

Arkansas Northeastern College

ENERGY

EDITION 9



Gabrielle
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Energy

Editor-in-Chief
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Second Hand

By: Alli Thompson

6 years old,
She doesn't understand,
How this disease,
Is consuming this man.

This man is her father,
Pretty shocking, right
All hell broke loose,
In one single night.

The night that her mom
Attempted to explain it.
Then she was trapped,
There was no way to escape it.

Reality had hit,
It hit way too hard.
This was the first man,
Who truly broke her heart.

He wasn't trying to hurt her,
But addiction is way too strong.
No anger, no sadness, she simply didn't care,
For it had gone on for far too long.

She's 16 now,
And she finally understands it.
Conditions are still the same, though,
It feels as if her father planned it.

He's getting better day by day,
But will it ever end?
She prays and prays with all her heart,
That one day she won't have to pretend.

Goodbye by Madison Smith

I say Hello,
Walking through the big doors, in complete awe
Meeting my teacher, how nice, how tall
Skipping through the halls with no care nor laws,
Playing on the jungle gym, scared to fall

I eat my lunch, so yummy and good
I blinked, how the time had flown
I waited for my mom and there she stood
Waving Goodbye as I headed home.

As the years prolonged, I grew and grew
My legs were longer, needing glasses now
Going on thirteen, beginning a new
I beg please time slow down

My ages added to a sum
Before I knew high school here I come
Driving my way through life in disbelief
I wasn't ready for such grief

Here I am now in my last year
The more I think, the more I fear
So many decisions to make
Maybe it's more than I can take

In three months it will all be over
A new chapter in my life to crossover
I will remember both the good and bad
Forever cherish the time we had

So long, farewell
There rings the last bell
I am sad to go, I cannot lie
To my teachers, friends, and school I say Goodbye

"Cil" by Esmeralda Palacios

It's been two weeks and Sam hasn't picked me out of the box yet. He picked Enc instead. I should've been picked. I'm at least 0.00015 cm taller than him. That's a fact. King Ryan, ruler of the pencil box realm, made me the honor himself to measure me by the hand of Sam Jasper. It was epic. We all have our own individual names but Sam likes to call us, pencils, ruler, sharpener, and paper. That's really racist and insensitive, I learned those words from that government expander Donult Triumph. I'd love to have his name, sounds very authoritative. Mrs. Jasper loves watching the big glowing box where he stations his rule.

Back to the main topic though. Every day he seems to find others more important than me and some of his choices are just plain out pointless. Literally. Sharpener doesn't mind though. I hope he knows he's just shortening our life span every time he decides we're not sharp enough. Gaudy, Carbon, Jelly, even Polly are those individuals. I understand him picking Carbon but Gaudy? How? I shouldn't even mention her name.

We had Gaudy's funeral three days ago. I didn't cry. Crying is for used up gluesticks so I laughed instead. Really loud. I hoped she could hear me from the death hole that's across Sam's room by his desk. Humans call it the trash bin. Serves her right for swallowing Nancy's skittles and taking my place. Watch I'm going to end up swallowing all the red skittles just like Red from the Crayola realm.

I'm tired of being in this box. I was born to create masterpieces, serve a mastermind, and possibly help my kind be cast as a 5 star on Amazon. That's my ultimate goal.

You know what? I think I've changed my mind. Right now we're waiting for the big yellow box on wheels to pick Sam up for S-C-H-O-O-L: six cruel hours of our lives. When we're there I'd rather stay in the box. Even though I can't see anything or hear a thing I've heard stories. Terrifying stories of this place humans spend 29 years of their lifespan.

It's a nightmare for all those who came from the school supply section at Wal-Mart. I will always remember the day when I was placed in that aisle. How I cried for my life to the parttime employer there. Did that old wrinkly guy listen? No! Humans are so deaf. If only they were born with ears like ours. They take up at least 15% of our body structure and humans on the other hand...it's a very pitiful percent. I hate that employee. I'll always hate him. Can't wait to-

AHHHH, it's here. It's hissing rumbling stomach and crude distinctive odor is so close I can feel it in my lead. I'm not ready. I spoke too soon. Sam, I don't care who you pick today, just don't pick me until we're back. I can feel my nightmares come true. Sticky fingers with Dorito crumbs and pencil gnawing jaws. I want to go home already.

Wait. Is that me? Sam grabbed me and placed me face down on a flat surface beside Paper. I can see my reflection on the shiny Lysol smelling desk. The impossible just happened right now. I was chosen.

LALA by Esmeralda Palacios

*I*t was a regular Monday morning for my brothers and me, breakfast at 6, chores at 7, and school at 8. We moved from the big city back to our hometown in Battle Lake, Minnesota. I wasn't very pleased with this drastic change in plans, but Memaw said we had to. Mum wasn't feeling well, and when one side of the equation is missing, everything goes downhill. Since then, that's how it's always been. The taste of blueberry syrup was still plastered at the tip of my tongue. Memaw makes the best blueberry syrup from the freshly picked blueberries she had in her garden. The syrup adhered to my lips against their own will and are now stuck to each other ever so slightly. I curl in my lips to lick off the remaining sweet, thick liquid from the pancakes I had scarfed down earlier.

I stare blankly at my boots wondering what the school lunch ladies had prepared for us today, only looking up to make my way towards the agonizing screech of the bus as it halted right in front of our gate. My boots sunk with every step I took over the freshly rained goo below. I usually don't pay much attention to my surroundings but something caught my eye at that very moment. I lifted my chin and shifted my gaze. The hairs at the back of my neck stood on end. There a few yards from the stop sign across the street stood a boy, I couldn't see his face, a Razorback cap draped a shadow over his eyes. It seemed as if minutes flew by as I stood there staring until my eyes watered and forced a blink due to the sharp sting of the cold wind. He was gone.

"Ms. Hudson!" barked Mrs. Luellen, our psychotic bus driver. She waved her hand frantically at me, "Stop daydreaming and move!" I rolled my eyes at her, hurried up the bus steps, and attempted to climb over backpacks, legs, binders, and notebooks to make my way to the back. The bus doors fold and close behind me as I think about how ironic that these items always seem to appear every day but disappear as quickly as they appear.

"Lala!" my eight-year-old brother yells from the front of the bus. Oddly, imprinted on his navy and white striped polo shirt, was a scarlet stain that wasn't there this morning when we were waiting for the bus. I frowned. Just another task for me on top of everything else. Still fazed from what happened I forget to respond so he calls out

to me again, “Lala!” Lala is the nickname both of my brothers gave me. Magdalena was too hard to pronounce for their small vocabulary.

“What?”

“Your friend Reese is coming over after school,” he beamed.

Reese? Who’s Reese? I ponder.

“Oh,” is all I could manage to utter. There are only 875 people in our small town. We all know each other. From Ms. Garner’s Donut shop to Uncle Deans’ barbershop downtown on Riverside St. Unable to think straight, I miss a step and fall flat on my chin. Warmblood gushes from my chin slowly making its way down my cream wool sweater. In agonizing pain, I stagger to get back on my feet. I lift my hand to my chin and wince slightly. I bend down to pick up my stuff. As I lift my geometry book that had landed on my right foot and almost cut off my blood circulation, I did a double-take at what I saw. The laces on my boots had been untied and were frayed at the ends. At one end, there was a slight red tint- like blood- on the black laces along with teeth marks; this wasn’t an accident.

All of a sudden, I see a shadow on the floor of the bus from the rising glow of the dull morning sky coming through the window on my right. Then coming from the same direction, a brisk tap-tap-tap and slight scratches make me jerk my head towards the sound. My eyes widen in fear. Hanging on the steel frame on the side of the bus, the same boy from before gazed back at me. The cap perched on his head was now crooked to the side far enough so I could see one of his lifeless bloodshot eyes, swollen and puffy, ringed with red; devilish. Not human.

His discolored lips moved to mouth *I’m coming for you.*

I scream.

The bus doors open again. I swivel around. Praying that it’s one of my brothers who fell behind. Martin is always a few steps behind everybody with everything.

On his first day of school, thanks to his incompetence both Ms. Gretchen and the Vice Principal argued in the office about his whereabouts. They argued back and forth until their voices were hoarse and there was nothing else to be said. That morning he had the brilliant idea to walk to school by himself just like the big kids he admired. I

wasn't flustered though, not even the slightest of worries came to mind. One way or another, he always finds his way.

I gasp. The bus is now empty. Something isn't right. I hesitate before taking small careful steps towards the front of the bus. An eerie feeling crawls over me. I'm not alone.

"Lala," a low grating voice interrupts the silence. "Look." Heavy, uneven footsteps follow. I almost jumped out of my skin. "I hope you remember me." With only a few seconds, the voice was closer.

"Whoever you are, stay back!" I raised my voice a notch too high, trying to sound unnerved but my words came out weak and broken. My eyes quickly dart to the open doors; wide-open doors. *You're going to be okay.* I reassure myself like I always do. *You've been through worse. And sometimes-no, always-find a way out.*

I grasp the straps on my backpack with my trembling hands to keep my body calm and steady. I take my stance. Focus. Many years in track throughout my middle school years have prepared me for this moment. My right leg twitches in anticipation. Now I'm ready. I bolt. I run past the open doors hurrying to the thumbprint scan to open our iron gate. Adrenaline courses through my veins, making my face burn and sweat. I could feel my heart in my throat ready to burst. *You're almost there. A few more steps Ma-*

I barely had time to scream when a sharp pain slams into the side of my body. I don't know where the ground is. The world spins ever so slightly, and my body goes numb as I float through the air, like gliding through the ocean back in Miami, Florida. The throbbing in my head slowly fades away while the world I know becomes a blur. A crimson curtain unfolds. *I'm almost there...I'm almost there.* The wailing of a siren keeps me from being sucked in by the darkness but my eyelids become too heavy to keep them open, and then, there was nothing.

The soft glow of the moon allows my eyes to adjust to the darkness. Faint whispers surround me. *Oh, it's cold.* I shiver. I can feel my toes under the silky fabric draped over my body. I slowly recover my memories. The hit. Floating. Then...the darkness. The sweet smell of lilacs hits my nose, and I cock my head to the side to face

the pale violet lump beside a small mirror. I find myself staring at my reflection. My once vivid taupe skin was now ghostly flushed and bruised; I barely recognized myself. Instead, a pair of scared, milk chocolate eyes stare back at me. I lean forward to try to get a better look at my surroundings. A sharp pain shocks through my lower spine, allowing a piercing yell to slide from my throat. I'm immediately pulled back down. The floorboards creak. I couldn't see him, but I knew "he" was there.

"Don't," I croak. My throat felt like sandpaper, and I hear another sound but it's closer this time. *Please go away.* I regain my strength and try again only to find myself back where I started. I shift my weight to the side so my hand could reach out for the bell sitting next to the bouquet of lilacs.

Before I could touch the tip of the handle a hoarse voice whispered, "Shh, Lala. Don't make the same mistake as your brothers." I swallowed back tears. *Stay strong, Magdalena. Just...DON'T MOVE.* My arm was still outstretched midair. It grew heavy and weary, but I dared not move a muscle. I stared at the moon through the window from where I was, tears swelling my eyes once again. The clouds in the sky rocked and swayed. As the minutes ticked by, they did the same, slowly covering the only protection I had. Soon the room would grow pitch black.

I'm then reminded of those sleepless Sunday nights under that cold apartment roof I shared with my brothers back in Nashville. Laughing endlessly at each other's jokes as our grandmother, Memaw, shushed us over and over again, urging us to go to sleep for tomorrow was Monday, and we had to be well and rested for whatever school had in mind for us. *Memaw! Oh yes!* I think to myself. Memaw should be home by now. Her evening shift ends around this time. It won't be long before she finds out of the accident and comes rushing right over to the hospital. A weight is lifted from my chest, and I let go of a sigh of relief. I rub my hand against the nape of my neck to wipe off the sweat that clung to my skin. I spoke too soon. My heart starts to race. Faint, slow footsteps start to make their way toward me. Getting louder and heavier with each thump. Soon a scrawny figure was towering over me. Out of fear, I hold my breath. "Ready?" chuckled the same disembodied voice from before.

Then I remembered. Reese. The same Reese who said he loved me but broke that promise. The same Reese who left me dumped that Saturday night on the front steps of a 2-star hotel. The same Reese that never apologized. I went to his funeral a year ago, I saw him in his casket!

“Please,” I cried, “Don’t hurt me.” I looked up to where I figured his eyes were to plead mercy but regretted it immediately.

“Don’t worry, Lala.” I quickly recognized the other voice. The boy. On the opposite side of the bed, out of nowhere another figure emerged stealthily tiptoeing across the room towards the foot of the bed with both of his hands folded behind him. *Please go away!* I screamed internally. God finally answered my prayers. The warm rays of the sun trickled through the transparent mustard curtains that draped over the only window in the room, allowing me to at last see my prosecutors. However, as the room absorbed their tints and shades, “they” were nowhere to be found. Nothing was left but a butcher knife lying still and placid inches from where the sinister figure stood minutes ago. The door was ajar. A faint scarlet handprint was left behind on the doorknob. Without waiting much longer, I grabbed the bell and rang it until my hands tingle from the vibrating ding-ding-ding. Soon enough, I was safe.

“I’ll be right over. Don’t you worry, pumpkin.” I’ve never been so happy to hear the muffled sound of my grandmother’s voice over the phone. I called her as soon as I got the chance. On the verge of tears, I took a deep breath. My words were shaky, but I managed to explain everything. Memaw helped dress and clean my wounds careful not to rip the tender skin on the bottom left side of my rib. I grinned from ear to ear when she was thoughtful enough to bring my favorite hoodie.

I sighed at the sound of the lock to the car door click. I pulled the hood of my hoodie over my head and carefully sat back in my seat. The muscles in my body delighted from the sudden reassurance slowly released their tension. Although it felt nice to finally feel my muscles loosen up, my body still aches all over. If I could describe the pain along with my current situation from one to ten, I’d have to ask for a few extra numbers. Under my hoodie, the bandages cling to my skin. My wounds are gruesome

enough to dampen and moisten them to the point where I needed a new dressing. I lift the bottom half of my hoodie to prevent it from getting soaked with blood. I contort my face and scrunch my nose; blood is now seeping through, dripping all over the seat.

I sat patiently there in the backseat waiting for the engine to start, looking at the rearview mirror and out the window every so often just to be safe.

“I’ll be right over. Don’t you worry pumpkin.” It was Memaw’s voice but right beside me. Her voice seemed to come from a broken tape recorder.

An urge to flee crawls over me, but instead, I remain where I am. I lean forward, shake her shoulder and ask, “Memaw what was that?” Her body fell limp, slumped over and before I could stop her from hitting the dashboard I heard a click of the car door open and felt an icy sting on my cheek of the frigid cold wind rushing in.

“Shh, Lala.”

“Turk’s Turf” by Esmeralda Palacios

“Oh for Turkey’s sake! The day is finally here!” I gobble at the top of my wattle.

“Shut up, America!”, groaned China, the turkhead of the farm. Perturbed, I bopped my head faster than usual at her comment.

“You look fatter than usual, China, who’s table are you planning on visiting?” I said, glaring with a sneer. I’ve prepared my whole life for this and I wasn’t going to let anyone ruin my mood. Unlike her my feathers were ruffled adequately in place, groomed to the 5,678th feather, and each precisely trimmed to their standards; 2 inches. Yes, you could say I was perfect!

“You’ve lost some weight, America-” she made a dramatic pause and oddly honored me with a quaking gobble then continued, “Might be because I own *all* the food supply in this pen, and I don’t plan on feeding you anymore. Good luck.” She stared blankly into space. Twitched. Twitched again. Then finally, turned around to head back where she came from, the manger.

“Before you leave, I want to make something clear,” I, then also made a dramatic pause then continued, “I’m going to be pardoned and you can’t do anything about it!”

“We’ll see bout that”, she snapped without even turning around to face me. I furiously scratched at the ground, aggravated at this rude behavior she just portrayed before my eyes. This meant war! I said I dedicated my life to this well now I’m going to sacrifice it for this cause. The president isn’t going to look anywhere else but me. Anywhere else. I puffed up my feathers inhaled then exhaled. Now all I needed was the popular vote. This was going to be easy. I wobble as quickly as I could over to the cleaning station, and yes, there’s a cleaning station.

“Hey, Merks!”, Farmer John calls out to me as I step foot into the *omnipotent loo*.

“Oh...hey,” I reply with a hint of disappointment in my voice. I didn’t expect him to be here. I suppose he would do. I glance at him up and down then let out a sigh. He won’t do. Before he could scoop me up for an afternoon cleansing I turn around and head back outside. One thing nobody told me was when all the cameras would come in. If and when they do I had to look the best I could. Taking this into account, Farmer

John wasn't adequate for this position. There's only one person who could do a decent job.

"Britain!" I yelled. "Britain I need your help."

Her head quickly popped up from the flock. "Oh shucks, now what, America?!"

Britain, my 2nd cousin on my father's side was the only turk I trusted my feathers with. I explained my dilemma to him and how I imagined my victorious win. I knew I was going to win. I'm certain I can win without China's ridiculous food supply.

She waited for me to finish then whispered softly but loud enough so I could hear, "America, listen to yourself. You're gobbling nonsense." Confused, I looked around to see if anyturk was close enough to overhear our gobble. No turk was even close enough to catch a whiff of it.

"Uh, I don't see why you're whispering" I stated as a matter of factly.

"I've learned that if you whisper something you know the other is not going to like to hear they won't blow up their feathers as much. I suppose they were right," she said beaming. I couldn't believe my own ears.

"I was counting on you; now I guess you're a foe-for now." I needed her and I wasn't ready to cut ties with her yet.

They're here. I can see them from my peripheral vision circling the pen eyeing each of us individually. I keep my composer calm and steady; unlike the others, I know how a fine American fellow is supposed to behave. I hide my beak under my wing to keep me from cuckling disrespectfully at Norkrea. I don't understand his ways. Thinks he's at the top of the coop, in reality, he doesn't stand a chance. He must've seen my attempt to keep the peace because he came wobbling straight towards me with his beak open wide disgracefully allowing his tongue to dangle. A chicken would know better.

I stared at the megaphone in the scorer's hand patiently waiting for them to announce the nominees. All five microphones were connected to one single speaker in the middle of the pen. Heads bopped here and there, up and down as the red led light on the speaker turned on.

“Switzerland, Japan, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia
...America, Norway, and France-you’re in our top ten.” Even though I don’t have eyebrows I
felt them furrow and contort in confusion. I averted my tiny beady eyes to the speaker
and thought: *Hmm, is it just me or when he got to my name his voice trailed off?*

Infinite Words

By Mallie Zielinski

Words seem infinite. A continuous mix of letters that create a rhythm we've all come to understand. Over the years, these letters have become normalized, accepted, with no thought to their significance or the impact they have on this world. We learn from a very young age the certain mix of characters that should be used in our everyday vocabulary. Just like numbers, we think that the possibilities that lie within these patterns of letters will go on forever.

Words, however, are not infinite. Did you know there are only 171,146 words in the English language? Did you know that there are only 41,477 words that start with the letter "D"? It seems strange, but eventually, words will run out. There are only so many words and phrases that can be used to describe the activity of life.

The letter "D" seems to have such an impact on everyone's life. It is one of importance, some defining part of the alphabet. Some just don't realize it. Words like death, depression, and decline are everyday things that have yet to be brought to attention. You don't realize how much one letter can affect you until one of its words is brought to your attention.

For me personally, the letter "D" means so much more. This 1 word out of 41,477 words has played a huge part in my life. It haunts me every day. It has broken my heart time and time again. It is a weight that has yet to be lifted off my shoulders. The sad thing? At one point, this 1 word out of 41,477 words was my saving grace. It was once relief at the end of a long day. It used to be the thing that brought me comfort in the midst of chaos. In fact, out of the 171,146 words in the English language, this one word was the very first one I ever spoke: Dad.

Dads are meant to be here forever. They're meant to hold your hand when a boy breaks your heart. They're destined to walk you down the aisle. They're supposed to stay until you learn how to live without a father's guiding hand. The word "Dad" is supposed to be a part of your normal,

everyday vocabulary for a long time. It was only a part of mine for ten years.

And suddenly, this 1 word amongst 41,477 words starting with the letter “D”, this 1 word amongst the 171,146 in the English language, is one that I can barely speak without having tears come to my eyes. It is one that catches in my throat every time I try and piece together the letters. It’s a word that I wasn’t ready to forget.

Now, the word “Dad” is replaced by multiple different words and phrases: guardian angel, dead, gone, deceased, never coming back. I never thought I would speak the words “Guardian Angel” and “Dad” in the same sentence at such a young age. I didn’t realize how hard it would be to replace a word that I’ve grown up with.

Now, six years later, I still struggle with the weight of this word. The crushing feeling has yet to go away. I don’t use it in my everyday vocabulary anymore. It is simply a word that once held life in it. It is simply a word that has been repurposed with death. This is the first time I’ve written the word in years, and somehow, it’s just like the day I stopped saying it altogether.

**Ultimate Fighter
By Guztavo Juarez**

I'll start at Ten
Since it was a Win
Somethings up at 9
That's something you decide
I'll win at 8
Some things you need to create Deciding factor is at seven
You will be sent in heaven
What about six
You can be in a mix
Im happy at five
Running from a hive
Clean sweep at four
You will want more
The ships at three
Get up on a fee
Go in at two
What to do
Gotcha at one
I just won

Inspiration by Muhammad ali

A Letter to The Promised Land

By Mia Cox

It has been a month since she last thought of you.

But as the days grow longer, the vivid thought of your hand possibly grasping around her finger
can not leave but for a moment.

The days that she once thought were soon going to be filled with pure happiness but were a
deception in disguise leave her to think, if she tries again, will the outcome change? she
often uses her smile to shield others from her broken reality

What many thought was a joyful smile was always a cry for help

No one ever bothered to ask the girl who always smiled if she was alright

Because all she showed was what others wanted her to see

She has trouble sleeping at night because as she wakes and hopes to see you by her side,

She remembers you're gone.

Maybe one day, she'll be able to feel the warm, calming embrace of yours that she was never
able to feel.

Some days, a tear falls down her cheek as she yearns to hear what your voice could have been.

But even then, her cries for help, even if shown, go unheard.

So until you two meet again, her arms will always be open, waiting for you.

A Way Out by Elizabeth Burchell

Suicides have become the second-leading cause of death among teenagers in high school. Eighteen point eight percent of students have considered committing suicide.

Unfortunately I am a part of that 18.8%. I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression when I was thirteen, which sounds like I would not even begin to know what that is. The truth is I grew up too fast and went through a lot of trauma that I would never wish upon anyone else. I learned how to keep a picture perfect smile on my face everyday. What kept me from doing the impossible before was the pain of my family and friends that I felt I understood would be unmeasurable. Life is not easy, not in the slightest but there is hope. It is something that I've been told since I was old enough to write my name.

It all started when I was thirteen years old; I was angry and upset with the world. I even questioned my existence. I felt like I was screaming in a crowded room but no one could hear me. My life felt like there was no purpose at all. I had finally decided that there was no other option but to end all of the pain and suffering that I was feeling. I was a loaded gun ready to be fired.

While my older sister was in my living room sitting as cool as a cucumber, watching the television with the sound on one hundred, I decided it was the perfect time to do it. I took the sharpest razor blade I could find. I told my sister I loved her and went into my bedroom. I slowly opened my closet door and shut it as quietly as I could and locked the door. I sat there contemplating all of my options for what seemed like forever. I then decided that this was it. I texted my mom and all of my close friends to say my last goodbye. Then I did it; I slit my wrists and I could feel my heart rate increase. I had passed out moments after and I do not remember much.

What I do remember is I woke up to my sister pouring water all over me, it felt like I was

about to drown. I can remember hearing her cry out but her voice was fading in and out. She instantly called my parents and my older brother to help. Then boom, all of a sudden my older brother slammed the door open and was there to rescue me from everyone's worst nightmare. There were some custody issues between my parents so my father and grandparents had assumed I did this for attention when in reality I was battling my own mind daily. The cool wind howling as he was walking me out sent shivers across my spine. My brother immediately rushed me to the hospital and I was able to get the help I needed to survive.

A quote that I had learned in therapy and one that has stayed with me is "Life is also like the ocean. Sometimes it's calm seas, and everything is smooth sailing. Other times you have to swim against the waves." Although I was feeling lost and hopeless I found peace in a world of chaos in this quote. I felt as if suicide was the only option when I was younger but I have learned many coping skills and ways to help others in the same situation I was in. It has been three years since January 24th, 2019 and I am strong, healthy, and alive.

Chocolates Boxes and Life Changes by Brooklyn McCormick

“Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you’re going to get.” Many people receive the sweet parts of life, while others get the bitter end. I always had the sweet experiences, but in an instant, I was shown that life was no longer about candy and toys; it was about valuing relationships. I never would have thought a tragic accident would have to occur to make me realize.

My family has always made sure that I get the sweet parts of life, especially my mother. My mom is the peanut butter, and I’m the jelly. She’s my best friend. If someone were able to open up my mom and I, and see our thoughts and ideas, they’d be identical to one another. I don’t often show my mom how thankful I am for her, and I really need to. Something about my mom and I is that we love holidays, especially Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day is the one day we focus on showing all of our love for one another. Since I was a toddler, my mom has always gotten me my favorite heart shaped box of chocolates for this holiday, and then took me to our barn to ride our horses. The taste of the chocolates was like heaven in my mouth. It was my favorite thing. It was February 13th, 2017, the day before Valentine’s Day, and I was leaping with joy. Little did I know, this would be the worst Valentine’s day to ever come.

“Brrrrng” Brrrrng” went my mom’s alarm raring, ringing, and reaching for me to get up from the room next to mine. Her alarm always woke me up. I leaped up as the alarm continued to ring, and made my way to the kitchen. As I walked in, the big red, heart shaped box of chocolates caught my eye. I smiled and hugged my mom. My mom and I exchanged gifts with one another and were having the best time until an argument broke out. It was a silly, meaningless argument, but I wasn’t going to be the one to apologize. My mother then told me she was going to the barn to feed our horses and that if I wanted to go ride them like we planned, to come on. I thought to myself, “Do I really want to ride horses and argue all day, or just stay

home and eat my chocolates?” “No I’m fine, I’ll just stay here.”, I said with an attitude. She proceeded to walk out and leave, and I had a gut wrenching feeling. I snatched my chocolates off the kitchen table and laid down on the couch for what felt like hours. I wondered when my mom was going to arrive back. After two hours, lying on the couch, I began to grow worried. I paced the room like a dog waiting for its owner to arrive. I had finally begun to gather myself, until I heard sirens. My knees hit the floor. I knew it was my mom and I had no way of contacting anyone and no idea what had happened. I felt helpless. I placed my hands on my face and began to sob.

I then heard footsteps and my front door flew open. It was my aunt. My aunt was teary eyed and that’s when I knew it wasn’t good. She grabbed my hand and motioned for me to come with her. I scurried out to the vehicle with her, panicking. My aunt looked me in the eyes, “Your mom had a seizure while driving and was in a very bad accident Brooklyn, we have to get to the hospital.” she cried. My heart sank. I thought to myself, “The last time I saw her, I was hateful. I can’t lose her.” I grew more anxious the closer we got to the hospital and the second we got there, I bolted in the doors. The smell of the hospital made my stomach turn. I looked around the corner and found more of my family members waiting to see my mom. After what felt like forever of waiting and worrying, the doctors allowed my aunt and I to see my mom. Her room number was room eleven, which I would remember forever. I walked in and saw her in horrible condition. She had a broken neck, a fractured arm, and many other internal complications. My heart ached. The good news was she was going to be okay, but it would take time. A relief was lifted off my shoulders. The doctor pulled me to the side, “The policeman told me that the passenger side of the car was completely crushed, and if you were to have gone with her, you wouldn’t be here right now.”, he said. I slowly walked back to where my mom was laying, softly touched her hand, and kissed it. If it wasn’t for me staying home to eat my box of chocolates, I

would have gone with her and not ever made it back home, it was a miracle. My thoughts were continuously beating my heart to death . I never apologized to my mom and had almost lost her. I knew I would be completely lost if she was gone. I was just glad she was okay and thankful for my box of chocolates.

The quote, “Life is like a box of chocolates” stuck with me forever. I was so used to always receiving the “good chocolates” that I never thought of the “bad chocolates”. Life changes could occur and turn life around for the worse in the blink of an eye. I learned that cherishing the people I love and valuing them is one of the most important things in life. Learning to prioritize valuing relationships will change life in the best way possible.

“The Only People” by Alyssa Crafton

The only people who have the rights to care,
Are the only ones who haven't been affected.
The only ones who haven't had the strength to wonder why
All the brutal things they **say** cause and effect did.

There was no cause, nor a pause
In the face of injustice, it doesn't stop at all
So why should we look at the situation through rose-coloured glasses?
We will see all those red flags as white.

The only people who have the rights to question
Are the people who don't want answers.
The only ones who knew all along, all these struggles
Are the people who haven't been handcuffed to the system.

The only people who make those decisions
Are those who know what will happen if they do.
They won't have to wake up and worry about
The bullets knocking against their door, begging to be let in.

The only ones who haven't been affected
Are the only ones who will lay.
They will have their **names** sprawled on the protest signs
But they won't put the back in pay.

Behind the Scenes

By: Alli Thompson

Her life was like a movie,
Not as perfect as it seemed.
She struggled with addiction,
But not the kind you think.

Perfection was her enslavement,
Anything less was considered a sin.
Any time she made a mistake,
Cuts were formed in her thick, thick skin.

She was mentally sick,
Tired of stressing.
No matter the situation,
Her life was full of second-guessing.

She had to find herself,
Before it was too late.
Continue her journey,
But with a clean slate.

But what could she do?
She was only 16.
She should have *no* worries,
Other than boys and her dreams.

She met some good people,
That taught some good lessons.

Forgiving herself,
Would be the biggest blessing.

She broke a few hearts,
Most of which she regretted.
But some things you can't change,
So in her mind, that fact was embedded.

The sparkle returned,
to her deep blue eyes.
And as for her old life,
She said her goodbyes.

Behind the scenes,
Her life wasn't perfect.
She knew one thing though,
It *was* worth it.

A Fishing Trip

Fishing has always been a size and numbers game for me. My fishing expedition's success is based solely on how many fish I catch. When the trip does not provide the numbers or size that I want, I return home in defeat. I have always believed that this ideology was universal amongst fishermen. However, one particular trip deep in the Appalachian mountains changed my outlook entirely. Sometimes, enjoyment can be found in what you experienced to get to your destination instead of the destination itself.

My alarm rang at 5:45 A.M. on a Thursday morning. Today was the third day of our family's six day vacation. I roll out of bed, turn on the blinding lights, and haphazardly fix my sheets before making my way upstairs. The cabin was desolate as I was the only one awake. I walk to the closet where my waders have been stored. After inspecting them for any damage and remarking on how small the years have made them, I put them on. I walk onto the back porch, inspecting the old water stained stairs from floods prior for anything interesting. I double check my fishing gear and walk down to the river. Before I set off I look back at the cabin placed precariously on the hill side. I see my father standing on the balcony and I wave before making the rest of my journey to the river's edge. As I reach the river I study the crystal clear water which flowed like a busy highway, carrying sticks and leaves downstream to great unknowns. The air carried so much humidity that my mouth tasted as if I had drank directly from the stream. The river nestled in the forest had the smell of a life completely different than my own. Today I was destined for a particular spot almost a mile from my cabin which looked perfect for brook trout, small feisty fish with the most vibrant colors that nature could provide. I triple check my gear and put my first foot in the water

I scan the water through my sunglasses, which had not been worn long enough to become unnoticed, for any signs of fish. I spot a drop off halfway across the river about three feet deep, the perfect place for a few hungry fish to hide. I get close enough to make a cast but not too close to scare off any potential fish hiding in the deep pool. I cast and watch the neon green line float across the water's surface past the pool I was sure held fish. After the lure has reached the end of its intended destination, I pull up on my rod and cast again. I cast for five minutes and continue walking upstream. The water pushing against me with every step reminds me of what it may be like walking in a hurricane.

The sun now peaked from behind the mountains, bathing the river and surrounding woodland in orange and red hues. As the sun grew more vibrant and oppressive I knew my window to have a great day is getting smaller. After walking for another twenty minutes casting at so-thought ideal spots without any luck I come across a more than ideal habitat. It was another drop off, cloaked in shadow from some overhead trees. I casted at this nook for what felt like an eternity, each time letting the line drift across the mirrored surface of the water anticipating a bite. Eventually, one did come. As soon as I set the hook I knew it was small, its pulls against my rod felt akin to a toddler trying to lead me to something. When the fish presented itself to me it was not everything I hoped for. It was an average size rock bass, which is still small by most standards. I place my hand into the freezing water to retrieve him, his slimy exterior resisting my touch. Removing the hook from his bottle cap size mouth was no trouble, after all I was using barbless hooks to minimize any damage to fish that I might have the pleasure of meeting today. He fit perfectly in my hand, mouth and tail just barely hanging over the edge of my palm. His color was about the most vibrant shade of brown there could be. Stripes made of somehow similar yet distinct browns lined his body. Perfectly camouflaged for his dwellings. I lowered

him back into the water, looking at him from the surface was like looking through glass. He quickly swam back to his home and I set off again.

While I walked I noticed the birds were fully awake now. Their disorganized choir now drowning out the sound of rushing water. Other wildlife also started making appearances: a small rodent scurrying across the shore, a bug flying too close for comfort, a snake swimming past, and a deer enjoying a cool drink to start their day. Unfortunately, I paid too much attention to what was around me instead of what was underneath me. My unwatched foot landed on what could only be described as a rock with no friction. As it glanced off I knew I was in trouble, my body weight was now completely committed to the fall. I was now at the mercy of gravity. For the first time in ten minutes a sound louder than the birds made itself known. The roar of displaced water enveloped all sides of me. My instincts kicked in causing me to flail wildly, which luckily stopped me from being completely water logged. As I righted myself I noticed my entire right side was now freezing and cold. I walked to the shore to assess the damage. Luckily almost everything made for fly fishing is waterproof, the only thing that was not was myself. I stood and recuperated before going back to my task. Carefully with each step I continued towards my destination.

After wading all morning I finally reached the place that inspired me to take this trip. The sun now was directly overhead and I knew the hottest hours of the day were quickly approaching. This part of the stream was the narrowest I had seen all day, it also moved the fastest. Half of the river consisted of flat rock making it easy to get within casting distance, the other half was rough and jagged rock that sometimes jutted out of the water like a small mountain range. The ripples these protruding rocks created were perfect for trout. I could see them lining the bottom waiting for their next meal. They looked like black and orange

submarines and I knew at least one of them was hungry. I made my first cast directly behind a ripple and hoped for the best. The water carried my line downstream as I waited for it to become taut with a fish. I repeated this process for three hours which went by like waiting in a doctor's office. After the third hour and countless new lures I thought my bad luck was finally at an end. I saw a decent sized trout follow my lure from his submerged hideout. He followed my lure and as he closed the last few inches between him and it he turned away. At that moment I decided it was time for a break. I walked to a flat spot on shore and retrieved my lunch. Somehow it remained dry after my earlier meeting with the water. I still could see the trout hugging the bottom of the river, somehow remaining completely stationary besides the pace of the water. As I sat and ate I thought of the day's escapades and my failure to make it worthwhile. But as I thought about it longer I realized that I was not disappointed unless I told myself to be so. The natural beauty and unexpected events did more than enough to soothe any problems I may have had with my journey. After finishing my lunch I rose from my improvised chair on the shore and began back to the cabin.

A journey does not have to be about its destination, sometimes happiness is found in what it takes to get there. Nature has a charm like no other and it is impossible to overstate the importance of taking time to appreciate it. Thinking about the present holds many more gifts than thinking about the future does. And lastly fishing should not be just about whether fish were caught, instead what the experience as a whole was. Unless I am fishing a tournament, then it is entirely about how many and how big the fish caught are.

“Untitled” by Anonymous Student

In today’s society, more and more teenage girls are suffering from an eating disorder. That is because teenage girls have an unrealistic idea about what their bodies are supposed to look like. Everything on television, in magazines, and on telephones projects the image of the perfect female body. Comparing myself to those images led me to develop body dysmorphia. Developing body dysmorphia then led me to pathological dieting. It is a constant struggle. It is full of feelings and ideas all day every day, every time I eat something, everytime I take count of all my flaws, every time I look in the mirror.

Ring! Ring! Ring! The most annoying sound in the world, the noise of my alarm clock. As my eyes open from a full night's rest the first thought I have is how my body looks after sleeping off the calories I ate yesterday. Not even picking up my phone, the first steps I take are towards my mirror. I do the same routine everyday, lifting up my shirt and looking at my body as I turn from left to right. I always think I'll look thinner than I actually am. Disappointment washes over me because my “morning skinny” is hardly different from the way I saw myself right before I got in bed.

Hunger immediately takes over, but since I am not satisfied with my appearance I won't dare eat anything to make it worse. I then put down my shirt to stare at my face for way too long to point out the flaws I see. At first glance I see blackheads crowding my nose. With more examination I notice hair growing under my eyebrows and above my lip. I start to feel my jaw just to grab the excess skin and wish it wasn't there. Taking my hands away from my face I begin to comb through my hair. All that's left behind are broken, brittle pieces damaged from the heat I put on it to make myself look “acceptable”. All the while my stomach continues to growl as it's begging for food. Still I ignore it and lay down to distract myself with my phone in hopes I stop thinking about food. Scroll after scroll are these perfect girls with no acne and no

fat rolls which makes me convince myself to not eat for longer. Seeing comments from boys saying words like “hot”, “sexy”, “perfect” all makes me think of the features I need to change about myself to meet the standards.

Hours go by and I can't fight the hunger anymore. My body needs food, and has to have energy to get me through my day. Walking into the kitchen I look up at the pantry and refrigerator looming there like wild beasts just waiting to open their jaws. I dread the sharp sting I am going to feel when I open the pantry and refrigerator door because I always immediately start thinking and looking for the food that has the fewest calories. I look for food that won't make me look bloated. Everything that is in the pantry and fridge smells and looks amazing. I am now so hungry my body is telling my mind what it needs instead of what I want to give it. Pasta is my craving for today, but they have so many carbs and so many calories. At this point my hunger has finally taken over and my body is getting what it wants. Bite after bite the taste of food is amazing, but there's still so much guilt that consumes me.

Finishing up the pasta and there's not a single bite left. I am so disgusted with myself. How could I just sit here and eat a whole bowl of pasta without stopping myself? Like always, the first thing I do after eating is go to the “little god” that reflects an image I am not willing to accept. Seeing my stomach being bloated and feeling like I have gained ten pounds makes me sick to my stomach. My first reaction is to go to the bathroom. As I walk in the bathroom and close the door behind me I know exactly what is about to happen. I prepare myself as I take my hands and put them down my throat. All that guilt and disgust seems to go away for a little bit. To me I get to enjoy the food I eat but I do not enjoy taking in any of the calories. In the back of my mind I know that isn't how it works, but I want to believe it is.

Once again I look in the mirror spinning and turning to make sure I look better than I did before. Though all the pain I just put myself through I still feel so gross in my body. The stretch

marks, the rolls, the acne makes me feel hideous. I am not supposed to look like this, and I am positive I am not supposed to feel like this. The dreadful walk back to my room is the worst. Acting like I'm perfectly fine and content when deep down I am nowhere close to either. I always catch myself scrolling through old pictures wishing I looked like I did a year ago. To be fair I was twenty pounds lighter, but in every picture I can see how unhappy and hungry I was through every smile. I starved myself more and more everyday just to feel pretty. I just wanted to be accepted and loved. Not being validated and striving to be thinner or have clearer skin and all in all just being able to be "better" is what kept me from changing. I always say "if I just get a little skinnier things will be different." As I sit here over a year later I am more disgusted with myself than ever. Not because of the way I look, not because of the way I feel, strictly just because I let myself do those actions. I treated myself as if I was so different from everyone else, and acted as if every other person was perfect but me. Being in a state of realization is one of the greatest feelings. There is no "standard" and there is no "acceptable". I am the only person that can make those qualities up. Those thoughts can only be believed if I let them. Trying so hard to look different for someone else isn't healthy. Seeking attention for changing in wrong, unhealthy ways is not realistic. Not having to worry about what I am eating next or what I look like in the mirror ten minutes after I just looked at myself is so relieving. Having been so obsessed with my appearance was one of the most tiring times of my life. Yes, of course there are hard days, but I never miss the way I felt so poorly of myself.

I lived with having an unrealistic view of myself for so long that it led to the obsessive disorder of refusing to eat or immediately getting rid of what I had eaten. Knowing I don't have to fit society's image of the ideal female body is a weight lifted off my shoulders. I wish I could tell every teenage girl with an eating disorder that her life has meaning. That when she looks in the mirror she doesn't just have to see her flaws, the extra pounds on her stomach, the blemish

on her face, and the state her hair is in. After recovering from such an awful illness, it feels so great to finally be happy just being me.

Selfcare

By Kerrigan Foster

Serotonin, a 5-hydroxytryptamine in your brain
Equally as important as dopamine,
Likely to cause happiness, sadness, and most feelings between.
For the people who lack these chemicals,
Chemically, you're imbalanced, but
After a long day,
Remember this,
Enjoying life is hard if you don't enjoy yourself.

h a z e l

By Kerrigan Foster

i never knew hazel could be my favorite color
until i saw your eyes
and i fell in love.

i never knew hazel would corrupt my life
but when i met you
i was already consumed.

i always thought hazel was the color of eyes
that was often uncommon
but when i saw your eyes,
that's all i ever would see anymore.

A New Home

By Jaylen Howard

I walked up a golden stairway that was surrounded by nothing but stars and planets everywhere. Up on top of the stairs, there was a booth that looked half clean and dirty. There only one side with trash everywhere and graffiti sprayed on the side of the booth. Inside, there was a grayish looking man. His skin was rough, his hair was messy. His face was just a mirror attached to him. As I got closer, he looked towards me but said nothing. I looked at the mirror attached to him seeing myself. I saw myself having cuts all over my body, my clothes were dirty and had some blood. My hair was messy and greasy. My I felt my heart beating faster and felt myself shaking. My breathing was getting shaky as well. The man then reaches into his pocket and pulls out a blue ticket and handed it to me. He points to a plain old bench next to a railroad.

I walked over starting to feel a bit warmer, and the air started to smell like lavender. I heard the sound of a train approaching, and the smell of lavender was then replaced by smoke. The train then opens up, and it was bright. Inside were people talking, eating, or sleeping. Everyone was clean compared to me. No cuts or dirty clothes. A small creature then came out of the train. It looked like a pink blob creature with legs. It had birdwings and multiple mouths and eyes. It began to walk around me between my legs like a cat. I saw my wounds closing up, and my clothes becoming clean. I felt myself becoming more alive. I feel like I can move around and play around for hours upon hours without feeling tired. The creature then bit down on my ticket and swallowed it. It then gently pushes me gently into the train.

As I enter the train, I could smell smoked turkey, lasagna, and rolls. There was more of the small creatures moving around carrying a plate of food and drinks on the top of their heads.

Some of them were laying on people laps just sleeping or enjoying the pats they were receiving. The creature that led me inside the train took me to an empty seat. I sat down, and the creature left. The train began to move forward then upwards like a rollercoaster. Objects were not falling and was staying in place. Some of the people were still standing and did not seem effected from the sudden change. The train continued to ascend. Looking out the window, I saw even more stars than before than the ones at the stairwell. The planets were bigger and clearer than before. The small blob with legs came back to me again with a plate of sweets like chocolate cupcake, cookies, and donuts. I took a cookie and bit into it. The taste exploded into my mouth feeling my mind with nothing but bliss. The train soon stopped, and the doors opened. Everyone began to exit out of the train, and I followed.

Exiting the train, I saw a new bright world. It was a beautiful city with neon lights flowing around. There was a sign that said *Welcome to Covegan*. There were people having fun doing whatever, but there were more creatures in all different shapes and sizes. Some looked like a humanoid with wings, some looked more animal like with a sheep like feature. The only thing they that was consistent about them was the fact that they had wings and multiple eyes everywhere on them. They interacted with the people playfully, or they were having a conversation in a language that I couldn't understand. One of the creatures that was tall, and humanoid was coming towards me. On the top of its head was a light blue halo. It gently picks me up and carries me around, and began showing me around my new home.



"Heaven" by Allison Moody



“Red Beauty” by Gabriella Garcia



“Scarab” by Justin Branch



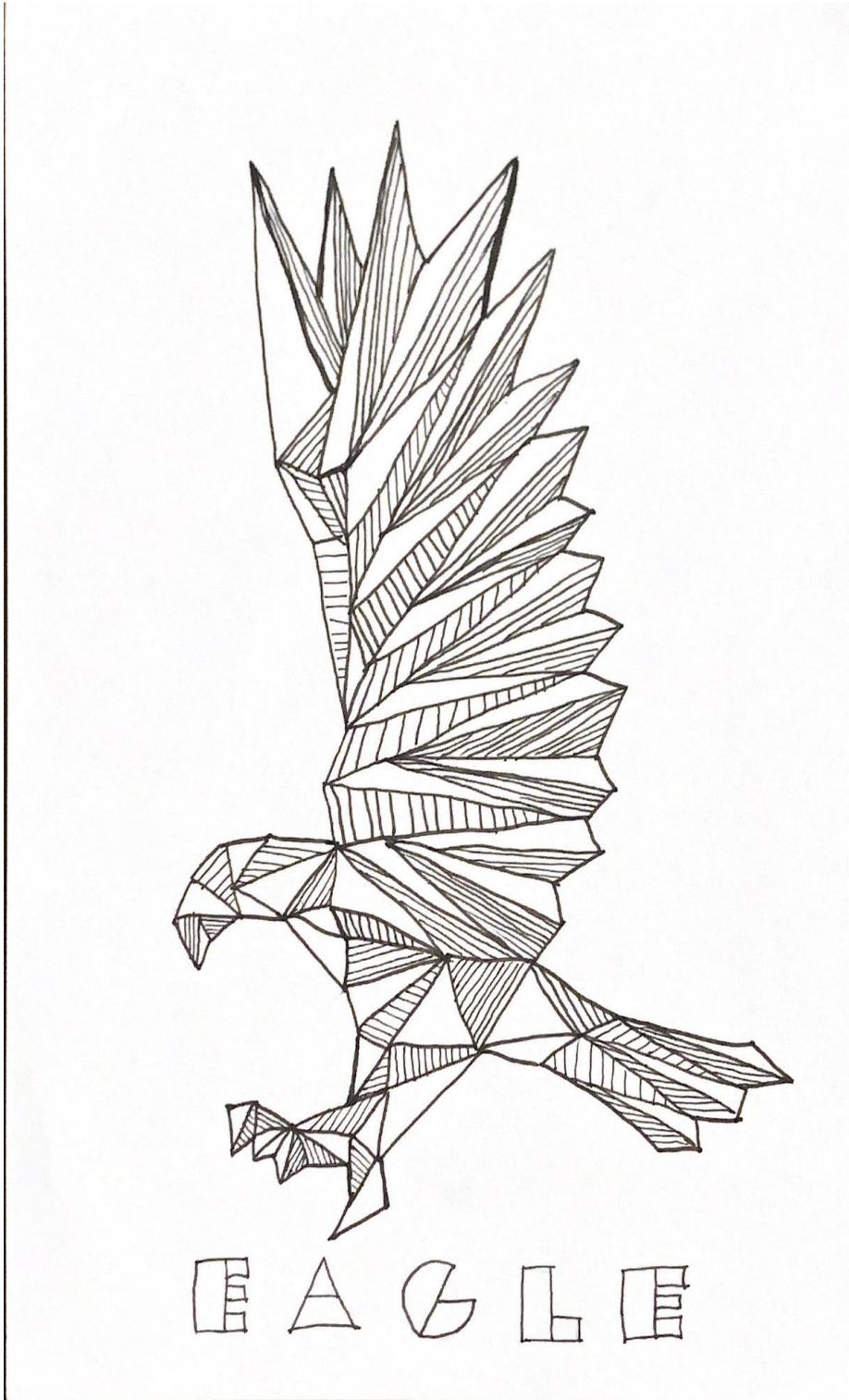
“Untitled” by Kelle Lamon



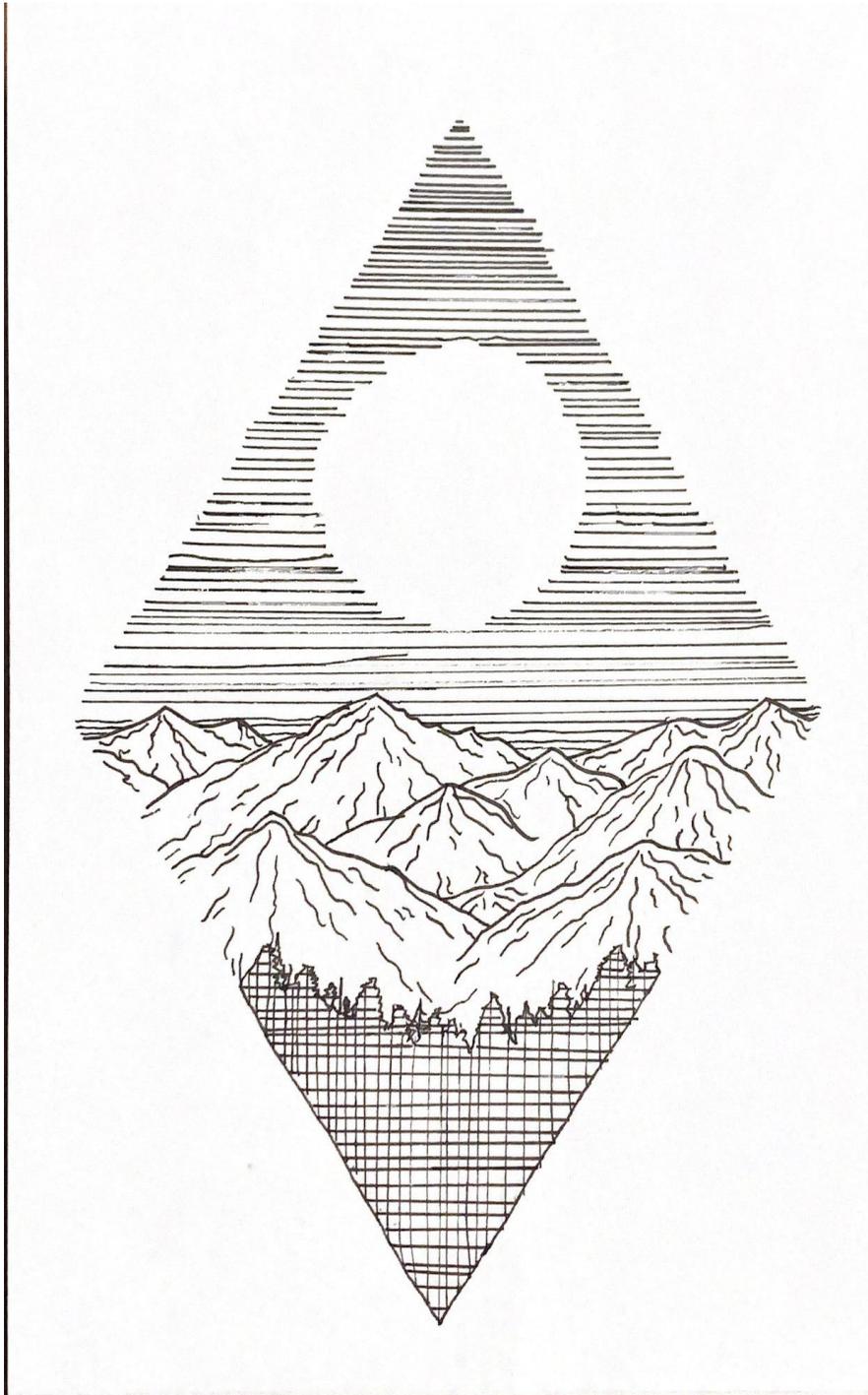
“Serenity” by Addison Chidester



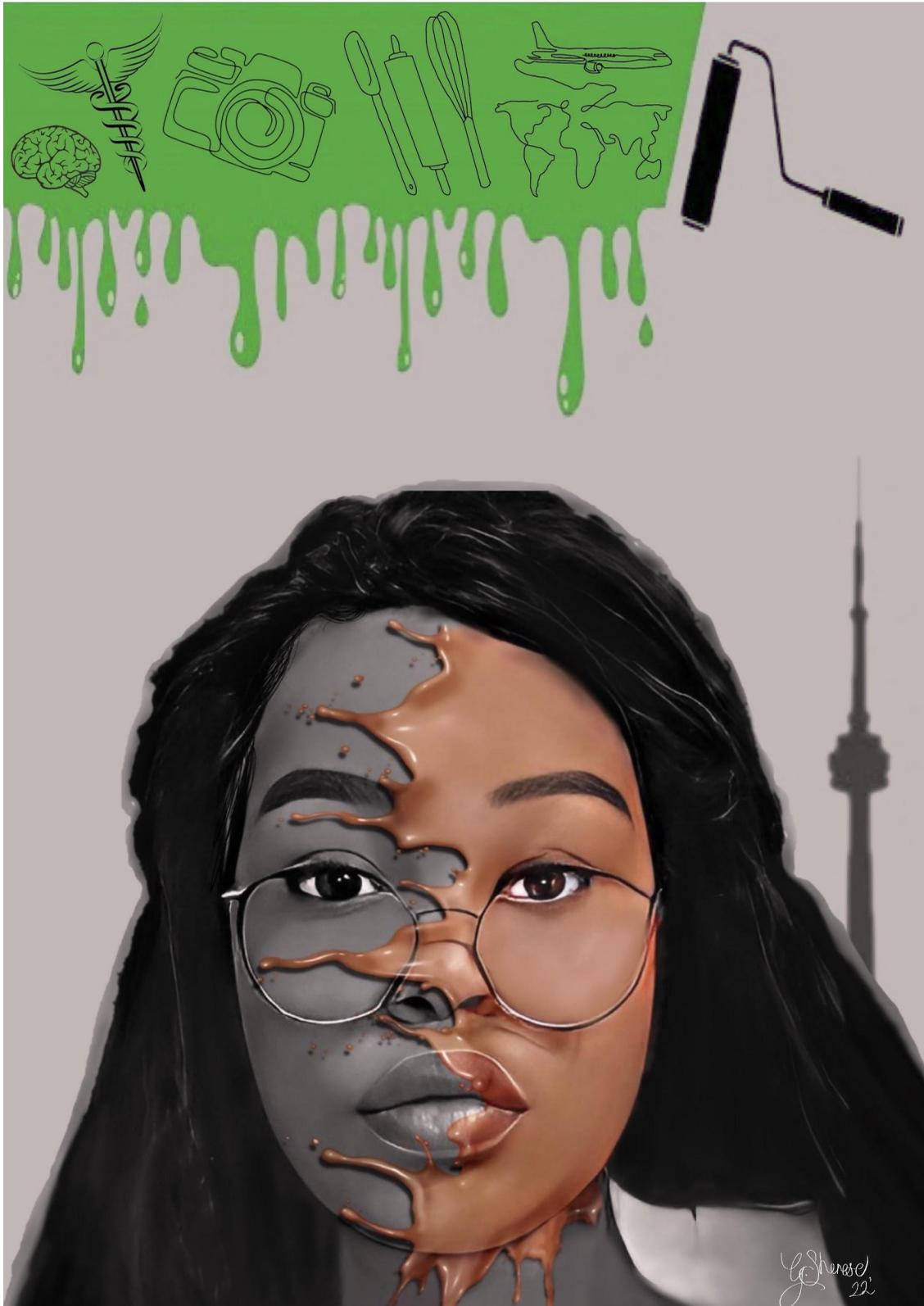
“Comic Book Redo” by Gabrielle Mays



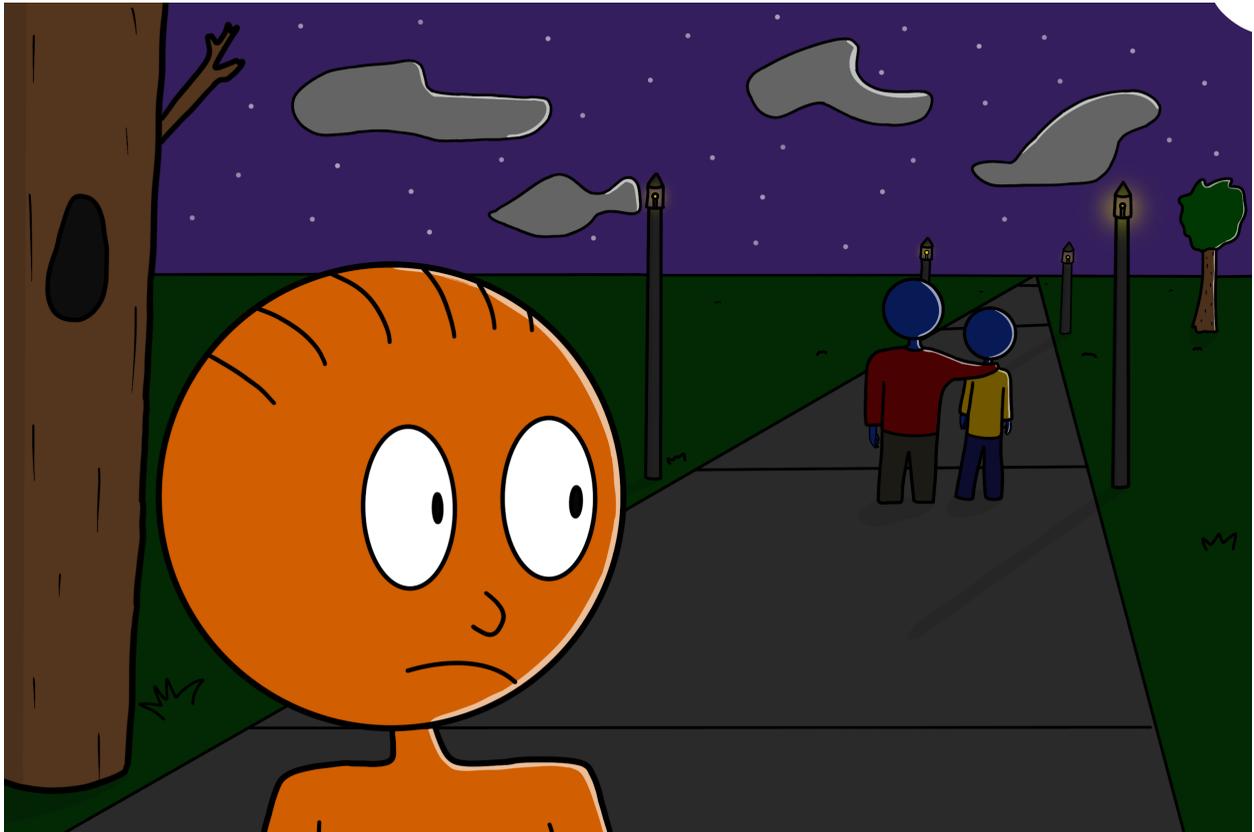
“Geometric Eagle” by Gabrielle Mays



“Geometric Landscape” by Gabrielle Mays



"My Future" by Gabrielle Mays



“Untitled” by Jaylen Howard



“Untitled” by Kerrigan Foster



“Untitled” by Kaylee Watts



“Untitled” by Kerrigan Foster



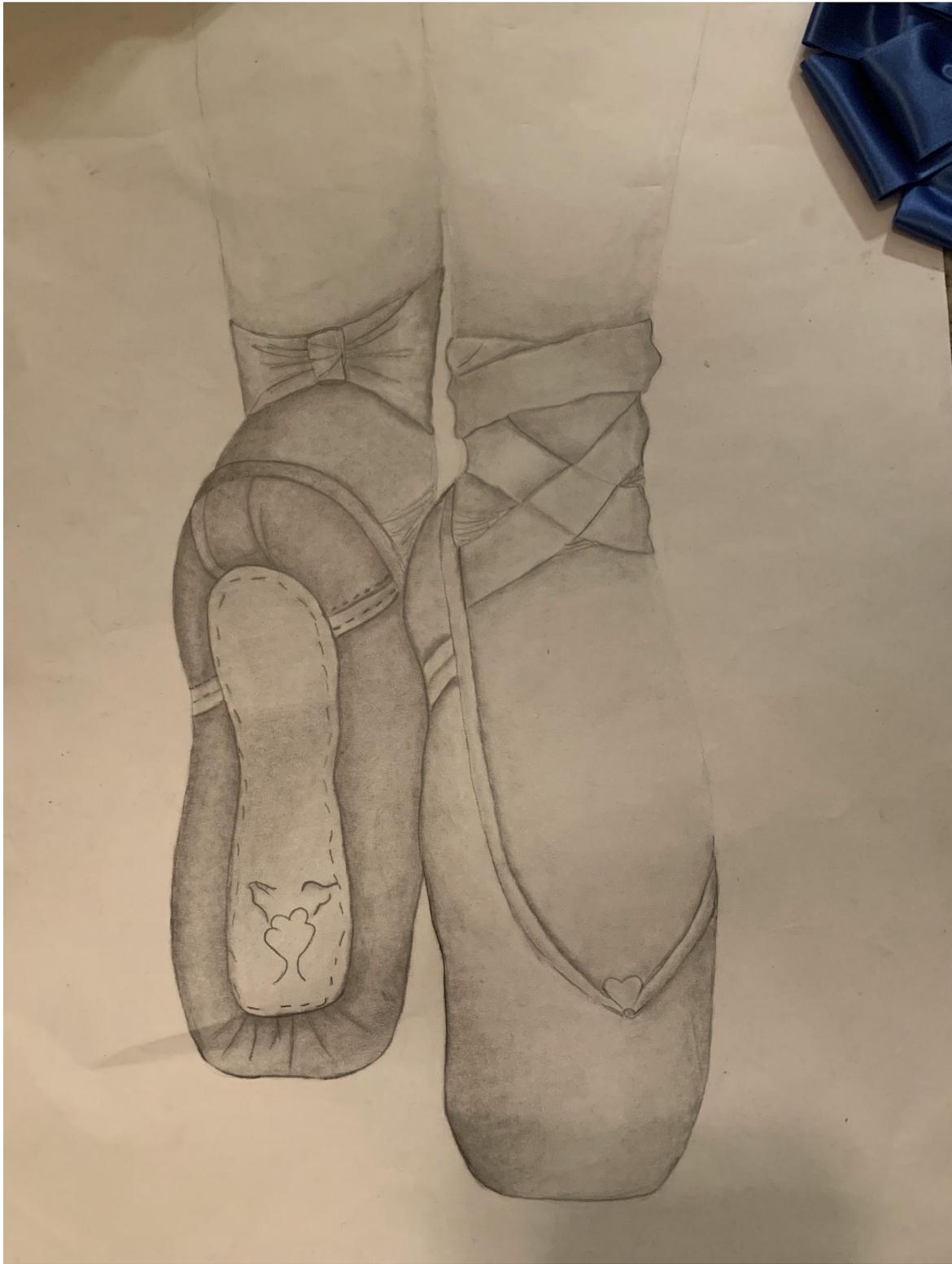
“Untitled” by Nathaniel Barajas



“Untitled” by Nathaniel Barajas



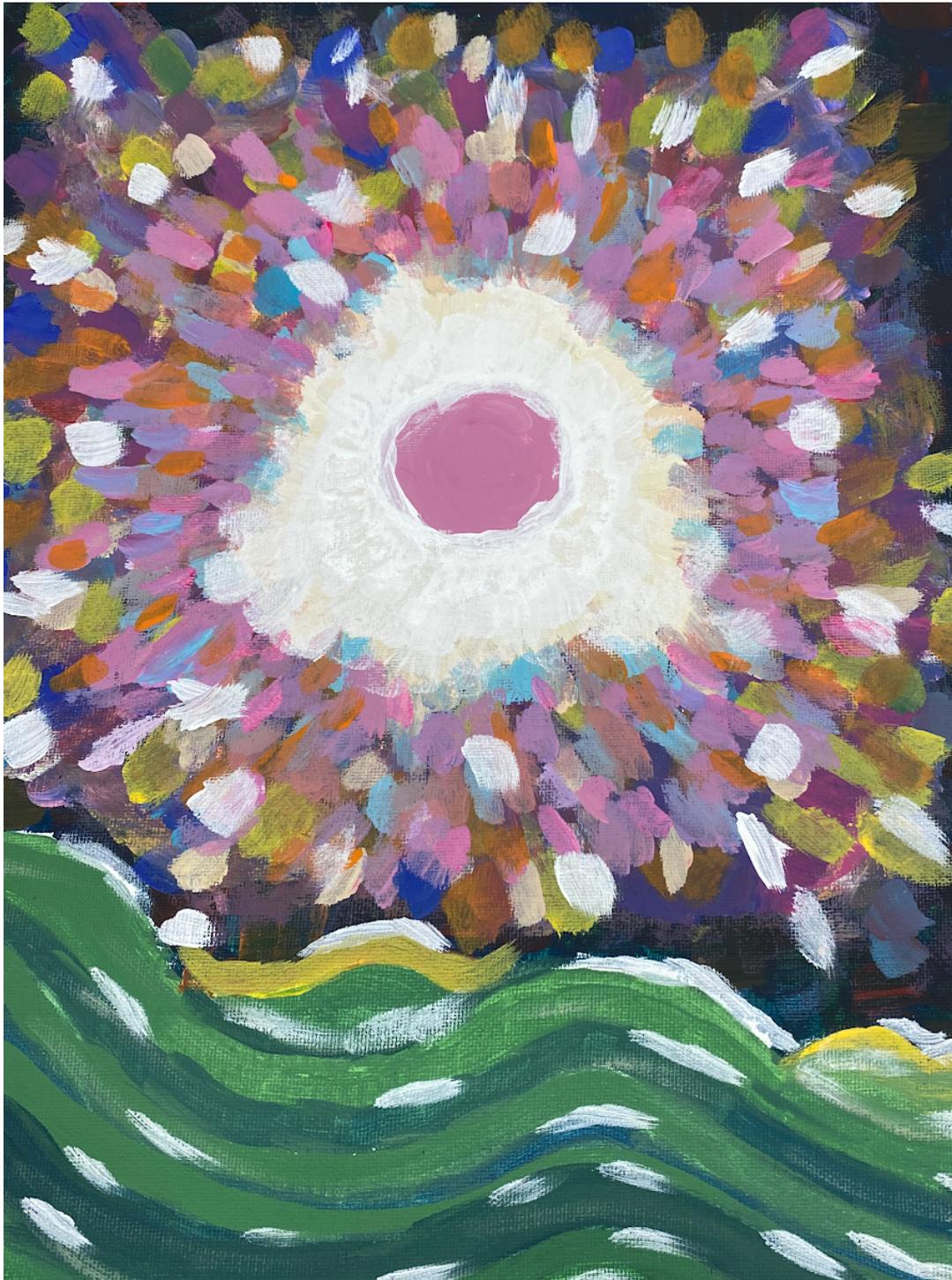
“Washington D.C.” by Alyssa Brown



“Twinkle Toes” by Gabriella Garcia



"The American Farmer" by Katie McClelland



"Sun Rays" by Allison Moody



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