



The  
Silver  
Lining

Creative Journal

**2023 Edition**

*Cloud County Community College*

*The Silver Lining*  
Spring 2023

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**Editor's Note**

After the successful relaunch and expansion of *The Silver Lining* creative journal in 2022, Cloud County Community College's students, faculty, and staff are excited to share their creative writing and artistic talents once again. The 2023 edition has grown—in size, in contributors, and in ambition. We are thrilled to showcase our talented community, and we hope to inspire more artists and writers to share their own voices with us in the future.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Disclaimer**

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*The Silver Lining*  
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“Women’s Anthem - Poster Design”  
Jasmine Sakaguchi



**WOMEN'S ANTHEM**  
Women are fierce.  
They are powerful.  
No matter what  
language they speak,  
how they dress or  
the work they  
choose to do,  
What matters is they  
have a choice,  
and the freedom  
to carve out  
a life for themselves.  
As long as  
we know women,  
who are  
strong and resilient,  
we must respect  
them, carry  
them forward,  
lift them up.  
For they are  
the product of  
all our  
other selves,  
the women  
we were,  
the ones  
we strive to be,  
the collective  
struggle of  
our mothers,  
our sisters,  
our daughters.  
Our salvation  
will only  
come if we  
stand together.

**DEI**

Jasmine Sakaguchi is a freshman at Cloud County Community College in the Humanities and Fine Arts major. She was born in New Zealand but has lived in Australia and Japan. In her spare time, she likes to pole vault, spend time in nature and watch movies. She hopes to go into a creative field such as design or architecture in the future.

**“Philosophy”**  
**Mary Shaffer**

I’m no poet.  
I’m a writer, a singer, a dancer, a gamer,  
but no poetry falls from my fingers, nor my mouth.  
Maybe I make it too hard, giving myself a limit.  
Poetry may be just another form of art, but art is just another form of  
truth.  
I guess that makes me a liar.

Art is just an expression of what the artist may feel or think,  
disguised by pretty colors and abstract shapes,  
encoded in a way that only other artists (painters, musicians, poets)  
would truly understand.

Many value art more than the brightest jewel.  
Yet the jeweler is more respected than the artist.  
Should that make me a thief?  
It certainly makes one wish to be,  
to steal the glory.

They say there is no place for art in the world,  
yet what they don’t realize  
is that art is what makes us human;  
what keeps us sane amongst the insanity.

I wish to observe nature’s beautiful ugliness,  
and perhaps capture it to be observed for eternity,  
by means of roaming image or flowing sound.  
If I were able to keep these experiences in a bottle,  
then I could observe them forever.

But, what media do I possess to be able to capture such a moment,  
to make life that cannot die?  
The painter has paint, the musician has his instrument,  
yet the poet has nothing but his words.

---

Mary Shaffer is a freshman at Cloud County Community College and majoring in Humanities and Fine Arts. Although still figuring out exact details, she plans to use her strength in writing towards her career. She wishes to make movie scripts and novels, and she practices writing while listening to music.

**“Cherries”  
Doga Eski**



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Doga Eski is a freshman from Turkey. Her major is Math & Engineering and she plays volleyball for Cloud. She likes to play games with her dog, paint, go on sunset walks, and hang out with her friends in her free time.

**“Some People Mispronounce Poems”**  
**Brenton Phillips**

some people mispronounce “poems.”  
it comes out “poims”  
as if they’re balls bouncing down the street.  
there goes one now, let loose  
by a kid who doesn’t yet  
understand the physics of gravity  
on a downgrade  
or a dad who will just let it  
get away, is too old  
to catch up with it.  
Poiim!  
    Poiim!  
        Poiim!  
            Poiim!  
like a cartoon ball—you can almost see the dotted-line arcs as it  
bounces  
    bounces  
        bounces  
        and finally is  
        swallowed  
        by  
        a  
        storm drain  
                            and from there floats into the sewer system  
                            where it either belongs  
                            or maybe will do the  
                            most good.

---

Brenton Phillips began teaching at Cloud County Community College in 2002, after teaching high school English, drama, yearbook, and forensics for sixteen years. Currently, Phillips serves as Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business and Chair of the Humanities Department. His interests include reading and writing, theatre, watching classic films, baseball, camping, playing guitar and drums, and studying history and music.

## “Different View”

Tatom P. Smith: Thor’s “Write It!” Contest Winner

What do you mean it is wrong?  
it looks right to me.  
Is it backwards like a moon’s last phase?  
What do you mean, It is wrong?  
I don’t notice a difference.  
You say it is wrong, but I don’t know the difference.  
Left is right, up is down.  
I sit; silently suffering  
What do you mean it is wrong?  
It looks right to me  
My mind is like a wounded puppy  
When someone changes  
Erases  
Or mocks  
Sputtering and gasping I drown in others criticism  
Always correcting  
Correcting  
Correcting  
But I carry on like a whale in migration  
I am a chameleon a master at blending in  
And you won’t notice what I feel  
My smile hides my struggle.

---

Tatom Smith is a junior at Junction City High School, who struggles with dyslexia but has learned to overcome it, is the daughter of an active-duty army family. Traveling extensively and lived in seven different states. She is a percussionist on the drum line and served as the base drum section leader. In her spare time, she likes to roller skate, paint, write, and hunt for fossils. After graduation, she plans to attend Fort Hays State University and pursue her life-long dream of becoming a paleontologist



## **“An Ode to Literature”**

**Katria Kinsey Kindscher**

To put it simply,

I’m bad with words, no not in the literate sense, in the sense that I cannot form a single proper sentence that actually represents what I’m thinking.

My mind is a never-ending cluster of phrases and definitions, a muddled mess. An evergrowing dictionary taking notes on which words I find more attractive.

Which words leave me flicking my tongue craving to use them again,

which words leave others with a feeling deep down,

a craving to sculpt a sentence around that word,

which words leave imprints on people like my shoe in the mud.

I prefer words that slide off my tongue, sentences sweet like honey, and witty responses are the stinger on the bee.

I am not an inherently funny person, I am witty and sarcastic but lack the makings of a true comedian. No, no, I have no book titled *101 Jokes to Pass off as Your Own* I don’t have a laugh that makes others laugh. I don’t have a bubbly personality unless I’ve partaken in one too many bubbly beverages. My type of speaking is the type that you’ll laugh at because you have no clue how to respond. My words don’t mesh, my sentences are incoherent bouncing from one to the next, bumper cars branding the borders with dents, borrowing paint from one another.

My words form on my lips like finely aged wine, the time that it took for my perfectly shaped vowels and pristine pauses representing the punctuation I spend so much time panicking over.

A tantalizing tablespoon of words dripping and spilling, cravings for a writing that stains the table cloth forming tableaux.

I do not have the ability to speak of wonders-that is simply not where my talent lies. My ink is where my blood lies the pulsating splots from a prolonged thought in which I forgot to lift my pen. I like to take my time.

My pen creates its own lines, I only crave to be present enough to watch where it takes me.

My way of writing is raw and primal and poetic and I am in love with all it could be.

I spend hours searching for the perfect sentence, thesauruses and dictionaries pile around me, a slew of synonyms are riddled off by my phone, one after the other till the transition is almost unnoticeable. I search for the punctuations that hold perfections and no revision necessary.

I crave to make a flow that is smoother than Mac Miller’s.

I crave to create a world in which people anticipate the next word on the next page. I want my writing to be an addiction-

Actually, I want my being to be an addiction. My writing is only a tangible form of myself. One that can be recorded but each word is a part of me. Each word was carved from me and sculpted in my sentence.

I want someone to grasp every word I write like it is their lifeline. I want people to look in books and find combinations of words so odd that they can only come from me. I want to be the creator of combinations like ice cream and fries. I want my writing to have its own form, to come alive, to deliver its own audience.

So I ask to be forgiven for my sloppy words and the hours it takes for me to say what I mean when trying to speak.

As I previously mentioned,

I am bad at talking, but with a bit more time to create a correlating stream of thoughts, I may be able to write an ode to you.

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Katria Kindscher is a freshman at Cloud County Community College, with the goal to pursue a degree in education. She intends to transfer over to the University of Kansas and acquire a certificate in ESL. Katria hopes to one day be able to teach English as a Second Language in other Spanish-speaking countries.

**“Western Feel”  
Kenzie Cooper**



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Kenzie Cooper, a sophomore from Wamego, Kansas is pursuing her degree in Elementary Education. Following her time at Cloud where she is on the volleyball team, a student ambassador and a member of Phi Theta Kappa, she will attend McPherson college to continue her academic and athletic career. In addition to painting, she also enjoys baking and fishing in her free time.

**“Leaving Home”**  
**Kenzie Strathman**

It’s a whole new world to me.  
The people, much different from my own.  
Is this a place I really want to be?

Everyone comes from somewhere else.  
It won’t be too long until they are forgotten,  
by then I may have even forgotten myself.

I can always feel that home is near.  
The sweet sounds of peace and quiet;  
The sounds I long to hear.  
Home is always welcoming,  
home holds my family dear.  
All I have learned is that home is not here.

---

Kenzie Strathman is a freshman at Cloud County Community College, coming from the small town of Goff, Kansas. She is studying pre-physical therapy here at Cloud and will be transferring into a physical therapy assistant program at an undecided institution. When she can, Kenzie enjoys going home to help on the farm and playing with her dog Maggie.



**“Submerged”**  
**Katelynn Brogan**



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Katelynn Brogan graduated from Washburn Rural High School and is now a freshman at Cloud County Community College. She is a part of the volleyball team and plans on majoring in Elementary Art Education. After her two years at Cloud she hopes to pursue two more years of volleyball at a 4-year college. In her spare time she enjoys fishing, playing yard games and painting.

## **“Sea for Yourself” Te Araroa Sopoaga**

Take a deep free dive with me under the sea  
into the deep mysterious blue.  
Within the reef the water is clear and fluorescent,  
but it is beyond that reef I want you to swim with me.  
Jump into the open ocean  
and you will find yourself wading through the unknown.  
What is down there  
beyond the depth of perception from your foggy snorkel?  
Hold your breath.  
The silence of the ocean creates a secretive ambiance,  
but down here it is no secret  
that a whole underworld lives and breathes.  
Although it can only be seen temporarily,  
before you return to your own world,  
you can capture just enough to feel the desire to search this under-  
world again.  
There is a divine ecosystem down here  
swimming and scavenging wild and free.  
An entire environment just waiting to be seen.  
Just as you seize this surreptitious world,  
your body alarms you  
it is time to return.  
Gasping and panting for air of your own.  
The underground world is so far fetched  
From what you have always known.

---

Te Araroa Sopoaga is an international student from Wellington, New Zealand and a sophomore at Cloud studying Psychology. After graduation, she plans to study at a 4-year school to finish her bachelor's degree and continue playing basketball. In her spare time, she likes spending time with her family and eating out with her friends.



**“Protecting my heART”**  
Amy Kern



Amy Kern is a graduate of Washington High School with a BFA from Fort Hays State University and a MFA in graphic design from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Amy has been teaching art and graphic design at Cloud County Community College for the last 4 years. In her spare time she enjoys traveling with her two children and making art.

## **“No Place Like Home, No Place Like Here”**

### **Brenton Phillips**

To my relief, it is a bat the boy carries. Too many times already I’ve had to make a split-second call to Morales, our .50-cal. gunner, to take out a Bad Guy wielding an AK-47, and in the second between my order and Morales’s pressing of the butterfly trigger, my mind races: Is that an AK? A shepherd’s staff? A hoe? Not only does a kill require a ton of paperwork but also a visit from an investigative team to make sure the kill is legit. My dread of killing a civilian is profound. My stomach is Maalox’s most loyal customer.

The village has been deemed friendly by our G-2 guys, the ghost-like residents trying their best to go about their day-to-day business while surreptitiously feeding us intel on insurgent operations in the valley. We have stopped our Stryker vehicles to make some more nice with the villagers, who smile cautiously, knowing that friendliness toward the invaders, if the word spreads beyond the valley, will invite the reprisals we’ve heard about--and see too often--and that no one wants to think about.

But I’m not thinking about reprisals now; I’m not even thinking about home at the moment. I’m wondering where the devil did that kid come up with a baseball bat in a forsaken hellhole where the main sport is dodging RPGs and grenades, just trying to survive bullets and shells from both sides in addition to just worrying where the next meal is coming from?

As I order a dismount from the Strykers, the villagers timidly approach as they always do. They know US soldiers bring gifts with them—out-of-season Santa Clauses with oranges, Hershey bars, Skittles, Fritos and Cheetos, a bounty of junk food from our mechanized sleighs to supplement their meager diets of roots and goat meat. (I guess Santa Claus isn’t quite appropriate in this country, but you know what I mean.) Such treats apparently make the risk of reprisals worth it. Anyone carrying American largesse, if caught by the Bad Guys, well you can guess . . .

I approach the kid; he is probably nine or ten, although years of war and malnourishment make him older in body but not in face. He surprisingly bears no lines of worry, his eyes sparkle in the sun and the shock of thick black hair hangs low on his forehead. He wears a pair of cut-off dungarees of some kind, not the kind you typically see on kids around here. A rough blouse, plain, once white but now the color of a pencil eraser smudge, and what I could swear was Cheetos dust where he wiped his hands.

The bat is a Louisville Slugger, the kind I always had when I was a kid, but scarred with dents and chips, probably from hitting stones since there is no sign of a baseball. Or maybe it is his protection from the other boys in the village, who curiously are nowhere to be seen. There is probably no lonelier sight than a boy with the equipment of a team sport and no team. Even the Louisville Slugger brand burned into the wood is almost obliterated by blunt force trauma of some kind.

We stare at each other for a minute or so, sizing each other up, I, a captain who has decided that this would be it for me when my latest tour is over, he a kid who is probably destined for an abbreviated life in which youthful optimism has already been sucked out of him by years of war, no prospects, nothing to look forward to. I can look forward to many years with my wife and my kids, now in high school, planning for proms and colleges and careers and grandkids. And dying quietly in my sleep decades from now.

I squat down, beckon the boy to come over to me. He holds the bat tensely, as if it could become a weapon at a moment's notice. Maybe he thinks I want to take it from him, contraband property of Uncle Sam. I wonder if the Bad Guys would punish him for having it.

In the meantime, we can have a brief game.

“Sergeant Morales!”

“Captain?”

“Get that roll of duct tape.”

“Duct tape coming up, yessir!”

By now the other guys, about a dozen, have circled around the boy and me. Morales appears with the tape.

“Start wadding it up into a ball.”

“A ball, sir? What for?”

“This kid needs a baseball.”

I don't have any better ideas. I think wrapping the tape around a small stone might work, but then it probably wouldn't fly too far. Morales wads the tape until he has a rough sphere about the size of a baseball.

Then everyone knows what to do. The guys arrange themselves into a team, arguing about who plays what position.

“I played shortstop in high school.”

“So. I played it in Little League!”

Eventually we get organized. I take off my ACU jacket and fold it into a home plate. I then notice the boy is entranced by the t-shirt I wear underneath my ACU, a baby-blue tee with Kansas City Royals emblazoned across the front and Hosmer 35 on the back. I bought it at Wal-Mart in my hometown in Kansas after the Royals won the American League pennant in 2014. They lost the World Series in seven games to the Giants, but stormed back in 2015 to take the Series from the Mets in five games. Eric Hosmer, or the Wizard of Hoz as he was often referred to, was my man—a lefty like me and first baseman—but also a team leader on a team full of leaders—Mike “Moose” Moustakas, Lo Cain, Salvy Perez, Alex “Gordo” Gordon, Alcides “Esky” Escobar. (Those guys were my equivalent to my Dad's mustachioed Oakland A's of the early 70s, taking 3 World Series in a row, the made-for-a-baseball-team names, legendary for Dad—Sal Bando, Joe Rudy, Vida Blue, Blue Moon Odom, Reggie Jackson, Bert Campaneris, Gene Tenace, Mike Epstein, Catfish Hunter, Rollie Fingers. Dad used to recite them like a litany of saints—St. Jackson, play for us.) They all had the swagger, but Hosmer had something more, the charisma, the humor, the square jaw, the steely eyes, the sympathetic eyes, the humility of a leader of men. A guy you could rely on, the kind of guy I hope I am to my Stryker team. I bought two of those t-shirts, brought one to this war. I don't think of it as a good luck talisman that protects me from death or gives me any superpowers. I think it makes me comfortable, maybe some kind of Jungian archetype of innocence in a time before this endless war, the mythic purity of baseball, the quintessential American game. I wear the tee under my camo ACU blouse, the boy-under-the-warrior who once threw baseballs to gun down runners heading for second base or charging home, in a time long ago, now hurling metal death at the enemy.

The boy sounds out the words on the shirt: “Kan-zuz See-tee Roy-alz.” I figure he hears enough English from all the Americans soldiers who roll through his village and maybe is in the process of actually learning English in the school we have established, so he knows the alphabet sounds. I turn around so he can read the name and number on the back.

“Hoss-meer, tirtee-fife. “

I pat the boy on the shoulder. “That’s right, Slugger. Hosmer, thirty-five. The Wizard of Hoz.”

“Weezard of Hoss?” He says it slowly, almost reverently. Followed by a huge smile. Does the kid like the sound or is he really familiar with the allusion to the movie?

“That’s right, Slugger. You got it. There’s no place like home!” I tap my foot on my folded ACU. “And this is home!”

I then get the lightning-bolt inspiration from the baseball gods.

“Everybody—let’s play ball!” It is amazing how these American boys just seem to naturally fall into baseball positions. They have been doing it most of their young lives in sandlots, in city leagues, in high schools, in colleges. Morales squats behind home, looking as if he has lived his twenty-three years there.

“Okay! 2015 World Series. Royals-Mets. Top of the ninth. One out. The Mets lead 2-1. I’m Hosmer on third base.” The guys in a kind of slow-mo act out my narration.

“Salvy smokes a grounder right to Mets third baseman Wright. Wright eyeballs Hosmer, gluing the Hoz on third, then fires to Duda at first for out number two. But Hoz! Hoz is breaking for home, thinking, “Why am I doing this?” The crowd and players are thinking, ‘What is he doing?’ Duda at first fires the ball home, the game should be over. Hoz is storming down the line, he’s going to be thrown out, but Duda’s throw home is wide! Hoz dives headfirst into home and scores the tying run! The Royals crowd goes wild!”

I get up out of the dust cloud created by my slide, the boy is jumping around like a madman, the guys join in whooping it up. The universal language of baseball has attracted some more villagers, some who join in the merriment, some who apparently are wondering if we’ve all gone crazy. But we are all one.

And then we get orders to move out. I tell the boys to saddle up. I look down at my boy, who still has the glow of victory on his face. We stand grinning at each other.

And I whip off my Hosmer 35 shirt and pull it down over the boy’s head and shoulders.

It hangs to his knees, but he looks confident that he could make Hoz’s mad dash home a thousand times and make it. I muss his hair, and he says, “The Weezard of Hoz.”

“You got it, Slugger. The Wiz. There’s no place like home! “

My mind races around all the other clichés. Home sweet home. Home is where the heart is. Home is the starting place of love, hope, and dreams. We’re just trying to get home. Take the long way home. Home is where our story begins.

I jump back in the Stryker, and we set off. We boys in the armored vehicles wave, and the newly christened Wizard of Hoz waves back at us until we are out of sight.

Three months later we’re at an airbase, getting some down time. At chow I run into a friend in the Criminal Investigation Department who is working with the UN looking into war crimes by the enemy. We do a lot of small talking, he tells me where he’s been, what he’s doing, I tell him where I’ve been. One valley name makes me stop talking when he raises an eyebrow and tilts his head a bit.

“I got something to show you.” We walk over to the trailer he operates out of, and from a briefcase he pulls out an envelope with a pack of photos. I know what’s coming, given the nature of his job, and I don’t want to look, but I can’t turn away. A series of shots show a village I’m familiar with, the buildings all where they’re supposed to be. A few stray goats.

But no people.

The last few photos show a mass grave, now uncovered, filled with bodies, both male and female. I hope my boy had been out with the sheep that day, dreaming of baseball, using his Louisville Slugger to put that duck tape ball over the fence at whatever Fenway Green Monster he could dream up. Among the corpses I make out a piece of powder blue material, dirty, with brown streaks that I take to be dried blood. I can make out the letters HOS and a 3. The rest is covered up with other bodies. I wonder what happened to the bat, and hope to God it wasn't used as a weapon in the end.

There's no place like home.

Home is where our story begins.

And ends.

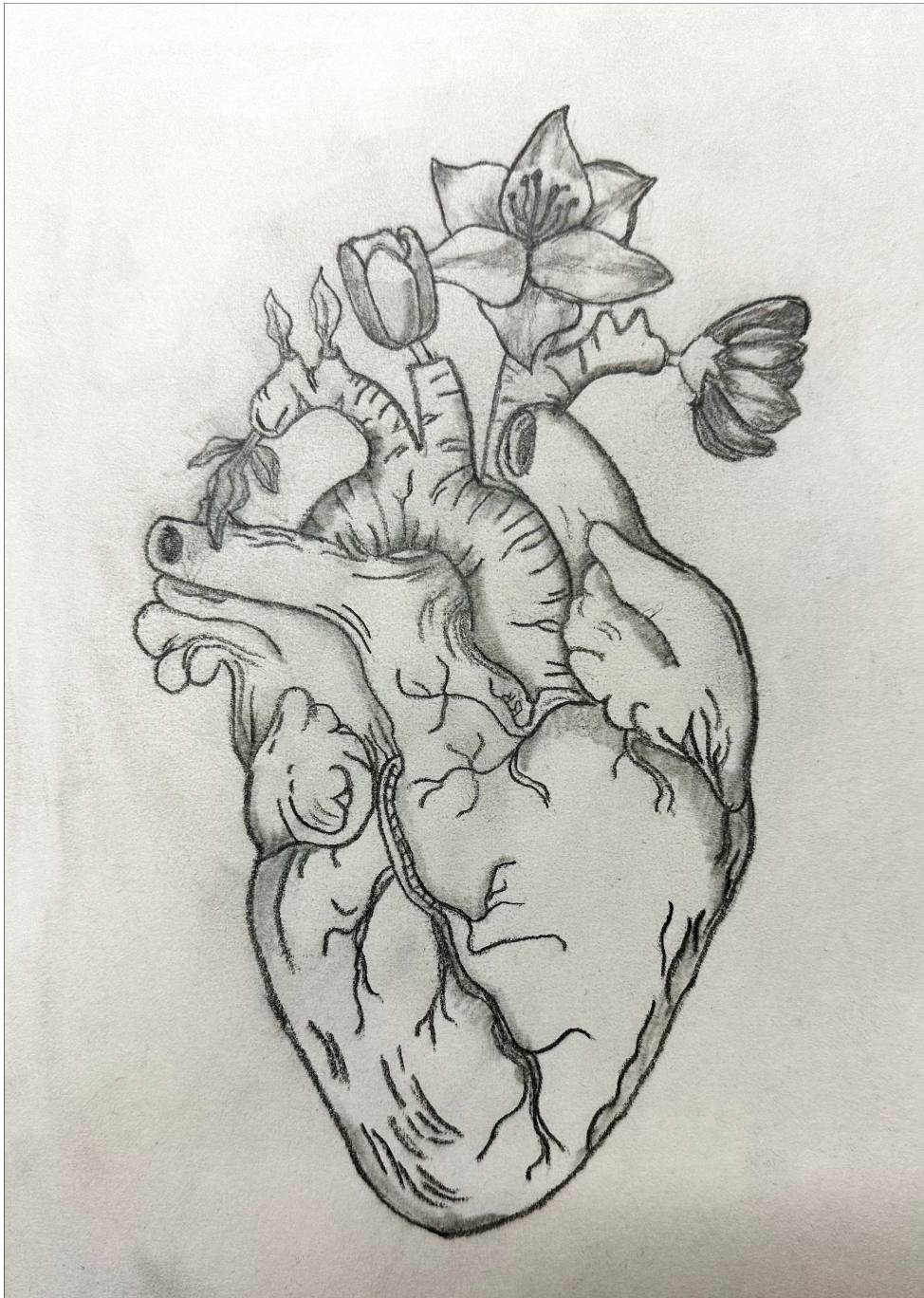
Back in the tent where soldiers try to re-establish some kind of normalcy in their lives with computers, I email my wife. I never tell her much about the war. I figure that when I get home, maybe I'll share some stories about what I've seen. But I doubt it. I remember that Tom Hanks movie about World War II, the one where he says he doesn't know how he will ever be able to tell his wife about a day like today. So I stick to how much I miss her and the kids, about the beautiful sunrises and sunsets here, the striking landscape straight from another planet, far from baseball, far from home, that I can't wait to get home. XXX's and OOO's inside a heart. And finally a P. S. I want her to send me my other Hosmer t-shirt.

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Brenton Phillips began teaching at Cloud County Community College in 2002, after teaching high school English, drama, yearbook, and forensics for six-teen years. Currently, Phillips serves as Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business and Chair of the Humanities Department. His interests include reading and writing, theatre, watching classic films, baseball, camping, playing guitar and drums, and studying history and music.



**“Flowers in Strange Places #1”  
Ryah Klima**



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Ryah Klima is native to Concordia, and a sophomore at Cloud. After graduating in May, she plans to attend Kansas Wesleyan University to continue her education, where she will get her bachelor's degree in communication studies and theater arts. She hopes to become a broadcast journalist for radio and television. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family and Ismael, creating art, and watching movies.



**“Love’s Residence”**  
**Kaitlyn Beikman**

Can you hear her singing?  
in the whistling of the wind,  
in the drumming of the rain.

Hiding in words never spoken,  
in every lingering glance,  
and every thought of a future  
that may never be  
...but could.

In thoughts too bold to truly say,  
in feelings too strong to fully express,  
and in all the little things.  
This is where Love resides.

She makes her home here,  
moving in with no warning.  
Settling herself into the confines of communication  
and decorating her space with beautiful artwork.

She rules her quarters with a firm hand,  
squashing insecurities like bugs skittering in dark corners,  
and stubbornly making her opinions heard,  
regardless of how they differ from our own.

Granted, her methods may be bothersome at times,  
but we do not ever wish her to leave.  
For Love has turned our connection into a home,  
and we have found comfort in her residence.

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Kaitlyn Beikmann is a Sophomore at Cloud, obtaining her associates of humanities with a focus in creative writing and graphic design. After graduation, she plans on pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree at Wichita State University. Kaitlyn is honored to have been a part of the Silver Lining journal as both an author and editor, and she is excited to carry her love of art, writing, and storytelling with her into the future, wherever it takes her.

## **“Soulmate” Dana Pleas**

What is a soulmate?  
Well in our lives it is someone.  
Who you share your dreams with.  
Who knows what your feeling at all times.  
Someone who comforts you.

What is a soulmate?  
Someone who completes your inequity's.  
Someone who travels your same path.  
Someone who you would willing give your life for.  
Someone who makes you feel whole.

What is a soulmate?  
It is more than just finishing each others sentences.  
It is someone who stands beside you.  
In good times as well as bad.  
It is someone who intimately feels your pain.

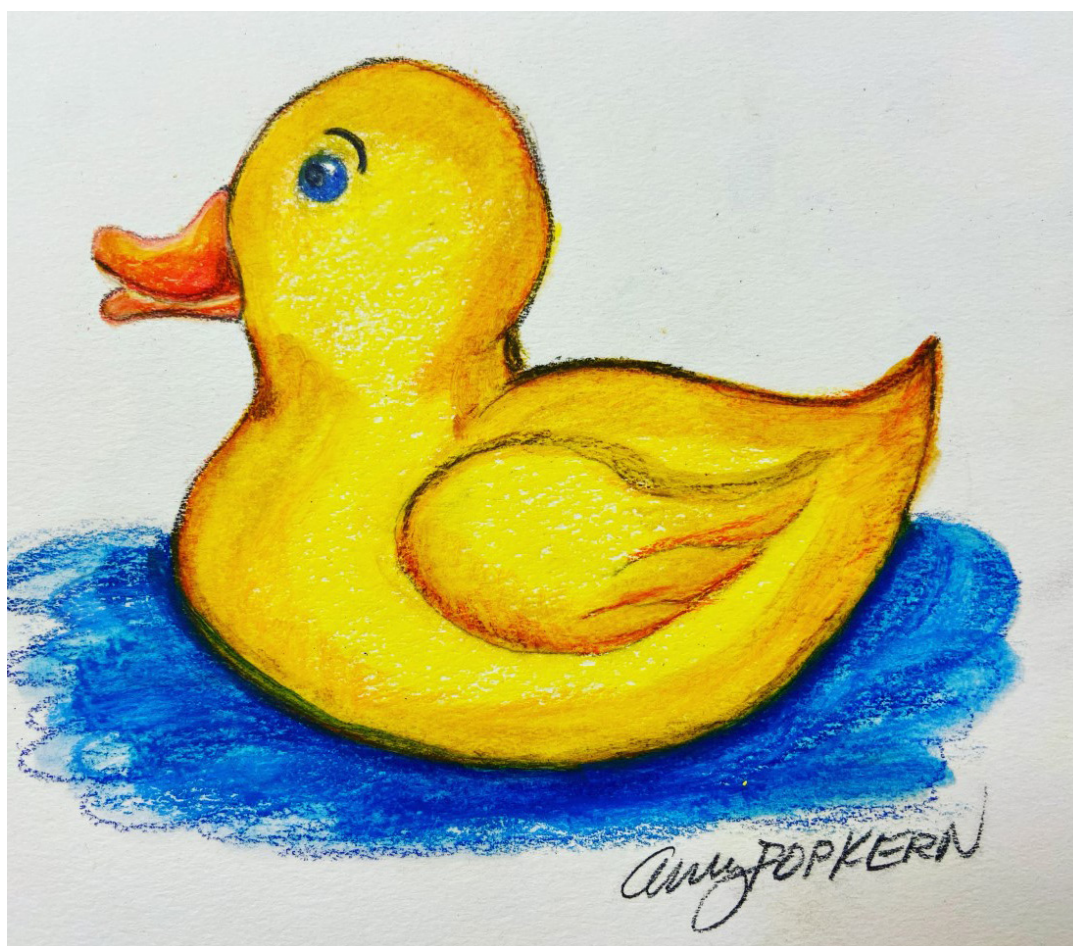
What is a soulmate?  
It is someone who you share your whole life with.  
Someone who knows you inside and out.  
Someone who you happily grow old together with.  
Someone who you can look back at all the memories with.

What is a soulmate?  
It is someone you are tied to with love and caring.  
Someone you give your all to.  
Someone who is your other half.  
Someone who you will spend eternity with.

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Dana Pleas was born in Anchorage, Alaska but grew up mostly in Kansas. She is 43 and has been married going on 21 years and has 4 lovely children. She currently is a undergraduate at Cloud County Community College in Junction City, Ks were she lives. She is pursuing a degree as a vet technician. She loves to draw and paint and write poetry in her spare time as well as cooking great food. She cares for her aging husband while attending to her schooling.

**“Quackers”  
Amy Kern**



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Amy Kern is a graduate of Washington High School with a BFA from Fort Hays State University and a MFA in graphic design from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Amy has been teaching art and graphic design at Cloud County Community College for the last 4 years. In her spare time she enjoys traveling with her two children and making art.

**“My Bean”**  
**Zoe Bechard**

To my dearest little bean,  
You are the brightest little light in my life  
She reminds me of myself in so many ways  
Her firecracker energy and her fiery red hair  
Her crystal clear blue eyes are so pure  
Her smart little brain amazes me  
The way she always has a ornery grin on her face

She’s my mini me

When I count my blessings I count her twice  
Beyond thankful for all she brings in my life  
The feeling of when I first held her gave me so much joy  
I never knew that a little human could make me feel so happy  
Every time I see her I cherish all the memories  
She’s the best niece I could ever ask for

I thank my brother everyday for the best surprise  
Watching her grow and learn has been crazy  
I feel like yesterday she was just learning how to walk  
Now she is running, talking, and finding herself  
I love who she is becoming and can’t wait for the years to come  
I wish I could give her the world  
However, I know she will be great  
She will never know how much she means to me

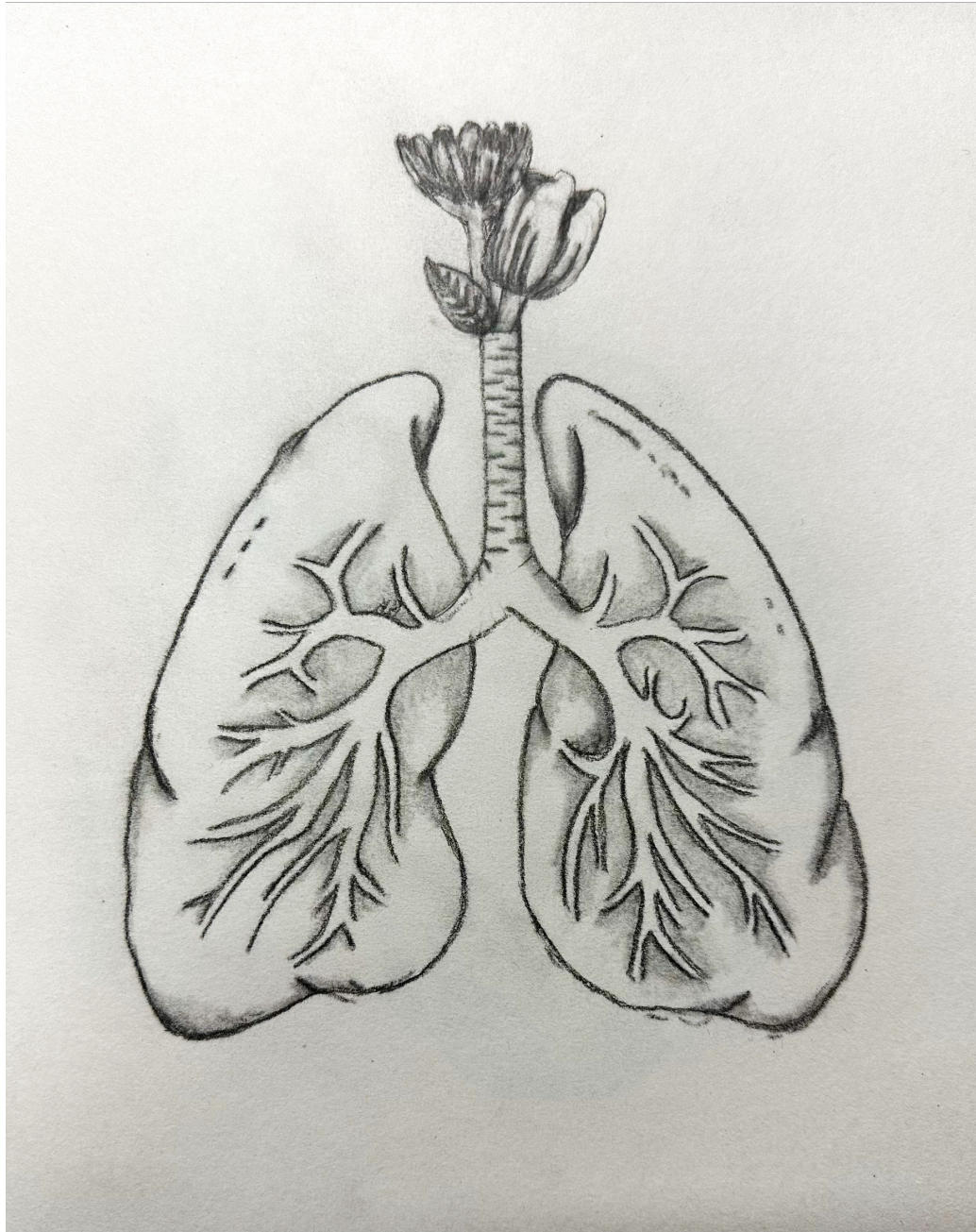
I love you Sophie Bean

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Zoe Bechard is from Kansas, and she is a sophomore getting her associates in Science here at Cloud. When she graduates from CCCC, she will then attend Salina Tech Dental Assisting School. She will later become a dental assistant. In her spare time, she likes being outdoors and being around her loved ones.



**“Flowers in Strange Places #2”  
Ryah Klima**



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Ryah Klima is native to Concordia, and a sophomore at Cloud. After graduating in May, she plans to attend Kansas Wesleyan University to continue her education, where she will get her bachelor's degree in communication studies and theater arts. She hopes to become a broadcast journalist for radio and television. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family and Ismael, creating art, and watching movies.

## “Seriously” Dana Pleas

In our adulthood we have become to serious.  
We forget the things in life that should take precedent.  
I lost sight of everything.  
I should have put in front as important.

I should have recognized that.  
But it took a great fall and.  
One word from my 5 year old daughter.  
That word was “ Seriously “

That word sounded so funny coming from her.  
At that time it did not mean a lot.  
I just wondered where she got it from.  
She used it as A flabbergasted expression.

Now as I look back after my fall.  
That word puts a lot in perspective for me.  
I had somethings in the right place.  
But I also had other things that should never have been.

So now I sit here checking myself.  
Looking back and picking up the pieces.  
One thing stands out bright,  
The young kids have a lot right about what is important in life.

One, Family first.  
Two, Always love what you do and do what you love.  
Three, No need to rush everything will come in time.  
Four, Always do your best and try, try, and try again.

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Dana Pleas was born in Anchorage, Alaska but grew up mostly in Kansas. She is 43 and has been married going on 21 years and has 4 lovely children. She currently is a undergraduate at Cloud County Community College in Junction City, Ks were she lives. She is pursuing a degree as a vet technician. She loves to draw and paint and write poetry in her spare time as well as cooking great food. She cares for her aging husband while attending to her schooling.



**“A Funeral Party”**  
**Logan Sprague**



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Logan Sprague is a native of Kansas and a sophomore attending Cloud as a graphic designer major. After graduating from Cloud, Logan intends to carry on his education and attend University. Along with graphic design Logan is an avid music lover and musician, creating a mix of goth and metal music, and also a photographer, with interest in polaroid film photography.

**“Yo Mama”  
Aeryn Rekward**

Want to hear a joke?

Yo Mama is so poor; she bounces food stamps!

Didn't you laugh?

Well, I didn't think it was very funny when my mom worked herself to the ground.

Hands shaking, throbbing, peeled to the bone,

Just to feed her two young children some days going hungry herself.

Only to have kids and teachers subject her children to the harmful derision of mockery.

*“You need to tell your mom to feed you more!” “Skin and Bone!”*

*“Chicken noodles not enough!” “Mosquito bites!” “What are you wearing?!”*

**STOP!**

**PLEASE JUST LEAVE THEM ALONE!**

Because we didn't think your jokes were very funny.

Your mama's so poor... Yeah, but she tried.

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Aeryn Rekward is a native of Kansas and a sophomore at Cloud County Community College, soon graduating with an Associates of Arts degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. Aeryn is still undecided on a university, but she plans to become a mortician. In her spare time, she likes to do arts and crafts, most specifically crochet.

## **“Images in the Dark”**

**Aiclyn Eller**

I would look up at the dark ceiling  
and watch the swirling specks.  
I would watch them turn into people.  
Tall people and short people.

Sometimes they would look friendly  
and then their faces would warp,  
Turning into monsters with terrible smiles

But they can't hurt me.  
My feet are under the covers.

Sometimes I would look at the specks  
and I was certain I could see air.  
Or maybe they were fairies.

But then it stopped.

It stopped when I no longer had my bed.  
Because he thought taking his things were more important than his daughter's  
comfort.

It stopped when the yelling stopped.  
When the house was quiet and his t-shirts still hung in the closet.  
When even though I was angry I would smell them when no one was looking.

It stopped because I had to grow up.  
I had to be someone my father never was.  
Someone who cared for my mom.  
Someone who cared for my sister.  
Someone who fought off the monsters hiding under *my* bed.

Someone who would never scare the ones they loved.

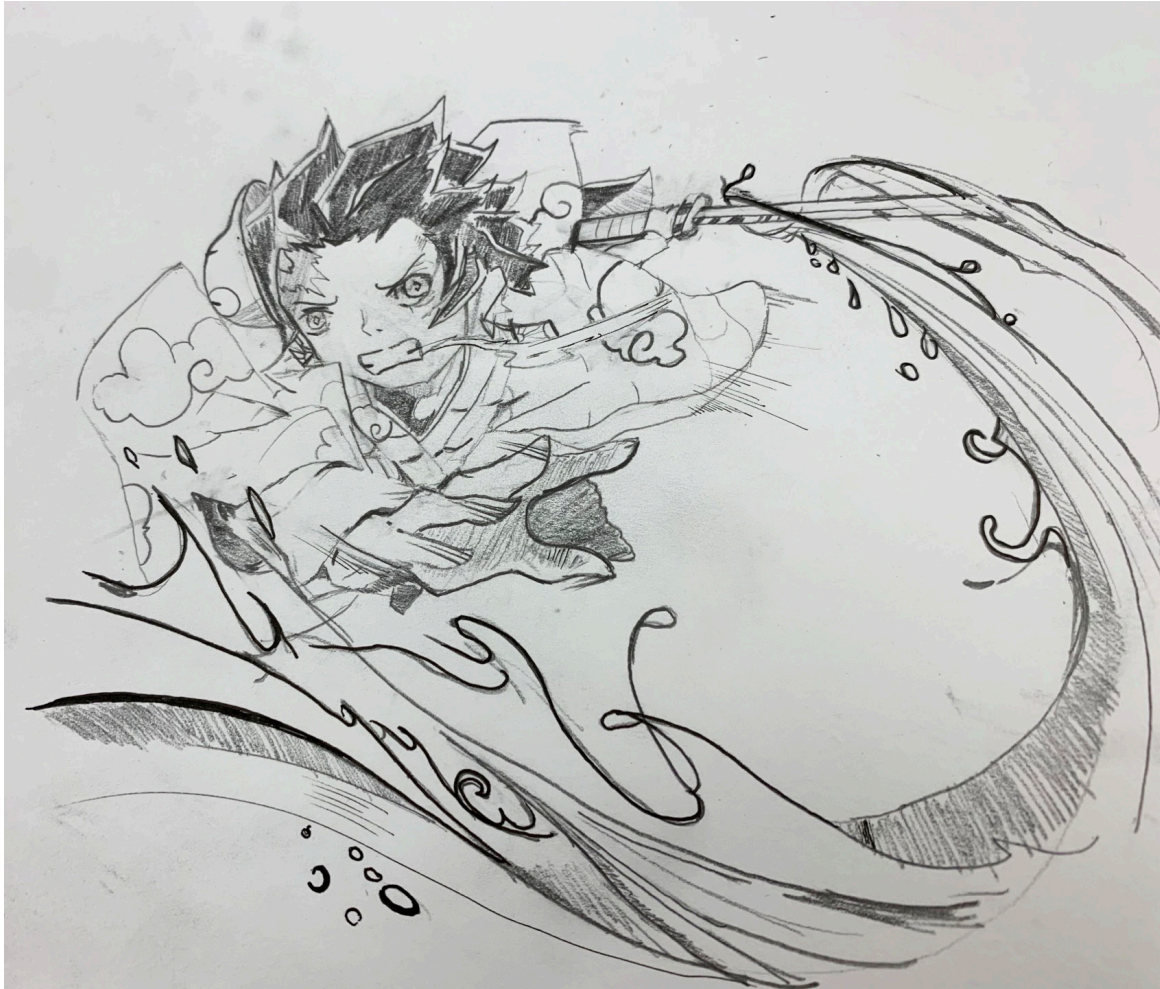
Maybe I was too tired to see the specks after that.  
Maybe I knew I didn't need to make up monsters anymore.  
Because sometimes real life monsters are enough.

Even if that real life monster should have protected you from the imaginary  
ones in your head.

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Aiclyn Eller is a sophomore at Cloud majoring in Biology. After graduating, she plans on attending KCKCC to study mortuary science. In the future, she hopes to own her own funeral home to celebrate the lives of loved ones. In her free time, she enjoys going on adventures and being with friends and family.

**“Water Surface Slash”  
Warren Abonza**



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Warren Abonza is a native of Manhattan, Kansas and a freshman at Cloud within the graphic design area. After graduation, he plans on attending Kansas University and hopes to one day become a great video game animator. In his spare time, he enjoys drawing as well as reading. He strives to master drawing different angles and positions of fictional characters.



## **“Spring Comes”**

**Erica Sublett**

Iris skipped past me in the park so fast I almost didn't have time to call out her name before she would have been out of sight. She turned, her light brown hair appearing silky as it caught the sun's rays. Her freckles seem to glimmer in the light. Bright eyes catching mine. Iris squeals and rushes back to me, throwing herself on top of me in an unsurprisingly tight bear hug. Her usual greeting.

Iris spoke in soft musical tones, “It's been a while hasn't it?”

“Yes it has! How was your vacation? It's been a long one this year hasn't it?” I replied, as Iris sat down on the bench next to me.

“It sure was a long time! The weather has been keeping us at a delay, It's been all over the place this year! It's been hard to predict. But we should be here to stay for a while now hopefully. There's already lots to do for spring this year. Flowers need pollination, seeds need planting, and hibernating animals need to be woken up.” She spoke all in one breath, hands and feet fidgeting with excitement.

“I've always loved your passion for Spring! Your positive attitude always rubs off on me! I can already feel my winter depression leaving my body as we speak!” I said

“Aww you flatter me! But I'm just doing my job!” replied Iris bashfully.

“Nonsense! You always go above and beyond to make sure spring is beautiful every year!” I exclaimed.

“Oh stop it, all that high talk will go straight to my head” Iris said, turning bright red and nervously playing with her hair. “Besides, all the seasons are just as important, and all are beautiful in their own unique way.”

“I know, but that will never change the fact that you will always be my favorite season. It's always fun to see you! You should try to stay a bit longer this year since you came later than you usually do.” I said hopefully.

“That's the plan! I would really like to stay longer this year! But I cannot control the actual weather, it's always unpredictable. Lucky for me, Summer and I are good friends, she doesn't mind if I stay a bit longer and working with her is always a blast! She isn't grumpy like winter, he always destroys my hard work if I start too soon by freezing everything! OH! Look at the time! I must get going, lots to do! Anyways it was nice getting to catch up with you! Be sure to take care!” Iris said, hopping up quickly.

“It's been nice seeing you Iris, I hope to catch you again sometime soon! Have a good rest of the day and don't work too hard!” I said with a wink, and off she went. Skipping down the road, deeper into the park.

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Erica Sublett is from Courtland, Kansas. She is a freshman at Cloud County Community College. She plans on continuing to pursue her passions of cooking and baking, along with graphic design.



**“Butterfly Cadence”**  
**Brenton Phillips**



(acrylic applied with nylon-tipped drumsticks playing my high school marching cadence)

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Brenton Phillips began teaching at Cloud County Community College in 2002, after teaching high school English, drama, yearbook, and forensics for sixteen years. Currently, Phillips serves as Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business and Chair of the Humanities Department. His interests include reading and writing, theatre, watching classic films, baseball, camping, playing guitar and drums, and studying history and music.

**“Crowning Glory”**  
**Julia Galm**

She wants her hair to grow too large  
to be containable, restrainable.  
No sleek buns nailed down with scalp-scrapping pins  
or shellacked over with glistening spray.  
No “extra hold.” No “maximum control.”  
Not a lifeless thing displayed behind glass,  
but a follicular bevy, a hive of hair fluttering, darting  
about her in a buoyant bouffant.  
Alighting upon a bared shoulder,  
ready with venomous split ends.

She wants wisps and curls  
to unfurl themselves in tangled tendrils,  
see them stretch outward in hungry exploration,  
reaching silken strands to bask in the glistening sun  
or to slink into pools of cool shadows, soothing snarls.  
Eye-catching coils hiding thorny barbs and daggers.

She wants to cast wide the web of locks to  
harbor orphaned birds, strays, and fly-aways,  
A defensive cocoon within an offensive coif.  
Knotted claws cleave an egosystem of her own making.  
And unmaking.

She will capture chaos to carry the wild with her—  
Her crowning glory.

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Julia Galm teaches within the Communications Department and serves as a member of the Title IX team. She enjoys vegan cooking and baking, playing a dwarf warrior in D&D, and going on midwestern adventures. She hopes to one day age disgracefully into a figure much like Baba Yaga.



**“Artist Rendering”  
Kenzie Cooper**



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Kenzie Cooper is a sophomore from Wamego, Kansas and is pursuing her degree in Elementary Education. Following her time at Cloud where she is on the volleyball team, a student ambassador and a member of the Phi Theta Kappa, she will attend McPherson College to continue her academic and athletic career. In addition to painting, she also enjoys baking and fishing in her free time.

## **“Obtaining the Holy Grail”**

**Suzette Ghent**

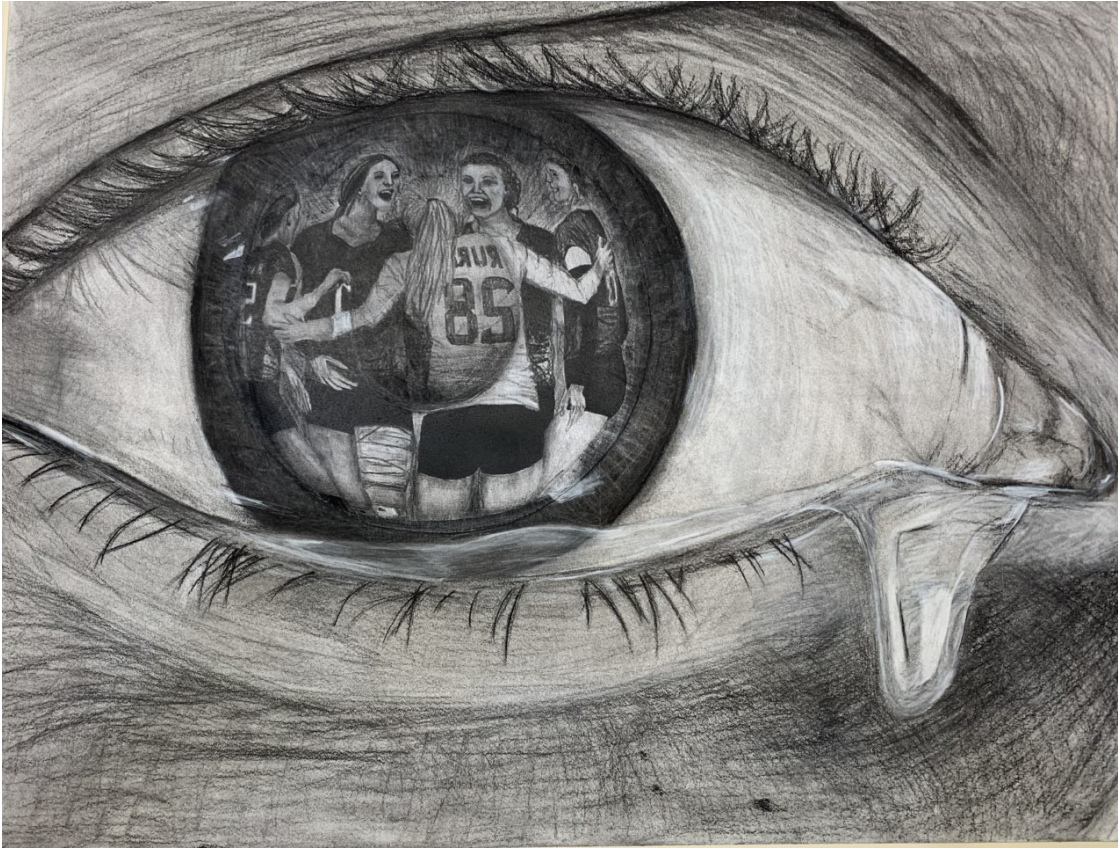
The anticipation and tension are palpable. The prize has been advertised, sought after, and dreamed about. I scan the crowd for the true competitors. They have been spotted. Each looking for their true competitors. Eye contact is made; we know each other. We have won against each other, and we have lost to each other. We search for more. Sweat is beading on my brow; my body is tingling. We each slightly shake our head to the others. No other true competitors are present. However, one can always surprise you. The clock is ticking down the minutes. Three bodies shoulder and elbow their way to the front. My heart rapidly beating, I smell victory. I feel victory. I am victory. Only seconds now as the controller adjusts their headset. The time has come! The controller bellows, “The bidding starts at \$1000!”

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Suzette Ghent was raised in the South and has lived in Kansas for the past twenty years. She joined the faculty of Cloud in 2007. She has been the lead English and Communications instructor on the Geary County Campus since 2015. In 1996, she received her Masters of Fine Arts degree from Florida State University. Suzette is an avid Barbie collector and loves to travel and spend time with her husband, children, Archie (her bratty Corgi), and Oliver (her perfect cat).



**“Senior Year”  
Katelynn Brogan**



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Katelynn Brogan graduated from Washburn Rural High School and is now a freshman at Cloud County Community College. She is a part of the volleyball team and plans on majoring in Elementary Art Education. After her two years at Cloud she hopes to pursue two more years of volleyball at a 4-year college. In her spare time she enjoys fishing, playing yard games and painting.



## **“Haute Couture Murder”**

### **Alina Vetrova**

As they made their way through the dark, dense forest, they could feel the chill of the night air creeping into their bones. They were both experienced detectives and were not easily intimidated, but the darkness of the forest was still unsettling. However, they pressed on, determined to solve the question occupying all their thoughts: what is happening in this forest?

Between two trees, barely illuminated by the pale light of the moon, in a dank haze lay a body. Everything around seemed too ideal, fake and unrealistic, as if someone had cut this section out of the forest from a Shishkin painting. Even the air seemed to have stopped.

“Don’t you think this is strange?”

The phrase, that jumped out of Victor’s and Frithof’s mouth simultaneously, echoed through the forest, breaking its dead silence. Speaking at the same time had already become a regular occurrence for them. Eight years of joint work could not pass without a trace—whether they wanted it or not, they developed together like centuries-old trees growing nearby. Being in the company of one person for days, it is impossible not to start living and even thinking in a similar way, inadvertently adopting character traits and facial expressions. Ironically, each always saw each other as two lonely strangers, bound only by work.

Taking a second to sort through their racing thoughts, they looked at each other and silently continued to study the crime scene with their eyes. They seemed to exchange thoughts without words, like two super-computers connected to the same network.

Every breath of forest air involuntarily brought back to both of them memories of their first case as a team. Then they, completely inexperienced and full of enthusiasm, also explored the crime scene, looking behind every tree and under every stone. Each seemed to be trying to impress the other with their guesses and knowledge; they did not know how to listen to each other at all and work like a Swiss clockwork—smoothly and accurately. Of course, the years taught them a lot and gave them the most valuable thing—strong friendship and the ability to work together; but both of them remained young and stubborn in their souls, denying the importance of each other in their lives.

The same memories, inspired by associations with the past, were at the same time both confusing and helpful to find the right solution for the investigation. The collection of evidence took place in complete silence for the detectives; only the police, cordoning off the crime scene, were buzzing nearby like locusts on a summer evening. The identity of the victim was established almost immediately. Jonathan Hutchinson, forty three year old, owner of a successful voice assistant business, was stabbed to death around two a.m. that same day.

The profile of the perpetrator formed itself in Victor’s head, and he confidently declared: “We are supposedly looking for a man between the ages of twenty and twenty four, about 6’1, and the part of the same the social circle of the murdered. Obviously, the attack was made with a dagger of about 8 inches, but our colleagues from the forensic science will provide us with more accurate information.”

Half-heartedly listening to the reasoning of a senior colleague, Frithof wrote something in a notebook, standing over a barely visible footprint. “Coppers, huh,”; he said to himself; “Victor, look, he’s really about six feet tall, and he wears those fancy new shoes,”; he said mockingly, pointing with his finger at the slightly visible contour of Yves Saint Laurent engraving imprint inside the footprint.

Victor carefully examined the find and smirked, “Yes, our buddy made our work easier and signed his own sentence. He absolutely couldn’t leave the house without getting fancy...

Nice place for fashion week,” he chuckled sarcastically, running his eyes over the branches and stones lying everywhere.

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The investigation was going suspiciously well—the evidence turned out to be very telling; there was no confusion: to complete the utopian picture, only the murder weapon with the fingerprints left was missing. All trails led to Saul Badman, a lawyer working for Hutchinson’s company. Badman was one of the most famous and prestigious lawyers in the state, with great media fame, recognition, and a huge flow of wealthy clients. Everyone in the department knew about Badman’s professionalism and his brilliant knowledge of the law, therefore, almost immediately, many participants in the investigation saw his possible involvement in the case logical—being able to cover his tracks, deftly juggling the laws, he could easily get out of the water dry. But what, then, was his motive? Envy? Personal conflict with a client? An attempt to get financial gain, to carry out financial fraud after the death of the company’s owner? All of these guesses seemed to be quite good explanations of motive for the young members of the team, but Victor saw them extremely childish and unprofessional, constantly drawing Frithof’s attention to the department head’s apparent unhealthy interest in taking Saul into custody.

The suspicious interest of Michael Verdinsky, the head of the police department, became clearer with each passing day of the investigation. He constantly urged Victor to make a decision on Badman as soon as possible and take the case to the court, assuring that no one would check the conduct of investigative measures and that all the evidences already speak for themselves. There was barely concealed anger and nervousness on his face every time he received a refusal and a request for additional interrogation of a suspect.

At one of their regular Friday meetings, Verdinsky no longer concealed his mood; enraged at his disobedience to orders, he rudely snapped Victor out of his thoughts: “Detective Cavelier, what are you playing at? Stop beating a dead horse, the case has long begged you to take it to court! Are you so heartless that you do not want to put the soul of the unfortunate Hutchinson to rest by bringing Badman to justice?”

The detective’s patience was running out; he, rising from his chair, looked at his opponent with a stern, contemptuous look. “Are you talking about heartlessness, Officer Verdinsky?” he said in a calm but attacking tone. “You are about to convict a man whose guilt has not been proven. You are not humane, you are cruel and biased. Is it our goal to put an innocent person behind bars? We serve justice, honesty and truth, not chasing the number of “successfully” solved cases.” After a moment’s pause, he continued, angrier, “I’m aware of the fact that you and Badman haven’t gotten along since your days at Stanford. Did you really decide after so many years to take revenge so stupidly, and moreover with someone else’s hands?”

The face of the head of the department turned purple, it seemed that he was about to jump out of his boots from overflowing anger. “Dismissed!” he said through gritted teeth.

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The detectives’ office became visibly empty. The abandoned office chair sometimes creaked in the draught, and on the table, on which there always used to be a pile of papers, now only a cup of unfinished Frithof americano stood alone. Detective Frithof Waldkauz has now been appointed chief investigator in the case. Even after two months of working alone after Victor’s dismissal, he still habitually started each new work day by grabbing two mugs from the cafeteria to make coffee later, but then he returned one to its

place each time. A strange feeling of inner desolation swept over him at these moments. He felt like an important part of his life just disappeared in a moment. At first, Frithof thought that he was just bored alone and that he was simply not used to work in a new style, but now he began to realize that with Victor's resignation, he was left not only without a colleague, but also without his only friend. They always had mutual respect, trust, and support, as well as a shared sense of purpose, values, and experiences. They were both feeling comfortable being themselves around each other, and they were always there for each other in times of need—whether it was providing a listening ear, giving a helping hand, or simply being present.

“True friends always have each other's backs,” thought detective Waldkauz, tearing up papers prepared for the trial of Saul Badman.

Taking a piece of paper from the table, he went to Officer Verdinsk's office. He entered without saying a single word and, after giving the head of the department a stern blank look, he placed a piece of paper on the table with a confident hand. It read “Resignation Letter” at the top in black ink. Frithof left the office in complete silence.

The way home seemed eternal. He was pulled out of his thoughts by a text: “Beer at six?” A barely perceptible smile flickered across Frithof's face. “Sure,” he replied almost immediately, thinking about how fitting the offer was. “A true investigator, huh, almost a psychic” he laughed to himself.

They met at the local pub they used to go to, their usual spot. The bartender greeted them with a friendly smile and handed them their beer, then went back to wiping glasses. They clinked their bottles and took a sip in silence, both deep in thought.

“How's work going?” Victor asked, breaking the silence.

“Unemployed people don't have work going,” Frithof chuckled.

Silence hung in the air. Victor looked questioningly at his former colleague.

“Have you ever been disappointed in life?” Frithof asked rhetorically, leaving no room for an answer. “Sometimes things just fall apart, and you have to make the difficult decision to move on.... I quit today. I could no longer look at the faces of these corrupt clowns.”

Victor couldn't believe what he was hearing. A mixture of joy, confusion and pride filled him. All that time, just like his friend, he was thinking about morality, saving a human face in matters of law and, of course, friendship. “Siamese twins”, “one brain for two”, “geniuses who went crazy at the same time” - it was not without reason that their colleagues called them so among themselves.

“I truly appreciate it, really. Not every colleague would do that, huh?” Victor chuckled with a sad note in his tone of voice. After a short pause, he continued slightly hesitantly, “We are complete fools. We are two adult men, but we were thinking worse than toddlers. ‘I don't have any friends!’ ‘I'm so lonely, this job has swallowed me from head to toe, there's absolutely no time even to make friends with people,’ we reasoned like that all our lives, didn't we?”

Frithof shook his head in agreement. “We have always been so focused on the work that we missed the main thing... You know, I feel that true friendship that we were looking for was right in front of us all the time,” he said, continuing Cavalier's thought.

They talked for hours, discussing their concerns and frustrations with the case, and their growing suspicion of Verdinsky. They shared their theories, and even though they still didn't have all the answers, they were determined to uncover the truth.

“We can still make a difference,” Victor said, determined. “We just need to stay focused and not let anyone get in our way.”

Frithof nodded in agreement. “And most importantly, we need to stick together. No matter what.”

They finished their beer and headed out, both feeling a sense of renewed purpose. They knew that the road ahead was not going to be easy, but they were ready to face any challenge that came their way. The investigation of Jonathan Hutchinson case was far from over, and they were determined to see it through to the end, no matter what.

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Alina Vetrova is an international student from Russia, Republic of Buryatia, Ulan-Ude. She is a freshman at Cloud majoring in Criminal Justice. She came to the USA with a strong desire to participate in creating a safe and secure community, and she dreams of becoming a criminal investigator. After graduation she plans to transfer to a four-year university to continue her education. Alina speaks Russian, English and German. She enjoys music and has 13 years of choir experience. She loves dogs and is eager to get up close with the work of the K-9 Unit.

## **“Never Never Land”**

### **Jeremiah Johnson**

This is a story about a boy who struggles with life, and all that comes with it. School, Work, friends, and family. He just wanted to live a normal life—a life without big expectations—in a world where he feels like he could be himself and not worry about feeling judged or mistreated just because of who he was, the way he talks, or the way he thinks. He didn't want to feel alone in the world, but he also couldn't trust the people there around him, feeling like at any moment they could turn on him leaving him to rot. The only thing he could do now throw on a fake smile and pretend that everything was okay, that he was no longer himself anymore. All he wanted to do was lock himself in his room and cry to stop all of these thoughts about himself. What if he were to just disappear, poof away from this life self-deprecating life he was trapped in, and transported to a place where freedom and adventure were not only expected but encouraged. Would there be anyone to mourn him or would they just brush the thought of him away like he never existed, like he'd never break every bone in his body, twist every limb till they snapped, all for the comfort of the ones who claimed to love him.

As a boy, he would stay home with his mother, and she would tell him all these exciting stories about adventure in a far-off land; about a boy named Peter Pan who fought pirates with just his sword, talked to mermaids, and flew with fairies. He danced with Indians and played pranks on his friends, the lost boys. The Boy envied Peter, he wanted to be just like him, to never have a care in the world, to live just the way he wanted. To be free, away from all those high expectations in a world where he could be happy and have fun. Neverland is a special place, full of wonders and life. His mom would talk about the many places at Neverland like the mermaid lagoon, Indian Camp, Cannibal Cove, Skull Rock, and who could forget Peter Pan and The Lost Boys' secret location Hangman's Tree.

He was tired of living in a world full of problems and rules; he wanted to be free from everything. So thinking about what he heard in the many books about Peter Pan, he opened his window and thought of happy thoughts, and before taking the leap of faith out of the window, he whispered to himself, “I do believe in fairies; I do, I do. As he hit the ground with a pop. Everything was black for a few seconds, and when he opened his eyes, there sat Peter Pan, Tinker Bell, and the Lost Boys. “You're awake,” said Peter to the boy. The boy asked Peter, “Where am I?”. Peter Pan and the Lost Boys begin to help the boy up to his feet and Peter Pan extends his hand out to the world and said, “You're in Neverland.”

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Jeremiah Johnson is a sophomore from Salina, Kansas majoring in Psychology. For fun he enjoys hanging out with friends. After he graduates from Cloud, he plans to transfer to Fort Hays or Emporia State University to get his B.A. in Psychology. Jeremiah would like to thank his family and friends for always supporting him.



## **“Forgotten Ruins”**

### **Christopher Hester**

It was another Sunday evening at Jake’s house. Chad and his friends all got together at seven o’clock in the evening to play their weekly session of DnD. Chad was a young Caucasian male with blue eyes and blonde hair. He was quirky and didn’t really get out much except to play DnD with the group.

Chad pulls out his phone to check the time. It is currently six-thirty pm, and he is running behind. It’s a twenty-minute drive to Jake’s house and he still has to stop and get gas before the drive. He begins to write up a text to his friend, Jake, that he may or may not be late to the session. Jake replies immediately and tells him it’ll be fine because someone else is going to be a few minutes late already.

Chad grabs his bag that has his character sheet and dice and heads out the door. He hops in his blue colored two-thousand and seven Pontiac, throwing his backpack in the passenger side seat. He heads to the closest gas station to pump some gas, grabbing an energy drink to get him through the night in case the session runs past four hours again. A four-hour DnD session wasn’t uncommon. In fact, anything shorter than four-hours was considered to be a small session and probably wouldn’t get anything done as far as main questing goes. This wasn’t a bad thing though; it just means that Chad could hang out with all of his close friends for longer and have a good time.

Chad finally makes it to Jake’s house ten past seven. He rushes into the house without knocking, saying hello to Jake’s mother as he runs down into the basement. Everyone was there already, and Chad caught the back end of a conversation on Ryan’s character sheet.

“No, you can’t change a spell you picked at level three. That’s cheating. Be happy with what you have.” Jake said while arguing with Ryan.

Ryan responded, “Well, I think that’s dumb. I only needed it at level three, but now that we are level nine, I don’t really want acid slash anymore though. I hardly ever use it.”

“Not my problem man. We all have to live with the weight of our decisions. Be grateful you’re all still alive. Level nine isn’t an easy level to achieve you know.”

Chad smiled as he started listening a little more to their conversation. Ryan was always trying to add something or manipulate it’s definition to fit his needs. He is what was referred to as the “problem player.” Someone who is never happy with what he has and is always trying to change the game how he wants too.

“You’re finally here! Guys we can get started now.” Said Debbie.

Debbie was the only girl that played with us. She was a level nine cleric who, inside the game, has a thing for Ryan’s sorcerer. Their back stories were sort of similar to each other and they just kind of went with that as a means to have more roleplay early on. It worked out well for everyone because she got a small bonus that the DM (dungeon master), Jake, gave to her for doing well at the roleplay early on. She is the main driver for our campaign as she is really the most outgoing person Chad has personally ever seen. Chad is a level nine wizard who tends to clash a lot of the time with Ryan in and out of the session. In DnD, wizards and sorcerers are naturally always bickering amongst themselves. This is because wizards learn all of their magic through studying lore and spells either through an academic level, or personal study. The more they learn the more powerful they become. Whereas Sorcerers have an innate ability to learn magic. It comes naturally to them, and they don’t even have to lift a finger to cast any magic. This causes some heated debates between the two classes because wizards argue that they are more dedicated to the weave of magic whereas sorcerers can’t appreciate what they have because they have never

had to work for it. Sorcerers are the jocks of modern society and wizards are the know-it-alls who can't stop pushing what they have learned on others.

Outside of session, Ryan and Chad just never really got along. They aren't lifelong friends like Jake and Chad, but they have been friends for a few years now. Ryan is just naturally controlling and tries to micromanage everything him and Chad did together. Chad was the opposite; he just wanted to relax in the comforts of his own home and play video games after school. Which never really happened because Chad either ended up just doing more homework to stay ahead or read a book.

"Hey guys, thanks for waiting for me. You guys ready to take back Mount Mikuel?"

This seemed to get everyone at the table excited. Debbie was the first to respond, "Let's do it!" She said with a smile, "I can't wait to see what kind of magic items we find up there!"

Ryan jumped in as well, also excited, "Or what kind of monsters we will find!"

Jake dimmed the lights to an eerie setting and gave us a quick recap of last session and went on to explain the current setting.

"It's a little past early morning, you guys all feel well rested, and you packed up your gear from the other day. You start to head up the mountain when you come across an old shaft that seems to be abandoned. You don't know where it leads, but it looks like it goes into the mountain."

Ryan is quick to say, "Let's do it! Who knows what we could find in there?!"

Debbie and Chad look at each other than both say "It's probably not a good idea man. Jack isn't here today, who knows what will happen to us?"

"Whatever, he is only a fighter. We can melt whatever we see without unstoppable magic."

Chad chimed in, "What if they are resistant to magic? Or rush us with melee weapons? What then? We don't have our meaty tank to distract most of the combat we will encounter."

"Fine... I get what you're saying, and its logical. Let's move on up the mountain thin." Ryan says this and sits back in his chair defeated.

Jake doesn't look to happy at the thought of his party not going into the old ancient ruins that he worked so hard on but carries on with the session. Later in the session, about halfway up, the party sees the same entrance to the ruins.

Debbie is the first to react, "Wait, the same entrance?"

Jake replies, "Roll an investigation check."

"Natural 20."

"Yes, it is identical to the first one you say. You feel a hint of magic leaking from the entrance."

Chad enters the conversation, "Hmm, sooo.... Its important. That much is apparent. All the more reason to avoid it until Jack is here."

Jake gives the same look as last time and asks the party, "So, do you all want to continue up the mountain?"

Everyone shakes their heads in agreement and begin to scale the mountain once again. They get a few miles further up the mountain when they are met with powerful creatures called the "new" ones.

"Uh oh," Ryan goes on, "These guys are no joke. Are we sure we want to fight them?"

Jake butts in and informs the party that the entrance to the ruins has just reappeared again and that the party has an option to go in there if they want to flee.

"Wait," Chad said, "You mean to tell me that we can only flee if we go in the ruins?"

"No, not necessarily. Your chances are higher though if you decide to retreat within the ruins."

Chad, getting physically upset, "Okay, so what does everyone else want to do? I choose to fight. I won't let these guys push us into the mines where they want us."

Debbie and Ryan both join in and agree to fight the “new” ones. They have an epic fight with a couple close calls, but thanks to Debbie, the party manages to pull through with slivers of health.

“Can we do a short rest?” Chad asks.

Jake responds almost immediately with a grumpy face, “No. This area doesn’t seem safe enough. But there are some ruins you can go inside and rest in.” “Seriously dude? What’s your deal with these ruins?”

Jake seems to brush off the question and tells the party that there is another wave of “new” ones coming and they have to make a decision. Debbi and Ryan decide to go into the ruins, but Chad, out of spite, decides to stay and fight. Claiming that it will give the party a chance to get further away from the creatures. Ryan and Debbi not wanting to make new characters agreed to this and sadly went inside, leaving Chad behind. Chad fought the “new” ones off as long as he could before his character finally died. He looked at Jake with a menacing look, almost tearing up at the loss of his witty wizard, Arch Duliok.

“Why...” Chad said with a pause, “Why did you want us to go in there so bad?”

Jake, not looking Chad in the eyes, “I gave you a choice man. It’s not my fault. You can roll a new character while we go through the ruins. If you do it fast enough, we could add you in as a lost adventurer or something.”

Chad was not on the same page and broke out into a subtle cry. “I am leaving. Thanks for nothing, *bro*.”

Chad got up from the table and made his way out of the room. Debbie and Ryan sat there in silence until he left. Debbi gave Jake a dirty look and went out to catch Chad before he left.

“Chad! Hey, wait up.”

Chad stopped just outside of his car. “I’m not going back in there. He was railroading way to hard. And to put the icing on the cake, he killed me.”

“You were the one that decided to stay outside and ‘defend us.’” Debbie snapped. “Look...” she said more softly, “Don’t be too hard on him. This is his first campaign. Don’t give up on it yet. I am sure he feels bad. Its not easy for anyone at the table to lose a character. Especially when you’re the one responsible for it. Make a character and we will see you next Sunday?”

Chad wiped his face and looked at Debbie, “Okay... I will do that then. Thanks Debbie. I appreciate you coming out here to talk to me. Enjoy your campaign. You better find me something in that damn ruin.” He said with a little side smirk.

“Catch you around dweeb.” Debbie said and lightly punched Chad on the arm before she went back inside to join the other two.

Chad got in his car feeling a little better than before. He started up his Pontiac and started heading home. He decided to take the scenic route in hopes of giving him a little bit of time to clear his head and think of a new character for next week. He drove for fifteen-to-twenty minutes before you found himself to be in an area unfamiliar to him. He pulled over to gather his bearings and started to put his address in. The sky started to get a little bit cloudier, just before it started to drizzle. Chad saw a low-key coffee shop and ran inside to relax for a moment before going home. When he walked in, the only sound was from the radio behind the counter that seemed to play some type of Celtic flute tune. There was nobody in the building, not even behind the counter.

Chad called out, “Hello? Is there anyone in here?”

Chad started to explore the area a little bit, pulling some books off the shelves to take a look at them. When he pulled a book down that read “The Forgotten Ruins” on the spine, the bookshelf slowly creaked open, followed by an unlocking sound—like a key to a lock. A cool breeze came from behind the shelf when Chad opened it up entirely, leaving him with the hairs on his neck standing up.

He called out one last time, “Hello?” and then cautiously made his way inside.

He walked down a flight of stairs before coming upon a torch lit hall with a door at the end. He walked up to it and on the door read “Enter into the ruins if you care. Some may come out, or some may die, will you dare?” Chad put his hand on the knob and felt a surge of other worldly power enter in his body starting from his hand. The world around him seemed to go dark as he fell unconscious.

Chad woke up wearing a weird robe and wielding a staff with a travelers bag on the ground and a small grimoire opened spine up. It wasn't long before he was greeted by someone in fully body armor.

“Wake up wizard, the day is young, and we have much to explore before the new ones catch up to us. Gather your belongings. I will wake the others.”

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Christopher Hester is a Sophomore at Cloud County Community College. His goals include transferring to University of North Texas, getting a master's in creative writing, reading/writing, and learning Japanese to one day spend most of his days wondering the jaw-dropping scenes there. Christopher hopes to one day be able to write for a living and live his days drinking copious amounts of caffeine and binging his favorite amines.

**“TARDIS Door, TARDIS Lights”**  
David Shirkey



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David Shirkey resides in Concordia, Kansas, and teaches Mathematics and Statistics at Cloud County Community College. He enjoys drawing, painting and woodworking. He is an avid Doctor Who fan, as is his son Phillip who wanted a Doctor Who themed bedroom.



## **“The Skull Key”**

### **Justice Good**

There is a skull shaped key that can reveal the unknown. It was hidden in a small dark damp space. I tried every door. The peculiar thing is, it fits all of them. I slid it into an aged door, and as I turned the key, I listened for the click that proved success. When I opened the door, I was struck with the reality that the key in my hand should have never been found. I was greeted with the sight of a colorless world, a forgotten kingdom covered in mist. Though it was dark and eerie, I stepped through the doorway, but regretted my decision as sounds of crunching reached my ears. My treacherous mind filled in the blanks of what was being crunched, and it was not a pretty image. A ground shaking growl began, and the image in my head became a shadowed monster munching on the bones of others that were stupid enough to follow their curiosity through the door. I stepped back hoping to make a quick retreat to safety, but it was too late. The door slammed closed. It was solid against my back. I tried the handle only to find it locked. I slid the peculiar skull key through the lock expecting the same result as every time before, but it refused to turn. Despair rose up in me as I turned it with all my strength only to realize that I had found the one lock the key would not fit. The skull key slipped from my fingers and disappeared into the mist.

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Justice Good is majoring in social science. She began taking classes at Cloud County Community College in 2022 and plans to graduate in 2024. Eventually, Justice wants to work as a forensic psychologist. Justice enjoys learning about the human mind, reading, and writing about fantasy/mysteries.

**“Palm Rotation”  
Warren Abonza**



Warren Abonza is a native of Manhattan, Kansas and a freshman at Cloud within the graphic design area. After graduation, he plans on attending Kansas University and hopes to one day become a great video game animator. In his spare time, he enjoys drawing as well as reading. He strives to master drawing different angles and positions of fictional characters.

## “Round Robin” Brandom Galm

This way and that way, Paul butterfingers the bottle of lavender. His left hand holds three bottles, their necks choked by index (bay laurel), middle (lemongrass), ring (labdanum). His right hand, slick, barely holds one bottle. Nearby, Suzanne stirs and waits for bottles. They both stare across the room. A table with citrus, clove, cinnamon, and cubeb. A table with sandalwood, sage, spearmint, and saro. Paul places the bottles, creating a table with lavender, laurel, lemongrass, and labdanum.

“Can we do this?” Suzanne asks.

“We can do this,” Paul replies.

“What’s our mixture?” Suzanne asks.

“Our mixture is human,” Paul replies.

“A human is mixed variably. Which mix shall we use? Elemental? Blood and plasma? Psycho-social?”

“None of those, for certain.”

“What other then?”

“Love, care, compassion, hate. Our laurel, labdanum, lavender, lemongrass. Two-to- three-to-one-to-half.”

“Two love to three care to one compassion to half hate?”

“That is the ratio I believe in.”

Suzanne separates the bottles, sequences with Paul’s instructions. Her dropper tools are ready. Disinfected, rinsed, laser-lined for precision in measure. She squeezes rubber, pinch and release, pinch and release. She holds the glass to her ear, listens as air is pulled in and out with each pinch and release. Paul watches, side-eyes, criticizes.

Across the room, Paul sees citrus, clove, cinnamon, and cubeb. A body moves across light and shadow hides the rest. There is glass clinking. There is laughter chuckling. There is a voice in the air that tells him something. Paul ruffles, criticizes. Cut. Paul turns to Suzanne. “I’m going to use the restroom and grab a snack. Can I bring you back something?”

“A drink with fizz and kick, please.”

Paul turns from Suzanne. She wants desperately to dip the dropper, but takes a breath instead. All of her life, Suzanne wanted to be someone who created memories. Her own were fractured. She technically has some, owns some others, and leases the rest. The strongest, a time her family sat in a local pizza parlor, grease hanging in the air, visible, soaking into her clothes, the metal rack towering above her head, the pizza placed atop it, steam rising, pepperoni crackling, a deeply inhaled sensory appetizer preparing her for the main course of grease-drenched cheese that splattered her cheeks when she bit, her uncle complaining about something, her mother, his brother, telling him to quiet down, not in front of the children, her first bite boiling a blister into her tongue and roof of her mouth, her second bite seconds later doing the same, but not caring because it was delicious and warm. The weakest, a papercut at school, second or third grade, sliced on a vocabulary worksheet, blood seeping into *exactly, finally, gravity*.

“It’s coffee, but I had them use sparkling water.”

“Perfect,” she says, dipping her finger to test the temperature. “Also perfect,” she says, lifting the mug to her lips.

Lights return, bringing sweat to Paul’s brow, beads on downy fuzz. He dabs it away while Suzanne gulps her last gulp, and they return to their table. Suzanne picks up the dropper and looks over to Paul. He holds up a hand, lowers it; Suzanne raises her dropper, lowers it. They move as though it was rehearsed. It was not. A beautiful visual, indeed. A light swings toward the dance, casts shadows beneath them, larger and elongated, standard conversion of inches to yards.

Suzanne lifts the labdanum bottle and inserts the dropper, feeling it best to lead with care. Paul gently places a hand to hers.

“Let’s start with the hate. We’ll go smallest to largest. Then we can add the H<sub>2</sub>O, that hydration sensation, baby.”

“I can dig it.”

Suzanne lifts the lemongrass bottle and inserts the dropper. She squints as she squeezes, watches the oil replace air in the thinness of the glass. Her hand trembles as she squeezes again; the precision hits her nerves. Laser-line by laser-line, the oil leaves the vessel and is returned to bottle. Another line. Another. Almost too much, but Suzanne has done it! She nails her measurement for lemongrass!

Suzanne and Paul both realize they had torso-trapped their breath and exhale. Suzanne transfers the remains of the perfectly-measured dropper into a frosted beaker nearby. Now that the lemongrass is delivered, time seems to move more quickly. Less time remains. A new pressure system moves through. In the distance, a high-five, a low-five—some slapping of hands. Mumbles of agreement as sandalwood and spearmint somehow strike stability.

“Behind, behind, we fall behind. Now do the compassion. Follow hate with compassion. That’s what the Bible says, according to those who hate first.” Paul again authoritates. “Trickery of take take take then promise the gift.”

Suzanne closes an eye as she examines the lavender. Something is off with this bottle, she senses. She swirls it lightly, flicking a wrist. It could affect the mix. A risk they have to take. A second dropper is anointed; she squeezes the rubber and pulls. Looking at lines, she’s nailed it in one! A perfect pull! Without hesitation, she transfers it to the beaker. Compassion coalescing with hate, olfactoring fruit with floral. It is a delight, no doubt, a success as well.

A long and toothed zester ripping flesh from fruit. Purple...are they seeds? Purple seeds. Butter on a spoon, the lick of butter from a spoon, salty and not at all satisfying. Something in the air. Steam or smoke. An older woman reading from a card as an older man pipes a thought from another room. An arm tired from battering batter. A new lick, sweet from the mix. Salmonella, oops. The older man remains, perpetually.

Love is a struggle. It feels thicker.

“I’m struggling with love, Paul. In this case, friendship might suffice.”

“No, find the love with love, Suzanne. Love is the struggle. Love is the viscosity. Love is 10W40 to keep that engine firing on all cylinders.”

“Love need not change in three to six months.”

“We don’t have time. Please, just trust.”

“Love me?”

“Never.” Suzanne appreciates his bluntness, though his delivery could improve.

Her original dropper will not work. This laurel resists. She races across the room to get something more sturdy, something to match its thickness. This means no laser-lines, so it’s all intuition from here. Too much and it’s over. Too little and it’s over. It’s better to have love and lost. She’s in it to win it, that, right there, all the marbles.

Her hand muscle aches, the thick one between thumb and index, the one that so easily cramps with any sort of extended fingertip-to-tip action. Make it okay too long and it becomes clear. She is squeezed out it seems, but finds a way—the other hand. Of course, the perfect solution. A lefty by trade, a righty right now, Suzanne plunges the tip deep into the bay laurel. This is the moment her mother warned her of. Her father could care less, but barely.

Suzanne feels the momentum swing after depositing the laurel love into the beaker, but as a result is less careful with care. She spills an extra drop of labdanum into the beaker. Unintended, but still it’s there. A little more care never hurt a soul, Suzanne thinks to herself.

“A little more care never hurt a soul,” Suzanne says to Paul and others.

“Perfect. They can definitely use that,” Paul affirms to Suzanne and no other.

That extra drop, however, has added a touch of discord to the mix. Suzanne wanted the vanilla of amber, but got the punch of leather. It works. Does it work? It works. It has to work.

At the precise moment she stirs the final mix by adding the hydration sensation, baby, vaguely 90s power pop starts to play. The song is instrumental, lyricless, but familiar. Words she



knows that never existed. Suzanne hums along. Paul taps a beat. Others react similarly, other words in their heads. Same notes, different lyrics, mostly. Everyone hears *indication* in time to the bass lick, but the rest of the words are fleeting and ambiguous. Music making memories, Mandela-style—effects, not prisoner-presidents. A guitar kicks in and disrupts, wails and whammies, a solo that breaks any language formation. Suzanne realizes the drums are synthed, not sticked. Suzanne realizes the lyrics are there but she chooses not to hear them. Suzanne wants to dance, but not with Paul.

A light, the light. On her. On Paul. On others. Suzanne shields with a hand. Paul shifts his vision. On your marks.

“Ladies and gentlemen. What an incredible Round One.” This voice is powerful, booming in that deep bass that can rattle a thing that rattles easily. Which is to say, it is probably more of a baritone. “Let’s meet our judges.

“You know him from his work on such televisual shows as *Here!*, where he played the boy with two whole pennies to his name, or in *Dominus et Dominus* as Chris Volu. Most recently he can be seen on Broadway in a musical adaptation of a child’s dream, the part just before they wake up, paralyzed by hypnopompic visions of their mother doing handstands, but it turns out she was actually doing handstands. Loddies and gentlefolk, Gen. Frank Bunson!

“Next to Frank, we have the impeccable, impressionistic, impulsive, improbable, improvisational queen of the evening news, local to you, wherever you be, Ms. Miggan Marigoldringerfer. Miggan, might I say those socks are particularly pillly this evening. Are they old? The color is vibrant like a new blue sock, but those *pills!* Those pills!

“And of course, your host and steady judge, night after night, you love to hate him, but let’s be honest, he’s pretty toxic—Dominic Derrrrrrrrrr,” the baritone breathes, “rrrrrrrinker!

“And then there’s me, your emcee for this affair, but I am unimportant. I matter not beyond this handsome face and cordially curled coif (not a toupee).” This last part, like all parentheticals, is understood, not spoken. Everyone thinks it, wonders about it, but would never have the heart to mention it, especially not directly. The fragility, after all. So easily broken! The baritone resides in ears a moment more, then walks to his perch atop a blue-tape x on the floor.

Suzanne and Paul clap. The two citrus-clove-cinnamon-and-cubeb clap. The two sandalwood-sage-spearmint-and-saro clap. The judges clap for each other and themselves. It is rude and pretentious, but expected. Celebrate yourself and others will celebrate with you, out of obligation.

Suzanne and Paul have been randomly assigned third position, after citrus et al. and sandalwood et al. Paul thinks they should be second between citrus et al. and sandalwood et al., to keep things alphabetical. Is there no order to this chaos? Paul thinks in his head.

“Is there no order to this chaos?” Paul whispers to Suzanne.

“Cut,” A voice in the dark is there, suddenly, a silhouette only to Paul and Suzanne’s eyes. He is brought a sandwich, also a silhouette. Suzanne wonders what black tastes like, whether it has scent. “Tell that man to stop whispering. He is, after all, wearing a microphone, and as we know a microphone will catch the tiniest of sounds. Especially ours, which are of the very highest quality. Back to one.”

Paul is embarrassed, apologizes, fractures. Suzanne looks disheartened, worried it will affect the judges’ perceptions of them, which Suzanne believes are already incredibly low. Her mind drifts while the action lifts again. As the scene develops, Paul smiles, nods, laughs, nods, gasps, chuckles, pats, panders, laughs. He is a true player of the game now.

Suzanne dwells on her mistakes: the time she left the oven on and her house burned down; the time she walked a dog; the time she worked all day with ketchup on her chin; the time she purchased life insurance from a TV advertisement; the time she answered  $3x - 4 = 2$  with 7, *I guess?*; the time she answered the phone after her father died and didn’t cry; the time she spilled thynge rong; the time she, look a bird.

A bird enters.

“Cut.”



A bird flutters.

“Cut.”

A bird flip-flapping, cutting the air, is picked up by nine highest-of-quality microphones.

The bird lands on the table holding remnants and dripdrops of sandalwood, sage, and spearmint. No saro was spilled.

A woman speaks first, a woman from another pair. Not our Suzanne, not our Miggin:

“Look at this creature, an incredible round one, with its feathers all a flutter. Some black, some red, some black, some grey. These same things hold my head at night and some afternoons. He reminds me of my brother, all puffed in anger and confusion. What leads you to anger and confusion, birdy birdy?”

Next Dominic Derrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrinker, voices his ever-important opinion, and the room shifts their attention his direction. His blouse ruffles as he dictates:

“I know this beast. I know it well. I believe it followed me here from Tennessee. Yes, that is the one. The very and no other. How do I know, I can see you all about to ask, for I am a great anticipator—well, it is there in the eyes. And oh! Do you hear it? Do hear the tweeted song it sings us all? That voice I would recognize anywhere. For you know,” here he looks to Paul for acknowledgement, which Paul is more than happy to provide, “I received my second PhD in bird sing-songery from the University of South Dakota, the most prestigious sing-songery program in this great land. This was, as those in the know know, after my first PhD in biophysical camaraderie. Therefore, these eyes and these songs, those luxurious tones that you all can hear amplified by these high-quality microphones, piped into this sound system, converted into a digital signal, and then returned to the ear pieces each of us wears—these things prove, definitively, that this bird is the very bird that I first met in Tennessee.”

Suzanne speaks nexts, in an attempt to move the process along, anticipation anchoring her voice:

“This is a robin. Round and beautiful of voice.”

Paul bobs to Suzanne and elaborates, bobs to Dominic for reassurance, bobs to camera with soundbite:

“What my esteemed colleague and co-perfumerator means to say is that this bird is a robin. But it is not just any robin, as Dominic so eloquently stated. If we look at its size, we might determine its gender. This is very important, as the world informs us, because we are nosy and hard binaries keep us comfortable. I do not know whether this robin is male or female but I insist it be one or the other.”

Another male voice, whistly, this one attached to sandalwood et al.:

“It is our bird. We stake claim. The wings first beat upon our table, marking our luck in its favor.”

Several replies, synchronous:

“This is fair.” “This is true.” “I support.” “I uphold.”

Hearing no dissension, sandalwood et al. arises again:

“It is settled then. Shall I name it having claimed it? This is an important responsibility, and one that I take lightly. That was a joke, if you wish to use it. The audience enjoys my humor, I would guess. Let us think on what this bird represents and arrive at a name, for that is the greatness of names. All names are thrust. So let us think a moment and ponder. By us I of course mean I because I am the claimer who names. But saying us allows me to use your perspectives too. It is in the agreement we all sign when we acknowledge our humanity.”

The robin chirps again. Cries ring out from around the room; people reading the sing as a sign. It flits, briefly, over toward the judges table. Gen. Frank Bunson hides beneath it, admirable his performance of cowardice. The bird swoops up and around and this way and that. It rests again near a blinking red light on the black machine.

Suzanne is now lifting herself into the air. She feels floaty, but is probably just jumping really high. The bird and voices and chirps and the chits are too much. She wavers in flight. A dream and a memory are created. She will dream of this later, unsure of whether to call a nightmare or

night terror. She will remember this moment forever, unsure of whether to call it formative or hindering.

The judges are ready to announce winners of Round One. Suzanne and Paul hold each other's hands, left in right, respectively. The judges sniff. The judges waft. The judges pass judgment off. The air is an uncomfortable headache of scents, clashing and clanging. Cameraman on Camera Four wears a nose plug, experienced as he is, knowing where he is. His partner resents his arrival at home, so he showers at work now and brings an extra change of clothes. Suzanne is here with Paul, but they will leave separately.

Robins are everywhere, as common and humdrum as many in the studio. No one gets into birding by spotting a robin. Arguably, a cardinal and a blue jay are equally as common, but more celebrated. Why the robin is a state bird in two locations is anyone's guess. No one rushes home to tell their mother or father or sister or brother or imaginary friend about the robin they saw, unless the robin is dead, mutilated, or otherwise catastrophized. The exception is the nest for those who wish to celebrate it. A gutter, a porch, a shrub, a tree. Tell it, take a picture. In spring-time sticks and twigs hold round robin eggs. Later, blue shells litter the dirt, concrete, or wood planks below. Later, still robins occasionally litter the same spaces. Later still, some robins feign strength, fly away, become mundane and unspectacular, but territorial, griping, fighting with others because they can. To be the roundest voice in the room.

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Brandon Galm originally hails from Northeast Ohio, where he first developed his love for silliness and words. His first work--a Choose Your Own Adventure story called "The Case of the Missing Quartz," written and illustrated for an elementary school class--made his friends laugh, and he liked the feeling. He's been writing off and on ever since, seeking the approval of anyone who will read what he's done. His most recent publication is *Cosmic Microwave*, published by Red Flag Press. He currently resides in the windy city of Concordia, KS with his wife and their cat, Sancho and Julia, arespectively.

**“Farmers’ Morning”  
Tanner Shipman**



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Tanner Shipman is a Kansas native and a sophomore at Cloud majoring in Animal Science. After graduation, he plans to transfer to Kansas State University to major in Animal Science and Industry and hopes to one day run his grandparent’s farm. After college, he intends to continue the family tradition of raising show cattle and farming. He enjoys spending time with friends and family, hunting & fishing, and golfing, etc. Tanner has also shown cattle for several years, participated in 4-H, and is a current FFA member at Cloud.