wanted to keep walking until we hit Mexico. The ending of this night was something I didn't want to come.

We reached his car and I suppose he wasn't excited for it to end because he said:

"Do you want to keep talking?"

"I sure do!"

He reached into his car and pulled a better jacket out and put it on. My brain suddenly remembered how cold it actually was, but before I could even breath out a mist of frozen air, he wrapped me in a blanket.

He wrapped me in a blanket! Not that I needed it with the thought alone heating me. We leaned against the front of his car as if we were an album cover. The talking continued for what must have been an hour but I couldn't even tell.

But then came the dreaded "Alright, well-" that brought the time of my life to an end. It pained me to even begin saying goodbye. The goodbyes brought the cold

back. We had a long hug and as I began to leave my heart burst out:

“DO SOMETHING PHYSICAL!”

My heart grabbed my confused arm and it... gave him a pat on his head... Though I got to touch his hair, it was still lame and weird. We laughed about it but that didn't help the awkwardness I felt, the termites coming back.

I went to my car and put the left-over concessions inside.

Though I had fun, I still wasn't sure if this was a date or not. Now it may seem obvious it was but not enough to keep doubt at bay for me. I started thinking about how my friends would react:

“What do you mean you still don't know?”

“That's it? That's what all this has been building to?”

“That's ok, maybe next time.”

But it was anything but ok. I looked at the seat of my car, the choice of going about still uncertain; and then I looked at Karter's vehicle. I don't know what took over me but I just started walking towards his car. The car came to life and the headlights ignited. I started to run, I didn't know what I was going to do or say but I knew I was going to die if I didn't. I made it to his car and knocked on his window.

As it rolled down, I realized I still didn't know what to say. He gave me a friendly-as-always “Hey!”

“Hey, uh” I felt my mouth stutter out the question: “Was this, uh, just a hangout between... buds-” Buds? “or was this... uh.. Something else?” Something else? Does he even know what I'm asking?!

“Ok, can I talk to you?”

Here it is: here's the part where he rejects me. The part where he tells me he's straight. The part where my heart will cleave in two like a marble statue and it'll take months to recover. The one thing that could possibly ruin this night.

“Yeah, of course” Despite my heart bracing for impact, that came out quite naturally.

He opened the car and the termites of anxiety came back to chew at my legs and stomach. They gnawed and bit and stung as he stood up. Maybe he will make it less painful and just stab me to death. He took a deep breath and it felt like he was loading a shotgun. He aimed at me and said:

“I'm not sure either... But I don't think it was just a hangout.”

My heart lowered its shield.

“I do- don't think it was either.”

“I was too nervous to ask... but I was hoping it was a date.”

My heart softened but only halfway in preparation for the deadly “but..” He was as unsure as I was?

“I was hoping it was one too.”

“The thing is..”

I tensed up, I felt everything stiffen as if I gazed into Medusa's

eyes. I instigated this talk so I deserve whatever I have coming.

"I'm bisexual and.. I think you're really cute. I've just never been with a guy before. I have no idea what I'm doing"

I am absolutely melted inside but there's no time for that. I need to reassure him.

"Nobody knows what they're doing. Don't worry about it. I- I think you're really cute too." Then my mouth kept going "I've actually been kinda crushing on you for a while." I needed to stop. But before I can kick myself he smiled and... He blushed.

I've said previously that he created the second-best creation of the English language; well he took a breath before creating the best of all: "I don't want you to just be an experiment."

This sentence will stick with me forever as the sweetest thing I've ever heard. I will hold onto it and treasure it until I die. Which might be soon based on the hit my heart just took. His bearded lips began to form another sentence. I had to hold my molten form together to hear it.

"I mean the only time I've kissed a guy was when I was drunk!"

I'm not a bold person in my day to day. As we've seen today, I've let the bugs chew on me again and again, and my whole life has been like that. But now wasn't the time for overthinking, now wasn't the time for anxiety, now was the time

for boldness. My mind conjured up a sentence that'll get what I didn't even think possible to happen. My lungs loaded the sentence into my vocal cords, and I aimed my eyes at his:

"Do you want to kiss a guy while sober?"

Bang...

"Are you... okay with that?"

"More than okay."

We each took steps to each other and with each one time slowed. He closed his eyes, and I did the same. In the darkness of anticipation was when it happened.

I kissed Karter and Karter kissed I.

I felt everything around me disappear, everything except him. The car was gone, the street below was gone and left me floating, and my anxieties were cooled by a gentle snow. The butterflies inside me turned to rose pedals, and they drifted around inside me in a slow vortex. He put his hand on my cheek as I wrapped my arms around him. He wasn't holding me and I wasn't holding him: we were holding and melting each other. Nothing mattered but the two of us floating on Cupid's wing.

That's what it feels like when your heart goes all in.

That's what makes the world disappear.

That's how you play the harp strings.

## 6. Epilogue

After the heart's concert. We said our real goodbyes, our "See you Wednesday!" and the promise of a sequel was made.

I walked to my car, trying my hardest not to skip like a goat. I sat down and exhaled, filling the car with weightless rose pedals from my mouth. I then started laughing, and this laugh wasn't from a joke but from love's springtime madness. I drove home, hoping I wouldn't get

pulled over for driving under the influence of Aphrodite's liquor.

When I got back to my apartment, I felt my heart beat a liquid rhythm and it flowed down to my feet and rise to my knees. I knew there was only one thing I could do to keep myself from drowning: I danced. I had no music except for the drum inside, and it made me dance like leaves in the wind.

I've been hungover ever since.



Untitled *Eleya Morris*

## Herencia

*Lara Acosta*

Hijo, no te pierdas en las etiquetas,  
Ni te defines por los estereotipos,  
Ni te niegues de las nuevas  
experiencias,  
Ni te fijes en el grosor de los libros.

Son, don't get lost in labels,  
Don't be defined by stereotypes,  
Don't deny yourself new  
experiences,  
Don't even notice the thickness of  
the books.

No mandes a la fregada el estudio,  
Ni tomes orgullo en el ser mas listo,  
No mandes a la fregada a los tuyos,  
Ni quieras a quien te comeria vivo.

Don't throw away your education,  
Or take pride in being smarter,  
Do not deny familial ties,  
nor love those who would just as  
soon eat you alive.

No seas de esos que pierden la  
paciencia,  
Ni le pegues a tu esposa o tus hijos,  
No veas como deporte a la violencia,  
Ni olvides las enseñanzas de Cristo.

Don't be one of those who lose  
patience,  
Don't hit your wife or your kids,  
Do not see violence as a sport,  
Or forget the teachings of Christ.

No temas las alturas que alcanzaras,  
Tampoco temas de las que puedes  
caer,  
Como aguila, por los cielos, volaras,  
Si no te conquistan el dudar y temer.

Do not fear the heights you reach,  
Nor those from which you can fall,  
As an eagle, in the skies, you will fly,  
If you doubt and fear do not  
conquer you.

No tomes mucho ni te la pases  
crudo,  
Mantente sobrio desde principio a  
fin,  
Tu eres mi herencia a este mundo,  
Mejora el mundo que te doy yo a ti.

Don't drink too much or be always  
hung over,  
Stay sober from beginning to end,  
You are my inheritance to this  
world,  
Better the world that I give to you.



## Neo-Heritage

*Andrew Roibal*

### Introspection

*Kaitlynn Lynch*

I am worthless and don't have potential.  
I will always fail myself by thinking,  
I am important and influential.  
I've always been one to need convincing,

I'm smart enough for an education.  
I am who I am and that's a fact.  
I have to lower my expectations.  
I refuse to accept the concept that,

Nothing's impossible with persistence.  
Experience has led me to perceive,  
I'm unable to create difference.  
It would be foolish of me to believe,

I am enough and that is subjective.  
It's up to me to change my perspective.  
(Now read it backwards)

## Selling Popsicles

*Linglan Yu*

I grew up in a poor Chinese family. I remember my parents had to support thirteen people of two separated families that came from my dad's and mom's side. My mom was a farm worker. She worked hard every day with other villagers. The female workers' labor was much cheaper than the male workers' in my childhood. This was why at the end of year my family always owed money to the village governor even though my dad was an engineer in a gold mining company and didn't earn much money to support thirteen people. This is why my family was very poor. This was a biggest reason why my mom didn't like buying any snacks for us in my childhood memory. I often saw other children eating snacks in front of me. After seeing them eating their snacks, I would go home and hide. I knew my mom didn't have any money for snacks. Eating some snacks was my biggest wish in my childhood. I especially yearned for a popsicle in the hot summer day.

In the summer season, it was miserably hot in my village because it was very humid there. So, the popsicles were the children's popular delicious snack. I liked popsicles very much. My two older sisters and younger brother liked popsicles too, but no one got one in my childhood memories.

"Selling popsicles, popsicles for selling now, popsicles..." the loud voices came around my village. Most of the time I rushed out the door and welcomed the salesman coming when I heard those selling voices.

"The popsicle man is coming; the popsicle man is coming..." I cheered up with other village children. I liked seeing the popsicle salesman hanging their plastic wrapped paper box coming our village. I knew there were many popsicles I would love inside his cotton bag. Some other children immediately went back home and got money to buy popsicles.

"Give me one popsicle."

"Give me one popsicle, too"

"I want one, I want one..."

The village kids who had money were around the popsicle box and racing to buy popsicles. It was my happy time to see the salesman opening his box and take out the popsicles to handout to the them. I saw the fog come out that cotton bag like smoke coming out of the box. I could imagine those popsicles were cold as ice. I wished my mom could buy one for me and give me a big surprise one day. So, it was always a happy and exciting moment for me in the beginning. The repeated yelling "selling popsicles, popsicles for selling now,

popsicles..." was liking a beautiful song which I could sing too.

The dream was a dream! The wish was only a wish also! The reality was I only saw other kids eating popsicles front of me, my mom never gave me money to buy one. I didn't like other kids just showing off they have popsicles in their hands and putting the popsicles inside their mouth and using their tongues licking the cold popsicles. I ran back home and hid myself behind the door, but I still could see the popsicle salesman with kids and hear their loud noise. "Selling popsicles, popsicles for selling now, popsicles..." the salesman was yelling again after he finished his business. I knew he was leaving, because the volume of his yelling was more and more weak until it disappeared. For that unhappy moment, those selling voices were like a harsh noise and left far away for the end.

I dreamed of popsicles all the time. I dreamed I had a popsicle in my small hand on a hot afternoon. I would show my popsicle off to other children in my village the same as they showed off to me before. I dreamed of the freezing popsicle in my mouth. I would be very happy. I dreamed the popsicles would be melting on my tongue, and the cold feeling went down into my stomach; the hot day would cool down. I would be very happy with my little hand holding the popsicle stick the

same as other children in my village. The dream was only a dream; it was not reality. I missed a popsicle every day; I dreamed about a popsicle every day; I thought about a popsicle every day...

An idea came into my mind one day: my mom didn't like spending money for the popsicles for us. How about if I went to sell popsicles the same as the other people selling in my village? Maybe I could earn some money by selling popsicles, and I could eat my own extra popsicles after I earned my money back. I talked with my grandma first. My grandma was our daycare person while my mom was working in the field.

I asked, "Grandma, do you want to eat a popsicle?"

"My dear, we don't have money to buy popsicles," my grandma answered me.

"Grandma, I will let you have a popsicle very soon."

"You are dreaming, my little girl!"

"No, I am not dreaming. I am serious! Please listen to me, Grandma!" I was holding my grandma's hand and shaking her hand.

"Grandma, I want to sell popsicles the same as the people selling in our village, but I won't sell the popsicles in our village. I will sell them in the farm field.

"Look, it is so hot outside. The people working under the sun would feel very hot during their work. My

popsicles will sell out very fast. After I earn my money back, I will save six popsicles for us. You will have one, my mom will have one, my sisters and brother have one for each, and I will have one too."

My grandma held me in her arms tightly, and she cried, "You are too young to go out selling popsicles. I worry about your safety. You are just a little girl. I know you want to eat a popsicle, but grandma is poor. I don't have money to buy one for you."

"Don't worry about me, grandma! I am brave. I will sell my popsicles at the farm. There are always many people working. So, I will be safe!"

"Ok, my little girl. I will talk to your mom after she comes back home."

"Thank you so much, grandma. But I need a box for my popsicles. Can you help me make a box to prevent the popsicles from melting?"

"Yes, I will help you."

One moment later, my grandma took out a paper box. I don't remember where she found that box. Maybe that paper box was in the house already. I remember my grandma used the plastic to wrap the box inside and outside and sewed the plastic with paper box together. My grandma used the plastic wrapping my winter heavy cotton jacket and sewed it together too. My grandma's hand sewing was very incredible. I remember she made

some clothes for us. After she finished sewing my popsicle box, she said, "My little girl, always remember, leave the popsicles inside your jacket and wrap them very closely. Otherwise, your popsicles will melt very fast if you don't wrap them inside tightly."

"Ok, grandma. I will remember what you tell me. I will wrap my popsicles closely inside my winter jacket, so it won't melt very fast."

"Yes, my smart girl." My grandma was smiling to me.

"But, Grandma. I need some money to buy the popsicles," I asked my grandma.

"Don't worry about money. I will ask your mom give some to you after she comes back home in the evening. Ok?"

"Ok, grandma, you are my best grandma."

I lay inside my grandma's arms and I kissed her face strongly. I waited for that evening to come. I wished my mom would give me money to buy popsicles. And I was afraid my mom would say "no" to me. The time from afternoon to evening was very slow for me. I was very anxious, because I wanted money, and I was afraid my mom didn't want to give me money.

That evening finally came. My mom finally came back home. Immediately I hid myself on the bed and tried to sleep to avoid facing my mom's questions. Of course, I didn't sleep. I heard my

mom was asking my grandma,  
"What is this box for?"

"Oh, Ling wants to sell popsicles tomorrow. I made this box for her."

"She is too young to go out by herself to sell the popsicles. It is not safe for her."

"I worry about her safety to, but this little girl wants to eat a popsicle. We never buy one for her. She said she will sell popsicles in the farm field. There are always many people working on the farm, right? So, she will be safe. Look, how smart she is! She will be fine. And she said, after she earns the money back, she will save six popsicles for us. Everyone will have one."

"Oh, my God!" I heard my mom was crying. "Please, give her some money. Let her try!" my grandma said to my mom.

"Ok, I will give her 50 cents."

I was so happy when I heard my mom agree to give me 50 cents to buy popsicles, but I still tried to sleep on the bed. I heard my mom opening her locker and counting the pennies. My mom came over to me and left the money under my pillow, kissing my face. She thought I was sleeping. Suddenly, I opened my eyes and kissed my mom's face too. We both were laughing loudly. I thought I slept very well that night, because I would have my own popsicles tomorrow.

Next morning, I got up at five o'clock. My mom fried some rice for me for the breakfast. I ate a little bit.

My mom asked me to eat more. I said, "I don't want to eat very much. I want to save some room for my popsicle later."

"My foolish girl, a popsicle is not food. It is water after it melts."

I said goodbye to my mom and grandma. I left at 5:30 probably. The outside was still dark. My mom and grandma were standing outside the door and watching me leave. They were waving their hands to me and saying "Please, be safe. Ok? Be safe!"

"I will." I thought: my mom and grandma would not go back into the house until they couldn't see me.

It took me two hours walk to the popsicle factory. There was a long line there already. I don't remember how many people were ahead of me. I probably waited another two hours to get my popsicles. For 50 cents, I got 20 popsicles. So, it cost 2.5 cents for a popsicle. I wrapped my popsicles inside my heavy winter jacket closely and I tied my selling box very well. I hung that box on my shoulder and walked out of the factory door. I started my journey of selling popsicles.

The sun rose and I felt it was very hot when I was walking on the street, but I was very happy. I knew I would sell my popsicles very fast if it was a very hot day. I had to find a farm field first and I would like the way and direction was toward my village. This way which I could save some time to get home. Otherwise,

if it took me too long outside, my popsicles might melt before I got home.

Luckily, I found a farm very close. Yes, there were many people working. I was so happy to run to the farm. A moment later, I was like a balloon losing air inside. I was very dispirited because I was too shy to yell the words "Selling popsicles, selling popsicles now..." I sat on the ground and started to cry, because I didn't know whether I could sell my popsicles or not. Maybe ten minutes later, a lady farm worker (her age was similar as my mom) carried water to water the farm and was close to me. She saw I was crying. She stopped front of me and asked, "Why are you crying here, little girl?"

"I have popsicles. The popsicles are for sale. I don't know... I don't know how to sell. They will be melted if I don't sell them out. Woo, woo..." I choked out the words. Suddenly, I cried loudly and very sadly.

"Don't cry, little girl. I will tell my workers you are selling popsicles, but you have to yell out "selling popsicles now", then the people know you have popsicles to sell, right? Otherwise, nobody knows you have popsicles. Nobody buys them, right?" I nodded my head.

"I say: selling popsicles now..., then you copy me: selling popsicles now..." I nodded my head with sobbing. "Hey, workers! Selling

popsicles now..." She covered her mouth with her two hands, making a broadcasting and yelling loudly front of me.

"Selling popsicles now..." I said.

"Oh, very good you are! A little bit louder!" she was encouraging me.

"Selling popsicles now..." I was yelling out loudly with my very red face. She was clapping her hands for my bravery. I opened my box and took out one popsicle for her. I said: "Thank you so much for helping me! It is free for you!"

"Thank you for being so kind to me. I don't want it for free. I will buy one. How much?"

"5 cents." She gave me 5 cents on my hand and saying "Good luck, little girl!"

The farmers heard I was selling popsicles, and they came over and bought some. I was busy for that moment: I handed out my popsicles for them, and got their money and gave them change back. I sold 12 popsicles in that farm field. I would save 6 popsicles for my family. And I had 2 more popsicles for sale.

"Selling popsicles now..." I was leaving that farm and waving my hands to the farm workers. They were all waving their hands to me too.

On the way home, I sold those two popsicles. I finished my selling popsicles journey first time. I walked and ran very fast to get home. I shared the popsicles I left for my grandma and siblings. They were

very happy and I was very happy too. My grandma held me and said, "I am so proud of you, my little girl!" I shared the story of what happened at that farm with my grandma and siblings. My grandma said, "Thank God! You met good people today. You are lucky. And see, you can sell the popsicles. You can do it."

"Yes, I can do it." I was proud of myself.

Unfortunately, the one popsicle I saved for my mom was melted when she got home that evening, because we didn't have a refrigerator in our childhood. My mom drank that popsicle's water and she said "WOW, it is sweet. You are my sweet girl. I am so proud of you!"

Everybody was proud of me that day. I was a hero in my family. I

earned a little bit of money and everybody ate free popsicles that day. I still remember that white popsicle melting in my mouth and cooling water going down into my stomach. I was so happy I had one popsicle finally and that day was not very hot in my mind. I made my big dream come true in my childhood.

I never forget I was selling the popsicles in my childhood. I will never forget the lady who encouraged me to sell my fist popsicle on that farm. I am still thankful for her in my heart. This story and selling experiences I had, it affects my life very much. It encourages me: if I want something, I have to depend on myself. I always trust myself to start to do something.

"I can do it" is my motto!



The Splendor of Autumn *Siv Limary*

## Lake Shrine

*Matthew Sanchez*

Scent of heaven in the air.  
Green emerald lake, calm and tranquil  
sun beaming down'  
A spring bursts forth, a little torrent cascading into  
emerald green reflection so serene  
Sun feels warm, air so still  
Blue, green emerald lake captivating  
precious swans mill about, fish below looking in  
White rose so pure with a scent of heaven milling about.  
I float like a cloud and root like a tree  
The trail is my friend  
I've always belonged here.  
The presence of the divine, enveloping, soothing  
is palpable.  
I will stay long today.

## Autumn in Albuquerque

*Venkat R Nagaswami*

Autumn wind makes me tremble,  
the leaves of aspen keep falling,  
in multiple shades of orange and red,  
like confetti after encore performance.

Tumbleweeds rolling and spreading their seeds,  
gathering in size and blocking streets,  
damaging the undersides of automobiles  
and clinging to fences of parks and playgrounds.

I hear the sound of gushing propane,  
chiles roasting in black cages,  
pods cracking exposing flesh,  
the aroma pervading allover.

I watch the cranes migrate in patterns,  
garlands of Nature celebrating freedom.

## Gravity

*Skylar Brown*

Living sober nowadays I still feel like I'm in a dream.

Satan made me a fan when I watched him make our hearts bleed from  
reopening wounds torn from our stitches and our seams.

Got so used to sticking needles in my arms to see my God.

Turns out I sold my soul spreading demons, lost is the shepherd with the  
rod.

My third eye got opened, and it hates what I make it see.

I make believe inside a hologram, just another couple of slaves made out  
of you and out of me.

I see myself dodging homicide- It's looming over me and I'm ready to die.

Cause this life I got will be gone if I pass an unwelcome glance through my  
evil eye.

Everyone else is on the boulevard, and I'm looking at myself through their  
gaze.

I'm lost in psychosis thinking they see a living sage.

But what do I have that they do not? I'm emotionally unstable,  
hallucinating endlessly thinking I'm at the top.

My pop was telling me this life is not a game and got tears in his eyes  
seeing his enlightened son that still can't see how to make it stop.

He's got 40 years of wisdom for me so I better take his advice and crawl  
back to reality.

For way back when, little curious me, found black magic, and didn't realize  
I lost my gravity.

## A Good Cowboy

M.M. Olguin

I

I have problems.

Not the kind of problems you can see, though, all the problems I deal with are invisible to the naked eye.

I recently picked up my life and moved across the country. I was born out west in a small town where being a cowboy or a contractor are the only real professions and where wives are still domesticated. When I was 12 my father hit my mother, so she packed up our stuff and never looked back.

We ended up as far east as east could get, Maine. I never questioned my mother on this. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but be curious about my father and our life before.

Decades ticked by, loves came and passed, and I still never set down roots anywhere. I continuously closed myself off from people and the world, finding myself heavy into drugs for a few years. Floating from one woman, to one place, or one thing, and on to the next, never really giving myself to anything, except the drugs when I use. Until this past June, I turned 32, and that's when he wrote me:

*Johnny,*

*I should have reached out to you a long time ago. I don't really know what kept me from doing it. I guess after time passed, I didn't even know how to. You and your mother seemed so distant and I knew I had no right to ask her to come back. I*

*wrote your mother hundreds of times begging her to let me see you, or to at least give you things I'd gotten for you, but she never did. She always said she was protecting you and maybe she was right. I thought of you every day Johnny. I don't know if you believe me or hell, if you care, but I did. I thought of the two of you always. The ranch life wasn't for your mother and I should have known and respected that. I should have left it all for her... but I cannot undo what has already been done.*

*You're probably wondering why I bothered to write you all these years later, it's not to rekindle something or start anew. You are reading this because I am dead. Now you're probably thinking "this fucking asshole, reaching from beyond the grave to fuck with me after years of not caring!" Well yes, I am an asshole, your mother can attest to that. My point is, this life was not for your mother, but she never gave YOU a chance to decide if it was for you or not. So here it is; you don't have to deal with me now, but I've left everything to you. You can sell it all if you want but all I ask is one thing, come down to Silver and see it for yourself.*

*I am sorry I couldn't be the man you and your mother needed. I'll always love you.*

*Dad*

II

As I walk up to my dead fathers' home, a heavy feeling deep in my stomach pulls me back for a

moment. I push it aside, looking around; there aren't neighbors for miles. Four dogs come bounding up to me tongues out and tails wagging. Figures, my father hadn't mentioned dogs in his letter, and none of them wear collars. One of the dogs looks like he's holding onto life by a thread, another cowers behind the rest; a grey husky comes up to me first with a smaller German Shepherd at its side. All of the dogs are completely caked in dirt looking as if they've never been given a bath. Sighing, I pet all of them and turn around.

His little blue house sits on a hill looking out over an apple orchard. Walking around the land I realize how much shit is really out here. There are turkeys, cows, chickens, horses, donkeys, and goats. There are two tractors, eight trailers, three motorcycles, four trucks that work and four that don't, a '91 corvette, three unlivable mobile homes, a twenty-foot high shed full of tools, HALF a semi-truck, a walk-in freezer, an RV, a speedboat, a four-wheeler, an old post office building, a school bus, and a pile of steel in the back. And this isn't even everything! Maybe that's why he'd left it to me, because no one else would bother to deal with all this. All of this alone would take me months to sell.

Turning back around I made my way up the hill. The dogs circled around me, smiling and kicking up

dust until I reached the porch. I set all of my bags down and took a seat on the steps, pulling out my second to last smoke (though I told myself I'd quit weeks ago, I can't quit all my addictions at once). I couldn't help but instantly notice the complete stillness across the valley, swallowing me up in silence; broken only by a soft crackle when I drag my cigarette. I close my eyes, thinking about the silence, the air is cool, but the sun is bright making the skin of my face prickle with warmth. Opening them softly, I notice the yard is scattered with hundreds of bones. All different sizes, each looking like they'd been gnawed by one dog or another. There were Budweiser cans and cigarette butts scattered all over the porch. Oddly enough, though this world was so foreign to me, I felt right at home here amongst the useless shit in the yard; a home for where what once was comes to die. A graveyard of things that once had a purpose but now sit like trophies or memories scattered around as a constant reminder.

Finally, I muster the mental energy to stand up and let myself in, I unlock the door and swing it wide open. The smell of cinnamon candles and booze filled my nostrils like hot air fills a balloon. It felt more like a cabin than a house. There was a large woodburning stove in the living room, multiple pairs of work boots scattered about,

a huge walk in safe in the back office, dirty rags hanging from multiple door knobs. Wrenches, screw drivers and cowboy hats lay on just about every surface.

"Fucking fool." I thought, if he had known he was going to die the least he could have done was tidy up a bit! What nerve he had.

When I had first received his letter nine weeks ago, I was livid. Angry at my mother for not telling me about all the times he had tried to reach out to me, angry at my father for not trying harder, and angry at myself. Now, all alone in the house I could have grown up in, and I look in the fridge. I hadn't even thought of getting something. The closest store or food joint is at least 40 minutes away and it's already 20 past nine. The fridge is barer than mine back home, which is tough to beat; containing only eggs, four rotten pork chops, and a broken into 30 pack of beer. After the trip out here, I have no desire to get back in my car, so I guess I'll eat tomorrow.

### III

The next morning after hours of lying in bed freezing my ass off, I gave in and decided to get up. I look at the clock, 6:07am. This is the earliest I've been up since grade school but shivering in bed was not how I wanted to spend the morning. I've never used a wood burning stove, but I guess it's time to learn. I put on two pairs of pants,

three shirts, a jacket, a hat, furry boots, and gloves before braving the cold.

As I step outside, the cool October air hits my nose like a bird smacks a window. The sun isn't quite up yet but the sky is a light lavender making it just bright enough to see a few miles past the hills to the west. Again, silence blankets everything around me, leaving me with the sound of the dogs and me panting. I've never been in such a quiet place or engulfed in such a tangible calmness. I pull myself out of this new haze of reality, grab some wood and head back inside. Thirty-seven matches and an entire newspaper later I finally got a fire started, and a roaring fire at that.

After a breakfast consisting of only coffee, I pulled on some of my father's work boots, layered up again and headed outside. I don't know the first thing about farming. All I know, is that if I plan to sell all of these animals, I've got to keep them alive long enough to do so. I'll start with something easy, I'll feed the dogs. When I was trying to get sober about a year ago I constantly told myself "just one thing at a time", and one simple thing after another and you begin to show yourself you CAN do it, so that's how I'll tackle this farm too. Just as I finished filling nervous dog #4's bowl a large pick-up comes slowly rumbling up the drive, stopping a foot from my porch. A

small burly man with a peppered mustache and beard hanging almost down to his belly button hops out.

"Howdy," the man said, slightly tipping his wide brim hat, "Yeh must be Hardin's boy, heard yer ol' man kicked the bucket last week n' I been comin up and feedin the beasts, but since you're here I'll get on goin then."

"Hi!" I replied, reaching out my hand, he took it and shook far firmer than I did. "Uh... my name's Johnny. I'm just here to get things figured out and sell some of his shit he's got hanging around. Any chance you've got a moment to show me a thing or two? I'm a bit new to this."

The man chuckled softly, "They call me Less; more or less. But yeh, sure boy. Whatcha need?"

Less was a cowboy, the REAL definition of cowboy. He had 120-acre pear and apple orchard, raised over 50 cattle, knew how to fix anything with a motor and talks about how much he loves his wife more than any man I'd ever met. He used words I'd never heard of like "cheater bar" and he had certain base line expectations of what it meant to be a good man that I had no concept of. But, as I showed him around the yard and asked one stupid question after the next, he never got frustrated. He explained things twice, sometimes three for me.

It was mesmerizing to watch him work. He made it all look so easy, like a well-choreographed dance. He helped me fix the porch rail, build a dog house, repair the barn roof, and a couple other little things with ease. He never once smashed his fingers or cut himself; I smashed my fingers during every god damn thing we worked on. By the end of it I was bleeding from four knuckles, had two black and blue fingers, and a very damaged ego.

After Less had helped me with everything the sun was already beginning to set, causing the sky to turn blood red. I invited him in for a beer, but he declined, said he had to get back to his "ol' lady".

As I attempted to drag myself up the porch steps, I couldn't help but notice the sense of tranquility all around me, the pure peace.

#### IV

Great men are stupid. – Charles Baudelaire

This is the one thing I've learned about my father in the three months I've been here now. He must have been great, yet he was without a doubt stupid. His land was filled with hundreds of started but unfinished projects that could have succeeded if enough time and energy had been put into them. Yet there they sat, all scattered about, completely useless and left for me to figure out what the fuck to do with. He had the skills to complete every one of his projects, so in that

way he was great, but they never got done.

Today, I have two goals: put up a corral for the horses and store enough hay for the rest of winter. Less said that January through March are very snowy months down here so it's important to be prepared. With the new skills I acquired yesterday I feel much more confident. Plus, I've learned how much it helps to wear gloves. After watching Less work on one thing after another so weightlessly for months I had suddenly become obsessed with mastering this lifestyle. Don't get me wrong, it was damn frustrating, but these little projects have really helped keep my mind off of things.

I told myself that after three months I would have sold all the animals and begin moving on with my life. Now, looking around what was slowly beginning to feel like my 88 acres of land I let the quiet drown me. I let it fill my heart like hot water in a bath, burning me with emotion. It felt so good. I can't remember the last time I felt connected to anything, let alone to my father and a life I know nothing about.

I wandered around the farm for a little while, taking it all in with two of the dogs following at my heel. After enough procrastination and fear I was going to fuck up, I decided to begin. I collected eggs from the chickens, milk from the

cows, fed all the animals, picked the fresh fruit from the garden out back and finally approached the clearing that I planned to build the corral on. It was covered in orange and yellow leaves resembling what I imagine the surface of the sun looks like from up close.

I decided to build the corral with extra railroad ties and shit in the yard. It took me five hours to get something even remotely close to a reasonable corral, but I only smashed my fingers once. Though it was a bit uneven, it would do the trick. Nothing in my life has ever been perfect, yet for some reason that didn't matter as much to me out here. Just as I was about to dive deep into my thoughts again, I heard a rumble from the east, it was Less pulling up in his faded green truck with a black trailer each piled with enough hay to be as tall as a two-story home.

"Howdy Johnny." Said Less in a low rumble, "Where you thinkin' of puttin' this here? Yer ol' man's got a barn out back. Should prolly put it there, don' wan' snow gettin' in."

"Sure thing, what can I do?" I replied.

"Jus' help me guide here ol' Bessie on in boy," he slapped the side of the beat up pick-up with his hand twice.

Smiling I helped him back right up to the barn.

Less and I unloaded the hay in about an hour, even though id

improved drastically over the weeks, he still moved almost twice as fast as me. He asked me if I wanted to go see a band with him and the family tomorrow at The Redwood. I accepted and he offered to pick me up a quarter to 7. I thanked him for all of his help, and we parted ways for the evening.

Walking back to the house I thought about the people I had come across during my travels, the company I kept, and the women I held.

Less is a great man, and he's never once seemed stupid. In all of the relationships I'd had before this, no one has gone out of their way as much as Less has since the moment I met him. After watching his unconditional love for me (a man he'd never met) and how much joy he gets from it, it makes me want to be more like that. Yet, maybe that's what makes him stupid, trying too hard.

The east coast made me cold and unwilling, things out here in the country are not like that. You have to know your neighbor. The most common form of currency is trade. You have to know how to communicate what you have as well as what you're not willing to give.

V

After what felt like one of the most wholesome days of my life yesterday a piece of me expected today to be just as easy. I was growing used to this life out here.

Many nights I have laid awake thinking about what it would be like if I stayed here a little longer. One thing I have learned through trial and error, is as soon as you have an expectation of something it gives it the power to go wrong. I didn't expect life to be this serene down here or for it to be so enjoyable to be sober here.

Before dawn, when night is at its coldest and the world is calmest, I hear a yelp that makes my stomach turn. I sit up, instantly annoyed thinking maybe it's just one of the dogs dreaming. But suddenly, I heard it again, two times louder and this time with a quick hard snap. I jolt up out of bed, throw on some boots and grab the pistol. Less showed me how to shoot two days ago. Crossing the house in seconds, I swing the door open and instantly wish I could close it again.

I had never seen so many pieces of what I assumed was gut. At first, I didn't know what I was looking at but as I took a step down the porch, I noticed a blue eyeball in the dirt below. Dog #4 was strewn across the yard in at least 25 different bloody pieces. Tufts of fur and skin tissue covered the ground like bits of furry jelly. It smelt like hot metal, thick enough that I could taste it in the back of my throat. I was so consumed with the mess in the yard I hadn't realized that two of the other dogs had also been injured. The grey husky looked like he'd

been bit right above his left back leg, ripping his soft belly area open. Blood was slowly pouring out of him, judging from the pool in the dirt it looked like he'd already lost almost a quart of blood. The German Shepard had a huge gash across from the tip of her nose to her eyebrow, but it was nothing compared to the huskies wound. She stuck close by his side, whimpering.

I have no fucking clue what to do. I'll call Less.

Less was there within in minutes, with a pistol of his own.

"What happen' boy," he said. "Tell me everything."

"I-I don't know. I came out here, I'd heard a snap and a howl. I saw what looked like a pack of coyotes run into the hills, but I don't know what to do. This one-" I gestured toward the husky, "I don't know... What do we do?" My voice cracking slightly.

Now was not the time to get emotional, I had to keep it together. "Son, ain't no way we gon' get somebody out here in time, he's sufferin'." He nodded his head in the direction of the husky. "I'll do it if you can't. Done it before." "No. Thank you Less, but I've got it." I replied.

I couldn't breathe. I knew Less would do it for me, but it wasn't his responsibility, this wasn't his fathers' shit left to deal with, it was

mine. So, I needed to do it. I have to learn.

"Just tell me what to do and I'll do it." I said.

"Aight' boy. Load your pistol and aim good, the quicker you get er' don't the better."

My hands are shaking. Loading the gun, I slowly walk toward the husky. I've never killed anything larger than a quarter, let alone my fathers' dog.

## VI

We buried both dogs out back.

Less finally went home around a half past noon, said he'd be back to pick me up that evening for the concert. He said I probably shouldn't be alone with my thoughts.

He was right. I didn't want to think about it, it took me four fucking bullets to put the dog down and the German Shepherd howled the whole time. My clothes were stained red.

After a 20-minute shower and me practically trying to scrub my skin off, I got dressed in the only nice pair of clothes I had brought with me. Less pulled up the house at 6:45pm exactly. I climbed into the back of his truck with his daughter who I had met only once before. His wife Jade had peppered hair just like Less. She wore it in braids. We listened to country bands I'd never heard of the whole way to the pub. Mary, his daughter, sang along to

each of them and had a voice as smooth as honey.

Drinking at the Redwood feels like coming home after a long journey, it feels like falling into the arms of someone you've come to know better than yourself. Either that or they just have damn good whiskey. On my fourth drink I'd decided to bum a smoke from someone, even though I hadn't had a cigarette since the day after I got here. But I figured what the hell. Less said he'd join me; said he never smokes but the occasional drunk drag always makes him happy. We made our way through to the bar, past the stage and the pool tables, out back into what reminded me of a small sunroom where we could smoke. I noticed the fiddle player standing off to the left. I asked him for a smoke, and he obliged. He didn't stay to chat, leaving Less and I alone in the odd smoking sunroom.

I suddenly realized this was the first moment I had taken to sit in silence since everything this morning. I took a long drag of the cigarette and in a moment everything that I had been holding back boiled up like soup finally reaching a boil.

Looking at me like he already knew Less said, "You can feel Johnny."

I broke down and did just what he said to do. I felt it all. And it felt

like one of those cartoon anvils falling on my chest over and over again until I look just like the scattered guts in the yard this morning.

"I've ears boy, if ya feel like yappin about it." Said Less.

So, I yapped. And he listened. Until finally I grew quiet and Less said something I'd been wanting to hear since the day I'd arrived, I just didn't know it.

"Johnny, do you know why your daddy wrote you that letter all these years later and asked you to come? He and I had never really been all that close, but I always knew why he continued to write you. Do you know?"

"No." I replied.

"Because your daddy knew what it felt like to have love taken away from him and even worse in his case what it feels like to take it away from yourself. When he lost you and your mother there was not a day that went by that he didn't beat himself up for it. All he ever wanted was to love you. Don't kick yourself for the dogs, Johnny; love and life are complicated things. No one blames you."

"Thanks." I said. I can't really muster out any other words, the whisky was cloudy in my mind, but Less's words meant everything. And that was truly what I'd come all this way to hear, I just hadn't known it.



**Beyond the Post** *Abraham Assed*

## **Cain**

*Rayanne Whatley*

the silence of Cain  
standing alone in the field flattened by wind  
reeds bowing while GOD  
asked where Abel had gone.  
as the sheep grazed just over the hilltop and the breeze  
carried over something coppery  
Cain  
thought longingly  
for his mother.

## Infamous Iscariot

*Melanie Woods*

One of a trusted twelve  
hand-selected specifically by the  
Chosen One.

Each of us serving a particular  
purpose.

We followed Him endlessly  
from town to town,  
helping those we came across  
and spreading our message.  
Witnesses to all His wonder, He  
kept us all so close.  
No matter where He went, we  
were found nearby.

Until one day...  
a tiny seed began to stem  
something  
so immensely dark and  
treacherous.  
Day by day, I felt in me a  
distance begin to pullulate.  
No longer did I find myself  
craving to be near,  
instead; I found an ever-growing  
fear.

Then one day He spoke to us  
of something that was soon to  
come.  
He knelt before us and washed  
our feet,  
as He told us of His love.

One fateful night, over an  
evening meal  
He began to warn us of the  
things to come.  
He gave to us a ritual

through which we'd  
always remember Him.  
He claimed that soon He'd have  
to leave  
without His trusted twelve,  
alone, to fulfill His final goal.

Two of us amongst our ranks  
were not what we would seem,  
He called us out, only one by  
name  
and told us of our shame.  
Peter would deny three times,  
and one of us even worse.  
Amongst our numbers, there  
was one  
who would commit the ultimate  
betrayal.  
And within my heart I somehow  
knew  
that I was the one of which he  
spoke.

So I set upon my plan to fulfill  
my final duty.  
No one else could complete this  
part,  
and I did not know why -  
but in the end the prophecy  
would finally be fulfilled.  
Without understanding what  
was to come,  
I walked up to the enemy  
and offered them the Chosen  
One.

I knew the consequences

of what I had done, but as it  
passed,  
cared only for my reward.  
As time went on, the guilt  
inside  
grew far too much to bear.  
The Chosen One is lead to  
death,  
the cause of my despair.  
For what had I done this  
treacherous thing?  
Simply for some gold...  
I abandoned my reward  
and walked out into the fields,

slowly giving in.  
Smited by God as I took my last  
steps,  
drowning in regret.

But what I could not know  
before the grave  
is now known to all:  
without my traitorous acts,  
His love could not be known.  
The Resurrection has come to  
pass;  
He has been called Home.



**Fear of the Unknown** *Noell Aldaba, Acrylic and Pastel*

## Mouth

*Ema Beckley*

Suddenly, they were disgusted by her mouth.

They thought about the teeth clanging together, saliva seeping between them.

They thought of the tongue and the foul, unladylike things she used it for.

They heard the moisture smack and moil as she spoke.

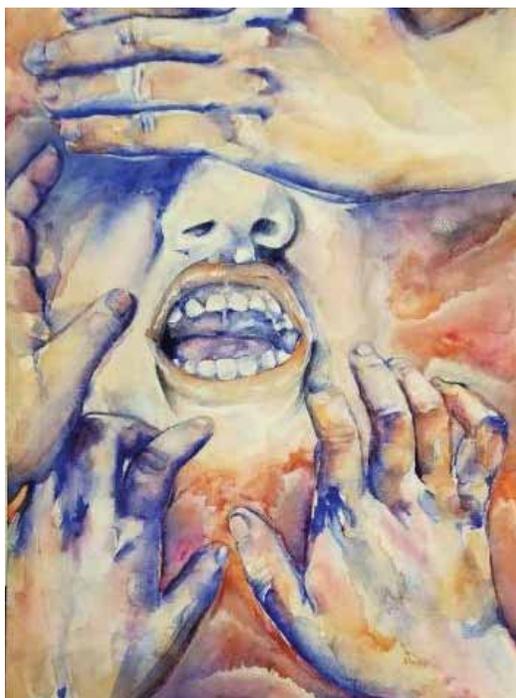
They thought of the breath-- a vile mixture of sickness and failure and weakness originating from the dryness of the gums and the pathetic thoughts of the head.

They could smell it from here.

It made them notice these things in themselves.

They decided they wanted her to stop speaking.

They decided they wanted her mouth to be gone.



**Unheard and Unseen** *Zachary Smith*

## Koi

*Junko Featherston*

I

Me and my sister always dreamt of koi fish, you know, those big ol' fat ones that were native to Japan? particularly Hokkaido region. Did you know in 2007 one of the biggest koi fish was 90 lbs and lived in Texas? Must be some of those nasty American hormones they pump into their cattle or something. But in Japan a koi fish can live to the age of 100! A man named Dr. Komei Koshihara bred a lovely koi fish named "Hanako" and this koi lived to the age of 226, can you even believe that?! It also had this beautiful and vivid red and white color all over his body. In American Koi breeding they only classify them as red, yellow, striped, cream, etc... But in Japan there is specific meaning and definitions for the colors of Koi. For instance "Hanako" the Koi was what you would call "Kohaku Iro" or red and white color which symbolizes career success.

You can tell if a koi fish is unhealthy right off the bat! First off, they reek of sardines, their flesh is covered in mucus, their eyes get sunken in and cloudy, the worst part is that their colors become gray! Koi fish are so disease prone, that is why I

think that American's pump these beautiful fish full of fillers and unnecessary synthetic growth-hormones. I have lived in Japan for just over three years now, and I have learned a tremendous amount about koi fish breeding upon my arrival! I know that when I grow up that me and my sister will be Koi fish breeders in Japan! We want to show those people who only care about what the size of their koi is, that color is most crucial! Certainly not how much they weigh.

II

My name is Naomi, I'm a second year in Junior high and I live with my okaasan, otoosan, and my imouto-san, Hima! Hima is four years younger than me, and my parents make it like my "job" or something to watch over her. I guess I do have a strong bond with Hima, she just bugs so much because she is always needing to take her supplements or whatever.

"Naomi! It's Five AM, you know what that means!" my okaasan shouts, she typically has this stern voice to her that I admire. If mama were a koi fish she would be a Kuchibeni koi! They're these super pretty Koi that look like they have red lipstick on.

“Okaasan... chotto matte kudasai...” I say in a froggy voice. My Japanese is not good yet, but mama and my peers can see that I am trying... hopefully.

“Get your butt down here now. You have school in 30 minutes. Tell Hima-chan to wake up too.”

I yawn, sit up, and rub my eyes so much to the point that when I stop rubbing them they start burning and it feels like the universe is spinning around me.

“Hima! Okite-kudasai. Mom seems a bit irritable this morning, so get your butt up now!”.

The world around me has stopped spinning and as it comes to a halt I realize that I am just a soul in a useless body, in a dark room, next to a small girl that needs a shower. We sit at the dining table with our legs tucked underneath us, this style of sitting is called “Seiza”, I learned that from my dad when he scolded me for “sitting like an American”.

“Hima, you need to take your medication. Do you need me to prepare that for you?” mom smiled and said with a sincere tone.

“Nah, I think I got it.” Hima excused herself from the dining table and made her way to the medicine cabinet and got her prescriptions. A mixture of blue

pills, green pills, white and red pills made their way to the brown table with oriental patterns on it. I saw Hima swallow every single one with her orange juice.

It’s baffling seeing her try to scarf down over 12 pills in the morning. She reminds me of a seagull trying to swallow a crab, but the crab keeps nipping at the seagull’s neck. I can see the discomfort of my mother and father seeing their youngest having to take such a plentiful amount of medication.

### III

It is nightfall now; the twilight has a somber tone as the green and yellow fireflies have risen above the grassy plains of Kushiro Shitsugen National park once again. Hima and I run around trying to catch bugs in a glass mason jar, it has a tin foil lid with holes cut into the top. We manage to catch four and we name them all. Tetsu, Bill, Peony, and Hima.

“Why did you name the firefly after yourself? I think it suits you. Since you’re sort of like a bug anyhow.” I laugh with a subtle smirk.

“If I do not get to be a koi fish in my next life, then I would love to be a firefly.” Hima utters with a dark tone in her small voice.

I lay down in the grass and Hima lays right next to me.

"W-why are you thinking about the afterlife already?" I hesitate.

"I feel my bones ache more and more everyday sissy. What do I do... What if mom has to take my bones away because I cannot walk anymore..." Hima takes in a deep breathe and after a few seconds she exhales.

"Naomi... My body has been hurting more and more everyday. I do not understand what is happening to me. Why does okaasan and otosan keep taking me to the hospital? Why won't they tell me what is wrong with me? I notice that you do not have to take the big red pill or the green pills everyday like I do. I just notice everyone staring at me at the dinner table when I try to take these pills that they force me to take-- I-I wish they had like liquid medicine I can swallow instead of those god-forsaken pills." My little sister rambles, her body is turning pale. I definitely have noticed her limping more than usual.

"I do not understand your situation either Hima... I'm sorry I can not help you more with this..." In my brain I'm trying so hard to come up with the words to say to make Hima feel like she is going to be okay. I feel helpless. Why am I even

so anxious talking to my little sister? This is about her not me. What is wrong with my brain. I truly wish that I could help her.

#### IV

11 PM on a Saturday night. Hima and I make our way home to the small tenements of Hokkaido. Mama and Papa are asleep on the floor next to the air conditioner.

"What kind of koi fish do you think you are?" Hima asks in a cheerful tone. As if our conversation about her illness did not happen.

"An Ochiba Koi! Their beauty is unmatched their light blue scales with their stripes of yellow signifies that it is fall. I think if I were to identify with any season it would be Autumn."

"Oh..Honto-ni? I always thought of you as a chō- chō koi! Since they resemble butterflies, with their wispy tails, and are a symbol of beauty." Hima says with a smile, looking up at her older sister with sheer admiration.

"Seriously?!" I say in utter shock, my face is flushed. "I always thought of you as a butterfly. Always so graceful and mature for your age! I- I actually think it suits you more."

Hima smiles and reminisces about that one time, about a year and a half ago, when they

first started visiting koi ponds and koi competitions and Naomi would always call her a “yamabuki koi” which is an all gold koi that resembles family riches and prosperity. Hima smiles and holds my hand.

I notice that the late hours of the night turn into the wee hours of the morning. We fall asleep in our bedroom, still holding hands. The comforting embrace of my sisters hand made me feel less alone in the world. For the first time in a while, I actually fell asleep comfortably.

#### V

Dawn has come again; oh the dreadful agony of prying your crust-shut eyes open just for it to still be dark as night outside. I sigh and groan, and do my typical 4:30 AM complaining. Usually by this time Hima throws a pillow in my face and tells me “Uresai!”. But the earth stood silent, no one was awake. In fact, I shouldn't have been awake at 4:30, considering I wake up at 5 AM usually. Dissociating more than I ever have, I had a feeling in my stomach. A feeling that instantly made me want to drink a bottle of cyanide like those bombers in WWII. I look over at Hima, her hand was still in the grasping formation that it was last night. She looks pale. I gaze at her

adolescent body. Her eyes are open and bloodshot; white foam has leaked from her mouth onto her Powerpuff Girl pillow case.

I stare blankly at my little sister's corpse on her pink bed. My body fills with uncertainty, as if this is a dream, as if-- I'm dissociating again?

I lay back down into my bed, the lingering smell of Hima is on my pillows. I stare at her from my side of my bed and do not blink. The only thing I can think of is “When is she coming back?”, as if she just left her body momentarily and her charismatic, bubbly-self will possess her corpse once again and ask me to go look at the koi fish with her again.

With me still hoping that she will come back, I hold her hand once again, but instead this time it is cold, as cold as a frozen bag of peas. I lie awake and cry, my face is emotionless, but the tears are rolling off anyway; they warm my face.

#### VI

It is now 5:00 AM, I have not moved from my spot. I am waiting for her return. My mother and father have woken up finally and yell out my name to wake up Hima and come out from our bedroom. My body is still in shock. I say nothing to my parents. As I lay in my bed

next to my sister, who will return shortly.

5:45 AM, my mother has become irritated by the fact that neither of us has replied to her constant nagging. She knocks fiercely on the door and barges in. I know the first thing that she sees is her child, her baby, her blood, pale and dead on her child size bed, with her eldest holding her hand and staring blankly ahead.

Okaasan gasps in horror and screams. She grabs Hima from her bed, and carries her to the living room, where my otosan also scream in terror; tears drop down immediately. Mama has so much expression on her face, I haven't seen her show this much emotion since that one time I fell into a river and almost got swept away by the currents... As my hand was forcibly released, I finally came to the realization that she is no longer with me. Why must "God" take the life of a child? The life of the literal symbols of innocence, purity, and prosperity.

My hand has become warm from holding her hand for too long. I wonder if her hand is also warm now. I wonder if her limp, lifeless body could have perhaps felt my last embrace.

#### VII

I wonder if that morning should have gone differently. If

I could have stopped her death or something. I miss holding her hand.

The casket lowered into the dirt. Family from the United States has come to watch the funeral. I have not spoken to anyone since that day. My heart feels as if those fireflies flew off with my still-beating heart that night. As if my soul died alongside Hima's.

Her death-box is now in the ground, the dirt on top. The ceremony is over. I look over at the crowd and everyone is wide-eyed and wanting to puke at the fact that a child has died.

#### VIII

Across the cemetery there is a huge and vast garden. It felt as though it was calling to me. The vast foliage and petunias lured me in. The beauty kept my mind at bay. I could only keep wishing I had my sister with me to come explore this garden with me. As I step closer to the garden, I notice a huge pond filled with Koi fish.

I look at the pond and start my examination. I look for the healthy fish, like I'm always keen to do. It seems that they are all variations of Red and White, Kohaku-iro Koi.

In this huge pond, I would imagine there are over 300 kois but I never was good at estimating. I sit by the pond,

alone for the first time in forever. I cry, with expression this time, my face crinkles up and I let my sobs be heard by the hundreds of koi fish.

As my wails shake the pond all the koi scatter to the farthest part of the pond, where I am not.

Except one. One koi fish that stays and has a unique pattern, unlike any I have ever seen before. I scoot towards the pond and I look at the beautiful koi, it swims around charmingly

and makes me smile for the first time in the past week.

Gold scales reflect off the sunlight and shine brightly amongst the other koi, it has wispy tails and long whiskers. Like it is a mix between two different koi. I look directly at this carp, and it shoots water from its mouth up at me. I laugh and admire the beauty of such a unique creature.

I sure wish Hima was here to see this.



**The Phoenix** *Eileen Renee Moya*



**Stormy Night** *Samantha Hoffman*, Acrylic Paint and Pastel

## A Dream Pantoum

*Jené Montañó*

in my daytime dreams  
we have a cottage in the clouds  
tinged orange and cream  
and our love refracts proud.

we have a cottage in the clouds  
my heart doesn't know ache  
our love refracts proud.  
we have mushy bananas to bake

my heart doesn't know ache  
the rent is always paid  
we have mushy bananas to bake.  
our yard is never in shade.

the rent is always paid  
serotonin on demand  
our yard is never in shade  
our skin glows tanned.

serotonin on demand  
my thoughts interrupted.  
our skin glows tanned.  
a return to a world corrupted.



**Believe me, if I had the words to save you I'd use them instead** *Haruhian Sakurai*, Paint Tool Sai and Wacom Tablet

## Ghosts

*David Rojas*

The multicolored leaves scattered at our feet.  
The damp grass beneath our backs.  
The worn and torn books you loved to read.  
The crisp mornings when coffee lingered on your breath.  
The song of a hybrid engine waking in the night.  
The long hours spent in so many empty parking lots.  
The brushes and the paint for the projects we once made.  
The art gallery I loved to hate.  
The white hotel room in the tiny forested town not so far away.  
The relentless hunt for that obscure pizza place.  
The fair ocean scented hair.  
The stormy eyes that goldened in the light.  
The rose petal lips that pouted when I stared.  
You left yet they all stayed.



Thetans & The Swirling Technicolor Spectacle of  
Spiritual Technology *Billy Mahoney*

Sushi

*Emily Stäke*

Did you really think  
That you could hide fish in rice?  
Oh, the green paste burns!

## My First Cell Phone

*Noelle Rightley*

As soon as season starts the kids start rising out of the corn. As you drive down the highways of Illinois with corn fields reaching up to the sky on either side of you, you see small bobbing heads of children making their way through the rows of budding corn. These children work their tushies off for everything. From my own experience, you have to have broke parents and a strong will to succeed to make it all the way through the season. Not only did we give up our summer as a children but we also had to push ourselves to our limits every single day and make the decision to go back in to the corn every time we finally make it to the end of a row and saw the blessed bus holding the water and the possibility of going home away from the scorching sunlight. The strength of these little warriors is truly remarkable. Not only do they push their limits physically but emotionally as well. It was a truly horrific decision to have to make as a child to go back into the corn again after the deadly incidences.

Every day, rain or shine, children get up and are ready for the bus by 6AM. Lucky for my siblings and myself, our boss, Rod, lived right up the road from us so for the first couple years of our employment he would pick us up right outside the front door. We had a checklist of things that we needed to remember every morning when we were getting ready for work. Thankfully my siblings and I would all work together to make sure we had all we needed. Workers have to remember safety first and wear big strong boots that's bulk will hold up through the season. The boots are very large but lots of mud gets caked in the grooves of the soles during the long trudge so when you wear tennis shoes you can easily lose a shoe in the depths of the grime. I remember being the victim of the mud pulling off my shoe and inevitably sinking my cold food into the squishy floor below. Tucked into the boots, and the socks underneath, are durable jeans that are buckled up and holding down a long sleeve breathable button-up. You'd think with the heat, you

might want to wear shorter clothing, but with the corn stalk leaves reaching out their razor-sharp edges at their disturbers, we had to be covered head to foot. My brother would walk through the field without sleeves and he would come out scratching the little red bumps and cuts forming rashes on his skin. "It's worth it when it's hot, to not have sleeves in the way," he would say when we looked at him as though he'd lost his senses. Accessories are essential as well. Children wear a bright orange hat and green bug-net, along with rubber gloves. Remembering to dress safely and prepare enough snacks to survive a long day of work, my siblings and I would wait in the driveway for the large school bus to make its way awkwardly down the small road towards us. Lots of times we would have just smashed our feet in the heavy mud caked boots when the bus made it to us, and we would have to tie them up once we were in our seats.

"Hello, Rightley's!" Rod's shun-shine [sunshine?] attitude never ceases to cheer up a morning. He showed up that day just as any other day to greet the Rightley children as they

made their way onto the bus. His large coffee mug in one long hand and control of the giant school bus in the other. Rod was a tall skinny man who always wore long blue rubber rain boots. They matched his coat of choice that was draped behind him on his chair. As Rod continued through the bus stops, he smiled warmly at every worker stumbling sleepily up the steps next to him. "How's it going today Rod?" I loved asking Rod this question every morning. "Hi... HO! Hi-ho! It's off to work we go!" Rod's answer was joyful and happy as always. As we made our way towards our seats, passing those our friends and coworkers would soon occupy, Rod waited to watch our progress in his mirror. He only ever used one hand when he drove as the other was holding onto his coffee mug, but he seemed to be a safe enough bus driver. He loved every single one of us and we all knew it and loved him too. Mr. Navara, his partner, on the other hand was definitely the bad cop. He sat behind Rod on the bus watching a little more grumpily under his large safari hat. He was a kind man, but not so open in fondness as Rod. Mr.

Navara was a small Italian man who was quite a bit stricter. Together they were a great team to lead a large band of children.

Once we had all of the children rounded up and had safely made it to the field for the day, we started breaking ourselves into groups. Normally you just have one teammate that you go in with but teams that were comprised of younger children had an older one with more tenure experience watching to make sure that tassels weren't missed. As we went through the corn, we pulled off the top piece of the female corn so that the pollen from the row of male corn, that separates every four rows of female corn, can pollinate the female and create seed corn. At six in the morning the weather is normally pretty cold. During this time of year there are many storms. Rain is a good thing for the corn, but normally we were very cold in the morning covered in the dew from the storms of the night before. The weather through the night is unpredictable. Some days the rain never stopped from the night before and the winds would push the rows up against each other in a confusing mess.

During these storms there isn't much that can be seen other than about a foot in front of the workers and they stumble through the long fields.

Large irrigators move through the field every day to water the fresh sprouting corn which causes giant ruts to be formed in the ground. On a day when the corn is cold and the dew from the leaves is making your clothes cold and heavy, these irrigators can be a tiny spot of heaven. Once the sun starts beating down on the metal it makes it hot. I remember climbing on top of them to warm up with my sister so many times. We would just sit there and take a tiny break from the work, relaxing on the warm surface. They do pose definite safety hazards though. During the storm, the ruts are a silent trap for children who are eyeballing the tops of the corn. It's only too easy to slip into a rut and be face down in the mud. Days aren't always cold. Sometimes the sun beats down on the bright orange hats of the little workers as they make their way slowly through the rows. Tired from the heat and still worried about the ruts underfoot, many kids just like

my brother would take off their long sleeves and allow the skin on their arms to be rubbed raw from the leaves. They all came out of the corn scratching their arms and running precious water over them to alleviate the sting.

The day of the incident, it was cold outside. There was no rain anymore from the storms the night before which had died down hours previous to the crews arriving at the site. The sun was coming up over the huge treetops and many workers would lift their faces and arms to the sky hoping to find comforting warmth from the cold. I remember my clothes feeling heavier and heavier as they slowly soaked up the water from the leaves. All that could be seen in every direction was the never-ending corn rows. The cold flicks of water hit my face gently and left water marks on my goggles. It was the second time our team had gone through this field, so we were watching double rows. My team member was walking so slowly due to the extra work and lack of motivation. I tried to be patient and wait for her, but once the work got started I just

wanted to fly through the field and get it over with.

All I was focused on was getting to the other side of the field. As I continued on picking, I faintly heard screams in the distance. In the field many workers would randomly scream out their frustrations or yell in fear of a coworker attempting to scare the others, so I thought nothing of it. I continued on and the screams got louder and more frequent, my heart was now racing with worry I broke into a run as I searched for the source of the terrified screams. Slightly farther up, eight rows to my right I came to a terrified halt. Before me was one of the legs to the huge irrigation system. The large metal equipment sat among the broken stalks of the row which it was running through. Folded over the base of the irrigator leg was the body of a young girl attempting to climb over the equipment. At her feet lay another body, that of her best friend. The second girl was the source of the screams. She was sitting in an upright position with her back against the irrigator, eyes wide open. I can still feel her eyes looking through me. I can still smell the

burning flesh melted against the metal. I spun around and immediately broke into a sprint. As I sprinted back straight down the field I screamed as loud as my lungs would allow, "Get out of the field! It's not safe!" Once at the end of the row I bent over and placed my hands on my knees gasping for air in exhaustion from the breathless run.

The first person I saw once out in the center of rows was Mr. Navara. I stuttered, "There has been an accident in row 14 two girls are injured! They need help!" Mr. Navara then coldly replied, "This better not be a joke Miss Rightley. You'll be in big trouble!" Astonished I then relayed the situation to Rod. Immediately he was in action. Rod called Emergency Services and sent runners to evacuate the field. Rod started running up row 14 toward the irrigator which he climbed over earlier in the day. Mr. Navara shuffled everyone onto the bus for an endless wait. Emergency Services arrived. They pronounced Jade dead, she had died instantly, and swept away Hannah who died once arriving at the hospital. We were later informed the incident occurred

due to lightening striking the irrigation system during the storms the night before. The girls were 'fried' due to the live electricity coursing through the irrigation system. Neither of the girls had rubber boots to protect them from the current as Rod, who was climbing over them earlier that morning had.

This devastated our corn community. Many children worked in the fields, and everyone was aware of the dangers. Still every year children go into the field. The world doesn't stop just because those girls did. The harvest is coming and we as a community will need to continue on. We continue on so our community will continue to profit off of the natural resources we have been provided. The children continue on so that they can have the things they need as well that are on a slightly smaller scale to the normal eye. They need clothes, and shoes. These children are paying for their school events and for projects. They are paying for their phones, and their service for that entire year. Some are saving up for vehicles and others for college.

As the season comes to an end, the fruits of our labors

reach our mailboxes. The paycheck we have been working so hard for has finally arrived. As soon as it comes, it leaves in the form of bills. This money will fund our needs for an entire year. All of that hard work for me definitely paid off. At the time I was purchasing my first

cell phone with that money. It was the first thing I worked really hard for. The reward made me even more sure I would be going back in every year going forward I could. It was a hard decision to make, but it was one that I couldn't have chosen differently.



**The Corvus** *Sarah Goldberg*

Sebastian Duke

Gavin Barrera

Eleyna Morris

Lara Acosta

Andrew Roibal

Kaitlynn Lynch

Linglan Yu

Siv Limary

Matthew Sanchez

Venkat R Nagaswami

Skyler Brown

M.M. Olguin

Abraham Assed

Rayanne Whatley

Melanie Woods

Noell Aldaba

Ema Beckley

Zachary Smith

Junko Featherston

Eileen Renee Moya

Samantha Hoffman

Jené Montaña

Haruhian Sakurai

David Rojas

Billy Mahoney

Emily Stäke

Noelle Rightley

Sarah Goldberg

