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 ST. THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

# VOYAGER

SPRING 2024

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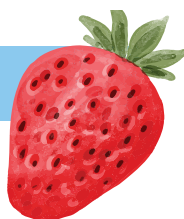
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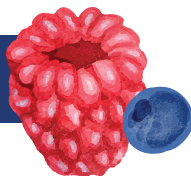


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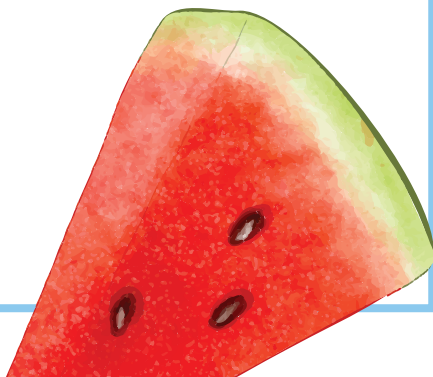
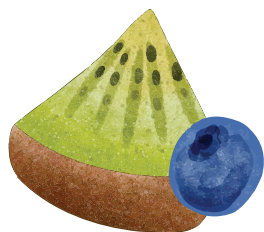
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# Sadness

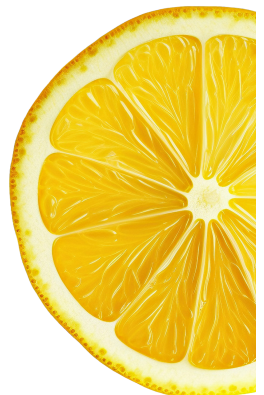
GABRIELLA ORTIZ

I have you creeping around my heart lately,  
the color blue washes my soul away  
and leaves a shallow of despair  
the salty taste of tears is all I taste,  
my eyes are overflowing with acid.  
I wish for happiness to sweep me off my feet  
but you are standing in its path of reach.  
You go away, then come again as you please,  
I have no way of stopping you.  
You are like a villain taking a lollipop from a baby,  
You are the person who makes a series for main characters to  
be loved just to kill them off and creating anguish for us  
You are standing in the way of my happiness  
It almost makes it seem like you are death, who is always  
looming around every corner  
just waiting to strike anyone down.  
I know that I will prevail you in due time,  
but for now, I will just wallow in you.





STEPHANIE CUEVAS



# The Snake

GIANNA ORTIZ

The ground is full but not alone.  
The multicolor slithering on the ground cries  
Why must I be punished?  
Why must we have double meaning?

Just like the slithering creature,  
being compared to Gehenna... but what if that wasn't true?

He made the creatures perfect, so why can't I be perfect like the rest of them?

The journey is a long trek to its end.  
But it is reborn again once dead.  
I tried through each grueling day,  
We are that slithering creature.

Perfect and yet judged wrongly!  
Our multicolor back slithers through the day.

Looking for the hope,  
that isn't lost.



BRYANNA ELY



# The Summit

REGAN BYRNE

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My steps slow and deliberate leaving the lobby, the wind picked up, blowing my hair into my face. The lights from the street cast my shadow against the sliding doors of the E.R. The air is cold and sharp as I take a deep breath, filling my lungs with air I didn't deserve to breathe. My hands numb and shaky, legs loose, yet they wobble as I walk away from the hospital unaware as to how I'm still moving. My hand digs down into my left pocket searching for my little black bag of instant gratification that landed me at St. Charles Memorial. I turn onto Lincoln Ave seeing all the homeless, and addicts roaming the street.

Typical...

I look up at the sky, still dark and cloudy. Watching the rain fall to the ground, each raindrop falling into place, forming a puddle at my feet. Each of them adding to the slick street of this shit town. Although it's not the raindrops fault. It's just falling where it was meant to fall, with no chance to change its course. Much like myself, I see everyone I've ever met. Falling into their place as I'm still stuck to wonder why I haven't quite found my own. I snap back to reality to the sound of a car honking, and people talking, strangers walking by me. To their jobs, homes, back to their lives. Their families. And I, here another druggie with no home, family or any fuckin clue as to why I'm here. I have seven dollars, no cellphone, and an 8th of magic powder to numb my sorrows.

Here's to the New Year huh?

I start my walk down Lincoln, making sure to keep my head down. The last thing I need is to be recognized out here. I push my hood up over my head, and walk all the way to Burnham Blvd, seeing all the cafes, convenience stores, and cellphone repair shops that crowd the streets now. I walk now recognizing what was... and what there will be. When you live in the same place your whole life whether you want to or not, you see your neighborhood change. The good and bad battle it out for territory, even though it wasn't theirs to take. Pushing the boundaries of what people can handle.



The pain in my sides returns as I walk past all the familiar people I used to know. But the sickest part is. They wouldn't recognize me, even if they took the time to look at me. Not that they would consider it. They'd be worrying about me mugging them before they thought to offer any help. I'm the person that parents point at, and show their kids as an example. Of who not to be.

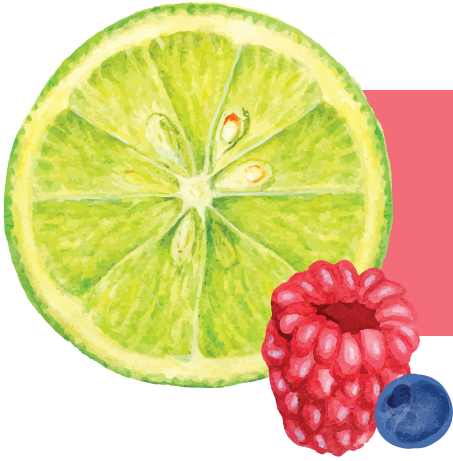
I tend to think about this a lot, and it reminds me of a poem I read.

Something I think I'll never be able to forget. It was written by someone important to me. But now he's gone too. They made me feel things that I had never felt. He wrote about 'Broken Glass'.

He once said, "Who wants a piece of broken glass?"

But they don't realize those cracks form an image, an image of strength and beauty. One of the battles, hard fought, both those that were won and lost. But those cracks don't make them less valuable. In fact, they way I see it. Those cracks are what make them beautiful. Because before that. They were just a piece of glass. But now they are art.

Now, I limp away feeling those words again. I know I feel like that glass. Cracked, and broken in every place possible. Although I don't see an image, I don't see the beauty he sees, but I know that there's beauty in everything. Looking up and down the streets right now. All I see are the cracks, and the broken pieces. I like to think that one day I'll see the beauty in the broken pieces. One day I might see the picture. Like he did.



# Untitled

HUNTER DALTON


A tragic irony defines me. Sentences sound stunning, but the thought no longer excites me when I try to channel my creativity into something tangible. Rearranging and connecting those words is draining but helps me complete my thoughts. And eventually, when I find my way, my idea becomes seamless. Creating something beautiful consumes so much energy; I wish I could express my thoughts verbally instead of stringing together words on a page intricately.

My defining characteristic, the shape of my being and the molder of my conscience, occurs when I arrange my thoughts, purse my lips, and speak. The words I produce, those beautiful yet phonetically

mangled words, are not who I am. It all makes sense in my head. Yet, there is no feeling I know better than my struggle to escape being strangled beneath my own words, altered thoughts, and ideas. This is not who I am but what I unwillingly portray to others.

I'm swimming against the tide; my ripples are stumbling blocks. Having a communication disorder makes life challenging. Imagine knowing what you want to say, trying to eloquently express your thoughts and ideas, only to fall short—and most times, flat on your face! That fall is natural for me, and it hurts every time.

My ego has developed permanent and long-lasting scars that vary in color and darkness. Some have yet to be healed entirely, while others have started to create those thick, uneven layers that protect me through “the worst.” I answer in abbreviated words and sentences, struggling to be understood. My thinking is black and white with




no deviation towards the midline. Sharing thoughts and ideas with my peers proves that I belong, adding value and insight, and ultimately, I gain self-worth. If only it weren't so difficult for me to be understood and for others to understand.

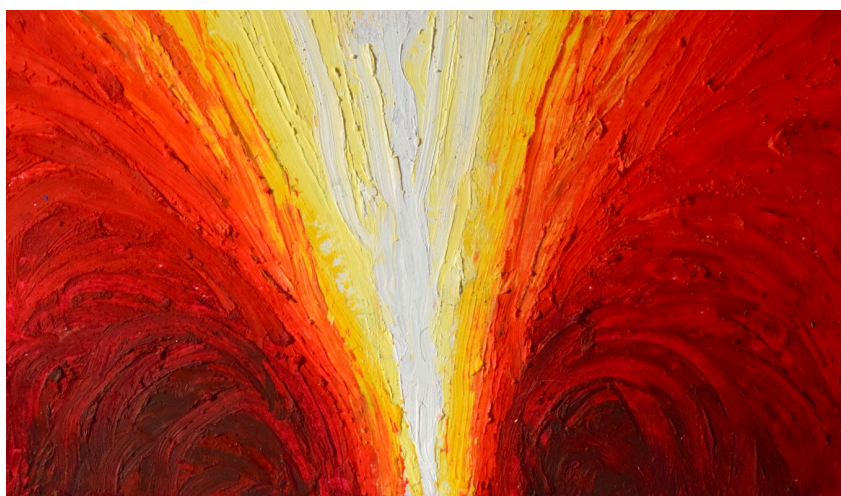
The mountain I climb every morning when I place my sneakers on school grounds has eroded somewhat over the past 15 years. Initially, it felt unachievable to take even one step, let alone finish one day. Those days have grown shorter as the years have gone by. I've adapted year by year, and as I understand my fractured way of communicating with others, I know my journey more clearly.

Perseverance propels me forward every day, step by step, inch by inch; I become more secure in my footing and gain ground. I keep telling myself, "Baby steps." My experiences along the way have eroded those stiff, jagged peaks in the distance into a more sculpted

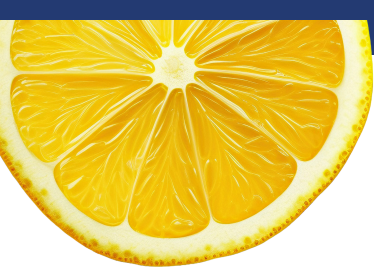
landscape. The view of my horizon has softened, exposing more valleys along my route toward an achievable and exciting future.

Revealing yourself can be an act of bravery. I am the face of Autism. My struggle is real. Sometimes, moving beyond a diagnosis can feel insurmountable. When someone believes in you, it can be the difference between slipping backward and moving forward and achieving. My past doesn't define who I am or what I'm capable of. As the years have gone by since my diagnosis at 18 months old, I have learned that I'm not a diagnosis nor a bewildering series of letters and numbers used to classify me medically. I am just an abbreviated form of unique perfection in my mind.





FRANCESCA GABRIEL



# Future

ALEXIA FAIRWEATHER

The ball is in your court; play it. The future is in your hands; grab it. I entered the building and was greeted by officers. "Place your items in the bin and step across," he said.

She is clear. Do you know where you are going? I remembered saying yes. I Entered the building; received. My number.

"P17," my future shouted at the door, dressed in a suit with a file in her hands. "State your name," she said. My future told me it would be easy.

I closed my eyes to recall a memory. All said, all done. My future told me to make use of what I was given. The future is in your hands; grab it.

The future is in your hands; grab it. I saw a man holding the light. I walked towards the light, looked to my left, and saw a man crying.

All I saw was darkness. The ball is in your court; play it. Searching for a light to flicker in the darkness, I reached for the ball, but it was out of reach. My future failed me. No, you failed it.



# Your Eyes

MONIQUE MULLER

Your eyes remind me of pecans, the richest and darkest brown.  
If looked at deep enough, the perfect dose of hazel can be detected too.  
It is said that eyes are the gateways to the soul. What beauty those eyes behold,  
A beauty so powerful that it teleports me to a place afar.  
As I stare into your eyes, a tornado swoops me up and delivers me to a place so mysterious yet beautiful.  
Am I living a dream or is this true?  
The waters are so peaceful and quiet, perhaps they are listening to something.  
The birds are gathered in the trees and singing their chirpy songs.  
The colorful flowers and branchy trees show their support by dancing with the wind.  
I follow their path. I follow their moves. I find myself seeing my final destination, you.  
Suddenly, I feel at peace.



JENNA VERDICCHIO



# Ars Poetica: I Like Poetry.

MONIQUE MULLER

I like the freedom of poetry,  
Almost as much as the deer likes  
to be freed from a  
lion's carnassial teeth.  
I like the rhythm that poetry creates,  
The sound echoed by the beat of  
the African drums.  
I like the experience created by imagery,  
The senses that creep up on you,  
Like the predator does with its prey.  
I like that I can express myself  
Through my ideas, emotions, and  
imagination.  
I hear the poem calling,  
It's calling my name.

What beauty this art holds,  
It's like the radiance of a blooming flower  
In the midst of spring.  
It starts small and insignificant but  
blossoms into a beautiful, vibrant Protea.  
The Protea holds significance to all, but  
Especially to those who need it.  
It represents courage, strength, and transformation,  
Something that I hope to convey through  
My poetry.

I like to write poetry because I get to tell  
My story.

# The Funeral

MONIQUE MULLER

It was at my grandfather's funeral that I finally met my mom's ex-husband - my supposed father. I first knew him by the name Roy, which I thought was the Afrikaans word Rooi, which means red. Red - the symbol of love, a way that I wished I could have described my relationship with my father, but no, this was just as non-existent as he was in my life.

He stood there with his supposed new family, wiping the tears off of their faces while simultaneously acting like my mom and I were never a part of his life - like we, too, didn't lose a loved one.

He was not at all what I had envisioned him to look like. His receding hairline reminded me of Prince William, except my father was an older and uglier version of him. He was dressed in an oversized suit big enough to fit two of him. Not to mention that he reeked of cigarettes. I could smell it from the other side of the room.

As I stared at the person I wished would have been a part of my life, I held onto the red necklace he supposedly gave me for my first birthday. Suddenly, I felt a nudge in my side. It was my mom. She wanted to go and introduce me to her ex-husband, the person that I refused to call my father.

My mom gently tucked my hair behind my ears. "It's time to go and meet your father. Remember, mom raised you to be the better person, so tell him and his family that you are sorry for their loss," she said.

I thought to myself - sorry for their loss? What about mine? What about the fact that I had just lost my grandfather? What about the fact that I had lost the family that his children have now and that I can never have? I didn't want to say this to my mom because every time we spoke about my dad choosing another family over ours, it made her sad. She had never told me this directly, but I saw it in her face, especially her eyes. Her gentle, hazel eyes would start watering, and her thin lips would quiver, almost like she was suffering from hyperthermia.

"Sure, Mom," I said, smiling at her.

I would do anything for my mom, even if it were something that I despised - like her ex-husband. My mom and I were like two peas in a pod. We did everything together and always supported each other. We had to! It was innate because it had always been just the two of us. Thank God for that! I couldn't have imagined my life any other way. I couldn't stand her ex-husband, which wouldn't have worked out anyway.

As we were about to approach him, I glanced over at my mom and couldn't help but notice that she was anxiously playing with her bracelets, almost like she was in search of something. Perhaps she was trying to find the words to say to him, I mean, it couldn't have been easy seeing the person that you loved with another woman, especially if that was the woman that you saw him cheating on you with. Was I in search of something, too? Is that why I was continuously holding onto the red necklace that he gave me?

My mom's aroma stood out even more than our search for something. What? Her aroma tickled my nostrils. It smelt so sweet like she had engulfed herself in cotton candy. All that I could think about was how much I loved cotton candy. My mom knew that I loved the smell of cotton candy. She always wore her cotton candy smelling perfume when I was in a moment of distress and needed to be distracted and comforted from the things that caused me distress. Perhaps that was why she wore it today - she knew that I would have been distressed in both having to say my final goodbye to my grandfather and meeting her ex-husband.

My mom started the conversation. "Hello Roy, how are you?"

"Ummm Hello Nel. I'm umm, good thank you... Why are you here at my father's funeral and who is this?" he said, with an annoyingly high-pitched voice.

"Your father played such a big role in both my life and Sophie's. Sophie

loved it when he used to come and visit her every three months. Roy, I would like you to meet your daughter, Sophie."

"My daughter? I had a daughter with you? I don't think so. For the record, I would never consider her my daughter," he angrily stated as he pointed his finger in her face.

His demeanor reminded me of someone who was drunk and wanted to make their point - using their hands or fingers. God, he looked so dumb doing that!

"Yes Roy, you did. You left two years after she was born? Did you seriously forget that? How dare you say that in front of your daughter?" she said, sadly.

My mom acted like I hadn't known that he didn't want to be a part of my life but I knew. Him never having made contact with me was a clear indicator of that.

"That is not my daughter. She looks nothing like me whatsoever. Don't you ever make an accusation like that again, especially in front of my family," he threatened.

At that moment, I noticed the pain in my mom's eyes. Pain that had been created by the person to whom she once dedicated her life and whom she tried to raise a daughter with. All that I thought of at that moment was that he was a monster - a monster for

having done that to my mom, the person who had the kindest heart and most compassionate soul. The person who would have taken the shirt off of her back for those who needed it. As I tried to restrain myself from punching him in the face, my mother's wise words, "Mom raised you to be a better person," constantly repeated in my mind until the words "I'm sorry for your loss" slipped out of my mouth. I took my mother's hand and I guided her away from the situation. At that moment, I felt that I needed to be a parent and that it was my job to protect my mom from experiencing further pain caused by that monster.

We went and took our seats in the front of the church, on the opposite side of where my father and his family sat, getting ready for the eulogy to begin. All that I could think about was if he had ever verbally abused my mom. If he had ever said anything that cut so deep in her heart - something that she would never have told me - to "protect" me. He was very daring - anyone could have seen that by the way he spoke to her - his mannerisms. I still hadn't gotten over the fact that he had pointed his fat finger in my mom's face - to be honest, he was lucky that I hadn't broken it!

As I stared at that monster, searching for the answers that I so eagerly wanted, a tear shed down my cheek. A tear that was obviously caused by my allergies - I did not care enough for that monster to shed a tear. Rather, he was lucky that I hadn't just punched him in the face. Of course, during that moment, the priest decided to test if the microphone was

working. I nearly jumped ten feet in the air and if I hadn't already been awake, I surely would have been now.

The priest began his eulogy and the service was beautiful. The entire church was filled with people - people who were seated, people who stood, and people who even waited outside the church doors. Considering the amount of people who came and celebrated my grandfather, he must have left a great impact on their lives. It sounded like him - he was always involved in helping and caring for the community.

As I stared at the flower arrangements, having tried to avoid the priest's eulogy to prevent a situation of uncontrollable crying, my eyes instantly shifted toward the photo displayed on my grandfather's coffin. As the priest started talking about my grandfather and how he had left his granddaughters (one being me) behind, a tear shed down my face and this time, however, it hadn't been my allergies - it was a result of sadness - of longing for him. My grandfather was the only connection that I had on my "father's" side of the family. He was the only person who had truly loved me and wanted to be a part of my life. His wife and the rest of my "father's" side of the family were just as non-existent as my "father" was - just words representing a name with

no representable meaning behind it.

Having seen the photo of my grandfather that was displayed on his coffin, brought back so many memories - memories that were so sentimental to me. When I was seven years old, he came to visit me and took me to buy my very first phone - one that was only able to call and text. At first, my mom was not fond of the idea because obviously, I was seven years old. She came around once he explained the reason behind it. My sweet old grandpa had told me that he wanted to buy me a phone because he missed me endlessly and wanted to talk more often. We were only able to talk over the weekends because my mom worked long hours during the week.

Once I had the phone, we were able to call each other at least four times a week, which I loved. I always looked forward to his phone calls and often avoided going to bed unless we had spoken. We talked about regular things such as, how I was doing in school, if I had met any boys that I liked, how my mom was doing, and when we would see each other again. He always started the conversation with "Hello Grandpa's little princess" and always ended it with "I love you, my little Soph!"

As I relived these memories, I caught myself smiling. However, my smile dissipated when the memory of how at some point during our conversations, we also spoke about his son - my "father". My grandfather always stated that he wanted my "father" and I to have a relationship

and that "eventually your dad will come to realize it." I always heard the disappointment in my grandfather's voice whenever we spoke about the non-existent relationship between his son and me - even as early as the age of seven. My grandfather used to start the conversations being very bubbly until we got to the topic of his son, where he then became more reserved and quiet. His voice used to tremble and he constantly cleared his throat - almost like there was something stuck in it and he just couldn't get it out. I always wondered if it was tied to his wish - the wish that before he died, he could see the relationship between my "father" and I blossom into something beautiful - something that was connected, eternal, and created by pure love.

Sadly, that was not the case because my grandfather died before I even got to meet his son. I guess that's why I was here today - to not only honor my grandfather for the role that he played in my life but to also honor his wish. Had mom known about Grandpa's wish? Was that why she wanted to introduce me to my "father"?

The priest and other family members had finished their eulogies and it was time for my grandfather's son to say his eulogy. At first, I wasn't going to look at him while he spoke but

something within me wanted me to look at him and listen to what he had to say. It was almost like something took full control over my body - like I was being possessed by something more powerful - because my eyes were fixated on him and my ears were desperate to hear what he had to say.

He started off talking about what a great father he had and what active role his father played in his life - quite hypocritical don't you think? He then proceeded to list all of the things that his father used to do with him and declared how important it was for him to have had a great relationship with his father - something that he clearly forgot to follow through with his first biological daughter (me). Then came the last part of his eulogy - the very thing that pissed me off to no end - the thing that pushed me over the edge - the thing that made me hate him more than I ever had before - the thing that ended the chances of my grandfather's wish having come true - and the thing that ended the possibility of our relationship existing.

He called for his family to join him on the podium. His wife and two daughters stood up and headed his way. I had found myself wanting to stand up but just couldn't. It felt like a thousand pounds of rocks were dumped onto me, restricting my movement. As I stared at him, longing for my name to be called, he continued on with his speech, not once having glanced over in my direction.

He hadn't acknowledged that I was his daughter and now hadn't even called me to join him on the podium. He stood there huddled with his new family by his side, having thanked them for being a part of his life and for their support during the loss of his father. It was at this moment that his actions had sufficed his words.

As I sat there in shock and dismay at what I had just witnessed, my mom's rustling in her handbag caught my attention. As I turned to face my mom, tears ran down my cheeks. I knew this not because I had felt them running down my cheeks but rather, because my mom had pointed them out after I had asked her what she was searching for.

"What are you looking for Mom?"

"Tissues. I am looking for tissues to give you," my mom hurriedly said.

"I don't need tissues Mom. It's just my allergies," I aggressively stated.

"You need to wipe away those tears. He's not worth your tears Soph!" she gently exclaimed.

"What are you talking about Mom? I am not crying, especially not over a jerk like him." At this point, the tears had quickly run down my face and I couldn't control them. Why had my eyes deceived me? Why hadn't they just held back the tears? Why hadn't they just acted like they were dry? I mean, hadn't I already suffered

enough with my allergies this year? Before I even got a chance to continue explaining myself, my mom leaned over and hugged me tightly. She wrapped her arms so tightly around me that I felt my oxygen levels dropping - like I was being suffocated. At this point, my body had deceived me too! It had given in to her - it just became weak, like it needed her to rejuvenate it. Perhaps that was my body's way of telling me that I needed that one tight hug to realize what was important in life - my mom. Was I going to come to terms with the situation or was I just going to sit here and let him ruin something else? I took the tissues that my mom had given me and wiped away the tears.

I opened the locket of my red necklace and I stared at the photo of my "father" admirably holding me in his arms, for the last time. As I stared at the photo, I couldn't help but replay his words "I would never consider her my daughter" in my head. I wondered what was wrong with me for him not wanting to be a part of my life. I wondered what I did for him to have changed his perception of me. Furthermore, I wondered why he hadn't seen that I was his daughter. I mean it was pretty obvious that I had his blue eyes, his dimples, and his free earlobes! God, I even had his small chunky fingers. How had he not seen that? I had to stop myself from dwelling on what he had said to me

and therefore I had no choice but to get rid of the necklace.

I closed the locket and yanked the necklace off of my neck. I got up from my seat and proceeded toward the garbage pail that was situated just outside the church doors. My mom hurriedly ran behind me, questioning where I was headed but thankfully in due time came to the realization. She allowed me the necessary time and space to deal with the thing that was long overdue. I held onto the necklace as my hand stood over the garbage pail. I waited for a sign to state that me throwing the necklace away, would be a mistake but there was none. There was just a calming sensation that came over my body - almost like the thing that I was possessed with had left my body. As I let go of the necklace and watched it slowly fall into the garbage pail, a tear rolled down my cheek. Without hesitation, I wiped it away.



FRANCESCA GABRIELE



# Silver Lining

ALEXIA FAIRWEATHER

Soaring on the wings like a dove.  
I carried the torch of renewal and rebirth,  
life trails, I carry scars earned.

My testament to the will, I gleam in  
the twinkling of adversity. I draw for breath  
as the wind howls in the air.

I broke apart but stitched with fragments of hope,  
seeing for a time the silver lining in my life delicately still.  
In the darkest night, a light shines so brightly,  
Into the unknown, life's imperfection shows.

The winding dirt roads, the journey foretold,  
In a twist of faith, the silver lining carried me onward.



# Whispers of the Earth

TRISHITA DEY

In the depths of woods and beneath the waves,  
Where nature's murmurs serenely sway,  
A tale unfolds with every breath,  
Of the earth's sorrow and joy  
Of swaying branches,  
Reveling in the embrace of the wind.

Wildflowers bloom akin to verses,  
Penned on pages imbued with unseen might,  
Their pens flow like rivers, unbound,  
Through realms of grief and enigma profound,

With each breeze, they beckon: awaken.  
Witness the river, despite all impediments.  
It persists.  
With ink that cascades like the river's stream,  
They lament forests lost to despair's theme,  
Yet like the river's unwavering course,  
Through halts and hurdles, continue your force.

Life's journey resembles the river's flow,  
With twists and turns, yet onward we go,  
For eventually, we find our way,  
Through trials and tribulations, come what may.

Yet within their lines, hope does gleam,  
A guiding light in the darkest dream,  
For in the words they gently impart,  
Lie seeds of change within the heart.  
Like a canopy offering solace.  
Life's horizon brims with varied dreams,  
We must seek and allow them to gleam,  
To keep the flame of hope burning bright,  
For in our words, the earth may find,  
The strength to mend, the bonds that bind.



2

# Autobiography of Adam

ALEXIA FAIRWEATHER

Life began with someone, then began with me, then began with you.  
Just a man I am, a mortal man at that.  
Dust I came, perfection to the eyes.  
Eden, my heaven, naming everything to exist.

Blame Eve, they say. I shall never take the blame.  
Should I blame Eve? How could I? She is my wife.  
Innocent I was before she came along.  
I thirst for knowledge, but I had it all.

We all made choices, and this was never mine.  
In the name of love, I was cast beyond the gates.  
To toil out of comfort, to endure pain.

In the name of listening to my wife, the world would take a turn.  
A journey I never asked for, but I had to learn.  
In the web we weave, we must find peace.





SAMANTHA LARKIN

# Maui The Hero

MONIQUE MULLER

My one mistake does not undermine  
all the good I have done over time.  
Take a look at my body. What do you see?  
A body glaring with tattoos, can it really be?  
You seem unsure, but it's indeed true.  
My tattoos represent all the good that I do.

I pulled the islands from the deep blue seas and  
filled them with endless coconut trees.  
I snatched the breeze that fills your sails and  
Leads you along your adventure trails.  
I defeated the sea monsters that swarmed your retreat,  
And as a result, you have endless fish to eat.  
Honestly, the list goes on and on  
and at the end of the day, I am the one that won.

You characterize me as the bad guy,  
A man whose personality is sly.  
Let this be known: I am not the villain you portray me as.  
I am the hero who saved the world and set you all free.

# The Painted Lady

ALEXIA FAIRWEATHER

I painted a canvas so bright,  
A piece of pain, closely tight.

In the darkest night,  
Beauty comes in a simple light.

Pillow of teardrops, I own that right.  
The gloomy tales, in celestial light.

The thorns of a woman bloom in sight.  
In the garden she bore, butterflies took flight.

Her wounded soul took flight.  
Rose from ashes, crowned in light.

The wall of the tapestry holds tight.  
Alexia is embracing pain, to hide in beauty's height.



# How To Make Peace With Being Fatherless

MONIQUE MULLER

Do you ever find yourself dreaming of the day when you get married and how your father will be the one to walk you down the aisle and deliver you to your future husband? Of course, you do - most girls do. However, you are not like most girls - you have a deadbeat father who wants nothing to do with you, regardless of your continuous efforts to build a relationship with him. Unconsciously, you always find yourself sitting somewhere - like at your birthday party blowing out your candles, or at the kitchen counter writing an essay on loss for the seventeenth time, or on the grainy beach kissed by the radiant sun - wondering what your life would look like if your father actually took an interest in having

a relationship with you; of what having a father would actually feel like. Sadly, you will never be able to experience this. You will however, be able to describe what being fatherless feels like or how it affects you, even though you may not want to acknowledge that you feel a type of loss - a void in your heart that can never be filled by any other man than your "father".

Sometimes you will feel the urge to walk away from a conversation that involves your father and just break down and cry but you can't because you don't want to show the world that his absence bothers you - that the pain you feel inside runs deeper than a ravine. Instead, you find yourself building a barrier between yourself and others because you feel like they don't understand your loss - that they're just tired of hearing how his absence truly affects you.

"He's not worth being sad over. He's just a deadbeat father," their stern and loud voices repeat in your head.

The fact of the matter is that you already know this but just can't seem to accept it.

You spend most of your time thinking of ways to accept being fatherless but can't seem to figure out where exactly to begin. You think about it for a while - like when you are eating a warm toasted bagel from Zimis that is overflowing with cream cheese, and when

you are contemplating on what topic you should pick for your next essay, and when you are lying in bed wearing your favorite red, fleece pajamas facing insomnia - but then it hits you like a wrecking ball. You pull out your computer and you start typing. Suddenly, the page is filled with words and you've found the answer that you've been seeking. In order for you to move on, you need to face the idea of being fatherless right in the eye. You need to talk about how it affects your life and what better way to do this than by writing an essay?

You begin writing your essay and it starts by describing what being fatherless means. It means having your mother raise you as a single parent while still having to work more than 45 hours a week in order to provide you with the best possible life - a life that she was never fortunate enough to have. It means having your mom hire someone to take care of you while she is missing out on some of the most crucial moments of your childhood. It means having your mom keep you in a bubble - a bubble that is supposed to protect you from the dangers out in the world - dangers that she once had experienced and wants to shelter you from.

Before you know it, you are ready to write about how being fatherless makes you feel. Being fatherless feels like you are trapped in the hot desert with no visible sign of water - except you are not in the hot desert - it's just the burning sensation

of your aching heart and the dryness of your throat from all the times you spend crying over him. It's like trying to survive in Antarctica - except you are nowhere near Antarctica - rather, it's just the coldness you feel inside, which is geared towards other men because you fear their abandonment of you. It's like constantly having to doubt your partner's intentions and having to withhold your trust in him because you feel the need to protect your heart from further pain - pain that can be caused by yet another man. I mean, would you seriously let another man double-cross you like that again? It's like staring in the mirror and hating what you see because all that you see is a reiteration of him - the dimples, the attached earlobes, and the small, chunky fingers - features that are so distinctive of the first man to ever break your heart. Furthermore, it's like searching for a pot of gold, except there is no rainbow - it's just your search for wanting to feel lucky enough to be loved by someone who is supposed to be your father.

Well, now that you have that out of the way, it's necessary to talk about how it affects your daily life. You know that it affects your daily life when you find yourself constantly blaming your mother for your father's absence in your life or when you try to attend Church every Sunday but can't even make it down the road before hyperventilating to the point where you need to take a calming pill. It's when you have to miss your

father-daughter dances every year because your father decides that he no longer wants you to be his daughter or when Father's Day rolls by and the card that you are forced to make for your "father" at school needs to be thrown out in the trash before your mother ever has the chance to discover it. It's the fact of being okay with anyone walking out of your life because you have already experienced one of the most important people in your life walking out on you. Furthermore, it's when your mother - a woman with a kind heart who had to relearn how to love - finally meets someone who makes her happy - someone who brings about a smile on her face that you have never seen before - someone who brings about a shimmer in her hazelnut eyes that can only sparkle when they are around - yet here you are, unable to connect with that person because you fear that they too would not want you or that they too would just abandon you.

When you think that you have taken full control of the situation and you are finally ready to accept being fatherless, your dead-beat father just comes and steals that strength from you, leaving you weak and unable to move on. Where did it begin, you ask? It begins when you attend a close friend's wedding and see her father walking her down the aisle and can't help but shed a tear because that is something that

you will never have. You sit there, surrounded by the echo of cheerful voices but can't find the urge to be cheerful. Rather, you find yourself digging through your memories in search of that one photograph that you have with your father - the only photograph that you have with him. You find yourself traveling back in time to relive that one special moment for just one more time. The moment when you had a father who made you feel special - even if it was just for a day.


You are now the girl in the picture - the girl who is nine years old and can't seem to find any faults within her father. All that you can think about is that today is the day that you get to see your dad. You are so excited yet so nervous. One thing about your dad is that he always makes promises. Today he promised you that he was bringing presents for your birthday. He knows that you love watching movies and playing with baby dolls. You are wearing your favorite pink dress today - especially for him - and you're really hoping that you impress him. When will your stomach stop spinning? When will your heart stop racing? Oh no! You can't throw up now! He's almost here! Think about how you can impress him! Think! Think! Think! A good distraction is what you need in a time like this - you need to finish decorating the cake that you made him. Surely that will

impress him, right? Maybe if you give him a big hug and tell him how much you miss him, it will make him never want to leave you again. Maybe if you tell him that you love him and want him to stay, he will want to get back with your mom and then you can all be one big, happy family.

Sadly, this is not the way your future will go. In six years you will come to the realization that this is going to be the last time that your father ever visits you - that his promises to come and spend time with you are just empty vessels. You will get upset by this and your heart will shatter leaving a hole that can never be refilled. You will blame your mother for your father's absence and she will take it like the strong woman that she is. You will eventually learn the truth about your father and then end up resenting him for it. You will be consumed by guilt for blaming your mother for your father's mistakes and eventually, you will develop a form of depression. You will need to see a therapist and it will be a traumatic experience. Your mom will stand by your side and when she finds out what has caused your depression, she will make you vow to stop beating yourself up over a deadbeat's mistakes. Do not worry though! Everything will turn out great for you. You will meet your boyfriend in the United States of America (I know that you will be in doubt but yes, I said that right) - a man that is

going to love you more than anyone else could - a man that promises to never break your heart - a man that makes endless sacrifices to keep you close to him - a man that is afraid of losing you because he sees your worth - a man whom you are planning on marrying. Remember the time when you told yourself that you wouldn't go to college? Well, guess what? You will be going to college to pursue a career in Early Childhood Education. What's even better is that the hole in your heart will slowly start to close, leaving behind a small scar - a small scar that will serve as a reminder of your bravery in accepting your father's absence in your life.

Now I know that it is a lot to take in but you need to wipe away those tears and erase the picture from your memory. You are worth more than the way he makes you feel.

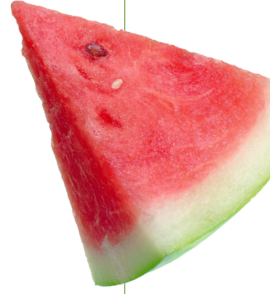




FRANCESCA GABRIEL

# Ode to My Hand

BY ALEXIA FAIRWEATHER



A language spoken, shy and still, you are connected to me, and  
I to you. A story is untold, the fingers know. We toil in the day and wonder at night.  
Author and maker, our fates collide. We indulge in moments and create with stride.  
A true companion, so real and pure, we create a lifeline through the lines.  
My hand is a faithful one. I am a person; you are my brain.

You guide me through my raveling thoughts; with you,  
My dreams and fears express all that can't be said.  
Bold as we are from pen to page, we became a unit.  
In a universe you and I can only see, we create a language we can only speak.

We cannot speak physically, but you became my silent muse, a grand journey  
we are on, entering the unknown in places never told, still as you are, my tears  
You felt like embracing sorrow, and you remain my truest guide.

With rhythm, we align. My partner and I held steadfast through it all.  
The storm passes, and the winds hollow, creating a symphony we only know.  
To you, my hand, a steady one, my full confidence will forever stand.

