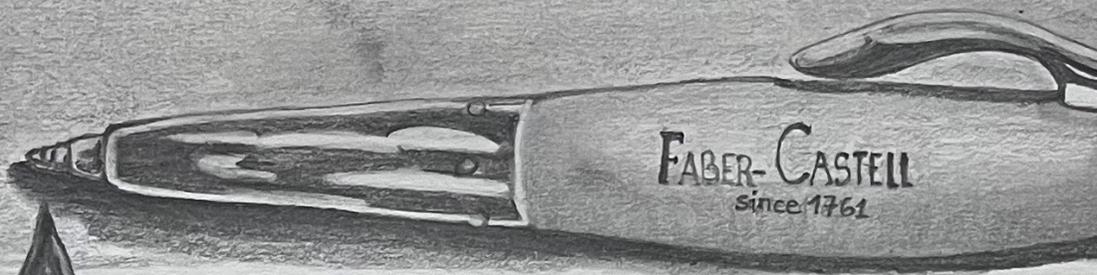


THE  
GRYPHON  
SPRING 2024



MC

MONTGOMERY  
COLLEGE

**COVER ARTWORK BY  
PRISCIL MOUTSINGA**

**GRYPHON LOGO BY  
DEREK OLMEDO FERNANDEZ**

The Gryphon is a  
mythical beast with  
the head, wings, and  
upper torso of an eagle  
and the body, hind  
legs, and tail of a lion.

# *The Gryphon* **2024**

*The Student Literary and  
Arts Magazine  
of  
Montgomery College  
Germantown Campus*



*Montgomery College  
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# The Staff



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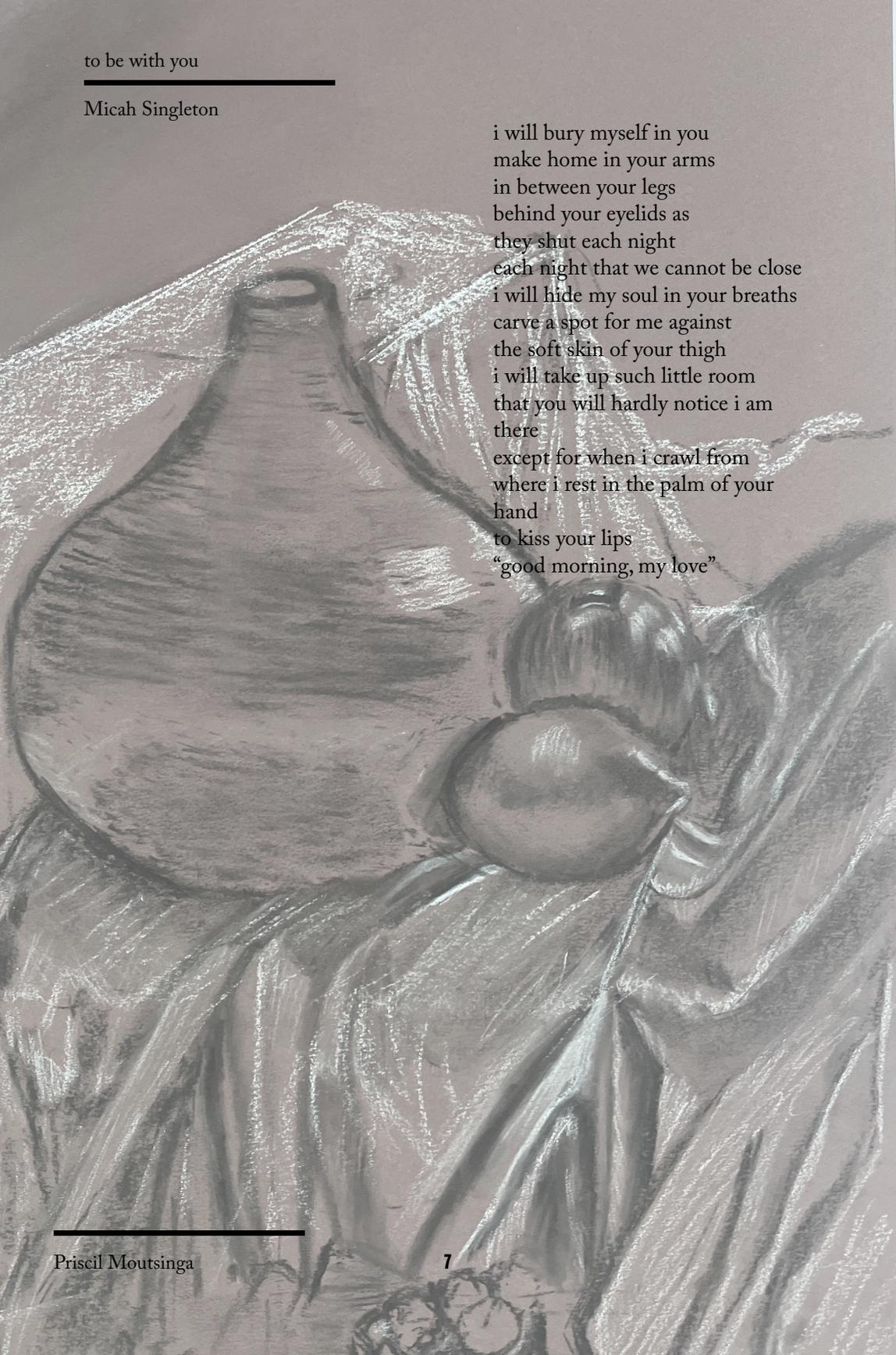
Prof. Sharon Anthony, Faculty Advisor



to be with you

---

Micah Singleton



i will bury myself in you  
make home in your arms  
in between your legs  
behind your eyelids as  
they shut each night  
each night that we cannot be close  
i will hide my soul in your breaths  
carve a spot for me against  
the soft skin of your thigh  
i will take up such little room  
that you will hardly notice i am  
there  
except for when i crawl from  
where i rest in the palm of your  
hand  
to kiss your lips  
“good morning, my love”

Goldie and Keno revved their engines. The crowd went wild.

“There’s only room for one biker gang in this town, and it’s going to be mine!!” yelled Goldie.

Keno scoffed. “Yeah right, not with that bike you won’t.”

You might be wondering how my brother got in this mess. Let’s rewind a bit. My name is Felicia Jones and Stephen, also known as Goldie, is my brother. He’s been riding ever since he could afford a bike and got me into it about a year ago. I occasionally ride with his gang, The Thunderstrucks. There’s an intense rivalry between The Thunderstrucks and The Mongol Crew. I’m not entirely sure what happened because no one wants to tell me. I’ve asked, begged, pleaded and none of them budged. After months and months of fights and hate, Keno, the leader of The Mongol Crew challenged my brother to a race. On June 10th, the race was going to be held on the outskirts of town. Whoever loses has to move their gang to a different city. I have three days to put an end to this.

You see, I’ve got to put a stop to this because Keno and I are secretly dating. Keno doesn’t know I’m Goldie’s sister. Whoever loses the race has to move their gang and well, I’ll never see them again. I love my brother, but I love Keno also. I couldn’t live without both of them. They’re my ride or die.

“Girl, you got to tell Keno that you’re a Thunderstruck. If your brother loses, it’s bye bye love of my life.” Rita, my best friend, said.

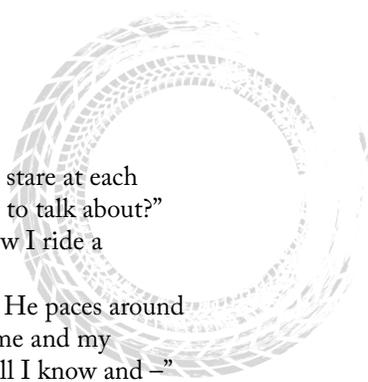
I sigh, “I know but what if he breaks up with me? Or what if he’s ok with me going away and losing? What if-”

Rita puts her hand up. “Let me stop you right there. If it’s really meant to be, he’ll do what he can to put a stop to all this. And if he can’t handle you being part of The Thunderstrucks than he’s a bitch. Now get it together, put on a cute outfit, and go get your man!”

I straighten my back. “Rita you’re so right. If he can’t accept my family, then I don’t want him. I’m going to talk to him today!”

Today actually turned into tomorrow because Keno was working until the night shift. I sent him a text saying I needed to talk to him. I ride my motorcycle to his apartment, and I walk up the step to ring his doorbell. He hugs me hello and lets me in.





“Can I get you anything to drink?” He asks? I nod no. We stare at each other in silence for a bit. “Are you ok? What did you want to talk about?”

Sweat runs down my back. “Uh so um, I – did you know I ride a motorcycle?”

His face lights up. “No way! You should join my crew.” He paces around the room excitedly, “This is great. You can hang out with me and my friends! You’ll love Tiny, he’s a great guy. I can teach you all I know and –”

“– and I’m already part of a gang.” His smile fades. “I’m Goldie’s sister. I joined his gang before I dated you and I really like how things are going and I just didn’t know how to bring it up.”

He turns his back on me, staring out his window. “I assume you want me to call off the race?”

“If it’s possible.”

He mulls it over. “It’s tomorrow. A lot of people are involved. Have you told your brother yet?”

“Not yet. I was going to do it later today.”

“If he calls it off, I’ll back off but if he doesn’t, I’ll have to follow through. My reputation is on the line.”

“Keno please. I can’t lose you.” Tears well up in my eyes.

He sighs and drops his head. “I can’t lose you either. Don’t worry, I’ll think of a plan b.” He caresses my face and leans in for a kiss. I melt into his arms, content. “I love you, Felicia.

Goldie and Keno revved their engines. The crowd went wild.

“There’s only room for one biker gang in this town, and it’s going to be mine!!” yelled Goldie.

Keno scoffed. “Yeah right, not with that bike you won’t.”

My heart pumps fast. Goldie didn’t come home at all yesterday and today he brushed me off. Keno doesn’t know that Goldie doesn’t know. The horns blow and they take off. Dust rains down as it quickly disappears into the horizon. The crowd patiently waits until they come back. There’s an anxious buzz humming through the different gangs. A lot of them don’t want to leave. We finally see them coming back around. Goldie is in the lead, with Keno right on his tail. Just as Goldie is reaching the finish line his tire pops. Keno barely manages to avoid a collision and stops his bike. He helps my brother up, and they seem to be talking. They walk to the finish line together.

The two gangs crowd around both. “Well boss, what’s happens next?”

Keno and Goldie look at each other and then look back at us. “We ride.” Goldie says. I sigh in relief. Keno winks at me and smiles. Looks like this town is big enough.



---

Rachel Crespo

Sonnet

---

Bailey Mathis

The sun goes down beneath a hazy sky  
Triumphantly, the night appears with grace,  
And tho' the question is no longer "why",  
I cannot help but yearn to see your face.

This argument, this fight, this déjà vu  
Reminds me of a time I could not win  
And tho' I may have only eyes for you,  
I cannot drink enough to purge my sin.

If ev'ry war we never fought was won  
And victory assigned to those who lost  
Then I—and only I—would always run  
To lose for you no matter what the cost.

No heartbreak is enough to change my mind—  
No truth enough despite my learned kind.



### Aakiyrah King

The past three weeks since submitting her resignation with Barnes' Industries has been the most chaotic weeks of Trinity's life. Suing the company was a drunk idea, but seeing the case build momentum is both thrilling and overwhelming. The legal papers were served a week after her resignation, and already, the news and media are going off the hinges to get an inside scoop.

To both their surprise and relief, Trinity's outcry for justice created a major domino effect for Barnes' Industries as dozens of Black and Brown employees go on strike to symbolize their unwavering support. Trinity's inbox has been filled to the brim with employee testimonies, and it doesn't take a lawyer to know that they've built a groundbreaking case.

Not only has the media caught a whiff of the story, but companies are bursting at the seams, eager to seat Trinity at the head of their Marketing Department. Trinity has always had faith in her work, knowing she's an immaculate businesswoman, but seeing so many companies begging for her attention has caused a new wave of confidence to surge through her.

So, as she sits in the heated office space next to James, her best friend and lawyer, she's never felt more powerful. Meanwhile, Mr. Barnes and Ms. Watts look equally drained. It seems the company tanked after her departure. There's no Ms. Jones, no department head, and over 30 employees have walked out in protest. To say either of them is exhausted would be a grave understatement.

"Good afternoon and thank you both so much for joining us in this meeting." Mr. Thompson, the company lawyer, announces.

"It's a pleasure to be here." James starts, "Let's talk."

"You've caused quite the stir Ms. Jones, and honestly, I'm disappointed." Ms. Watts kicks it off. She, more than anyone, is most enraged by this lawsuit simply because it's the exact opposite of what she wanted to happen. Trinity was supposed to either quietly relax her hair or quietly leave the company. Amanda never expected Trinity to attract news, media, and other employers.



"Amanda-" Mr. Barnes bites but is quickly cut off.

"No Gerald, this was never supposed to happen! You wanted her to run the department, I told you she wasn't ready. Now look, we're down nearly forty employees over her!" The last word comes out like venom.

"Excuse me?" Trinity snaps her gaze in Ms. Watts' direction. Fire burns in their gaze as they lock eyes, neither backing down. James is the next to speak.

"Ms. Watts, the repercussions of this company's crass behaviors are not my client's fault. Her public resistance was the driving force for other undermined employees to speak up as well, and that is the fault of none other than you two for the environment you've created for your Black and Brown employees."

Amanda scoffs. She didn't care. This company wasn't meant for the weak, so if employees can't stand the challenge, that's on them.

"I'm sure there is a humble conclusion we can reach, yes?" Mr. Thompson continues.

James has been through this before. The wear and tear on their faces. The forced pleasantries at the start of the encounter. They're cracking under the pressure. James knows this meeting is to make the case go away, and as much as he wishes to bring the company to its knees for the sake of his best friend, as her lawyer, he can only proceed if she wishes to.

Luckily, they were on the same page. So, when Mr. Thompson writes something down on a sticky note before sliding it across the table, Trinity's face contorts with a look of disgust, her eyes darting between the three professionals across from her. She quickly responds with, "I don't want your hush money."

"Ms. Jones, I can assure you that this is not hush money. Consider it a reward for your tenacity these past few weeks."

"I'm not interested."

"You will also be reoffered the position with a raise, and we will rescind the stipulation."

"I'm not interested."

Amanda scoffs. "That's it, I've had enough!"

"Amanda!" Mr. Barnes barks. She's done nothing helpful this entire time. Initially, he wasn't opposed to the stipulation, because like Amanda, he wanted his company to maintain a certain image, but after seeing everything he's worked so hard for unravel before his eyes, he's become desperate to remediate the issue.

"This has gone on long enough! She has tarnished the integrity of this company, and for what? Is this a temper tantrum because the poor little Black Girl can't get her way? It's pathetic!"

Amanda's hands instantly fly to her mouth with the realization at the words that just slipped. The entire room is silent, and the tension in the air is thick. On one side of the table, there is a bone chilling fear residing on their faces. On the other side, Trinity's breathing staggers as she fumes with anger. James, both infuriated and protective of his best friend, decides to break the silence.

"I think Ms. Watts has said more than enough. Now if you'll excuse us-"

"Let me tell you something, Amanda," Trinity's tone is eerily calm. "Every morning, I wake up as a Black Woman and deal with every piece of baggage that comes with it. The dirty looks, the competitive disadvantage at work, the snark remarks of people like you. I've been with Barnes' Industries for the last six years, working my way up from an intern to being offered a head position, and never once did being a Black Woman interfere with that.

I submit my projects faster and more accurate than any of your white employees. I show up to work before them, I create far better ideas than them, and I work way, way harder than any of them. That's what a Black Woman does, she's met with adversity and overcomes it. So, me choosing my identity over my position is not a Black Girl having a tantrum, it's a Black Woman taking a stand, and I will never bow to the likes of you."

With that, Trinity grabs her things and exits the office, James not too far behind. The past few weeks were hectic, but nothing compared to the following weeks. After the meeting, Trinity and James proceeded with the lawsuit. Her statement along with the testimonies of dozens of other employees made it easy for the judge to rule in their favor. Shortly after, Amanda Watts stepped down from her position because many employees refused to work under her. While Barnes' Industries still thrives, it has taken an obvious blow and will forever be stained with the atrocity of what happened.

The news and media were relentless, desperate to hear Trinity's side of the story. She traveled the country, appearing on Good Morning America and other shows to talk about her experience. She accepted a head position for another remarkably successful, very Black- Owned tech company.

James' career also experienced a major boost, as he gets asked to take on more cases due to his major success. He was even asked to join the C.R.O.W.N. (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) Campaign to make it illegal to discriminate against natural hair in the workplace. Everything for the two best friends seems to be looking up for them with no chance of coming down.

It's almost surreal. Trinity had the chance to make Black History with Barnes' Industries, but she ended up making Black History in America.

I Am

---

Gabriela Reyes

I am the maize in my grandmother's  
corn flour tortillas  
I am the assembly of leaves in a black  
tea bag  
I am written in the lines of Percy Jackson books  
I am the twirls and whirls of a cumbia dance  
I am the serene shots of scenery in a romance film  
I am the deep cerulean brush strokes of  
Starry Night  
I am the wind coursing through the beaches of El Salvador  
I am the frayed ends of my favorite pair  
of Levi 569 jeans  
I am the curves and grooves of Gaudi'  
Barcelona architecture  
I am the ups and downs of the San Francisco Skyline  
I am the wings of an airplane that has touched every corner of the world  
I am the plush gray cushions of my Bose headphones  
I am the first streams of sunlight at dawn  
I am the cacophony of laughter at a family reunion  
I am everything, everywhere, all at once

I Am

---

Andreas Sanches

I am the sushi  
that satisfies my hunger  
I am the lemonade  
that refreshes my mind on my most stressful days  
I am not My Hero  
but my father is  
I am resilient  
although sometimes the mission seems impossible

I am The Scream  
who sings samba  
I am as free  
as Muhammad Ali  
I am the happiness  
that Bossa Nova transmits  
I am the secret  
that the Amazon rainforest holds

I am the City of Lights,  
where dreams illuminate the night.  
I am Cristiano Ronaldo  
a goal-scoring force, relentless and bold  
I am the intricate dance of Math  
where numbers waltz in an elegant path  
I am the equation  
the solution untold

Am I?  
I think so, therefore, I am

---

Priscil Moutsinga

i'd ask you to be my valentine

Micah Singleton



i'd ask you to be my valentine

but what if we don't look right together.  
what if people see us and find themselves wondering  
what a guy like you is doing with  
something like me. see

i'd ask you to be my valentine

but i'm afraid i'm busy that day  
i've made plans with myself  
to look in the mirror and point out the  
places i could fix so that maybe  
my name would start to taste different on your tongue and

i'd ask you to be my valentine

but your presence is enough  
to light up the room and mine  
burns cities to the ground so

i'd ask you to be my valentine

but i'm afraid that the words may get  
stuck in my throat or worse  
they'll come out but you  
will hear them or worse

i'd ask you to be my valentine

and you'd say yes and i'd  
have something lovely in my  
clumsy hands and i'd  
destroy it without even trying  
because that's just who i am, yeah

i'd ask you to be my valentine

but i have been rotting  
from the inside and  
you do not deserve to be  
the one stuck dragging my  
corpse around



The young king woke early that morning. It was just before sunrise, so there was enough light to see that something was sitting on the table beside his bed that hadn't been there the night before. He lit a lantern, the movement waking his wife beside him.

"What is it?" She asked.

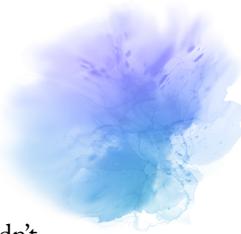
It was two things: a rolled sheet of parchment, and a rough-hewn dagger made of bone. They both went a bit pale when they saw the dagger, but the king unrolled the parchment and started reading aloud.

Dear King Edmund and Queen Leanna,

Thank you for everything you've done for me. I know you're probably concerned about this note, especially with the dagger next to it, so I'm going to explain everything.

I was born a mermaid. The Sea King's youngest daughter, in fact. But I always felt as though I didn't belong in the water. I was fascinated by the artifacts I found in the wreckage of ships and items that had been lost to the sea. I was always pestering my grandmother for tales of the land, for she had seen much of it. I longed to be allowed to go up to the surface, as my sisters were. At last I was old enough, and when I came up, what should I see but a party on a ship. It was your engagement party, Edmund, as you might have guessed, though at the time I did not know you. All I knew was that you were very handsome and I wanted to be at that party with you, laughing and smiling and walking around on two feet, rather than swimming alone through the sea with my tail. Then, the storm came up, which I'm sure you remember so well. I didn't understand the peril you were in, so I enjoyed it immensely. The danger of your position didn't sink in for me until your ship broke, and I remembered that you couldn't breathe underwater as I could.

When I saw you sink under the water, your crewmates unable to search for you because of the storm, I didn't think. I rescued you, holding your head above the water while you remained unconscious. I was too tired to do anything more, so I let the current carry us where it wished. As the morning came, we reached a bay, one which I'm sure you know well. I pulled you up onto the sand, made sure you were still breathing, and then slipped back into the sea as I heard people approach them. You know what happened next, so I will not bother to waste paper writing it all down. I continued to watch you, first to make sure you really were ok, and then because I became enchanted with your life. I listened to others talking about you, how good of a person you were.



After a time, I started to fancy myself in love with you. I didn't really know what love was, I see that now, but back then, because I longed to be up in the open air with you, to talk to you and laugh with you, I thought I loved you.

I was in despair, for I could never be with you, as I was a mermaid and you were human. I grew desperate, and finally chose to make a terrible deal with the Sea Witch. I traded my tail for human legs, gave up my ability to breathe underwater and swim the depths of the ocean for a chance to dance in the sunlight and walk through the grass.

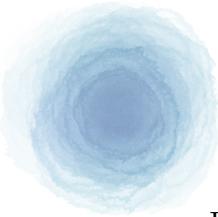
I didn't regret it then, and I still don't, though some might say that it wasn't worth what I gave up. I had to give up my voice, which was my pride and joy, for a chance to walk on two legs. And this spell had a time limit, one year, after which, if I had failed to do what I set out to do, I would return to the sea, not as a mermaid again, but as foam on the waves, my spirit gone forever. But even that did not sway me, determined as I was to become human.

I took the potion and turned into a human. The transformation was so painful that I fainted, and when I came to, you were there, Edmund. You know what passed over the next year, so I will not go into details about it. Let me just say, that as time passed, I fell more and more in love, not with you, but with the land above the water. However, I still thought that it was you that I loved, so little did I know my own heart. Indeed, when I first met you, Leanna (for I know you are reading this too), I was jealous, so much so that I'm sure you must have perceived it.

However, you have become my closest friend, teaching me to read and write so that I may express myself, and it was you, with your pure love for Edmund, and his love for you, that showed me that I wasn't actually in love with him. I realized that he was my closest friend, but nothing more. I was truly happy for you the night of your marriage, and still am. However, my realization came at a high cost because of the bargain that I had made.

I had been given a year in which to live as a human, during which time I must either win your heart and become your bride, or fail, and die at the end of the year.





I was offered a final chance, a last way to gain my life, one that my sisters traded their beautiful hair for. If I were to kill you, Edmund, with a knife made of bone, pierce your heart with it, the spell placed upon me would become permanent and I would be fully human. I couldn't do it, of course, but I couldn't bring myself to tell you about it either. Not until now. This night is my last night, and when the sun rises, I will be gone.

I do not regret my decision, and I do not hold any grudge against either of you. You are my closest friends, and I only wish that I might have had someone love me as much as you love each other. Know that I will die happy, having felt the sun on my face and the grass beneath my feet, having danced and climbed trees and explored the world above the water. I'm sorry that I could not spend longer on land, but I'm thankful for the time I did get to spend up here, and I'm thankful that I had two such friends as you in my life.

Your friend forever,  
Avda

King Edmund and Queen Leanna looked at each other, both their faces pale in shock. Then, in unison, they rushed to the window. They looked out toward the beach and could just make out a lone figure stepping down to the water.

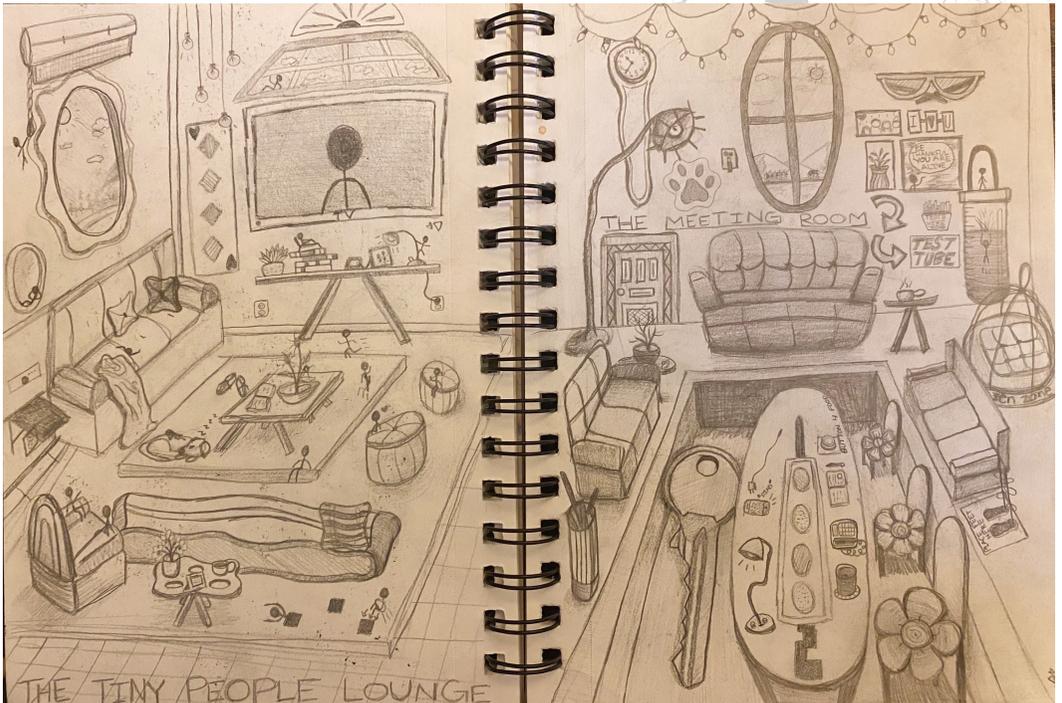
They saw her look up at them and raise her hand in farewell as the sun broke over the horizon. Then, a wave crashed into her, and she was gone.



# I Am

by Sam Faarzenah

I'm a Persian that doesn't purr  
I'm a foodie who doesn't share,  
I'm considered white, but not that fair,  
I am furious- not enough to tear  
The books I bought but never read  
I love cooking, mostly with a pan,  
When one talks about faith, I hear sham,  
If you call my country Eye-Ran,  
Will I correct you and say it -just for fun  
An eye does not run,  
It's ERAN?  
Probably not.  
I am a master of mispronunciation  
I do lack skills in good communication  
I don't even have an education  
Who am I to judge?  
A linguist? A professor?  
None of the above,  
So, let me infer,  
I'm just a Persian that doesn't purr



## I Dance

---

Gladys Munashe Chiraramiro

I dance to honor those that came before me  
Those that swayed to the beat of the drum  
The heart that sounds like a beating heart  
Meaning in each dance is personal

I dance to appease the gods  
The gods that conquered the earth  
The earth that shatters with each beat  
The beat of the drums that thuds  
Thuds that sound like thousands of hooves

I dance to heal my soul  
My soul that hurts many times  
The times I hurt are the times I cry  
I cry because of the heart caused by many  
Many who thought I would never heal

I dance to fill the space  
The space in my living room too small  
Too small to fill the void inside  
Inside the heart that is ready to burst  
Burst with the many accolades it hopes to get

I dance to ease my soul  
My soul full of wisdom  
Wisdom bestowed on me by the elders  
The elders that choreographed every movement  
Movement that represents my people

I dance to remember the steps  
The steps make me laugh  
The laughter of repeated childhood mistakes  
A childhood filled with song and dance  
Dance used as a pastime

I dance to feel loved  
Loved in the arms of the one I hold dear  
Dear enough to hold closer  
Closer for the world to know  
To know i have found the one

I dance  
And will continue to dance  
Until I have no more dance left in me

It was a quiet walk through the forest. Mist coated the floor of moss and roots. It was more peaceful than usual. The wisps of wind danced through the tree leaves. Soft light shined gently between the branches, leaving dots of rays across the ground. It was a step, step, step, before he made it to the wall of briars, blue roses decorated here and there. He pressed his palm against the wall and with one soft prick, the wall gave way to a garden clearing.

"It's been a while."

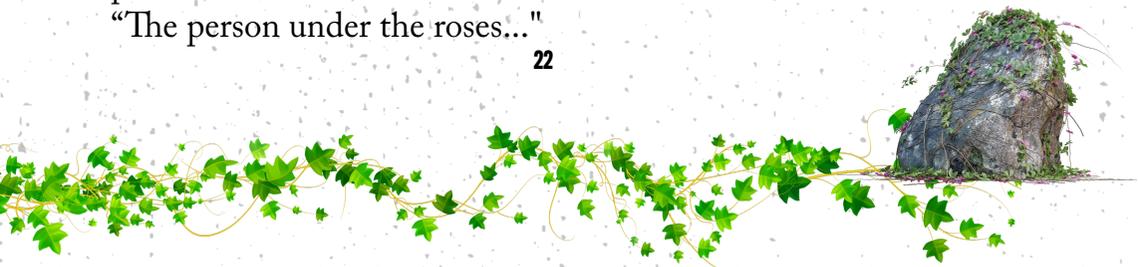
Patches of flowers were scattered beautifully across the moss. A bendy stream presided along the right side of the garden, water bubbling across the rock and branches placed in the medium. To the left was shade from the trees that grew taller than the wall itself. Sleeping birds and squirrels dreamt away in its bark. In the center lay a rectangular patch of blue roses, not a briar in sight, with a semi-circle of rocks placed from shortest to tallest. The last one had 'R' etched in it.

Beside it sat an individual in a black cloak. Hearing footsteps behind them, they turned, removing their hood knowing whoever made those steps lacked malice. He wouldn't have made it into the garden if he did.

"And you are?"

The person smiled as he sat next to the cloaked individual. He released a soft exhale as he plucked a stray blue-thorned rose that grew too far from the rest. His hands flitted with the stem as it wrapped around his finger, rubbing the soft petals.

"The person under the roses..."



The one in the cloak widened their eyes and looked at the patch of blue. They hovered a hand over the patch and the person next to them. He felt the same but so different. "I'm the one who took over when she left." He smiled and they reflected that smile. The cloaked leaned in and curled a piece of his hair back in with the rest. It bothered him.

"Do you miss her?" They asked softly and he breathed, watching as the stem grew further up his arm.

He leaned back with a hand placed behind him to keep him up. Gentle light dusted across his cheeks as he looked up.

"Every now and then. But, I think she'd hate me if I admitted it. But it's been too long since I've talked to her."

"How long?"

"Few months. Maybe five?"

They patted and rubbed his shoulder. He released a chuckle.

"She doesn't want to be remembered for my sake, but I don't care. She helped me realize who I was, and I can't help but thank her." He hiccuped as the petals of the thorned rose began to fall from the stem. A gust of wind lifted the petals and drifted them to the palms of the cloaked, who paid no attention to it. All of it was on him.

"She loved me when I was too small to be noticed. She loved me while I was still trying to acknowledge and accept myself. And she loved me after I flourished. I'd like to think she loves me now, even though I was the one who made sure she was gone."

Drops of tears fell onto the blue petals and he released a shaky exhale. He leaned into the touch of the cloaked figure.

"She does. She loves who you're growing to become." They pulled him into a hug.

"Do you think the others are prepared for who I become?"

A blue rose is positioned in the upper left quadrant. A thorny branch extends from the upper right towards the center. Several red rose petals are scattered around the scene, including one in the top left, one in the top right, and one on the left side.

They pulled away but he remained close. The stems of the former rose shriveled up, falling from his arm and into the hands of the cloaked figure. He leaned back into their shoulder, rubbing his cheek into the person's cloak, feeling a wave of warmth and comfort.

"The ones that matter are already there with open arms." He watched as they clasped their hands over the remains of the rose. Opening their hands, the rose reformed, now thornless. He smiled. The cloaked one tucked in the blue rose behind his ear.

"Do you think you can answer me now?"

"Well, who are you?" He said with a smile as he wiped his tears. "This is my garden."

"I'm Mori. I am the watcher of your garden." They said, combing their fingers through his hair. "Your name?"

"Killian."

A thorny branch extends from the lower left towards the center. A blue rose is positioned in the lower right quadrant. Several red rose petals are scattered around the scene, including one in the bottom left, one in the bottom center, and one in the bottom right.



My eyes burn from pouring out fictitious feelings.  
My hollow heart breaks so carelessly.  
I plaster a practiced pose for all your practical problems,  
While searching for hope hopelessly.  
Will I ever free myself from being a burden,  
From the repressed rage,  
From the pretentious persona I uphold,  
From the regretful decisions I made?

Forcing my mind down into my bones because I'm never  
alone.

Days do not go by, but the hours do not stand still.  
When my sanity escapes, but people will not leave,  
Work piles up, secrets spill.  
Wipe it down with more lies, harbor more guilt,  
Pass it on, signed and sealed in the will.

I know the act never ends, the good times never last.  
I have learnt it again and again from the past.  
Cannot run from the swarm of reality and its trials,  
But will the labor be worth the effort before I retire?



Yusuf Benya

A Youngish richly dark man with a skeletal frame in a long blue heavy winter coat sitting on damp earth and grass, one knee up near his chest with fingers loosely interlocked in the darkness of his eyes, great pools of dark churning water colored only by the willow white of his iris, veiled in a suit of darkness behind him, a slowly rising sun behind him filling the trees, and the undergrowth around him outlining him in a silhouette of gold.

"Oh, my sun Your love, our love, is fickle, like a burning kiss. Yet still, this is our year's moment of moments. I'm yours; I can see it in your eyes, yet I'm your capture. We are two alone; I can't escape."

*... Was that incoherence for me?*

"Signs: You can just say you don't like it."

*... Why do I see no need to approve or disapprove, especially when I have better things to do?*

"Yeah, good morning to you too."

*... I have nothing to say about your prattling nonsense.*

"I know; I know you're on your way, but I want to have words with you so we can be clear."

*... I am clear. I have always been the one left in the dark.*

"Yes, yes, yes, you're doing the most important job, and yet you have time to talk to me every morning."

*... You complain to me; you beg and moan and whine and cry and blister with consistency as if I can somehow alleviate your woes.*

"You're right,... you are right."

*... Then. You will do me the kindness of being silent unless you want to suffer the consequences.*

"I HAVE, as you put it. I have always been the one left in the dark. Is it so much to ask of you to be a friend and not simply be alone in the dark?"



*...yet I am not a friend to you or any other; you are a fool to court me, creature. You shut the company of your fellows for the company of your terminus.*

"I'm not like them; they may see me look into my eyes as they shake my hand and feel flesh under these, only to realize it's skin deep."

*... Then you are the damned.*

"Perhaps I should have your full company."

*... Then I would have silence, yet I know you will not.*

"Why!"

*... Routine ritual, sheer habit How many years have you done this? I have been here immutable since time immaterial, one does not simply abandon that ritual, especially one as despite as you*

*"..."*

"So I am alone."

*... You are all pieces of meat on a ball of mud floating in the air. Do as you would.*

"Fine, I thought this could be enough; it should be, but... I can't live like this."

*... See to your task, and I will see to mine.*

Striding through a dark forest, just beginning to glisten by the morning's light, a figure silhouetted in darkness wearing a dark blue winter jacket makes his way out into the light of dawn.



Michael Chance

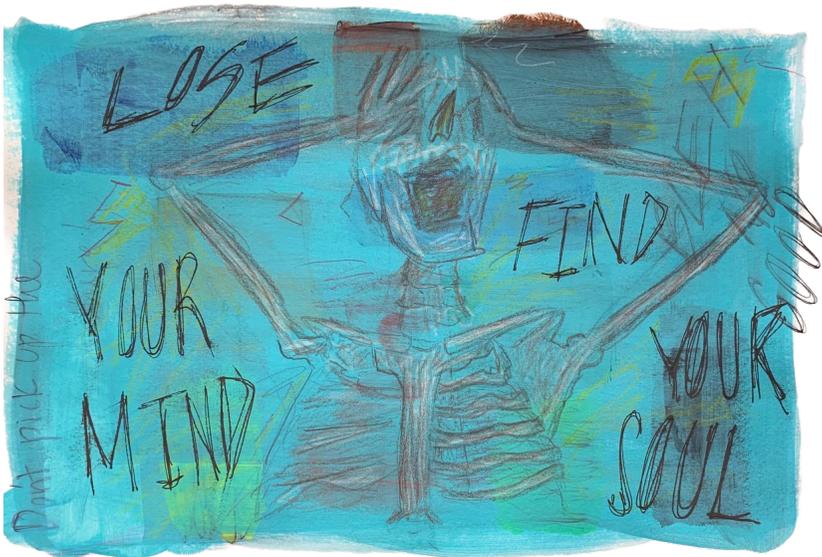
Why must my heart pound? As I laid, each heartbeat pulsed through my entire body. My bones ached in rhythm. Every beat was a knock on the door to my soul. Death is calling. The frog in my throat continued to bloat with every moment that passed. I can't breathe. Drenched in sweat, the air in the room graced my body. Streams trilled down my nose, onto my lips — then my tongue. I mustn't worry! It's no good. As I strained my senses, a shadow danced at the edge of my vision. I could have sworn I saw a dark figure lurking in the corners of the room. What do I do! Do I call for help? It's too late; there's no getting out of this. I have already surrendered. Darkness from which I can't escape! Silence who opposes my every move!

If I budge, he might hear! Silence truly is my enemy. Where can I turn that he will not go? Rising slowly, the bed creaked. Nothing, yet. I stood up from my bed, and felt around in darkness for some sort of object. My vase! I must grab my vase! The vase that originally belonged to my mother, was a special blue china she cherished — a gift from a distant memory. A glimpse of hope crept into my soul, but soon left as I realized it was on the other side of the room on the dresser. But I had no other choice. It got quiet. A shuffle in the corner. My heart dropped. My legs wouldn't move. But there was no time. God, please help! Please, my Lord and Savior! I ran to the dresser. A shadow appeared from the darkness. My eyes closed. "ARGHHH!"

I gathered all my strength and swung. The vase broke; blood began to pool around the shadowy figure as he lay silent. A metallic smell began to surround me. My hands trembled as I surveyed the scene. The realization of what had transpired sank in — a battle against the unknown, fought and won in the shadows. My mother's vase, once a symbol of warmth, stability, and memories, now lay shattered, sacrificed for my survival. A conflicted sense of relief and sorrow washed over me. I won, but at what cost? The room, once a battlefield, now held the weight of a secret struggle, hidden from the outside world. The darkness that had threatened to consume me had been met with defiance, and the price paid was etched in broken shards and spilled blood. Nevertheless, I lived another day.

Jade Trowell

It grows and festers  
It boils my blood until my skin starts to melt  
The flesh of my body crumbles off as it emerges  
A sad pile of mush is left on the floor  
It emerges from the puddle  
A huge gross monstrous creature  
Nails long like sticks  
Skinny and dark with a misshapen face  
It bends down Infront of you  
Looking you in the eyes  
Like a mirror  
Mocking everything you do  
It follows you  
A process that happens every day  
It picks at you day by day  
Piece by piece  
Until you finally open your mouth, and the dreaded words circle the air  
Leaving a dark cloud that travels in one ear  
The creatures descend into the ground and is no longer seen  
The only thing that got hurt that day was the pride leaving your body  
The secret that escaped so sneakily through your teeth  
That horrible sentence that broke that ever so stable relationship



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Ayah Hamouda

# Editors' Page

Abigail Ott, Editor-in-Chief  
Creative Writing Enthusiast, Avid Crocheter, and  
Passionate Reader

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Ayah Hamouda, Managing Editor  
Writer, Photographer, Artist, and Cat Lover

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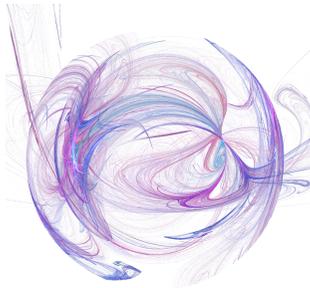
Bailey Mathis, Poetry Editor  
Avid Poet and Knows Way Too Much about Star Wars

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Killian Sibug, Fiction Editor  
Writer, Overactive Imaginist, Chronic Book Binger, and  
Owns Too Many Journals

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Yusuf Benya, Art Editor  
Writer, Just getting started trying to live up to my great  
ideas and expectations



# Acknowledgements



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