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2017 Spring Quiz & Quill Magazine

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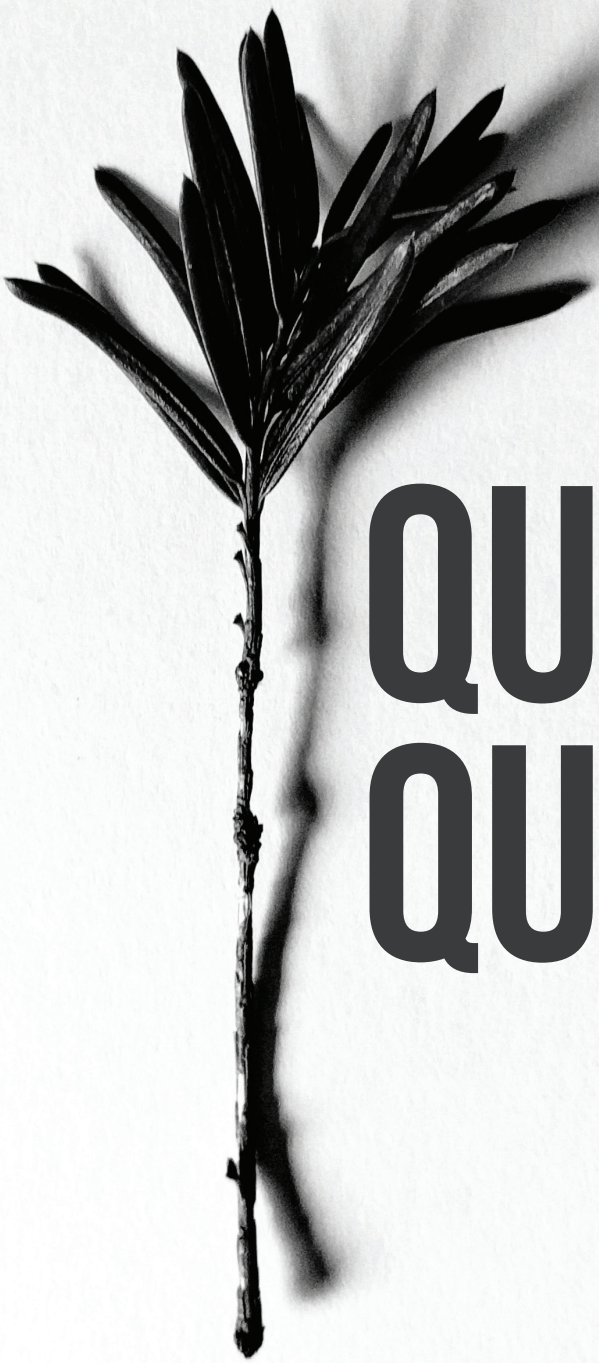

QUIZ & QUILL

OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT LITERARY MAGAZINE | VOL. 98 | SPRING MAGAZINE 2017

QUIZ & QUILL

ESSENCE

Jacob Strous

QUIZ & QUILL

OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT LITERARY MAGAZINE | VOL. 98 | SPRING MAGAZINE 2017

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Q&Q prides itself on publishing the highest-quality creative work. Therefore, every precaution is taken to assure writers' anonymity during the selection process. Only the advisor of Q&Q knows the identities of those who submit work to the magazine until after staff members' selections are finalized.

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LETTER from the EDITOR

DEAR READERS,

It is with my deepest gratitude to follow in the footsteps of Josh Brandon and Jess Campbell as the managing editor of *Quiz & Quill*. Though this year has been a new journey in the absence of the aforementioned fearless leaders, I have grown to better understand the power of writing, the bonds that are built among a committed group of people, and the labor that comes with birthing a magazine.

My home at Otterbein has always been with the heart of *Quiz & Quill,* made of a cherished team that cultivates a realm in which those who want a place can have a place where they contribute the beat. Thank you to the members who work to make the literary magazine its strongest. Thank you to the secretary, genre editors, and copy editors for the extra hours and thoughts throughout each meeting, process, and the getting-things-done. I want to thank Lydia Crannell, our page designer, for her patience, partnership, enduring effort, and beautiful designs. And of course I want to give my everlasting appreciation and wonderment to Shannon Lakanen, our faculty advisor, who molds this group of people together with her expertise, encouragement, support, and demand for a real definition of "flow."

Lastly, the *Quiz & Quill Spring Magazine* could not actually exist without the amazing creators of the work. In viewing this magazine, you will be reminded that there is no other time than the present to promote voice, hear voices, notice silence, and observe the nature of things. I hope that you find yourself turning each page with attention to the careful intent behind every word, space, and image and discovering the life that these talented student writers and artists breathe into the depths of this publication.

ALL MY BEST,

Sarah Carnes

SARAH CARNES

10,000 BLACK WOMEN; OR FOLKTALES ON YAA ASANTEWAA

Claudia Owusu

don't worry
you are made from cages
somebody's/mama's rain dance
shedding dead leaves
and showing lion teeth

10,000 miles of brick door
you are so close to truth,
monsters don't know you
sugar shelved idiosyncrasy
you
shit talkin', glory walkin'
serendipity

you cool blues body of work
weathered tongue hanging words
like broken light fixtures
on the floorboards of the sky
you
supreme touch of
beat and break
you love kneaded
and folded with prayer
you luxury of a place
you jagged beauty you
an eclipse of a sun
somebody's baby's lover
mining the day
hour by hour
weaving june day clouds
like juried symphonies

you conducting stone you pushing against stone
you a river bridge stretching the landscape of the earth
you dirt you loamy soil dirt you rose water brigade you thunder steppin'
stomp
you cement block heels you barely scratching the surface you heavy metal
you woman in parts surround sound loud noise
and cautious beginnings
echoing against surfaces
you floating beast charcoaling middle lines

with all the words of night
you lonesome lullaby
come here, and rest

CARROTS

Kristin Gustafson

I wanted to throw away all of the knives in my house.
But then how would we
cut carrots?
Asked my
Mother.
How would
I carve this meat
as if it were my
own
wrist?
How would we eat
without asking
my body
to play
the role
of a
metaphor?

WINTER GARDEN

Jordan Nelson

THEO'S LETTER

Casey Hall

(Lights rise, THEO VAN GOGH *sitting on the bed next to a desk. A solitary wilting sunflower in a vase next to the pen and paper.* THEO *holds a journal/sketchbook in hand, examining it closely.)*

THEO

You've been gone so long, but I still feel like I'm missing a piece of myself. I wish you were still here with me. Maybe you can hear me, from wherever you are?

(Begins speaking as if to someone out of sight or offstage.)

Today was rough, worse than yesterday, but better than last week, and I still suppose it was better than the week before.

And if you were to put my life on a graph, I guess it would be more positive than it has been in a long time. I returned to my job, you know, the one at the gallery? I'm still selling paintings, but there is very little demand for them these days. People come in the shop looking for art for their homes, but they say your paintings are too colorful, or that they are too unique. Your canvases would bring life to any room, meaning to any life. Sometimes it seems like I'm the only one to see that.

If only more of your paintings remained here. I don't know where they went. I just hope they are as loved as they were in my own possession. How long ago did I see them last? It seems years since you left, but it's only January, only six months since July.

Ever since returning to the gallery, I've had these awful headaches. It can't be the paint fumes, after all I work in a gallery and not a studio. But they do seem similar to the ones you would get when you were working for hours at a time. I feel as if it is a bad omen. Maybe my time there has passed. Maybe I need to move on. Maybe.

I always thought you would outlive me. You had this air of immortality, one which you always infused into your work. But I understand that you needed to go. Maybe people don't see it now, but the gift you had, to find and embody the beauty in life, to paint the things only your brilliant mind could comprehend, will bring joy to people. Sadly, it is certainly past your time, and maybe mine as well, maybe even past dear little Vincent's time, but I will be sure that your

work outlives you, outlives us.

I've kept all your letters. I've been rereading them recently, trying to make sense of what you could have been thinking. But as much as I try, there doesn't seem to be any sense to be made. I know you often felt despair, but your last letter was filled with hope and concern for me and my family. And you talked of your friend, Hirschig, even asked for paints for him. It's hard for me to believe you would have done this and then make the decision to leave us. There are others, too, with whom I've tried to talk about you. All grieving, including the many that we saw at your funeral. None so upset as I, but their grief is palpable.

The world lost a brilliant man when you left, Vincent. And not just for your art. Everyone said you had a beautiful soul, a kind heart, even on your worst days. I wish I had known more that you were struggling. I had sense but not sense enough to pay you a visit, and this is something I shall regret for the rest of my time.

See you soon my dear brother.

(THEO stands, strolls around the room, pauses to look offstage, as if through an open door. He returns to the small set and sits at the desk.)

The doctor told me I should write you a letter. That perhaps it would bring me some closure.

(THEO *writes for the rest of the play, talking as he does so.)*

I don't know if this will help at all. Now all I can think about is a reply that will never come. I shall wait forever …

My dear Johanna is heartbroken. She has always loved you, your work, and your heart. She agreed to name our son after you. Our beautiful little family is so broken now. Vincent will never know his uncle, his namesake. I will be so proud if he turns out to be half the man that you are.

(Another glance offstage.)

I am having a hard time writing this; I've barely been able to comprehend it myself. I am also nearing death. I've had these horrible headaches, the doctor says there is something wrong with my head, my brain. I think I am going to quit my job at the gallery. It's only been a few months since I returned there, but I've decided this time is needed to spend with my family. I wanted to give them the time you couldn't.

It doesn't make it any easier. I will never get to see Vincent grow up, to see if he becomes a painter like you or if he will choose another brilliant profession. I will never see Johanna grow old, never witness her age with beauty and grace. I will never retire in a house on a lake or explore nature the way you so loved to

do.

But I think I am ready all the same. I am ready to see you again. My heart aches without you. I must believe that you will be waiting at the end of whatever comes next. Maybe Heaven is letting you paint the sunsets and the night skies. Their beauty has been especially brilliant this winter. I took my time to admire them. I learned from you, too late, to open my eyes to this beauty, this absolute wonder of nature.

(THEO *stands, pauses in thought.)*

Dr. Gachet, overcome with grief, could hardly bear to say his final words to you. You were devoted to two things, he said: humanity and art, and that would ensure that you would live on in the hearts and minds of people for generations to come. I must believe this to be true for I do not know what became of you or what is to become of me. Our memories will live on, but yours, my brother, your memory, your very soul, will thrive and blossom in the hearts of all people.

(Returns to bed, lies down. He holds his hands on his stomach, lies serene, silent, for a few moments.)

I felt your presence in the room tonight. That's when I knew it was over. I felt more calm and it gave me the hope and closure I needed to write this letter and say what I need to say to you. I hope you are waiting for me.

Goodbye, Vincent, may we meet again in a place where our suffering may be swept away by the brilliant beauty that you have always known.

(Slow fade to black. End of scene.)

I WROTE YOU A SONG

Abby Studebaker

I wrote you a song,
But I'm better at epitaphs
And the thin black words felt false
Like ideas that only exist in between space and meaning.
So I crumpled it up
And threw it into the fire
And felt less hollow while it burned.

I built you a boat
With my unskilled hands,
A tiny little thing out of scraps and splinters,
And I thought it might carry you away
From this landlocked town and all the people in it you couldn't stand.
But I never got the sails quite right,
They never caught the breeze
Or bloomed full like swallows' wings
To carry you on soul-widening journeys.
So I crushed it underfoot
And hoped your own feet might carry you instead.

I harnessed the moon,
To brighten your nights and
Infuse your days with wonder.
But you said it hurt too much
To see something so perfect and so free
So far away.
So you closed your eyes
And I mustered an eclipse,
Cobbled from shadows and shades,
Hoping the distance wouldn't break you as harshly
And instead you could shatter like glass.

A WALK IN THE PARK

Catherine Gallagher

WE MUST BE SMILING

Isabel Billinghurst

Our mother must be smiling from behind the camera
Since we are smiling
And our excitement must have been contagious.

I wonder if he knew how badly
I wanted him to be my friend.
I wonder if I knew all that he was not
And would never be.

Now alcohol stains his breath
Like blood, and his suit of armor does
Not fit; I think he buried it
With his sword, as abandoned
As my preconceived notions of him.

In this picture, we must be smiling
Since neither of us knew what he was,
Then.

ROGUE

Alex Futo

"Are you here?" he asked from atop his red pickup truck throne. It hadn't seen the open road for months, and rust seeped into its cold steel, its carotid arteries and flammable heart. It was missing a tire and a steering wheel, but it had the trademark pine tree air freshener dangling from the rearview mirror. Its radio's speakers were shot. The cheap red paint was faded and the bed was empty, aside from him.

For the boy in the dark hood it was home, with his own homey touches: broken taillight, dented bumper, and all. She remembered when he remodeled it with his bloody knuckles and broken toes.

"Yes," she said. "I'm not stupid."

"You're staring at the wall with glossy eyes like them."

Them. She remembered when them was only a nightmare that clawed at the back of your mind, or a hit television show that took the Emmy's by storm. Those days were simple, domestic. Nowadays life was about as simple as walking backwards blindfolded on hot coals, each step leading up to a ravine with no bottom. These days life hung from a thread, and the line between sanity and insanity was blurred. Blurred because the CDC said so, said that a virus seeped through the cracks right from under their noses to dig holes into your psyche, but her eyes were not glossy.

"My eyes aren't glossy," she spat, tossing a rock at the infamous Pepsi can that stood exactly ten feet between them, not even an inch off. The line it drew was sacred. Nobody crossed the line. No contact. No exceptions. Those were the rules.

She had this itch to vandalize what it stood for and piss all over it because she was a Coke girl and Pepsi tasted like straight corn syrup.

"Marlo, don't!" he snapped, and she cocked her head to the side. Now they were on a first-name basis? Was spending six months in hell (an abandoned parking garage) with a Pepsi can standing guard between them that much of an ice breaker? She hadn't the slightest idea.

"What? I missed."

"It's not funny."

"We sleep ten feet away from a Pepsi can every night with one eye open. Sounds like the start of a bad joke to me."

She threw another rock and missed by an inch, just an inch, and cursed under her breath. “Damn. The ol’ curveball is fucking with me.”

“Marlo, if you throw another rock I swear to god—”

“You swear what to him? God hasn't been listening for months. That fucker wiped his ass with us and left the bathroom stall wide open for the next deadbeat dad.”

She swore her mother taught her how to speak like a lady, like a woman weaving an air of respect and integrity into each consonant and vowel. Her mother also tried to cut her throat as she slept, whispering a crooked lullaby in her ear as she set the blade against her skin, so spitting daggers of profanity didn't taste so bitter in her mouth. Tasted like copper. Like blood. Her mother’s blood on her hands, warm and thick like human lava.

“Are you here?” he asked slowly, eyes calculating and putting formulas together for each move she made and breath she breathed.

He spoke in code. It was their safe word—sex not included, sadly. Nowadays being here meant so much more than ringing a doorbell or sending a text to tell your friend to meet you outside their house because you're too afraid to walk in alone. No, it meant more than that. You were alone, feet melting on coals and eyes blinded. To be here was to step off the path and rip off the blindfold; to be the opposite was to fall into the ravine with no bottom.

She tapped her temple. “I'm here. I'm not scrambled eggs yet.”

Yet. A three-letter word. The elephant in the room. The grim reaper’s scythe being sharpened against your bones. It was the truth neither of them could face, which brought them here. Together. In an abandoned parking garage surrounded by remnants of an old world she could hardly remember and wished she could forget. In a standoff with a Pepsi can and a red pickup truck with a broken taillight and a dented bumper. In a twisted relationship with a boy that kept quiet most of the time and was a piss poor companion, but good enough to help her sleep at night with his snores and sleep talk. They came here because the three-letter word, the elephant in the room, and the grim reaper’s scythe being sharpened against your bones was not something they could face alone.

He stared at her for a long time. She counted the seconds and the milliseconds in between. It felt like an eternity with his brown eyes burning her skin like cigarette butts, and his mouth set straight through his face like it’d been carved into a headstone. His ebony skin had a glazed shine over his cheeks, and it pierced her eyes with a stunning glare. The muscles in his arms tightened like tripwire and she could trace the outline of his pecs with her imagination. His hood shadowed his frizzy hair and failed to shield his brown matches from lighting a fire against her skin. He was the most beautiful thing she’d ever seen.

"Say it," he grunted, and his voice was rough like gravel but smooth and thick like caramel. Like her mother's blood on her hands.

She rehearsed the words in her head and spoke mechanically, like he'd just popped a quarter in her mouth. "I, Marlo, am not rogue. I'm here." She grinned and continued before he could go back to chipping rust off his crimson throne with his finger. "My brain is not Swiss cheese. I'm not psychopathic. My mother's name was Laura. I used to have a pet turtle named Franklin, but he only lasted a week. I—"

"Stop that!" he yelled, and his rough, caramel voice echoed against the white, rotting walls. He'd never snapped like that before. She must've struck a nerve hidden within the bowels of his mind, shriveled up and almost forgotten.

A silent pact was suddenly written between them, like the Pepsi can standing at attention. She wondered that in this silence, as they stared each other down, if he could connect the dots on her cheeks to create a constellation of her life story. She wondered if the swell of her small breasts caught his eye, or if her body, as straight as a board as it was, could be painted with curves for him. She wondered if he could see her mother's blood staining her hands. Would he call her a liar?

"I'm sorry, Cal."

He froze like a deer caught in the high beams of a semi truck. "What was that?" he asked, slowly, like the rich caramel was drizzling all over her skin.

"What? I thought we were on a first name basis."

His Adam's apple bobbed, and she toyed with the idea of having it between her teeth.

"I never told you my name."

Her answer reached the tip of her tongue like the dagger her mother tried and failed to use on her. "You carved it into the hood of your truck like an epitaph. 'Here lies Cal Pynes. May he rest in peace,' is what you wrote. Kind of dramatic, don't you think?"

She'd crossed the line. The sacred line. She made contact. She made exceptions. She broke the rules. She did this late at night when his snores sounded like angry bears, or when he whispered faint apologies to a Vivian she could care less about. She played Russian-roulette with the revolver currently tucked into his Levi's while he slept, only pulling the trigger once each session. The adrenaline lay in waiting for the next time as much as it did in the act itself. Death was inevitable; the game of eenie-meenie-miney-mo was the fun part nobody told you about on the playground.

He jumped off the back of the truck, leaving the dented bumper and

broken taillight in his wake and putting the Pepsi can within an inch of his boot. There was a fire raging in the matches of his eyes, burning, boiling. He wouldn't dare take another step. She knew he wouldn't. What the Pepsi can stood for was sacred, and he'd branded that oath across his palm months ago. Hers too, with a glass shard from an old beer bottle they found lying around. That was the only time he had ever been close to her and awake, slipping the keen edge against her palm as if she couldn't do it herself. Not asleep, snoring and screaming at Vivian to stop. Awake. He didn't trust her, and she didn't trust herself. She broke her oath, but her palm was stained with blood before he marked her and death was inevitable.

"What the hell, Marlo?" He sounded angry. Warm and thick like human lava cascading down her face. "We made a deal! You promised to honor it." He raised his hand and showed his scar, red and sizzling. "You *promised*. The whole world's gone to shit and all I had left was our deal. It made sense. It was logical. But you had to go and piss all over it like the rogue you won't admit you are!"

Promise. Shit. Logical. Piss. *Rogue*. Those words flashed before her eyes like a picture show: shaking hands, a pile of shit, a brain (with no holes), a dog lifting its leg, and people stalking the streets with demented looks in their eyes and patches of blue and itchy scars marring their skin. The last picture, the finale, broke her. She screamed and kicked the Pepsi can, kicking everything it stood for and promising to piss on it later, because she was a Coke girl and Pepsi tasted like straight corn syrup. It flew across their humble abode and echoed each clink as it went.

"Marlo, stop." She saw the glint of steel before she stared down the barrel of his revolver, her six-chamber adrenaline rush. It rattled in his hands and his muscular arms like tripwire wilted. Like they'd been dragged down by a bag of bricks. Like the weight of her mother's blood staining her hands.

"Shoot." She stepped up to the barrel like she was taking center stage. She pressed her forehead against it and dared his matches to ignite. "Do it. I'm rogue, remember? I can't be trusted. I'm unpredictable. My brain is Swiss cheese and I'm psychopathic. Shoot me."

He chewed his bottom lip. The Adam's apple she craved to grate between her teeth bobbed again.

"I said shoot me, damn it. What's wrong? Are you getting cold feet? I thought you damned the rogues. You built a prison for them in hell, remember? I heard you talking about it in your sleep. Y'know, after you were done screaming for Vivian not to jump." He bared his yellow-stained teeth and pressed the barrel of the gun harder into her skull. Good. She'd found the bowel-nerve again. "I don't want to be some psycho stalking the streets. I don't want to fuck with you *normal* people. I don't want to chew on your Adam's apple or piss on that fucking Pepsi can. I didn't want to stab Laura in the chest, but she made me do it!"

"Marlo!"

Her words slipped off her tongue like the dagger she plunged into her mother's beating heart. "What? That's the truth. I killed Laura before she could kill me. I hear her screams, even now, grating my ears like nails on a chalkboard. I feel her blood soaking my hands and staining my clothes. It burns, Cal. Burns a whole lot 'cause blood is like lava. We're all just volcanoes waiting to explode. But hey, you do what you can to survive, remember?"

The gun was unsteady, shaking like a leaf in his sweaty hands, but his finger skimmed the trigger. "Marlo, you're sick."

"We're all sick, Cal. We're all falling down the rabbit hole one way or another. Laura was like Alice herself. But me? I'm hoping for the easy way out. Can ya give it to me?" She pressed her lips to the end of the barrel like it was her lover. "Can ya, Cal?"

"I don't want to kill you," he said, slowly, and this time it sounded like the caramel was hardening in his throat. He was choking. His finger shook against the trigger.

"S'not hard. Just one click and I'm free as a bird. Imagine that, Cal. Me flying far, far away. Maybe I'll meet the deadbeat upstairs in the bathroom and talk to him for ya. Maybe I can convince him to listen, but I'm guessing that bastard is deaf. I mean, how can he ignore all this noise?" She opened up her arms and looked up, having the gun dig into her chin. "It's buzzing down here. It's a real party. Why don't you join us you sick son of a bitch!"

"Marlo, please." He was begging now. She could hear it on the tip of his tongue, the dagger he didn't want to use.

"How many times have you killed Vivian in your sleep?"

Dead silence. Radio silence. She tipped her head down and pressed the barrel to her forehead again. "You talk a lot in your sleep. I've heard you shoot her, strangle her, mutilate her, and drown her. I mean, sometimes you save her. Sometimes. Other times you watch her jump. Tell me, Cal. Are you really better than me? Maybe you're just better at hiding it. But damn, are you one twisted, sick son of a bitch."

"Enough!" His finger was steady on the trigger. The anger that dented the bumper, broke the taillight, and tore off the steering wheel showed its true face. His face. She smiled.

"Do it, Cal. It's on the tip of your tongue. Just do it. Nobody will blame you. I deserve it, don't I? And you know, deep down, you want to do this. It can only be you, Cal. I trust you. Erase the Marlo that killed Laura and is itching to stick her hands in lava. Erase her, damn it. It'll set her free. You too, actually. You'll be free, Cal. Free as a bird. Even the deadbeat upstairs knows

you were born to be rogue. You're rogue, but you're free. Remember that. Rogue, but free. That's your new lease on life. You got that, shithead? So do it!"

The crack of the bullet piercing through her skull sounded much more satisfying than the clinking Pepsi can, as did her body hitting the cold pavement with a thud. She lunged at him at the end of her speech, of course. Otherwise he wouldn't have pulled the trigger. He was angry, but he was too chickenshit to pull the goddamn trigger without a proper invitation. Even the deadbeat dad upstairs would've laughed at the fool who couldn't pull the trigger on a martyr. She died for her beliefs, because death was inevitable. Death was what she believed in the most when the world went to shit and Pepsi cans were declared sacred landmarks under oath.

The puddle of human lava surrounded her and inched toward his boot. He yelped, broken from his trance, and jumped out of its path before it could set him on fire. Her blood was fire, and he was the match that made it so. His dark hoodie was made darker by the splash of molten red, and he scrambled to tear it off before it could burn his skin. He dropped the gun in his panic. Tears blurred his vision and soaked the glazed shine of his cheeks. The anger dissipated and fear took its place.

"I am not rogue," he whispered. "I am not rogue."

Rogues were killers.

"I am not rogue."

Rogues deserved a special place in hell to rot.

"I am not rogue."

But Marlo was on the other side of the barrel.

"I am not rogue."

And he pulled the trigger.

"I am not rogue."

Marlo's blood stained his hands.

"I am not rogue."

He was afraid.

"I am not rogue."

He was afraid because deep down in the bowels of his mind he knew he enjoyed it.

"Am I here?"

In a fraction of a second he grabbed the gun and shoved the dripping barrel into his mouth. His tongue caught fire and he wailed; her blood was still fire. His finger rested on the trigger and the tears were spewing out of his eyes like raging geysers.

"I, Cal Pynes, am not rogue." His words slurred into gibberish as his tongue frisked the cold steel. "I'm here." Sometimes, in the face of death, it was better to tell a lie than a truth. Liars were martyrs that didn't feel pain anymore. They were free.

Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click.

The crack of a bullet piercing through his skull didn't grace his ears, and he did not fall to a resounding thud. Instead he stood still and listened to a click six times over. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. His six chambers of freedom were empty. He had used the last bullet on Marlo, but he swore there were more.

What he didn't know was that she played Russian-roulette five times over the course of their time together. She tossed five bullets and kept one. She knew he wouldn't fuss with the chambers nestled into his waistband, so she counted on using a different chamber each session in a clockwise rotation. She picked a winner because the adrenaline pumped with the clock. The anticipation and uncertainty were the fun of it all. Death was inevitable, and it was so much better to go out with a bang.

He threw the revolver on the ground and screamed. He drove his foot into his throne's bumper until he kicked the license plate out of its socket and his toe filled the void with a crack that the bullet couldn't fill. He punched the driver side window once, because once was enough. The door clicked open and he sat in the seat with a glossy look in his eyes. The same look his fiancé Vivian gave him before she fell asleep in his arms. The same look she gave him the next morning from atop his windowsill before she jumped into oblivion.

He placed his hands on an imaginary steering wheel, flicked the pine tree air freshener, and turned on the radio with no sound. With salt in his eyes and his Adam's apple clogged in his throat, he pretended to drive off the cliff into the ravine with no bottom because that was home for him now. That was here.

In his imagination, the radio sprang to life: "Here lies Cal Pynes. May he rest in peace." Static jolted the message. "He is rogue, but he is free."

THE SNOW IS DANCING

Jacob Strous

THE MCDONALD'S OFF OF CLEVELAND AVE. SPEAKS THE DAY BEFORE IT GETS TORN DOWN

Gyasi Hall

i mean come on man it's not like i asked for the boy to die it aint like i asked people to put flowers and shit in the alley behind me cuz i wanted to fuck with traffic they just do that cuz he aint got a grave yet i mean come on it's not like i drank the ripe blood cuz i wanted to it's like when you open a can of pop too fast after shaking it up ya know that shit started bubblin that shit started seeping in through the floorboards that shit will flood the whole block if you let it so yeah i drank it but not cuz i wanted to ya know cut me some slack there are families here man yeah course the news gunna say it's a gang thing but come on what else is new and sure i didn't know him personally but i know 20 kids just like him and i knew the kids that knew him and they all say someone was talking shit is all someone brings a gun to a fist fight and paints the hood a shade of red you only get to see when you know they aint comin back and of course no one gunna want to wade through that shit just to eat a big mac sure but i swear man you tear me down and aint no one gunna build shit around here ever again you gunna have a lot filled with ghosts and gravel for like 15 years but if you keep me around maybe the families might return cuz yeah the hood may be haunted but shit people gotta eat man look i know what it's like to be robbed shit just last summer this dude ripped his heart out and held it up to the light but i thought that shit looked like a gun so i just gave him all the money i had to give and you know what i stayed in business i rebuilt i survived each sunset a penny at a time and filled whatever half empty stomachs wandered close enough come on man please yeah this shit is tragic but if you kill me people are gunna starve out here man please people will eat each other alive man please if you kill me linden will become a graveyard and then what will we do

ODE TO MY MESSY ROOM

Kristin Gustafson

the only space i know
floor covered with clothes, symbolizes my body
i, too, am uncomfortable when naked

blue shag carpet asks to hold more jeans
more leggings more shirts that make me feel too big
make me think i'm taking up too much room
nobody told me that i could be the night sky when i grew up
no one said that i could throw my arms into the air and finger-paint
    with the starlight
instead i throw my clothes on the ground
not giving a fuck like my mother would want me to
denying "the man" of His army-like folding skills
wishing instead i could shoot stars into the sky

DAYDREAM FOR LONELY HEARTS

Sarah Carnes

she holds the crinkled column of
Lonely Hearts
against her plaid skirt
until the two blend together
in the pale yellows, oranges, and baby blues.
she is lying down on the smooth brick
ground waiting for
a romance that will let her be
still
kiss how she wants
and keep her peach-colored cashmere sweater on
when he does not utter
the words

"take it off."

SUNDOWN BY THE LAKE

Ling Lu

DYING WOMAN

Adriann Ricketts

She tells me my mother is dying.

No, that is not true.

My mother is not dying. My mother is here, next to me, on a country highway, with the sun showing its face—a rare thing now, what with the changing seasons, and the changing leaves, and the changing dynamics between people—telling me that a woman I've never met is dying.

I never cared before. Genetics have nothing to do with family.

The woman next to me is aged, with time, with life, with experiences, bad and good.

Aged with family. Like a daughter who didn't care who she hurt, who didn't care about what she put in her body, who didn't care if she dragged her first child through the smoke with her, who allowed her daughter to run around covered in the ashes of cigarettes, breathing in the toxic fumes of her mother's life.

The woman next to me is a blessing, a miracle. She can be vicious and harsh, or soft and temperate. She can be the ocean during a storm, her waves crashing and thrashing and colliding violently against one another, or she can be the stream five minutes from our house, trickling ever so slowly across the rocks, making her presence known quietly.

The woman next to me is my mother. Not the woman dying.

But

I am startled when my throat closes, when my eyes burn, when my fists clench in the fabric of my jacket. Such a high level of emotion rises up in me, and I don't know if I'm angry or I'm sad. But either way, I shouldn't be.

The woman dying does not deserve such a reaction from me.

And as I fight with myself in the passenger seat, my mother tells me the details: that the woman dying called her from a hospital in Dayton and told her she almost overdosed on heroin and she has ovarian cancer and that my mother should think about taking a life insurance policy out on her, and she spits those words with bitterness and disbelief and asks, "How could she do that?" and I just want to laugh and say, "It's probably so that her life will actually be worth something."

And then I'm startled by the venom in my thoughts, so I turn my eyes to the sky (such a nice day, such bad news) and wonder why some people choose to destroy not just themselves, but the people around them, and I think that no mother should ever have to receive a call from her daughter telling her, "Make my life worth something because right now, it isn't."

"I'm not going to do it." My mother is confident in her words, and I know she's telling the truth, and that regardless of whether or not she still thinks of the woman dying as her daughter, she still thinks of her as a person, and she refuses to cash out on death.

We have these talks when we are alone and my sister is not around. My mother writes it off as, "Oh, she wouldn't understand," but I wonder if it's because my sister is more inquisitive than I. She would ask for the details. Where is she? How long has she been sick? When did she get out of jail?

But not me. I swallow the questions along with the fury and just nod my head.

Unlike my mother, the woman dying, to me, is not a person. She is a face that I don't know, that I've only ever seen in photographs of when she was young and I wasn't even an idea.

She is a face that is defined by drugs and bad decisions. She is a face that is swallowed by shadows.

She is a face that I wouldn't recognize on the street. (She may have already walked past before, and I wouldn't even know it.) You could point to a crowded horde of people and say, "That is your mother." And I would not know who you were talking about because I do not see my mother in there. (My mother is next to me, her heavy hand in mine, her existence strong and silent and there.)

She is a face that if I saw, I would walk—no, I would run away, because she is a stranger, and I do not talk to strangers.

That is a rule my mother taught me when I was young, like mothers are supposed to do.

(Mothers are not supposed to hand their children over and disappear, then have the nerve to call and ask how they are.)

I suspect it is the end of the conversation, but my mother continues, bringing the past with her.

"I gave her a second chance. After I got you girls, I told her that if she could find a job, stay off of that shit, get her life back together for a year, just one year, that I'd let her see you. And you know what? She couldn't do it."

I am a well-adjusted person. I was too young to remember whatever had happened before my mother had gotten custody of me. I had the fortune of being adopted by my grandparents and having my past explained to me when I was, in their eyes, "old enough." I am not, nor was I ever, the adopted characters you see on TV, who spend their tragic lives going through an identity crisis and trying to figure out where they come from or who they are. That is not me.

But make no mistake. At that very moment, I wanted to scream and tear out my hair and throw myself against the windshield.

I could feel a violent tantrum brewing in me. No, not a tantrum. I was not a child. It was a breakdown.

I have never once wished I was still with that woman, and I am confident I never will. But at that very moment, I couldn't help but wonder why she couldn't do it. Why she couldn't pick up the pieces of her horrible and broken life and try to stitch it back together just enough to where it made even the tiniest bit of sense.

For the first time, I almost wished I could meet her just so I could scream in her face. Why couldn't she get it together? Why couldn't she do it for herself? Why couldn't she do it for her mother? Why couldn't she do it for me? How could she look at her life, at the despicable people she surrounded herself with, at the violent father of her child, at her fragile daughter, and think, "This is okay?"

How could she not care about me?

***

"You didn't want to meet her, did you?"

"No. I don't think of her as my family. I don't think of her as my mother."

Because the woman next to me is my mother.

She is the good times and the bad. She is the checking of my temperature when I'm sick, the asking of how my day was, the I-love-yous and the I'm-disappointeds, the text-me-when-you-get-theres and be-carefuls. She is the goodnights and good-mornings. She is the kisses on my cheek and the I'm-proud-of-yous. She is the hugs that I took for granted, and she is the heart that was big enough to carry me inside. She is the woman who hung the moon but can black out the stars if I am burning too bright.

And I want to tell her all of this, but the lump in my throat won't go away, so I hold it inside until I can put it on paper, but I swear she smiles, and I think she knows and for right now, it's enough.

So my mother and I just drive home.

YOUR MOTHER; OR ALL THE MOTHERS THAT I'VE EVER SECRETLY WISHED WERE MINE

Claudia Owusu

i fold myself into the corner of the four-inch room
as you run your fingers over the seasoned piano like
the spirals on a two-ply notebook. you tell me about your
mother—how she used to chug her warm beers seated
on a mahogany bench before the black and white beast,
the living room light growing small with each gulp as she got
really into Alicia Keys and cried—her emotions spilling out
of her chest like a tornado in a Louisiana storm / seamless and
rigid.
you say this and i peer at you, stretching my finger to the lines
of your forehead as you play / you don't seem real and i fold
my arms into perfect creases on my knees as your music swells
over my head.
the heavenly
gates open and tears bloom out of my eyelids like freight trains
under the safe sheet of mourning,
my shoulders heaving
my sobs echoing
the ways in which i am sure angels lament their immortality.
you ask me if i am okay. you say that my laughter
the way it moves through sadness, hard and stable,
smiling
i say, *this?*
it's nothing.

PEACEFUL BONOBO

Jillian Jorgenson

PULSE

Yoshi White

(SPEAKER *walks through the dark against a shadowed background to center stage before lighting comes up slowly. They should speak to the audience. Silent demonstrations of the emotion or events can be portrayed behind* SPEAKER *or not.*)

SPEAKER

Edward Sotomayor Jr.

Stanley Almodovar III

Juan Ramon Guerrero

(*Beat.*)

Omar Mateen walked into Pulse nightclub and claimed 49 lives in the name of Islam. 53 others were injured before he died in a shootout with local police, before we knew the self-hatred that really stood behind his gun.

(*Beat.*)

Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera

Luis S. Vielma

Peter O. Gonzalez-Cruz

(*Beat.*)

In the wake of this tragedy, social media lit up with messages of solidarity from the LGBTQIA+ community, offering comfort to families and survivors. Tears landed on phones and keyboards as we all struggled to articulate the grief that had torn its way through the collective heart of members and advocates alike. Many mourned the loss of these individuals as strongly as what it had revealed: that what progress we had made was just an ever-thinning mask over the disgust and hatred of our neighbors, our fellow congregation members, grocery store clerks, bus drivers, legislators.

(*Beat.*)

Luis Omar Ocasio-Capo

Kimberly Morris

Eddie Jamoldroy Justice

(*Beat.*)

Many who had lived long enough to remember breaking down Stonewall just to be seen felt their shoulders sink as the weight of a battle they thought already won settled back again. Those who made it through the AIDS epidemic only to be left with funeral arrangements survived to gain hope. Pop culture began to come out and it almost started to feel okay for homosexuality to exist … until the death of Matthew Shepard. A brutal murder to crumble that foundation all over again.

(*Beat.*)

Darryl Roman Burt II

Deonka Deidra Drayton

Anthony Luis Laureano Disla

(*Beat.*)

They fought. They fought for justice for Matthew Shepard and equality for themselves. They won. Over the past 18 years these rainbow warriors gained for themselves and those that followed: the right to marry, to live freely, to have their right to work protected. They had more to do, but with every step the light grew.

(*Beat.*)

Jean Carlos Mendez Perez

Franky Jimmy Dejesus Velazquez

Amanda Alvear

(*Beat.*)

Then Orlando ripped them back to the UpStairs Lounge. Shots fired as ears rang, trying to make sense of something senseless. The steady beat of life-blood keeping their hope alive was interrupted. So many pulses stopped, ceasing to drown out the surrounding chaos as adrenaline tried in vain to save them.

(*Beat.*)

Martin Benitez Torres

Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon

Mercedez Marisol Flores

(*Beat.*)

Then … while sympathy, condolence and grief flooded social media, *politicos* waged wars over gun control and religious leaders attempted to capitalize on the deaths of homosexuals. The tragedy began to get lost beneath the deluge. Action was called for, but not what was needed. Instead of solidarity the nation divided further, because a person not for my cause is obviously against.

(*Beat.*)

Xavier Emmanuel Serrano Rosado

Gilberto Ramon Silva Menendez

Oscar A. Aracena-Montero

(*Beat.*)

In a society that is supposed to work for the inclusion of all, we raised our respective weapons. Wielding this tragedy to change the world instead of working to support that which was left in pieces. 20 years old, a law preventing the study of gun violence leaves one side with nothing but "unofficial" numbers, easily dismissed. They are asked, "How will taking the weapons of law abiding citizens stop these criminals in the act?" But no reason can be heard over the conservative screams, "My rights! My Second Amendment rights!"

(*Beat.*)

Simon Adrian Carrillo Fernandez

Enrique L. Rios Jr.

Miguel Angel Honorato

(*Beat.*)

Back when the fastest reload was 30 seconds after the first musket fired and British soldiers were forcing their way into our homes, the Second Amendment was protection. Centuries later it puts us at risk as shells fall to the floor at a rate of 800 per minute. Things have changed since 1791, but fear has left us stagnant. We have come to equate gun control with abolition and so we fight against any progress. Calling upon rights and religion, the fight continues as 53 lie in hospital beds, hoping against hope that they don't join the 49 already gone.

(*Beat.*)

Javier Jorge-Reyes

Jason Benjamin Josaphat

Cory James Connell

(*Beat.*)

Guns aren't the problem! It must be immigration! But the shooter was born in America. Guns aren't the problem! It must be homosexuality! But our laws protect our right to live our journeys. Guns aren't the problem! It must be mental health! But healthcare isn't an inalienable right. Guns aren't the problem! It must be religion! But gun violence doesn't go to church … No matter the rebuttal, the protests remain, politicians stand at their pulpits like children stomping feet and shouting, "Because I don't want to!" Venom flies as hundreds of family members weep over caskets. They don't know how to say goodbye to someone who wasn't ready to leave.

(*Beat.*)

Juan P. Rivera Velazquez

Luis Daniel Conde

Jonathan Antonio Camuy Vega

(*Beat.*)

Families in mourning bombarded with hate because of a decision that never existed. Roger Jimenez using Christ as a weapon only hours after shells had cooled. "The tragedy is that more of them didn't die." No, the tragedy is that Christ is nowhere in your Christianity. So many have been turned away because of the misrepresentation of His message.

(*Beat.*)

Christopher Andrew Leinonen

Frank Hernandez

Shane Evan Tomlinson

(*Beat.*)

Whether you believe or not, the reality is that some never read their Bibles. Since it seems to be such a major concern, here are a few places they can start: It all started with one man and from that man we all came. "There just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so also was death passed on to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Hate spills from the mouths of men who call themselves righteous, but it's their sharp tongues that give them away. "Once you were alienated from God and were hostile in your minds because of evil deeds" (Colossians 1:21). It is not God but man who

attempts to qualify just who can be saved. "For God so loved the world that *whosoever* believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Perhaps it is the fear of the consequences of their actions that creates such bitterness. "Judge not lest ye be judged, for what judgment you judge, you will be judged and for what measure you mete will be meted to you again" (Matthew 7:2). After all, heaven is open to any who believe in Jesus Christ as their savior. "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius so no one can say that you were baptized in my name … For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Corinthians 1:13-15,17). "I resolved to know nothing when I was with you except Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). The truth is, you can preach the gospel without passing judgment. Your focus should be your own salvation. "Continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). So how could a man of God speak such hate in the wake of such a tragedy? He couldn't.

(*Beat.*)

Brenda Lee Marquez McCool

Angel L. Candelario-Padro

Geraldo A. Ortiz-Jimenez

(*Beat.*)

America was founded and has stood on legs of freedom, but they have been severed. Now replaced with crutches masked as religion and big business politics, we cannot keep ourselves standing. We will continue to fall because we refuse to recognize that those who are different are not inherent threats. Inalienable rights are not meant to discriminate based on race, sex, religion, sexual preference, gender identity, age. When you begin the process of deciding who deserves to have rights, you walk the path of oppression, of Hitler, of Stalin, of death.

(*Beat.*)

Akyra Monet Murray

Paul Terrell Henry

Antonio Davon Brown

(*Beat.*)

Apologies are owed to the victims and their families. For using their grief as a weapon for our causes. For debating the rights of their loved ones. For not protecting them from this horror by adapting our laws to our own progress. I speak their names so that they are never forgotten, so that they are made

human rather than weapon. So that they are truly free.

(*Beat.*)

Christopher Joseph Sanfeliz

Alejandro Barrios Martinez

Rodolfo Ayala-Ayala

Tevin Eugene Crosby

Yilmary Rodriguez Solivan

Joel Rayon Paniagua

Juan Chevez-Martinez

Jerald Arthur Wright

Leroy Valentin Fernandez

Jean C. Nieves Rodriguez

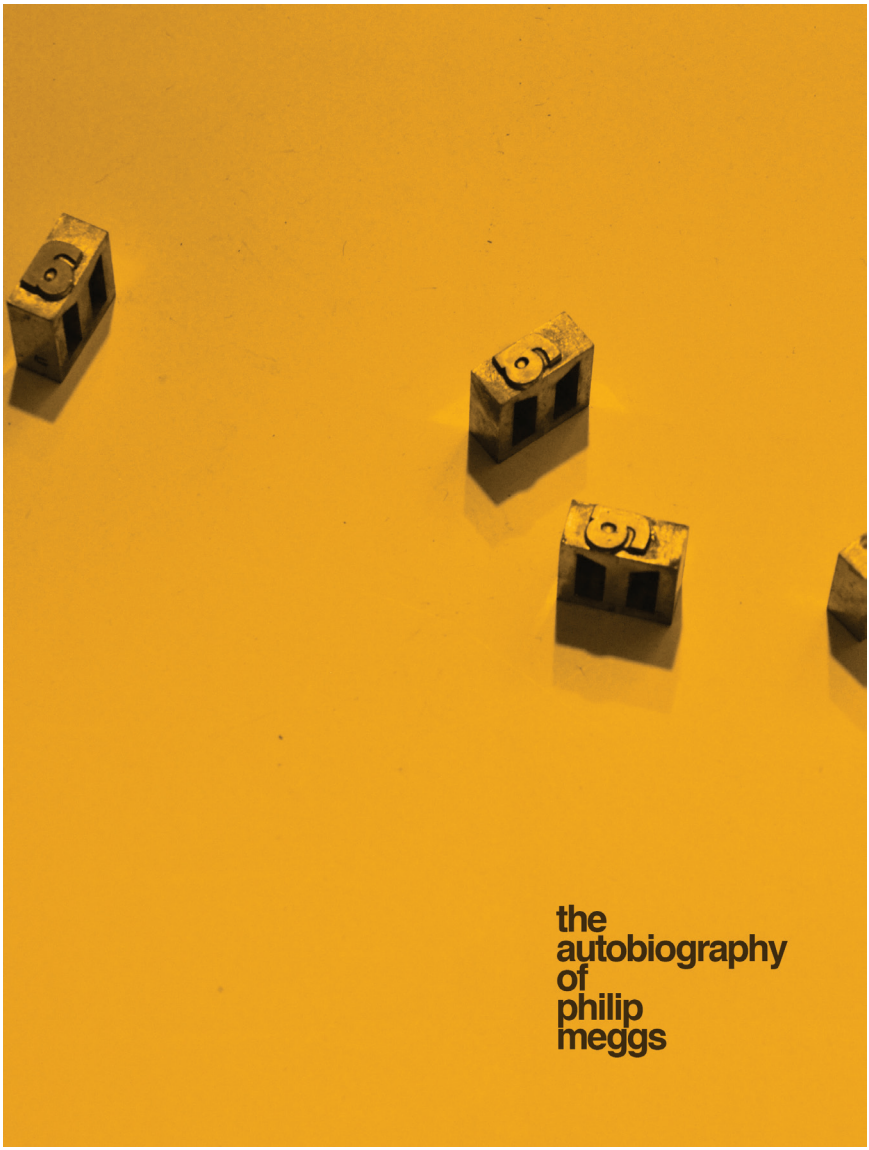
(*Beat.*)

Of all the debates, political and religious, one thing is sure: 49 pulses have ceased to beat, gone from this world, and that alone is a tragedy.

(*Lights Fade.*)

PHILIP MEGGS

Jacob Strous



MARTYR

Alex Futo

I am a martyr.
They string lights with my innards,
play darts with my bones.

My blood runs thick with tar
and if I scream,
they say I'll choke.

Ignite me, I say.
Because I'm a fire they can't
put out,
can't see burn.

When I burn
my body will finally
be a canvas
that people can believe in.

VIEW OF THE NEIGHBOR'S YARD

Gyasi Hall

There was a thump, and then a cough, and then a sputter, and then what felt like a decade of hard, incessant barking, the kind of repeated yap that seemed almost to sprout from Jim's wife's dog and become a living thing all its own, infinite and loud and spreading itself over their lawn and the night that covered it, the kind of sound Jim had long ago learned to ignore and to detach from everything else and put away so he could try and get some sleep, the inevitable side effect of marrying into dog ownership. There was another cough, and then the sound of tires fighting with the road as a truck peeled away and vanished and was never seen again, and the barking twisted itself around its exit, began to call for the return of something lost instead of the defense of something safe and there was a mound on the front lawn now and the dog kept barking, kept screaming, kept erupting with new panic that melted into the cicadas' hum and wind's own howling and the sounds of the dances the leaves had spent their whole lives mastering and Jim didn't wake up. He had never much liked dogs but his son did and he was out with friends tonight so he convinced the annoyed corners of his brain that their dog was just lonely and then there was another much quieter cough but he didn't hear it because the dog kept barking, this breathless and impossible cry that seemed almost to shine. Five or ten minutes like this until the dog started clawing at the front door, a pathetic scrabble of keratin scraping against some immovable structure, and mewling too, a high-pitched whine just loud enough to carve holes into whatever sleep Jim and his wife were trying to build. She rolled over and told him to please go and check on the dog and so he did; he sat up on the side of the mattress and rubbed his eyes and gave his consciousness time to level out and calibrate itself, his body some grand machine being turned back on after a long period of tuned out grace, and Jim realized just how goddamn *loud* the dog was barking and so he waded through his dark house in his boxers and turned on the foyer light to find the dog still barking, and now jumping slightly, trying to reach something hanging out there in the open night, and he told the dog over and over again that mommy and daddy are here and that his boy would be back in the morning and that everything was okay and he even pet the dog and tried to hold it but the dog just kept barking and didn't stop. The moon was full that night. Its light reached the brim of its craters and then spilled over, gushing forth, touching everything, itself a sort of hollow star and if it weren't for the tiny hands of dew covering the lawn's grass grabbing the light and keeping it, Jim may not have seen the mound laying maybe a dozen yards away from his door. The night was not as cold as it might have looked, and Jim's bare feet felt fine even against his concrete stairs and now the mound had grown arms and a jacket and a simple head of thick brown hair and the mound was not moving and looked like it might have never moved at all, not even once, and the mound had no need for air because the mound had become just another thing for dogs to bark at and for the earth to pull closer to its chest and whatever terror Jim might have felt seemed to live somewhere down the street, close but still

far enough away, until he reached for the mound and flipped it over and saw something that looked like his son but wasn't, something that looked like his son but was grey and blue and already starting to expand and harden, his eyes so much jelly, vomit still fresh on his lips and in his mouth and on the lawn and down the front of his shirt too, a high tide of violent sickness reaching for his ankles and the dog kept barking because it knew it could do nothing else and Jim held the mound in his arms and called back to the house for his wife to wake up and call an ambulance, his mind now nothing but a swamp of panic and bravery and action and denial, a swamp exclusive to fatherhood. To Jim, the idea of overdose was still hours away, and maybe he had always suspected his son of doing drugs with a few of his friends in the way that seemed to him almost mandatory for kids their age but he knew his son was a strong and smart boy so he hadn't said anything, hadn't stepped in, hadn't thought for a second that anything like this could ever happen, not to either of them, that the kids would be so scared of the carcass their friend was becoming as to dump him out in front of his parents' house and try and run from the blame and the guilt and the death that was cementing itself in his lungs and heart and all the way down to his fingertips, and the fresh coldness of his body told Jim that he must have been dying on his lawn and coughing and seizing and watching the vile parts of himself rise up through his stomach and his throat and he had needed help and Jim hadn't moved, hadn't helped him, and he had always thought the world more noble and the universe more fair than all of this but the dog was still barking and he couldn't keep his son's limp skull up and dig into his pocket for his phone at the same time. Jim's wife was spelling out their address to the operator when she emerged from the house in her beautiful night gown and from the porch she took in the whole scene, the dog and the dew and the two men she loved most on her lawn, one holding on to nothing and the other holding on to nothing at all, and she dropped the phone and let out a primal sort of scream, the kind that's somehow scarier to think back on than to hear, a shriek of distilled grief that's exclusive to motherhood and the operator said Hello? Hello? a few times into the open air but no one heard it and Jim's wife had started to run over to her baby but her legs were too weak and she fell in the grass halfway between the house and the horror but she didn't stop moving; she crawled on all fours until she could touch whatever was leftover of her only child and when she saw the pale puffy mask over her son's face her sobs possessed her completely and the dog was still barking because Jim and his wife would not stop crying and they held each other like that for an unimaginably long time until the ambulance came, all lights and piercing noise. When the driver pulled up to the curb and the EMT jumped out of the flashing missile the first thing they saw, besides Jim and his wife and their son growing dead between them, was the cascade of porch lights coming on as curious neighbors came out of their homes and watched the mound and its family in terror and awe and for a split second the EMT didn't move, or couldn't move, and everyone who saw the parents mourning knew that there would always be a part of them stuck kneeling on that lawn, and it didn't matter how fast the ambulance got to the house or how efficiently the EMT put the mound on a gurney without making its head roll or how many miles over the speed limit they drove as they flew to the hospital because the boy was already dead, and some of the neighbors stayed up and some of them went back to bed and

when they put his body into the ground people said he was in a better place, said that his soul floated up and popped into the open sky like a balloon and became one with heaven but it didn't matter because the boy was dead, he was dead and they had heard the dog barking but didn't do anything until it was too late, and after a while Jim and his wife never brought his name up again and eventually the worst night of their lives became a story told to new neighbors by grandmothers and the sun turned into the moon over and over again, the sky spinning in place.

COMFORT

Troy Neptune

GRIEF

Lydia Crannell

ROSE, 17 years old, unable to heal after Charlotte's death, ignores Grief as much as possible
GRIEF, preferably a female but can be either sex, dressed in black/gray shades, NOTE: cannot be seen or heard by anyone except ROSE
DAD, oblivious
MOM, alcoholic, depressed
ELENA, Rose's best friend
DR. SANDERS, gender is irrelevant, Rose's therapist

SCENE ONE:
The Bedroom

(The stage is set as a minimalist bedroom: a large bed center stage and a door stage left. The door remains in the same place the entire play. ROSE *and* GRIEF *lie asleep in the bed until an alarm clock—on/off stage, location irrelevant—wakes* ROSE. *She looks at* GRIEF *with disinterest and sighs.)*

ROSE

Come on, we need to get up.

*(*ROSE *Moves to get out of the bed while* GRIEF *rolls over.)*

GRIEF

Whyyyy? Let's stay in bed today …

*(*ROSE *stops to sit at the edge of the bed exhausted, as if they've had this conversation before. She sighs.)*

GRIEF

Ya know, I have a feeling today's going to suck anyway … let's avoid it.

ROSE

I have school.

GRIEF

Come on, Rose. You look a little sick anyway.
(Fake coughing)
You don't want to go to school … it's so dull …and no one likes yo—

ROSE

I'm fine… I have a Bio test anyway.

*(*ROSE *grabs a book from under the bed and sits on the floor to read. After a moment,* GRIEF*, suddenly energetic, begins to jump on the bed.)*

GRIEF

Oh well! Guess that means I'll just come with you then!

ROSE

Seriously? Can't you find someone else to bother?

*(*GRIEF *still jumping, recites in a sing-song voice.)*

GRIEF

Ro-sie Po-sie is so no-sy!
Char-ming Char-lie is so dar-ling!
Ro-sie Po-sie is so no-sy!
Char-ming Char-lie is s—

ROSE

I'm trying to study.

*(*GRIEF *continues, singing louder.)*

ROSE

Stop.

(More singing. Finally ROSE *slams her book to the floor, frustrated. Startled,* GRIEF *stops.* ROSE *moves to grab shoes from under the bed. She puts them on and moves to leave.)*

GRIEF

That was mean.

ROSE

Yeah, well you're annoying.

GRIEF

Charlie hated it when you were mean.

(Beat.)

It scared her.

ROSE

(Moving to exit. Quietly.)

Screw you.

(Lights fade.)

SCENE TWO:
The Kitchen

(A small table with four chairs sits on stage. The table is set for three. A fourth bowl should be accessible on stage. MOM *and* DAD *sit at the table.* DAD *reads a paper.* MOM, *hungover, pours from a flask into a mug when* ROSE *and* GRIEF *walk through the door.* GRIEF *goes to hover over the parents casually.)*

ROSE

Mom, it's not even eight …

MOM

How'd you sleep?

ROSE

Okay, I guess. I have a bit of a headache …

DAD

Breakfast will help.

GRIEF

(Plopping herself onto the fourth chair.)

She's not hungry.

ROSE

I'm not hungry.

MOM

Well, have a bite anyway.

*(*MOM *pushes the bowl towards* ROSE. ROSE *sits until she realizes there are only three bowls on the table.)*

ROSE

Hey Dad, where's Charlotte's bowl?

*(*MOM *and* DAD *exchange looks.)*

ROSE

I can get it.

MOM

Rose—

GRIEF

They think you're being stupid.

ROSE

No, it's fine—I'll just grab it.

DAD

Honey … it's been six months.

(Ignoring everyone, ROSE *moves to find the bowl.)*

GRIEF

They've moved on. It's just a bowl to them now.

DAD

I think we can stop setting a place for Charlie.

ROSE

(Stopping with bowl in hand.)

Why?

GRIEF

Come on, Rose. You know why.

MOM

Because it won't bring her back.

(Tempo builds.)

GRIEF

Putting a cereal bowl at the same place every morning doesn't mean anything.

ROSE

What's wrong with you guys?

DAD

Sweetheart—

GRIEF

Nothing's wrong with them. Something's wrong with <u>you.</u>

ROSE

Every day we set out <u>four</u> place settings—

GRIEF

You're broken. You're broken. You're broken.

MOM

We're just reminding ourselves of the pain.

GRIEF

Pain that they've stopped feeling.

MOM

Charlie would want us to move on. For you to move on with your life.

GRIEF

But you can't stop feeling everything, can you?

DAD

We need to be a family again.

GRIEF

Ro-sie Po-sie is so no-sy …

ROSE

There are four members of this family.

GRIEF

Your fault! Your fault! Your fault!

DAD

Oh Rose … we're not saying—

MOM

We just think that it's time.

GRIEF

Char-ming Char-lie is so dar-ling … Ro-sie Po-sie …

DAD

After everything—

MOM

We're not saying—

ROSE

I don't UNDERSTAND—

GRIEF

BECAUSE SHE'S DEAD.

ROSE

(Slamming the cereal bowl onto table.)

SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHE'S STILL MY SISTER. DEAD OR ALIVE! BOWL OR NO FUCKING BOWL!

(Silence. Long pause.)

Stop pretending that we're okay.

(She sits. Pause.)

MOM

I'm late for work.

*(*MOM *exits.)*

DAD

(Kissing the top of ROSE'S *head.)*
Go to school. We'll talk later.

*(*DAD *exits.* GRIEF *sits.)*

GRIEF

You're broken.

(Lights fade.)

SCENE THREE:
The Classroom

(The kitchen is replaced with three desks facing the audience in a single row. GRIEF *sits at the farthest desk stage right, head down.* ROSE *sits in the middle, exhausted.* ELENA *rushes in. She plops into the remaining desk, chatting away.)*

ELENA

God, Mrs. Allen was a total bitch today. She held us past the bell to continue a twenty-minute lecture about how she 'isn't satisfied with our work ethic.' I'm like, calm down lady—it's only the school newspaper. You'd think we were writing for the New York fucking *Times* … anyway, what's wrong? You seem down.

GRIEF

She's just tired.

ROSE

I'm just tired.

ELENA

(Making a buzzer noise.)

Wrong answer. Try again.

GRIEF

Her parents want her to forget Charlie.

ROSE

I got into a fight with my parents. It was bad. I don't really want to talk about it.

ELENA

Sooo, Brian Duhannan was asking about you last class … you know between Mrs. Allen's rant.

ROSE

Brian Duhannan? What did he want?

ELENA

Just to ask if you planned on coming back to the team … he misses you—well more like pines over you.

GRIEF

No, he doesn't.

ROSE

No, he doesn't.

ELENA

Yes he does! 'Oh Rose! Your breaststroke is so … fast.'
Don't give me that look—it is! The fastest in the district.

ROSE

Poor Brian, then. Just tell him that I'm not coming back … not anytime soon anyway.

ELENA

But why, Rose? You've got major talent. You know it. I know it. Heck the guy who sits outside of 7-Eleven knows it!

ROSE

Elena—

ELENA

What? You know I'm right. I heard that the USC recruiter was even willing to come back next year to see you. USC, Rose! We've been talking about this since we were six and it's finally hap—

ROSE

Elena. Stop. Please. I don't want to swim anymore.

ELENA

You've been saying that for months and I just don't buy it. When are you going to stop blaming yourself?

GRIEF

Never.

ROSE

Don't you find it ironic that the captain of a varsity swim team couldn't even save her eleven-year-old sister from drowning?

ELENA

There's nothing you could have done.

ROSE

Everyone keeps telling me that! 'She was too far away. The waves pulled her out too fast. Even if you had been right next to her.' But it still doesn't change anything. I should have been there! I swam for thirteen years, trained seven, and it still didn't matter in the end.

GRIEF

Nothing mattered in the end.

ROSE

I'm so tired of people telling me to stop blaming myself … I've got nothing else to blame.

ELENA

You know that's not true. Want to know what I think—

GRIEF

No.

ELENA

I think that you want to compete again, but something's holding you back. And maybe that something is really yourself. But hey, don't listen to your best friend or anything—what do I know, right?

*(*ELENA *sits back, done with the conversation.* GRIEF *gets up and moves to* ROSE*, hugging her from behind.* ROSE *accepts the physical connection and they stay like that until the lights fade.)*

SCENE FOUR:
Dr. Sanders's Office

(On stage is a couch and chair. DR. SANDERS *sits with a clipboard and pen.* ROSE *and* GRIEF *sit on the couch.* GRIEF *is somehow touching* ROSE*—head on a shoulder, head in lap, etc.* ROSE *stares into the distance as* GRIEF *quietly sings the "Ro-sie, Po-sie" song.)*

DR. SANDERS

Rose? Rose?

ROSE

Hm yes? What?

DR. SANDERS

What are you thinking about?

ROSE

Nothing. It's not important.

(Pause.)

I keep thinking of this saying—no, more like song, that Charlotte came up with when we were little. Ro-sie Po-sie is so no-sy. Char-ming Char-lie is so dar-ling. Kind of stupid, I know, but it always made me laugh.

DR. SANDERS

Does it still make you laugh?

ROSE

(Considers. Beat.)

No. I feel like there's a weight on my chest, pushing and pushing until I can't breathe. Until my ribs crack in half. Until I'm broken from the inside out.

GRIEF

You're broken. You're broken. You're broken.

ROSE

I'm fine, though.

DR. SANDERS

Are these the same feelings you had three months ago?

ROSE

(Beat.)

No … those were different.

DR. SANDERS

Let's talk about them, then.

GRIEF

No no no no … we don't want to talk about three months ago.

ROSE

I don't think that's a good idea. I'm okay, now. Really. Things are manageable.

DR. SANDERS

It's a good idea to re-evaluate progress and to see if there's anything that needs more attention. It's only been three months … I don't expect the trauma to just disappear.

ROSE

Things were harder to control back then. The sadness and urges and feeling

that nothing would ever be okay. Like I'd never know what happiness felt like again.

DR. SANDERS

And then things got too overwhelming?

GRIEF

Stop Rosie.

ROSE

Yeah … they calmed down after the hospital … for a while anyway.

*(*GRIEF *starts to panic, moving freely around the stage, possibly crying.)*

DR. SANDERS

So, do you think the doctors helped?

ROSE

I don't know … I wasn't there for that long. It was nice after a while … so many people wanted to hear about Charlie, and after a while it didn't hurt so much to tell them.

GRIEF

Rose, tell her we don't need a hospital anymore. It was so—so <u>sterile</u> last time. And I couldn't find you. I wasn't with you for such a long time, and now that I've finally got you back—no, no, no. Tell her no, Rose.

ROSE

But I'm okay now … really, I promise. Bad days yes, but …

DR. SANDERS

And school? How's that going? Friends?

GRIEF

Rosie has me.

ROSE

… It's … fine. There's Elena.

DR. SANDERS

What about swimming? You have to miss it.

GRIEF

Nope.

ROSE

Not really.

(Beat.)

I mean … yeah, I miss it … of course I want everything to be better and normal but it's just not.

DR. SANDERS

You know, Rose, Grief doesn't last forever. It's been a part of your life since the day you lost Charlotte … but it's time to move forward.

GRIEF

What does she mean, I won't last forever? That doesn't make any sense!

ROSE

It's hard to let go of Grief.

GRIEF

Let go? Let me go? You want to leave me? No! No! I'm not temporary, Rosie! I'm here to stay! You need me!

ROSE

I—I think I need to leave, Dr. Sanders. I think we've done enough for today.

DR. SANDERS

Alright. But let's meet again on Thursday. And remember, you have control of how you heal.

*(*GRIEF *begins to pull on* ROSE'S *arm, attempting to drag her towards the door like a child would their mother. As they leave, the lights fade,* GRIEF *in distress.)*

SCENE FIVE

The Bedroom

(The last scene mirrors the set up of the opening scene: a single large bed is the only thing besides the ever-present door. GRIEF *and* ROSE *enter the room.* GRIEF *is distraught, pacing.)*

GRIEF

You should stop seeing that doctor. They're wrong about everything—about me.

ROSE

I like Dr. Sanders … and I think they're helping. At least I hope so.

GRIEF

What did they mean by 'letting me go,' anyway?

ROSE

(Taking a seat on the bed. Beat.)

They meant that Charlotte's death was six months ago.

GRIEF

So?

ROSE

So maybe it's time I stopped grieving and find acceptance …

GRIEF

(Trying to move closer to ROSE*: grabbing a hand, hugging, etc.)*

Ha! Well that's just crazy … right, Rose?

ROSE

I don't know.

GRIEF

Come on, Rosie, you want me here.

ROSE

(Beat.)

No I don't. This isn't how I want to feel anymore.

(Pushing GRIEF *away so the contact is broken.)*

You're bothersome, and distracting, and manipulative. You've made me believe lies.

(Beat.)

Life shouldn't be this hard … but you're making it so … so unbearable.

GRIEF

You don't <u>want</u> me anymore?

ROSE

What do you not get about the situation?

GRIEF

But this doesn't make any sense—

ROSE

I don't want you anymore! You need to leave.

GRIEF

But—but—

ROSE

LEAVE!

GRIEF

I can't leave! You need me as much as I need you—

ROSE

That's not true.

GRIEF

Yes it is! What will you do without me?

ROSE

ANYTHING. EVERYTHING. For once I'll be free—

GRIEF

Stop kidding yourself, Rosie! You'll never be free! Because YOU HAVE NO ONE. You won't have me and you won't have your sister, because maybe you've been pretending it's all a dream for the past six months, but CHARLOTTE. IS. DEAD.

ROSE

I KNOW CHARLOTTE IS DEAD—BUT I'M NOT.

(Silence. Pause.)

I'm not dead … And Charlie wouldn't want me acting like I was. She wouldn't want me constantly surrounded by you. I don't have room for Grief in my life anymore.

(Pause.)

Get out … And never come back.

(Completely shocked/hurt, GRIEF *attempts to combat* ROSE'S *argument one last time, but can't. She turns and looks at* ROSE*, as if someone has died for her too. She reaches the door and turns back around.)*

GRIEF

I'll miss you, Rosie Posie.

*(*GRIEF *exits.* ROSE*, exhausted and overwhelmed, collapses on/against her bed. After a moment, she starts to quietly sing the "Ro-sie Po-sie" song. A smile washes over her face as she remembers something we can only imagine as beautifully sweet. The lights fade to black one last time.)*

THE END

FIRST TIME AT CHURCH

Ling Lu

NONNA, DID YOU KNOW?

Mackenzie Thomas

Hey Nonna, did you know?
That when you died, I didn't want to get out of bed that morning?
The light burst through my bedroom window,
glowing bright orange rays around the frame.
It was an angelic morning, but I hated it because
I wanted to sleep more.
I ignored my buzzing phone for forty-five minutes
until one of my sisters burst through the door and told me to get in the car,
"we have to go to the hospital."
You weren't feeling right.

Nonna, did you know
how you wanted to die?
When you were told you couldn't take both medicines at the same time,
was it like a lottery, did you gamble—
which medicine do I stop taking?
What a sour starting hand you were dealt.
How did you choose;
Which cancer do I want to die from?
Is it ironic that you died from the treatable one?
Did you laugh?
Did you want to be a "medical marvel," as the doctors described you?
"You'll go down in the medical books," they said,
grasping for some shred of hope to give you.
You smiled graciously and accepted the sentencing.
"The first one with these two types of cancer."
You didn't cry at all.
Instead, you told us with a smile on your face and an unfathomable glee.
In that moment, you became a superhero.
In that moment, I knew you always had been.

Nonna, did you know
that I watched the 4th of July fireworks from my bedroom window,
faintly feeling the far-off boomings that lit the sky,
listening to mom's ex-boyfriend talk to Nicole on the front lawn about your death?
He made her feel better.
My body felt nothing; the shock wouldn't let me feel anything.
Did you hear me
when we were all sitting in the waiting room, a hallway apart from your cadaver,
making bad jokes and having a giggling fit?
Do you forgive me?
I bet you already knew I would do that.
I can't cry at funerals, you know.

I laugh.
I even laughed at yours,
babbling emphatically about the memorial video I made,
bragging about all your favorite songs I so cleverly remembered from our conversations,
alongside treasured photographic memories of family and friends.
I haven't watched the video since.

Nonna, Nonna, did you know
that on the day of your funeral
it poured down a heavy summer rain,
all the clouds in the sky suffocating us in a gray gloom,
until we arrived at your burial site?
The clouds suddenly subsided;
the sky was alight with blue and yellow shine,
clear as ever a sky could be,
and it didn't start raining again until after we all sat down in the limousines;
Did you, did you know, Nonna?

Nonna, do you think Whitman was right—
does the weather sympathize?
Or was that you?
There was a theory that it was your parents who saved us from rain that day,
but plenty of people get rained on at funerals.
We are not special.
I want to pretend that you stopped the rain
because you have that kind of power.
But what of the people who suffered the rain through their losses?
Nonna, there's this girl from my high school
who, a year after you passed, was diagnosed with glioblastoma—
the very same as you.
It's been two years.
She is still alive.
She says on her Facebook that she owes her life "to the power of prayer and God."
You were just as religious and mindful in your prayers as she was.
How am I supposed to feel?
If she lives because of the power of prayer,
then why did the power of prayer let you die?
Why did her God, your God, let you slip through their fingers?
I know you had two types of cancer, Nonna.
More than she.
But I still don't understand,
nor am I certain I particularly like
crediting lives to the power of prayer.
It sounds so … selfish?
Or am I selfish?
Nothing makes sense, Nonna.
You're not here.

Do you know you're not here?
Nonna, were you there,
so soon after your passing,
when I prayed to you?
Maybe you scoffed
because I never prayed before,
and have not since,
but I prayed to you then.
I talked to you.
I thought I felt your presence.
I still can't tell if those kinds of senses are real
or imagined.

Did you know, Nonna,
I also felt Granny hug me once, too?
After she passed, a year before you,
I cried when I thought about her, and I promise,
promise with all my being,
that I felt a hand rest on my right shoulder,
her arm pressed against my back, squeezing me to her.
Was that real?
Do I believe in it?
What do I believe anymore?

Nonna, did you know
your death kinda messed me up.
Big time.
I would say I'm "fucked up" now, but
you hate swearing.
(Except I just swore, and if you're reading this, then I'm sorry.)
And Nonna, did you know,
that this is the first time since that I've directly addressed you
in one of my writings?
That this is the first time
I felt that I could.
It hurt me so bad, Nonna.
It still aches, Nonna.

Nonna, do you know
who I am now?
Do you even recognize me anymore?
You took a part of me when you left, Nonna.
I feel very different, Nonna.
I'm not sure I like it, Nonna.
I don't know who I am anymore, Nonna.
I've tried to figure it out, but it hurts, Nonna.
There's nothing there, Nonna.
If there is, I'm too scared, Nonna.
You were supposed to help me, Nonna.

(It's not your fault, Nonna.)
It's not your fault.
It's not my fault.
It's not.
Whose fault?
Who can I blame?
I don't *want* to blame anyone.
I *have to* blame someone.
What does it mean if there's no one to blame, Nonna?
I'm scared, Nonna.
Your name is like a charm, Nonna.
Sing me to sleep, Nonna.
Sing me that "April Showers" song from *Bambi* that you loved to sing, Nonna.

> *"Drip, drip, drop, little April shower,*
> *What can compare to your beautiful sound?*
> *Drip, drip, drop, when the sky is cloudy,*
> *Your pretty music will brighten the day."*

I am not afraid of storms, Nonna.
You taught me that, Nonna.
They eventually will end,
like all things, Nonna,
but they're so beautiful to experience.
You left me with so much, Nonna.
You left me, Nonna.
Please, Nonna,
sing me to sleep.

OWEN

Kristin Gustafson

The sweater-clad boy
sits in the coffee shop
Sipping on
irony
before his fingers
find guitar strings
Takes avant-garde
to the extreme
Hides depression
in the pockets
of his maroon jeans
Hoping one day
it will be
too small
to fit

FALL LEAVES

Catherine Gallagher

AUTHOR & ARTIST BIOS

Isabel Billinghurst is a freshman, feminist, artist and creator who loves the collaboration between papers and paints.

Sarah Carnes is a junior psychology major and creative writing minor. She is lucky to have been granted with the opportunity of being the managing editor of *Quiz & Quill*. Since she began her journey at Otterbein, she has always felt that her home was built around the friends involved with the magazine. Sarah hopes to continue her work with *Quiz & Quill* for one last year and defeat the daunting depths of psych research for her honors thesis. Her parting words: surround yourself with good, and be good.

Lydia Crannell is a junior creative writing and music double major. She is the page designer and fiction editor for *Quiz & Quill* and a staff member at the Otterbein Writing Center. If Lydia's not practicing cello, writing something silly, or dying her hair an outrageous color, you can assume she's watching Netflix.

Alex Futo is a sophomore creative writing major and marketing minor working on developing an individualized major focused on publishing. She's been a part of *Quiz & Quill* staff and editorial board, *Tan & Cardinal* staff, and has been published in both magazines respectively. Currently, she's trying to find her voice as a writer amongst all the background noise of college life.

Catherine Gallagher is a junior double major in studio art and individualized art history. She loves to paint and draw, and hopes to express the emotions she feels through her artwork.

Kristin Gustafson is a sophomore creative writing major. She enjoys good slam poetry and bad puns. She also believes that life is too short to wear matching socks.

Casey Hall is a sophomore creative writing major with minors in literary studies; women's, gender, and sexuality studies; and justice studies. She gets her inspiration from lived experiences, fantastic encounters, and a variety of artistic works. Casey would like to thank Alex for reminding her to submit to the magazine this year and J.K. Rowling for creating the series that inspired her to write her first stories.

Gyasi Hall is a sophomore English creative writing major with a film studies

minor. He writes poetry, stage plays, and essays, and is trying to get into writing more fiction. He wants to ask you about your favorite albums and where you like to go out to eat.

Jillian Jorgenson has used photography as a hobby for many years, and while she has captured a variety of subjects, she finds herself returning again and again to nature and wildlife. Animals are very much like us in the ways they express their emotions and interact with one another, and it can be rather easy to see ourselves in them. This connection inspires Jillian as she works towards a career in wildlife conservation; she believes that we're all connected in some way or another and our actions impact one another in ways we don't always see. It is her hope that her photography inspires others to see themselves in these beautiful creatures and to raise awareness of the world's endangered and threatened species.

Jordan Nelson tries his hand at many things. Sometimes they work, a lot of the time they do not. Psychology worked for him, that is why Jordan is majoring in it. College? Not so much. That is why he is a sixth year student. Jordan does not let that bother him, though. It gave him opportunities he would have missed out on otherwise.

Troy Neptune's work emphasizes a representational approach to the figure through a diverse range of printmaking and drawing techniques. He utilizes a variety of expressive marks to capture the emotions of a particular moment on paper. Some marks are delicate and precise, while others are moving and passionate. In a heteronormative society, his work questions the gender stereotypes that envelop daily life by representing androgynous figures. The power of the observer and how they engage in the work drives the underlying intentions of the composition. It is Troy's hope that his work will induce a change in perspective, an openness that helps to remove the persistent stigma of homophobia, the underbelly of society.

Claudia Owusu is a sophomore who thinks time is passing by too fast. Her favorite color is still mustard yellow, but she does not know for how much longer.

Adriann Ricketts is a 21-year-old junior. She enjoys prowling around the campus at night, breaking into the Bean, and making rude comments in her head.

Jacob Strous's goal as an artist is to portray refined qualities of his surroundings.

Abby Studebaker is a sophomore creative writing and JAMC double major. She is co-copyeditor for *Quiz & Quill*, a staff member for Otterbein's *Tan & Cardinal* magazine, and a member of Tau Epsilon Mu sorority. Abby is also a member of the women's lacrosse team. She loves being involved in the English department and getting to do what she truly loves: writing.

Mackenzie Thomas is a senior at Otterbein studying creative writing, literary studies, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies.

Yoshi White is a wife, a mother, a submissive, a bisexual, and any number of other labels that apply in any given moment. Writer just happens to be the one that best encapsulates them all.

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