

the **SLIGGO**
Journal
of Arts & Letters

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Erratum from Spring 2021 Issue:
“Greece” in the Table of Contents should read “Grease.”

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We would also like to honor all of the work that Professor Robert Giron has done for *The Sligo Journal* over the last 12 years. He founded the journal, served as Editor-in-Chief until his retirement from Montgomery College in 2017, and then continued producing the hard copy of the journal through his Gival Press until retiring from the publication of *The Sligo Journal* in 2021. *The Sligo Journal* truly is an important part of Professor Giron's legacy at Montgomery College. We deeply appreciate the vision and labor that he committed to make *The Sligo Journal* the award-winning publication that it is today.

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the **SLIGO**
Journal

Poetry

In the Delivery Room

Mary-Kate Wilson

First Place Winner, 2021 Sligo Journal Student Poetry Contest
(Italicized phrase lifted from “Metaphors” by Sylvia Plath)

The nurses wore white and I didn't.
They had me in spotted blue
paper, thin against my sweat-hot skin
as I tried to imagine love for him.

They had me spotted: blue
and bruising, *A cow in calf*,
as I tried to manage a love for him
sweeter than being watched

and bruising like a cow in calf.
Holding attention, my knuckles whitened.
Sweeter than being watched
is being seen, able to get as dirty as you need to.

I was unable to hold their attention. In my whitened knuckles
I clutched those hospital sheets like a blanket,
being seen. When you're able to get as dirty as you need to,
you wear white, just to prove how clean you can be.

I cherished those hospital sheets like a blanket.
Nobody saw me in the afterbirth.
You wear white, just proof. How clean can you be
when a surgeon sews your girlbody back up again?

Nobody saw me. In the afterbirth,
paper-thin against my sweat-hot skin,
he sewed my girl body back up; again
the nurses wore white. I didn't.

Sleeping Beauties

Emily Boa



Untitled 2

Eden Unger

Second Place Winner, 2021 Sligo Journal Student Poetry Contest

You must love the newborn birds in spring, and you must learn to forgive their excitement at the sight of a new world, wretched as it may be, no matter how early in the morning. You must love the sun beams in summer, how they peel back skin like old wallpaper, and the speckled brands they leave behind. You must love the inevitability of fall; the undying joy of summer seems eternal, but it is sweetest as it slips away. You must love the bite of the cold winds during winter—how they numb fingers and toes, because only in not feeling do you remember the miracle of touch, of feeling everything.

You have to love this world until it kills you. When it becomes hard to see the beauty in it all, when you begin to think that it might just be shit after all—this is when it is most important to hold onto that love, to hold tight to the world as it chokes the life out of you. The moments when you very nearly black out are when you most appreciate the light. When you cough up blood, make sure to smear it across your face so you can look at the world one last time through a rozy haze.

And when you wake up the next day faced with the impossibility of doing it all over again, you must love the futility of it all.

Fluid Vessels, Rigid Vessels

Camryn Stalvey

Some vessels know their name,

Others don't yet.

Some vessels emanate boisterous personas that bellow their identity with confidence, with certainty.

Those ships exclaim with joy at the exciting unpredictability of the currents.

Other vessels lean on timid personas which tirelessly search the seas for a concrete identity, but each one they try on feels like a square peg in a round hole.

Those ships stay firmly tied down to port, eager to avoid unfamiliarly, eager to stay comfortable.

Some vessels rejoice at the mention of voyage,

Others groan in bitterness,

their floorboards creaking with dissatisfaction.

Some vessels explore the seas with sails stretched wide, welcoming the unpredictable gusts of winds, learning all sorts of things from it.

Those ships think wind to be their mentor.

Other vessels tiptoe through the seas with knotted sails, aiming to avoid the unpredictable winds, falling prey to the conditions outside despite their precautions.

Those ships think wind to be their enemy.

All vessels sail the sea,

the difference being,

some go willingly, eager to venture out into the vast unknown, rewarded with curious currents,

with each fluid exuberant motion they stride onward.

Others are shoved out of their familiar harbors, rough winds and rocky waters clawing at their sides, tossed about in a frenzy,

with each tiresome inflexible motion they remain rigid.

Which vessel are you?

Which vessel do you wish to be?

Head in the Clouds
Veronique Bloomquist



The Cradle of Larceny

Elizabeth Vandegrift

Well hey, All-Nighter—your desk is a town.
The Lava Lamp Eiffel pierces city sky,
As number-2 pencils cut city traffic.
Eraser bits are x-walking all over your essay,
Mumbling, “That’s a D plus, if you had me guessing.”
Hey Mr. All-Nighter, can I jump on too?
This party’s just starting, and its quarter to two.
Say, Ms. All-Nighter, you’re blocking the moon.
What do you mean, just an LED for your room?
Hey Ms. All-Nighter, I hope you don’t mind...
That page oughta be rewritten—now a fifth time.
Ahoy, Mr. All-Nighter, your eyes are shot in red.
At age fifteen there’s no reason to dread.
Hey, Ms. All-Nighter, not to be sappy.
Could you smile above our town,
And assure that you’re happy?
I don’t see any clouds, but it’s starting to rain.
Mr. All-Nighter, homework tears can stain...
Oh dear, All-Nighters—what can be done?
Shouldn’t children your age be having fun?

Sanderlings

Dustin Duby-Koffman

At the water's edge the sanderlings inverse surf,
scurrying to find what the waves left behind,
before quickly legging it away, before the next lap
of bubbles slides up the shore. They move in little flurries,
feathers unfluffed, dainty and determined.
I watch the dance, rhythmic and exact,
and wonder if the sanderlings dream of catching waves.

I wish I could remember it all

Erin Petersen

What is a memory in feeble minds—
But the imprint of shallow feet on sand?
Or a far-off place for which I still pine?
Or the creases on my grandfather's hand?
In the chaos of life's turbulent seas
My mind struggles to hold memories tight
Even if faintest feelings will not cease
These moments flicker out like old street lights
My crystal thoughts do not forever freeze
Fleeting snow in the spring, melting away
When all I know is snatched up by the breeze
What is a memory but softest clay? —

deaf church

Jack Hairston

the pale man in pale robes stands at the altar
moving his lips and shaking his fists

everyone sits in rows with their heads bowed
so they don't have to look at his red face

their lips move too and their fists tremble
tightly clenched around each other

but they do not hear the man
the man does not say anything

it is only silent in his great cathedral

its high stone walls and shuttered windows
a haven for holy vacuum

buffeted from within
as the silent pains of every person
escape in gusts from their open mouths

it is almost as though the man who runs his hands coarsely
over the keys of the decrepit organ in the corner

is sucking the sounds of life into his great brass tubes

perhaps to fool himself into thinking that he is expelling them somewhere
that anyone might hear them

and all through the silence no pleas are heard
as the deaf church spirals through emptiness
leading those within it to another vacuous place
devoid of a soul willing to listen

Gentle Forest

Veronique Bloomquist



Surrounded by Lilies

Lily Chung



Rust

Silmarien Grinath

I will rust with you
Slip my hand into yours
And let the rust build up
On the joints of our fingers
Until time and decay
Has made us inseparable

I will rust with you
As we dance in the rain
I won't miss out on our life
And I don't want to stay
Perfect and pristine

I will rust with you
In the overgrown garden
With the rose bushes
That sprawl
With romantic abandon

Black Boy Beautiful

Elisha Patrice

Black Boy, don't you know that you are beautiful?
I've seen beauty in sweat rolled down bronze backs on black tops
Bouncing basketballs
Playing hard like the NBA was filming every play

Seen beauty ripped through Beyblade battles in my living room
Oh, the joy of seeing black boys and their toys
Seen beauty, dressed like super Mario and Sonic fight stuffed ninja turtles
You had to be there
It was like watching a real-life video game change

Bush Campers camouflaged in blue to protect and serve
berated that boy with bullets
One shot, shield pop, knocked him out the game
Their badges still blameless

I wish I could tell my little brothers that a bubble could protect them from
This battle royal
That I had heals
To keep them from the boxes the world will try to place the Patrice m in

Boys Make your place in this world beautiful
But Boy your beauty should not have been accompanied with RIP Tamir Rice
There is innocence in fortnite
Until your skin makes you a player in real life

Black boys your lives matter
And you don't need no hash tag to define you
Black Boys you are beautiful and
Not just for your ability to form lines over beats
Or being the best athletes
Black boys take a stand
Even if it's on one knee
Boy pledge allegiance to your hue

They will try and break you
Make you the beast

Place you behind bars 16
You ain't whips and chains
You a chain breaker change maker
Don't allow them to place their bricks of bias in your back packs
Unpack your own beauty
Break through their glass ceilings
Walk with your head held high
be authentically you

Black boy you be King
They will try to make your crown target
Blood ruby
You still be beauty wrapped boldly in bravery

I've seen beauty freestyle up and down Olympic size pools
I swear my brother was born with fins he swims like gold medals are in his lungs
Felt God in the embrace of a 10-year-old
If you've ever been hugged by black boy know you blessed
seen black boy beauty on stages
With no filters

Boys they will try and filter you with barricades
Boy jump their hurdles
Run the race be consistent, persistent, and powerful in the face of opposition
Boy being black is not your condition
Boy it's your confidence
And it's no coincidence that God kissed your skin with melanin

Boys this world will try to scar you
But Be Mufasa like Lions run through the fields of your ancestry
Boys stand in face of adversity
As they laugh hyena
But be symbol Simba
And Long Live the king

Black boy I wish you long life
Because everything and I do mean everything that the light touches can be yours
This world can be yours
Because black boys
You...are...beautiful

If You Can Hear Them All

Hamza Ewing

“Anyone who says a bullet sings past, hums past, flies, pings, or whines past, has never heard one—they go crack!” —David Niven

Thousands constellations
Comets slicing
through the firefight

Into tree trunks pave stones
Threstles bell towers lace
Curtains arteries school

burnt tires steps
bones toys

at three times the speed of sound;
their cracks-following one second late-
reminders that you are in fact
in that moment

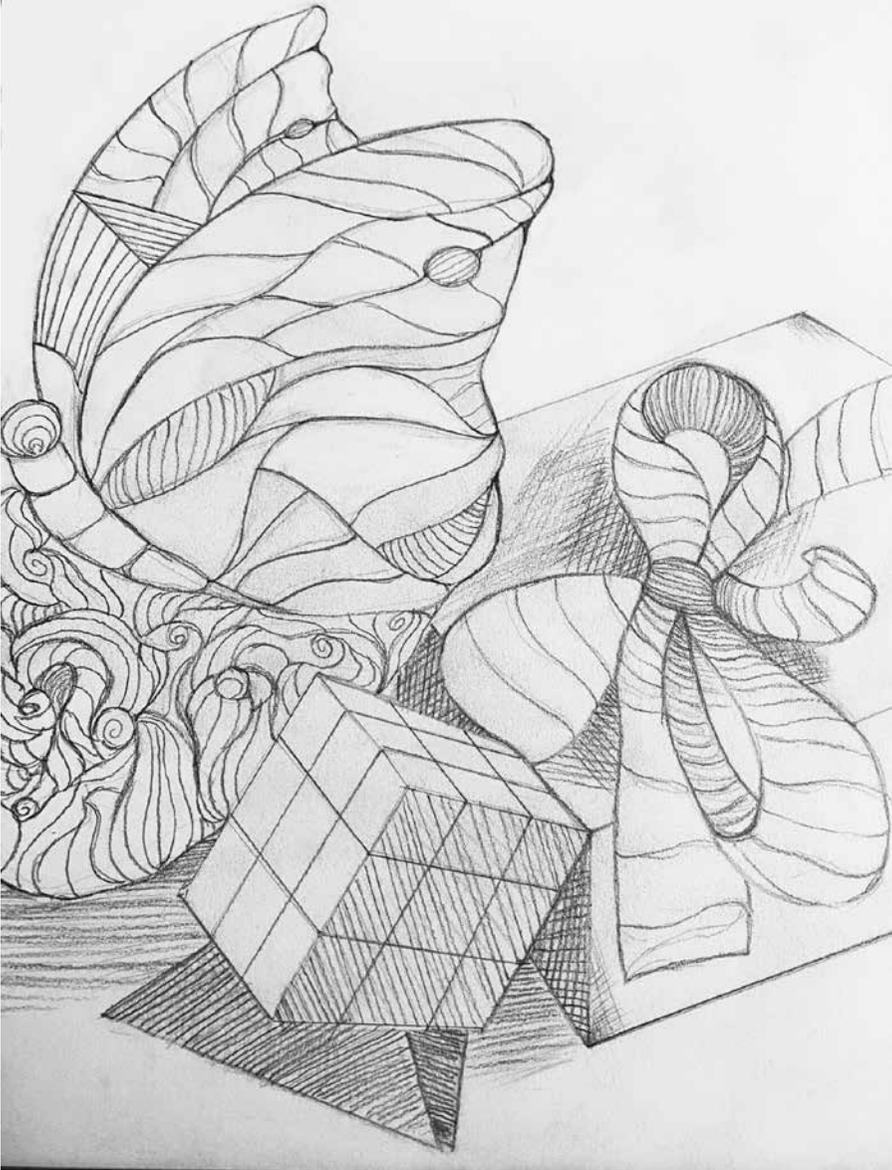
Existence
in a cloud of non-
that maybe
you ought to snatch
that instance grasp it
so hard it becomes
a diamond in your fist

because the clod of lead
trailing your name
in its wake

sounds
like nothing
at all

Is the sound
of nothing
rushing
to you.

Lines in Motion
Aranthza Sanchez Acosta



false poetry
Alexzander Baetsen

i never knew how sweet lies could taste
until you left my tongue coated in words
that seemed too beautiful to be spoken
the venom that dripped from your lips
looked so much like honey to someone
who has never known sweetness

the SLIGO
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Fiction

Fantasy

Jeremiah Towle

Chased up a tree by cacobears again, Colton decided to call it quits for the morning. He'd underestimated how difficult this quest would be. He'd expected a short walk, maybe a skirmish or two before he grabbed the artifact, and a hasty return to town—hasty only because if he died while carrying the quest item, he'd have to backtrack and collect the thing a second time. As it turned out, though, this part of the Sylvagant Forest was crawling with cacobears, and now there were two of them clawing at the base of the tree, and two others encircling it with identical walking animations, all four of them making the very same growls and snuffles. Furthermore, he was running out of arrows.

Colton logged out and removed his headset, and his bedroom reappeared before him. The late-morning summer sun pouring through his window was a little disorienting, more intense than any light in virtual reality could ever hope to be. He took off the rest of the VR gear he'd spent so long saving up for—the gloves and the leg pads and the haptic sensors—and stretched briefly. The way the save system of *Age of Arcane* worked, he wasn't sure if he'd be back in the tree when he returned to the game, or in the nearest village. Either way would be fine by him. The cacobears would move on soon, or just disappear now that there were no players in the vicinity, and if he ended up in the village he would only lose a few minutes' progress, minutes that had consisted largely of walking through the woods.

"I thought you'd gone to work," his mother said when he came downstairs to have breakfast.

"Nah, I'm just working a half today," he said from the kitchen, pouring cereal. "Twelve to four."

"Ah."

That concluded the conversation. His mother was engrossed in some sort of baking show, eyes alight, clearly taking mental notes of recipes and preparations. His father was in the backyard, and was trying, as usual, to build something. His smartphone was propped against the foot of the grill, playing an instructional video. Colton waved at him through the window, and his father gave him a cursory wave in return.

When he went back upstairs his younger sister Natalie's door was open, and she was sitting at the foot of her bed, music emanating from the tablet in her hands. She was watching a YouTube video of someone named Kaley Hamill, the latest blond-haired pop singer to come off the assembly line

Shells' Composition

Veronique Bloomquist



and into the popular consciousness. From how focused his sister looked, and from her ukulele sitting on the bed beside her, Colton guessed that she was trying to learn the song. He paused outside the doorway and listened to the music video, waiting for some particularly insipid lyric to come, and when it arrived he snickered at it.

“Sophisticated,” said Colton.

Natalie gave him the classic siblings’ look of disgust. “More sophisticated than Aaage of the Arcaane,” she said in her most dramatic voice, a bit like the ghostly moans of Jacob Marley.

“There’s no ‘the.’”

“What?”

“There’s no ‘the,’” he repeated. “It’s just Age of Arcane.”

“That’s so stupid. It’s an adjective. It’s like if you made, like, a basketball video game called Age of Tall.”

He shrugged.

“Why do you like that game so much?” she asked, and now her tone was not condescending in the least, but perplexed.

Colton shrugged, told her that it was fun, and left for work shortly thereafter.

But he kept thinking about his sister’s question, all the way into town, and the best answer he could come up with was the one that occurred to him while he was getting into his truck and happened to look up at their home—a house in the woods, painfully far from anything interesting, so far even from the one-horse town where his workplace was located that the only sounds you could hear, standing outside, were that of the birds and the breeze. The answer as to why he liked Age of Arcane so much was this: it was fantasy. Not in the sense that there were dragons and wizardry and the quasi-medieval aesthetic that post-Tolkien fantasy was wont to employ, but in the sense that it placed you in this world, this envisioned daydream, in which you could be great, have fame and fortune and accomplish momentous things. Things that didn’t happen in real life. Fantasy.

When his shift was over, he went home, went up to his room, and went back to the other world. When the loading screen disappeared, he was returned to Hestrel’s Grove, the closest village to the place at which he’d last logged out.

It was more crowded now than it had been in the morning. In the street between the rows of small plain buildings, there was an assortment of player-controlled characters milling around, talking to one another, each with a username and character level hovering above their head, all of them dressed

to the nines in whatever fancy cosmetic items they'd unlocked—armor with skulls on it, armor that was neon purple, wizard robes that crackled intermittently with digital lightning. Colton heard the jagged sound of someone with a bad microphone laughing uproariously at someone else's joke. On the sidelines, non-player merchants were issuing loud greetings, the same ones over and over again, like motion-activated Halloween decorations making the same cackling comment and same stilted movement for each trick-or-treater that passed, and they referred to each and every player as "Adventurer!"

"There's way too many cacobears, man," said a minotaur warlock, whose accent suggested that the corresponding flesh-and-blood person was from New Jersey. "And those pink things with the spears. I don't get how this is a 'level ten' quest, you'd have to be like a twenty."

"No, no, just use Mana Trap," said a fellow clad in the peppermint-pattern armor that had been awarded to all the players who went online during the Christmas season. "It speeds up all your cooldown times, so you can just, like, fireball them one after the other. And then for the boss fight, just keep running in a circle."

They were discussing the very same quest that Colton was on. It didn't matter who got there first—as he understood it, the prized thing was in a cave somewhere, guarded by something generic and fearsome, and each player who went inside would enter their own private instance of the cave. That was more or less how all the fetch quests worked. A thousand Jasons could steal a thousand Golden Fleece in unison, and all the Jasons, in reality, were not adventurers at all; they were cashiers or data analysts or high school kids, or any of a million other things from the realm of the banal.

But the illusion was entertaining. And since his family wouldn't be having dinner for another hour, Colton exited the village and walked back into the Sylvagant Forest.

This time he made it past the cacobears, programmed to give up the chase if their target made it more than a hundred meters away, but was then set upon by the pink things with spears that the minotaur from Jersey had mentioned. These were called gizzergricks, according to the onscreen caption that popped up when he first took aim at one.

This being VR, the accuracy of the bow was based on the player's aim, rather than on how many skill points he'd put into Archery, and his aim was decent. But the skill points determined how much damage the arrows did. Currently, each of his shots had all the stopping power of a thrown custard pie.

And so he found himself being chased through the dark woods, until he broke through to a clearing and saw the first thing in this game to really and truly take him by surprise.

It was a log cabin, small and somewhat lopsided, with firelight coming

Daydreamer

Alina Delcid



from inside and digital smoke rising from the stub of a brick chimney protruding from the roof. Colton was quite sure that the developers of *Age of Arcane* had not put in any such buildings, only castles and ruins and the little houses and shops of the villages. That meant that a player had gone to the trouble of building this place. As he got closer, he realized that the windows even had glass panes; there was no need for insulating a home in this game, or protecting the interior from rain—he wasn't sure if they'd bothered to add the possibility of rain in this part of the game world at all—but someone had decided to make them proper windows, not just squarish holes cut into the logs.

He assessed all of this in the four seconds it took for him to sprint from the edge of the clearing to the front door of the cabin, with six or seven gizzergricks gibbering at his back with their six or seven prerecorded gibbers. He tried the door and managed only to rattle it back and forth on its hinges a little. Locked. He would have tried kicking it down, but it was hard to get kicking motions to register in this game; he would just be standing there flinging his leg about like a failed Rockette.

One of the gizzergricks struck him in the back with a thrown spear, taking out a fifth of his life total and inviting the haptic response system to issue a cruel jabbing sensation to the base of his spine. He didn't cry out, but the physical manifestation of the virtual blow knocked the breath out of him, and he stiffened up in pain both inside and outside the game. Another spear sailed past him and lodged itself in the wood next to the door with a stock sound effect thud.

He did the only thing he could come up with: stuck out a hand and knocked on the door.

The door swung inward, and for an instant, he and the person who had opened it were likely wearing the same expression of confusion outside the game, though their characters' faces were neutral. "Come in," she said, and stepped aside.

He staggered into the room, and she closed and latched the door behind him. He was amazed to see that the inside of the cabin was more detailed than the out. In this room there were shelves full of books—pure decoration, as the books in this game had nothing on the pages but long wavy lines—and a little cabinet on which stood a vase, holding a bouquet. There were paintings on the walls, and closed doors to other rooms. A multicolored rug was laid out on the floor. There was a fire in the hearth, and a couch was positioned in front of it, close enough to it that someone could have sat in it and basked in the warmth, if there had been warmth to feel. There was even a little pile of logs by the fireplace. More vases of flowers stood on the mantelpiece. He hadn't noticed before that so many types of flowers, in so many colors, existed in this world.

Outside the windows, the pack of gizzergricks went through some

animations of frustration, stamping their feet and throwing predesigned tantrums, and then retreated into the woods.

Colton turned and looked at the other player. The username was “K,” suggesting that this player had been one of the first; all the short names were taken by this point. K was a level one character, a pretty mundane-looking human woman, wearing a simple tunic and trousers.

“Hey,” Colton said, “thanks. I didn’t think I was going to make it.”

“No problem,” she said. She had a light, pleasant voice. And a microphone with very good sound quality.

“Did you build this?” asked Colton.

The character’s head inclined a little jerkily, implying that the player was nodding. “Yeah,” she said.

“Why?”

She was silent for a moment. “Just felt like it,” she said at last. “It seemed like a nice place to build a little house. I mean, there usually aren’t as many of those things around. ‘Gizzards’ or whatever.” She started walking around the room, perhaps admiring her work. “The wood was easy to get, I mean, the trees just reappear like two minutes after you cut them down. So do the flowers. All the other stuff is just stuff I bought in one of the villages, with the gold you start the game with.”

He wasn’t sure she had understood his question. “Are you doing the Luck of Ashes quest?” he asked.

“The what?”

“Luck of Ashes,” he said, growing more confused by the second. “It’s a repeatable quest that’s in this area. Good way to earn XP, I mean, you can just keep doing it over and over, so I figured since you built a base here...”

“Oh. No, I haven’t.” She chuckled, like he’d said something funny. “Huh. A ‘base.’”

And she was only a level one, that was the strangest part. She’d built a whole home—odd in and of itself, as Colton was certain that the building feature in this game existed only as an imitation of those outpost-constructing survival games that had been popular a few years ago. And yet she hadn’t earned enough experience points along the way to reach level two. Hadn’t she killed a single monster? Hadn’t she completed a single quest?

“So is that what you’re doing?” K asked him. “The ashes thing?”

“Nah,” he said. “Different quest.”

“To do what?”

“It’s just a fetch quest.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s—you know, it’s just going and getting something.” How, he wondered, could she not have heard this term? “Hey, sorry about busting in here. I, uh—the situation was getting kind of desperate.”

“That’s alright.”

“Do you need any healing items, or anything? I’ve got some I could spare. Or maybe some gold...”

“No, thanks,” she said. “I’ve got everything I need.”

“Okay.” He walked to the door and unlatched it, glancing out the window to make sure the coast was still clear, and as he headed outside, she followed him to the doorway to see him off. “Well,” said Colton, “I’m gonna go see if I can make it the rest of the way.”

“Good luck. If you come back this way, let me know how it went.”

“Sure. See you.”

“See ya.”

She closed the door behind him, and he heard the latch click back into place.

There was no temperature in Age of Arcane, no atmosphere, no climate; the occasional snow and rain were illusory things that had no effect on the world or its creatures. And yet he truly felt that he had exited a warm place into the cold.

No monsters in sight. He used one of the health potions from his inventory to regain the life points he’d lost, checked his map to make sure he hadn’t lost track of what direction he was supposed to go, and walked to the edge of the clearing.

But he was so astonished by what he was walking away from that he had to take a last look back. Through the window, he could see K feeding another log to the fire, then moving out of view, perhaps to the couch.

Just staying there, not doing anything. Was it possible that a person could be so completely missing the point of it all?

He realized, all of a sudden, how desperately he wanted to better understand this. He had a strange impression that some great truth was glimmering just beyond his reach. But returning to the cabin would be too weird. In life, and in Age of Arcane, one does not double back to ask personal questions of a stranger.

So—off to the cave. To the boss fight at the end of the quest. Off to face something generic and fearsome, like everyday life itself.

She thought she’d have a little more time to rest by the fire. But just a minute or two after the stranger departed, her manager poked his head in—not into the cabin, but into the room she was sitting in outside the game.

“Twenty minutes, Kaley.”

“Okay,” she said. She surprised herself with how crestfallen she

sounded, though she doubted her manager, who had started away almost before she'd spoken, would notice. The couch in the green room was quite comfortable, and sitting on it she could almost convince herself that she was sitting on the couch in her cabin. Perhaps she could have been in such a place in real life, a rental at least, had she been granted a single day to herself; had her tour schedule not been a nightmare without end.

Kaley Hamill took off all her VR equipment, packed it up, and changed into the first of three outfits for tonight's performance. It had been decided, not by her, that costume changes were of the utmost necessity, and that the clothes would have to be as extravagant, as exotic, as painfully special, as some of the getups she'd seen on other players in *Age of Arcane*.

Headlining this festival was the biggest thing she'd ever done, the highlight of the tour. This was great, she told herself. This was a momentous thing.

She already knew she would spend the whole show anxiously awaiting the next bit of down time, the next moment in which she could return to the cabin.

That was the dream—a little house with a view of nature, someplace calm and quiet. But that was only a fantasy.

Lake Trail
Ruqayyah Aakilbey



Hold onto Your Strength

Rafael Rodriguez



The Puffin and the Myth of the Diamond Fish

Rodas Mekonnen

There is an old myth in the Westman Islands about a sand eel that got struck by a shooting star hundreds of years ago. Some claimed that the fish died, while others claimed the fish transformed into a diamond fish with a star marked on its right side. Some claimed that the diamond fish could grant wishes. A puffin named Noah believed that this story was nothing more than a myth. Not until he became the one to discover the truth of the story. Noah, a pelagic seabird, was a very charming and friendly puffin. With his soothing voice, he comforted birds who struggled physically and mentally, and he dived into the ocean to catch fish to feed little birds and penguins.

One day, while Noah was flying around to hunt fish, he saw a female puffin dive into the water and grab five herring fish at once. Noah found her strength quite attractive and quickly fell in love with her. Noah thought she was the most beautiful puffin in Iceland, so he used his colorful features and sweet words to approach Mia. At first, she ignored him, but he was never the kind of puffin to give up easily. Mia was impressed by his self-confidence and his charm. Thus, she accepted his feelings, and they lived together for three years. Each year, to attract Mia, Noah grew smooth new black feathers and his beak brightened to a hot orange. She fell so madly in love with him that even if the couple got in a fight, she would return to the same burrow to apologize and cuddle, and he did the same. Noah would dig burrows with his beak to shelter his partner and himself. Whenever Mia saw him with his chest muddy from digging, she would laugh and rub his beak frantically. They were like the Romeo and Juliet of the Westman Islands of Iceland.

One morning, Mia and Noah went hunting fish while the rising sun cast a golden hue across the morning sky, and the rays of sunlight gave a bright, beautiful yellow color to the clouds and the mountains of Westman Island. Listening to the waves sing was Noah's favorite part of the day, and they observed the miracles of the blue-green water rolling up, rising and accelerating with a sound like applause. When the tides of the ocean began to roar, the freezing winds brushed Noah's face. He would lower his trunk by bending his orange legs and then straightened his hip, knee, and ankle to push his body up off a mountain peak, stretching his wings and rising to half a mile above sea level. Mia followed him, and they flapped their short wings frantically to stay aloft. While wandering for hours, Noah saw whales through the clear Icelandic water. He observed salmon bending their bodies and tails back and forth. The fish just under the surface were so entertained by the sun rays that they began to jump in and out of the ocean. Noah told Mia to float on the surface of the

water while he hunted some fish. Noah plunged into the sea, and he used his big orange feet to steer in the water. Noah held his breath for half a minute and grabbed two fish with his upper beak, which had a patch of small spikes. When Noah swam back to the water's surface, he shared the fish with her, and they rubbed their beaks and flew back to their burrow. They lived a happy life together on the beautiful island until they had their puffin chick.

Noah and Mia were delighted to witness their little egg hatch into an adorable healthy puffling. Noah wished their chick's first word might be "papa" while Mia wanted it to be "mom." They always teased each other, "she will call my name first." Their love for their little puffling was so great that they took turns to protect her against seagulls. Unfortunately, their joy did not last long. For years, the water had been growing warmer and the ice had been melting. The puffins sensed that the careful balance around them had begun shifting violently. The fish near the island slowly began to disappear, some migrating away, others dying. The couple was unable to feed their baby, so they began to roam around Iceland, but even around the larger island, the fish were scarce. Exhausted, birds dropped from the sky; larger birds began to eat small birds, and small birds began to eat their own babies.

A puffin chick must eat five times a day. One day, after only receiving one meal, the chick lost her balance, stumbling near her burrow. The puffin chick began panting and breathing heavily as she fell to ground on her left side. Her little orange parrot-beak left lines on the freezing ground as she curled and knitted her brownish eyes closed. Noah and Mia found her lying on the ground, and their hearts broke into pieces seeing her helpless. "Baby, are you okay?" Mia asked with a wrinkled forehead as if the chick would reply to her. "Poor baby," said Noah woefully and helped her get up, and the chick weakly limped back to the burrow, holding her little wings. The chick cried for food, sounding like a muffled chainsaw starting up. But it was beyond their abilities to grant her wishes. Having a chick during this crisis left them beyond anxious, and they prayed for better days.

Noah could not bear to see his family miserable or starving, sick or hunted by predators. They were the family he had prayed for, a family he worked hard to form, but he was petrified to lose them. Noah scavenged for two days, but he could not find a single fish in the ocean. He plunged into the ocean, only capable of staying underwater for a minute. Noah thought if he were to dive deeper, he might find at least one fish. He dove more than 150 feet in the water with his rubber-like webbed feet, but the ocean was empty of life. At the very bottom of the sea, a small fish flicked its tail back and forth, shining like a diamond. The fish began swimming free like it was released from prison. Noah felt like that was the last hope he had, and he knew he had to go beyond his limits to catch the fish. Noah struggled to reach the fish but was forced to return to the surface when he felt suffocated. He could not give up.

He had to do something for the sake of his family. With a deep breath, Noah dove 250 feet into the ocean, his chest hurting while the shimmering fish dodged him. Noah was a puffin who would never give up easily. He swam past her and came back and attacked her. He held the diamond fish with his beak and rose towards the water's surface. Crushed, the diamond fish died in his mouth. When Noah broke the surface, he gasped to get air and was thrilled to hold a fish after three days of searching. He rose from the water to fly back to his burrow.

Around seven in the evening, the sun dimmed while Noah flew with the diamond fish. He flapped his short wings at twice the rate he usually did to stay in the sky. Unfortunately, a gray gull followed him with his long wings and harsh wailings. The gull had a black mark on the tip of his wings. He had a long bill, webbed feet, and maliciously reddish eyes. From the way he chased Noah, it was obvious that he was hungry. It seemed like he would aggressively eat anything he saw with his unhinged jaws. The gull's long, black-tipped wings made him faster, and the gull closed the distance until he was a few feet away from Noah. Noah used his last desperate burst of speed to swerve to the left, and he just made it back to his burrow. He hid inside, a near-miss. When the gull landed on the ground, Noah hastily hid the diamond fish in a hole of the burrow. Noah stuck his head slightly out of the burrow and saw that the gull looked miserable.

"Why...umm... are you following me?" stuttered Noah with a voice full of fear.

"I'm sorry buddy; I must have scared you. A few minutes ago, I saw you holding a fish as I was wandering around to hunt; I suppose you have it," answered the gull.

"What is it to you?" asked Noah bitterly.

"Oh... don't get me wrong, buddy. My baby gull has been starving for days, and she is about to die," lied the gull with misty eyes.

"I am sorry for what you are going through, but I only have one fish."

"Don't you have a kid? Can't you understand what I am going through? Can't we share the fish?" responded the gull. No one understood the feeling of desperation more than Noah, as if he had been searching for the last fish in the world. He pitied the gull, and Noah nodded his head. Noah ducked back inside his burrow to get the diamond fish. He dragged it out, holding it in front of the gull. It took the gull a few seconds to notice the star mark on the right side of the fish. The gull realized it was the diamond fish from the story his father told him as a kid, the one that could only grant one wish. The gull was one of the animals that believed in the truth of the myth. The diamond fish had been hiding in the heart of the ocean for hundreds of years. Perhaps, the warmth and emptiness of the ocean stimulated it to come out.

The gull thought, "Why did it come out after all of these years? I must take the fish to the peak of the tallest mountain in the Westman Island for my wish to come true." As Noah gently laid the fish on the ground, the gull hastily tried to take the whole fish. Noah guarded the fish by puffing up his body, and he slapped the gull on the face with his wings. The gull aggressively spread his wings up and stomped on the ground, so Noah stuck out his neck and hissed at the gull. The hungry gull was not easy to defeat. He pushed Noah with his sharp black wingtips and picked the diamond fish with his hooked bill. The gull rocketed to the sky while Noah slumped in the dirt. Gulls are naturally strong and with their long wings can fly higher than puffins.

The gull stridently laughed as he increased the beat of his wings to race to the tip of a nearby mountain. Night had fallen, and the stars were shining in the sky as if they were cheering for the battle between Noah and the gull. Noah was quite a few seconds behind as he worked to keep up with the gull. Upon arrival at a mountain, the gull slowed its wingbeats as gravity took over to pull the gull downward. He landed on the mountain, and he tilted his head up to the sky while holding the dead diamond fish with his beak.

"I wish to become immortal," cried the gull. Shocked, Noah remembered the myth of the diamond fish from his youth.

Noah suddenly snatched the fish from the gull's sharp beak. In a matter of seconds, Noah tilted his neck up as if he were about to howl, and he made a wish for the ocean to be full of fish. The gull did not know that one must wish while holding the diamond fish just as a shooting star passes to fulfill his desire. The gull was infuriated, and he ruthlessly snapped at Noah's wings. Noah lost his balance and fell, rolling down the razor-sharp rocks of the mountain. The gull ate the golden fish and never came back again.

Mia and the puffin chick were in their burrow when Noah got attacked. They waited all night, but he never showed up. The next day, the puffin chick swung her little wings and flew up. Mia was touched as well as heartbroken to witness her chick's first flight. She had hoped Noah could witness the chick's first departure. Mia and the chick went searching for him. When she looked down to the ocean, she saw hundreds of shimmering fish swimming under the clear water.

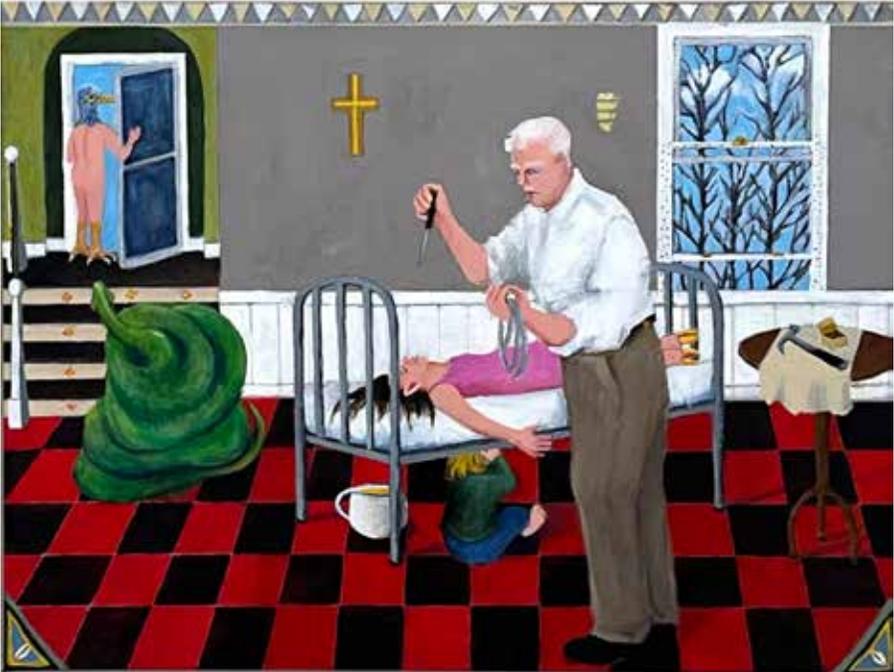
"Wow! I haven't seen this many fish in years. Where did they come from?" asked Mia, delighted. "What a wonderful day," added Mia while shedding a tear of happiness.

But little did she know that her happy tears would become full of anguish. They stood in great shock when they found Noah dead lying on the frozen ground. Mia's eyes filled with tears of sorrow as she saw her love lying immobile and remembered the touch of his beak against hers. The puffin chick tried to move her father with her little beak as she uttered her first words with a soft unclear voice, "Papa...papa."

My Last Drawing
Camilo Camacho



Sow's Ear
Lynn Kidder



Baby Teeth

Mary-Kate Wilson

I have two baby teeth leftover in my adult mandible. One day I will have a child's soft open sores again, and will need fillings or gold caps or a set of ivory dentures.

When I open my mouth against the mirror, twin bottom molars twist towards my tongue.

Each time I visit Dr. Bowen's office, the same magazines sit whitespined on the table: *Methods of Cultivating Backyard Prickly Pear in Modern American Cities*; *Knife River Flint of North Dakota*; *Megafauna Discovered in Northern Siberian Ice Block*.

"Gee, you're getting bigger," Dr. Bowen's gloved knuckles hit my top teeth.

His oily eyelids turn blue beneath the examination chair's thick yellow light. The wide-windowed room smells of peppermint and rubber.

The biologists had pulled the mammoth's tiny brown body from ice to scrape samples from her still-new teeth. A pair of sled dogs had chewed off the calf's left ear, but most of the specimen remained in-tact. Her mouth was stuck open to the cold.

"How's school?" His face is smooth and dry, apart from his eyelids.

"Uh-huh," down-up. The basin under my tongue fills with spittle.

"Good. Any sports?" He yawns. The metal tools are cold on my inner cheek.

"Uh-uh," up-down. My throat is thick. I feel the roll of skin beneath my jaw expand as I open my mouth wider.

"Hmm." Dr. Bowen pokes at the tender inner gums of my bottom teeth. "You used to be a dancer, right?" His voice is lemony. "It's not too late"

The mammoth calf was born in springtime, according to her dental growth. Her teeth were still plaque-soft 40,000 years later. Her body had essentially been pickled by acidic bacteria, left in perfect condition for observation.

"Uh-huh," down-up. My lips are drying. A cramp blooms on the back of my neck.

An electric brush squeals against my right canine. "I'm surprised you don't have any cavities this time." The dentist pulls away from my mouth and swivels his chair back towards a coffee-lined desk.

If I stayed still any longer, I could be a specimen. Before the Smithsonian could encase my jaw within the rare mammals exhibit, they would scrape

at my teeth to discover my final meal inside of them. In a special back-lit box beside my bones, they would display the first baby tooth I lost, excavated from the Saint Bernadette's basement, when I got my jumper bloody and left it red-rooted in the carpet. I would always be part-child.

"Sorry. It's been a while since I've been here." As I speak, the mint-hot paste grits against my teeth.

"You've gotten so big," the back of his crew-cut skull bobbles, "I wouldn't've known it was you. Here," his chair squeaks back towards my body, "open up again."

His blue fingers reach at me, a silver scalpel between them.

The mammoth is frozen twice; once in the Siberian tundra, and again within the old magazine in the dentist's sleepy chair, as he pulls at my gums and pokes happily at what pieces of me are determined to stay small.

His fingers are gummier than I thought they would be when I bite down onto his glove.

"Jesus Christ!" His sharp probe scrapes deep against my thin gum. The cut burns. A warm metallic trickle bubbles into the space under my tongue. "God, that hurts," he winces.

When he pulls his hand back towards his body, there is a gash in the blue latex of his pointer finger, and the pink fossil of my teeth is lodged into the visible skin beneath it.

"Don't do that again!" He snaps.

On top of his nail, a spot of my blood is pooling; warm, alive, and still growing larger.

Contributors

Ruqayyah Aakilbey is 20 years old and a photographer in her free time. She really enjoys photography as an outlet and a way to express herself without using words.

Alexzander Baetsen is a third-year student at Montgomery College studying elementary general and special education. After graduating in May 2022, they plan to begin their teaching career in Montgomery County and later pursue a position of leadership where they can formally develop educational policy.

Veronique Bloomquist was born and raised in Quebec, Montreal. Her first year of college was in Graphic Design, but she left to travel. She visited and lived in Vancouver for half a year, and then Hawaii for three months and Mexico for two months. She then moved to California with her husband, lived there for five years, and studied massage therapy. She worked for a chiropractor for two years. She now lives in Maryland where her husband grew up, and she is back at school in Business Administration.

Emily Boa is an oil painter experimenting with impressionism, with a focus on capturing the beauty of everyday life. Her portraits and still lifes are created with the intention of emphasizing the importance of light and color rather than the subject itself. She is currently attending the University of Maryland and is an art gallery assistant at Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture galleries.

As Camilo Camacho was drawing “My Last Drawing”, a spider was in his view. So he decided to include it in the portrait and was going to title the drawing “Spider Man.” Unfortunately, that was already taken, and he was worried about trademark lawsuits. It is not a Marvel of a drawing, but at least he can Stan back and look at it.

Lily Chung was born and raised in Rockville and is currently studying Graphic Design at Montgomery College. She plans to transfer to a four-year university. She enjoys drawing and painting, and art has always been something she has liked since she was young.

Alina Delcid is a graphic design student at Montgomery College. She has

been taking art classes since middle school and has participated in multiple art competitions. She is planning to continue with her education in graphic design and most likely will transfer to Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland for Fall 2022.

Dustin DUBY-KOFFMAN is the author of two chapbooks of poetry, *Eating Broccoli on the Moon* and *Dedicated to the Seekers*, both from Unrestricted Editions. He also wrote the lyrics for the family album *Be Your Own Fan Club*, which is available on streaming services.

Hamza Ewing is a graduate from Montgomery College, an active writer, and an entrepreneur based in Germantown, Maryland. He is also a current intern at CAIR and an aspiring activist dedicated to dealing with civil rights and social justice issues.

Silmarien Grinath is a young artist in DC. She likes playing with multiple forms of art but finds herself most at home in an aerial dance studio or covered in flour from baking projects while she jots down notes for her poetry and writing. She is also an introvert who has not yet mastered the art of writing blurbs about herself.

Jack Hairston wrote “deaf church” about an idea someone gave him; he thought to himself as he sat down to write it, “How could a church be deaf? What would that look like, and how would the atmosphere feel to those inside?” It then poured out of him, almost an annulment of his faith as he relived some of his life’s worst moments in the Godless house of irony he had created for himself. In his view, the poem is raw, and the reader might tell by reading it how he felt in those moments and in remembering them.

Lynn Kidder has been exploring painting at Montgomery College in retirement. She finds the faculty and facilities excellent.

Rodas Mekonnen, born and raised in Eritrea, became the first child in her family to pursue her higher education. Rodas came to the United States in 2016 and received her high school diploma from Northwestern High School in 2020. Growing up, she loved creating stories due to her belief in having “full control over what occurs in the story and how it ends.” Though she is a business major student, she still enjoys crafting stories in her free time. She earned her certificate at the humanities Cherry Blossom Conference after she presented her first narrative essay called “Confidence” in the spring of 2021.

Elisha Patrice is a Montgomery College student studying social work. Elisha

uses her poetry for her own healing and for the healing of others. One day she hopes to open an art therapy practice to use art as a tool for managing their mental health.

Erin Petersen is a seventeen-year-old student at the Germantown Campus of Montgomery College. Through the Early College Program, Erin is pursuing an associate's degree in Biological Sciences, ultimately aiming to work in the environmental science field.

Rafael Rodriguez was born in Santa Rosa de Lima, a small town in El Salvador, and raised between the villages Copetillo and La Joya. He went to the schools in Canton Copetillo Caserío La Ermita and Canton La Joya. In 2013, he decided that he needed to move to the United States so that he could find a safe place far from violence. In May 2017, he apprenticed at Art on the Block during the summer then he worked as a studio manager. The art that he creates not only reflects his life as an individual but also the lives of many other young immigrants in this country who work hard towards their dreams. He graduated from Montgomery College, teaches visual art at Joe's Movement Emporium, and has a studio at Red Dirt Studios. His goal is to become an art professor, and contribute through the arts, to make a better place for the youth who are still in El Salvador. He hopes to keep creating art about immigration injustices, exploring different mediums.

Aranthza Sanchez Acosta is a graphic design student associated with fine arts. "Lines In Motion" was a piece meant to convey line familiarity using cross contour and cross hatching on a simple still-life. It was one of her strongest pieces for Introduction to Drawing.

Camryn Stalvey has always enjoyed reading and writing; at eight years old, J.K. Rowling's literary works cemented Camryn's love for reading and inspired a love for writing stories and the occasional poem.

Jeremiah Towle is a writer and performer based in Silver Spring. His short story "The Other Dead," published in *The Sligo Journal*, received an award from the Community College Humanities Association in 2021.

Eden Unger is a general humanities student at Montgomery College, where she is working towards an Associate of Arts. Her poems are inspired by a love of fantasy and science-fiction, and her background in music. She can be reached anywhere if you shout loud enough.

Elizabeth Vandegrift's poem is an attempt to portray the overwhelming despair

of so many college and high school students. Interpret it as you will.

Mary-Kate Wilson's work has appeared in *Polyphony Lit*, the *Scholastic Art & Writing Awards' The Best Teen Writing* of 2019, the *Between the Lines: Identity and Belonging* 2019 anthology from The International Writing Program, and the Parkmont Poetry Festival. She is currently a student of English and Arabic at Smith College in Northampton, MA.

