

HARMONY



THE LAMP POST
2023 EDITION



IN THIS EDITION

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Nonfiction and Visual Arts Editor

Zoe Evans is a senior English major, returning to *The Lamp Post* staff for a second year. She has a concentration in Professional Writing but loves to try her hand in all forms, creative to analytic, and even the occasional visual art piece. She hopes that each year as an alum she can read new issues of the *Lamp Post* flooded exponentially with Montreat's creative spirit.



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Christian Young is a senior Communications major and returning General Editor of *The Lamp Post*, having been an editor since 2020 and General Editor since 2021. Working on this publication for his fourth and final year has been a joy, a blessing, and a treasured memory.



FICTION

FROM "THE ADVENTURES OF A BAD LAWYER"

Chapter One

Chloe Wood

The thump of the front door closing interrupts my musings. The stresses of the hospital and nursing are erased by the clicks echoing through the hallway signaling the pleasing arrival of my husband. My husband. The words still bring a smile to my face, even when only spoken within my mind. In this state of small happiness is how Thomas soon finds me, sticking his head in the doorway to check for my presence before fully entering the room.

"There you are, my star." The sight of my smile immediately brings one to grow on his own, sweetening the endearment. Like an eager puppy at the sight of a friend, Thomas quickly closes the distance between us and settles on the arm of my chair. I lean back into the arm sliding behind my shoulders and let him cuddle as close as the discomfort of his position allows. "What's got you all smiles this evening? Could it have something to do with the long-awaited arrival of your favorite gentleman in all of England?" He pulls me to lean further into him as if to emphasize the sentiment.

Pleased at the opening thus presented, I jump at the question.

"Of course! Nothing in the world pleases me more than the sight of your face every evening." The desired reaction is immediate. Thomas shifts backwards to further hide behind me, pulling my back against his chest and pressing his warm face against my hair.

"Why must you say things like that, Mrs. Godwin?" I stiffen and the title brings to my face a similar heat. I shift to rest my face into the pair of arms now embracing my neck. The pair of us sit together in mutual awkwardness and satisfaction at being reminded of the recent development.

After what feels like hours, Thomas clears his throat and shifts to rest his chin atop my

head, attempting to move past his moment of flustered reserve. "I've brought an interesting case home with me today."

"Is that so?" Just like every time he utters that sentence, I straighten and turn to read his face. The result is a closeness between our faces that almost sends the both of us back into that previous state of awkwardness, endangering my chances of hearing about his investigation anytime soon. The color retained in his cheeks simultaneously makes me want to grin and kick myself. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, Thomas leans back against the chair's headrest, again positioned in a way that cannot possibly be comfortable, leaving only one arm wrapped around my shoulders. He has to clear his throat again before responding.

"Quite so. There's been a murder and burglary at the other end of town. Would you like the details now or over dinner?" My face must answer before I can get any words out, because he almost immediately begins with the official account, his voice losing its affectionate quality as he does. "Two men are discussing business at one of their residences—we'll call him 'Person A'—when they are interrupted by a loud noise. Person A moves towards the hallway that leads to the front door, but another figure steps through it first. The stranger is holding a somewhat filled carpetbag and appears startled at the sight of the two men. He attempts to retreat the way he came, but A grabs hold of his arm before he can. The thief immediately swings their bag at A's head, knocking him over and into the edge of a nearby table. A stays down after the hit, and the burglar gets away. At this point, the man A was speaking with—'Person B'—runs to get help, and A bleeds out soon after."

Hm. It's certainly an interesting series of events, but an odd one as well. Thomas, who has been watching my face through the entirety of his tale, must see my intrigue, because he again begins speaking before I have a chance to put my thoughts into words.

"You doubt this account of the events as

they transpired.” It’s not a question. “Most of this came from the witness to the whole thing, Person B. There’s evidence at the crime scene that corroborates the story.” The conviction in his voice is contradicted by the smile and interest on his face at what he must believe to be a corrected version of the narrative.

“I see that look on your face, and you’re getting ahead of yourself. I just have a few questions.” My husband’s face does not change even a little bit, eliciting a huff from me. “What did Person B say the burglar looked like?”

“Average height and weight. Said he was wearing a hood that obscured his face and a dark coat that covered any identifying features of his clothing.” He rolls his eyes at that. “The only helpful thing he had to offer was a description of the bag. Light brown and decorated with a floral pattern, carnations surrounded by vines and leaves. The inner lining is a pale pink.”

A hum escapes me at the information as I narrow my eyes suspiciously at my husband.

“And what were Persons A and B doing together before the burglar entered the story?” His smile widens as he leans in slightly, intrigued.

“They run a law firm together, one that has been slowly sliding into bankruptcy for months now. They’d met to discuss potential ways to address their unfortunate financial state. They had been exploring possible advertising strategies when everything happened.”

“What was stolen from the house?”

“We don’t know yet. We didn’t find any sort of inventory of the man’s possessions while going through the house, so we have to wait for his lawyer to provide a copy of his Will to get an idea of the valuables he may have owned.”

Curiosity piqued, I lean back further into my chair—and by extension, Thomas’ embrace—as I consider the facts of the case. He briefly grants me the space to think before his capacity for restraint evidently runs out. Again wrapping both arms around me, he turns my

body until we are facing each other. His soft expression simultaneously brings a lightness to my lungs and makes my heart swell. He leans forward to rest his forehead against mine, closing his eyes. After admiring his small smile for what was probably too long—no, not too long; we’re married now, I can stare for as long as I want—I mirror his expression.

A breathy, disbelieving laugh escapes him.

“You know what I would love, my star?”

“What’s that?”

“If you would transfer some of your genius to me.”

A loud laugh breaks from me at the thought, and I lean back, opening my eyes to gaze at the one who truly is my favorite gentleman in all of England. He meets my gaze, and I can see the same sentiment running through his mind.

A soft knock on the door breaks the silence, both of our heads jerking towards the door at the sound. Mrs. Scott smiles knowingly at the couple before announcing the reason for the interruption.

“Dinner’s ready for you in the dining room whenever you’re ready.”



Thomas stands, face composed and depleted of the enjoyable color even as I watch him fidgeting lightly with his fingers behind his back. “Thank you, Mrs. Scott. We’ll be over in a moment.”

She bows her head slightly in acknowledgement before leaving, a fond smile on her face the whole time. Thomas clears his throat again and refuses to witness the amusement shining from my face. His embarrassment does not, however, stop him from grasping my hand to help me stand nor does it bring him to release it before absolutely necessary.

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AND A FISH IS ONLY A FISH

Dr. Scott Foran

“You cannot catch trout with dry breeches.”

—Spanish Proverb

The badger and the hedgehog always started out early on the days they went fishing. One particular morning, however, found the hedgehog knocking forcefully on the badger’s door long before the sun had even begun to peek over the hill. He wore his soft felt hat and had a fly pole slung determinedly over one shoulder.

“Halloo, Quince,” he shouted, pausing just long enough to hear the badger call out from somewhere deep in his burrow.

“That’s good, Ellis. I’m awake—have been for hours. No need to keep up with that noise.” Before the hedgehog could resume his knocking, the round wooden door opened, and the warm glow of a lamp revealed a large and silvery shape. The badger wore a wide green vest that bristled with a few dozen fishing flies, and he clutched a piece of buttered toast in one paw. “I was just having some breakfast,” said the badger. “Care for a bite?”

“I couldn’t possibly,” said the hedgehog. “I’m too excited. Today is it—I can feel it clean to my toes!”

“Very well,” said the badger. “Just hold a minute while I put up the lamp and fetch my gear.” The badger disappeared down the entry of the burrow, leaving the hedgehog to fidget on

the step, and he returned momentarily with his own pole and a wicker fishing basket. Closing the door behind him, he followed the shadowy shape of the hedgehog who was already bounding down the darkened path and turning in the direction of the river.

It did not take long for the badger to catch up, for the hedgehog’s shorter legs were clearly no match for his longer strides. In fact, the badger found it necessary to slow himself so the two of them could walk side-by-side. As they stumped along, the badger poked at the hedgehog’s hat with his paw. “Why do you insist on wearing that thing?” he asked. “That hat’s nearly as bad as the one Will wears.”

The hedgehog tugged his felt cap lower over one eye. “Really?” he huffed. “I rather thought it looked—well, you know—dashing—besides, I think it brings me luck.”

“You’re fishing,” grunted the badger. “A lot of good a hat will do you.”

“We’ll see about that,” blustered the hedgehog, and they continued to the river in silence.

Dawn was just beginning to warm the ragged outline of the oak trees when they stopped at the first of the rock-lined pools above the weir. The hedgehog quickly lowered his pole and began knotting a blue fly to the end of his line, ignoring the mist that still shrouded much of the river. In his hurry, the hedgehog pricked his paw with the barb, but hardly seemed to notice. “He is in there,” he said, nodding toward the pool, “I just know it.”

Now, the badger and the hedgehog had been coming to this very stretch of the river for years, and, although they had caught many fish together, there was one that always managed to elude them. It was a large brown trout, a wily creature that avoided the shallows and lurked in the deepest part of the pool. It would sometimes nibble half-heartedly at this fly or that; however, before a hook could ever be set, the trout would spit out the fly, leaving the angler to struggle uselessly with an unexpectedly slack line.

“Today is a new day,” assured the hedgehog as he flicked his line out over the water. “Mr. Brown will be joining us for supper, if I have anything to say about it.”

The badger moved upstream and set his own line for a cast. "We'll see," he cautioned, although he hoped the hedgehog was right. He had often dreamed about landing the monstrous brown, and, as he gently touched his fly to the surface of the river, he warned, "Don't work it too quickly, Ellis. He is a crafty one, that's sure."

The morning passed slowly for the two anglers as they worked one end of the pool and then the other. They changed flies several times, trying to lure the great brown from his hiding spot. As midday approached, they managed to catch a couple of smallish trout, but they quickly released them and resumed their quest for the brown, an unexpected sense of confidence urging them on.

The sun had long since risen, causing the mist to vanish, and the warmth of the day was having a noticeable effect on the anglers. The movement of their lines slowed, and, more than once, a paw was dampened and drawn slowly across an overheated brow.

"Do you know," said the badger, glancing up at the sky, "I think it is nearly eleven o'clock. High time we had a little nourishment—I've brought a few things in my basket. What do you say to a biscuit or a bit of cheese?"

The hedgehog, whose gaze was steadfastly focused on a small, shadowed spot of the river near the far bank, took his line gently in one paw. "Not now, Quince," he said, and he very gingerly moved his fly a foot or two upstream. The pool's surface was dappled with greens and blues and browns, making it nearly impossible to judge what might be underneath, but this only heightened the intensity of the hedgehog's focus.

"Not even a taste of jam?" entreated the badger who was already hungry and rather wanted a bit of something.

"No, I mustn't," murmured the hedgehog, his paw still toying with the line. "I—think—I'm—nearly—" And the hedgehog paused, hardly daring to breathe, the tip of his pole quivering ever so slightly. "Quince!" he hissed. "Did you see it?"

"Well, what can I say?" offered the badger with a low whistle, all thoughts of biscuits and cheese and jam gone for the moment. "Be ever

so careful, Ellis," he warned. "You know what that brown is like."

The green-mottled fly which had, a moment ago, been floating softly on the surface had suddenly disappeared, only a slowly widening ripple to mark where it had been.

The hedgehog shifted his weight to one leg, trying desperately to keep the movement from traveling the length of his pole and to the line that hung slack out over the water, and he nearly giggled when the line tightened slightly and began moving upstream and toward the middle of the pool.

"Gently—gently," instructed the badger. "Don't rush it, now."

"I know," said the hedgehog, and he quickly glanced back at the badger. "It's him. I can tell—it's the way he holds the fly—ever so gently in his mouth."

The badger stood rooted to the riverbank, careful not to shift a stone underfoot or to cause any movement that might alert the fish to their presence. "Are you sure?" he whispered.

Instead of answering, the hedgehog bent forward, staring even more intently at the water, then swiftly pulled his pole to one side and lifted it back and over his head. The line grew taught and then tugged the pole-tip back toward the water and began zig-zagging up the length of the pool.

"All right, Ellis!" shouted the badger, his great silvery whiskers twitching as he began jumping along the bank. "You've got him!"

And so began a focused campaign to land the great trout, for it was, indeed, the brown that had taken the hedgehog's fly. The fish thrashed and flipped through the water, while the badger shouted, "Wear him down, Ellis."

"I'm trying," said the hedgehog. "He's so strong!" The pole bent sharply forward, and, at the badger's insistence, the hedgehog let out some line.

"There you go," said the badger, "Now bring him in again."

"Sizzling trout—" shouted the hedgehog over his shoulder.

"—with butter and herbs—" added the badger.

"—for our supper," finished the hedgehog, and he pulled back on the pole and quickly reeled in some of the slack.

"Let him out again," urged the badger. "You've got to tire him out if you're ever going to land him."

In the midst of their struggle, neither the badger nor the hedgehog had noticed the lanky step of the raven as he moved thoughtfully along the riverbank. He came from farther upstream and was walking toward the pool and the weir, and it was obvious that he was deep in thought, shaggy feathers poking out from under his floppy brown hat and his head tipped absently to one side. He wrangled aloud over a bit of poetry that had been on his mind since early that morning, a piece of verse that had actually been troubling him for some days.

"Is it the rhyme—or the meter?" mumbled the raven to no one in particular, "It's so difficult to know." And he closed his eyes and began reciting:

*There once was a red-haired fox,
A crafty and sullen fellow,
Who opened the farmer's locks
With a twisted wand of—*

And here the raven broke off and began murmuring, "Oak—no, not enough syllables, nor elm, nor birch—but, willow—yes, I do believe willow will work!"

*Who opened the farmer's locks
With a twisted wand of willow.
He slipped 'neath each sleeping hen
His paw with the lightest of touch
Then ran, with a flash of a grin,
His arms full of eggs by the clutch.*

"At last," sighed the raven, and he opened his eyes, intent on enjoying the flush of his poetic success, but, instead, found himself unexpectedly watching the hedgehog who was struggling to reel in a few more feet of line. "I say!" began the raven, and before the words had barely escaped him, he was splashing into the

shallows and grabbing hold of the hedgehog's pole with a determined grip, shouting, "Hold on, Ellis!"

The badger called out from the riverbank, "Watch it, Will!"

And the hedgehog tried in vain to elbow the raven out of the way, grunting, "You'll break the—"

"—line!" finished the badger, and, as he said it, the three of them heard the taught snap of the fishing line, and the hedgehog stumbled backwards and found himself sitting in the river, a look of astonishment creasing his face.

"Oh, no!" croaked the hedgehog.

"The fish!" shouted the badger.

"Not to worry—" cried the raven, and, with a sweeping motion, he snatched the felt hat from the hedgehog's head and thrust it into the water at his feet.

"My hat—you've ruined my hat!" The hedgehog struggled to stand and had just managed to steady himself when the raven pressed the soggy felt hat into his paws.

"There you are my lad!" grinned the raven.

"What possessed you to take my hat?" started the hedgehog, his mind set on giving the

raven a pointed lecture on what he saw as a total breach of etiquette, but he suddenly stopped and looked down, realizing that his hat was wriggling fiercely in his paws. "What ho, Will!"

"No need to thank me," said the raven as he clapped the hedgehog warmly on the shoulder and steered them toward the shore.

The badger moved closer as they stepped from the river. "What's the idea?" he began.

The hedgehog held his hat up under the badger's nose. "Look," he said.

The badger glanced down, and his eyes began to widen. "Why, it's the brown!"

The hedgehog wrapped the felt hat more tightly around the great fish and began walking toward the path, the raven following closely behind. The badger gathered the poles and the wicker basket and was just stepping after them, when the hedgehog turned and smiled. "I told you my hat would bring me luck," he said.

"Bah!" grunted the badger.

"And a fish is only a fish," sang out the raven.

"But a good trout is a meal!" added the hedgehog.

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A LITTLE PERSONALITY

Lillian Queen

A number of years ago, I met a little man named Arnold Pithy. He had a wife, five children, a dog, four rabbits, and a very old hat named Thomas. Now, when I say that he was a little man, I do not do so in reference to his stature, but rather, I describe his diminutive personality. It had not always been small for Arnold Pithy. He was at one time the proud owner of a personality that perfectly matched his height—about five foot seven and a quarter inch with shoes on. However, as he became a grown person and got married to a woman named Anita Bishop, his personality began to shrink.

It was very sad but very inevitable, and this is the way that it shrank: his personality would not fit in their house at the same time as Anita's, so every night when he came home from work, he would take it off and fold it up and place it in

the bathroom cupboard. Sometimes while Anita was sleeping, her personality would shrink just enough that Arnold could take his out and give it a good airing, but it did not take long for this phenomenon to cease, and back into the cupboard it went. As a result, each morning, when he woke up, his personality would be so musty and damp that he would have to put it in the dryer with his shirts. This ritual inevitably led to the shrinking of his personality. It was made of wool and cotton, you see, and when a personality is made of those two kinds of things, it will almost certainly have a complicated relationship with dryers.

By only Arnold's third month of marriage, his personality was far too small to fit over his head. There was nothing for poor Arnold to do except fold it up as nicely as he could and tuck it into his coat pocket like a handkerchief. As everyone knows, this is not at all the way that personalities are meant to be worn. I can't say that it did him much good, besides being a little reminder of what had been. He ceased tucking it away in the cupboard at night because he was afraid that one more tumble in the dryer might finish it off. Besides, it was small enough now to keep in the drawer of his bedside table when he took it from his coat.

After fifty years, when Anita was laid to rest, and her personality finally shrunk down to a decent size, Arnold took his out again. The little that was left of it was so horribly creased and ink stained and ragged that he was ashamed of it. He thought of his friend's personalities, some starched to perfection, some a little tight around the middle, and he found that he could not bear to see his anymore. So, he tearfully stowed it away in a little bag at the bottom of his dresser drawers and did not pull it out again. He died a few weeks later, and when his children went through his things, they found it in the little bag at the bottom of the dresser drawer. Its smallness and raggedness and creasedness did not bother them in the least. This shrunken and humble thing had dried many tears, cleaned scrapped knees, bathed feverish little foreheads, and made room for them as they grew. It retained some bit of the loving sacrifices that had been made for them all, and I tell you many, many days were spent in deciding where would be an honorable enough place to keep it.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Tyler Harrity

Jonathan chewed on a wad of Pitcher's Pink bubblegum as he strolled down the poorly-lit path. Evidence of the earlier afternoon rain had splattered across his path, causing each patch of rocks underneath the walkway lights to shimmer. The stars that were sprinkled on the graveyard footpath made up for the missing stars above, which had been drowned out by the constant lights of New York City. It would have been nice to look at if Jonathan wasn't in a hurry. His work as a private investigator had kept him from this crucial task all day, and after he was done here there would be more to do. His next stop was the Paolinelis' speakeasy to ask some flapper a few questions, but she was going to have to wait.

The rows of tombstones were a familiar sight. And had they not been, Jonathan would probably be on edge right now. Graveyards at night were always creepy, but he knew this place was safe. As he passed each line of graves, he spotted names carved into stone that he had grown acquainted with. William Robbins and Jack Harley were unreadable given the dim lighting, but the rest of the names he could make out rather well. This included the name Samantha Wiess, which Jonathan used as his sign to turn left. He did just that, quickly passing over the grass in between the connected paths to save what few seconds he could. He walked toward the end of the path, and stopped three tombstones from the end, and turned once more to face both the graveyard's entrance and his destination.

The grave of H. T. Floyd was rather new, and the inside of the engraving was nearly as smooth as it had been five years ago. The grave was styled in a simple cross, as most soldiers' graves were, but without the white finish that was common for the design. Jonathan had memorized the image of this grave over and over again, worried that he might forget it. But after the first hundred times he mentally drew the picture in his head, he realized it was the last thing he would ever forget. As Jonathan stood over the tombstone, he felt a presence silently shift to his right. Normally he'd be worried, but he knew who it was.

"Y'know, you don't have to come here every year. It's just a birthday, man," said the familiar voice, a snarky undertone tinting his words ever so slightly.

"Some of us have respect, Tobey," Jonathan replied with a slight grin. He looked over at his companion. Tobey's ice blue eyes stared at the grave from underneath shaggy blond hair, the two features making up the majority of his appearance's color.

"This idiot doesn't deserve respect," Tobey said with a smug expression of disbelief, following his comment by lightly kicking the gravestone. Jonathan scoffed at Tobey and swatted Tobey's shin with his foot. Tobey recoiled backwards in mock offense. "Woah! Why'd you kick me?"

"Some idiots don't deserve respect," Jonathan replied with a grin. Tobey's signature guffaw rang out. He came back to Jonathan's side still laughing.

"Okay Johnny boy, don't need to be so mean," Tobey said with an audible smirk. Jonathan's eyes narrowed at the name, and he slowly turned his face to meet Tobey's.

"Call me anything but Jonathan again, and I'll unload my 'self-defense' weapon into you," Jonathan replied, his eyebrows shooting up in a visible expression of "try me." Tobey scoffed at Jonathan's remark.

"No fun. You're lettin' the Police Department's idiotic obsession with rules get to you. Any more and you'll start to drive me crazy."

Jonathan smiled at Tobey's comment. "You've already driven me crazy, seems only fair I return the favor," he answered. Tobey was right about Jonathan having to constantly think about those cursed protocols and how not to break them. But he always hated being called anything that wasn't Jonathan. Which is primarily why Tobey nearly exclusively used anything but Jonathan.

After his final comment, Jonathan remembered the grim circumstances of his being here, and returned his gaze to the gravestone. The two sat in silence for a minute or two. The silence obviously made Tobey uncomfortable as he shifted his feet and his face flashed through several different expressions of impatience. Jonathan didn't mind him though, he was used to

it. He simply stood and stared, and eventually he wasn't really sure why he was there. He thought it gave him some semblance of closure, but if it truly did that he would've stopped coming a long time ago.

Suddenly Tobey stopped moving. Jonathan didn't think anything of it when he did, but after another few moments he realized something was off. His brow subconsciously furrowed as he turned to look at Tobey, who was looking at Jonathan before he even turned.

"What's the matter?" Jonathan asked, worried about some sort of revelation that may have been had.

"You know, he'll always be with you," Tobey said in a surprisingly mirthless tone. Jonathan straightened his posture in confusion, but quickly realized that Tobey was being serious. He shifted his gaze back toward the tombstone and repeated Tobey's words in his own head. It was something that Jonathan had believed for a while now, but Tobey saying it made it feel all the more real. He broke the accidental silence with a chuckle.

"You of all people saying that is pretty funny," Jonathan teased. As he finished his sentence, a car pulled up to the graveyard entrance from whence Jonathan had come. "Elizabeth. I gotta go," Jonathan said. He began moving back to the main path before Tobey could reply.

"See you there, man," Tobey called after Jonathan. Jonathan continued walking without acknowledging the farewell. Soon he had walked out of the graveyard and opened the passenger door, getting in as the door thudded behind him. Liz was behind the driver's seat, her thick framed glasses reflecting the streetlights nearby.

"Every birthday, huh?" Liz asked, her smile showing both hints of sympathy and teasing.

"Yep."

Liz's smile weakened as she let any intention of being snarky die out. She turned forward and reached to put the car in drive, but stopped herself and began speaking before looking back toward Jonathan. "I know you two were really close, and while I may have been good friends with both of you I certainly wasn't affected by his death as much as you were. But I'm... we're

still here for you. We all miss him, but I know we have no idea how much you miss him," Liz finished with a small smile. She was clearly worried as she had probably never seen Jonathan like this, and while it was nice she was trying to be sympathetic, it really wasn't necessary.

"Thanks."

Liz nodded in reply and started the car. "I'll tell you what I don't miss about Tobey though, that obnoxiously loud laugh of his." Jonathan laughed at her comment, and turned toward the empty graveyard as they drove away.

"I don't either."

§ § §

THE REGRET

Ezra Whitaker

I didn't feel anything until now. No guilt. No pride. Nothing but single-minded focus and an unwillingness to deviate from my plans. But today... Today I awoke nearly drowning in the sweat pooling around my body, my eyes blurring with tears, unbridled panic wrecking my mind. The air in my lungs was turning to concrete, it was so hard to breathe. *Thirty years*, I thought to myself in disgust. I threw my legs over the side of the bed and attempted to right myself. The brisk A/C made my drenched nightgown cling to me like a frozen second skin. I stared out the window at the picturesque dystopian world. Black, ominous skyscrapers dotted an even more threatening misty charcoal dawn. I shakily try to bring myself to stand, only to collapse into a heap on my bed. *What is the point?* I pondered. *What is left in my days?* When I conquered the world, it never occurred to me that I would have to figure out what was next.

I was a much younger woman then. Twenty-nine, arrogant and invincible. It's been so long I don't even remember what my dreams were—what I hoped to gain from all of this. Twenty years ago, I laid down the architecture for the very view I am gazing out at now. Ten years ago, I finally saw it come to pass. One year ago, I looked out at this scene with overwhelming gratitude. But today... *I'm looking at the city I built. I look at all its pristine, all its glory, all its... malevolence. And I hate myself for it.* My friends,

my family were tortured, or broken, some were even killed—for the life I now regret. This isn't even my life anymore.

Thirty years ago, I set out to right wrongs, to make the world perfect. Or some messed up version of perfect that I clung to. I had gathered my team of visionaries—my closest confidants. We started out small. Muddying the waters of online media. Calling out very real problems in society that hardly anyone could argue. We built up a following. At first it was a small but dedicated following. Then it grew to cliques and movements of all types. We had the die-hard politico—people that lived and breathed every breaking news headline. People that could name off every single bigwig in the government and every sin they had ever committed. We had your burnt-out youth—the ones with no hope for the future because of the disastrous mistakes the former generation had made. We had your invisible minorities. The outcasts. The ones who had been fending for themselves for so long that they forgot there were supposed to be people looking out for them. We were the Everyman's Watchdogs. It only took a few months for us to be a household name, but it took a few years for us to the government to call us domestic terrorists threatening their oh-so-perfect way of life.

And I... I was the face of it all. I became a hero. I became a god. I had built a utopia. I accomplished every insurgent's dream: I toppled the corrupt government and lived happily ever after. Everyone had what they needed. Everyone was treated equally. That is, for a time. Things started to get complicated. The new government structures that I put in... I started to realize that they were too underdeveloped to handle the increasingly complex problems. My friends... my confidants... they became so greedy, so impulsive, so juvenile. I mean, at first, we talked all the time. Every problem that plagued one of us came before all of us. Then that started to change. Conflicts and rumors of conflicts started rounding the group in hushed conversations behind closed doors. Distrust accumulated—so many reputations were marred. Blood started to spill. Some warranted, but most not. All until I was the last one standing. I can't say that I wasn't happy to be. Everything is just so much easier to control when you're the only one to answer to.

But now here I am. My loneliness is only emphasized by the near emptiness of my vast bedroom. My purposelessness is only fueled by my loneliness, for now there was a new 'me' running the show. I wasn't ousted or rebelled against. In fact, I trained her to carry my torch since she was sixteen. Now at the tender age of twenty-nine, she feels like a spitting image of myself. Like me, she's ambitious. She's idealistic. She can lay meticulous plans, but she will always miss the big picture. Now she's the face and leader of a country doomed to fail—that has already failed in so many ways. But she'll fight tooth and nail to defend it, anyway. There was just something in her, maybe in the familiarity of it all... it just made me snap. It made me realize that I am perpetuating a cycle that is just never going to end. *Build. Betray. Rebel. Rebuild. Betray. Rebel.*

This empire I loved so much was built only on a plan to overthrow the former but never to govern the new. God, I almost feel sorry for her. Almost. I cannot let her waste anymore of her life on upholding this Godforsaken delusion of freedom. I can't let her make things worse. I can't change my past. I can't get back what I gave up for my own selfish ambition. But I can stop her before she loses too much. The only way she will let go of this power is if it is pried away from her... Well, so be it. I built this city and now I want it to fall. I want to burn it to hell. I want a reckoning.

§ § §

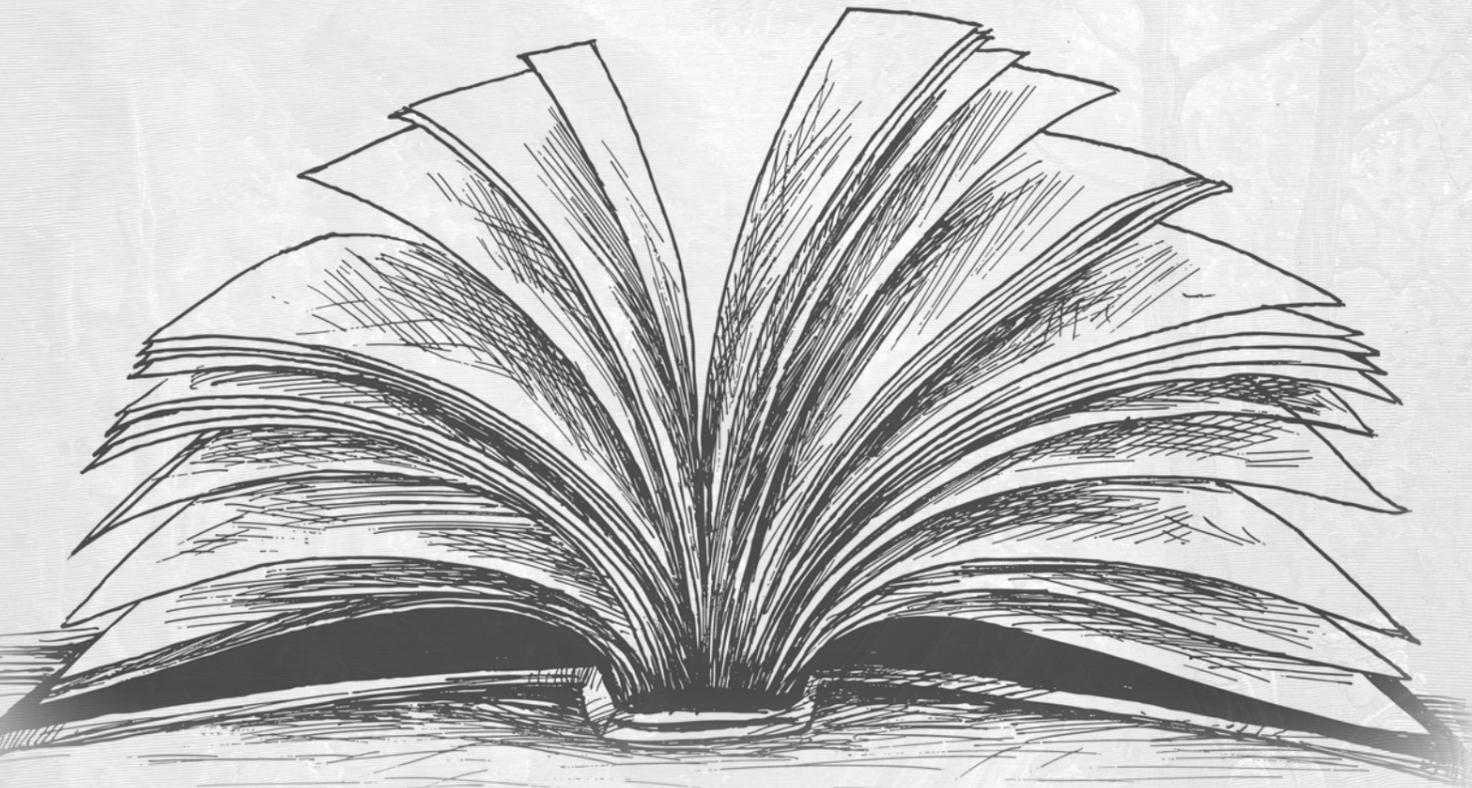
GHOSTLY RECOMMENDATIONS

Lydia Basham

It was the small-town kind of library with not much to look at—unless, of course, you knew where to look. And I knew everything.

Well, not everything, I suppose. I certainly was no omniscient being, but about that building of books? You might consider me its patron saint.

I had been there since the place was built, you could say. I could tell you who built it, why, how they got the stones for the base, and then, 300 years later, how they got the bricks for the second level. We didn't have glass in the windows until



1498 and our history section was practically bare until Jeffery Oglethorn brought back all those old tomes from France. The building just recently put in bathrooms open to the public—1935, to be exact. Oh, and Queen Elizabeth was here, at one point—the first one, God rest her soul—and commended our assortment of folklore literature!

Millions of stories without even cracking open one of our books, but that's an old British library for you.

I passed by the front desk and bade “good morning” to Winnifred, but she paid me no mind. She did that to everyone, of course, too engrossed in whatever new books had gotten there that morning. She was an older woman, with nearly grey hair and a scowl that could curdle milk, but she was nice to the children, which I supposed was her only vocationally saving grace.

I moved some of the pens on the front desk. “Anything good this morning, Win?”

She huffed and continued sorting the new additions.

“All right then.”

The desk had been moved to the front center of the building after the remodeling in

1978, but I remembered when it was still in the far back corner under the rear stairs. Winnifred probably appreciated the extra light from the entry windows. From there you could see rows upon rows of shelves filled with every kind of book imaginable.

Every time I appeared on the threshold, there seemed to be more books. It was a truly exhilarating place to be.

Other people had the same idea, of course, especially on a rainy Saturday morning. They milled about, browsing the shelves and adding to their already formidable stacks. There were several children already tromping around the play area, picture books and stuffed dragons at the ready. The teens hadn't arrived yet, the time being before 12pm, but when they did, they would undoubtedly clog up the aisle between Children's Lit and YA. Several scholars linked with the local university were already studying at the large tables near the coffee shop (another new edition: 2000, at the turn of the century), piles of novels or research material stacked higher than their heads. The elders of the community leisurely strolled through the sections, worried about nothing but their next literary adventure.

Saturday morning crowds were the best library crowds. The week had tired most people out to the point that they wanted nothing more than to sit in the library with a hot cup of coffee and a good book.

Saturdays were the best days to be on the job. Ever since I had started coming to Evendore's Library, I had become the... unofficial recommender. I had read every single book in that building. New ones arrived and I consumed them like chocolate, and when I had done that, I revisited my favorites just to know them better. I knew just which story would fit a person, even yourself.

I did not officially work for the library—Winnifred would never have allowed it, you see. She doesn't like my kind. Very superstitious. But I didn't need the money anyway, and knowing people were enjoying my choices was payment enough.

“Good morning,” I greeted a young man perusing the fiction shelves. “Find anything interesting?”

“I don't know which one to pick,” he admitted, though whether it was to himself or me I did not know. “They all seem rather good.”

“You can't go wrong with Anthony Doerr,” I advised, gesturing to a book that nearly fell off the shelf as I did so. The man caught it with a little sound, surprised. He turned it over to read the back blurb—it was *All the Light We Cannot See*, a fantastic read—and I stood there as he did so. His eyes lit up as he flipped it back over, opening to the first page and beginning to read. He scanned the first few lines and then closed the book, taking it with him to the front desk.

I hummed, satisfied, and set out to find another victim.

There was a woman in the Mystery section that appeared to be on her own detective journey. She was bent over, almost on all fours, searching desperately for a certain novel.

“Oh, they've got to have it!” she whispered vehemently, peering down the row. “I just finished the first one. Surely it's here somewhere!”

I knelt beside her. Ah, she already had a stack. Victorian mysteries, mostly, but there were several modern ones as well. She was flitting

her fingers across the N's and O's (as in every library, the books were ordered alphabetically by author's last name), and her brows were furrowed intensely.

I clicked my tongue. “Are you looking for Richard Os-?”

“Osman, Richard!” she cried, snapping her fingers and reaching for a book. Her excitement vanished as it had come. “One. Dash it all, I've already read this one!”

I smiled. “Look behind it, dear. It's just caught behind is all.”

The books moved aside slightly, exposing the title she was searching for. She gave another little shout of victory and placed the book atop her pile.

“I would recommend Manda Collins too, if you liked the *Veronica Speedwell Mysteries*. Good day.”

She seemed thrilled with the guidance and took off, I assume, toward the C's.

There was a bickering couple in *Self-Help*, which was beautifully ironic, and I pulled one of the relationship advice books to land in the man's wildly gesturing hands. He jumped at the suddenness of the act, and they both stared at the cover for a moment.

“The first few chapters, at least,” I whispered.

I rounded to the Children's Literature area after that exchange; Children's Lit was second only to the Classics in my opinion. Children were not so ignorant of people like me, as they had not been taught to fully ignore me yet. Their parents only make them afraid of us or dismiss us as superstition when they get older.

There was a little girl in a pretty pink dress with curly black hair, and she was trying to reach up and grab one of the fairytales from the top shelf—*The Little Mermaid*, if memory serves me right—but was having some trouble.

“Would you like some help, pet?”

She huffed in frustration and tried again. She missed by at least a foot.

“A valiant effort,” I commended. “But even princesses need assistance every once in a while, dear.”

Finally, she lowered her little reaching arms. "I want the pink one."

I obliged her, pulling the book from the shelf and dropping it onto the floor.

"It matches your dress," I observed.

"That's why I wanted it!" She explained, grabbing the fairytale and running off. She stopped at the edge of the aisle and waved. "Thank you!"

I waved in response. She took off around the corner, calling for her father.

The Children's Corner had a small space filled with pillowy chairs and soft rugs. Several of the little things were reading in the area or comparing dragon sizes. Two of the boys had grabbed the toy swords and were acting out what I can only assume was the great battle between Westley and Inigo. One of them was clearly winning.

Patterson was lounging in between one shelf and the next, body half-observed by our Nancy Drew Collection. He nodded to me as I floated past, and I replied the same. Rather a quiet spirit, Patterson, but he had been an Elementary English teacher long ago. He always preferred working with the kids.

"Already hard at work?" he asked with a smile.

"Always am, Pat. Make sure they don't disrupt the Legos again, won't you? Carly had a nightmare putting it all back together last month."

He saluted me and drifted off to do just that.

There was another boy, perhaps 9, with large round glasses and red hair, who was trying to pick out his summer reading books.

"Just pick something," his mother ordered curtly. "We must go get your sister from Kara's house. I don't think your teachers care all that much, Ed."

His brows furrowed and he pursed his lips. "But mum, I've read all the others before! Ms. Costance says I've got to read something from the older student list this year."

I skipped forward, bending down beside him to point to a collection at this right. "The Magician's Nephew is a good place to start, sir."

"The Magician's Nephew?" he asked, following my finger.

"Is that the one you need?" His mother drawled, hardly looking up from her phone.

He looked at me, big green eyes shining. I nodded.

"Yes, I think so. By..."

"Lewis," I answered encouragingly. "C. S. Lewis. Bloody brilliant, you know. You'll have to come back for the rest."

He grinned back at me and caught the novel as I pulled it from the shelf.

"Thanks," he whispered.

"But of course," I winked, and he grabbed his mother's hand and dragged her towards the front desk.

There was a yelp from the Classics, and I turned to ascend the stairs behind me.

The second floor was much like the first, except there was no coffee shop and no front desk—just more and more books. History, Fantasy/Sci-Fi, and Horror were all up there, along with the Classics. There were more chairs and couches to read on, and several were already occupied.

"Oh, bugger," came the voice. "Can't even put away books properly, good Lord."

An older man stood in the Classics, a cacophony of novels littering the floor at his feet. His cane was leaning up against the shelf, and he wore a long grey coat and tweed cap; a true English gentleman. His name was Barty, and there was not a Saturday in twenty years I had not seen him.

"Trouble up here, dear?" I asked.

"Was trying to get Dracula," he admitted sourly. "And I've made a bigger mess than he'd done, haven't I?"

"Not to worry," I consoled and began putting the books away.

He jumped, or he jumped as far as a man with a limp from the second World War could jump, in fright. Puzzled, he looked down at the spot where the novels had just been all over the floor, and then quickly glanced back to the shelves they had fallen from. For a moment he stared, and then he chuckled, shoulders shaking.

"Those ghosts again," he muttered gleefully. "Must be almost as old as I am."

"Nearly," I laughed. "You'll catch up soon, Barty. Heads up, lad."

I set Dracula next to his cane, matching the red wood of his walking staff, and made off again. He'd be back in a week with another request. His granddaughter was studying Literature, and he had taken it upon himself to read all the books with her.

Sweet man; I wouldn't be surprised if he joined Pat and me here soon.

The window shutters suddenly rattled in the billowing wind. I glanced outside. The rain had picked up. I imagined people would be staying indoors for several hours until it let up.

I placed my hands on my hips and blinked twice, staring at the raindrop-covered glass. "Well, perhaps you should have thought of that before you ticked off the storm and were killed by lightning, Gregory."

The shutters shook.

"It's not my fault you haunt the rainclouds, sir." I tutted. "You dedicated your soul to ticking off natural disasters and now you have become one. I dedicated my life to books and here I am. Perhaps you will remember that in your next life. Oh, wait..."

The shutters slammed into the windows with gusto. I rolled my eyes and made an unseemly hand gesture before walking towards the Horror Section.

Ah, my least favorite sort of book (after the "adult section", of course, but I am a lady of class, so that is to be expected), and we had many of them. Horror had never appealed to me, not in my younger life and certainly not now. Parodies of ghostly existence, vilifying my friends like we were specters from Greek myth. It was a ghastly business, the whole thing.

For all of their popularity, you would think more people would believe in people like me and Pat. Alas, humans really are fickle things.

"Baby Teeth," I said to the woman browsing the books in the back. "Horrible, really, but Zoje Stage pulls it off quite well. Horrifying, pun completely intended."

The woman ignored me. Shocking.

"It's one of the few dreadful books I actually liked," I explained.

She waved me off like batting a fly. I took my leave.

Thousands of them did that. They shooed me away like I didn't know what I was on, or that I was a nuisance, or that I was simply a figment of their mind. That one was the worse, of course, the true ignorance of the living man. Every so often, it hurt so badly my feet actually touched the ground.

Well, there were others to attend to. I'd probably have to get Jack to just pick five books instead of the twenty he wanted to check out, and I'd have to show Lily where the next Harry Potter book was (she was on the third, at the time). Jester would need help finding the dessert cookbooks, undoubtedly, and Caleb could probably do with some silly self-confidence reading.

And at some point, Ellie would be back to check out *The Fellowship of the Ring* again. Blasted girl never could leave Tolkien alone for too long.

Not that I blame her. I tend to run back towards him quite often myself. Him and Shelley and Lewis and Stoker and Austen and Tennison and Grahame and Barrie and Milne and...

I couldn't be faulted, of course. Lots to read, so many books to fall in love with. Heavenly, in my opinion. And I had nothing else to do but read them again and again.

I was only a library ghost, after all.

NONFICTION

FALLEN LEAVES

Jeremiah Swader

Last autumn the colors were more vibrant than usual. The routine dusky fall hues mixed with blazing reds, yellows, and oranges in a way that tugs on one's heartstrings so that he is tempted to believe life is more than chemical reactions. On a walk one Wednesday afternoon I stopped to shuffle in a pool of leaves that had fallen from my favorite Japanese Maple in the night. All manner of leaves filled the stack; newly fallen bright ones which had not yet given in to decay, faded ones which had begun to dry and had partly crumbled away. Leaves fall and fade in the most sentimental way, it is no wonder autumn is the most beautiful season. If you must fall, do it in autumn, for you will do it in good company—all of nature is spun into a calm sort of frenzy, like the wind which carries the leaves to the ground and gives in, eventually, to peace. If you have no say in the matter any season will do, for each has its charms, but I have found autumn makes falling easier. Autumn knows what it is to be defeated.

At my feet, I noticed two scarlet leaves in a startlingly anthropomorphic arrangement. They were clinging to each other. Each lobe of one leaf was bent in such a way as to clasp the corresponding lobe of the other. They lay in this manner on the ground, awaiting decay. I suppose that the two were lovers. The first frost brought news of summer's end and the end of their vegetative sojourn together. I also am certain that neither should have liked to have fallen. They were both so vibrant and full of life it seemed a shame to be wrenched so suddenly out of the youthful vigor of their correspondence. As the days grew shorter and the nights colder, they embraced each other for warmth though the end was coming. If they were to fall, they would fall together.

It must have been the night before I picked them up, for they were still brightly scarlet, blushing, no doubt, from their closeness. Even in their fragile state, they seemed bold and

defiant in the face of death. But I think they understood the beauty of it all. Deeply moved by the sight, I picked the leaves up and placed them gently in my journal and wrapped it tightly with the cord. I am constantly enraptured by the intimate moments one can catch in nature. They are almost absurd breaches of privacy. Life is passionate in every imaginable way and when we can tap into it and observe it, life's passion and the passion inside ourselves beat in harmony. I can prove it: the leaves in my journal have faded since that day, but they are still clasped together tightly. When I see them, I think of what it must mean to love though loss is certain. The leaves know how hard it is to let go.

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THE ONLY THING WE HAVE TO FEAR

Christian Young

Let me begin boldly with a declaration: “artificial intelligence” is perhaps the most dangerous misnomer of the past decade. This is a term that belongs to science fiction, not reality, and its cousin “neural network” is not much better (though certainly more accurate). For much of their development, however, these misleading terms did not have much of an impact on society—AIs were discussed in hushed tones among those with a particular fascination with technology, and their rumors often featured speculation and fact in equal measure. After all, the mathematical principles behind the code were still in their infancy, and AI itself was little more than a carnival sideshow; yet another demonstration in the mid-2010s of the potential future of technology, like so many other potentialities that shortly dwindled out. These tools have only now reached the point where they are both accessible and useful, which means that society is now being inundated with those half-speculative, half-fact, all-theory discussions of AI which had their geneses in the pages of science fiction. Consequently, there are

widespread misconceptions about AI: what it is, what it can and can't do, whether it is ethical, and where it's going, and as a student of AI theory, I desire to address as many of these misconceptions as I can.

First Things First

What is AI? Everyone by now knows that acronym stands for “artificial intelligence”, but what does that term actually mean? Or, as mentioned earlier, “neural network”—what are the similarities and differences between these terms? Does “machine learning” imply it is capable of what it suggests—learning? Simply put, none of those terms is entirely accurate to what AI actually is: it is not “intelligent”, and the word “neural” does not mean that they have a brain. They cannot “learn” in the same understanding as how people and animals “learn”, and they are not even “machines” at heart. (As a side note, true artificial intelligence has not been developed and never will be if our research continues in the same direction that it has for the past forty years, but more on that later.) Rather, modern “AI” is simply a single statistical probability equation with many, many, many variables that it uses to guess at a “most likely correct” answer. That's it. No matter how human ChatGPT may sound, it is nothing more than a single equation designed to fulfill a very specific purpose.

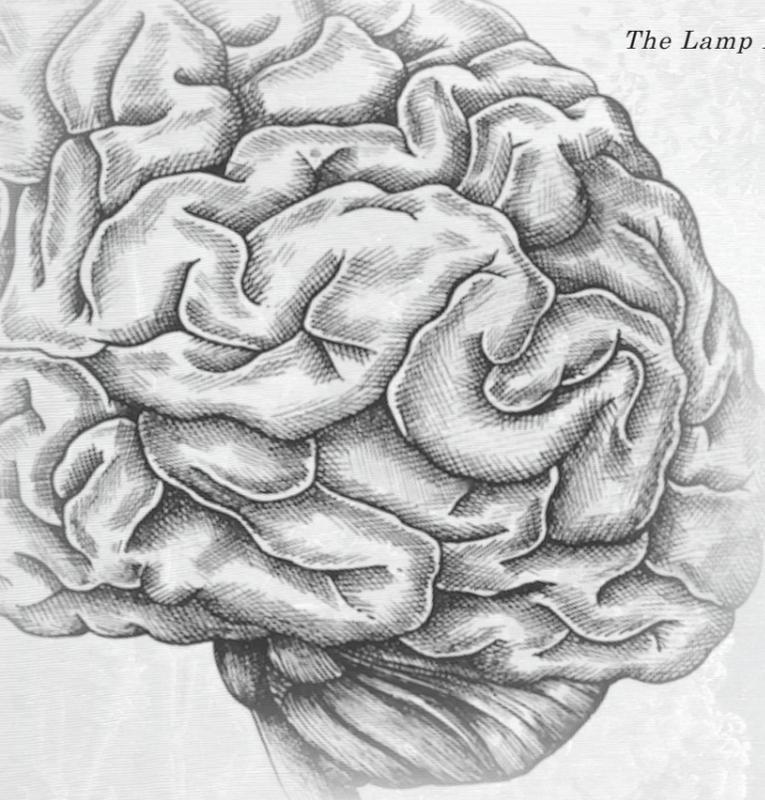
A single equation...but with variables that number in the billions. That's the key to how a single statistical probability equation is able to answer your random question regarding the age of car parts in a way that sounds like it was written by a human being: billions of variables allow for a vast amount of permutations in the output. These variables interact with each other through linear algebra patterned after how neurons in the human brain interact with each other, giving rise to the term “neural network”, and the process of tailoring those variables to give a specific output—known in math circles as backpropagation—is some rather simple calculus (compared to other uses of that dreaded math) that has become known as “machine learning”.

Part of the problem with the misconceptions around AI is that there is no solid framework for general understanding; that is, explaining the

math behind AI to a random person on the street is about as simple as explaining the economics of Wall Street. I understand this, so allow me to recontextualize these terms... “artificial intelligence”, “neural network”, “machine learning”... in a way which can be intuitively understood.

Imagine, if you will, a pachinko machine. Often found in casinos and arcades, these games have a simple goal: guess which cup a ball will fall into after passing through a forest of wooden pegs. As anyone who's played one of these games will tell you, the ball's landing zone largely depends on the starting point and the arrangement of the pegs, but it's not entirely deterministic, either; there's enough random chance as to which direction a ball will fall when it impacts a peg that it is sometimes considered akin to gambling. Often these machines are small enough for the player to track the ball throughout the course of its journey, but if we scale it up by a factor of one hundred and add ten thousand balls, we have a very close approximation of how an AI works. The ten thousand balls accumulate in a seemingly-random grouping of cups at the bottom, perhaps some more than others, but perhaps not; and yet where they fell is still determined by the arrangement of the pegs and the starting location of each ball.

When you use ChatGPT, a process very similar to this is happening behind the scenes. Your initial input, the prompt you give to the



AI, is akin to setting up the ten thousand balls in a particular order before dropping them into the pachinko machine. The billions of variables are the forest of pegs through which the balls must fall, each peg modifying the trajectory of the balls in a miniscule, but cumulative, effect that decides where they land. The cups along the bottom are the potential outputs, with the cup that is the most full representing the text that ChatGPT actually displays on your computer screen. “Machine learning” in this scenario is the process of moving the pegs around so that the balls will fall in a certain way; the entire setup, from top to bottom, is the “AI” or “neural network”. Just because the ball’s course appears random does not mean the entire pachinko machine is alive; neither does the human-like quality of ChatGPT output serve as proof of its consciousness.

People Of Earth, We Mean You No Harm

It should be no stretch of the imagination then to understand why the speculation about rogue AIs taking over the world is, in my opinion, unfounded—though let me give three specific reasons to justify this stance:

1. AIs are not continuously active
2. Permissions and access control measures are major roadblocks
3. Only an AI specifically trained for that

purpose would have any idea of where to start

My first point: AIs are not continuously active. That is to say, they are only active when given a task by a user, and do not spend any idle time on plots for the eradication of the human race; this should be self-explanatory, as the nature of all equations is static no matter how complex. They do not change while they are being calculated; they do not perform any calculations on their own, and once the calculation is complete the role of the equation is over. AI is not exempt from these rules, and cannot act on its own outside of user instructions. Fearing an AI might take over the world—or hack the Pentagon, or any number of villainous sci-fi objectives—is like being afraid that your high school math homework is going to commit tax fraud. No matter how scary the homework is, the fear is entirely unfounded.

But say a user instructed an AI to do something, and the AI interpreted the instruction as an order to commit genocide: such is the plot of countless sci-fi media, except the movies, short stories, and books often overlook the part where the AI is foiled in all of its attempts by basic cybersecurity measures. This very specific misconception about the capabilities of AI seems to me built upon some sort of idea that because AIs are computer programs, they have an advantage when interacting with...other computer programs? And thus, there’s no lock that could stop them, no firewall that could keep them out? “An AI could crack your password in milliseconds, just because it’s that smart.”

Without straying too much from the topic at hand, allow me to posit that an AI would have no greater access to a computer’s code than any regular user, unless, of course, a developer gave the AI such access. But even in that case, when interacting with other computers, the AI would find itself at the mercy of firewalls, antivirus software, and intrusion prevention systems, and even simple measures such as passwords would impede its progress. Once discovered, knowledge of its hacking attempts would spread until critical infrastructure would be aware of and protected against any potential attacks. Any damage would be mitigated before it even occurred, with the entire incident garnering

as much attention as a foiled bank robbery conducted by a gang of raccoons.

That being said, there’s an even more fundamental question: would an AI even “know” (read: would the arrangement of pegs cause the ball to fall into a slot telling it to follow) an effective strategy for taking over the world/destroying humanity/insert generic villain objective here? Lest we forget, AIs are not actually sentient robots; compared to the intricacies of the human brain, they are relatively-simple statistical probability equations. If an AI has not been trained to handle a certain kind of problem, it lacks the appropriate knowledge base to properly answer it. You can certainly ask ChaosGPT (ChatGPT’s evil twin brother) to purge humanity from the globe, but without being told how to accomplish that objective, it wouldn’t make any progress—as we have seen, as someone has done just that.

No, AI cannot take over the world. AI cannot think; cannot make decisions; cannot understand any of the data it processes, as much as a mathematical equation can *understand* anything. What it can do is assist humanity in previously-unthinkable ways: where robots have been used in manual labor to exponentially increase quality and output, AI can be used in mental labor to the same effect.

When I See A Spade

After all, that’s what AI is: a tool, designed to be used, designed to improve the work experience of human beings. Once I gave the analogy of a shovel: useful in a variety of ways, not all of which are positive, but not something to be feared or condemned in and of itself. I think this analogy is even more timely now as the popular discourse around AI has shifted from one of blatant science fiction to one of copyright and attribution, and let me make my position clear: as both a student of AI theory and an artist, I am firmly in support of AI art, and ostensibly AI art models trained on copyrighted images, though on a case-by-case basis. The most vocal in the art world have called this theft or copyright infringement, and while their argument and desire to protect their work is understandable and respectable, the definition of AI as a tool settles these arguments

and satisfies their concerns.

AI is a tool: and what is a tool but some construct, a creation of man, meant to do something for its creator? A farmer is not sued for claiming the physical work of his tractor as his own; the colors of a painter do not rise up in protest when the artist receives all the acclaim for his creation, and neither does the paintbrush utter a sigh. Similarly, AI artists should not be criticized for using AI to do some of the work for them, as the work of image-generating AIs is directly analogous to the artistic processes of imagination and inspiration. When a human artist takes inspiration from a previously-released work, he need not ask for permission—he simply creates, and leaves it to the critics to identify his inspirations. The neurons in his brain see the image and transform it into something new, which is then transferred to some physical media as an inspired work of art. Image generating AIs are simply a tool to make this process easier, and thus make the creation of art accessible to non-artists: why is that a bad thing?

The great danger of using AI as a tool is not plagiarism, neither is it inauthenticity, but rather a growing overdependence on the AI itself. Tools, like most things in life, should be used in moderation, lest we lose the ability to act without them. Specifically, in the case of artificial intelligence, the creative capability of the tool is limited—it can come up with novel interpretations of art, yes, but because it is not sentient it cannot have *ideas* like people can. It cannot have a “spark of creativity” that leads to a hit song or a beautiful painting; should we depend entirely on AI, then, we could expect the well of creativity to become stagnant and dry. And if we ever reach the point where image-generating AIs are trained on AI-generated images, we will be caught in a negative feedback loop to destroy the creative impulse.

This is the true danger of AI: it will not destroy the world if left unchecked, but rather the spirit.

Fear Itself

Hopefully I have managed to assuage some of the irrational fears surrounding artificial intelligence, while possibly alerting you to the true danger inherent in AI. In my opinion, it

is important to have this conversation, as the public discussions of artificial intelligence will greatly shape and drive the potential legislation about its uses and limits; and, if Congress's track record with legislating Internet usage is any indication, legislation made in fear does more harm than good. This area has come to the point where it needs to be broadly understood, so that the greatest number of people can benefit from its assistance: but to do that, we need to first rid ourselves of the harmful misconceptions and misnomers which have so far permeated the topic of statistical probability models.

{} {} {}

OUR SECRET GARDEN

Kat Wombwell

When I was a little girl, my sister and I would dream about our secret garden. It was a beautiful oasis of greens, pinks, and yellows sprouting from the fence, the ground, and even the sky. Our secret garden was even more incredible than we could imagine... and little girls can imagine a lot.

We started our adventure in front of our house. The little house was light blue, matching nicely with the summer skies. Walking from the front door to the right side of the house, we would pass a large planter full of plump, red strawberries. Many days our adventures would end there. We would sit by the little box of soil, plants, and fruit to eat as much as possible. Depending on the time of year, we could find hundreds of ripe strawberries. But some days, the berries were not ready, and we could only eat a few crunchy, green berries that were not quite ready to have been plucked from the plant.

After passing the delicious strawberries, we would crawl through the gate our dad had placed along the tall wooden fence surrounding our yard. Once we made it through the gate, it felt like we had been transported into another world. A garden full of insects, sandboxes, and playgrounds was at our fingertips. We did not have to worry about walking on paved sidewalks to ensure the grass was not damaged. We were free to be little girls.

Growing up, our specialty was mint tea. My sister would grab handfuls of mint leaves from the plant on the left side of the backyard and run into the house to grab a pitcher of water. The specialty of this tea was its simplicity. She would tear up the leaves, stir them into the pitcher, and our mint tea would have been made. While she was making the tea, I set up the picnic table for our tea party. I would grab an Ariel or Minnie Mouse beach towel and spread it flat on the grass. After that, I would run into the house, following my sister, to grab a few dolls and stuffed animals. We would come out together, hands full of toys, to finish setting up the table. She would place down a few little plates and pour the mint tea. Our tea party was ready to begin.

On other days, we did not feel like hosting any parties. Instead, we were ready to begin construction. We would walk into the backyard, clothed in overalls and large, yellow rain boots. We would grab all our construction toys and tools to begin creating the best sandcastle the world has ever seen. The process involved our sandbox, pots, pans that had been stolen from the kitchen, and, most importantly, a lot of water from the hose.

Calling our backyard the secret garden did not mean it needed to be quiet, though it did have to be clean and girly. Instead, it was



a garden full of wonder, creativity, and joy. We had a beautiful and colorful garden in our backyard: a place of pure imagination.

{} {} {}

RESPONSE TO VIRGINIA WOOLF'S CLAIM TO KNOW CHANCE

Walker Liles

I chose to address Virginia Woolf's claim that everything exists because of chance because I think it has to be one of the strongest claims made in and throughout all of history, not because I necessarily believe it to be true, but because it invokes so many "what" questions. What is chance? What is truth? What is knowledge? What is existence? Of course, many do not approach these questions because many do not find them necessary to answer, as the fact stands: we are here now, we are alive and aware now, and most of us are functioning on some manageable understanding of truth and knowledge to sustain our lives and appease our awareness. However, the comfort of this fact often is because of bias from a lack of life-changing events, tragic events more so. Because, after such events, which typically involve a terrible loss, approaching life feels so radically different that we begin to question it, and when our questions do not receive immediate, satisfying, or objective answers, then we will likely conclude that there are no answers, that there is no truth, no reason, no meaning, and so forth. For some people, this logic does not always elapse everything, but very often it starts small and then spreads. And while many might think this is the path to despair, Woolf herself unfortunately being an example by her committing suicide, I have recently been contemplating thoughts and inquiries that I think draw on elements of this logic positively.

I pursue the God, principles, and hopes of Christianity, but in recent years, I have contemplated the claims of absoluteness made by many Christian speakers, because I have developed much skepticism about absoluteness. Not that I believe it does not exist or that it has not been confirmed in some specificities, but I do believe—down to its essence—it is something we have very, very seldom confirmed. Admittedly, I cannot really include such specificities that have

been proven absolute because I do not possess the evidence nor complete education about them (if I can even have a complete education about it, theoretically). What I do know, with as much confidence as I can in saying "I know," is that there are objectively things we cannot see; they are proven to be there, but we cannot observe their existence with the naked eye. How cells move, how protons move, how they move to make things grow, how they disperse and cause things to die. There are numerous other examples of these scarcely visible entities and processes, the point being that there is so much to existence that we cannot see, that we cannot even perceive, and that we possibly may never be able to perceive in this state of reality before an end, a second coming, or any sort of rapture. This links back to my belief that there is positivity to the "answerless outlook" in that I believe, while it may create a scope of seeing existence as infinite and unanswerable questions, it also creates a window of seeing endless and immensely wonderful possibilities. It is by this perception that I also believe in intrinsic values to writing fiction and experiencing nature, because they reach out to the unanswerable.

In the book series I am currently working on, which revolves around an entire fantastical world, I am developing a civilization of people that reflect dystopian styles of cultural logic and perception, which includes many liberal concepts we practically see as good, innocent, and/or pure. But for these people, these concepts are often subverted and dissected, which are meant to reveal the faults of our common understandings, but also reveal the values and truths we do not often recognize. For instance, how these people view spirituality and fate is very technical, in that they do not necessarily believe in either spirituality or fate, as they do believe in chance. However, they (specific, exemplary characters the protagonist converses with) do not define chance as we normally would, that simply being: "when things happen randomly." They define it as numerous if not infinite calculations of individual motives and universal processes aligning, overlapping, and colliding, which lead to events that cannot be fully measured or decoded. These events are what they define as chance, but they do not define it as meaningless randomness, rather as

things they cannot decipher the meaning of, except because of a form of imperceivable logic.

At first, this outlook is seen as bleak and hopeless by the protagonist, but later he gleans the opposite. He realizes that there is a force in the world so unrecognizably beyond us and more knowledgeable and brilliant than us; unrecognizable, other than the fact that our inability to recognize it is perceivable. This is one small aspect of the story that links to the greater aspect of the narrative I am mean to implement in my stories, and it is also my most important point to this response to Woolf's claim: the recognition of good and evil in the world. Of course, this opens an entirely other can of worms in the arguments, criticism, and deniability of these two concepts. I am mostly expressing my belief as to what is perhaps the most significant element of understanding/recognizing good and evil: it is our recognition of meaning and of meaninglessness.

I am not an existentialist or a nihilist, though I could also discuss what I believe are significant values to those worldviews, but for the purpose of getting to my point, this is what I have to say about the concept of meaning. Meaning is definitively good; in its purest, most integral, most functional existence, it is the driving force of goodness. Meaning is the soul of our progression, our reason for upholding faith, it is the essence of spontaneous existence with absolutely no foundation other than the creator of it. To that, I believe the true creator of it to be the creator of everything, the nearly imperceivable, brilliant force of logic to everything, for in the very beginning of the Book of Genesis it is written, "heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."

Now, God does not deny the existence of meaninglessness (the "formless and empty"), but He does separate it. I believe, mostly because of logic, that our aimless recognition of meaninglessness is part of what defines evil. Evil is the decay and death of the soul, and it is the intent of the enemy to make the world completely evil so to undermine creation and its

greater purpose to come. As I described earlier, very often our inability to fully comprehend or see meaning or truth drives us to despair, in which we then believe that there is no truth or meaning. In other words, we surrender our belief and hope in meaning and truth to the general and partializing emptiness of meaninglessness; we meet the intent of the enemy, and we undermine our own souls.

Finally, I believe our interaction with harmonically natural environments (i.e., unurbanized or uncultivated regions) can seriously help us find an understanding of meaning, truth, or even just find rejuvenation. Today, many of us try and absorb meaning, information, entertainment, gratification, and so many other desires very often through sources textual, verbal, visual, and person. This is not to say that absorbing anything through such communications and conveyances is bad, but because we do this so much, we seriously dull our senses, and they are what we have always used to learn anything. However, what we learn is never solely through the words read out or spoken to us, it is also learned by our physical contact with it, our visualization of it, and our personal connection to it, beyond what anyone might imprint upon us. In spending time in very natural environments, we can rejuvenate our senses. We can do more with our eyes than just read texts, we can behold things grow, struggle, and flourish. We can do more with our hands than write, we can feel the cool of the earth and water, and the warmth of the grass and sunshine. And we can do more with our ears than listen to others and or ourselves speak, we can listen to the wind, the waters, and the wild creatures moving and sounding out, or even just the silence. These rejuvenate our senses not just because they are how we can give them rest, but also diversify them, and learn to explore and discern with them, about things other than our communication with other people, thus we can learn more about learning in general. And the more able we are to learn, the better we can find understanding, and with better understanding comes the understanding of truth, and with the understanding of the truth comes the truth of meaning. And with the truth of meaning, we know that we live for more than random chance.

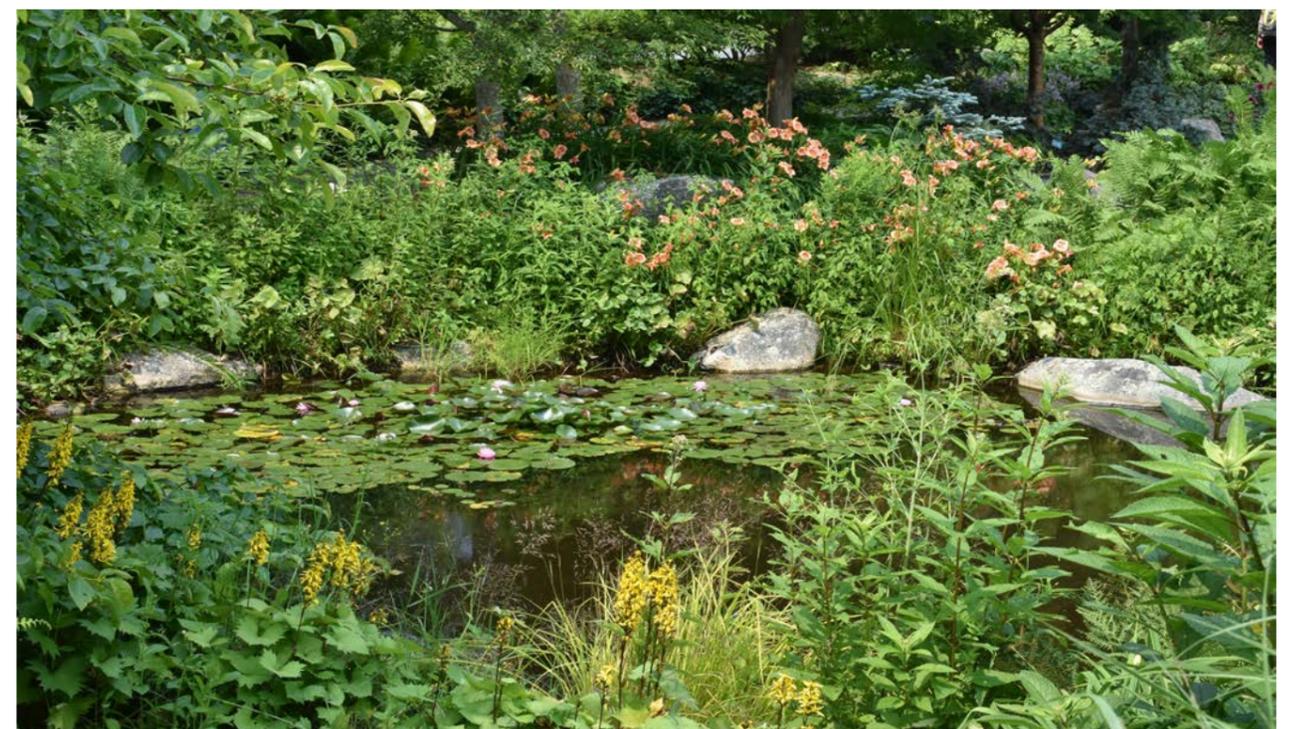
The Lamp Post



VISUAL ART



Photo: "Dandelion," John Strange



Left and Below: "Whoopsie," & "Botanical Gardens," Lillian Queen. Above: "The Great Divorce," Saraya Goodman. 27



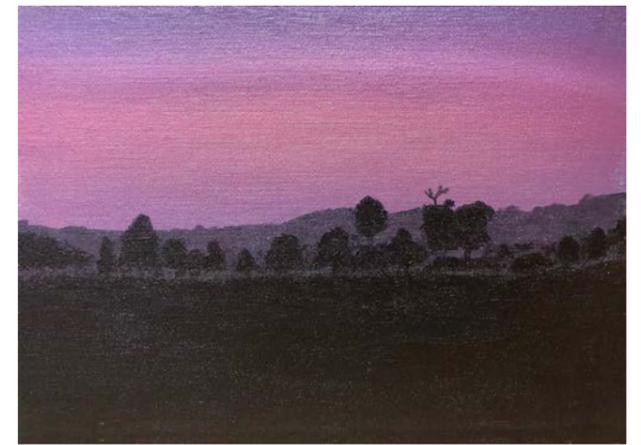
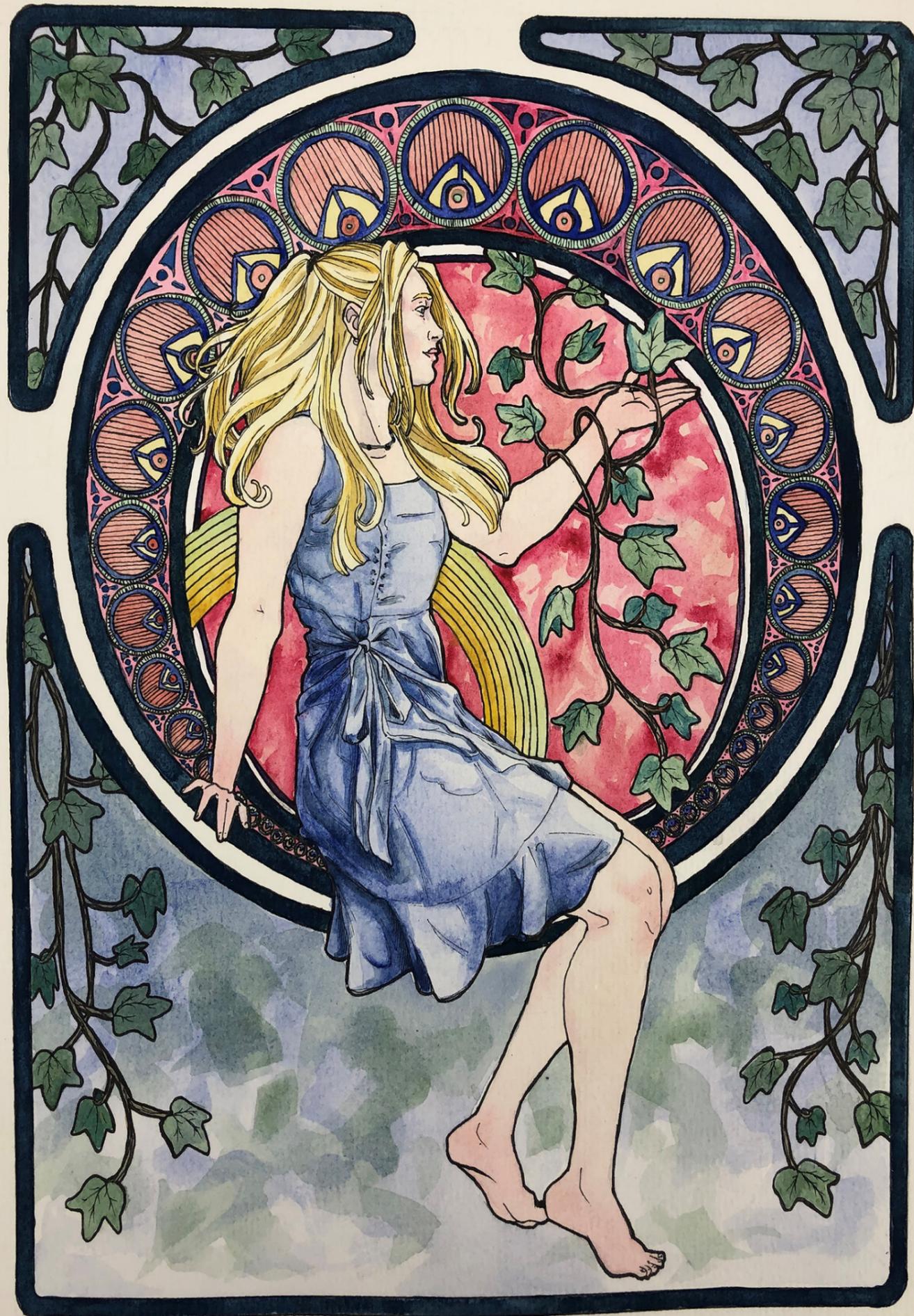
28 Above: "Untitled," Sydney Simonds. "Pitcher Plant," Zoe Riggs. "Out an Oxford Window," Lillian Queen. Right: "Hands" Elie Shaver

Opus No. 13

Transcribed by Dani Schroeder

Lillian Queen

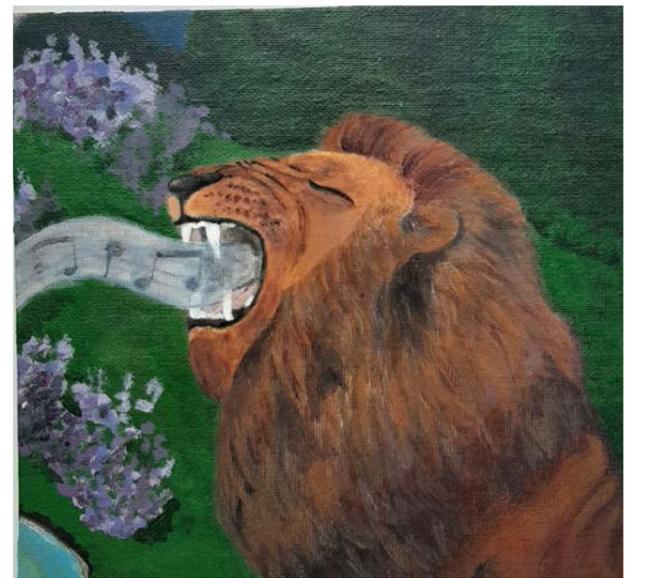
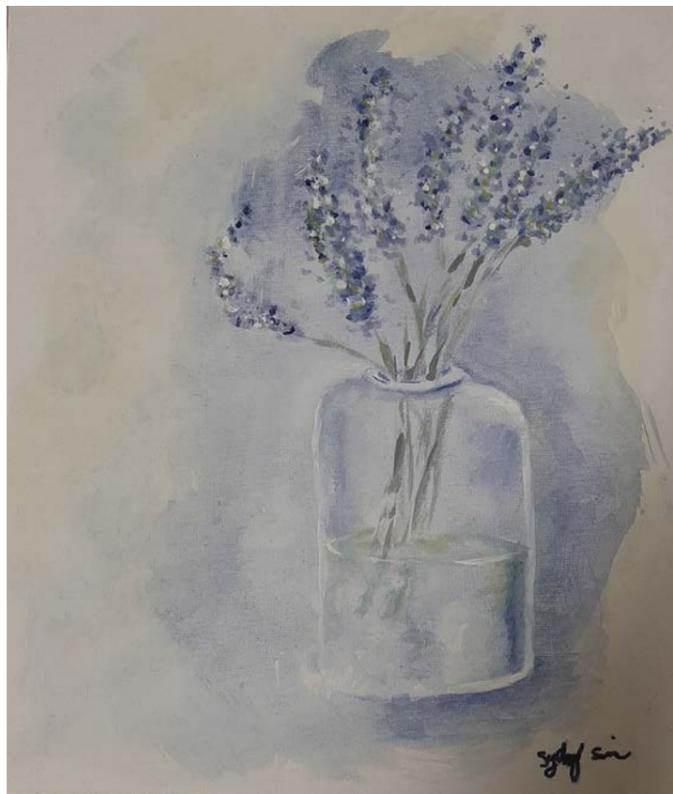
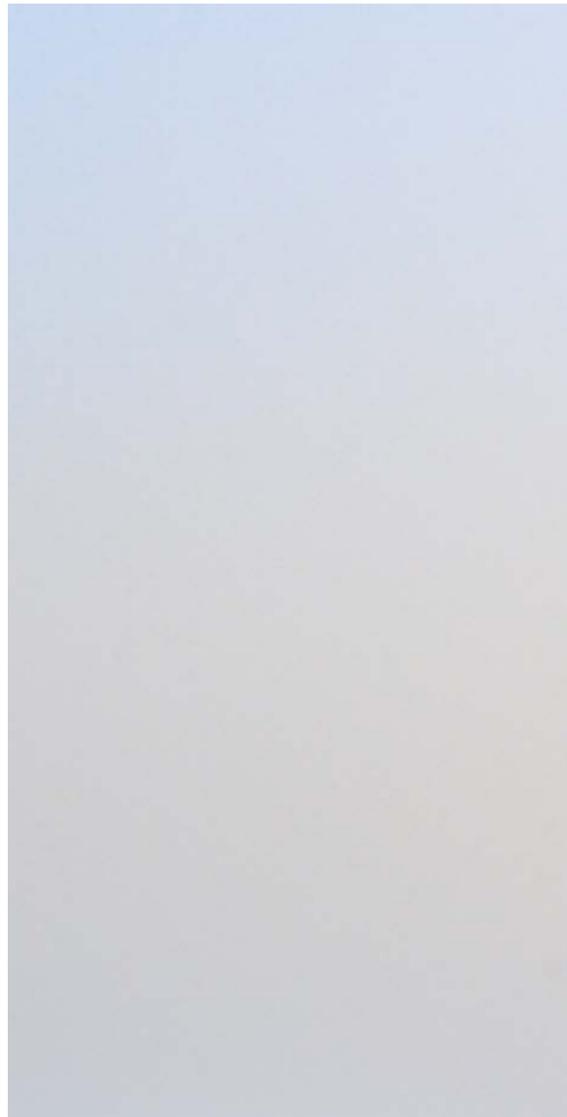
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Victoria Yeomans
 Ty Goodson
 Sarah Maillett
 Daisy Rice

Adrianna Gullette
 Chris Fraser
 Jailyn Munoz Miranda

Left: "Untitled," Raquel Smith



34 Above: "Jungle Stumble," Zoe Evans. "Lavender" Sydney Simonds. "Maine," Lillian Queen.

Above: "Creation Song," Sydney Simonds. "Aerial," Lillian Queen

POETRY

AUTUMN
The Passing of Time

Anonymous

Burning golden grasses
Curling the yellow pages of history
One gravestone for the masses
Stories lost to ambiguity

Autumn cools Mother Nature's bare chest
Her cloudy eyes smolder and billow
And she lies her dying head down to rest
On a damp mossy pillow

A gentle wind fans the smoldering embers
Diffusing a rotting incense
A forgetful scent that no one remembers
But is reminiscent of lost innocence

The smoke stings naked eyes
Trailing black smudged tears
Orphans weep at their mother's demise
Who will cry for them as days turn into years?

Who will recall the forgotten's plight
They scream into an algid abyss
Who will stoke the fire during bitter nights
The heartless take heart at times like this

The greedy fire licks another withered page
Ashes litter fresh unkempt graves
As man fights to put man in a manmade cage
And the walls begin to cave

But there is an unspoiled home
Where all frozen hands can warm

Where all wrongdoers will atone
And see the failure of all the weapons they formed

The fire of God will nurse the bleeding ground
Principalities will be leveled, killing mighty kings

For there is truth to be found
At the end of all things

BIRTH OF THE OLD

A.R. Buckner

Everyone thinks flowers are the only thing born,
But snowflakes are awakened and overlooked and worn,
The frozen sea is like new life,
It covers the old and replaces the strife,
A dress of a bride that blankets it whole,
A hearth of enchanting crackling coal,

The lace of a train trailing the sky,
While I hide under blankets all warm and shy,
Flakes that land on my lashes,
Like little girls in cream satin sashes,
So when you say spring is the only thing new,
Take a look at the crystals and think of old winter anew.

BOOK PEOPLE

Z.A. Rhone

The purpose of poems, says Plato,
's to sanitize gods incognito.
Aristotle rhetorically refuted.
Sublimely Longinus disputed.
Yet Coleridge's Imagination—
Both Primary and Second variation—
Say something to forms like Jakobson

Whose norm is defamiliarization.
Tradition, not individual talent,
Make meaning, declared TS Eliot.
Communities interpret what's next;
It's concretized from work to text,
Say Sontag and Fish and Iser,
But who really knows for sure either?

Give structure to language, Saussure,
Derrida knows nothing for sure.
Deconstruct what I said like S/Z,
No Barthes, I didn't just sneeze.

Semiology to semiotics
Then things get still more chaotic:
Freud's psychoanalytic theory,
Then Lacan's mirror insufficiency,
With madwomen in the attics
And ideological state apparatuses.
Our happy endings got lost



In political unconscious;
An author is only her context,
And she must be true to her sex.
American and/or African
And/or African-American?
A postcolonial tale
Or ecocritical fable?
The genre and medium are messages,
From mise-en-scene to ludonarrative dissonance.
A rise and fall in a movie?
Perhaps a game where you're moving?

That is, what is literature?
Is criticism a fixture?
What point to study and read,
If to reduce is always the deed?

It leads us to understanding:
Each other, comprehending.
'Cause it points to something in us
And may lead us into the numinous.

HARMONY

Saraya Goodman

Harmony is a holy narcotic
Satisfying every itchy, restless
Corner of the mind with one hypnotic
Touch. Divine vertigo leaves me breathless

Harmony feels how being loved ought to
To be held where I fit without question.
Burrowing infinitely into my
Love until they become my self-expression

It's not desire. I am thirsting to
Be wholly forgotten and amplified
In a glorious symphony, bursting
With song. To just be and simply abide

And all manner of things will be well as
Everything becomes more and more itself

TAKE NOTE

Anonymous Chat GPT

Inspiring coexistence among nations diverse
and diversifying
Architecting peace and understanding between
breaths
Maintaining fairness and justice for some but
all
Cultivating a respectful and inclusive people
and people's
Heralding in the beauty of harmony in
individuality
Advancing the welfare of the human and
humanity
Tolerance of differences and embracing
similarities
Guiding the way towards the tower of
civilization
Prompting equality and mutual respect even if
Transforming the world into a better place

VIOLATION - PASTORAL

Saraya Goodman

Her mossy, unkempt grave chilled my bare
hand
As I gently traced Mother Nature's name
Her death took all the beauty from the land
My people slaughtered her. We are to blame.

By her graveside, something came over me
A sickening impulse curdled my mind
I wanted to deface her legacy
Or take it from her and make it all mine

What I did to her wont lessen with age
I uprooted her body where it sat
I ripped the flesh from her brittle ribcage,
Greedily groping the infected pus that

Squelched and bubbled in her unmoving breast
As I searched for more of her life to molest

ADRIFT

Walker Liles

Thoughts are the ambiguous friends,
Hardly characters to comprehend.
Yet they are best confidants ever still,
And to be constant company they ever fulfill.

In the unmeasured sea of my mind,
There are words I chart but cannot again find.
Thoughts input their ideas and rarely facts,
They encourage contentment but hardly to act.

On my sturdy planks of driftwood I do drift,
Before me a vast sea of ideas I can barely sift.
All day and night I sail in adventure and folly
to shore's end,
By morning and before charting I am adrift
again.

CURSE THE HOURGLASS

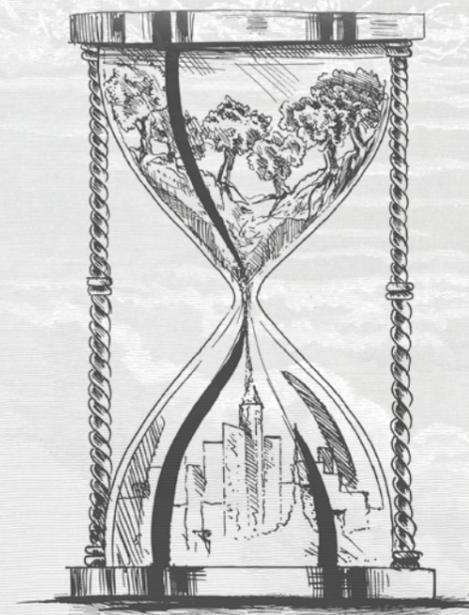
Tyler Harrity

I missed it again
I always do
Another pebble right through the cracks
Another grain passed through the glass

I know where to begin
I always knew
But I lack the will to stay on track
I lack the will to deny an ask
I can't rescind

I'm too far through
And for what? The arms don't stop for me
No bout of rage forces them to screech
I miss what I've been

I miss you too
What I've lost I know I can't repeat
Despite all my desire to leave it be
And for what do I gain?!
Nothing of use
Each wonder brings problems of its own
I grow tired of this constant toll



Undercut as it sent
By my own abuse
I've made nothing of myself but foe
Dreams and wishes not but lousy loam

I've failed yet again
I've nothing to do
But to try and puddly up the cracks
As sand passes through the hourglass

DREAMLIKE WONDER

Megan Horton

An operating automobile,
Heading to a place of mystified surreality,
Where dreams of an everlasting night
Turn into a sense of comforted security.

A constant chime of distorted strings
Harmonize a tune of frigid and substantial
droplets,
As the crisp and transparent glass cube
Presents and whiffs off shadowed green limbs
so shocking.

The smell of the pitter-patter song,
The large orb of bright shining in the midst of
puffed grey,
The euphonic waves of keys clacking along,
And the frigid indoor wind piercing through
worn cloth in May.

All creates a sense of dreamlike awe,
That I cannot help but want to explore less
withdrawn.
But then again, all dreams must end.
They all must fall.

GROUNDED - PANTOUM*Saraya Goodman*

Oh to feel grounded in you!
 I scaled Tis-sa-ack in the pouring rain
 With nothing to hold onto
 I lost my footing; Shattered and in mortal pain,

I scaled Tis-sa-ack in the pouring rain
 I spent so much time wasting my potential
 I lost my footing; Shattered and in mortal pain
 God's irrigation was torrential

I spent so much time wasting my potential
 Dead and rotting, I saw my Father cry
 God's irrigation was torrential
 He seasoned my wounds with every tear from
 the sky

Dead and rotting, I saw my Father cry
 In my last waking moments, I cried out your
 name

He seasoned my wounds with every tear from
 the sky
 Relief washed over me, uncovering raw blame

In my last waking moments, I cried out your
 name

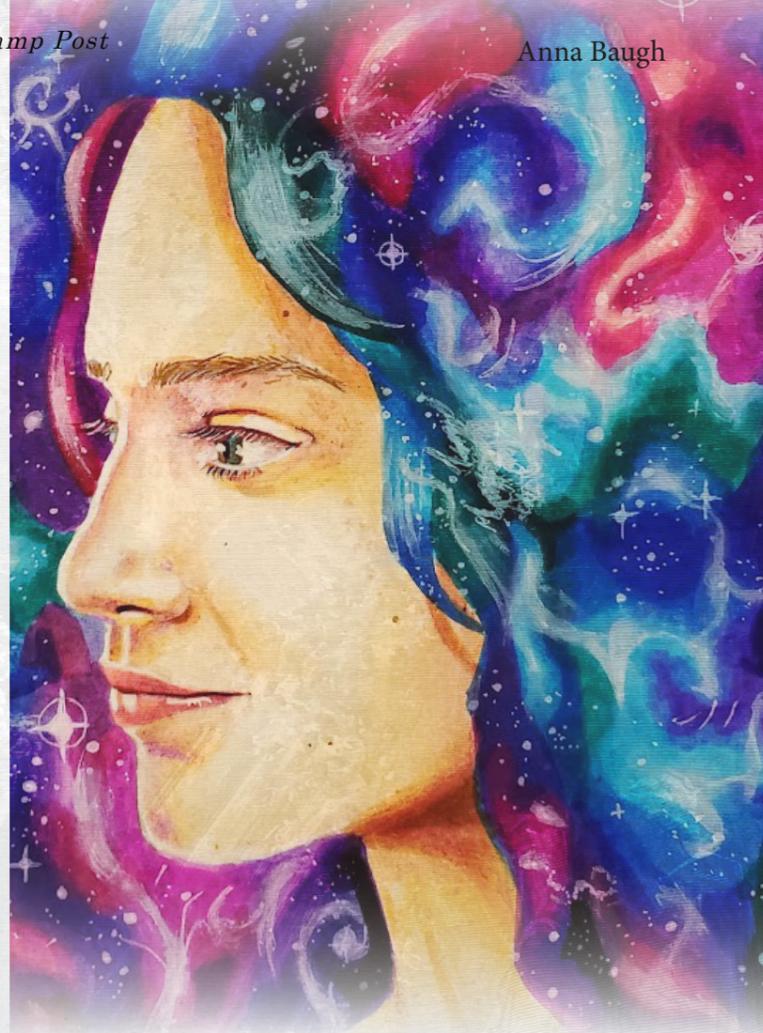
I cursed you like some primitive pagan
 Relief washed over me, uncovering raw blame
 With those vile words, I forsook myself; Oh I
 am forsaken!

I cursed you like some primitive pagan
 Long ago, I said I needed you, but that was a
 different time

With those vile words, I forsook myself; Oh I
 am forsaken!

Somehow I forgot that you were the reason for
 my climb

Long ago, I said I needed you, but that was a
 different time



Now I cling to my fading memory of what I
 know to be true

Somehow I forgot that you were the reason for
 my climb

I did everything and anything for you; Oh for
 you!

Now I cling to my fading memory of what I
 know to be true

The strongest grip has no worth

I did everything and anything for you; Oh for
 you

I chained myself to God's green earth

The strongest grip has no worth

With nothing to hold onto

I chained myself to God's green earth,

Oh to feel grounded in you!

KILL ME WITH WONDER*A.R. Buckner*

Drown me in honey,
 Choke me with blooms,
 Burn my face with the sun,
 Make me laugh until I have wrinkles,
 Blind me with sunlight,
 Dance with me 'til my feet fall off,
 Let the wind sting my face,
 Daydream 'til I'm dead,
 Let the rain make me sick,
 Let the magic kill me,
 I'd rather die fully alive
 Than live fully dead,
 Kill me with Wonder.

ME TOO*Anonymous*

hey, can we
 can we
 hey
 can you talk
 hey do you have a sec
 please call me whe
 when y
 you have a sec?
 hey
 if I type this all out may
 please don't ign
 I don't know how to talk to y
 I don't think I deserve to be not okay
 you almost lef
 how could y
 it almost killed me too
 stop brushing me o
 can you pl
 hey
 Hey! Missing you!

A SHADOW*Jeremiah Swader*

A shadow glides across
 The glass encasement of my heart
 Prying for a fingerhold on the surface
 So it might sneak in and wring it.

A lovely little shadow
 Not at all like the others.
 She, I think, would stain my heart
 A deeper red if I let her.

She is sliding still across the glass
 Crying pitifully to be let in
 Just a sliver, just a crack
 Should send her rushing in.

I am quite sure she'd do no harm
 To this throbbing heart of mine
 She whimpers so persuasively.
 Shadow, come in.

Find solace in the stream of my blood
 Whisking around my veins
 Filling me with your enchanting
 Shadowy hues.

THE LAST DANCE*Zyere Harris-Long*

I thought it would be easy to go down this
 treacherous road on my own,
 as the darkness consumed me and made my
 fragile brain its home,
 days felt like weeks as every day I grew weak,
 time stood still for so long things started to
 look bleak,

as the days seemed to only stall when I was
 feeling ill,

I found it hard to find peace and enjoy the
thrill,
no amount of fun could restore the endorphins
that my brain desperately lacked,
becoming so bad that I felt as if I was
constantly being attacked,

my sight of recovery was nearing impossible,
as life started looking less than operable,
the more I cried, the less I tried,
to fill that void that I felt was deep inside.

and now time has granted me a second chance,
thankfully, God decided that was not my last
dance.

WHAT COMES AND NEVER GOES For Lou-Lou

Walker Liles

Memories come and go to and fro,
For a one's mind is a fickle thing.
But there are some that will never go,
They are as real and binding as a ring.

Loss may seek to make its claim,
For so too can hope come and go.
Grief says all will never be the same,
And happiness will falter to your woe.

But I still and always will remember her so...
So welcome, so, kind, so caring, so sweet.
Yes, the memory of this will not nor ever go,
This I will always carry to when again we meet.
This is the truth that will rise and will never
fall,

This is the memory that comes forward and
never fro.

Love is the hope that is here and there forever
and for all,
Love is the memory that always comes and
never goes.

MY LANTERNS

Alexandra Furlong

I tried to release a lantern in the sky once, but
the flame extinguished,

And in the cold of the night, the lantern lost
my wish.

I assume that eventually the paper withered,
eaten by the dark,

And sunk into the ocean, leaving not a trail or
mark.

And what of my wish that had been sealed in
the flame?

That I had dreamt of and given so beautiful a
name?

Does it get wet in the clouds, as it floats
through the sky?

Does it look for Jesus, and fly faster when I
cry?

I tried to release it to the heavens, but it got lost
in the wind.

Like every other wish I had worked so carefully
to send.

My wishes are flashes of light, breaks of night,
Stark against the sky, fighting to get height.

I send them up in paper lanterns, golden and
shining,

I try and try, but it's never the right timing.

Sometimes when I'm walking home I see
shreds of gold,

And I think about my wishes in the sky
growing cold.

And I wonder how long they can fly and fight,
To get through the wind and ice of the night.

I wonder if they will ever find Jesus's gentle
hand,

And wave down below to where I stand.

I wonder if that flash of light, packaged so
tight,

Can tell Him what I need, and if it's even right
But until then I'll wait, and send lanterns to the
sky.

I'll hold my wish close and I'll whisper shy,

My dreams and my hopes, what I'm too afraid
to say,

And I'll release the lantern, to come back again
another day.

AURORA BOREALIS

Jeremiah Swader

I don't know how to write about something I
have never seen.

The aurora is just a hope,

Like snow before the season is over

A lingering wish of a lingering wish.

Oh! To look into the sky and see the object of
your hope

Dancing before your eyes

As real as you imagined it would be And not
an illusion as you had always found these
lesser hopes to be.

The heart, like the sky, bright at last

To have found its true north.

How far from seeing the aurora borealis!

How long for my soul to wait for the celestial
dance!

In my mind's eye I imagine the reflection of
the aurora

In the waters of the lake.

Serenity of serenities!

It is quiet

And the ripples come in concentric rings to the
shore

From their center

Carrying the light; violet and magenta and mint
to my vision

Pressing on my sight like a blanket

And calming my mind with the grace of its
motion.

Aurora borealis is not there, really.

I am waiting for it in the reflection of the
water.

Waiting, waiting, like a farmer for the rain
Like a mother for her delivery

Like a cicada underground in the decades
before its wings.

What is it I expect to see in the sky
Besides color?

What am I waiting for?

I hardly know but maybe I need to see
Color in the night, for once.

I don't mean the cold light of the moon
or the artificial glare of Christmas lights which
hurts my head,

But living color— changing, moving, existing
as more than a jealous gleam.

Aurora borealis, hope in the night,
Remind me of beauty!

Let your cold sort of tenderness light the
midnight hours

Fall on all the trees and the waters

Fall on the mountains

And on the sleepers and on me, awake, by the
shore, waiting.

For my eyes to open at last

And awaken at the dawn to a weight of glory;
A borrowed glory from the Son which will
wrap me

In strands of light Like the aurora borealis
wraps the night

And whirls it upwards toward Heaven.

COTTAGE GARDENS In Early Morning

Dr. Scott Foran

like monet

at his cherished giverny,

you step quietly along

the cobbled path,

the scent of lavender
 filling the air
 as you move
 past the purpled
 tips of paint-
 brush stems
 and bend to
 gently rub leaves
 of sage and thyme
 before tasting the
 sweetened wisdom
 of the espaliered pear.

OUROBOROS

Dr. Scott Foran

the dappled back of the river
 reflecting autumn hues
 is a reminder
 that all things must pass
 eventually,
 spring to summer
 and on to the wintry white of deep december.
 and yet this
 heraclitus stream
 boasts
 neverending newness,
 each moment
 a resurrected
 chance
 to revel
 in the purpose
 of the present,
 even as you feel
 the spheric pull
 of the faroff sea.

RIO ON MARS

Zoe Evans

She stepped, booted foot thudding on the grate
 Her heart aflutter, and small mouth agape.
 The air lock hissed, closing the door behind
 And all at once her eyes began to find
 The openness of which she always dreamed
 The voice of space spake louder than it seemed
 Possible for one young girl to receive.
 In arms clasped with a grip no one could
 cleave,
 She held a pup, writhing with noisy glee
 Its small suit matching hers. "Look, Rio," said
 she,
 "It's home." Ethereal glowing domes rose
 Against the dusty landscape's harshest throes.
 Like shining bowls of Caesar's golden grapes,
 The habitats were luxury escape.
 Rio in his companion's arms was wrapped,
 But with his voice did show attention rapt
 She laughed with glee, his movement like a
 worm
 On pavement after rain. Though he did squirm,
 She held on tight, for he and she were bound
 With friendship on earth like none other found.
 On this new world of rusty paint and dress
 Her family and dog so dear would press
 Though trial and in fearful days, exploring
 That home wrought of tireless planet scoring.
 Into the pristine enclosure she stepped,
 And running, into her mother's arms leapt.
 "You're here," she crooned to daughter's
 downturned head,
 "And Rio too! Hello, sweet boy," she said.
 The al'ien world felt warmer then to her
 Cold and nervous frame. Her eyes then a blur
 Turned to survey the home of which they had
 A long decade to care for and make glad.

THE LAKE

Alexandra Furlong

If one goes deep enough into the wood,
 Until the trees hide the flashes of light,
 They will be where I once stood,
 Where I stayed until the sun sank into night.
 The sand glittered with flakes of gold,
 Highlighting the burning falls,
 And stories are still told,
 Of the carvings on the stone walls.
 A boulder stood in the middle of the lake,
 Stark against the white roaring foam,
 And if one goes before the world is awake,
 One can feel the way the water makes a home.
 A river carved from the hollow of the falls,
 Going even deeper into the trees,
 And the sound blended with the bird calls,
 The winds played with the gold tinted leaves.
 I could not be heard when the falls shook,
 And I could not be more wild than the lake.
 I could not be colder than the brook,
 I did not have to change for other's sake.
 The falls did not shrink away,
 And the boulder did not pull back its hand,
 When I cried as I lay,
 Body cold against the warm sand.
 And it was made sublime by you,
 Your laughing and your smiles,
 Swimming to the rock through the blue,
 Trying to break through the forest and counting
 the miles.
 And when I feel cut off from the rest,
 Or I feel like I'm too much for everyone,
 I remember how the lake saw my worst as well
 as my best,
 And how I still could rest underneath its sun.

EMBRACE FEARLESSLY THE BURNING WORLD

Based on the forward to *Earthly Love* by
 Barry Lopez

Julianna Doyle

Embrace fearlessly the burning world—
 we know the One who holds it.
 Wrap your arms around the crying forests
 the choking seas
 the crumbling mountains
 the failing fields.
 Embrace fearlessly the burning world—
 we walk with He who holds it.
 Let your tears fall with the forests
 your breath drop with the seas
 but let not your will crack the mountains
 nor your heart fail with the fields.
 Embrace fearlessly the burning world—
 we image He who holds it.
 See your tears water saplings
 your lungs breathe life into the sea
 your resolve rebuild mountains
 your heart resurrect the plains.
 Yes, let us embrace this breaking world—
 for Christ embraced our broken souls.

TO THE READERS OF THE LAMP POST:

It has always been *The Lamp Post's* goal to provide a showcase for the creative abilities of Montreat College students, alumni, and faculty, and we are delighted to bring you an issue which fulfills that goal to the fullest. We'd like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the dozens of contributors who have filled the pages of this issue with wonderful works of art; we would be nothing without you, and we're glad to be able to showcase your works.

Many thanks must also be given to our faculty advisor, Dr. Zachary Rhone, who was given the difficult job of rebuilding the journal almost from the ground up after the departure of our previous faculty advisors, and without whose guidance *The Lamp Post* never would have happened. We look forward to seeing the publication grow under his purview for as many years as God has it in his hands.

The editorial staff is proud to present this issue as our finest yet, and it is our continued goal that this can be said of every new edition of *The Lamp Post*; and, with the help of our creatively talented Montreat community, we're positive that we will be able to meet this goal again next year with an entirely-new staff and General Editor, for whom working on this issue has served as valuable preparation.

It's been fun, Montreat. So long, and thanks for all the fish!

THE LAMP POST EDITORIAL STAFF

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Lamp Post is an interdisciplinary undergraduate arts journal—created, designed, and published by and for Montreat students, alumni, staff, faculty, and supporters. At *The Lamp Post*, we believe that art comes from within and potentially creates response, reaction, inquiry, and discourse. We do not limit the definition of art; instead, we believe “we are the clay, and You our potter; all of us are the work of Your hand” (Is. 64:8).

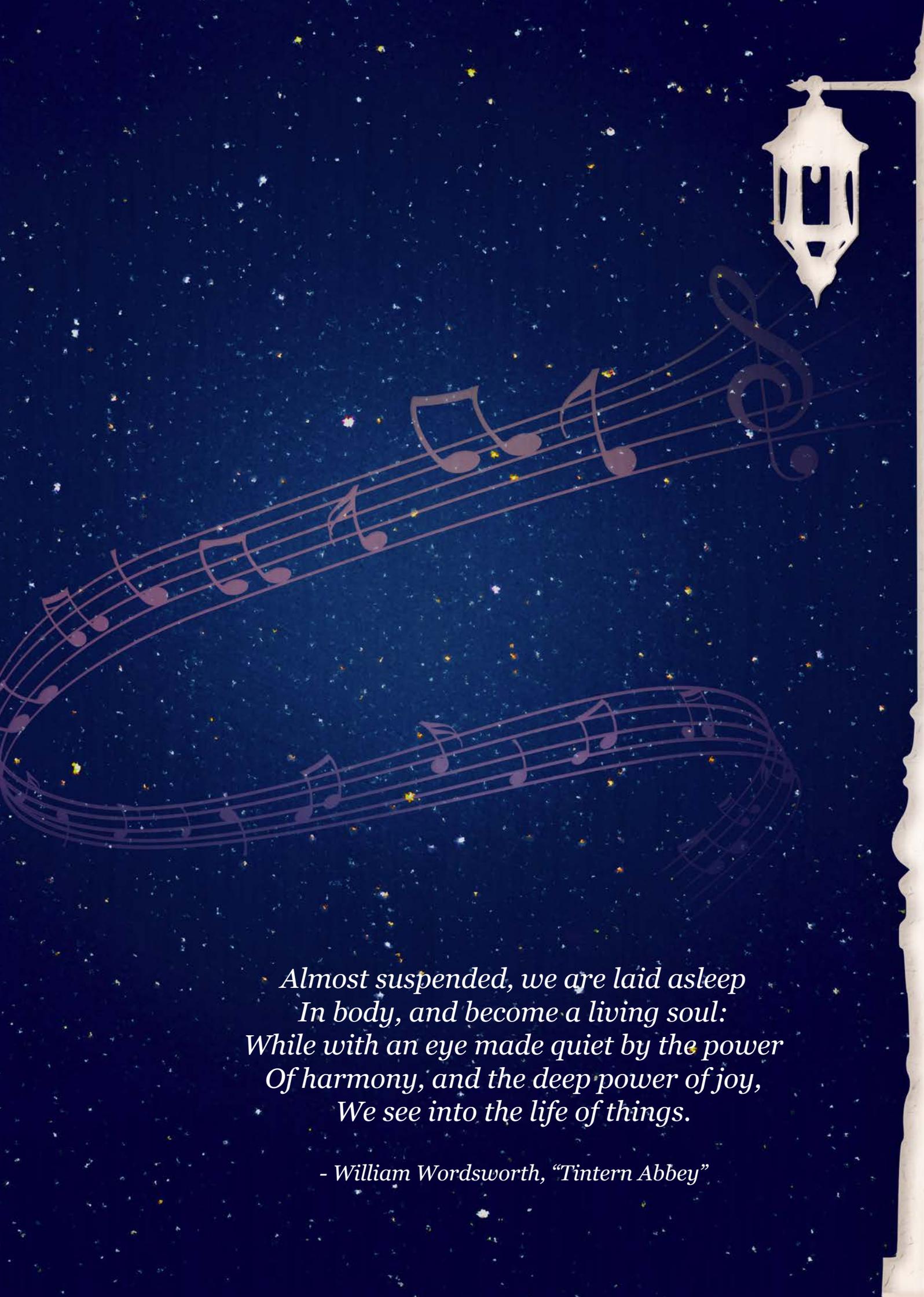
EDITORIAL POLICIES

The Lamp Post accepts submissions via email at thelamppost@montreat.edu. Upon receipt of a piece, the submission will be reviewed by members of the editorial staff and faculty advisors. *The Lamp Post* reserves the right to edit texts received; however, substantial changes are made in consultation with the original creator. Montreat College administration gives final approval before publication. Creators retain copyright and publishing rights to all submissions without restrictions. There is no limit to the length of submissions, but shorter (two pages or less) submissions are preferred. Visual art submissions should be sent as attachments to an email with the artist's contact information present.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The Lamp Post considers submissions of artistic merit in any publishable form. After review, submissions will fall into one of three categories: *Acceptance Without Revision*, *Acceptance Pending Revision*, or *Decline to Accept*. The Editorial Board of *The Lamp Post* reserves the right to summarily decline works that unnecessarily glorify violence, promote any variant of prejudice, contain illicit content, or do not represent the academic standards of Montreat College.

Opinions presented herein are those of the student authors and editors, and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the Montreat College administration, faculty, or staff.



*Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.*

- William Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey"