

An abstract painting with a complex, layered texture. The background is a mix of vibrant blue, red, and green. A prominent feature is a honeycomb or cellular pattern in shades of red and blue, which appears to be overlaid on the other colors. The brushstrokes are visible, giving the artwork a sense of movement and depth. The overall composition is dense and colorful.

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VENTURE

The Online Literary Journal of Rider University

In 2020, Venture unfortunately took a hiatus due to COVID-19. In 2024, we have relaunched online as a literary journal. Take a look around. We hope you enjoy your stay.

For more information, email us at venture@rider.edu.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

Venture is the online undergraduate literary journal of Rider University. The journal publishes fiction, poetry, and nonfiction that represents the diverse aspects of the Rider community and the larger world. Venture seeks to foster relationships between artists to create conversations about the human experience in all of its beautiful, raw, silly, messy, and profound forms. Our editors and production team are committed to bridging the different communities within Rider to each other, and those communities with the people beyond our campus. It is our hope that the writing and art we present in this magazine will function as a time capsule and be a thrilling venture of its own.

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

When the relaunch of Venture began last semester, the majority of us didn't know what working on a literary magazine entailed. There was a massive learning curve, but the passion that our whole staff and myself have had for this has really brought us to this point, where finally after 4 years, Venture is finally back. I was selected by the rest of the team to become the new Editor in Chief for Venture. I am incredibly grateful for the trust that they have put in me as well as our Web Editor, Ashley Morales, to lead and help bring the journal back in its newest iteration. I am also incredibly grateful for all of the submissions that we received from the Rider community, and just how excited people have been for Venture's return.

We decided that the theme for Venture's return should be Revival. Pieces like Sophia Porter's "Home" and Emily Ivanauskas' "Steady Breathing" do a wonderful job at exploring these themes in ways that I think can resonate with other college students. There are so many other beautiful, profound, and lighthearted works that are in this Spring 2024 issue. I hope you all read and enjoy them just as much as the editors and myself have.

Maura Corman, Editor-in-Chief of Venture

Fiction

The Fiction Editors have chosen works that encapsulate not just the theme of Venture's Spring 2024 edition, but also what it means to be human, and what it means to heal. Breaking the cycle, coming of age, finding new life in the darkest spaces, or finding out it was never there at all. There is no such thing as a beginning without an end before it. Like the sun after a starless night, like a bird rising from the ashes, these stories show what it means to start over again.



The Tale of Night and Day

Carole Cobos

Hello Reader! Allow me to tell you the story of Night and Day, two halves of a whole. Bound by something greater than love, friendship or family. Something with no beginning, something with no end. Something with no name.

Now, play close attention to the story, Reader. It is short but every word counts. Day and Night coexisted long before Day had realized how utterly lovely Night's stars were. So bright, glimmering pinpricks of gentle light amidst velvet darkness. Day was so enchanted that he plucked one for himself. Oh, and how he loved that gentle light. He cherished it above all else, placed it beside him and they shone together. It made for a striking look in the morning, a brilliant star dangling over a softly rising sun. Night was there too, lingering to watch, but being ultimately ushered away by Day. Night left, a star lost.

Day was so taken with the star, with its soothing beauty, that he took another one. Day noticed that Night had been watching as he had taken another star. He looked, trying to gauge Night's reaction, holding the newly acquired star tightly.

Night stayed silent for a moment, as if lost in thought, trapped in an internal debate, and then said, belatedly, "What?"

As if Night was asking, *What are you looking at me for?*

At least, Reader, that's how Day took it. Day grew more confident and simply smiled, brightly, shamelessly, "Nothing!"

The following visit he took another one. And then another. And then another.

He plucked them from the night sky and happily arranged them around him.

Night had watched him quietly, but did not utter a word in protest. At least, not until he

tried to form a constellation with the stars he had taken.

“That’s mine,” Night had protested, sharply and suddenly. “That’s, that’s *mine*.” Day was not impressed by that objection. What’s the harm? Is Night really going to pick a fuss over a *constellation* of all things?

He said as much, “It’s just a constellation, Night. Don’t be selfish.”

Night turned away without a word more, leaving Day to form his own constellation. And despite the newly applied constellation beside the sun, it went unobserved and unappreciated in the day. All that changed was that the days dragged longer and the nights passed quicker.

For a short while, the people on Earth celebrated and threw kisses up to Day. The Day beamed all the brighter. He turned to Night and gloated, “See how they love me? See how they send me kisses?”

Night did not speak a word in reply, but the silence should have spoken volumes. Unfortunately for Night, Reader, Day was not known for keen observation and went on to bask in the affections lavied upon him. It lasted him a short while, a decade or so for you, Reader, but akin to the blink of an eye for Day.

At this point, Night was a mere shadow, a passing reprieve, and Day was almost always. The people of Earth had hid away by then, retreating into their homes miserably. They grew irritable, they spoke in reverent reminiscent tones of when there was a gentle night that embraced and let them rest.

Can you imagine, Reader? To live in Day, and never have a Night that would guide you to bed and tell you to rest? Can you imagine how miserable you would be? Wouldn’t that drive you mad?

Then you can imagine how those inhabitants of Earth felt.

Their grumblings did not please the already weary Day, ragged from constant expectation and shining. It aggravated him. He turned to Night, *turned on Night*, turned in an outburst so violent and explosive, that Night couldn't help but flinch. Day turned to Night and said, "How come you are not splitting the work evenly with me? I'm tired of such relentless responsibility." Oh Reader, Night did not like that one bit.

Night, who had once been so magnificent. Night, who had once been at peace. Night, who had once been *content*. That Night, that very same Night, turned to Day and snarled, "How am I to be upon the world if you had taken the light that bound my darkness together?"

Day understood then the gravity of what he had done, what exactly he had taken. Too late, for sure, but alas. He responded, unapologetically, unaware. "You should have told me to leave your stars alone."

"And you should have asked," Night snaps back. "You've ignored me since the beginning of time and only turned to me when I had something you wanted. Then you *stole* from me. You stole what was mine and you didn't even care that my glowing stars were lost in your harsh unforgiving rays. I should have said 'no', I should have stopped you, and I resent that I felt that I would be burdensome to you. I, I should have done a great deal of things to protect myself, but the fact is, Day, you should have never stolen from me in the first place."

Day looked upon Night, feeling his indignance dampen and grow heavy within him. It became something else, something new. Something alien.

Day suddenly felt as if his light was too bright, too upsetting. He suddenly felt as if the world had crushed down on him and kept him from speaking. He suddenly felt small, and at the same time so horribly, obtrusively *big*.

He looked to Night, who was tattered and nearly translucent and said, still selfish but learning, “I don't feel good. I feel...”

Night looked at him, before saying softly, “You feel Shame. You are embarrassed that you hurt me. It upsets you.”

“You know that sensation well?”

“I feel it all the time.”

“But Night, you've never done me any wrong.”

Night laughs, it's a tired laugh but it's the first time Day ever heard any laugh besides his own. It's lovely, and he wishes he had made an effort to hear it before.

The laughter trails off, curling around like stardust, like magic. Night then says, “I'm afraid that Shame is a condition of my existence.”

And Day felt the terrible feeling of Shame spread through him.

“Is that my fault too?”

“Not you entirely. You're just Day. It's bigger than us both.”

“I don't want to feel like this. I don't want to hurt you.”

Night sighs, “I'm already hurt, Day. Just don't hurt me anymore. Then, if you're lucky, you won't feel like this anymore.”

“I won't hurt you anymore,” he promises. “I'm sorry.”

Night didn't say a word, but somehow still managed to sound skeptical.

Eager to prove himself, Day reached around him and gently gathered the beautiful stars and set about returning them to where they belonged.

“I know this won't undo the damage, but I swear to consider you onwards. I swear to return your gentle goodwill.”

“To the future then,” and Night did sound a little more cheerful.

Day could not enjoy it too much though. He was a little confused. “If you're Night and I'm Day then who's The Future?”

Night glimmered, “That's us. Together.”

Day beamed softly, careful of his overwhelming rays, “I see.” Silence stretched and before they could go their separate ways once more, Day said, quickly, urgently, “I wish I hadn't hurt you.”

“Me too.”

Day said, again, because it was important that Night knew he wasn't malicious. It was important for Night to feel safe. “I didn't mean to. I didn't realize. I didn't think. I'm not trying to redeem myself but I swear I didn't mean to.”

“Oh, I know, Day,” and Night did sound understanding, comforting. “No one has taught you to consider Night. It's alright.”

“But you've never treated me in such a way.”

How can Night forgive Day when Night has never done anything to deserve his accidental brutality? Was Day just born selfish? Was Night born surrendering? As if knowing his mind, Night answered, “Well, all I've been taught was to consider Day. I suppose we've both been ruined just a bit.”

“But we know better now,” Day offered hopefully. “I won't hurt you and if I do, in any capacity, you won't let me, right? And then we'll stop feeling Shame?”

Night descended upon Day in a flurry of darkness and embraced him. That, sweet Reader, was the first ever eclipse.

Night's velvet darkness covered the Earth and soothed the Day. Like Day, she was necessary, and has existed unappreciated for so long. But now she was back, and she was full of love and hope and she was embracing Day and maybe things would change from them on.

Hopefully. What do you think, Reader? Do you think so? You do, don't you? They're just children, you know. Their time is yet young.

The little people on Earth looked in, and cringed, and cheered, and all they saw was a total eclipse. A ring of stardust surrounding the long forgotten moon and marking the brilliant revival of Night.

As The CD Skips

David Collins

There's not much that can be said about my father, both for the fact that he was a simple man and that he's been dead for twelve years. Nobody at this wake knew James, the man he became after he died, and since neither my sister nor mother bothered to show up, that would never change. Sitting in the back of the funeral hall, grief and mourning staining my scarred face, I watched with clenched fists how everyone else lamented over his body. Ire crept up my spine as I saw this horde weep over a shell, shedding tears for a husk that lacked neither the soul of my father nor the fragmented consciousness that he became.

I had yet to see James' corpse, and it wasn't until the crowd quit that I finally gathered the courage to look at his casketed cadaver. Making my way to the coffin, I spotted with morbid accuracy how the white makeup that Death had caked upon his face illuminated his once gentle cheekbones. Shifting my eyes to the floor, I chuckled solemnly, remembering the night he caught my sister and I applying mascara to each other. I can still recall how violently she sobbed as he set her makeup ablaze in the backyard, and I can still hear his drunk voice slurring out, "This is what you get for trying to make your brother a queer!"

'He wasn't always like that...' I thought to myself as I kneeled down to pray. Beneath his casket, I prayed for a clear mind. I prayed for the ability to remember the good man he once was, but as I scoured the trenches of my mind for evidence of this claim, his warmth evaded me.

Pictures of my father hung about the funeral home, taunting me with their saccharine depictions. These photographs, all digitally touched up and Hallmark-ified, lacked the violent bitterness that I had learned to associate with him. In their perfection, though, I found myself

locking my gaze upon the warmth of a specific holiday photo. Without warning, the memory of the last night I spent with my father ambushed my mind, flooding those once navigable trenches.



I remember the hot humid air of the Summer's evening weighing me down as I entered my home. I was ten years old, yet my muscles ached with octogenarian pains after a long day of trips, slips, and slides. The airconditioner, set at a never-changing 65 degrees, had sucked the water out of the air, snatching the water from your nose and mouth violently. Despite this, the walls carried an oppressive dampness and the floorboards felt moist below my feet.

Climbing the stairs, I heard a righteous battle of genres occurring throughout the house. To my right, in the first room from the stairs, sat my sister, reading some dark graphic novel while listening to My Chemical Romance's "Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge". I dared not to enter her room nor look at her possessions, still haunted by the nightmares inflicted when she made me watch the second Saw movie with her.

Similarly, around the corner in the vacuously large living room, my father listened to the Dropkick Murphys "The Warrior's Code" album on repeat. Never having gotten the chance to go to Ireland, my father associated himself with everything Irish that he could, a trait that made many surprised when learning that he had never been to Boston.

As I made my way to the living room, I saw my mother sitting on the couch with a melancholic look upon her face. My father, sitting on the couch opposite of her, rose from his seat and walked to the kitchen, kicking the beer bottles and pizza boxes out of his way during his voyage. I could smell the beer escaping from his breath and how its scent gripped tightly to his clothes. I could feel the tension in the air, and I was scared that I had somehow caused it. I saw that my mother had her shoes on and seemed anxious, darting her eyes back and forth throughout

the room.

Returning from his alcoholic trek, my father grabbed me by the arm and pulled me to the couch with him. Holding two beer bottles in his other hand, he thrust one in my face. “You’re old enough now to drink, so drink!” he barked, causing my mom to rise to her feet.

“Jesus James! What the fuck is wrong with you? He’s just a boy, leave him out of this!” she shouted back, reaching for my shoulder before my father pushed her away. “That’s the problem! The world is going to hell, he needs to be a man! I’ll make him a man!” he commanded. Beneath their towering bodies I cowered, feeling every action in slow motion.

“Get away from him James! We’re leaving now!” my mother yelled, both begging and instructing.

I felt the room change, and I saw a large shadow weigh upon me. Separating me from my mother, James ordered me to drink the now warm beer clasped in my hands. Afraid of what would happen if I didn’t, I took the cap off and downed a full sip to make my father proud. It felt cool and refreshing going down my throat, but upon the taste setting in my senses became overwhelmed, not being able to rid themselves of the disgusting flavor that haunted me. Vomiting on his shirt, James snatched the bottle from my hand and turned to my mother.

“See what you did? You’re upsetting him!” my mother yelled. It was around this time that I noticed my sister standing in the doorway, hoping the darkness would conceal her. “You want to see upset? I’ll show you upset!” my father bellowed as he drew his hand back. From this point the series of events that followed, despite my first hand experience of them, escaped me. Perhaps for my own protection, perhaps for theirs, my mind refuses to let me return to that place.

Recalling as best as I can, I see my mother standing over my sister, hugging her and

crying. I see the two of them rising to their feet and I see my mother reaching towards me. I see my dad come between us, and I see my mother and sister abandon the house. My memory begins to clear after this, I can remember clearly how my father chucked his phone at the door as hard as he could, screaming obscenities for an audience that wasn't there.

With my mother and sister gone and James' phone in pieces at the door, I had no way to escape this warzone. I was alone, the man that I had called dad was gone, and I was trapped beneath the weight of a stranger's wrath. Wrecked with fear, I found myself sitting motionless on the couch, refusing to speak or look at him. For hours the only sound present in that dark living room came from the broken CD player on the nightstand, playing the same Dropkick Murphys album tirelessly.

After some time, he eventually turned on the tv. With its bright beams shooting throughout the room, I shifted myself backwards onto the couch, laying down and turning my gaze towards the ceiling. The paint chips, forgoing their decay, danced above me in the light of the television's iridescent rays. In their fluorescent vibrations I saw a world beyond my own, a world I wished to be a part of. This beauty, though momentary, helped me forget about the terror of my situation and helped me gain the courage to look at my father.

Upon seeing him, the first thing I noticed were how his pupils rolled back into his head and how his eyelids fluttered. 'He's high', I remember thinking to myself. A month prior to that night my father had overdosed in his sleep, prompting my mother to teach me how to recognize the symptoms of drug abuse in case it happened while we were alone. I spotted the culprit in his hands, a heavy looking pill bottle, but as I watched him pass between the veil of consciousness, I was unsure what to do.

In his sleep, a series of drug induced muscle spasms spilt a waterfall of chalk invaders from the medicine bottle in his hand. Sprawling out in every direction, the horde of cut Xanax blocks and cheap painkillers hid themselves among the savage jungle of half filled beer bottles, filthy clothes, and empty food containers that obstructed the floor. Afraid of what might happen when he woke up, I threw myself across the room in a vain attempt to find all the tablets, spilling numerous bottles in the process. With sweat and nerves loosening my grip, each capsule I found seamlessly slipped through my fingers, running further and further away each time.

It took a few moments, but eventually I was able to calm myself enough to get back to the task at hand. I measured my progress in songs, hoping that despite how scared I was that I'd be able to find three pills through the duration of each track. I knew that he'd wake upon its end, and that the ceasing of Ken Casey's voice would signal the ceasing of my peace.

The album had finished and the room was eerily silent by the time I found enough pills to satisfy my fears. Slowly making my way to my father's couch, I cautiously stared at his eyes, waiting for them to open. Hesitating for a moment, I decided to reach out and began pulling the pill bottle from his clammy palm. Noticing no reaction in his body, I slowly began to pour the pills back into the bottle and placed it on the floor near the couch.

Suddenly, as I began to rise from the floor, I felt a weight on my shoulder. All parts hairy and sprawling, I feared some demon spider had crawled upon me in the dark of the night, but all I saw was my father's hand. Turning towards my dad, I readied myself for whatever curses he threw at me, preparing my sense of self-guilt. Waiting for the inevitable, I sat there watching the dark shadows explore his now bony facade, noticing the flickering of his eyes and the cold rasp coming from his throat. Without warning, I felt myself pulled towards his chest and heard his voice grow warm. Hearing the voice of my father for the first time all night, I remember him

saying,

“It’s ok Junebug... tell your sister it’s all going to be ok”.

Upon hearing this, my eyes began to water. I had hoped that he’d keep talking, that he’d never leave me again, but that comforting voice was soon replaced by a guttural fog of beer and bile.

As I shifted my eyes away from him, I locked my gaze onto the family photo hung upon the wall. Behind a half broken picture frame, I saw my sister and I shoulder to shoulder, with our parents standing above us in front of our bright Christmas tree. The photo, even in this dark room, radiated bright orange rays down upon me, and for a brief moment I felt as if I could smell the pine and vanilla scent escaping from its frame.

Looking back and forth from the picture to James, the tears finally escaped my heavy heart. Kneeling against the couch, bound in lacrimation, I grabbed his arm and wrapped it around myself. I pulled myself into him, despite my fears and repulsion, and for the last time felt the comfort of my father’s presence.



Yanked back into the present, I found my body locked before the coffin, crying hysterically. Tears dropped down upon James’ body, smearing the preservative that embalmed his face. Not daring to face anyone, I quickly composed myself and rushed out of the funeral home to my car.

Overcome by a swarm of past pains, I found myself instinctively making two stops before I returned home. The first was at the local music store, where like a ghost I glided down the aisles, grabbing a copy of that old Dropkick Murphys CD and a crappy, worn out disc player. Neither speaking nor looking at anyone, I left a fifty dollar bill on the counter and returned to my

car just as swiftly as I had left. The second stop I made, pulling over on that sad and desolate highway, was at a rundown liquor store. Standing hesitantly on the other side of that portcullis, I asked the cashier for the cheapest, worst tasting beer he had. He must not have heard me, as when he pulled an ancient cardboard container from the display refrigerator behind him I saw an obscene price appear across the cash-register's front. Letting out a sigh, I once again entered a dream-like state where before I knew it I was back at my apartment.

Dashing past my roommates, silent as the night, I dragged my chair towards the middle of my bedroom and sat down before the window. With the sunset on the horizon, I plugged in the CD player, tore open that box, and allowed the nostalgia to wash over me. Through a feedback-ridden static, I discerned the lyrics of "The Green Fields of France", and as I sipped the cold beer, my throat rejected it just as it had twelve years prior.

Surrounded by my anxieties; the pounding in my heart, the twitches in my hand, the sweat upon my brow, I continued to drink that piss-flavored yeast. Crushing the can in my hand upon downing the last gulp, I noticed how the aluminum cut into my palm. Seeing the glossy crimson droplets race from my veins, I mustered a half laugh that my tears drowned out, and as the CD skipped I felt my father's presence for the last time.

Breathless

Michael Keahon

Six year-old Max leaned on his elbow and gazed out the window of a truck driving alone on a forest road. Tree trunks whizzed by in pulsing blurs, which made his head sleepy. He peeked through the canopies to the looming waves of sea-blue mountains, rolling over a boundless carpet of green. Max's father, Tom, looked ahead and grinned wide from behind the wheel.

"I guarantee it! You're gonna enjoy this place. It's really something."

"Okay. How much longer?"

"Nearly there. Ten minutes or so."

Max sighed and refocused on the trees. This wasn't the first time he and his father drove like this together. To Max's initial excitement, and eventual boredom, his father liked to take him on fishing trips. But, *this* trip would be special. His Dad said so. Yet the thought of fishing made Max more sleepy and he looked out the window. He imagined basketball players passing and weaving between the trees, until the rumbling truck lulled him to sleep.

Dirt and pebbles crunched under the wheels and hunting equipment rattled in the bed behind them. The path dipped down and over a hill. The truck made a *CLANG* and startled animals that dashed into bushes. The jolt shook Max awake, but he soon heard the sound of rushing water from somewhere in the dense wood. Tom slowed the truck and raised his head to listen.

The forest was thinning. Sunlight filled in the open space and Max felt like he could breathe deeply again. He thought the land looked like a big bowl of popcorn as huge rocks

erupted and clumped on the earth. The truck lurched again, clinging to the path further down and around the larger boulders. The whisper of water grew louder, climbing to a roar.

They finally emerged into a clearing and Max saw where the roar came from. He threw open the door and ran to get a closer look. A large river had cut through the mountain stone, breaking and spilling into steep falls. The water foamed white, rabid, and spit clouds of mist hanging in the air. Sunrays painted rainbows above the rocks. Tom called out to Max.

“Don’t go any closer! Ground’s slippery and the current’s rough.”

Max halted and peered over the side to watch the river. The water flowed endlessly and it entranced him. He’d seen nothing like it before. His family went to the beach last summer, but that was a different kind of water, and a different kind of endless. Max’s ocean was flat, calm, wrinkling in long waves that rolled gently and fizzled into the sand at his ankles. This violent water was out of place in the quiet mountain, or perhaps instead, it was a pulsing heart. Max imagined someone upstream turning a knob to cut the current, letting it eventually slow to a trickle...and then...stop.

He then remembered his mother’s watering hose and how she’d let him give drinks to her marigolds and roses. His parents had both come on the trip, but she said that she was feeling a bit car sick and decided to hang back at camp. She told Max that she’d tend to the fire, fix up their gear, *and* that she couldn’t wait to hear about his father’s old “favorite place” when they get back.

Dark slender things peaked out from the foam of waves, but Max couldn’t tell what they were. He squinted and saw heads of fish. Big ones, it looked like. They swam against the current that fiercely fought them back. Tom pointed to a group of them and Max watched, squealing in excitement.

“Look! They’re jumping right out the water!”

“Yeah. Big leapers ‘round here. They gotta be if they wanna get past the falls.”

Max looked from the tiny fish heads up to the ferocious waterfall above them. They looked like, to Max’s amusement, himself attempting to perform a layup at his brother’s highschool court. That net was so far away.

“Well, what’s up there?”

“They have to get upriver to calmer waters. To lay their eggs and make more fish. All the fish we can see, they were all born there.”

“Oh! Fish eggs,” said Max. He wrinkled his nose. “They’re making babies. Gross.”

The fish sprung in the air, flipping their tails wildly before falling back to the waves.

“It’s way too high for them.”

“They’ll get there,” said Tom. “Just wait a while. You’ll see.” He started toward the truck.

“Come help me unload stuff in the meantime.”

Max stared a moment longer before skipping over to help his father. Tom walked to the back of the truck and opened the bed. He hauled out a folding chair, threw it under his arm, and handed a smaller one to his son.

“No rods?” said Max.

“We don’t need ‘em today,” Tom said with a smile.

Max shrugged. He heaved his chair and followed his father. They set the chairs down facing the river, safely on the bank. Tom walked back and grabbed a hefty cooler, settling it down next to his seat. He sat next to Max, opened the cooler, and grabbed one of the few beers from the ice. They sat quietly and watched the fish jump.

Tom took a sip of his drink and leaned forward in his chair. He watched Max stare at the rushing water, the leaping life.

“Beautiful. Isn’t it, Max? My father took me here when I was a boy, you know.”

“Really?”

Max couldn’t picture his father as a kid, but he remembered being shown an old album with faded photos of a boy with a wide grin. The smiling boy had a missing front tooth and wore a sun hat with a long brim that was much too big on him. He stood holding a large fish in front of the rapid white falls.

“Yeah. I was eight,” said Tom. “This was his favorite place. Then it became *my* favorite place.”

“Can it be my favorite place, too?” said Max.

“Of course. That’s why I brought you here. So you can see it.”

“Then it’s mine, too!” Max slapped his knee.

“I wish you could have seen how it was when I was young, though.”

“Why?”

“There were a lot more fish then. The factories they built dump chemicals in the water. It makes the fish sick, so there aren’t as many now.”

“They should shut them down!”

“I think so, too. But there’s still lots of fish left. They’re very tough.”

Tom took more sips of his beer and placed it down. He pointed again. “Look. They’re jumping higher now. Almost reaching the top.”

“Wha– they are!”

Max watched the fish launch themselves into the air, flapping their tails to propel themselves up, up, up. Their fins pumped madly and pushed on the wind. At the peak of their jump they seemed to hang, just a split moment, frozen in the air.

“It’s about time. They’re almost doing it,” said Tom.

“Doing what?” said Max.

“You’ll see. Just watch.”

The fish leapt far up like scaly, writhing rockets over the water and ghostly rainbows. Max sat quietly while time seemed to move slower, icier than before. The jumps were long and high as more fish took hold of the air, until they were pulled back down. Finally, one large fish, gasping and sparkling under the sun, jumped clear over the top of the falls.

Max drew a gasp. The fish never splashed back down, but it kept on going. And going! The fish soared above the water, thrashing about until it found a current of air to ride. It settled itself safely inside and swam freely far above the river. Max found his breath and jumped up, pointing and tugging at his father’s vest.

“Dad! Dad! Look! The fish is flying! It’s flying!”

“Yes it is. And the rest will, too. Watch.”

Just as his father said, Max saw the fish— one, then another, and more— take to the air. They shot out of the water and did their flailing dance before adjusting to the wind and collecting together into schools. They swam in lines and groups, turning and flowing, and some veered off to swim around before joining the rest.

Max awed as a current brought a group of fish over his head. They fluttered above, casting down shadows and drops of river water over the two onlookers. Max and Tom held their

arms over their faces to shield themselves from the fishy rain. Looking up at the scene, Max felt like he was underwater. A diver on land. Breathless.

“Amazing every time,” said Tom. “Like I said, *this* is my favorite place.”

“Me too,” said Max.

The father and son stood silent for several minutes watching the fish swim above their heads with looks of wonder. Max’s eyes were sore after looking for so long, and from looking towards the brilliant sunlight and silhouettes above. After a while, Tom took another sip of his beer and turned to his son.

“We have to go. Your mother is expecting us soon.”

“Ok,” said Max, not looking down.

“Let’s wrap this up then. We’ll have to bring some back to her. One second.”

Tom turned around and walked back to the truck. Max didn’t move, or look to see Tom return with a rifle. He began loading the magazine.

“These aren’t regular fish, so I’ll have to get them this way.”

Max turned and saw the gun. His eyes and cheeks whitened. “You’re killing them?!”

“Just a couple, for us to eat tonight. Your mother’s going to grill some over the fire.”

“No. You can’t!”

“Max, we’ve gone fishing before. It’s the same thing. What’s the problem?”

“It’s not the same. You’re killing them! Like the factories!”

“No. Those places poison the fish. We’re only having a few to eat.”

“But they need to get back home! They want to make new babies. They tried so hard.”

“I understand that, but we have to eat. Do you want to be hungry later?”

Max didn't care about hunger. "You can't kill them, too. There's not as many now. You said so!"

"Don't worry 'bout that. There'll be plenty flying around when we leave." Tom gripped his rifle and flicked off the safety. "Now, stand back and cover your ears."

Max started to protest before Tom raised the gun to a school passing overhead. He tracked their paths smoothly with the barrel, glancing down to the ground to watch their shadows drift over the rocks. Max cupped his ears as Tom fired a number of rounds into the group of fish.

Blood sprayed as the shots bore through the meat. Max watched two of the fish fall to the earth. They landed with a heavy *THUD* and writhed on the ground, gasping with horrid open mouths. The rest of the group scattered, swimming in sporadic directions until they recaptured the currents of the wind and swam away.

"Aye. Still not too bad a shot after all," said Tom. He opened the cooler next to his feet and took the other beer from the ice. "Let's go bring them back to camp. Max, grab that one near you."

Max was silent. The feeling of flight crashed down like the animal on the ground before him. Even though he covered his ears, the ringing still blotted out the world.

"Okay."

He walked several steps to where a fish still flopped frantically on the rock. Water and blood pooled on the stone underneath it and the wet scales still glistened like gems in the sun. He watched as the fish's spasms slowed and weakened. It took empty breaths, silently opening and closing its lips. Nothing to say.

The fish lay on its side and Max saw its large eye, clear and colored like a gleaming marble, open to the sky. It barely moved as he got closer. In the reflection he saw the silhouettes

of the other fish soaring above their heads. A mirror– the blue of the sky, the white wisps of clouds, the scaly black rockets– showed in the glassy eye until the fish finally stopped moving altogether.

It was too quick. Just a moment ago he watched the schools ebb with the wind, their collective dances a magnificent journey. He looked up to the other fish still swimming above him. Although he was still there, still watching them, the feeling he had before the shots rang out felt like an old dream. The screech in his ears subsided and he listened to his own shallow breaths.

Max made a decision then. He will return to this place someday, but he will come alone.

The boy hoisted the slimy thing into his arms and gave it to his father, who stuffed it into the cooler and loaded it on the truck. They climbed in and drove off toward the forest road. Max sat, without saying a word, watching the shadows of the fish flying above blend into the darkness of the canopy. He listened to the roar of the water hush into a whisper as they were once again engulfed by the quiet mountain woods.

barren

Nick Kelly-Wilson

A world exists within myself, burrowed deep within my intestines and nestled upon my pelvic bone. It is small, and vastless, and in itself has all of the answers to every question that hasn't been asked yet. It is solely me, something I grew and created my whole life and something that, one day, could maybe make something bigger than myself, bigger than itself. It settles, heavy and weightless, in the center of my being, pulling me into its gravitational field and holding me close, embracing me with phantom limbs that hold the broken pieces of myself together with a promise of a better tomorrow.

My featherlite touch caresses the outside of my world, hidden behind a thick layer of cellulose, muscle, tissue, fluid, that cocoons it safely inside of me.

"What are you doing?" he whispers in my ear, a smile dancing on his lips and sinking into the skin of my cheek, burrowing in and enveloping me in adoration.

"Atoning," I whisper back, the barest hint of pain riding the waves of my voice, traveling their way over the fake leather seats, the iced metal of the side walls, the gray curls barely showing above the seat three rows ahead of us bouncing with every bump, slithering through them, up over and around the ancient bus to nestle into his ear. "Praying."

"Praying?" he whispers, his hand leaving its isle of solitude, joining mine on the outside surface of my world. "To whom?"

"To us. To the world I've created, that we've created," I breathe, the proclamation a prayer itself. "To life and a world and tomorrow and *us*."

"Do you want to test for it?" he asks, hope behind his eyes and layering every facet of his voice, oozing against my iron will.

“No. It is there. I can *feel* it. *You* can feel it,” I say, grabbing his hand, the smooth skin sliding under my t-shirt and resting upon the crest of my belly button, flesh on flesh on a universe. Maybe, if I push his hand deep enough into the firm skin covering our world, he wouldn’t need to doubt. No test can fully encompass, no mind truly comprehend my world. “You need to believe. Feel the swell, the firmness, the *promise*”

His eyes meet mine, and there is nothing extraordinary about them. They are blue, just blue. But they are my blue, and I know that blue like I know my own name. They are not something to get lost in, but something to bring you home. Our eyes are locked, both caught on this precipice of the promise of tomorrow, hands and fingers intertwined on the swell of my stomach, protruding only just slightly, when he is ripped from me, or maybe I am ripped from him, and I am careening across the seats, cracking and collapsing against the roof.

~ ~ ~

Agony, noun: Very great suffering, either physical or mental. A word that, in and of itself, is just a word, with two vowels and two consonants and one maybe, a word that does absolutely nothing to convey the sheer magnitude of ripping and cutting and burning and pain.

I can feel my lifeblood, the cosmos and stardust seeping out around me in a puddle of molten mercury. My lungs are filling with stars, burning bright and consuming all, and all I can do is lie here blind, sputtering and gasping and suffocating, the pain too intense to remember anything except for the intense galaxy of my body, for the world in my stomach.

A world that is on fire. It is *burning* and my eyes are glued closed with tears that I can’t shed, and I am vomiting up full iron bars and choking on my riches.

Someone is calling me, screaming my name, screaming for me to wake up, and I am hoisted into a pair of arms, my arms ledden and reaching out towards my resting place I was stolen from, aching for a peace that could drown me in my own blood.

The pain radiates from my thigh, a piercing and throbbing sort of pain that travels down and in and up and out, that burrows into my ribs and spikes in my head and suffocates in my lungs. That burns my world, on fire, hot and raging, simmering and steaming.

I can feel it fading, like I can feel myself fading. If the creator, the mother, dies, what chance does her creation stand?

~ ~ ~

My eyes peel open, corner by corner, one by one, until I am back where I started, blue eyes locked into my eyes. But no, I am not where I started. I am in a small cramped room, and he is covered in blood, eyes coated in tears, clutching his arm to his chest in the way I was clutching at my stomach earlier: desperately, as if it is the only thing in the world that matters, that is physical and plausible.

I can't blink. The immense feat of opening my eyes must've drained all of my will to live, will to retain any semblance of autonomy out of me, because *I can't blink*.

In fact, I can't feel myself, I can't wiggle my toes, or twitch my fingers, and my stomach is hollow and I can't hear my heartbeat over the blaring siren, the beeps and frantic words.

"Clear!" someone shouts. Someone who I can't see or identify, since they are on my right, and my eyes are paralyzed in place, locked with the rivers of his, and he is crying out my name and, wow. I've never seen him cry like this before and

pain,

and nothing. I felt the jolt, the hundreds of volts sprinting through my muscles, into the sinews of my tendons and the marrow of my bones, causing my chest to rise and fall not with breath but with electricity, but luckily it is over now and I am still still and I still feel nothing and maybe this isn't the worst thing that could happen.

He's not looking at me anymore. Why isn't he looking at me? I miss his eyes, my home, and I want to see his eyes again.

"Clear!" My eyes are desperately reaching out to his, but his head is down and again, there is nothing, but

pain, again, shocking and flowing and racing, and then

nothing. The alarms are still blaring, a siren ringing, someone is pushing up and down on my chest, and the explanation floats up from the back of my mind. Compressions. They're doing compressions on me and I can't feel them, and I am dying. Am I already dead?

I look at him, and his head is still bent. God, do I miss his eyes. His arm is still bent, unnaturally, but he has the fist connected to his injured arm clasped in his good one, resting on his lap, head bent down, eyes closed, and his mouth is moving.

He's praying.

"Clear!"

He's praying not to a higher power that doesn't exist, an unknown unproven deity, but he's praying to us, he's praying to me, he's praying to my world.

"Save her, please. She is my whole world, just please, please."

Pain.

A steady beating rhythm, a heartbeat, starts as a black hole eats away at everything that ever mattered, ever existed, and while I am something, I am feeling and I am something, my eyes come crashing down and I am filled with absolutely nothing.

~ ~ ~

The droning of a machine rouses me. I can't remember where I am. Where am I? I feel tingling, like a million little butterflies are crawling inside of my veins, looking for a way out. I creak my eyes open, the action feeling like some form of repetition, and spot him, hunched in a hospital chair, looking intently at a monitor in front of me.

I notice we are not alone, there is someone, a doctor in a white coat dragging something across my belly, something cold and is it the thing that is cold or am I? Images of blood and bone and shocks and prayers flood my mind, and I am frozen again, searching for the world inside of myself.

“See? There's nothing in there,” the doctor says. My eyes, the only mobile part of my immobile immaterial self, swerve to look at the little black screen and strain to see anything on it, why is it blank, why is there nothing on it?

“She was so sure though, I was convinced she had taken a test and was just fucking with me. I could've sworn I felt it. There's nothing there?” He leans forward, trying to get a better look at the little black box, but it is no use.

I am hollow, the remnants of a supernova, stardust caking my eyes and the cosmos seeping out in torrents.

“There never was.”

Home

Sophia Porter

Being alone always frightened me as a kid. When you're little, you should be playing around, finding things you're good at. I learned how to act when I found that shapeshifting parts of me to please others made me more favorable as a friend. People wanted to be around me if I mirrored them instead of being myself. So that's what I did. And I was never alone. In a way, it was more comforting for me to hide who I was, and putting on a performance came naturally for me. I'd found what I was good at.

I believe my insecurities began with my childhood best friend. She enjoyed being around me because I agreed to do the things she wanted to do, instead of arguing with her like her sisters did. Therefore, I became the friend she wanted me to be: obedient and loyal. A yes-man.

I can remember the first time I noticed a difference between me and her; we were sitting on a mat in small group during church. She had on an Old Navy white ruffle dress, and I was wearing my favorite white tulle skirt and a glittery white top, with a bow in my hair.

She told me through a whisper, as we were coloring in Noah's arc, that she thought the girl behind us was weird. I turned to look behind me, and I saw a girl sitting alone. She was sitting on one of the squares of the mat that was a color, giving the illusion she was literally in her own bubble. She had her hair pulled into a messy ponytail, clearly done herself, with silly bands up both arms. I recognized some of the bands, because I collected them, too. She wore a striped skirt and a t-shirt with a unicorn on it. Looking at her in that moment, I knew I would never have the unbridled confidence that she had.

Years passed, and nothing had changed between me and my friend. But after graduating high

school, life became too surreal for her and she stopped talking to me. It was weird. I was no longer held to be this pet-like friend to anyone. I could finally be myself. This led me to spiral about who I was, what I looked for in a friend, and what I wanted out of life. Maybe I didn't really know these things.

Then I went to college: the place where a person can find out who they are through trial and error. Unfortunately for me, I still had that unrelenting fear of being alone, so I majored in acting and filled the gaping hole of loneliness with the closest person to me.

My first college roommate was nice enough; she had red hair, blue eyes and a Y2K fashion sense that I could never pull off. We had met on our college's Instagram page, which led to DMing about the latest Bridgerton stars and celebrity couples we loved at the time. We had a lot in common. As we started getting closer, she would do this thing where I would tell her how I felt, and she would tell me that I probably didn't really feel that way. Like when I thought her friend was cute she said, "Everyone goes through that. Even me. Don't worry though, you'll grow out of it."

One good memory I have from my childhood with my friend was seeing Frozen in theaters. I remember we both cried when Hans went to save Anna from being frozen, then said, "Oh Anna, if only there was someone out there who loved you." I remember the anger we both had, and then laughed afterwards because he wasn't real.

I never thought I would meet Hans in real life.

When I met my roommate's friend I noticed he took his sense of humor pretty seriously. I thought it was too on-the-nose, like saying "You're mom" as a reply to every question. How

can

it be funny when everyone is expecting it? At least it was not too hard to mirror his

conversational tactics, for an actor you would think he would try to be somewhat clever. As more friends began to show up, I found myself going toward the corner of the room, out of everyone else's way.

He came up to me later in the night and asked if I was okay. There was something I had not noticed before; I swore I could see the danger in his eyes, like the gleam over a sword in a cartoon. Then it was gone.

That shapeshift had stuck with me longer than others, and felt more like second nature over time. A mutual friend of ours wanted us to be in their scene for class, and we agreed. We hung out almost every night after rehearsals, which bled into rehearsing lines on nights we didn't have rehearsals. I enjoyed being around him, and he actually enjoyed being around me. It was a first for me, and because of this, I would give him anything he asked for. He took the time to notice what made me laugh when I felt like crying. He memorized my coffee order, and knew my favorite color. This guy had a way of stripping me bare without taking my clothes off. I thought this was what love felt like.

Then he dumped me.

The school year had ended and I went home for the summer. If I could really call it that, the term 'home' had lost meaning to it over the year, and I did not know what the word meant anymore. It was comforting to be in my childhood house, so I held on to that feeling a little longer. I spent most days on my bedroom floor, looking through old photos and memorabilia of me as a kid. One particular photo, I am looking in the mirror applying makeup whilst sitting on my Nonna's bathroom sink in an all green outfit. I was so small and oblivious to the things around me. I don't remember the photo being taken, but I liked the peaceful feeling it gave

me.

At some point it was fall. I was back at school with a new roommate, his name was Nico, he loved the musical Wicked and some guy named Chris. I do not remember the seasons changing, or feeling the first cool breeze. I blinked and the spring buds had turned to rotting yellow leaves.

Winter was just as bad, if not worse. I was alone, and I had been for a while. My greatest fear had come to fruition before me, and I had done nothing to stop it.

The next Spring came and I finally had enough. I was done festering in my own melancholy. If I was going to be alone, I was going to learn how to do it right.

First step: Move away from 'home'.

Second step: Come to terms with being alone.

Third step: Figure out who I am.

To start, Nico and I got a lease on a small apartment just off campus. I lived there, while he went back to New York for the summer. I was going to be alone on purpose. I absolutely hated it.

Why was it so frightening to do things by myself?

I went to Panera by myself for the first time, and my hands were shaking as I ordered my food from a kiosk. Not even a real person, a tablet, made me anxious.

I found a table in the back as soon as possible, and put my headphones on to help drown

out the sound of everyone around me. In hindsight I should have kept them off and made a friend. But I wanted to be alone.

The road to self discovery began with a new Pinterest board and a sage green moleskin journal. I first made a board for the aesthetic of my younger childhood self, the one from the photo, then a playlist with all of my favorite songs, including various artists from the Jonas Brothers to the Little Mermaid soundtrack. As I dug up lost artifacts of myself, I had fun. After about 3 hours of joyous nostalgia, I left and headed to Target.

A small, and yet still as important step in this journey, was to buy myself a lego set. They were primarily for boys in my house growing up; I would watch my brother unwrap lego sets on holidays. I wanted to find one beneath my own wrapping paper, to feel the satisfaction of putting those pieces together.

I built a superhero lego set that day and cried for 2 hours.

Then I put it on my bookshelf, along with the two new books I had bought to get me out of my five-year reading slump, and took a step back to admire my new collection beginning to grow. The old parts of me that had died stood before me, encouraging me to keep going. A coloring book I had, reminded me of the girl sitting alone all those years ago at church. I wonder if she, too, found joy from admiring her own collection.

I picked up the pieces of myself that were still dragging on the floor behind me. I exercised to strengthen those parts (exercise being reading and painting). The art I made portrayed the feelings I held closest to my chest, the ones that were hard to say out loud. My favorite piece of art had every kind of blues, pinks and yellows to emulate a sunset, with bright fluffy clouds all around. Off-center to the right, there was a figure of a girl in the clouds. She was faint, and

could shapeshift into something else within a moment's notice, if this acrylic sky were real. I titled the piece 'Home'.

The painting was somewhat of a self-portrait.

I remember the moment I had finally started to feel comfortable in my own skin. I was working at my terrible minimum wage job at 10pm on the first Friday of the school year. Over the summer I felt like I was drowning, unable to keep up with the crowds and their demands, but not tonight. Tonight I was cool, calm, and collected.

Some old guy who was bald, wearing a Life is Good shirt, and looked like he hadn't had a good laugh in a few years pulled me aside to tell me he had an ice chip in his ice cream. He was adamant that ice, no matter what, does not belong in ice cream, and someone needed to take care of it. Normally when dealing with ridiculous customers I would get too flustered to say anything,

but tonight I smiled at him and asked if he wanted me to remake it for him. He said no, but he appreciated my concern.

For the first time I felt like I was confident, it felt fucking awesome.

When I got home, Nico greeted me from the couch. He doesn't expect me to shapeshift or change parts of myself for his friendship. It is a strange feeling, to have someone see you for who you are and have them love you all the same. Especially when that someone is Nico, who hates anyone that smiles at him on the sidewalk.

"You're home late," he says, eyeing me as if he doesn't know exactly where I was. "You got me, I was with my other lover," I say, dramatically looking away from him as if we were in

a telenovela. “I wanted to tell you, but I just never found the right time. I am sorry it had to come out this way.”

Nico clutches his chest, equally as dramatic, “I. Am. Devastated.”

I mimic him, then laugh as I start to head to my room, as he adds, “Can I talk to you for a sec?”

“Did the Wicked movie trailer come out?”

“God I wish, but no,” he gestures to the seat beside him on the couch.

“Okay.” I take a seat beside him hesitantly.

“You seem different.”

I stare at him for a moment. Somewhat frightened, I respond, “Like, a bad different?”
“No. I didn’t mean to say it like that. You seem happier.” And he just smiles at me, a warm smile that expresses he’s proud of me.

He was right, I am happier.

Nonfiction

The Nonfiction Editors carefully read through every piece, but the three you are about to read stood out the most. Here you will find heartfelt pieces that are bound to tug at some strings and possibly cause some tears. You can expect three very different narratives, all heartfelt and beautifully written.



I'm Not Broken: A-Sexual Discovery

Skye Chernobilsky

I haven't always felt different. At least, not that I can remember. In fact, I always did my best to be the same as everyone else. I got a boyfriend when a lot of the other girls did. And another one. And another one. And, somehow, even another one. I liked the same colors other kids did; blue was my favorite for most of my adolescent years. Looking back, however, there was always a certain *something* that was different. When a teacher would ask for "a strong boy" to move a desk/chair, my hand would shoot up, knowing that I could help. When the girls in my classes started talking about how they were beginning to "go to the next base" with their partners, it made me cringe and made me incredibly uncomfortable. Now, it's not that I didn't **want** a relationship with someone, it was that physical aspect that made me uncomfortable. And even still, I continued to get in and out of relationships with an uncanny speed, for which I can probably thank the lack of physical presence in my partners (they were long distance). With all that being said, I *still* didn't know how to put into words how I felt. I no longer felt attracted to the male species, that much was clear. But society's expectations and beliefs, along with my family's, were proving to be too much to bear.

For the second half of high school, I made a point to not get into a relationship with anyone. This, however, did not stop me from having a continuous existential crisis about my identity. I had hoped that by making certain that I wouldn't have to deal with the burden of a relationship, I simultaneously wouldn't have to deal with the idea that I wasn't meant for one. I had chosen to do what so many others have done; avoid and repress. Not only was I unsure of what my sexual identity held, but I also wasn't certain of who I was as a person and what I identified as. I knew for a fact that I wasn't a girl. That had been determined basically since I

found out that was an option. But I didn't know who I was. I knew that I didn't want to be addressed as a boy, but I also knew that I wanted to present myself as a masculine individual and, for the longest time, I thought those had to go hand in hand. Fortunately, through extensive research, therapy, and open and productive conversations, I was able to come to the conclusion that I am a non-binary individual who uses they/them pronouns. Unfortunately, the struggle with defining my sexuality continued. I couldn't understand how someone who had previously been attracted to their partners was now repulsed at the idea of even holding hands with someone.

Eventually I came to the conclusion that I was probably asexual, which was a difficult realization because I didn't know how I could develop feelings for people but not be attracted to them. There was this preconceived notion in my head that because I had felt that way before, it meant I would feel it again. But time after time and partner after partner, the feeling didn't show.

How could it be true that I wasn't attracted to anyone physically, but I still liked people? What was it about the person that I was attracted to, if not their body? Could it be possible that I was attracted to their personality and not them? Did that mean I could never be in a relationship with someone? What if people started to not like me because of who I am? What if my relationships would end because of my innate disturbance by physical intimacy? What will I tell people? Do I tell anyone? All of these thoughts swirled in my head as I spiraled down into the imposter syndrome abyss.

I felt like because I had been capable of having these feelings before, I wasn't a true member of the asexual community. I couldn't possibly be asexual if I didn't always feel this way. I couldn't even say the word aloud. I couldn't bring myself to admit that that was who I was. Because if I admitted it to myself, if I said it aloud, if I *told* someone, that would mean it was real. That it wasn't going away. And I wanted, I **needed**, for it to go away.

I needed it to go away because it meant I wasn't normal. I would never have a normal life. I would never have a relationship again because who would want to be with someone that won't physically be with them? I would never have a long-lasting relationship with someone because eventually, they would get tired and leave. I had all of these ideas of what a relationship was supposed to be and was meant to look like, partially thanks to society, media, and my own personal experiences, and someone like me had no place being there.

I had been through so many experiences afterwards where people said that "you just haven't found the right person." or "it's not possible, you're just picky". Person after person couldn't believe that someone could experience no sexual or physical attraction to another being.

Even one of my closest friends at the time was completely baffled when I told her. We were sitting in my room on the floor, talking about her intimate interactions with her boyfriend and she was telling me all the gory and specific details. My hands rubbed the bumpy carpet up and down, trying to calm myself. The anxiety I felt from the discomfort of the situation crept into my throat and my self-soothing techniques weren't working. After a while I couldn't bear it anymore and I looked her dead in the eyes and said, "Please stop talking about this, you're making me extremely uncomfortable." She looked at me as if I had just killed her puppy. "But aren't you interested? Don't you want to know?" *No actually I couldn't give less of a sh*t about your sex life*, I thought to myself. I took a deep breath and, with the most level tone I could muster, said, "Not really. You know I'm gay and I also don't care to know about what you do in your free time with your boyfriend." I then went on to tell her that I don't experience sexual attraction and actually find it all to be kind of repulsive. This time with a my-puppy-just-died look she says, "I'm sorry I didn't realize." As if I hadn't been outwardly cringing for the last twenty minutes of her story.

Another moment that solidified my feelings was when I had mentioned to my mom that I was asexual, and her response was “But sex is such a beautiful thing. You just haven’t found someone you love enough to do it. You will.” “Okay” I responded, feeling my heart shatter into a million pieces as my mom refused to accept me the way I am. In hindsight, she probably was trying to convince herself more than she was trying to convince me but that’s not what it felt like at the moment. The feeling of resentment was overpowered by the lingering question in my mind; a casual and completely non detrimental what if...? What if my mom was right? What if I’m really not asexual? What if, in reality, I just hadn’t met the right person yet?

And because I’m just a teenager with more judgmental thoughts about myself than the antagonist in a coming-of-age 2000s movie, I decided I wouldn’t tell anyone ever again. I was tired of having to explain myself over and over again. I was tired of agreeing with the uneducated and inconsiderate people who voiced their unsolicited opinions. Mostly I was tired of being put in a box, by other people and by myself. I decided I wasn’t going to talk about it anymore. The only people who needed to know were potential partners because it would be only fair to let them know what they're getting into.

Once I realized that I wasn’t alone in my feelings, both about being asexual and about feeling like I wasn’t “asexual enough”, I started believing that I would be okay. I had first met someone who was also asexual on one of my multiple visits to Rider University. I was attending the Admitted Students day on March 8th and stayed after the event ended to play with the Pep Band. While I didn’t technically meet this person until this last September, we started talking in late April early May. The more we talked, the more personal the conversations became. I soon found out that they were demiromantic and asexual as well and that they also struggled with accepting these labels as truth. I finally felt seen, like I wasn’t the only one in the vast world to think this way. In reality, I knew that I wasn’t alone but this was different. This wasn’t a

hypothetical where the person wasn't real. This was my friend who, like me, didn't experience sexual attraction. Who, like me, didn't find sex appealing. And who, like me, had struggled with figuring out their identity. I realized that my identity was unique but that didn't mean that I was alone.

I wasn't going to let anyone tell me who I could or couldn't be, that was for me to decide. This time, I'm going to live as my personal authentic self. And if that came with stigma or social expectations that didn't fit me then that's exactly what they would be; not for me. It's time to set my own expectations, follow my own rules, and be my own person. No more living in the shadows. I feel different. I like being different.

The Nest

Suzanne Lewis

Last winter, a year after my husband died, I looked out my kitchen window and saw a large squirrel nest high up in a tree. I thought to myself, “Look what that squirrel has done. The engineering and planning that went into building that nest. It’s sturdier than a skyscraper!”

All winter I’d see that nest and marvel at the workmanship of the squirrel.

Spring arrived, the trees got their leaves back, the nest was hidden from my view. Summer brought strong storms with damaging winds. I’d look out the window and hope that the nest was still there.

Fall came and I started searching for the nest. The tree lost all its leaves, and the nest was gone.

I was sorry that the nest did not make it through summer. Just like my husband, it was gone forever. Habitually I kept looking for the nest and was sorry that it was gone.

Then a few days before Thanksgiving, I looked out the window a bit more to the left. To my utter surprise, I saw the nest. High up in the tree and sturdy as ever. I was filled with great joy and danced around the kitchen.

I had been looking at the wrong tree.

mom, no pienso que voy a ir al cielo

Ashley Morales

yo se que dije que quería irme de la casa, y todavía quiero, pero aveces se siente como yo sola me quiero alejarme de ti y todas las partes que siento que me has avergonzado. tú me has avergonzado.

//

i know i said i wanted to leave the house, and i still do, but sometimes it seems like i just want to get away from you and all the parts that i feel like have embarrassed me. you've embarrassed me.

-

PROLOGUE

she's an average height salvadoreña. a great cook, but terrible listener. a good cleaner, but a loud talker. she's the eldest daughter of thirteen other siblings, the second to be born after my tio israel and before my tio gabriel.

she grew up in un rancho (or at least that's what i remember it looking like). mama calla would send her to do the outside chores, like washing the clothes down by the nearby river or getting maiz from the farm in order to make the powder for tortillas. elsewhere, papa chepe would work with tio israel and tio gabriel because men did all the labor back then.

mama calla was pregnant for most of their childhood and going into their adulthood. consequently, she had to grow up too quickly. she stopped going to school in the fifth

grade

because her family needed her. she became a second mother. and with this new title, if anything had happened to her younger siblings, she was responsible and to be blamed. and even if she was the one who hadn't done anything wrong, and it turned out to be one of her siblings, like my tio isaias, and mama calla wanted to correct him by hitting him (cause that's what they did back in the day), she would step in to defend him. she told me he was so small, that he hadn't known any better and she couldn't bare to see him go through what she had gone through.

she told me of another time when she came back from the river with one of my tias, i think it was my tia yoli, short for yolanda. they were walking back with the buckets and something happened to yoli where she got hurt. i dont remember what happened in the between the river and her getting home, but she told me that mama calla eventually threw a rock at her head and she bled. when mama calla realized this the only thing she remembers her saying was: "*no le digas a tu papa.*"

and she didn't.

that scar is still with her to this day. when she raises her eyebrows or when she's laughing so hard that her face starts to crinkle, you can see it. a small t-shaped indent.

she forgives mama calla for this incident and all the years of abuse as a kid and teenager she had to face. she claims she did it out of love, her mother didn't know any better. *who really knows how to be a mom?*

at the age of 24 or 25, she married a Guatemalteco who had also recently come to the states. they

met through tio israel at the Iglesia de Liberacion Para Las Almas in Newark. she told me she liked him first but he was with some other girl. so she found a way to get her out of the picture (whatever that means).

she didn't tell her children about how they got engaged, all they knew was that it happened. a year later, she had her first child. a boy. she'd always wanted to have a son first because in any case, he would be the sole protector of his younger siblings. her next child was a daughter, someone who might be like her, she thought. her last child, another daughter, but this one would almost kill her. she claimed that through God's grace she was saved. she had wanted another child but she wasn't sure her body could go through all of the pain again.

she made sure to take her kids to church and raise them as pentacostal Christians. she made sure to make them participate in any and every event. when her kids started to grow up though, that is when she started to worry.

on the day of her son's first baptism, he had decided to skip it in order to go to a pool party. at the second one that was scheduled, his father was the one to lead him into a new life, a rebirth. *years*

later he'd be baptized again, for real this time.

her second eldest daughter took Bible study classes in order to get baptized, but she didn't know if it was because she wanted to make her parents proud or because she really, truly believed in the Lord.

her youngest has yet to be baptized. she's begun to worry that she has done something wrong

as a Christian and as a mother. but maybe she'll find him down the line.

-

EPILOGUE

I don't think my mom is necessarily a quirky or witty woman. My siblings might say that — but I also feel like those wouldn't be their first two descriptions of her. I don't want to say she's unique, in the sense that she's one hundred percent original. Yet, when I think about it for a while, I guess she is somewhat quirky, witty and unique. One of a kind one might say. When I was younger and in my teens, going through my extremely angsty phase, she wasn't someone I necessarily looked up to. I probably only looked towards her if and when she did something for me. For example, buying me something I wanted, washing my clothes, cooking what I had asked for, giving me money, or driving me or my friends around. I was a real grade A asshole (not so say that I'm not anymore) but I digress.

Over winter break I would wake up and find her in the kitchen cooking breakfast for my dad. I would do my rounds of saying good morning to everyone and then head to the bathroom. But before I got in she'd ask if I wanted some coffee. I'd say yes, but then she would proceed to find a way to mess it up. I would still drink it though.

When she would finish making tortillas, eggs, and frijoles negros, for my dad, she'd ask if I wanted some. She gave me a plate and served me. She'd call my dad from his "office" and if he wasn't busy, he would eventually join us. Sometimes he didn't and it was just her and I. My mom used to be a much more devout Christian. She still is but she doesn't really go to church anymore. Instead she'll listen to hispanic gospels or hymns, sermons on YouTube or even on Facebook live.

One of the many questions that frustrate me that she asks every other time I see her is: “*Ashley, ¿cuándo te vas a bautizar? Ya sabes que Jesus te ama, y que el se murió para que tu y yo vivimos en su gloria?*”

Or something along those lines.

I usually roll my eyes at this. Or I’ll try to change the subject. I don’t like talking about religion with my mother because anything that I end up contradicting against her, will result in bringing my father into the mix. Once he’s there, either hovering over me or sitting down, clutching his hands as if he’s talking to an ex-convict, he’ll go on for hours on a lecture. I don’t know what’s worse, having to sit through it all or having to pretend like I understand what he’s saying so I can get out of it quicker. I can say “I wish I wasn’t like this” all I want – but if I’m not doing anything to try to change, am I really that bothered with who I am?

The reality of it is – I don’t think or feel ready to whole heartedly convert to Christianity. I still have this idea that I may still be well off without it. Or maybe I tell myself this because I’m too scared to tell her that I don’t think I’m going to heaven. In part because I don’t want to break her heart again, but also because I don’t think I’m a good person.

It doesn’t feel like enough to say that I do in fact believe in God, but my interpretation of this all mighty entity is not the same as hers.

This is another story I will not show her. Another story inspired by her that she will never know. Another secret story hidden from her. I’m hoping it’ll be the last one though.

Poetry

The Poetry Editors selections evoke the vibrance and imagery aligned with our Spring 2024 themed edition as well as bring up valuable discussions. While you may not see yourself in a specific work, they hope you enjoy exploring new perspectives, challenging your expectations, and visiting new genres, contents, and emotional journeys. Immerse yourself in these freshly published works as Venture itself is once again reborn.

Why do I see only rotting corpses?

Klaudine Bessasparis

Your face is a tomb,
burying all those feelings
underground, it seems

until you friended me.
Then, your secrets leaked straight out,
skeleton's fingers

breaking the birch wood,
and snaking out to bite me.
Why do you infect

me with you problems?
I've your picture in my mind,
but now the glass broke.

The shards cut my skin,
spreading your doubt, like red flags
waving in the wind,

head to shore, blood drips,
but you just can't get enough
while you leech off me.

Like a therapist
I sit, waiting for you to
realize it's too late.

You cannot turn back,
but I can't let you move up.
You're six feet under,

your reputation,
well, skeletons have killed it,
you can't be revived.

You're stuck in those poor
trenches, and I refuse to
grab a strong ladder.

Don't Forget to Remember

Brooke Foster

Red thread
tied around an index finger;
a reminder, a reason
to remember.
“Don't let me forget.”

How could I forget
someone like you?
Your smile is
a blinding light.
Your touch is
soft silk.
Don't let me forget.

A red circle
on a calendar
slowly creeps
closer as a day
of little significance
Or is it?
Don't let me forget.

Forget me not
but remember me never.
Today is the day
it changed.
The thread unraveled,
circles were skipped.

Don't let me—

Who are you?
What is this?

Steady Breathing

Emily Ivanauskas

I found peace within your steady breathing,
Embodying the wind itself.
Found shelter from the heat and the rain
Under a vibrant tree canopy.
But I realized I missed the rain,
And the feeling of the sun on my skin.
The leaves blocked out the silver moon,
And silenced its ticking,
Leaving Earth uncomfortably quiet.
Now I can see my reflection
In rain's clear puddles,
And my shadow no longer
Has to hide in the dark.
Now the stars are dimmer,
But I can hear them better,
And the sound of wind,
Is no longer eclipsed
By your unreliable breaths.

Demon

Jenna Krauss

Fuck!

Stupid Ant!

I've been bitten.

Talk about gaslighting.

Tiny creature of trickery.

You think it's nothing,

but god does it itch.

Hydrocortisone stat!

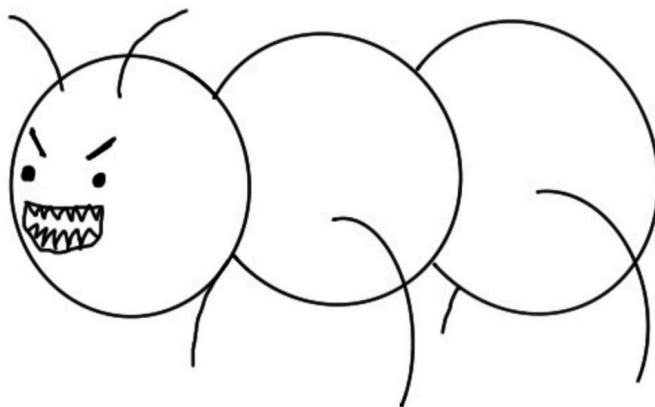
It's not enough!

Tylenol! Ice!

Whatever.

Bed time.

Don't let the bed bugs bite!



Self Portrait of Thirteen

Lizzie Mueller

I was orange, yellow, red
forking out of a thick brown body
tat promised to let me go

In summertime I grew green
malachite and peridot
arms reaching with little help

I stretched to reach
the snowflake obsidian sky
who whispered its misty music in my ear

I worked with the wind
Fighting for fluorite freedom
distorted fingers anchoring me in

Surely the white witherite winter would
carry me away
into the peppered vault above

But snow melted
into moonstone mud puddles
and I remained soggy and sorrowful

I was chomped on
by copper caterpillars
and beetles bathing in burmite

I was infested with gloomy, guileful
Golden garden spiders
obscuring my mind with a sweltering
stickiness

I felt the tanzanite ticks
resting swollen bellies on my shoulders
seeking shelter from an abandoned carcass

I sipped from the soil below my feet
from shrinking straws of dwindling life
suffocating in a silver silence

withering and wilting,
I waited for water to wash me
with diamond drops of damage

but instead I stood
in a sapphire spring
swarming with bixbite bees

feeding life into my veins
Vivinite vitality venturing every
inch of my skin

and as I breathed a fresh breath
of the new neptunite sky
I tumbled into a distant death

But instead of descending
into a gray ground grave
I glided in the serpentine sky

and a panting puff of
amethyst air ascended my spirit
a strength so strong
that where I'm going is a secret

only I know
it's where I belong

I did so many drugs in so many parking lots

Claire Palmer

They met me in space time,
where lightning struck the marble arch
and we were linking

red
monkeys,

from top bunk

to
bottom

i dyed my sheets with honeysuckle
and cried about everything.

one misstep and slip right off the cliffs edge
we were

t
n a a
u i o t
o n g s
m
stepping on pebble pockmarked shoulders.

smoking out of the tin can cosmos
we were
Aluminum Soldiers

Nose

Dripping

I rolled your window

Down

from the

Driver's seat

and met the interstate stranger.

homecoming

Aiya Rabah

When it's your land

yours

the soil recognizes your blood,

welcomes you home in full bloom,

she smiles down on you in the form of crisp rain and gentle sunbeams

because she knows you won't hurt her

When it's your house

home

you know which stairs creak

the way a pianist knows scales,

can create beauty from strings and tiles

she lets you walk because she knows you won't *stomp*

When it's Home

always has been, always will be

she weeps, she waits

for the day when the kind folk will return

after the smoke has cleared and the birds come out instead

she'll welcome you back

and never let you go

Modern cannibal

Jay Roberson

Scooped out my insides
And served up on a platter
I watch you feast
On the flesh that was mine

Something that used to be so familiar to me
Is far gone

There's no telling what comes next
You're an ancient mystery
A broken relic

Never filled, always hungry
But I'm right there to feed
Hot blood boils between

As cold came in December
Pieces came together
Fear struck my face
When I realized my place

Decorated and beautiful
A tool to be used, and used
Leave them open
Then leave the rest to me

Scraps left behind
On the table resigned
Discarded and pardoned

My skin soiled real fast
For you to leave it like that
You must be scared
Of cuts you created

I'm so scared of the truth
I try to patch it up
But it hurts to look

Tear in the Seams

Faith Robinson-Hughes

Skin glows like diamonds in the sun, she writhes beneath the heat.

Face perfected for the gods which pick it apart with their teeth,

Separating every hair and freckle on her delicate little body.

Time only sees the light of day when the brush is on her cheek.

The alarm rings when her bones don't sit right.

Like clockwork:

Pat over my tears.

Brush on my smile.

Eat your mistakes.

Dress up my wounds.

Pull out my desires - there's a tear in my dress, right along the seam.

Momma warned me about that. Said it came from too much loving.

But my dress glistens and glows with newborn dew, unloved and untouched.

She promised this would never happen.

If I followed the hands on the clock, tore out the ache in my spine, quieted the hunger in my heart, made myself tiny her him...

I'd be scooped in his palm with the gentlest of touch, and my dress would always be guarded, always be new.

Momma warned me about this. Choose the hand right. Some fingers have blades.

But my dress glistens and glows, unlobed and untouched.

Oh, how I wish there were fingers without blades to have my dress guarded and kept anew.

But surely the clean fingers are merely a myth, as I've never seen a dress without tears at the seams.

My block

Thalia Rose

My block don't know sleep
We've got cameras and permanent sirens
Lullabies are the pop pop of gunshots and frankly it's become a bit difficult to sleep without them

My block is permanently decorated with the festive yellow and black tape that says
"Yeah we wa here"

My blocks got the jolly man patrolling with his festive lights
Inviting his black suited primo

My blocks got class
We got swag
We got leather pipes serving cancer with every glass of water
We got blocked off roads
too large vehicles maneuvering too small streets because they gotta fix those pipes, but they've been taking they damn time

We got bloc parties that end with dead bodies
We got 4th of July fireworks that everyone seems to know are not our usually lulling gunshots
We don't got blood soaked sidewalks
Come on we got decorum
We do got splattered brains and intestines of unknown fury creatures and family friendly bodegas serving in rodent filled kitchens but what can we do?
The rodents are a crucial part of this neighborhood

Heirloom Treasures

Kaitlyn Seawood

In Grandma's kitchen, memories unfold,
Recipes and stories, cherished and old.
With flour-dusted hands and a heart so kind,
Traditions crafted, in every bind.

Worn recipe cards, aged with grace,
Spices whisper from time's embrace.
The pot simmers gently, tales untold,
Generations past, their love behold.

Secret sauces, spices unite,
Binding us in memories so bright.
From Sunday roasts to holiday cheer,
Each bite a journey, each taste sincere.

Laughter, tears, and whispers hover,
Recipes bind, our hearts discover.
In the kitchen's warmth, love's embrace,
Heirloom treasures, time can't erase.

A Blast From The Future

Fiza Syed

They say everything's fair in love and war
But where did the line go?
There's no peace anymore

They covered the enemy in gore
And betrayed their friends in the snow
They say everything's fair in love and war

Humanity lives at our core
So when did we go from friends to foes?
There's no peace anymore

They hovered over the romantics like boars
And punished anyone who broke the status quo
They say everything's fair in love and war

Our hearts were made to soar
So why did you punish us with faux?
There's no peace anymore

In the end, we paid the price to settle the score
Now condemned, we regret ever stealing the show
They say everything's fair in love and war
There's no peace anymore

Intimacy

Lilly Trace

Your heartbeat is nestled inside your chest,
Yet I can feel the thrum; it mirrors mine,
Mimicking your pace, keeping it in time.
I know no religion, but still I'm blessed.
All my inhibitions are put to test,
Our eyes interlock, our pulses both climb
Until we are lost in feelings sublime
For forever in the bright sunset.

Night comes, and now it's only me and you.
Thoughts fall from our mouths, unfiltered and real
With no one before have I been so true;
Here I'm allowed to be, here I can feel.
So let's waste the midnight hours, as we do,
And watch both of our walls begin to keel.

AUTHOR BIOS

Fiction

Carole Cobos (she/her) is a freshman English Major at Rider University. She has a strong interest in writing, editing, and publishing stories that encourage love and raise awareness. Carole particularly enjoys writing about culture and love: familial, romantic, platonic, etc. She spends an excessive amount of time reading Pablo Neruda's poetry and praising Taylor Swift's story-telling ability.

David Collins (he/they) is a third year student at Rider University pursuing a bachelor's degree in English with a Writing concentration. David often spends his free time reading and writing prose or poetry, engaging in quality time with his friends, or listening to a wide variety of music ranging from System of a Down to Gorillaz.

Michael Keahon (he/him) is a poetry editor for Venture. He is an English major and a senior at Rider. He recently enjoyed being a guest on Episode 2 of the radio show Rider's Writers Round. He's been having a great time experimenting with different styles of writing and encountering work by fellow budding writers. He loves going on long walks with his dog, Chloe, and discovering new music to jam to. He accepts any and all music recommendations!

Nick Kelly-Wilson (she/her) is an English creative writing major and a senior at Rider University. You can find her with her nose in a book, a paintbrush in her hand, or (more likely than not) scribbling something down to write about later. She hopes to one day publish a collection of her short stories/poems. Her biggest inspiration is Taylor Swift, namely her albums Folklore and Evermore, which can be heard during almost every writing session.

Sophia Porter (she/her) is a new author, and is excited to have been picked for the first article of Venture! She is a junior acting major with an english literature minor. She is grateful to have the opportunity to share a story that is near to her heart. She hopes that the takeaway is to find home not in structural places, but in safe environments and compassionate people. Find where your own heart gravitates to, notice where you are pulled to and go there. Sometimes it may change you in ways you never expected.

Nonfiction

Skye Chernobilsky (they/them) is a freshman at Rider University, from North Brunswick, New Jersey. They are majoring in Elementary Education and English Literature with a minor in Middle School Education. Skye enjoys photography, playing music with the Rider Pep Band and spending time in nature. They play trumpet and bass drum with the Rider Pep Band and are a founder of the Rider Jazz Band. Skye enjoys writing poetry and pieces that capture their past experiences.

Suzanne Lewis (she/her) graduated from Rider College in 1982 with a degree in Accounting. Since then she has been working in the nonprofit sector. She was an Assistant Controller at American Friends Service Committee (1985-2002) and Director of Accounting/Controller at Science History Institute (2003-2022). Suzanne has returned to AFSC in 2022 as she winds down towards retirement. Suzanne has also served as Treasurer for FACTS (Folk Arts Cultural Treasures) from 2011 to 2015. FACTS is a K-8 elementary school that serves students of diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds from the City of Philadelphia. After spending 10 years as a caregiver, she is learning how to navigate through life as a widow. Suzanne currently resides in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. She enjoys yoga, reading, and her 3 cats.

Ashley Morales (she/they) is a senior at Rider University. She is the daughter of Central American immigrants and the youngest of three children. She's still trying to figure it all out... whatever that might be.

Poetry

Klaudine Bessaparis (she/her) is the Treasurer and a Poetry Editor for Venture. She is a Student Writing Consultant for Rider University's Academic Success Center, a Copyeditor for Guardian Digital, and previously tutored students in entry-level Composition courses at Rider University. She is a book lover, an outdoor enthusiast, and a constant source of (very bad) puns. As a feminist who may talk about patriarchy a little too much, Klaudine presented an analytical work for Rider University's 2023 Gender and Sexuality Studies Colloquium, where she geeked out over Tangled even while admitting its faults.

Brooke Foster (she/her) is a sophomore at Rider University pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English with a concentration in Writing. Originally from Manalapan, New Jersey, she is an avid storyteller who enjoys crafting works ranging from poetry and realistic fiction. Brooke hopes to work in publishing with an emphasis on children's or young adult literature after graduation. Some of her writing influences include Leigh Bardugo, V.E. Schwab, and Steven Moffat. Outside of writing, you can find Brooke trying to cross off books on her endless to-be-read (TBR) list or discovering her latest comfort show on Netflix.

Emily Ivanauskas (she/they) is a freshman Environmental Sciences major with a minor in English writing. She adores both science and poetry, and has previously had poems featured in digital magazines. Over the last few years she has been finding her voice in verse, writing about her experiences with love and heartbreak, and finding inspiration in nature. Some of her fondest memories come from her senior year English class in high school in which she would improve her craft while receiving support from her teacher and peers.

Jenna Krauss (she/her) is a Senior Graphic Design Major with a double minor in Social Media Strategies and Web Design, and a Certificate in Leadership. Jenna enjoys leading the Graphic Design Club and playing in the Pep Band. She is infuriated about the little guys taking over her dorm apartment and biting her.

Lizzie Mueller (they/she) is a Secondary Education and English major who has been writing their entire life. They seek to explore human emotions and connections in their pieces, and use writing to cope with their own feelings. Lizzie dedicates this poem to their best friend Katelyn, who was a source of light in their life until they lost her to suicide at the peak of their teen years. Lizzie hopes this poem can reach others in their own way, and inspire perseverance through life's difficult emotions and challenges, spreading the message that in life you're never truly alone.

Claire Palmer (she/they) is a singer-songwriter from Ellington, Connecticut with a passion for poetry. She began writing and performing at 10 years old, and fell deeper in love with writing through interstate writer's rounds. She is currently the host of Rider's Writers Round on 107.7 The Bronc, highlighting different types of artists on campus and sharing original work.

Aiya Rabah (she/her) is a student and writer from New York. When she's not busy with homework she can be found exploring New Jersey with her family, reading, and taking pictures of her cats. She studies English Writing and Criminal Justice.

Jay Roberson (they/he) is a current Junior studying secondary education and English with a minor in special education. They are a news editor at The Rider News as well as a student producer for the show Pod Save the Teachers at 107.7 The Bronc. They hope to advocate for underrepresented communities through their work as an educator and a writer. Roberson can be reached at robersonji@rider.edu for any comments or questions.

Faith Robinson-Hughes (she/her) is currently in her Junior year and majoring in Film with a minor in English with a concentration in writing. On campus, she is involved with clubs and organizations such as: Black Student Union, Tapestry, and the Broncs Box Office. As President of the Broncs Box Office, she is working hard to connect with other artists to help encourage a safe environment for creative expression. Her hope for Venture is that it will become another safe space for the Rider Community to foster relationships and a deeper understanding of one another.

Thalia Rose (she/her) is a writing scholar of Rider University's class of 2024. She specializes in poetry and recreations of Caribbean mythology/folktale. She loves tea, painting and nature.

Kaitlyn Seawood (she/her) is a transfer student from Northampton Community College, PA majoring in multiplatform journalism with a minor in social media strategies. Kaitlyn serves as vice president of the Transfer Student Association, social media editor of The Rider News, and is a protege of the Gail Bierenbaum Women's Leadership Council. Outside of her academics, Kaitlyn has been recognized as a TEDx Speaker with her speech, "The Power of Positive Affirmations," and enjoys reading, writing, painting, hiking, music, and being surrounded by her friends.

Fiza Syed (she/her) is an undergraduate at Rider University, is a writer and poet passionate about literature. Inspired by current events like the war in Ukraine, LGBTQ+ rights, and the crisis in Gaza, she uses her poetry in this piece to shed light on pressing issues. Since childhood, Fiza has been recognized for her literary talents, from winning reading awards to being featured in her local newspaper. She also runs “The Infinity Archives” on Instagram, showcasing her writing. With a keen interest in psychology and cybersecurity, Fiza aims to major in them alongside her writing endeavors at Rider.

Lilly Trace (any pronouns) is an out-of-state student from Mechanicsville, Virginia. Trace is in their first sophomore semester at Rider University. Their passion for creation and language led them to choose English as their major with a concentration in Writing, and they’ve recently picked up a minor in French. As a lover of self-expression, Lilly is constantly finding ways to voice themselves to the world; whether it be through fashion, music, storytelling, or, of course, writing. They never know where the pen may take them on the page, but they enjoy every step of the journey.

EDITORIAL MASTHEAD

Editor-in-Chief

Maura Corman (she/her) is the Editor in Chief of Venture. She is an English major and works at Rider University Libraries. Previously, she was on the editorial team and published in her high school's literary magazine: Insights. She loves coffee, poetry, and goofing off with her friends.

Web-Editor

Ashley Morales (she/they) is the Web Editor of Venture. She is double majoring in Film and English at Rider University. She enjoys analyzing terrible (yet good) movies and listening to curated Spotify playlists.

Academic Advisor

Vincent Toro (he/they) is a Puerto Rican poet, playwright, stage performer, and educator from New York. He is the author of two poetry collections: *Tertulia* (Penguin Random House), which was a finalist for the Omnidawn Poetry Prize, and *Stereo.Island.Mosaic.* (Ahsahta 2016), which was awarded the Sawtooth Poetry Prize and the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber First Book Award. His plays have been staged at the Spanish Repertory Theater, where he is a two-time winner of the Nuestras Voces Playwriting Award.

Fiction Editors

Talia Hincks (she/her) is a Fiction Editor and on the events team at Venture. She is an English transfer from the CT State Community College, where she received the Annual Award for Academic Excellence in English, and graduated with honors in 2023. She is a proud homeschooler, a lover of adventures, and the most extroverted introvert you'll meet.

Lauren Mickley (she/her) is a fiction editor for Venture. She is a senior and double majoring in English, with a concentration in writing, and Bachelor of Music (BAM), with a concentration in voice and sacred music. She has a small addiction to book shopping at Barnes&Nobles, loves staying up way to late gaming with friends, going to hockey games with her family, and discovering new music to listen too.

Faith Robinson-Hughes (she/her) is currently in her Junior year and majoring in Film with a minor in English with a concentration in writing. On campus, she is involved with clubs and organizations such as: Black Student Union, Tapestry, and the Broncs Box Office. As President of the Broncs Box Office, she is working hard to connect with other artists to help encourage a safe environment for creative expression. Her hope for Venture is that it will become another safe space for the Rider Community to foster relationships and a deeper understanding of one another.

Michaela Smith (she/her) is a fiction editor for Venture. She is a Communication Studies major with a minor in arts and entertainment industries management. She enjoys writing poetry, and previously read her poems at the AEIM (Arts Entertainment Industry Management) Soothe and Groove event. Michaela loves music, painting, and spending time with friends.

Nonfiction Editors

Anthony Cammarano (He/Him) is a Nonfiction editor for Venture and works as the Secretary for Rider's Philosophy's club. He presented for the English Matters event in Fall 2023, speaking about Paradise Lost and its influence on rock/rap. He enjoys creative writing, listening to Sabaton, and walking around Rider's campus.

Bridget Gum-Egan (she/her) is on the nonfiction editorial team and the marketing team. She is an English major and works at the information desk in the BLC. She is very active at Rider in various clubs and writes for The Rider News. She enjoys reading, hanging out with her friends, and spoiling her two dogs, Sheriff and Enzo.

Adrianna Jaccoma (she/her) is a junior English major, a Nonfiction Editor, and part of the Social Media Team for Venture. She is an intern for By Yobe Qiu Children's Publishing company and loves her dog and reading. She is very excited to be a part of the Venture Relaunch.

Poetry Editors

Klaudine Bessasparis (she/her) is the Treasurer and a Poetry Editor for Venture. She is a Student Writing Consultant for Rider University's Academic Success Center, a Copyeditor for Guardian Digital, and previously tutored students in entry-level Composition courses at Rider University. She is a book lover, an outdoor enthusiast, and a constant source of (very bad) puns. As a feminist who may talk about patriarchy a little too much, Klaudine presented an analytical work for Rider University's 2023 Gender and Sexuality Studies Colloquium, where she geeked out over Tangled even while admitting its faults.

David Collins (he/they) is a Poetry Editor for Venture. He has presented multiple analysis pieces at seminars and colloquiums regarding Gender and Sexuality and 17th Century Literature. David's hobbies include reading, writing, analyzing media, playing Dungeons & Dragons, and going for nature walks.

Michael Keahon (he/him) is a poetry editor for Venture. He is an English major and a senior at Rider. He recently enjoyed being a guest on Episode 2 of the college radio show Rider's Writers Round on 107.7 the Bronc. He's been having a great time experimenting with different styles of writing and encountering work by fellow budding writers. He loves going on long walks with his dog, Chloe, and discovering new music to jam to. He accepts any and all music recommendations!

Claire Palmer (she/they) is a junior at Rider University with a major in Music Production. She is a poet, songwriter and performer with a passion for words. She currently works at 107.7 The Bronc as a Copy Writer and Production Director, writing scripts, skits, and jingles for FM and online radio. She is the host of the podcast “Rider’s Writers Round” where she interviews and shares work from the writers of Rider. She is currently a poetry editor at Venture.

Kyian Sykes (she/her) is one of the poetry editors for Venture. She is an English writing major and will be graduating in May 2024. She loves to go to Starbucks, write poetry, and spend time with the people who love her most.