

The Midway Muse

Literary Journal

Fall 2019

"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of the earth..."

-Henry David Thoreau

The Midway Muse

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Dedicated to Banu Bilen

Ed. D. – EKU 2018

Izmir, Turkey

Hiding the Shoes

for Banu

I carefully wrap the two pairs of shoes she is taking with her in plastic Kroger bags, tuck them snugly into the sides of her largest suitcase, remembering how her father had done the same for me. The pair she'll be wearing on the plane sits forlornly on the floor of the now empty closet; the only other pair of shoes—the slippers she wears inside the house--are on her feet. She never deviates from her upbringing of taking off her street shoes once she's inside and putting on clean, soft-soled slippers. I cringe to remember my lack of etiquette when visiting her house in Turkey, my shoes tracking dust on her mother's clean tile floors, gratefully (chagrinned) accepting the sandals offered to leave my offending pair by the door with everyone else's.

I'd need at least a whole suitcase to accommodate my shoes; in fact, the first time I travelled abroad, I filled a Pullman-sized case just with footwear, insisting I needed a coordinating pair for every outfit. My husband teased, called me Imelda, and suffered under the load of all my luggage. I've learned to travel lighter—forced by rising baggage costs and no husband to shoulder my extra weight—but still I couldn't go anywhere with just two pairs of shoes, even for a weekend. Banu's frugality and minimalism is notorious, though. She's equally thrifty about her clothes—all her meager belongings, for that matter. She just doesn't care about material things, a good role model for this American.

It's not the only thing I've learned from her. She's cut my spendthrift ways almost to the bone: why buy brand-names when the store's substitute is really just as good? Why eat out when we've got food at home? Why go to the movies when we can watch TV for half the cost? Why

throw it away when it can be used again? Why buy, buy, buy? She's right. I try. I am better for

it. I hope I can continue following her example, even when she's thousands of miles away.



She's happy to donate most of what she has accumulated over the past ten years: t-shirts, stuffed animals, jeans, even books—gifts or hand-me-downs primarily. Not allowed to work a legitimate job in the U. S. while on her student visa, Banu has done everything from washing dishes to gardening to painting houses to caring for a 107-year-old British lady, the mum of an elder at our church in Oklahoma where she was made to feel welcome in spite of her Islamic faith. What little money she has had she's spent on academics, knowledge greedily gleaned and stacked away, weightless in that deceptively little brain of hers. If there is anything she's gluttonous about, it's learning. Two bachelor's, two master's, a Ph.D. and more; it's still never enough. Research, discover, challenge—and all in a second language. Even now, she scurries to complete just one more online course, earn just one more certification to enhance her already impressive resume before she has to leave.

None of this surprises me. She was my best student in Cyprus, though perhaps my most reluctant one initially. While her other Turkish and Cypriot friends crowded around me, eager to get to know the American professor who had flown in out of nowhere to teach English and American drama that semester, Banu hung back, watching with suspicious eyes before committing herself heart and soul to the unique educational approach I had to offer the students at Girne American University (GAU) that fall. Before long, though, she was one of the trio of girls who came to be known as "Becky's Angels"—Burcin, Dilek, and Banu. Outside of classes, we met for lunches, coffees, afternoons on the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea. We visited historical sites, explored the Five-Finger Mountains behind the city, went on elaborate picnics, planned our impossible futures. The difficult decision I made to save my professional career—GAU had not lived up to my academic standards—to return to the States proved harder than I had imagined, especially when facing the hurt and angry faces of my new-found friends. "Why did you come in the first place if you were just going to leave so soon?" Banu accused. "I wanted an adventure!" I shot back, trying to mask my own tangled emotions.

Finally, I promised her and everyone else I'd disappointed that I would come back for their graduation in May, if I had to swim the ocean between us to make it happen. Watching me pack the night before I left, Banu broke the still-charged silence by threatening to hide my shoes. Puzzled, I listened as she confessed her childhood practice of hiding the shoes of those who came to visit, so they wouldn't be able to leave. I couldn't let her see how willing I was to let

her hide all my shoes; instead I repeated my promise to return in May and sat on my suitcases to force their closing. With this tenuous thread stretching between Cyprus and myself like a thin



elastic band, I flew back to America determined to stay in touch, thankful for email and social media. I did manage to visit a couple of times after our abrupt parting, once again to Cyprus to keep my promise of watching the class graduate, and then, a few months later, to Izmir, when.

Banu's parents invited me to stay after a site-seeing tour of Turkey she had arranged for us. We still laugh—now—at the snafus of that trip, Adam Lambert's "Mad World" playing endlessly in our heads. But the caves and fairy houses of Cappadocia were amazing and unforgettable, as were the library remnants of Ephesus and the actual ruins of Troy where Banu had studied archeology for her first degree. I had always assumed Homer had imagined the site for his classic epic, but here it was in all its broken glory, the wooden horse built for the less-than authentic film proudly guarding its fallen gates. We look silly-happy hanging out its windows, waving at her mother smiling anxiously below.

In spite of our different faiths, Banu was respectful and thoughtful. As we visited mosques and other cultural sites, she included references to *Hz. Isa* or Jesus, and accompanied me to The Mary House, where Jesus' mother (*Hz. Meryem*) supposedly had lived out the rest of her life after his crucifixion. Outside the house was a small tree blooming with pieces of white cloth or paper fluttering in the slight breeze. Identifying it as a "Wishing Tree," she solemnly wrote something on a scrap of napkin and tied it carefully to a branch with all the other fantasies. "I bet I can guess what you wished for," I teased. "To come to the States to study!" Her smile was confirmation. I added my prayer to hers.

Later, realizing my appreciation of historical sites, Banu's father asserted one needed to experience Gallipoli to fathom the colossal significance of the Turkish victory there over the British in WWI. Arriving late in the afternoon after the long drive, I was as moved by the imposing monuments to Turkish military prowess as I was bewildered by the British military command that had thought it possible to defeat the Turks in such a daunting environment. As if to make up for "my side's loss," we stopped along the way home for a full meze of Turkish cuisine where her dad insisted my money was no good. As we lingered over tiny cups of Turkish coffee, I gazed fondly at the faces around me, people I had already come to think of as family. Banu was the link between us, just as her translations bridged the gap between our two

languages. When it was time for me to return to the States, her father wrapped my shoes to



pack neatly in my over-stuffed bags. A Turkish coffee pot and ground coffee managed to squeeze in with my plethora of clothes and souvenirs, one last, everlasting taste of a culture I had grown to love. The rest of what I cherished was packed away deep within my swelling heart. Finally, I tore myself from our last goodbyes and rolled my suitcases to the rental car waiting to take me to the airport. Inexplicably, Banu's dad rushed out the door, and before I could ask what I might have forgotten, he flung a glass of water behind me. Banu later explained the customary gesture was for safe journeys and quick returns. I was relieved it wasn't an indication of "goodbye and good riddance"!

E-mails and Facebook updates flowed freely between Hawaii, where I was making my home, and Turkey and Cyprus, between me and Banu and all our mutual friends. For this reason alone, I staunchly defend social media: maintaining contact with all my students from around the world. I filled my time drafting the first of a series of memoirs about my teaching experiences abroad: *It's Not All Greek—or How I Learned to Stop Fearing the Muslims and Love the Turks.* Banu agreed to be my sounding board, catching my mistakes and adding her insights. One such exchange required a Skype conference: in a chapter where I'd teased Banu for her reluctance to pursue a handsome young man we had met, I had made what I thought was an innocent joke about the *Qur'an*—and that was taboo. She called, begging me to remove the offending passage from my manuscript, insisting no one would find my humor innocuous. At first, I determined she was over-reacting; I could see nothing offensive in my harmless little remark; but continued entreaties finally permeated my supercilious skull and I realized it didn't matter whether I found it necessary to delete a few trivial words or not. If she found it necessary, it was necessary. It's the appearance rather than the intention, as I had learned in other sensitivity training. I apologized and erased the odd sentence or two, carefully scanning the rest of my pages for anything else that might be misinterpreted or insulting, intended or otherwise.

The other topic that required face-to-face communication resulted from her announcement she was getting married. However, upon seeing her woe-begotten expression on my Skype screen, I felt I had to intervene. I asked her why she was planning something that so obviously did not make her happy. Confessing she did not love this older man who had proposed, she sighed there was nothing else for her to do. Alarmed, I assured her there was a wide world of something else to do and begged her not to go through with it. "If you could do

anything, what would you like to do?" I insisted. "Go to graduate school in the States!" she admitted, shaking her head. "But my father will never allow it." I asked her how she knew that. Had she asked him? She conceded she had not, she was just assuming he would be against such a daring dream. Stubbornly I persisted she ask him before she acquiesced into the mistake of her life. Until then, I said, I didn't want to hear her complaints.

I was not prepared for the following Skype call a few days later. The old depressed Banu had been replaced by someone I hardly knew, a grin lighting up her thin face like a firework. "He says I can! My father says I can!" I almost asked what her father was permitting before the news sunk in: she could come to America to study! But, there was one condition. "What condition is that," I asked warily. "That I can live with you!" she exclaimed. Before I could recover from her announcement, she hurriedly explained that he had never considered it safe enough for his daughter to travel and live in the United States until he had met me; then, he realized I was a respectable person with whom he could entrust his daughter's safe-keeping, if I was willing. I was willing, but….it wasn't that simple.



Initially, I was afraid the proposal was no more feasible than it had been before her father's consent. I lived in Hawaii. How could Banu afford to even travel to see me, let alone live in the most expensive state in America? Further, did she even know if the University of Hawaii had a program she wanted to study, and if so, would she even be accepted? And, the biggest obstacle of all, if accepted, could she afford it? I was willing, but I was skeptical. The

hurdles seemed too big to surmount, no matter how much wishing or permitting boosted our hopes to overcome.

As fate would have it, though, in less than a month I was making plans myself to pull up roots from Hawaii and relocate to Oklahoma, of all places. It had been difficult to find a full-time professorship in Hawaii, being a *haoli*, so, driven by a part-time salary in a full-time economy, I had been putting feelers out for employment elsewhere. My choices had narrowed down to a lucrative position in Singapore, a less-than-lucrative but equally appealing place in Lithuania, and a staid but steady offer from a university in Oklahoma. For once in my life—or maybe twice—I did not take the road less traveled by but settled for the security of a full-time,

tenure-track professorship in the heartland of America. I was about as excited as Banu had been at the prospect of getting married.



Until I realized how much more viable my living in Oklahoma was for her coming to the States to study. She researched the area, located a university literally next door to the one where I would be teaching, and immediately applied; she was readily accepted. In less than a month I would be looking for a two-bedroom apartment in Edmond, and in less than a semester, she would be buying a ticket to the Will Rogers International Airport. God certainly does move in mysterious ways. The time spent in Oklahoma is a chapter for another book. Banu got her second Master's degree, looked unsuccessfully for a cowboy to call Husband, and acclimated to

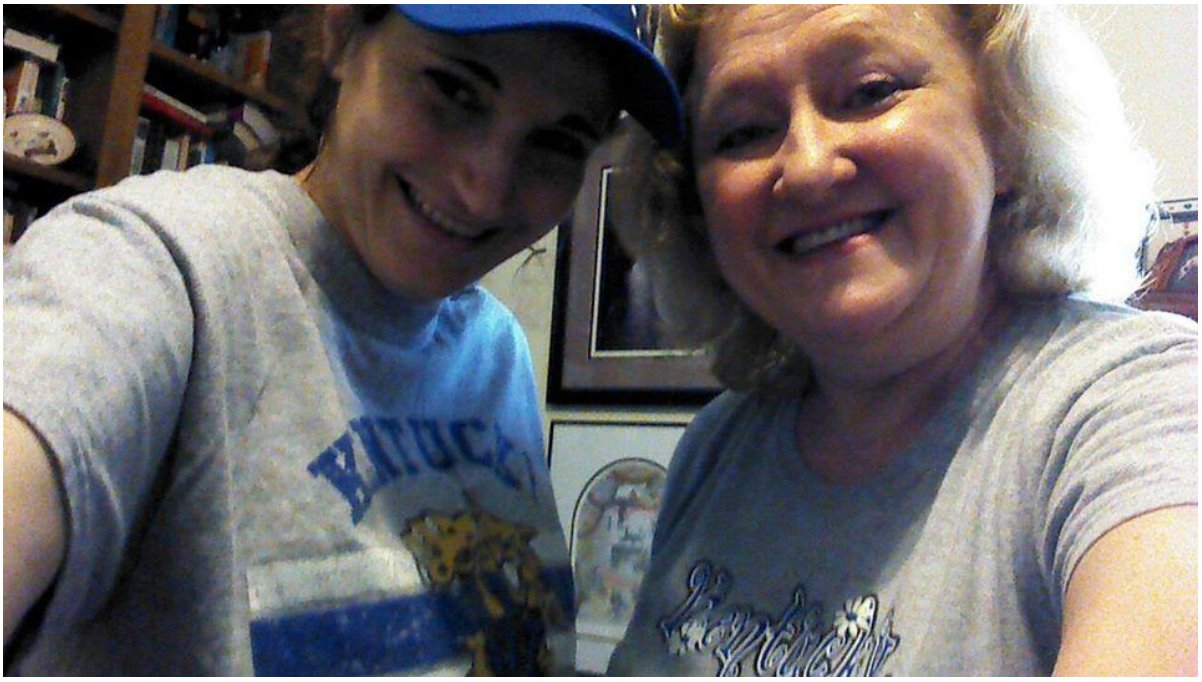
life in the U.S.A. When the time came for me to move back to Kentucky to be closer to my parents, she said her goodbyes along with me to the good friends we had made over our four-year sojourn in the West and prepared for lives at new universities: me as a professor at Midway, she as a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky. Dizzily, I experienced every change she made along her research path, from educational leadership to medical 3-D printing to Artificial Intelligence in cardiology, as she bounced from one new topic to another, sucking the marrow out of each one before rushing on to the next challenge. From student to instructor, she left her mark wherever she went: from EKU to Midway, from the Mayo Clinic to Stanford University.

Finally, her student Visa will expand no farther. The date is stamped unequivocally in black on her Turkish passport, and the American government is adamant no foreigner overstay their welcome. As if she ever could. Still, the day looms when she will have to go back to her own country, leaving all of us who have grown to know and love her as a student, teacher, sister, friend. Silently I curse myself for ever saying I never wanted children; in spite of my emphatic claim, God in his infinite wisdom went ahead and gave me the best daughter any mother could ever have--only to have to give her up too soon.

I dread the day when the packing is finished and she rolls her cases to the car waiting to take her to the airport for the last time. Shoe on the other foot, so to speak, I know I will be tempted to hide her shoes--and anything else that will keep her with us just a little longer. Already my house seems empty, too big without her tiny person filling it with life. Who will charm the snakes that slither into my house uninvited so that, ophidiophobiac that I am, I won't even have to glimpse their offending coils, I wonder. Who will recite Rumi with me, reminiscing about the magical time we saw the whirling dervishes, or make up silly songs to sing to all the cats? Who will watch BattleBots with me, planning our own creations: Cold Turkey and Chigger, or sleep through every movie we find on Netflix? Especially, who will dream and search and grow and trouble the Universe with our soul-searching questions with me when she's not here?

Even so, the day is fast approaching when it will be me tossing the cup of water from the door toward her receding back. I'll watch it arc in the sunlight, hang on the air for a moment brief as the breath caught in my throat--a tiny rainbow of momentary hope--then splatter on the ground in shards of indelible colors.

Rebecca Briley



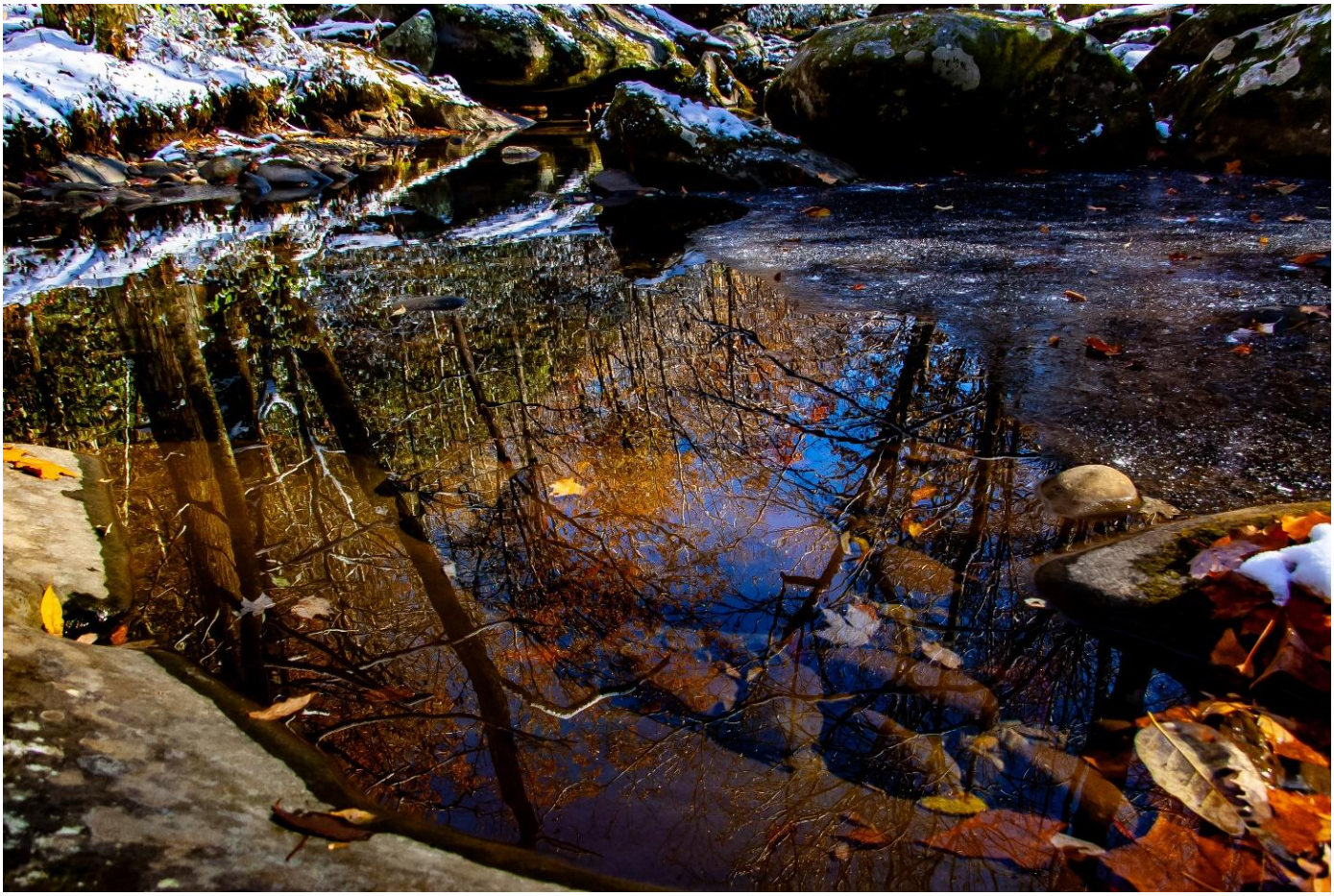


Ginny Gregory

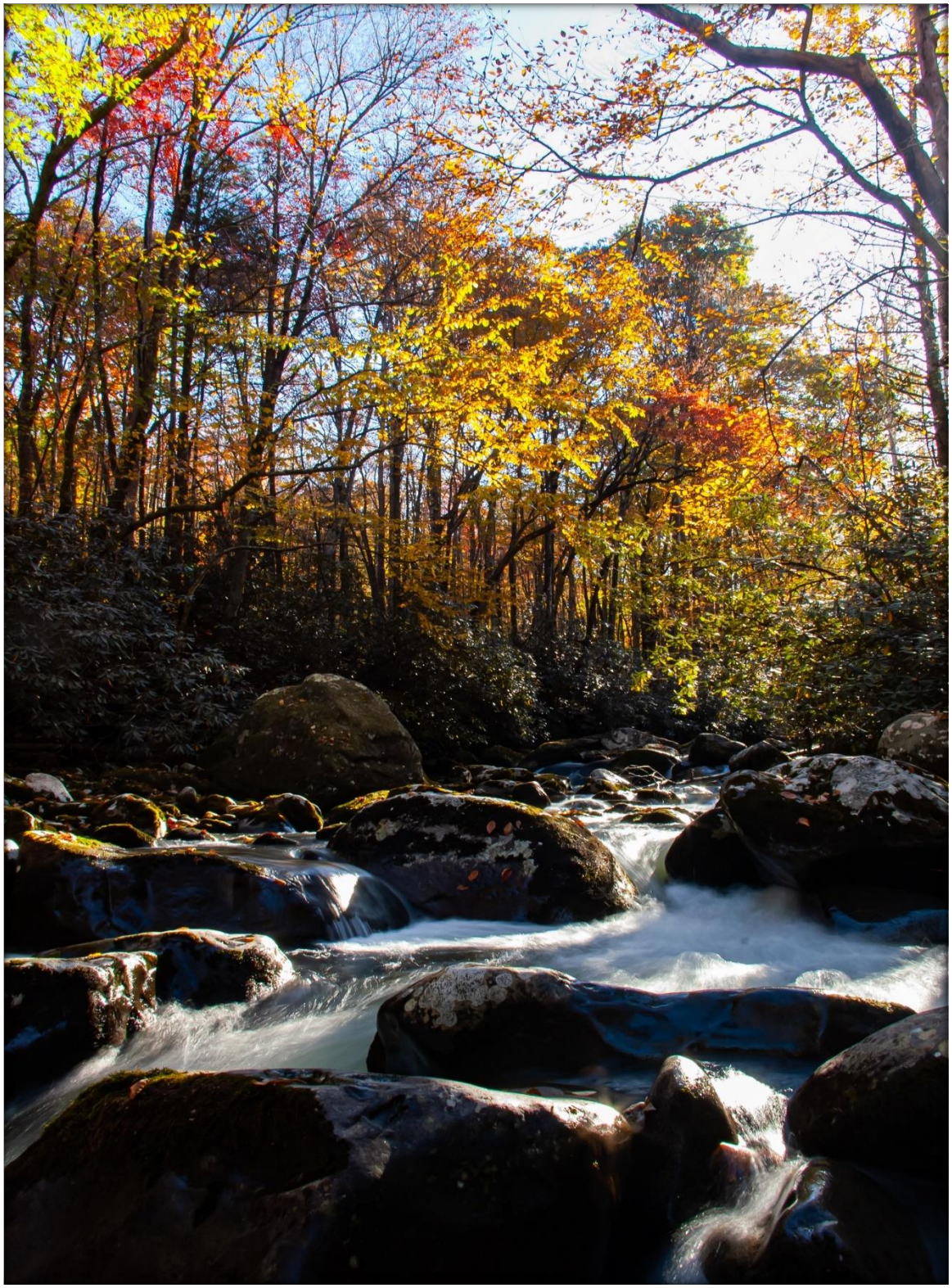
Forlorn

Wandering this world lonely but not alone,
Forever wondering how long I'll have to drone,
On and on through this empty sea,
Feeling this empty space inside of me.
Treacherous waves crashing all around,
I scream out, but no one is around to hear the sound.
Those that are always there for me,
Are lost among the waves of this treacherous sea.
They see me floating, but they cannot reach,
The waves are far to high for them to breach.
How long will it be before I fall under?
Will they reach me before the thunder,
Signals another onslaught from the storm,
Or will I be stuck here, forever forlorn?

Mitch Winchester



Carrie Hawkins



Carrie Hawkins

URIEL

They say that if you die thrice
heaving your body over the crest of the sky—
past the place where tide breaks,
where moondust settles over every step and leap for mankind—
you may, if your cry sounds close enough to thunder,
offer up a draught of blood, frothing from the tap,
for a breath of a chance at April showers—
given the gods taste and are pleased at the mead in your veins.
Back in the place you called home,
your best girl may die heaving out her twisted whelp,
and perhaps that doomed, bloody gift
proves the universe drank of you and was quenched.
You won't ever know, as none who die thrice ever make it out alive—
though the tide still breaks hard,
swallowing sediment enough to build worlds,
swallowing every footprint on Everest—
and each knows a fool who, ale-addled enough,
will claim to all who will listen that he's seen the other side,
and perhaps fool's gold is older than time.

Cait Smith



Abigail Hockensmith

You Were Here

You were beautiful, yet still.
You were here yet gone to soon.
You were precious, yet fragile.
You were tiny, yet powerful.
You were held yet loved.
You were cherished, yet never forgotten.

Held You

Let me tell you how I feel.
Is this a dream or is it real?
All I want is you right here.
Your coos and cries for me to hear.
I just want to be with you.
I cannot wait to see you.
You know how much I love you.
But I wish I would have held you

The pain of losing a sister than I never got to meet is a whole new kind of pain. I often wonder what could have been, the person she would have grown up to be, the memories we would have made, and the joy I would have with a new little sister. These poems were a way for me to reflect on my feelings. I didn't have the opportunity to see her, to hold her, or to tell her how much I loved her. Despite the sadness that my and I feel, I know that my sweet baby sister is in a much better place now and is loved beyond measure. I will see her someday and I look forward to that joyous moment when my family will all be together.

Ryleigh J. Bonk



Meghan Parks



Maria Yeager

UNTOUCHABLE

I've always wanted the untouchable
A fairytale beginning, with a fairytale ending
A love that lasts forever, never corruptible
A bond that never breaks, a relationship worth defending

I've always wanted the impossible:
A happy family, with no separation
Money well earned and credible
Great success by my own creation

It's nice to want things, right?
At least that's what I've always been told
Along with nothing is ever black and white
And not everything can be controlled

It's untouchable
Unreachable
Just like that of a distant angel
Or like a ship trapped in a tiny glass bottle

It may not be ideal
And it might seem confusing
But just know that everything is fairly surreal
Just like that of a baby bluejays' wings

I look up and see value
I look up and see dreams
But then I look back down and see what's actually true
Remembering how nothing is ever as it seems

I can never win
I always lose
Somehow I always sin
No matter what I do or how I choose

I'm waiting to be taken

I'm waiting for something
I'm waiting to be awakened
But all I really want is to end all this aching

I wish I would smile a genuine smile
But all I ever do is fake what I'm feeling
Maybe if I could find something worthwhile
I would have a story really worth telling

But until I find the ending I need
I'll be stuck on my own, deeply wishing I was free

I'll keep fake smiling
I'll keep my head held high
To cover my actions of continuous lying

I know the truth is what I'll see
I know the lies will catch up to me
Maybe one day I'll finally let go
Of all these messed up things I wish were not so

But until this day comes
I have to wait for my ending
Because if I don't, I won't see the blossom
Of the life of my own choosing

Isabella Robinson



Carrie Hawkins



Carrie Hawkins

Corrode Into Morose

Corroded to the core,
I am undead manticore.
Ruminating on repetitive,
becoming even adverse to negative.
A poorly veiled reprise: this life—
though the blackest depths of me lie
ever beyond the reach of others' lives.

I feel myself rotting inward to out,
a scorpion shedding deceitful
shards of paralyzing victories
reveled in time and time again.
I'm poisoned from within,
but unable to let poison win
as I grin and feast on departed,
parading remnants of former sins.

Stefanos Delipoglou



Salah Shakir

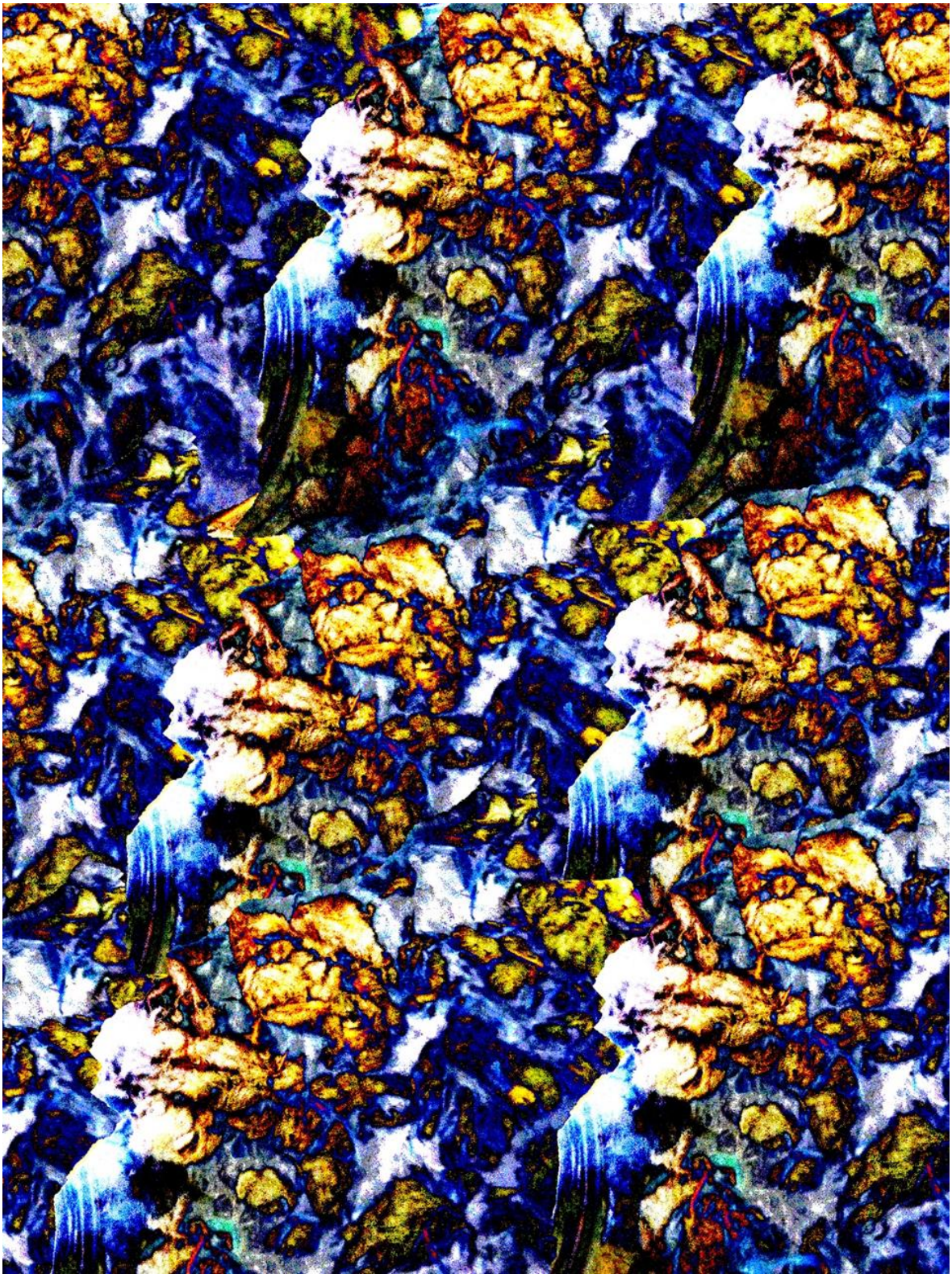
Eidolons

Eyes of eidolons:

anxiously agonizing
scrutiny burglarizing
pieces from inside of me.
Exterior ablaze
with praise, how it climbs
and raises forward, outward,
to all others: only up—
and how inside of myself,
I feel I've only shriveled up—
infused with disuse,
turned to rust before your gaze,
still unwilling to pause
and reflect on what I'm becoming each day.

Stefanos Delipoglou

Boulderstone Waterfall



Stefanos Delipoglou

Into the Abyss of My Heart.

Confused.

I am wondering aimlessly.

I don’t even know what I am looking for.

Something to fill this emptiness I suppose.

Put in the middle and abandoned to make everyone happy will take its toll.

If my heart could be seen,

You would see the restriction tape tightening around my heart,

Making it hard to breath.

What do I do?

I am only one person,

Yet I feel as though I have lived the lives of ten.

I should be thoughtless and immature, living up to my adolescence.

And still,

My head is filled with words.

Too many words; swirling.

Too many words leaving me dazed.

My heart and my logic fight for dominance.

Who do I choose?

I am only one girl, what do I do?

Sydney Houp



Salah Shakir



Hannah Waroway

NEVER ENDING

I think I need to put my words on paper
My feelings just become too much to handle
I'm always confused and always empty
Yet somehow manage to simply just smile

But it's a mask...a temporary fix

But a fix today means something more atrocious: tragic, cowardly, fun, or just a way of life
But life has more layers than one, two, and three; birth, then all the stuff in between, and then finally death…just simply death

No
Life can mean so much more if you just stop and look

See smiles meet the eyes
See colors interact with the wind
See how simple freedom flies
See how feelings really have no end

But wait...now you see
Turn around the corner and find a whole new community, diversity among us Generation Z
You see I talk like him, look like her, but am automatically a screw up because I am simply just me
It must suck for you that I couldn't care
But at the end of the day…life is never just fair and square
Square up, raise one fist, then perform a powerful roundhouse kick
Cause that's the life now of being him, her, and them
Fighting never solves
Fighting never proves
Fighting never wins
And fighting never ends

Endings are supposed to be in stories
Endings are supposed to be it: fin, finale, finito
But that's where you're wrong
Endings are endless
Like how infinity rises above and beyond us
Ha...did you get that Toy Story reference?

Every word in this paper and near rhyme as well, won't make sense if your life hasn't felt like a living hell
If you listen to these words
And listen to the rhythm
You will see so much more than just verses one, two, and three, all alone and hidden

The precisions, decisions, criticisms, and compositions
There's no outline of life
It's only our job to live it

Alive or dead
Dead or alive
We all just want to feel something
To feel lovely, to feel wanted

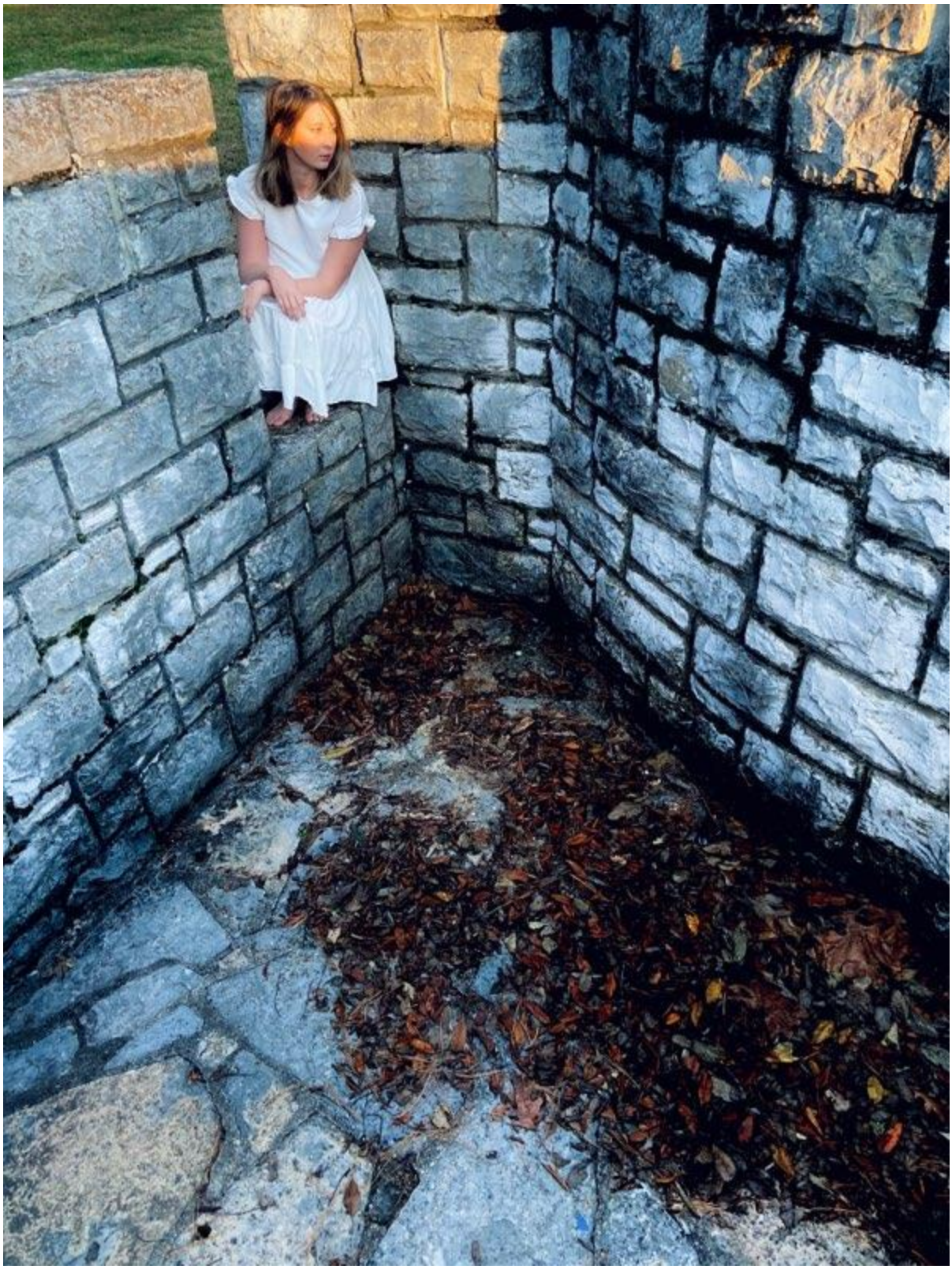
So screw these fairytales
Screw these fantasies
Screw these haters
And screw all these feens

For all it is I need
Are no more excuses or reasons why
Because my only enemy is my inner me:
Me, myself, and I

So even though my thoughts run out
These thoughts and words remain infinite

And now that I've given you a glimpse of what's going on
It's your turn to prove that nothing, not even endings, are ever gone…
To be continued...

Isabella Robinson



Lindsey Peters

Desire

My desire for you is drowning me.
Slowly suffocating,
Killing me.
Just one day with you could never be enough.

I need you today, tomorrow and forever.
Until the world around us withers away,
Until the air in my lungs turns to dust,
Until the light within my eyes fades into the sun.

I could look at you for eternity and not even blink; afraid to miss a moment of your beauty.
You are both handsome and beautiful.
A rare combination.

Your skin, as gold as honey.
Your eyes, innocent and curious.
Your heart, unblemished.

Sydney Houp



Hala Ayyash



Hala Ayyash

Home

Two hearts connected;
beating together in harmony.
I watch as the sound of warm laughter fills the air,
and your eyes disappear into those adorable crescent moons.
A sign of happiness.

My heart that was once frozen by this world;
a world that can sometimes be too hard to bare.
Becomes thawed by the warmth of your existence.
That fuzzy feeling that reminds me of Home.

Sydney Houp



Hannah Waroway

Can you see it?

Can you see it? That small orange ember there.
This is what is left after disaster, after despair.
All around it is carnage, raging flames, and black edges.
But, right there, in the middle, is an oh so tiny ember.
It's close to the end, it's fading, it's almost gone.
But please, don't count it out, it fights to stay strong.
The will is within it, to survive, to soldier on.
It fights to breathe, to regain thought.
Is there enough time left? Is there enough heart?
Do you see it? The tiny little ember?
It's waiting for you to find it.
It's waiting for you to remember how things were.
Before the earthquakes, before the storms,
Waiting and praying for you to find again the reason for it all.

Laura Minton

Contributors

Abigail Hockenmith | Psychology Major Midway U., from Lawrenceburg, Ky

Cait Smith | Midway Alumna 2018, from Frankfort, KY

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