



*Peal*  
*Spring 2021*



# PEAL

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Warren Wilson College



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Peal Magazine has been a cornerstone of the Warren Wilson community since its inception in 2005. The publication was originally spearheaded by the Creative Writing Department, but was turned over to the Writing Studio in 2014.

Over the last seven years, the Writing Studio has had the honor and privilege of publishing student and faculty poetry, prose, and artwork. However, this will be the Writing Studio's last edition of Peal magazine. Although The Writing Studio will always continue to encourage writers to inspire others in the power of their words, we will no longer be publishing Peal Magazine. But don't be disappointed yet! There will still be a publication.

Peal Magazine will be reverted back to the Creative Writing Department in a four credit, publications class next Spring. This course will be open to all students interested in design, copy editing, and publication.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who has made the magazine possible, including the College Press, the Creative Writing Department (with a special thanks to Rachel Haley Himmelheber, Tessa Fontaine, and Gary Hawkins), as well as our wonderful writers. Thank you for entrusting us with your work,

*The Writing Studio*



# *SWEET SONG OF HER LIFE*

Ruby Karyo

Leaping, laughing, smiling  
Dancing thru the days  
Her spirit, her life  
Growing as she plays  
Calling to the endless wind  
Come, I have so much more  
Like the power of the endless waves  
Crashing on the shore  
Listen to my song of life  
Bathe in all of me  
I give you my beauty  
For those of you that see  
Hear the beating of her heart  
It calls to all who can hear  
Singing the sweet song of her life  
To all far and near  
Yet very few will answer  
For very few shall feel  
Her kind and gentle spirit  
So alive and real  
For she is rare and precious  
With a power; intense and determined  
And only those who can understand  
Will see her standing there.

# APT A, NASHVILLE

Heather Davis

540 square feet  
slanted hardwoods of knobby pine  
a mysterious, rusted dent in the tub  
windows without screens but cobwebbed

a panoramic bay window standing taller than  
me makes all the rest seem...  
'cozy'

we share cozy

with  
neighbors  
keeping to themselves — a blue collar lot  
working, always  
zipping to and from, accomplishing  
the rhythmic tasks  
of keeping home  
with little mouths to feed

I wouldn't recognize them even if  
I saw them  
only by the sound of  
movement are they known  
at least 3

we are all hustling  
to make it in this city  
gentrifying faster than we can break  
a sweat

for a long time, I felt peachy about  
*allowing* the neighbors to squat

in the attic

Now I know,

with their dazzling feathered wings,

the birds  
are the  
Landlords

# LESSONS FROM MY MOTHER

Ella Syverson

The wind off the Lake is cold and sharp, the kind of wind that chills your lungs as you breathe it in and makes you feel distinctly *alive*. I'm standing on the shores of Lake Superior, greeting her again after four months away at my first semester of college. I've missed this Lake. Her wild beauty was replaced with North Carolina mountains and a college campus brimming with life and energy and people to fill my time and drag me from the stillness of quarantine. I try not to think about those people or those mountains now, but it's difficult not to when there's almost nothing left here to hold my attention and fill my time (and my heart) in the same way. I am back now, where I was four months ago, grasping to any ripple or change in the wind that breaks monotony. I am hoping, desperately, with this visit to Mama Superior, to find some joy or solace to carry me through the next few weeks. The Lake is dark today. A dull, deep blue tinged with grey. The wind has spun her waves into whitecaps and they wash over almost the entire thin strip of beach, washing away the broken glass and bits of driftwood that litter the shore.

My memories of this lake run decades deep. I have watched her waves and buried myself in her beaches for as far back as I can recall. When I think of home, I think of her Chequamegon Bay, a safe haven from the gales and currents that make her beauty dangerous. When I think of home, I think of the day I was eight years old and showed my new puppy how to swim and dig moats for castles in the sand, and of splashing water at my friends and staying in the Lake so long that our legs grew numb and our shoulders shook. I think of laying in the sand and watching the clouds dance overhead, and of running naked and laughing into her embrace when the sky is dark and the air is cold and the water is *almost* warm. I think of voicing my reverence, my joy, my passion for this water to the others who call her home, and the way our communities understand and unite around these relationships to water and to Lake Superior that we all hold in our own ways.

She is known to the Ojibwe people of this land that we now share as Anishinaabeg-Gichigami.<sup>1</sup> The Ojibwe hold and value this relationship, and have done so since before my people came to colonize and kill and pollute. My ancestors broke relationships with Earth and with water, and now, when I look out at Lake Superior with love, I sometimes whisper apologies for the trauma that is a part of my legacy. Mama Superior does not ask for apologies, nor does she offer forgiveness. She

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.badriver-nsn.gov/history/>

knows, and I know, that to move forward with care and respect is all we can do. I keep her in my heart as I move forward as a storyteller and learner and a change-maker who wants to work towards a just and liveable world. And every now and then, I come back to her and she reciprocates care with the strength and wisdom I need to keep walking this path.

Before today, my last clear recollection of standing on this beach was in August: a period of summer heat and time slowed by long lazy days, humidity, and black flies out for blood. A time slowed also by the stealthy creep of COVID-19, by six feet of longing and Zoom calls that never end. The Lake wasn't lazy though, or still. She never is. The sky over Superior that night was on fire — brilliant reds, pinks, purples, orange — a sunset reflected vividly in my memory and just as vividly on the rippling waters of the Chequamegon Bay in a mirror image of itself.

I hadn't known the sky would be so uniquely beautiful that night. I had only known that I couldn't stand another moment of summer stillness, that another second of time confined by the walls of my house or another breath of tepid air would suffocate me. I had left, almost running, from my house and down the street, taking the last few blocks to the Lake even faster when I saw the scarlet sky and knew it was not a night to miss sunset on the Bay. I had taken off my sandals to feel the warmth of pavement beneath my feet, then the dew on the grass, the sand between my toes, the frigid, numbing cold of the Lake water. Perhaps if I could only feel the night, the Lake, a little more then I would be able to learn her lessons. Perhaps she would teach me how to live a life of reciprocity and balance. Perhaps these lessons would bring me strength as I grow into the steward that I hope to be for her. Tonight though, all I need is the kiss of her waves.

Teach me, Lake Superior. Teach me how to paint a scarlet sky on swirling water, how to change from glassy stillness to roiling whitecaps on a whim, how to whip up a biting wind that chills your lungs. I am running now, invigorated by the wind and finding joy in unexpected exhilaration. I am running now, away from August stillness, away from quiet December snow, away from slowed time and mindless days and loneliness. I run until the wind steals my breath and my heart is beating harder than it has since I've been home. I run until I reach the end of my section of lakefront trail, until I must return with reluctance to the quiet solitude of my house, a few more blocks than I would like from the Lake. Teach me, Lake Superior, how to be *alive*.

# *HAIKU ABOUT A SONG*

Ursa Woodring

like sea kelp forest

thrashing in ocean current

I dance wildly



# THE FOREST OF THE MIND

Denia Carlton

“You want in? To my mind? Right this way...”

I put my hand at one end of the bridge and the roots begin to grow. They grasp the railings, and the vines of red leaves unite to create a canopy. The metal screams as the earthly fingers twist and strain. The concrete cracks and crumbles as the green spreads across the pseudo rocky surface to become a mess of vines and moss twisting the once clear path into a hazard of missteps and ankle twists.

The light fades as the path continues until the end is no longer in sight and the bridge to the depths is complete.

Walking down the path with leaves of ivy brushing against exposed flesh and clothes alike. Walking briskly, yet cautiously, lest the roots grasp at my feet and refuse to retreat. It's almost as if they are trying to protect me.

I'm going to regret this, I know it. I've known this since my first step, but I must. Sometimes there is only one clear way to go. A single path available to reach an end.

Where is the end? This path of natural greens and browns goes on for eternity. I walk until my feet bleed and still I have not reached it. Frustrated, I want to turn, or even look back, but I've come too far to quit now. I won't quit; I will rest.

I sit. Where I find myself I also find bandages and a fresh pair of socks in the tangled mess where it hurts my back the least to sit. I snack on some muscadines growing just above my head.

I feel better once I've rested and I get up, still sore but ready to continue. Looking up, I find that the end of the tunnel is just up ahead. Why couldn't I see it before?

At the end of the path is a door. Wood; oak. Handle; brass. Exactly as large and looming as a door would be after such a path, and yet somehow different. I raise my hand to open it and fear strikes. My heart is pounding, why? What's behind this door? Should I knock? I try to listen through it but the sound of

my heart pulsing in my ears is louder than what is or isn't on the other side.

Every experience floods my senses. Overloading my brain is a battle of feelings versus facts: doors are dangerous, don't trust them. Locked or not, whatever is on the other side will hurt you. Don't go through them. This side of the door is safe. Lock it and walk away. Don't risk it. You can't hear them on the other side, they want to harm you. Don't trust the quiet it only serves to make the loud louder. Don't trust the other side of the door, whatever is on the other side, whoever is on the other side, doesn't want you there. Walk away.

Away? There is no more away. My feet are still blistered and bruised from the path and there is no other path to take.

Holding on to this sentiment, I grip the handle. Twist. \*CRRREEEEEAAK-KKK\* FREEZE, oh god oh no I've disturbed them. What if they wake up? One eye through the new crack, it's dark. One ear to listen. Nothing's here.

I walk into an empty room. The walls are made of branches and roots and a bed of bark and moss lies ahead of me. There is no color, but I still see purples and greens and several natural shades of brown. On, no, in the walls and around the room are fireflies just now lighting up. Finally, I can see.

It's beautiful here. The fireflies twinkle like stars against the branchy woven ceiling. Calm. I'm so TIRED. I lie down. The moss tickles my neck and ears and is surprisingly soft yet firm. I don't want to get up. I don't want to close my eyes. If I do I might leave and it took so long to get here. Can I even continue if I don't close my eyes? There are no other doors besides the one I entered through, but I know that one doesn't lead anywhere. Is it locked? I could check, but that would mean getting up, my feet still hurt, and now that I think about it, so does my back and my legs? Why am I so sore? Walking shouldn't be that hard. How long was I walking? How long must you walk for your feet to bleed? How long must you rest for them to stop?

Rest. Yes, important rest. Energizing rest. Healing rest. I must rest to continue to... -\_- zzz My leg itches -\_- . No; one of the branches is scratching it -\_\*. That's not a branch. It's moving! \*\_\* NO!

I bolt up and swipe my legs furiously. And when I pull my hand away my leg has the glowing evidence of firefly homicide alight for all to see.

I'm up now. How long has it been? I feel a bit better. My neck is now sore and everything from earlier hurts more, but the adrenaline is still there from the excited awakening, so I get up.

I'm still in that room but I smell something cooking. Just outside. There! A window; the kind that latches like the ones in those old movies and cartoons. Was it there the whole time? I can't remember but I can open it. It's tough to move, being made of roots and all, but after some solid hits to loosen the earthy grip it swings open revealing a day far too bright >\_< •\_•.

Wait. It's fine, warm, and well lit, but no direct light coming from any specific direction.

Outside is a table keeping along with the theme of roots and vines. It sits in a field of grass, no, not grass; moss. I climb out of the window and jump down onto the soft damp field and look around. I am in a clearing surrounded by trees on all sides, except for, obviously, the Window? Nope. A thick bramble of trees surrounds me on all sides except for the mossy floor and the dining table. I approach the table, adorned with goblets of gold and silver. And plates of iron and brass with utensils of every kind and culture made from every conceivable material.

On the table are pancakes and nuts with berry syrups and milks and juices of many consistencies and colors. I am suddenly very aware of how hungry I truly am and rush to sit at the table. No chairs are there but there are stumps. As soon as I sit down \*snap\* a twig. Fuck. Is this even for me? Who made all this? I stand to run and turn to see an old lady with skin dripping off her skeleton and hair so white it scatters the omnipresent light.

"I'm sorry for interrupting!" I say, reaching back, hoping for my hand to find something sharp of a usable material. "I was just... and I saw the table... I didn't mean to intrude on your meal."

Without a word she looks at me and smiles. There is so much pain and exhaustion in her eyes; I want to stop and console her, but as soon as I think to, fairies and sprites and pixies of all sorts come from the trees in every direction buzzing around the lady and the table getting just too close.

I am uncomfortable. Thankfully they pay no mind to my presence and she motions me to the stump I am standing by and walks over to one herself. I sit, hungry and conflicted. There are so many mouths here all of a sudden.

What seemed like so much food just a minute ago now looks like barely enough for the lady and the faes. I don't want to take their food so I take one plate full of the same amount the lady had and eat slowly to see if any food will be left when everyone is done.

I'm full. I'm probably full. I ate something at least. A good... breakfast? What

meal is this? How long have I been here? Will I get hungry later? Should I ask for some to go? No, it's not my food. They shared their food with me. It would be ru...

“Did you want anymore? You should get some more if you want it before the ents get here.”

“Oh, no thank you. I'm full (am I full?) But thank you so much for sharing your meal. It was delicious(it was).”

Should I eat more just to make sure I'm full? What is full? Now I've thought it too many times it's lost its meaning, full full full full fu... I should just get out of here and leave the leftovers for the ents. They haven't had any and I've had some. I'll be fine. Right? I stand up to leave.

“Here, before you go.”

She hands me two plates; one made of wood and the other made of some kind of porcelain on top, secured together with some vines wrapped around them.

“In case you get hungry again.”

She smiles one more time. Less exhaustion in her eyes this time, although it feels forced, and her hand feels like dead twigs, one brisk wind away from snapping.

“Thank you (thank you).”

I walk away committed to a direction. I chose, just so I look like I know where I'm going. I walk until it feels like I'm good and far and stop to eat what she gave me. (I wasn't full).

Fuller now, I begin to look around. Where is the light coming from? It's dimmer now. Does that mean it's getting late? What happens when it goes away? Where is the sky?

I look up. I can only see a mess of branches and leaves — no blue peaking in between. I'm not sure if that means there is no sky or if it's a different color. I mean of course the sky, my sky, isn't actually blue it's the light that makes it look like that. So if the light is different here too, maybe so is the sky. Will there be stars? When the light goes away? I like stars but if there were stars then all of this would be pointless wouldn't it. Stars mean light. There is no silence with sound and no darkness without light.

I keep walking. I can feel it in my chest, before I hear it; the music.

Following the sound, the forest begins to thin, but never ends, and just outside of the maze of trees I find a carnival. There is so much color here. The light seems to be coming from everywhere and nowhere and yet, I know it's night. The streetlights and string lights are high above me, backed by a blank sky I can only make out when I am thinking too hard about it. I think there were stars but maybe those were just the twinkly lights.

It is sticky and colorful and crowded, but not with guests. There are acts and booths and carts of various fried treats. People with extraordinary abilities next to games of chance and scams of craft. Amongst all the acts not one person has a visible face. I'm sure the faces are there but none of them feel like faces. Like there are no faces to perceive, well not any that matter. I think I should probably be off-put by this, all of this, but I feel no malintent. I understand them, they just want to perform and as far as I can tell I am the only guest here.

I'm not hungry, for sure this time, but I don't want to pass up the popcorn and various fried things, so I relax. I truly feel at ease among these faceless patrons of the arts. I play games and even try my hand at a few acts myself. And. Get this. No matter how high I go, I never feel afraid. Physics seems to be working, for the most part, and I swing and hang from ropes and silks and bars but I know I'm not going to fall. Even during death defying drops my stomach stays firmly in place and so does the smile on my face.

As things get later and later, the festivities die down and I feel the urge to move on. I don't want to leave but I know that soon the light will go away entirely and my next big stunt is facing the dark.

Just the thought of this makes me uneasy. I'm not afraid of the dark as much as I am of the unknown. I am secure in the knowledge that what happens outside, in the dark, does not need me to understand it.

I don't even want to leave. I don't see the fireflies anymore. And what's worse is there still aren't any stars. I don't like it.

(This is a bad idea) I think before walking away from the oh so lovely faceless circus.

As the music gets farther and farther away and the lights refuse to cling to my back any longer, I walk. I don't know what I'm walking through and there isn't enough light around for me to even guess the outlines of things and I don't know if this perpetual silence is comforting or deafening.

Walking again, still sore but at least this time the pain is a sign of growth, a pain for a purpose. I spent the day comfortable outside my comfort zone flying and climbing around colorful tents and using muscles I didn't know I had and it felt good. So I feel good. It feels good to feel good, but it leaves me worried about what's on the other end of a good feeling.

I still can't see anything. I even try waving my hand in front of my face but I only manage to startle myself when my hand brushes against my nose.

I've walked through this darkness for so long I no longer have my hands out or feeling around. I know there is nothing. I am surrounded by nothing, only an inky blackness that, similar to my faceless friends, cannot be perceived. I am so confident in my isolation that a sense of pride wells up in me once again as I have faced another discomfort and found amiability amongst the adrenaline.

I know deep down that none of this will change my initial reactions, that the lessons I have learned I already knew but sometimes it's nice to experience the best possible outcome no matter the situation.



# *SPRING ROBINS*

Chloë Bloodworth

# *I'M STARTING TO THINK*

Ruby Karyo

I'm starting to think.  
Deeply into myself  
If he is me, or I am me.  
I am starting to think.  
Is it necessary?  
Is it love?  
Is love blind?  
I am starting to think.  
His questions, his mindset,  
We two different people.  
I'm starting to think, feel,  
Understanding from his perspective.  
What love, what stronghold  
Should I pull back,  
withdraw, or set forth the path  
It's not a doubt  
But I'm starting to think.  
Powerfully it's emerging.  
Sinking, stinking, biting  
Deep down,  
Feeling soul empty  
Yet a deep ache for the earth.  
Judgments clouded in my thoughts.  
Of good not of someone else's  
The difference is the soul.  
I'm starting to think.  
The world is not ready.  
Or is it?  
I'm starting to think.  
Feel, articulate, breathe, meditate  
And feel the vibration of freedom.  
Not just for me  
But everyone else  
The death, the living, the reincarnation.



What does a lioness do?  
But protect her own  
'Cos there is no fear'.  
Just limelight!  
I want a soul to connect.  
I want to be more in tune with myself.  
I am that I am  
A powerful creature  
I am starting to think.

# SEROTONIN

Serena Fick

Today I found  
that serotonin comes from  
eating spinach leaves  
straight from the ground  
and sweet peppers  
right off the vine.

And dopamine exists  
in helping you  
roll up your sleeves  
as we wait in cold air  
to rinse our hands  
with warm water.

Oh, happiness is  
a spoonful of honey  
from thriving bees  
and dirt under my fingers  
that I don't care  
to wash away.

There is love  
in the sunshine  
washing over my skin,  
to see it rise  
is to know  
this life's mine.

Pure joy  
fills the air  
as the world,  
she takes care  
to nurture my  
long-dormant soul.

# SONG FOR VENUS

Hannah Poe

Venus,  
bring the wind  
Flowers fly upon you  
from heaven's garden  
Feel the silky touch  
of your skin  
Begin to feel the love  
of the goddess within

Venus,  
hear the wave  
Embellish in the peace of mind  
you gave  
Don't worry of the nude  
no, don't have any shame  
for it's just man's doubt  
that is to blame

Stand bright,  
our lady  
Surround yourself  
with laurel trees and black tea  
Stand tall,  
our woman  
and take our thanks,  
pride, adoration

Venus,  
softened poise  
Your beauty magnifies  
the song of your voice  
Watch your amber locks  
twist into many curls of joy  
Look down upon man's pain

you live to destroy

Venus,  
Show no fear  
Your gaze upon your lovers  
is always kind and sincere  
So when you cry to yourself  
of how you are so wrong,  
take notice of the grace you bring  
and know that you belong

Stand bright,  
our lady  
Surround yourself  
with laurel trees and black tea  
Stand tall,  
our woman  
and take our thanks,  
pride, adoration

Venus,  
you leave us no doubt  
that you are the warmth we were  
dreaming about  
We hope you know you can never do us  
harm  
so forgive yourself  
live on with open arms

Stand bright,  
our lady  
Surround yourself  
with laurel trees and black tea  
Stand tall,

our woman  
and take our thanks,  
pride, adoration

Stand bright,  
our lady  
Surround yourself  
with laurel trees and black tea  
Stand tall,  
our woman  
and take our thanks,  
pride, adoration.

# *RAGE AND THE BETTER MAN*

Daniel Acocella

Under that empty sky, I met a dead man  
With his rough hands and bright blue eyes he sat cross-legged in the grass  
On his face lay a boundless grin, beads of blood running down his lips  
Under his unfaltering gaze, I trembled  
With gravely honeyed words he disassembled me  
His sermon soothing scars that would never heal

So quickly I drank his words. I could neither savor nor remember them  
My pleading eyes begging for even one more utterance  
Taking my hands in his, he drew his calloused thumb across my lips  
The taste of dried fruit and a warm ocean wind filled me  
In his palm I could see dawn breaking over untouched lands

It was not enough — it never could be  
His unyielding silence suffocated me  
My black eyes bore into my soft hands  
My words were not fit to be drank  
My oration born of endlessly murky grey seas

I killed the dead man under that empty sky  
In the cacophony of silence, I tore into him  
I wanted not muscle, sinew, nor bone

Blood

As he came apart in my delicate hands, his grin remained  
I found no cessation of thirst in his womb  
Gauging a gaping hole through his abdomen, I was birthed anew

My lips fused into one, my cherubic face burned away  
I could not utter but inchoate noise, for my fury had no use for words  
Guttural screams carried up to nothingness  
I railed against the mute blackness above  
No light from the sky nor the dead man's blazing eyes

Beasts exist without light and thrive without clarity  
Lucidity is a gift for the virtuous and a curse upon the wretched  
My misdeeds along with me faded into that empty sky

I know not when the darkness gave way to light  
The slender moon peering at me, gentle but knowing  
My maw reformed had become a delicate mouth once again  
I was an incomplete vessel leaking the words of a dead man

Filled with his grace  
I'd ripped myself apart

The moon's blinding light revealed naught but my violent flesh  
I wished to feel his voice and taste his grasp again  
If not that, then tears to mourn my avarice would suffice  
No — the light touches all and I was without respite

I was left with nothing but rage



# *STAIRWAY TO PURGATORY*

Benjamin Airing

# RACIAL ADS AND DISADS

Carlos Wyrick

I had my eye on it, the little plastic prop book, coated with cheap spray paint, it looked so bad it barely served its purpose as a prop. I had a quest to get one, they had some kind of magic or something. I didn't look into it, I was happy to have a quest. The shoulder bag, adorned with a purple hand-sewn patch with a black design, white stitches adhering it to the brown bag, lay all alone on the "porch" of the cabin. It was a covered area with a poor excuse for a pit stove, built sometime in the 80s. The light, an anachronism for the period we were supposed to be in, cast a red-orange glow on the area, but at this hour I didn't need to worry about onlookers from other cabins. I needed one of the books for my "employer," a character being portrayed by Jake Hemmit, my least favorite staff member at this LARP. I have seen what happens when you don't take quests and participate and it's a real bummer and a waste of money.

So here we are, I'm walking around like anyone else, I'm the only one who pays attention to who is sleeping where anymore so nobody would think twice about my being in this part of camp. I move into that horrid orange light to slip the book out of the bag and then I'll be off, but then I hear a raucous cackle from within the cabin, the players were still awake, and they had the door open. One of them saw me just as I plucked the book and I heard a "hey, who's that?" from inside. These amateurs had clearly shed their game personas as it got later in the night, thinking the game was more or less over, but the game don't stop 'til Sunday morning, baby.

I woke up in my cabin, I'm the only one there as is my preference. I'm sticky, the air is sticky, the camp's "mattress" on this bunk is sticky. It's more like the hardest bean bag you've ever felt wrapped in linoleum, cracks at the corners and god knows how old. My real life possessions and food for the weekend in one corner, and my "in-play" bag hanging on a nail in the opposite corner. The walls of the cabin have little gaps in places, a knothole popped out of the plank left of the window. This camp doesn't open in winter for a reason.

The graffiti on the bed frame doesn't register in my periphery as I rise up and dig into my various nutrition bars and Gatorade as breakfast. I don't hear anyone outside, and it's not bright enough to be noon so it must be around nine. I will have had 6 hours of sleep, my magic number at LARP events. I don my cloak and bag. Jake had gone to sleep by the time I got the book for my quest, so effectively half of the non-player characters (or NPCs) had gone to sleep with him, as he depicts



a significant portion of those people. I'm hoping he is awake and I can get this thing off of me, I felt like a real thief holding onto a car stereo or something; I had a "hot" item and I needed to offload it. That's something a video game just can't give you, the knowledge that on your person is an item that was stolen, and someone may be looking for it with intent to punish whoever has it. I make it to the mess hall, or as we call it "tavern" to find two of the older guy players already up and talking at a table. One of them takes notice of my entrance and stands. I consider myself pretty good at roleplay and I like it when my character has friends so I say, "Mornin'," in the accent I've chosen for this character, my best attempt at Irish, though I'm sure an Irish person would find it ridiculous. The older fellow doesn't greet me, he just steps closer and leans in.

"I heard someone is looking for you, thought you 'oughtta know."

"Me? Who was it? Did they say my name?"

"No, they don't know your name, just your description."

I was spotted; they saw me nip the book, but it was so dark, how could they have a description? I mean hell, my armor is all black, like half the characters here, and nobody came outside pursuing me. I'm going over it all in my head, the light-bulbs' hideous glow, the glance from the girl in the cabin. No way they saw who I was though, I talk to people here but I'm by no means famous.

The guy noticed my furrowed brow deep in thought, and he thought to shed some light by saying, "They described a guy in black, with your complexion."

There it was, that's the distinguishing feature. I happen to be the only brown person at this event of around 65 people, and so if someone "tan" or "with a dark complexion" did something, that makes it me. This fantasy world we are pretending to inhabit has lizard people, elves, sentient machine people, people with fire or water spirits in them, even an off-brand hobbit kind of person. Players apply makeup and fangs, contact lenses, wigs and costuming for every fantastical race they are depicting, and we just pretend the hobbit equivalent players are smaller than they are. Still, with all this diversity there is only one possible suspect when a dark complexion is the description, and it's yours truly.

I felt slighted in an instant, a steady anger building near where my neck meets my skull, a tightness in my chest that I feel when I'm frustrated.

I said to the guy, "Funny thing, you'd think that wouldn't narrow it down so much. I mean that's a pretty vague description."

He, being an older guy, and one of those not up-to-date on social responsibility replied, "Really only one person it could be."

He lifted his palms upwards and gave that little shrug like he wanted me to laugh it off with him, I was not swayed. I left the tavern. I wasn't going to sit around and wait for other players to question me about my whereabouts like some Spike

Lee movie come to life in this state park. I signed up for a fantasy game; stealing is allowed when it's "in-play" items, the props, the fake jewels, and gold. Stealing someone's actual possession is obviously not allowed and dealt with harshly. I didn't come here for a Ye Olde Raciale Profile Simulacrum. I can get that by walking around a convenience store not touching anything, watching the clerk watch me. I walk over to the staff cabin, normally used for counselors or as a first-aid station when church groups or summer camps rent this site. I see some movement. Outside there are several Rubbermaid bins, one overflowing with the latex foam weapons we use for combat in the game. Someone is awake, and I'm going to get out in front of this thing.

I tap on the screen door that leads to the central room of the staff cabin. It has a dirty concrete floor with a pair of steps on the left that lead to 2 bedrooms, and a fireplace on the right, doors on either side with another bedroom and a bathroom. Just the guy I was looking for, Jake was up, if only physically. His cheeks looked as though he'd been slapped vigorously, that strawberry yogurt color. His hair a blonde mess and a hoodie partially unzipped revealing he had no shirt on beneath.

"Oh, hey dude what's up?" he said, squinting as his head rose level with the ground.

"I gotta talk to someone."

He looked slowly left and right, his eyebrows then rose in reluctance. "Can it be me or what? Who do you need?"

I would have preferred any other staff member, as they all carried more empathy and understanding than this guy, but here I was and asking for another would have meant waking them up, something I can't bring myself to inflict upon a person.

"So here's the thing, I got that book thing your NPC asked me to get, Tether I guess his name is, right?" He nods. "So I got it, I took it from one of the ladies staying in the cabin to the left of the Viking cabin, and I think they saw me."

"Okay, well you gotta deal with that man, there's consequences for steal-"

"No man, that's not what I'm getting at. They're telling people someone with a 'dark complexion' took it." I even did the finger quotes. "They don't have any other description than someone in black with a dark complexion, if it was just black clothes that's half the game, but the skin color, that means me only."

A wry smile crossed his face. "Awww, shit that sucks man, they got you huh? Did they kill you? Do you need to mark a life off?"

"No, like, I need you guys to say something because that's not fair."

"You said they saw you, I mean you were seen doing it so-"

"Yeah, but they don't know who I am beyond my skin color, that's not enough to go off of and they shouldn't be able to use that to describe me."

"Wait...what?" Jake squinted hard and opened his pinkish eyes wide as

though it would induce more comprehension. I sigh, I'm not surprised Jake hasn't thought about this, why would he? He thinks labelling the bathrooms gender neutral while on site is "too political" to even discuss.

"Okay, so in this world, right? There are all kinds of people, in your world there aren't only white people right?"

"I mean..." he looks around. "It's mostly white people here, yknow?"

"I mean in the fiction man, the world you created."

"Oh, sure there are other people, like mostly on the other continents."

"Okay, so then, in this country we are playing in, it's not just white humans only?"

"No, there are people from all over here."

"Alright! So, then describing someone as having dark skin isn't actually very helpful and shouldn't be used since there are many people with dark skin in this country, and since the only other descriptor is black clothing, it could be a great many people, right?"

"...you lost me, what do you need me to do, man?"

I briskly rub my hands together until they are hot. "I need you to tell whoever is looking for me, that they can't use my skin color to look for me because that's not fair."

"Why isn't it fair? Someone could look for me based on my hair or something. Why is your skin color off limits?"

I expected some hesitance, but this was depressing. "Dude. If other brown people exist in this fantasy world, then saying someone with dark skin did something isn't helpful, it's not my fault your game is 98% white players. If there were ten-to-twenty other brown people on site some of them would be wearing black too, and so they would have to at least question us, they couldn't just pinpoint me instantly, it's not my fault there aren't more brown people here and I can't alter my skin tone to 'blend in' or something." I use my fingers to make air quotes for "blend in" I'm not sure why, but I continue, "So you need to tell them that they can't go looking for people with darker skin as their only descriptor, it's not fair."

He appeared somewhat befuddled. He looked down and to the side at the grass, the straps of his Thai fisherman's pants dangling as he held them up by the fabric bunched up in his left hand.

"Let me talk to staff and we will get back to you, man." He then moved to turn around and go back into staff cabin.

As he went, I said, "It will be easier to stop them beforehand than to try and retcon it if they attack me." Half of my sentence passed through the screen door to get to him.

I walked briskly back to my cabin, I didn't want someone getting any ideas

and making this more complicated. It was still early, very few people were up and about, after a few minutes a car would drive out or pull into the site, people getting McDonald's breakfast or coming back from their nearby homes where they slept. I had a sliver of signal, so I sat on the creaky bunk and scrolled while I waited for the rest of staff to awaken. Around 30 minutes after I got back to my cabin, someone knocked at the door. I considered not answering, just sitting still and hoping they would assume the cabin was empty.

Then the guilt hit me, the little voice that says, "if you don't engage with other people why did you even come?"

I walked to the door, my hiking boots making a dramatic clomping. "What is it?" I say without my accent, hoping they might see this as a bad time, maybe I'm not dressed or just woke up.

"We have some questions," they call back. For fuck's sake it's probably 9:45 and they've gathered a posse. I string out my hair a little and try to look sleepy before I open the door. The cabin windows have shutters so it's rather dark inside, I plan to squint before I touch the handle. The door opens, just as I thought, a couple of players that typically are part of the "lawful" characters in town as well as the woman whose book I nabbed from the bag. I put on my best hangover voice with the accent this time. If I tried to stay in out-of-play mode they might think I'm trying to get out of consequences that way.

"Can I 'elp you wiff something?" I said as I feigned wiping my eye.

The guy in the front had a green linen toggle jacket and brown pants, which looked to be made from scrubs, but they were split up the side and stitched with a green zig-zag up the breach. The other guy had a vest made of "tab mail" essentially chain mail made of discarded soda tabs linked together. It doesn't bend much but it stays cool in the heat and looks kind of like armor, along with a set of red bracers and black wrap pants. I didn't know any of their names, my friend circle didn't extend to this game and I'm not great at socializing at events. The woman had a more elaborate outfit: a black corset which shoved her breasts up over the top, two yellow sleeves, puffy at the shoulder, and a big wide skirt a different shade of yellow, the bag from last night over her shoulder.

The guy in green spoke first, "Do you have a book? Small, gold colored?"

I looked over their heads, to the right, and down, I frowned and said, "No I don't s'pose I do."

The two guys threw a glance at each other as if something had been confirmed. "Well, you were seen taking from that bag, can you explain that?" he said as he pointed to the bag she held outward, making 20% puppy dog eyes at me.

"I'd love to but I cannot, who saw what exactly? I was only up so late so maybe you're lookin' for someone else."

“She said her friend saw someone that looked like you —” I interrupted him — I’ll escalate this long before I sit back and take it.

“Woah woah, ‘looked like me’ eh? How so?”

“Well, she said all black with some kind of armor and darker skin and hair.” Said the toggle jacket guy. With that, my face found its way to my palm, which they no doubt saw as some admission of guilt or regret.

“Listen guys, you can’t do that. You can’t say you saw a person with darker skin as a description.” I spoke without the accent, hoping they would understand that I wasn’t in-play anymore.

“What do you mean we can’t? She saw what she saw, you weren’t invisible, or you would have had the headband.” He was referring to the green headband one must wear to denote they are somehow invisible within the rules of the game.

“No dude, you can’t use dark skin as a descriptor when looking for someone.”

“Why would that matter? It’s a part of your appearance, you didn’t wear any makeup to mask yourself.” Toggle jacket squinted as if indignant.

“Dude, my guy, I just happen to be the only person here who’s brown, I wouldn’t be the only person in this ‘world’ who’s brown.”

“Okay, so? We can’t ask people who aren’t here if they did it.”

“Yes. Exactly, that’s why you can’t look for someone based on their skin color in this situation.” I looked around to see if any staff members had woken up, or perhaps were coming to speak to me, none were.

“What do you mean? If someone was green we would look for someone playing an orc.” We were no longer even pretending to be in-play anymore; this was us talking as real people, and I’m glad it was early because I didn’t need the weight of ruining more people’s immersion on my conscience.

“Yeah, okay. The thing is, in real life, I’m not in control of my skin color so as a human in and out-of-play, you can’t make it a detriment to me.”

“I’m not doing anything to you, you did this and now you’re trying to argue out of it.”

“Fuckin’ hell dude. If I was that concerned about getting caught I wouldn’t have been seen stealing it, I would ha--”

“So there you did do it!” The tab mail guy finally spoke up, I was unsure if he was trying to force us back in-play, but I was quite sure I was going to ignore it.

“What I’m saying is you can’t find out this way, that’s not fair.” I felt that playground energy, when the other kids don’t agree with your four-square rules.

“You just think it’s not fair because you’re caught!” The guy in green said, jaw hanging open beneath the side eyes he was smirking at me with.

I threw my hands up. “I’m sorry, I have to talk to staff.”

The guy in green scoffed at me.

The woman said, “seriously?” behind me as I walked back towards staff cabin.

In any other situation, trying to appeal this way would be pretty poor LARP-ing. I guess you could call it bad sportsmanship, but the word “sport” doesn’t belong here. The group didn’t follow me, I assumed to further illustrate how “above” my behavior they were. I was becoming highly aware that if I couldn’t make someone understand, then this game would be over for me. I would be the guy who screwed up stealing something, then tried to get staff to let him out of consequences.

When I arrived at staff cabin, a few members of staff were up and moving about. Brenna and Jake were talking about something while Cole was applying red makeup to his entire face. Jake was slightly more dressed, now with a dark jacket on resembling a military uniform. Brenna is a somewhat more reasonable and (socially) responsible person than Jake, I expected that she would understand the issue. Jake noticed me approaching as he was buttoning the jacket, and intercepted me, I assume, to keep me from seeing Cole’s makeup as if I was going to be shocked the guy who plays all the demons is putting red makeup on.

“Hey, dude, what was that thing you needed earlier? I wasn’t really awake yet.” As he said this, I noticed the pair of energy drinks near his feet, one empty on its side.

“Yeah, that’s what I need to talk about. So, some folks have come and accused me of stealing that book you told me to get for Tether, right? So the thing is, they are only after me because they heard someone with a ‘dark complexion’ took it.” He pointed at me indicating that he remembered, so I continued. “Yeah, so that whole thing, did you guys talk about it yet?”

“Uhh, not yet.”

Brenna stopped folding costuming and walked over, her black leggings and tight black shirt would serve as her base layer for every costume she wore today.

“What did we not talk about?” Jake sighed, and lazily spoke.

“Something like, he can’t be looked for because he’s not white or something.”

“There is now a group that came to me and claimed I stole the book, which yeah, I did, but they only came to me because someone caught a glimpse of me and saw I wasn’t white, and like, used that as their only descriptor. Black clothes and dark skin. I talked to Jake earlier and like, it’s not my fault nobody else in the real world here is brown.”

I felt like I was speaking to a manager, the adult in the room, even though Jake is technically the owner of this game. Brenna listened to my explanation as to why the in-play demographics are relevant to the out-of-play ones, and why my skin was causing me to be at a disadvantage.

“Well, okay, so lemme see. Someone was seen, and the cat’s out of the bag on that one now, so...” Brenna was cut off by Jake.

“They saw you man, like I get it, but you should be aware that you’re extra recognizable when you do stuff like that.” I was flustered by his flippant reply.

“What? So my skin color out-of-play is like a built-in disadvantage?”

“Play an orc or something dude, be green or be a half demon and be red, you chose to be a human so your skin is your skin. We can’t make people see you differently than they see you, you just gotta be aware of that.”

“That’s not fair dude! If I was a white guy, they would have seen some guy in black and that’s like, 20 people here, even if they found me it would have taken all day and I could have offloaded the book.”

“What do you want, man? You want us to tell everyone to pretend your skin is white?”

At that moment Brenna spoke up. “Hey, hey, let’s just do this, since it’s still early, why don’t we give the book back, and we will tell them the book was lost. They think it’s you now, though they came to that information through...illegitimate means —”

Jake scoffed. “They saw a dark-skinned person, we can’t phys-rep minorities just because the game world is more diverse than Georgia!”

Brenna held up a hand. “Jake, stop. It’s really not a big fuckin’ deal, it’s just one item and we can’t exactly tell everyone who’s not white to play a makeup race so they don’t have a disadvantage.”

“Pshh! Disadvantage!” Jake turned about and finished buttoning the uniform.

Brenna leaned in towards me “Do you have it?”

I dug into the little bag I got off Wish, poorly translated English on the faux leather flap and produced the chintzy gold book prop.

“I’ll give it back, don’t worry there will be more of these in play today. If anyone asks, you didn’t take anything, they just lost it.”

Jake had opened his phone and begun scrolling when I was walking away.

I LARP for a few reasons, one is to lose myself in a fiction. I want to depict a character so fully that I can think the way they do for a while because they don’t have to think about the problems I have, just loot and use cool weapons and magic items. The drawback that people don’t expect, is that the other players, while duly ordained nerds simply for being at a LARP, are still from the Southeast. They still have the ideas, morals and empathy, or lack thereof, that they have outside the game world. It’s not a problem often. Usually I can just be my character, ignore friend requests online after the game, and we all get to be equal strangers while we’re there.

I chose to stop the player-base thievery. I could still be a cool thief character but steal from NPCs. Staff would set up little “houses” for me to steal from as part

of a quest, people knew my character could pick locks and knew how to be sneaky. I just considered it a part of this game in particular that I wasn't able to steal from players. I don't think the players involved ever trusted me again, not that players need to trust each other. In time I let that game go. I couldn't keep going when I knew so much about the staff and other players. It was difficult to let go of the character. I enjoyed him but I was literally seen as a thief due to my skin color. I don't need to put on armor and go to the woods for that.



# ART EXHIBIT

Serena Fick

And if she had seen them just then  
from a third person perspective  
they were a perfect representation  
of O'Keefe, Michelangelo, and Van Gogh.  
But she could only see him  
as he pulled her back in;  
a perfect exhibit of heart.

ANN

Thalia Garoufalidis

Waking up earlier than I normally do  
means seeing you sitting at the table,  
or on the porch if it's not too hot.  
Diligently working on the crossword,  
cup of coffee in hand.  
Helping you refill the bird feeder,  
seeing the seeds the squirrels will inevitably get.  
My mother's mother in the morning  
is like waiting for low tide and singing to snails,  
binoculars in hand.

# STEWARDSHIP

Stella Banowetz

She was there when no one else was  
Grounded me in the intricate workings of her world  
A safe haven  
Where I was reminded of my own humanity  
And the humanity that rests in each of us  
The farther I sunk into my turmoil, the stronger her whispers grew  
Like a magnet, pulling me into her arms  
There I was saved

When drills dug into her skin  
Her forests exploited  
Her biodiversity ravaged  
Her waters polluted  
Her air contaminated  
She let out a single cry  
One that hangs on the winds  
That circulate this earth  
Long ago I chose to listen  
Everyday I make that choice again  
For I am but one of her children

# THE WALKING BRIDGE

Jess Williams

The air we share,  
Shoulders like sails pitching it forward  
Making our presence known.  
A force making us choose between eye contact or evasion.

Right now I can't help but  
to take my chance at a parting glance  
At the people that pass me,  
Entering into my space.  
I hold my breath

Lonely Superstitions,  
Like when you pass a cemetery  
Or when you go through a tunnel.

Some stare down,  
Some smile.  
An occasional handwave.  
But some stare bullets  
That hit like my cousin's BB gun.

It was a summer day and he chased me around.  
Hunted me into the corner of his yard  
And shot me in the thigh.

I think that we probably won't speak again.  
The people on the bridge  
Who will never see.

The little mark still left  
The tension in my back  
That spot in the woods where I sit down,  
And wonder.

About how I forgot to put deodorant on this morning.  
About how I am probably not writing that essay tonight.  
About how everyone tolerates this deep discomfort.

# ODE TO HEIDI

Jordan Goodyear

Every weekend for a month now, I have taken the same journey. I walk out of the thunderous, frat-house-esque, dysfunctional but still loving family, Sunderland, and down the hill; this is just one of many hills. You get used to that once you're at Warren Wilson long enough. On the weekends, especially during the chilly months, nobody except for the true nature lovers come out, and even they have to sit out (or rather in) sometimes. I love it.

Not because the campus seems dead and cold with no one out; it's more like the campus is hibernating like a big black bear after a long year of hard work. I love the tranquility, the peaceful loneliness. Most of the time, I'm taking the small journey every weekend to escape the surrounding loneliness; you know, when you're in a room surrounded by people and you still feel so alone? That loneliness, that anxiety and paranoia-inducing, ever-evolving but nevertheless the same agonizing pit in your stomach you feel when the people around you and the surrounding circumstances are just too much. (Fun, right? Thanks, anxiety.)

I walk down two more hills (or maybe one big hill with two slopes), and I arrive at the garden. The blacksmiths are usually hammering away, but today, it's quiet. The surrounding area lacks the usual cachinnations of the hammers, mallets, and metal reverberating and echoing on loop throughout the chilly mountain air.

I walk down the path, and I'm greeted by the love of my life, the floofiest, most *beautiful* diva I've ever had the pleasure of meeting in my entire life: Heidi. By now, she knows me (or at least my warm lap and ear scratches), and she prances over to be greeted by my short, colorful fingernails. She purrs, rubbing her head against my small hand. I greet her, picking out bits of leaves and mulch from her warm, calico coat.

"What have you been getting into today, Miss Ma'am, Miss Thing?" She purrs.

I walk up the stairs to the Garden Porch. Heidi follows, jumping up the old wooden steps, worn but extremely loved by the Birkenstocks and work boots of many a Warren Wilson student. I sit down on the cold porch, and immediately, Heidi jumps into my lap, getting her floofy hair all over my XXL green sweater I got on sale at Target; it swallows and envelops my frame in the most comforting way. Heidi also appreciates the sweater, making biscuits on the cabled knitwear and getting her nails stuck in the process. She turns her chartreuse eyes to me, batting her paws at my facemask.

"Heidi, my kween! Miss Thing! Ma'am, stop!"

I scratch her ears and finally reach the sweet spot: that weird spot at the back of her jaw that meets her ear. She licks my hand, her entire body reverberating from the purrs that ensue. She stretches and circles her body around my lap, almost ritually, several times. Finally content in her positioning, Heidi lays down on my lap.

We always somehow end up falling asleep wherever we are. She is like a small weighted blanket, coaxing me to a peaceful, dreamless sleep, free from my anxiety ticks and worries of that day. I start playing “Beautiful Boy” by John Lennon on my phone; it’s sort of become our tradition over the past month. I hum along to John’s calming vocals as Heidi drifts off into her cat nap, her dreams filled with adventures of scouring the gardens. It’s still freezing, but today I was smart and brought a blanket on my weekend journey. I put it over my legs and Heidi. Although at first she is unsure of this foreign object, she eventually calms down and falls asleep, content with the warmth the blanket brings.

It’s this journey every Saturday and Sunday that makes my day. Sometimes, I even come down during the weekday to say hello and offer scratches and pats for my kween, Heidi. She is the main character in everybody’s story, reigning over her domain, the Warren Wilson gardens.

She brings a warm calmness to my otherwise ever-anxious and chaotic vibe. I know that if I’m having a bad day, I can draw strength and joy from her. If Heidi were a person, she’d be the Dowager Countess, maybe even Maggie Smith; regal, never taking anybody’s bullshit, always knowing what she wants and how to get it.

It’s been over an hour now, and my butt is getting sore from sitting on the porch for so long. I lay down, and Heidi lifts her head to peer and glance as if to say: “Hooman, why are you acting so odd? Why lay down there when you can sit up and give me pets and scratches?”

I get back up and do so; purrs echo from her tiny floofy body. I look at the mountains, shadows, snow, and sunlight covering their gargantuan slopes. The early winter sun is starting to set, and I know I have to leave my kween, the love of my life.

This is always the hardest part: the leaving. Partly because I don’t want to get up and leave, but mostly because I never know how to get her off of me without pissing her off. I know from past experiences that picking her up is a no-go — I have the scratches and scars to prove it — but no matter how much I shift and try to slide her off, she just meows in annoyance, repositioning herself on my floral maxi dress-covered legs.

I sigh: *she’s going to get mad, but it’ll be okay.* I start getting up, slowly at first. Heidi thinks this is another repositioning, circling my lap again. Soon, however, the lap disappears, becoming less and less until she is forced to jump off.

I brush the combination of dirt, dry grass, and cat hair off of me as Heidi gives me her famous death glare, meowing a river of what must be cat obscenities my way.

“I know, I know, I’m sorry, Kween,” I coax, scratching behind her ears.

I gather my things, shaking out the blanket and meandering down the stairs. Heidi follows, meowing after me. “I know Heidi, I have to go though, Miss Thing.”

She licks my hand as if to say she understands. I boop her nose as always, turning down the garden path that leads back to the hills. I turn around once more, waving goodbye. Heidi sits at the end of the steps, licking her fur and running off into the gardens to find another adventure.

“Bye, Heidi,” I whisper, “I’ll be back soon.”



# SELF OSCILLATING

Ephraim Grey

Bogged down in syllabics and mountains of semantics, I feel at odds with myself—  
    I find I cannot differentiate between the metaphor and myself.  
The result is that I can only talk in circles, spiraling downwards at the subject—  
    I talk about myself without actually talking about myself.  
Still feeling the body heat on the concrete, I trace the shape of it—  
    O, my finger is coming full circle with the outline of myself.  
Sometimes at night, the answer fleetingly comes to me, ephemeral bouts of  
    nirvana—  
    Amen! Hallelujah! A thing among things, standing above myself.  
I feel more of a connection with that which I can see in the mirror—  
    in alignment more with other people's perceptions than with myself.  
Turning around to face the person in the room, I find that there is no one there—  
    yet the feeling still remains, I nearly did encounter myself.  
Guilty over every gulp of air, I take off my mask and reveal my true face—  
    permanent marker scent wafts over eyes gouged out of myself.  
This self-hatred is narcissistic, and the idea isn't even all that original—  
    patch together disparate elements of others to compose myself.  
It occurs to me that I am that very being, and the horror of being perceived—  
    one and the same, the poem irrevocably reconciled with myself.



# *ROUND THE BEND*

Thalia Garoufalidis

# BOOTSTRAPS

Jess Williams

I am Jerry Fallwell (no relation, but I used to watch him on television with my Daddy.) and I love America. I love Jesus. I love John Wayne. I love inviting my sister Denise and her kids over to watch the *Charlie Brown Christmas Special* and *The Great Pumpkin* on Halloween. I own a house, a small western ranch style home with a recent bathroom remodel. I have a 30 year fixed rate mortgage (never missed a payment!) and I have a timeshare in Aspen (four weeks out of the year: (The Premium package)). I now have satellite television, which contrary to popular belief no longer goes out in a thunderstorm, but it has been out for the last week or so, and it's been impossible to get a repairman out here. I have a Dodge Durango that has never missed an oil change from new (235,000 miles) Bright Red with gold flake strips down both sides. The Durango, I call her Dorinda, was originally a 10 year anniversary for my ex-wife. She hated it. I can still hear her voice shriek, "I wanted a PT Cruiser, you dumbfuck!" Luckily, I got it back in the divorce. Go me! Before things started to get a little spooky around here I used to take my Dorinda to the local park on Saturdays so I could suck cocks in the restrooms, just to feel needed.

The alarm is chirping again and I force my leg out from underneath the comforter. I stay like that for another thirty seconds before finally flinging the rest of myself into a sitting position. I prop myself up and stumble into the bathroom. It hurts to piss for the third time this year. I grunt and plead with my urethra as if it was listening. I forgot to put a new coffee filter in again so there is just six cups worth of opaque brown water waiting for me. I sigh and grab the last sugar-free red bull from the fridge and stare out the window over the flat yellow ground.

*Around eight years ago I placed 4th at the Cass County BBQ festival. My Daddy taught me the key to good brisket is keeping it moist. Daddy would say that every thirty minutes you need to spray it down with apple juice so it keeps moist and sweet. He would spray the apple juice on his finger and tickle his way inside my mouth and I would laugh. Suck it, Jerry.*

*My Daddy was a character.*

I think I'm gonna hop in the car and go to the Family Fare and try to get some brisket to cook for tonight. I can invite Ricky or Bobby or Linda or Ray or Phil or Gary or Marliene, or I can just cook it for myself and have leftovers all week. The car is

sweltering and the leather seat feels like hot wax on the back of my thighs. The sky seemed to be glowing a faint green; it had been like that for the last couple months. I start to sweat ignoring the gas light that flicks on with the engine.

*You're a really lonely and sad person! And you can't even give me, us, a baby.  
All you do is play video poker and watch Fox News.  
You can't even fuck me right. Where's my baby, Jerry? What happened to us?*

I was cruising on the highway when I saw that the giant gas station out on six was just a smoldering piece of charred remains. There were a few mannequins (stinky and repugnant, not suitable for a storefront) just laying in the parking lot. Strange times these days with this virus hoax and the Democrats trying to destroy America. Damn commies! And they really need to clean up all these wrecked cars littering the road. For chrissakes, where are my tax dollars going?

And there were more mannequins here too. I stood in front of the Family Fare. It did not appear to be open. Spray painted across the front of the building red lettering stated:

**Four Adults. Two Children.  
CLEARED.**

I realize that it's going to be another canned soup night. I get back in Dorinda and try the radio:

*A message from the President of the United States of America: We are asking everyone to remain calm and stay inside. The government's main focus is maintaining the power grid. We are doing as much as we can to defend our country from **the visitors**. Wait for further information and God bless America.*

Oh not this bullshit! They've been playing on-loop for the last two weeks on every damn frequency, both AM and FM! I love our President of course, but I don't need to be hearing him everytime I turn on the radio. I haven't even seen any of these so-called "visitors" (probably Antifa). All I see is hundreds of these mannequins as if God dropped them from the sky: unclothed and burnt, flies and gnats, the soft buzz of rot. Fallwell men don't cry.

As I got back on the road, I thought about seeing my Momma in the backyard that summer before my freshman year of high school, laying there, still. She had on her white church dress with the peach colored roses. My Daddy's shotgun laying across

her leg like a strange bedfellow. A giant red blotch and her peculiar glare side-eyeing the lawn. I ran to her and put my hand on the bloody blotch between her chest. I hollered towards the neighbors house. "Please! Please Help! Please Help, Momma!" I scream into the empty rolling fields. I didn't know how to do CPR. I turn around and see my Daddy staring off into the yard like he did when tornado sirens rang in the distance.

"She left a lemon meringue pie burning in the oven," Daddy said.

I flit past him as he stares down at Momma. The house fills with the smell of burnt pastry.

My Momma was a good woman, a good christian woman. I think about the collection hat that went around 3rd street Baptist and how she would always toss in a two dollar bill. How she explained that while it wasn't a twenty, people always perked up when they came across a two dollar bill. And I cried quietly, staring out my window. I didn't like to cry. In fact I almost never did, but how could I not with my mother laying out on the lawn dead? My Daddy always told me that Falwell men never cry. Enough cry babies in this world already.

When I get home, the power is no longer working. There are dark clouds on the horizon, strange otherworldly noises spread across the sky. Is that a woman screaming in the clouds? What is that loud whooshing noise? Momma? Suddenly, the house began to shutter, the windows creaked as an intense weight consumes the atmosphere. Cows scream in the distance and my tears evaporate off my face.

Fallwell men don't cry. Fallwell men don't cry. Fallwell men don't cry.

# SECOND WAVE

Belinda Lewis

My people will line up  
waiting for a needle to the arm,  
laying our sand bags  
in preparation for the coming wave —  
while his will hunker down  
with no salvation in sight,  
bracing themselves for the impending tsunami.

“Our people are Guinea pigs” —  
a country where they go  
to see if the vaccine is safe,  
before coming back home  
to see if it is effective.  
“They stop coming our way.  
So we keep dying.”

This is our privilege —  
a lifeboat in a syringe  
while praying that my friend  
can just keep swimming.

# WHOLENESS

Heather Davis

I can smell the sourdough yeast from the loaf on the table  
A table littered with memories: pencil marks, scratches, candle wax, rings from abandoned cups sweating  
waiting for us to gather 'round

*Go ahead, tear a bit to carry the butter*

The loaf is a proud creation  
pieces and parcels, unidentifiable  
as the whole lay before us, radiating home  
the cicada song of summer

Essential ingredients spooned from nameless jars  
rays of sunshine  
weeks of spring rain  
rich compost  
a misplaced poppy, or two  
an unfortunate cricket

all of it  
the grain  
of life

*Stir it in*  
lovers that change us  
depression that expands the joy  
music under the stars  
the surprise of spring daffodils  
beauty again and again with her gypsy ways

all of it  
essential

because  
everything is everything else

# EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON

Belinda Lewis

If Eilerris Moonshadow had ever imagined what a god would look like.... This giant human woman was definitely *not* it.

Eilerris had found no purpose from her family and her fellow elves, nor had she found it in her training as she learned the magic and the ways of the cleric. For years after her training was complete, she had secluded herself from society, alone in her cavern retreat, hidden far in the mountains and sheltered by a roaring waterfall, spending her days in quiet and devoted meditation and only venturing out of her cave to forage for food. She had prayed zealously to Istus of Greyhawk, goddess of fate and destiny, looking for something — anything — to guide her toward her life's purpose.

Eilerris thought she had found her purpose when she came across a motley crew of adventurers who invited her to join them in their quest to defeat the dragon queen Tiamat. They seemed like such an unlikely group of travelers that she swore they were sent by Istus Herself to lead her to her purpose. A silent half-elf druid with deep red hair and green eyes that shimmered with a thousand untold stories. A powerful tiefling wizard whose spiraling horns, dark red skin, solid gold eyes, and towering figure struck fear in the hearts of friends and foe alike. And rounding out their group, a jovial dwarf bard whose tendency to shout either random insults or ill-timed puns while playing sea shanties was both endearing and incredibly off-putting, a comically surreal contrast to the serious manner of the rest of the group. But even though Eilerris spent many years in the company of this unusual band of adventurers — who went from strangers to companions to friends... she still couldn't find any discernible meaning or even *reason* to her journeys. The fact that events seemed to unfold as if part of a carefully orchestrated plan kept her going, kept her certain that if she just kept going, kept fighting these monsters, kept journeying across the continent, that she'd somehow find the meaning of it all, her purpose.

And now, here she was, holding the Crystal Orb of Divine Knowledge and staring up at this colossal and strangely-dressed human, one of many forming a circle around her as if mountains surrounding a deep valley.

"Are... are you Istus?" Eilerris asked, her words almost faltering at her throat.



The human blinked slowly. “Who, me? No, my name is Courtney.” Turning to one of the other humans in the circle, she added, “Ryan, what’s going on? You didn’t tell me they could come to life!”

“Beats me,” the other human replied, lifting his mighty shoulders in a shrug. “This is the first time I’ve seen this happen.”

“Couuurt-neeey,” Eilerris repeated, sounding out the alien name with careful deliberation. “Please, oh Great and Mighty Courtney, are you the deity in charge of this world? Can you answer my questions, and tell me what my purpose in this life is?”

“Deity? Me? I... I’m not really in charge of the campa — errr... world?” Courtney looked briefly over at Ryan; her expression appeared strangely uncertain for a god. “I just play you. You want to talk to Ryan here, he’s our DM... or I uh, I mean... the, um... world-creator...?”

“Play... me?” Eilerris considered Courtney’s strange phrase for only a moment before turning to look at Ryan. “O Mighty, All-Powerful, and All-Knowing Ryan, Ultimate Master of this Mortal Realm, please, your humble servant wishes to ask you a few questions so that she may seek to understand the meaning and the purpose of her life.” She knelt down before the giant man.

“Uh... okay.” Ryan looked at his companions, then back down at her. “Tell me, uhh... Eilerris... what is your first question?”

She paused, momentarily frightened by the reality that she would finally learn her purpose. “O Wise and All-Knowing Ryan, the first question that your humble servant wishes to have answered... is it true that my faithful companions came to me through destiny? I prayed to Istus faithfully to show me my purpose, and they showed up... are they truly a sign from my goddess? Or was it merely coincidence that they showed up and I have been misled?”

“Uhh... well...” Ryan shifted, raising one of his massive hands to his neck. “I mean, I guess you could call it destiny? Courtney wanted to join our campaign and she, well, uh... created you, so... we found a way to write you into the campaign. So... I suppose that yes, it’s destiny, at least in a way?”

“Courtney... created me?” Eilerris turned to look at Courtney. “Then, I thank you, O Benevolent and Gracious Courtney, for bringing me into this mortal realm.”

“You’re welcome, I guess?” Courtney replied, glancing over at Ryan. “This is *so* weird,” she told him, her voice quieter as if trying not to be heard.

Turning back to Ryan, Eilerris continued. “My next question, O Great and Omnipotent Ryan — ”

“You, uh, really don’t have to add all the ‘O Wise and Mighty’ and all,” Ryan interrupted, his cheeks starting to flush as red as the apples Eilerris had seen in the

last town's market. "It's just 'Ryan'."

"Oh. My apologies then, Ryan. My next question... throughout my journey, my companions and I have fought many creatures who have so determinedly attacked us — creatures which normally are docile and calm — and many times our attacks and spells had... well... no consistency. Sometimes we would miss our blow even when our foe was directly before us, and other times we would strike true even from a far distance away. And our enemies were the same! Surely there is a purpose, right? Everything happens for a reason... right?"

Ryan looked around at his companions. "Well... about that..."

"Wait, are you really going to tell her?" one of the humans, who had been quietly observing up to that moment, asked incredulously.

"I mean... she *did* grab the Crystal Orb of Divine Knowledge," Ryan said with another shrug, "I think we kinda owe it to her." He reached for something out of sight, and then stretched his cupped hand toward Eilerris. She grasped her quarterstaff tightly, bracing for what might happen —

He turned his hand over and a strange object, spherical but with many flat facets and made of a waxy blue material that Eilerris had never seen before, tumbled out of his hand and came to a rest in front of her. The round *thing* stood as high as her waist; as she looked closer, she saw that there were golden numerals carved on each facet. "What... what is this?" she asked, touching the object. It was slightly cool to the touch, and felt perfectly normal; it didn't seem to be enchanted.

"It's uh... it's a d20," Ryan replied.

"A... dee-twenty? What does it do?"

"It's part of my dice set. When you or one of your companions — or even your enemies that you've been fighting — try to attack, me or one of the other players here rolls this and it determines what happens. The higher the number, the better the result. If it lands on a 20, really amazing things happen; or if it lands on a 1, really bad things happen. I have others that determine how much damage gets dealt when someone lands a hit." He held out his hand again, dropping several more objects — a cube, a pyramid, other strange shapes that Eilerris couldn't describe — in front of her; all were made from the same material and had numerals engraved on them, just like the d20 in front of her.

Eilerris stared at Ryan in disbelief. "Wait, so... it... it's random?"

"Well... yeah. That's the fun of it."

"Fun? What about the purpose? The meaning?" She squeezed her eyes shut, fighting back tears as she shook her head violently. "My mentor told me all things happen for a reason. I thought there was a purpose behind when we hit or miss, some deeper lesson we had to learn to achieve perfection. You're telling me it's all a lie? There's no reason?"

Several of the humans laughed. One of them nudged Courtney with his elbow, jovially remarking, "Sounds like someone's gonna need a new character."

"Shush, I don't want to have to level a new character up to level ten again," Courtney replied in a low hiss.

"Guys, this isn't a joke," Ryan scolded them. Turning back to Eilerris, he continued, "Look, I know you think it's meaningless, but there kinda is a reason we use the dice. It balances things out and adds to the fun and the danger when there's a bit of randomness involved. Otherwise it would be too easy if everyone hits all the time."

"Too easy?" Eilerris repeated. "You think this entire journey would have been too easy? How many times did we almost die for this — this... this *game*?" She spat her last word out with considerable venom. "We're jeopardizing our very lives, and for what? Just to entertain you! What is the meaning in that?" Angrily, she lifted the Crystal Orb of Divine Knowledge above her head. "You aren't gods, you're monsters!" she shouted, hurling the orb to the ground.

The Orb shattered with a deafening roar, sending shards of crystal scattering through the air. The humans dissolved in a blinding light, and she suddenly found herself back in the temple where they'd found the Orb. Her companions stared at her with eager eyes.

"Well?" the tiefling asked. "What did you learn? What is your purpose?"

Eilerris looked down at the still-glimmering shards of crystal at her feet, her earlier anger dissipating into the air along with the magic that had powered the Orb. "There is none," she said quietly. "There's no meaning behind any of this. My mentor, our teachers, they were all wrong; nothing happens for a reason." She looked up again, noting the varied expressions of the rest of her parties: the shock in the eyes of the tiefling, the confusion in the eyes of the dwarf. The half-elf, though, stared at her with a look of regretful understanding; something in his eyes made Eilerris wonder if the silent druid perhaps had known this all along.

"But... what about Tiamat?" the tiefling asked.

Eilerris knelt down and picked up one of the shards, looking at her reflection in it. "Tiamat will still destroy our world if we don't stop her," she said. "But there's no purpose behind it. Our journey is just a game to the gods that run this world."

"Then what do we do now?" the dwarf asked. "Do we continue, or...?"

"May as well," Eilerris said, putting the shard into her pocket. "Even if there's no reason behind it beyond the fickle enjoyment of this world's gods... what else do we have to do with our lives but play along?"



# *UNTITLED*

Bejamin Airing

# MARBLE

Thalia Garoufalidis

Your mom bends her knees, crouching to sit down on the marble floor. Her sweaty palms against the slick cool floor momentarily relieve her from the intensity of the heat. A thin layer of dirt clings to her hand as she picks up a tall ribbed glass of lukewarm water with no ice; she takes a gulp. *Yeti to kryo den einai kala gia to moro.* She's in Greece, it's July of 1999, and she's three months pregnant with you. The windows are open for the occasional breeze to blow in and carry the heat away, the soft meows of a cat heard from the back alley. Motorcycles spitting out exhaust and gas fumes putter down the same road, their noises seem to echo off every open window and door.

Next summer, when you're six months old, you'll return with her and meet Yaya Ketí and Papou Babís with his wildly hairy eyebrows and permanently hunched back for the first time. You won't remember it, only through stories of you crying on the plane and being held up by Baba for your passport picture. The photo will live in the fireproof lockbox hidden in the linen closet at your Mom's house in Georgia. You may never feel like you've grown out of those plump rosy cheeks.

You'll be eight years old and complaining when she tells you her secret to staying cool at Yaya's home.

"When I was pregnant with you, I had to lay down on the floor," she says.

Wondering why you never thought of doing something as intuitive as that, laying down on the marble, you feel like you were cut from that same ancient stone. Feeling your tailbone and your shoulder blades poking out, noticing the curved nature of your spine for the first time against the solid stone. Sprawling your arms and legs out so that no limbs are touching in an attempt to maximize your surface area against the marble. Your fingers trace lines in the floor, moving into divots, and noticing the miniscule cracks where dust collects. They are so small, hardly able to fit the slender edge of your fingernail between them; you rest.

The summer after, in third grade for a show and tell assignment, you ask Baba sitting on the soft scratched black leather couch to write down their address. On a pale yellow sticky note *10 Thorikion Athens, Greece* reads in his perfectly uniform handwriting. He writes in English the same way he does in Greek. Giving the sticky note to Ms. Sisler, she types in the address and you watch it amplified on the projector. The earth from above, suddenly zooming in we travel fast across vast continents, momentarily settling on Europe, panning jaggedly to Greece. The islands look

like birthmarks on the ocean. The tan exterior is tagged with graffiti. The white shutters of your room closed, and the marble steps lead up to the heaviest door you've ever opened. None of these sensations are lost on you, but they don't seem to carry the same weight to anyone else in the room. For the first time you see what they see, and realize it's not beautiful to them.

When Baba tells you that Yaya and Papou grew up during the war, when schools closed, and they never learned how to read or write in their own language, you will be shocked and sixteen. It could have been over dinner, a pause between arguments at the old, dark stained table, or in the car on the way home speeding down Clairemont from the Greek Orthodox church, but you can't remember. All you recollect is the feeling that arose within you once you learned. You never saw them write anything besides grocery lists, and never questioned why they didn't send mail and only spoke through crackled speakers over Skype on Sunday afternoons. The verbal tradition of storytelling takes on newfound significance, seeping down through your bones, vertebrate, and blood, settling in your DNA no longer dormant.

At eighteen years old your mother will casually mention, while chopping a crisp yellow onion in the kitchen, that Yaya developed an eating disorder from growing up in poverty and famine. It stings your eyes. You never thought about this before in your life. The realization hits you like a stone. All the cooking, *yemista*, *pastistio*, *lukumathes*, *gavres*, *xoriatiki*, *meli kai yaourti*, *spanakopita kai ola*. Yaya insisted on eating *mono paximathi kai ligo feta*. For her health, she claimed stubbornly, everything she cooked she couldn't eat. Famine followed hunger, generational trauma passed down with food in our mouths. How you once saw her, you will never see her again once all of this is unearthed.

She will never be cured. She will die a year later, you will be halfway across the world, in college unable to attend her funeral. You will cry holding the two photographs Baba gave you of her playing bocce the only time she visited America. You will laugh because she is playing bocce.

At nineteen years old you'll be rambling about the patriarchy and western science's false constructions of birthing positions after taking a feminist philosophy class. Your mom tells you she asked her midwife if it was okay to crouch on her hands and knees. She tells you how you were born in cat position, the same pose you practice in yoga to stretch your back. And you will think about the flexibility of your spine and the rigid nature of marble. The significance of stone is never lost on you, like a chisel revealing a face you will uncover them too. You hold her and her mother Aphrodite in your hair. You will hate cutting it, you will hate feeling cut off from them.

# SEASONAL DEPRESSION

Rain Larson

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*                    \*

The leaves on the tree    outside my bedroom window  
are dead    falling like dreams fade away each morning

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*                    \*

Their young soft greenness    sapped away by cold Autumn  
Only tufts remain    on their skeletal branches

                  \*                    |                    \*

and someday    my branches will be stripped    just like an  
empty vessel    outside someone's bedroom window

                  |

I will be alone in my small world    without hope  
until sweet Spring    heals my sleeping mind once    again.

                  |

# *THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY*

Serena Fick

There is a universe watching over  
my loves, their numbers still flourish each day.  
Awake in yearning I am not sober;  
my dreams won't relent, my fondness still stays.  
In spark or with flame my loves grow and grow.  
Bright landscapes match my passion, adding strong,  
human allure. Wherever I do go,  
Earth sings my loves a disastrous song.  
Magnetic is his gaze, his smile, his hand.  
She laughs and daylight floods into the room.  
A plight only one man can understand,  
Hozier serenades my bride and my groom.  
Sweet Nature calls out; I return its cry.  
I love the world that my love's written by.



# WILD BLUEBERRIES

Ella Syverson

She grew up eating sweet peas from the vine  
In her aunt's garden  
Foraging for wild blueberries  
Like a fat black bear in August  
Drinking maple sap from the spigot  
Before it had a chance to be boiled into syrup  
She frolicked in the playground  
Made by fallen logs and mossy stones  
The lake was her bathtub  
The fallen leaves her bed  
The wandering whitetailed deer her friends

She thought, then,  
That the reason she played in the garden  
And swam naked in the creek  
And learned the names of wild things  
Was only to love and to play  
Not realizing that love is caring  
And that caring is rebellion

Not realizing that  
As she played in the garden  
The seeds of rebellion were planted in her  
They tried to bury us  
But they didn't know we were gardeners  
This was before the time she faced the trowel  
And only saw her aunties grow from the sun-kissed earth  
And like the oceans, rise  
When the water needed protecting

She grew up eating sweet peas from the vine  
In her aunt's garden  
She grew up knowing that Water is Life and Earth is Love  
She was taught to be grateful and to be kind

She was taught to be a steward and to be a storyteller  
She was taught to play in the woods  
And in the water  
And like her aunties,  
Rise in its defense

So that when the black snake  
Slithered through the Dakotas  
Polluting land and lifeways  
With greed and broken promises  
And when the fires lit by Glencore  
Filled the air with smoke so thick  
It obscured the blame  
And choked the voices that should've spoken out  
And when the calls of children, millions strong  
And the cries of the dying polar bear  
And the elephant holding her young close  
Fell on deaf ears  
And when she felt  
The weight of the world on her shoulders  
And pull of the high tide  
Dragging her down

She rises, like her aunties before her  
Breathes in the scent of sand and sweetfern  
Calls her comrades to arms  
Summons the courage to hope  
And yells with a voice that clear and unafraid  
The time is twelve o'clock, and  
She holds a homemade cardboard sign

Because she yearns  
Once again  
To eat sweet peas from the vine  
In her aunt's garden  
And forage for wild blueberries  
Like a fat black bear in August



*UNTITLED*  
Benjamin Airing

# THE FIRST POEM

Carolyn Carpenter

your dad told me  
over breakfast  
the morning I left  
that maybe I could write  
poetry about 'this.'  
I told him that I don't write  
good sad poems and I  
let a laugh come to my face,  
tears rolling down my neck

I am writing now, to tell you  
not what I could

(I miss your body and  
your love, and, hey, about  
that phantom limb the  
Universe left in her wake  
when she took you away)

but 'this.' This is all I've  
wanted to tell you since I stopped telling you things:

'this' is the first law of thermodynamics

'this' is a Newman projection of cyclohexane

'this' is a shunt that lives in the back of my grandfather's head

'this' is the indefinite integral to calculate area under a curve

'this' is two bodies in thermal equilibrium

(I hope you, reader,  
don't mind my saying  
it but)

we were once two bodies in thermal equilibrium

and I miss your heat  
but what I'm writing to tell you  
is 'this' and  
this is not a sad poem because there are  
no tears rolling down my neck and  
damn, if I'm not still learning

# Contributor Biographies

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## Daniel Acocella

Writing should be whatever you want it to be, and I think half the fun is figuring out what that is for you.

## Benjamin Airing

“Stairway to Purgatory”| Asheville, NC, 2018

“Untitled”| Asheville, NC, 2018

“Untitled”| Heredia, Costa Rica, 2016

## Stella Banowetz

Stella Banowetz (she/her) is a queer activist, writer, artist, and student from Washburn, WI. Her passion lies in environmental and social justice work. She is the former Chequamegon Hub Co-lead for the Youth Climate Action Team and co-founder of 350 Chequamegon Bay. Her writing, activist work, and social media can be found on her website ([www.stellabanowetz.weebly.com](http://www.stellabanowetz.weebly.com)). When she’s not organizing, she’s most likely doing something outside, playing roller derby, or spending time with her friends. In the future she hopes to work in politics or a related field to work towards making this world more equitable, and more just.

## Chloë Bloodworth

These lively robins and bugs reflect the new life spring holds.

## Denia Carlton

Take a trip with me into the head of a friend; a lovely little asshole I know with a mind encased in weeds and vines of thought and confusion.

## Carolyn Carpenter

I like to write poetry about the shimmering images all around; and I like to write about my joy; and I like to write about the big wide world, in order to love it all, in order to feel the Presence in it all.

## Heather Davis

Heather Davis is the Head Women's Soccer Coach & Director of Athletic Engagement at Warren Wilson College with a passion for building transformative and healing communities. She currently resides in West Asheville, NC with her wife, Kelsey, and dog, Stevie Nicks.

## Serena Fick

I am a first year student and English major, and I work on the photography crew. Just like photography, poetry allows me to document the cool and beautiful and unexplained things I see in the world around me. My work had never been previously published.

## Thalia Garoufalidis

waffle w/ hashbrowns, smothered & covered please

## Jordan Goodyear

Jordan Goodyear is a writer, artist, musician, and Conservation Biology-Creative Writing double major from Mount Airy, Maryland. When they aren't getting into mischief with their friends or hiking, Jordan enjoys writing bittersweet poetry, watching Drag Race, and learning a little something about everything. They are currently making a version of the Harry Styles cardigan and cannot wait for the refreshingly cold mountain air to greet the colorful knit. "Thanks for coming to my TED talk!"

## Ephraim Grey

Ephraim Grey is a transfer student studying creative writing. Focusing primarily on poetry and song lyrics, he is heavily influenced by Beat poets and surrealist cinema. He's also pretty mediocre at solitaire.

## Ruby Karyo

My name is Ruby Karyo, At the age of twenty-three, I moved to America with an aim of becoming a philanthropist, a film director, and as you may have guessed, an author. Presently, I'm pursuing a bachelor's degree in English — focusing on Creative Writing — and my self-published debut title, *Grace has Found War* (self-help) has proven an excellent learning experience. My dream is to build schools for children living in poverty — and I'm never satisfied to leave a dream in bed.

## Rain Larson

My name is Rain Larson and I am a creative writing major here at WWC. I wrote “Seasonal Depression” as I struggled with my mental health this past semester. I’m happy to say I’m doing much better now and am ready to share my experience through this poem.

## Belinda Lewis

I’m a junior Creative Writing major here at Warren Wilson; when I’m not studying, I like to escape into (and contemplate the deeper philosophies of) video games, endless Tumblr posts, and late-night Discord messages. Some of my most inspired writing comes from one (or several!) of these! For example, my story “Everything Happens for a Reason” showcases my love of gaming and D&D, as well as my frustration with the randomness of dice rolls. My poem “Second Wave” was inspired by an online chat conversation with a friend living in Peru, which was one of the last Latin American countries to secure vaccines for COVID-19 despite being heavily involved with human trials. Whether challenging the notions of fate through the fickle whims of a d20 or acknowledging the global inequalities made more prominent by a pandemic, I’ve always found that what looks like “escapism” can actually be endless sources of creative inspiration!

## Hannah Poe

This is a song inspired by Sandro Botticelli’s Birth of Venus, written from the perspective of one of the goddess’ admirers; it is a message of security and unconditional love to Venus in hopes to comfort her in her beginning.

## Ella Syverson

I am a freshman at Warren Wilson majoring in History and Political Science. I use she/her pronouns and call the Chequamegon Bay region of Lake Superior my home. I am passionate about community, creative writing, and social/environmental justice.

## Jess Williams

Just a Queer feller from Texas. I like to explore themes around loneliness and despondency in my writing. Graduating this fall with a degree in creative writing.



## Ursa Woodring

Ursa is a creative writing major at Warren Wilson College. They enjoy walking a lot, reading a lot, playing Go (a lot) — and writing when necessary.

## Carlos Wyrick

I'm a LARPer (Live Action Role Play). I'm also a person of color, and on a rare occasion this brings complications and awkward situations. This particular story is a work of fiction but it's a scenario that has played out somewhere to someone.

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The Peal Crew aims to enrich the creative community at Warren Wilson College by providing opportunities for publication and performance.

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