

SpawningPool
Art and Prose Chapbook
Spring 2021

Shippensburg University

SpawningPool is a literary arts chapbook published at Shippensburg University by a small and dedicated team of undergraduate students. It is composed of art pieces submitted by undergraduate students of the university.

SpawningPool accepts rolling submissions throughout the year, and we publish our chapbook every spring semester. *Spawning Pool* is a publication of *The Reflector*, which also accepts submissions year-round, and is compiled each fall semester.

Contact us:

Submissions and inquires: reflect@ship.edu

SpawningPool Art and Prose Chapbook, Spring 2021

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Layout by Hannah Cornell, Nell Behta, Megan Gardenhour, and

Autumn Jones

Cover design by Hannah Cornell

Art Editors

Megan Gardenhour

Autumn Jones

Art Committee Members

Kimberly Braet

Bailey Faesel

Maddie Frain

Sarah Herlia

Elizabeth Peters

Prose Editors

Hannah Cornell

Nell Behta

Prose Committee Members

Karon Banks-Bailey

Hannah Borkenhagen

Emily Dziennik

Caity Kennedy

Julianna Vaughan

Letters From the Editors

In times like these, it's so easy to feel separate, detached, alone. From personal experience, as well as the experiences of those around me, I know that the spaces between us can feel so wide sometimes. That's why I'm grateful to everyone who made this chapbook a reality - Professor Connelly, the Executive Board, and the other members of our committees. Each and every one of them worked tirelessly to produce something special, something necessary. Now more than ever, our creativity, and the courage to share it with others, is so important. Now more than ever, our stories and visions touch the hearts and minds of others who want to feel understood in their separation. Now more than ever, our words and pencils act as a bridge to close those lonely gaps. So thank you, and to everyone out there, our wonderful contributors, artists, and readers: no matter what you're going through, please keep writing and creating. We want to hear you all the way across the void.

Themes

Prose: These stories concern themselves with dreams and nightmares in the sleeping or waking world.

Art: The pieces of art laid before you represent illusions of the mind, body, and soul.

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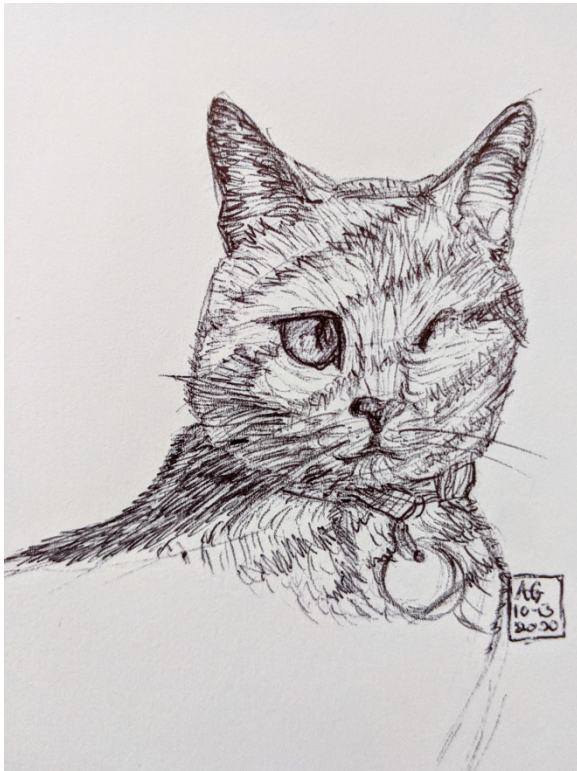
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Untitled

By Autumn Garibay

Wheat Field in Rain

A Tribute to Vincent van Gogh

I always liked the rain. It comes with sensations unimaginable with the sun. Clear blue skies and the vibrant yellow ball of light are things that burns the skin and appear almost daily. There is more mystery in rain. There always has been, and always will be. Light during the day is often more boring. It is easily anticipated and acts almost like a standard. That means that the yellow blue tint that appears is constant, and something that dulls with oversaturation. Clouds, however, make the world darker, yet the trees blowing in the wind remain visible. A veil of gray blue is draped over everything in sight and gives off an indescribable feeling of security.

The wind blew sharply as I walked out of the house. My hands trembled as I stumbled every now and then. My throat felt like it had closed up, leaving me gasping in the manure-scented air. The rain would be starting any moment, but I didn't care about the consequences. To become ill from the cold would be better than spending another moment in the confined, empty rooms of the house.

I can't say why I was so upset. It doesn't matter, though. The symptoms of my illness suffocate the logic of daylight with clouds of paranoia and uncontrollable, unrelenting emotion. Perhaps I had spilled the grains I had collected that day onto the ground. Perhaps I had seen a shadow which frightened me so much, that I spent hours thinking of it, until my fear dragged me out of the cluttered old rooms. Perhaps I had instead done nothing for days on end, and finally grew so repulsed at the mere sight of the same sets of walls, that I needed an escape. For all you know, the reason could be any, all, or none of these things. But the reason doesn't truly matter when it comes to art, does it? My gender, my setting, my name means nothing. The emotion of this moment is what captures the truth of life.

Dust kicked up from my boots with every step, as I made my way down the path, keeping parallel with the grass on my right, as I wove around the rocks. My shoulders were weak as I mumbled to myself what little songs I had heard as a child. The syllables passed through my lips thoughtlessly, as my mind wandered and sent a pang of guttural pain every now and then.

Some may find that their mistakes are able to be shrugged off, but each misspoken word of the old rhymes that I uttered left me full of rage. I wanted to tear through the weak flesh, or otherwise I felt I would scream at nothing. Even attempts to calm my nerves left me more furious than before. I dug my nails into my skin, the pain both agitating me and giving me an outlet that would be less public than a scream.

I looked around at the world. It was all so painfully complex. Each line, each circle, each color, each shadow created a sight that grew increasingly blinding. The dark green of the growing wheat burned my eyes, as the yellowed pathway repulsed every fiber of my being. I gritted my teeth and forced my gaze to stay on only my brown boots and the brown road.

Yet this action did not cease my torture. I found that the sound of my own feet, the deep crunch lift, crunch lift, crunch lift, that came from each footstep felt like a bug crawling down my spine. I muttered louder, but the sound of my voice could not block out the random screeching of birds, nor the swish of wheat

rubbing against each other, nor the dark growl of the wind in my ear. My pace quickened.

The cold in my nose jumped to the forefront of my attention, as did the icy chill in my feet. And yet my clothing clawed at my bare skin. I squirmed as I felt a pinprick of heat or itch flicker across my back. I strained, scratching, and digging into my fabric for release, but I could not reach the damnable spot. Instead, my attempts made my skin burn anew, and ache at any touch. My fury grew unimaginable, to the point where my hands convulsed, and I let out a cry, which was swallowed by the emptiness around me.

Yellow and green and brown blinded my eyes. The scent of manure suffocated my nose. My ears rang with the constant sounds everywhere. My skin crawled at the burning itching pinpricks, and the numbing freezing of my limbs. The fury and anguish that left a bitter taste on my tongue. Yellow and green and brown and manure and crunching and screeching and growling and crawling and burning and freezing and souring and pain. Over and over these senses churned in my mind until I could

no longer think. Yellow and green and brown and manure and crunching and screeching and growling and crawling and burning and freezing and souring and pain.

I close my eyes, but I still see Yellow and green and brown and manure and crunching and screeching and growling and crawling and burning and freezing and souring and pain.

I try to gasp for more air, but I'm met with manure and crunching and screeching and growling and crawling and burning and freezing and souring and pain.

I stop walking, but my ears ring with crunching and screeching and growling and crawling and burning and freezing and souring and pain.

I try to forget, but I still feel burning and freezing and souring and pain.

I spit, but still taste sourness and pain.

I try not to exist, but I still am in pain.

Then, a raindrop. Small, and insignificant, it lands on my nose. I look up towards the heavens, half stopped by the new sensation. Another falls onto my cheek, and slowly runs down. I

thought it would cause me itching, and yet my hands finally stilled. The wind and birds, and wheat became silent, as the simple, predictable sound of rain fell upon my ears. The indescribable, ever elusive scent of rain masked the stench of manure, as I took deep breaths to get a whiff. I stick out my tongue, the droplets falling onto it and removing the dusty dirt-flavor from my parched lips. The colors, before so blinding, paled as the rain covered them. Each aspect of my surrounding, which before had proven so overwhelming, finally dulled. The edges of the stalks of wheat gave way to bare lines. Streaks of green and blue and yellow were all that I could make out of the world. The color made up everything I knew, and yet the beauty became digestible. Each line of hue was part of something bigger, and I felt safely disconnected. Even in such an altered state, disconnected yet connected, it was all so beautiful.

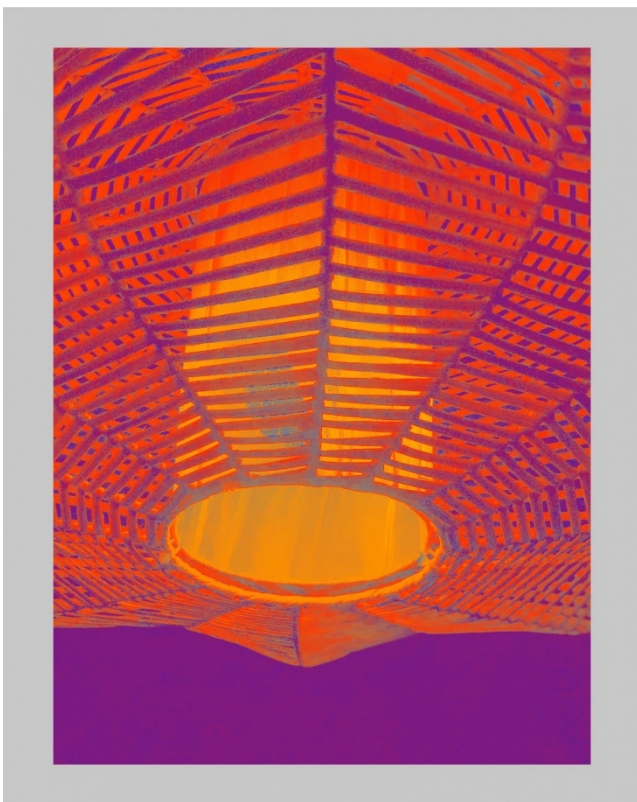
I felt a streak of tears creep down my cheeks, joining the movements and flow of the colors of the world, as I stood in the wheat field in rain.

Isabella Brignola



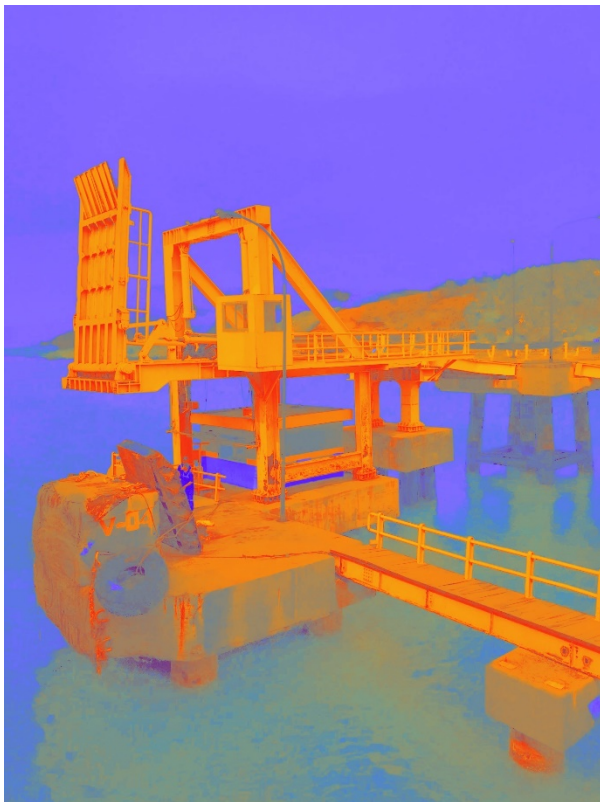
Ultra

By Sarah Herlia



Solar

By Sarah Herlia



Just Another Day

By Sarah Herlia

The Universe in a Car

I thought I would be fine driving home at night.

Admittedly, I was nervous as my father looked at me with those concerned eyes. His face rarely fell so softly, and so the quiet seriousness made me worry. “Be careful going home, alright? Just stay at 60 and you’ll be fine.”

“I’ll be alright.” I promised, my smile still brighter, despite the tightening in my chest. This wasn’t different from anything else I had done. Only a few months after I got my license, I had driven the 15 miles home on busy Friday nights at almost 10pm. I had already driven myself through the three-hour trip back to my dorm after voting at home on election day. Still, I found that I was concerned, since my father was concerned. Maybe it was the fact that every family member of a certain age had warned me to go home safely, but unlike usual, they stressed it with every goodbye, and explained the dangers as if I were a child.

Their fear was not baseless. Just that afternoon I had driven the way from Shippensburg to Reading in the midst of a

constant downpour. Even with the lighter traffic and daylight, I found that it was difficult to see amidst the clouds, raindrops, and foggy windshield. As I walked out of the fancy restaurant to my small gray car, the lack of rain made me more confident. Now that I wouldn't have so much water on the windows, I assumed that the ride would be no different than any other, and that I would be unaffected by the conditions.

When I first drove to Reading, I had prayed the entire way for less cars on the road. To be fair, I came from a city where even when the road is empty, there are ample lights to guide you onwards. In my experience, the drivers around Philadelphia and on the turnpike were speeding, impatient vehicles that served only to make my driving harder. There was the pressure to follow the speed, and when I didn't conform, I found others sudden swerving around me was a consequence that some enacted onto me. Therefore, the emptier the road, the easier it would be for me to drive. Then, of course, my way from my dorm up to Reading only solidified this belief. Driving on the turnpike at 1pm on a Wednesday, most of the vehicles were large, slow moving

trucks that seemed to drench my car even more than the rain. Fog clouded my windshield and made it so, at times, the lights were the only visual I had of the trucks. The entire experience left me seeing that any other people on the road were a hassle and a danger.

This was only compounded by my parent's teachings as I practiced for my license. When I first drove with my mother, she always warned me that I should keep distant from other drivers, and never get so close that I couldn't see the bottom of their tires. This led me to prefer an excessive amount of space between my car and any other obstacles. Then, my father explained as he warned me to be safe that rainy Wednesday night, "I just want you to stay away from other cars. That's what I'm really worried about."

So, as I started to drive down the strange patch of highway, with shops and garages on both sides, I was hoping for little to no traffic. I sipped my drink of coffee, hoping that the caffeine would keep me awake enough to stay completely safe on the way home. I also had my phone blaring music as loud as it

could, stuffed into the cup holder beneath the broken radio. As an avid music lover, I was sure that I would be singing the music loudly and happily the two hours back to my dorm. Eventually, the music had my voice practically yelling the tunes as my foot increasingly stepped on the gas. Looking over my shoulder and back again and again, to simultaneously check the highway to my left, I flew into a lane, and joined a small fleet of cars on their way down the turnpike.

The lights of the cars acted as not only place markers for where they were, but they lit my way just as they lit the other drivers'. Even the flashes of yellow and pale blue coming just above the divider in the highway gave me my bearings. The effect, however, was so subtle that I didn't notice its existence. I lived in a world where there were always others in your lane, lights on the side of the road, buildings just over the barriers, and fleets of cars passing yours in the opposite direction. The ensuing darkness of night affected only the background of the sky, which was an image that, at most, distracted me. So, I blasted my showtunes, and belted "Into the Unknown" as best as my alto voice could.

When I was little, my father told me “You’ve never really seen things get that dark,” as he pulled out of my uncle’s snowy Christmas themed driveway. This was one of the anecdotes of my childhood which I learned to tune out except for when searching for nostalgia. It was a story to me, like that of ghosts and monsters. “Out here there used to be less streetlights, an’ there wasn’t a highway, so there wasn’t much light.”

Wide eyed, I would try to imagine such a thing, but it is difficult to picture nothingness. True darkness must be seen to be envisioned. Besides, part of me disbelieved my father. After all, he isn’t very old, and imagining West Chester that way feels like describing New York City as a small town. To be so far from a highway was something that happened in Texas or Ohio, and to be without streetlights sounded like it was older than Edison. I suppose in going to a school three hours from the major city I called home, I should have expected to see this more. Even at night in the Shippensburg University quad, when I looked up to see a star or two, I never realized I would be somewhere where the roads outside small towns became so strangely dark. I just

stared up at the little balls of light and whispered to my friends how much more there were, and how bright they looked.

I did not see the stars driving to Ship on that Wednesday night. Firstly, there were still clouds that would have blanketed the void in a dismal gray anyway, and so not even the moon shone. If the clouds parted enough to allow some small light to shine through, the harsh beams of yellow, red, and grey would have blocked them out. As I drove further and further from Reading, I found that the lights on the side of the road slowly became less frequent, until the last one whirled past me without my noticing it. The light from the road and the passing buildings still lit my way. Then, the halo of those silent structures trickled out, leaving nothing but shadowy woods in their place. This was fine though, because I still had the other cars around me, and the ones just on the other side of the divide.

Even then, I marveled at the way it looked. As if the world had been photoshopped onto a black background, I noticed the way that everything fell away. All that existed now was the road, the cars on it, and my small little car marching onward

through the night. My mind wandered, and my lips began to still despite the blaring music in the background. Every now and then, the fog that suffocated the road lit up in yellow or pale blue, as trucks drove past, their lights shining just above the divider.

Then the cars were gone. I do not know when, but I know that eventually I reached a stretch of highway where the next slower moving car was too far ahead of me to be seen, and the next speeding car behind me was too far back to reach. The trucks on the other side of the highway became too infrequent, and the woods around gave no light at all. For the first time in my life, the only things I could see were the reflective side of the road and my own hands gripping the steering wheel. My throat no longer attempted to croak out any song as I continued my voyage into a never-ending void of road and reflective tape.

I allowed myself to think just a bit too much. I found my speed, once staying at the limit of 70mph, now slowed to 65, and then 60. Not that it mattered much. No one was there to care what speed I traveled at. For once, I felt completely and utterly alone in a way that was not just emotional, but physical as well.

Civilization could be close, but in that darkness with nothing but myself and the silent beat of “Doubt Comes In,” I felt like I was traveling out of the underworld, just as Orpheus does in the song from *Hadestown*.

My reality melted away. Nothingness surrounded me. I was sitting there, my foot on a peddle and my eyes looking forward, in an eternal loop of road, with the occasional deviation. The turns were the worst. How suddenly the edge of the road twisted in front of my car, so that my heart leapt at the first appearance. My fingers ached as I tightened my grip on the wheel, looking over my shoulder. Never before had I felt so isolated from the world. I dangled on the string of existence which I perceived from my car. I could have been the only thing alive in the world with no knowledge of it. That thought terrified me. If a tree falls in the woods, does it make a sound, or do trees cry out in pain only when they know humans perceive them? If I think, I am, but if I cannot perceive anything but my circle of road car and myself, then what is everyone else?

What do you do if the world has dissolved around you? When all has been lost and the simulation melts away to the hum of a struggling motor and your own terrified breaths, what can you do but drive forward? Time becomes loose and repeats the last minutes again and again. You can't notice this because everything repeats. I was repeating. My thoughts, my actions, my existence was all a big circle that went on and on. The wheels moved in their constant turning, and I turned my car to follow the road. My head ached from overuse, but what did it matter? Eventually, I would need to turn off. I knew my stop, but I began to wonder when it would appear. Signs were incoherent places that might as well be gibberish, and so my imagination painted pictures of an endless hellscape of black tar and yellow painted lines, and a universe dissolving. The entire universe was in that car, for in that moment, I was the only thing left.

And then I saw a sign.

“Shippensburg 25” was written on the top, and I felt my fingers relax. My shoulders drooped, and I took a breath. I had survived the uncertainty of the dark, danger of the rain, confusion

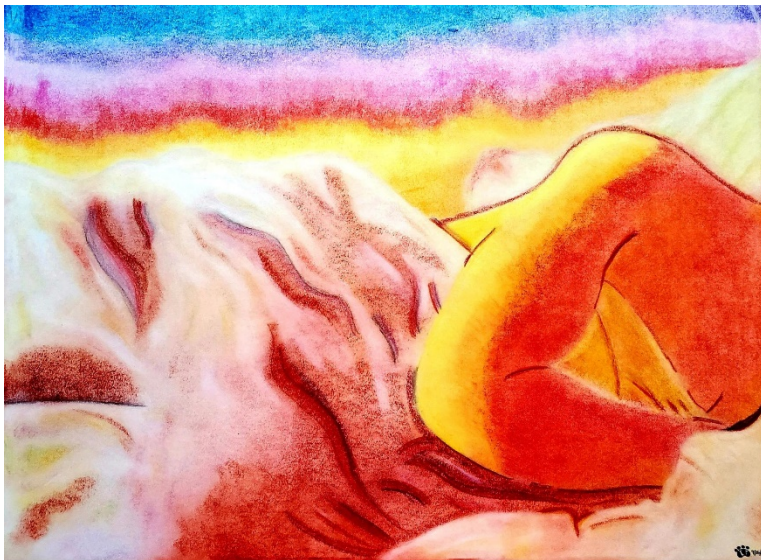
of directions, and creeping of fear and tiredness. When I pulled in the storage lot, it was 10:07, and I was thankful for every light I saw.

Isabella Brignola



Fabric Study #1

By Ernest Fraizer



Once Upon A Time

By Ernest Fraizer



Spice-Chan

By Ernest Fraizer

The Dream Amongst the Nightmare

The first thing I want in the morning is her kiss. The hazy illusions of last night's sleepy dreams melt away under the realization of what I crave. I want her lips pressed tenderly against mine, slow and sensual as she always does it. She knows just how to kiss me in a way that makes my head spin and heart race. Yes, oh yes, she knows just how to love me. She wants to love every curve of my body. My half-asleep mind craves nothing more than to be close to her touch and feel the warm heat of her body pressed against mine. The slow lull of serenity as her heartbeat pulses and my eardrums capture the rhythm. She is my wicked angel, my everything, and my best.

She's the first thing I crave in the morning, alongside my cigarettes and monster energy drinks. Honestly? The energy she pumps through my heart has nothing on the drinks; the nicotine buzz I get from her kisses are worth more than the tobacco's sins. She's my most favorite sin. Sin, oh sin. The way it rolls off the tongue is distasteful. How could a love so gentle, so blissful, be

considered blasphemy? It's cruel to put my salvation in the guise of guilt and shame. It's cruel to put something so light and filled with nothing but innocent intentions and scorn it. There's nothing more I want than to wake up beside her, content, loved, and accepted.

Acceptance. A word so deep it echoes into the breeches of our human psyche. A word so universal in our human need to feel like we belong. It carves itself into our hearts, and in many cases is the root of our bleeding wounds. Acceptance is something some of us seek from outside of us, others of us need to seek it from within. I've accepted myself. I've come to peace with my tender sin. Acceptance is not something that we all have the privilege of. Acceptance is necessary, it's a human need to feel like we have a niche- a family.

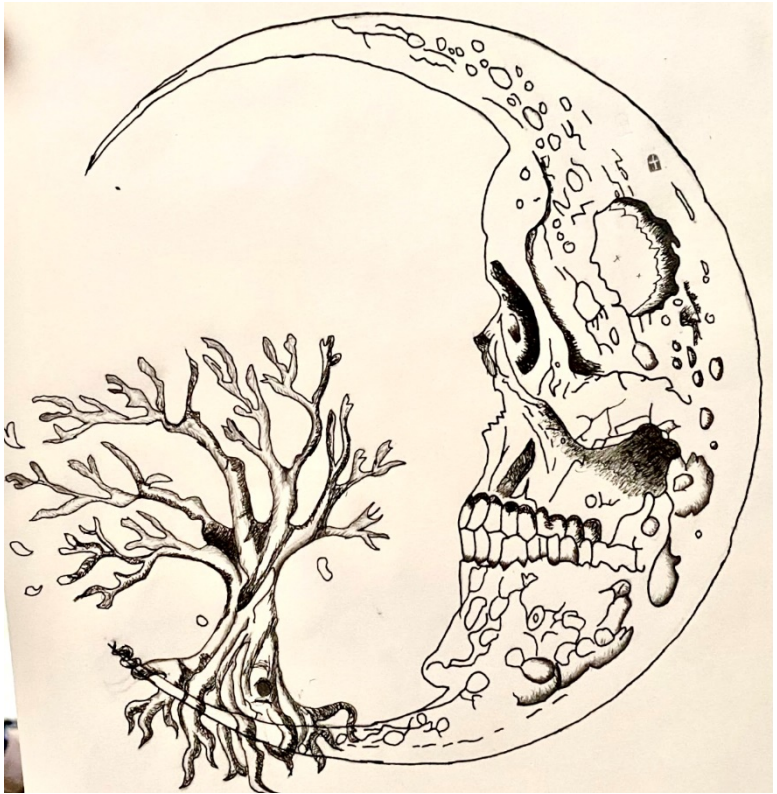
Family. A word so familiar to us all. If acceptance is the blood that runs through our veins, family is the heart pumping said blood. We all have a family of some sort, whether it's good family or bad, water or blood. I love my womb family, truly and honest to the pagan Gods and Goddesses above and below, I do.

Both my parents were active in raising me, all my siblings are there for me, and all my extended family has my love and I know loves me. Love does not always equal acceptance.

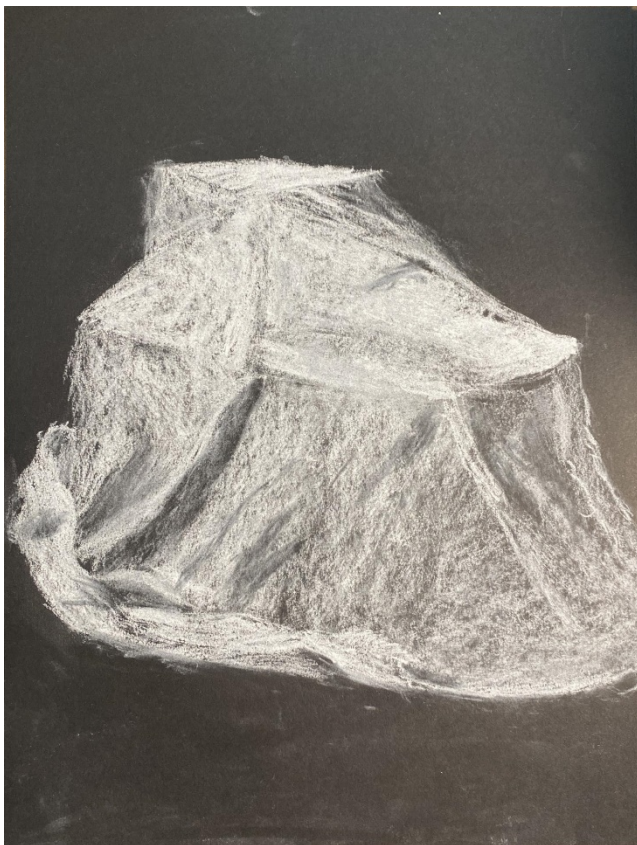
My father loves me, but I know deep down he's disgusted by me. My mother loves me, but she doesn't understand. I know I'm a complicated person, but I'm very straight forward about one thing- I'm not straight. I never was straight. I never will be straight. Yet, that's precisely why I'm in this nightmare. My lover is my divine dream, and the reality of my parent's disgust is the nightmare I'm living in.

My deepest desire is for my family to fall in love with my girl, as I have fallen deeply in love with her. That's my dream inside of a dream inside of a nightmare.

April Petesch



El Ultimo Deseo
By Carlos Mora-Fallas



Desesperación Cubierta

By Carlos Mora-Fallas



Liar

By Elizabeth Peters

The Wheat Field

I wake up with my hands damp with shreds of torn-up pieces of grass. Before opening my eyes, the smell of dampness or- no- almost resembling an earthy smell- overwhelms my sense of smell, and I open my eyes. I realize I am alone. I am alone in presumably a field. My dress- maybe it is the color pink? It is too hard to see because of the night sky staring down at me. It is damp, just like the grass I drop to the left side of me. I wipe my hands against my dress, wondering why and where I am.

I am not afraid but comforted by the pleasant smells that fill me with confidence that I am safe. I look around for inhabitants that could help me. Fields, I presume for miles, since I cannot seem to locate the slightest amount of light. I walk over a few steps as the smell of the earth guides me and gets stronger with every step. I crunch something beneath my right foot. I jump back in fear I hurt something, but I still cannot tell since there is no light. Leaning over and trying to feel for what I stepped on, I suddenly get distracted by an occurrence above me.

Little glimmers of light from far above me become prominent. Each one different in size and brightness. Not knowing what was happening, I looked up at every angle I could look at and found hundreds of thousands of smiling faces looking down upon me. The smiling comforted me even more than I was previously. Some were harder to look at, but some comforted me by guiding me to what I stepped on. I recognize them now as stars as they shimmered towards where I stepped on something crunchy.

And what I stepped on is a piece of wheat. Only the soft part is intact now, as the longer stem is in two. The crunchy part I hurt. I am sorry.

I realize now that I can look around easier. Now that I can see, I am in a wheat field instead of a grass field. The grass has found nooks around each piece of wheat to inhabit, and where I was- a tiny area of tall green grass, not mowed for some time.

I ask my newfound helpers where I am. Their expressions suddenly turned from pleasing to shy. Some began to scatter; others faded rather quickly. Suddenly, it was only me and one star

left. The star looked around and was disappointed about why the others left.

Did I do something wrong? I said out loud.

No, replied the star as he started floating more towards me and dimmed his light. *My sadness is immeasurable. My friends do not understand the importance of supporting others. My dear, you have appeared here tonight because you are confused about what path is right or wrong. You may not know this but walking the steps you already took tonight in this field is galaxies of progress.*

I begin to cry as I understand what the star is saying. I tried to hold it in as best I could, but the star already knew.

Crying is a sign of strength. You should never be scared to show your courage to be vulnerable. When at risk, I will be here to support you no matter what.

The tears stop. I ask the star why all the others left.

The star sighs. *The stars mean well but do not understand the contradiction between supporting someone and actually meaning it. They scatter because some are scared that they may say the wrong thing. Maybe*

I am saying the wrong thing to you right now, but it is worth trying something.

A few stars begin to wander back towards us after hearing his speech, and the glow of this star gets slightly brighter.

Some may take longer to realize the significance of their actions. But know that they mean well and have difficulty expressing feelings. You will know the ones that are true apart from the ones that lead you astray.

I realize what he is saying, and the stars turn up the brightness to see the rows of wheat all around me.

Look around you; each row of the wheat symbolizes the different roads you can take. Thousands of chances. Hundreds of opportunities. With only a few outcomes at the end of every row.

Only a few outcomes?

Yes, a few outcomes to symbolize what will happen in your future. See how every piece of wheat is not perfect- some stems out of place or taller than the rest of the group? There are feelings you may have during times of uncertainty that will happen in your future. We are not designed to fit in a perfect mold. No one is perfect, and that is okay.

Can I know what happens in my future right now?

My child, I wish I could show you and many others. The star takes a big breath of air and blows down all of the wheat stocks. *For now, you decide on your own.*

The stars leave. Everything seems to get blurry, and I awake in my bed. A piece of wheat now sits comfortably in my palm. I close my fingers and wrap them closely together and with a soft voice I say, *Thank you Wheat Field.*

Laura Zemba

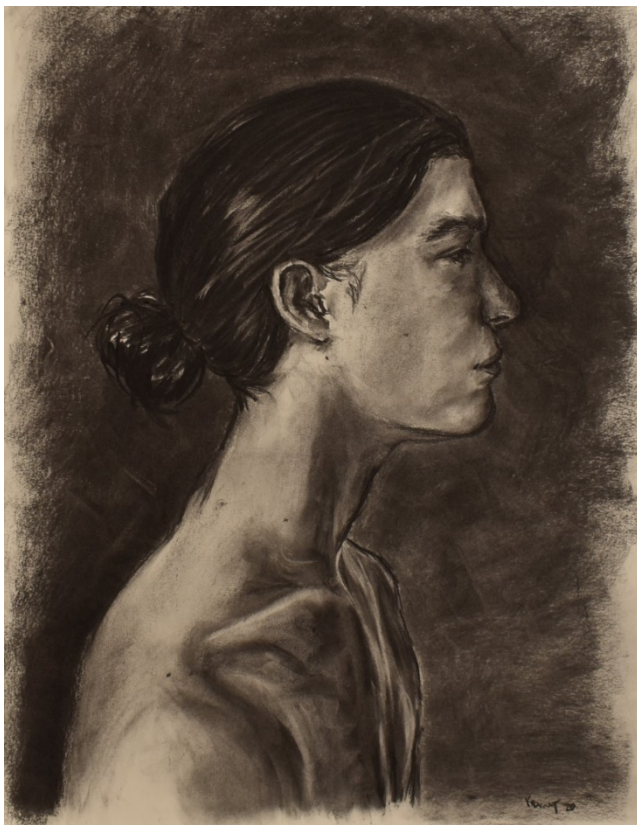


Frustration

By Elizabeth Peters



Bed in Blue
By Kimberly Braet



Steven

By Kimberly Braet

conceit

My limbs were dense and everything inside me was liquified to the point that I was worried my fears may start to trickle out of my nostrils and my tear ducts, flowing like tears that are made of thin air. How can you be cold and hot all at the same time? How can you be drenched in sweat but sure that it will form into an icicle before it falls from the end of you nose? And when that icicle breaks off and slithers down your back, melting against the heat of your skin but taking with it tiny bolts of lightning that ping off of each vertebrae of your spine. Perhaps the darkness that was beginning to consume the very edges of my vision had only made it that far by consuming every other person first because I was alone. It didn't matter that my fear was making me blind. It does not take any form of vision to understand with every single sense that your body has what a depth like that might look like, feel like, if only you could take a few steps closer. But I did anyway. My motivation to edge closer to the form in the distance was not some demented curiosity or a desire to overtake the

unknown, because I had been here before. Again and again I had walked along this plane that moved like water, but did not splash and had a viscosity that reflected the movement of the air and the convulsions of my barely present heartbeat. With each step forward a weight was added to my back and my skin was forced to fight harder and harder to maintain a boundary between the air and everything inside me that was gasping for life. With each step forward my body sank deeper and deeper into the tar beneath me until I was crawling along. Only then did I realize that the distance between myself and the only shape that broke up the darkness was closing, but even with that knowledge I could not make out anything understandable. Do you know when every muscle in your body screams at you to run and you keep moving forward? Do you know when you realize you are edging closer and closer to your own personal horrors but the only thing that can stop you is your own mind? And do you know when you plead with yourself to turn the other way and spare yourself and that force inside of you laughs in your face? That hallow cackle that can be heard by every living thing and echoes in their own minds with the

reverberation of a memory in which they heard it? I'd been here before. I knew that laugh the second it came out of my mouth and broke the deafening silence that only pushed me further into my own cavities. Maybe it wasn't silence. Maybe it was the hallow deafness that comes from too much noise all at once. Noise from within and noise from without.

As I got closer and closer I began to make out the twisted forms and shattered shapes that contorted together every memory I had with my mother into a horrifying display of what was barely perceivable to the human mind as remains. I gazed through her ribs to see that time that she caught me before I fell into the lake. I could feel her arms around my shoulders and the rush of her breath on the crown of my head as she rushed to prevent what could have been a broken bone. As she hugged me from behind her long curly hair fell in front of my face and swung back and forth like the weak vine I was running towards. Now her hair faded to wisps of sinewy vein that floated what felt like upwards as if we were under the surface of the water below me. They only barely held on to the yellowing bone that curved into a skull that

was created from the sewn together pieces of all of the times that she and I walked alongside each other. All of the times that she hugged me back harder. All of the times she promised to protect me. I inched closer to the ragged form but time was slowing down and my muscles were slowly weakening. In her shoulders I could see our laughter. What should have been a beautiful chime of happiness blowing through two souls connected by heartstrings was diminished into a garbled cough full of rot. In each chunk of her spine I could smell the cookies we just baked and the waft of her perfume. But as they reached my nose the tendrils of perfume twisted and wilted until they only resembled fresh soil that had been watered with agony. In her hands I felt the pilling thread of her favorite sweater and the warmth of her life. In that moment it twitched. Barely perceptible but enough to make me second guess the rotted holes that ran through each finger bone. For the first time, I closed my eyes. I squeezed them so hard I thought they might be pushed farther back into my brain until all that was left were two dark sockets that would fill with tears. I don't know how long I held my eyelids in the hope that they would seal. No

memories are good memories when you cannot make new ones. I felt a touch on my wrist. My trembling hand was stilled but I did not want to know how. I stayed like that. It stayed like that. My eyes were ballooning up with suppressed salt and sorrow and they fought hard against my eyelids until they were finally forced open. I stared through the surface below me that danced in the darkness like gasoline, refusing to look at the hand on my wrist. Stop the story. Stop time. I could hear the gritty ticking of her wristwatch and it clicked in my ear like the crack of a spine. I shifted my eyes to follow the sound and found my hand in another. So familiar. Wrinkles and cracks that followed me everywhere and tore my heart in two and pulled me apart piece by piece. And then another grabbed my wrist. I followed the weight that pulled at my arm and found only my own reflection, eyes meeting mine from above the surface that pulled me down.

Kaitlyn McCann



Couch at 9am
By Kimberly Braet

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