

# THE CATALYST





U W - L A C R O S S E

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CATALYST





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**THE HONEY BEE**

*Cortlyn Kelly*

## WHO WE ARE

The Catalyst is an undergraduate publication for the UW-La Crosse community sponsored by the UW-La Crosse English Club. The publication showcases the creativity and talent in the UW-L community, publishing original prose (fiction and nonfiction), poetry, artwork, photography, videos, music, and more from UW-L students, faculty, and staff.

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And, of course, all who continue to read and support our publication and the creativity that flows through our university

**LIVI HACKBARTH**

*Editor in Chief*



# Basket Case

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**ALAINNA JUSTINE**

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6 Natalie inbounds the ball to me. “I’ll post up down low, you got this!” Such a bitch. One day outside a basketball camp Natalie decided to trip me, I fell into a mud puddle. Ever since then she got everyone making me the butt of their jokes. I don’t know what her problem is. She’s just jealous that I’m better at basketball. I mean, I’m our best player, so people still like me during basketball season. I run down the court, sure as shit Natalie is posted up. She’s pretty huge so it would be an easy shot. I debate throwing her the ball, but I’m pissed she tried acting nice to me just to get the ball. I would have thrown her the ball if she would have kept her mouth shut. I fake right but drive left. Nobody expects a female point guard to drive left, but I can. My dad taught me basketball. I think my dad liked pretending I was the son he never had. I didn’t mind, I liked not getting treated like a “girl”. I pull up for a jumper and swish. No problem.

Natalie runs beside me as we got back on defense, “Don’t be a ball hog I was wide open.”

Fuck her. “Fuck you,” I say straight to her face.

“Technical foul!” The ref apparently heard me.

“It was to my own team!” What an idiot he can’t call that when I’m talking to my own team.

“Don’t push it.”

I shut up. What a fucking asshole.

My coach calls me over. “Hey, we need you out there, what are you doing?” You’re damn right you need me. His breath reeks as he leaned in. It smells like sushi. Who the fuck eats sushi right before a basketball game?

“Sorry, coach. Won’t happen again.” Well at least not where the ref can hear it.

“Alright, get back out there. Teamwork, remember?” He smiles at me encouragingly, but I get such a creepy vibe from him, so I never smile back. All the other girls try flirting and sucking up to get playing time. I swear a couple of them have done stuff with him. Stacy always sits right next to him on the bench. She honestly makes everybody scoot down and he gives the chair a big slap before she sits down like she is important or some shit. The truth is she sucks. We let her inbound the ball, but other than that, she never touches the ball if we can help it. At least Natalie and I agree on that.

I stand behind the three-point line as their best player shoots their foul shot. Swish. It went in. I look back at the bench just to see if there was a specific play he wants me to run, but Stacy is sitting there whispering something in his ear and they are laughing! It’s the fourth quarter and he isn’t even coaching. Whatever. I got it.

I look up to the crowd as I run down the clock a little more. We are only up by one, but it is almost the end of the game. I look around at the crowd and see my dad. He yells, "Drive in again and dish it out!" When my coach tells me something to do I almost always do not do that thing, but when my dad does, I always listen. One time my mom went out of town for the weekend and said, "Don't you even think about throwing a party while I'm gone. There better be no drinking and no boys!" I don't even like parties. I had no intention of throwing a party, but right when she said that I was like, oh shit, now I have to throw a god-damn party. I only had one beer. It was disgusting, but I didn't care, I finished the whole damn thing anyway. Word traveled pretty fast and I had a decent party going. Natalie even came, which was annoying. Her and her friends all puked in my downstairs bathroom, which is the good bathroom that my mom doesn't even let me use. "It's for our guests, Jane!" She always told me. That doesn't even make sense. Why have a bathroom if you're not even allowed to shit in it? Mom never found out about the party. I drive in and Natalie's defender collapses on me, leaving her wide open. I dish it out to her and she banks it in. Happy now, Natalie?

It's getting real close to the buzzer. The other team inbound the ball so quick and make a long pass to their post who's at the three-point line. Natalie is sinking down into the post for the rebound, but the fucking big girl nailed a three!

"Defense, Natalie!" Coach yells at her. She throws her hands up in the air like she did nothing wrong. What a brat. I can't help but smile. Now I'm pumped. I mean we just got scored on which sucks because now we are tied, but it's also all Natalie's fault. I will make up for it.

I pass it out to the wing and sprint down to the paint and am wide open, but that dumbass decides to lob a hail Mary. Bonk. Off the rim and into our opponent's hands. They make a mad dash to the other side of the court. Down to our final seconds, and swish. Another three. Down by three. Four seconds left. I try running past the heavy defense. I throw up a three with only a couple seconds remaining and a whistle! I get to shoot three. I make my first two but then comes the third. The crowd is obnoxiously quiet. I raise the ball and my hands tremble. The shot goes up. Miss. Fuck. Bounces off to the side. Natalie grabs it and puts it back up and swish. Makes it at the buzzer. Goddammit. Fucking Natalie. We won.







**Austin VanBuren**

# Howto: Look Good

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**ALAINNA JUSTINE**

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Sleep through your alarms. Rush to the mirror and critically analyze every pore and fine line on your face. Hate yourself. Try to brush your hair. Too tangled. Throw it up in a bun using 4 hair ties and 13 bobby pins. Ferociously brush your teeth. Contemplate if you have time to put on makeup. Compromise. Lather on tinted moisturizer and apply mascara in the car. Tinted chapstick is your friend. Crush your big meeting. Feel confident. Sway your ass as you walk down the hall. Realize 2 hours into your day you forgot deodorant and have started sweating. Spend the remaining 6 hours of your day walking around with your arms clung to your sides. Make frequent trips to the restroom hoping nobody is in there. Start the hand dryer. Bend your knees and raise your arm over your head. Frantically rub the sweat spot. Try to act natural whenever you think you hear the door opening. Realize 4 hours into your day you have a gob of toothpaste on the corner of your mouth from this morning. Spend the remaining 4 hours anxiously licking your mouth worried you missed some.

Realize when you get home your mascara made a black blur under your eyes. Take out your hair ties and pins. Your greasy hair holds in the air. Stare at your face. Hate that it is cover in pores. Realize your nose is crooked. Pluck your mustache. Try to tame your eyebrows. End up with only half an eyebrow. Hate yourself. Take off your bra and pants. Put on a sweatshirt with the hood up. Grab a bag of chips. Hop into bed. Scroll the internet. See a 6 week gym trial for \$99 and save the link. Spend the next week and a half telling people you're thinking of joining a gym.

One night before going to bed decide to wash your face. Decide that feels good. Impulsively go online and order \$162 in skin care products. Keep it going and sign up for that gym trial. Skip the first four days because you just couldn't find the time.

Your facemasks come in the mail. Excitedly open one and put it on. Peel it off and touch your skin. It feels amazing. You look amazing. Set all your alarms early to workout. Wake up and go to the gym.

Get to the gym and awkwardly join the class. Try to pay attention to the trainer as he tells you the stations. Everyone yells "got it" and high fives. Have no idea what is going on. Nod anyway. Mimic what other people are doing. Don't find the right weights. Use ones that are too heavy. Be drenched in sweat. Try to wipe some off your forehead and cry out in pain because you can't lift your arm that high. Go home and make a smoothie. Decide eating good is tasty. Go to the gym every day that week.

Go to the grocery store and buy \$226 in healthy food. Meal prep for the week. Let the majority of what you bought rot in the fridge. Go to Mcdonalds for lunch. Tell yourself you deserve a cheat meal. Go home, skip

the gym, binge watch Netflix, and eat all the candy you bought at the gas station on your way home. Go to Mcdonalds two more times that week.

Go out to eat with your family when your sister comes to town. Notice how perfectly scrawny she is and that she orders a burger and fries. Want to order a burger and fries yourself. Order a salad. Listen to her say, "You look so good! I wish I had your shape." Laugh but say, "thanks." Listen to her tell your family how great her life is. Smile but stay silent. The food comes. Spend the rest of the time wishing you ordered a burger. Barely eat your salad. Go home and make food. Next time you go out order a burger. Hate yourself. Spend the rest of the night shitting on the toilet. When the shitting concludes, make some toaster strudels and a bowl of ice cream and watch Netflix.

Keep up with your skin routine and ditch the makeup except to draw in the other half of your eyebrows. Look in the mirror and realize your face is still one red ball. Decide, "Fuck it. It's not working." Put on so much makeup.

When you get home become too exhausted and fall asleep with your makeup on. Wake up to a face full of new pimples. Pop. every. single. one. Cover the bleeding with makeup without washing last night's off. Spend the rest of the day picking at the scabs. Go to the gym after work for partner workout day. Hear the trainer say, "Everybody grab a partner." Look to your left. The girl runs to a different person. Look to your right and point at a girl. Watch her run past to someone behind you. Hear the trainer say, "Go!" Stand frozen. Tell him you don't have a partner. Be partners with the trainer. Hate yourself. Realize everyone looks like they came from a workout clothing catalog. Look down at your oversized grey t-shirt, red cotton shorts, and grandma shoes. Go home and buy \$247 in workout clothes. Wear them everywhere so people know you workout.

Meet a guy and stop going to the gym. He tells you, "you don't need a gym, you're beautiful." Roll your eyes but smile. Start being happy. Mess that up. Still don't go to the gym. Your trial is almost over anyway.

Buy a \$435 camera. Take a thousand selfies. Pick one. Download the best photo editor. Pay \$30 for premium. Remove all your blemishes, tan your skin, slim down your face, increase your lips, and write a not so subtle caption to that short lived guy in your life. Get a lot of likes. Fall asleep with your makeup on.



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SETH POLFUS





*Root River Feast*



*Yellow River Backwoods*



# Cliff Pass

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**LUIS ACOSTA**

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**14** Nature can force death, so can a bad personality.

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“Higher taxes equals a beautiful country, thank you to the people for making this highway renovation possible,” words, from the government official upon the returning of the once adored highway, rattled in his head like a pebble in a pill canister.

His ass burnt so bad, as he laid in horrible pain on what had to be new pavement.

The cliff side highway had been shut down, one of the oldest passes in the area. A winding strip going up and down the tallest mountain in the area. His marketing firm had a party put on to celebrate the opening of the high way they helped advertise. The party was at the new city hall psychotically placed on top of the mountain. Paying a parking ticket would be a day trip, he said to his wife looking for a laugh that wasn't there. Their relationship was rocky, he hoped this party would make her happier.

A beautiful ride up the mountain, but treacherous winding and diving corners driving down. It seemed almost unprofessionally maintained for such a new highway, he thought. The worry left his brain as quickly as it entered.

Everything would be fine, it's only a party.

He remembers the taste of champagne and Cuban cigars upon waking up to the sound of blood dripping, and the pounding of his head from his thoughts trying to escape the claustrophobia of his crushed skull. He had not one thought upon feeling the concaved crater on the left side of his head, only a sensation of horror. He grasped around himself defenselessly to get an idea as to what was making his back so cold. He lifted himself up, using his lower back and waist.

His back had been cold from blood loss.



The damn road gave away from him; he had crashed on the way back down from the party into a metal pole that was placed sharply on a winding corner. The collision sent him flying through his windshield away from the wreck. He was angry he didn't express to the public how shitty the highway really was.

It was a dark night that he may have enjoyed if he weren't in deafening pain.

Poor guy, they'll say upon his death.

Never really did anything, they'll remember.

Wasn't a very nice person.

All he did was work and spend money.

"His poor wife must be so lonely."

Thoughts pounding, obstructing his will to move.

He broke out of his self-pity, and became motivated to survive.



**The Dichotomy of Last Night**

*Marissa Widdifield*

# Born Again Virgin

*By Marissa Widdifield*

The ceiling fan spun in circles  
like an elegant stallion decorated  
in equally delicate jewelry,

rotating like a carousel pony  
overcome with an unconscious desire  
by mothers and their daughters.

A carnival ride for nomadic dust bunnies  
that hadn't been ridden in months,  
but somehow trapped her  
like watching a swinging pendulum.

Back and forth from  
pillar to post  
She stared at helicopter propellers up-  
stairs,  
wind wedged between her thighs that  
used to straddle decorative foals at the  
fair—

her eyes fixated  
on the whirling dervish dancing in pairs.

But she is not Islamic.  
She's confirmed to a Catholic church  
And lied to God to get there.  
It is purely a re-enactment of death and  
resurrection.

The ceiling fan's hum  
pulsing through her fingertips  
She still doesn't close her eyes



# The Struggle to Untangle Disturbance

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**GRETTA DURST**

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The purpose of these studs, riveted in skin, in leathers, each carefully placed in row to ensure the look of a warrior, is to ward off threats, to puncture holes in unwelcome hands.

Hands with a heavy history of alcohol and exuberant clapping across the faces and spines of children. Hands that would, without batting an eye, stab a horse and watch its black reflective pools water and shake and stay open through the profuse bleeding from its artery.

Arteries that clog from inhaling red meats, maybe from another horse whose neck bent and bled out, maybe from a deer off the side of the road, maybe the deer had black flies laying eggs in the flaps of its injury and was still eaten. Maybe the red meat was a corpse that jammed the industrial grade-mincer by falling in or being thrown, maybe the black flies couldn't get to those fleshy bones.

Bones under rot, stiff by rigor mortis, petrified from a fleshy wet reorganization of cells, bones of a lady who carried a garnet ring capped with white gold, carried her woes by writing lists and smiling so tightly that the veins in her neck resembled a cello's jutting bow hairs, carried a terrible scar on her brow from taking perilous blows to the eyes, forced to slam a bookend straight into the head of her abuser. It took one swing for her to whisper I'm fine now. Yes, I'm free...

Free as the hallows in the empty fields, the openings in the ground, the bouts of dirt that fold into a mourning adult blotting out the sky, pocketed in the grass, drowning in the backyard of his or her first home and knowing tens of years sojourned for that house to be taken back by the trees, the walls like a skeleton, the copper piping pulled, the bones exposed, the foundation stabbed and bleeding like the horse, and the hands who had built it eclipsed and destroyed by his grit, his intolerable valor, his yellowed fingers from eating cigarettes, his bloody lungs from packing ash, all the while blowing down on the city a curse of his memory to keep the air fraught.

## Apex in the Dark

*By Greta Durst*

It is the wood which airs madness.  
The houses deep in thick hills of needles,  
maple leaves, driftless valley dirt,  
snow painted with blood.  
Accidents of insanity sit with the wind  
and moisten the crystals in delicate ears.  
The ones who live here have cells  
from the forest settling in the layers of their eyes,  
refracting on moments of sheer  
separation, of mind, of limbs, of body.  
This wood does not do but what it does,  
and the asylum built here is an asking offense, or  
perhaps a deep welcoming of the souls  
that will never again be theirs.  
Children were brought forth, yes,  
but only one was born here,  
raised into the sappy atmosphere where  
the trees cough up and stick  
to the skin and wish to ooze  
and linger with the curious hand.  
And who pulls away shall weigh heavier thoughts  
on what species lay apex in the dark.



**Elizabeth Roberts**





**Elizabeth Roberts**

# Rusted Plate

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**NOAH FINCO**

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“It is here,” said the man in the dark hood. The knight at his side gave him a sideways glance. “The place you seek,” he continued before pulling aside the brush to reveal an opening in the forest. At its center stood a once magnificent shrine now reduced to rubble. The knight stepped into the clearing and turned back to the hooded man. “I will go no further,” he said shaking his head. “It is to be you and only you. So, said the gods.”

The knight nodded and tossed him his coin purse. “Consider my horse the second half of your payment,” said the knight who then charged toward the temple gate without so much as glancing backwards. When he arrived at the temple entrance, he shed his heavy travel cloak, coaxed a flame from his lantern, and set off into the darkness before he could convince himself not to.

The knight navigated the twists and turns of the temple corridors for the better part of an hour, accompanied only by the echoes of his rattling armor and labored breathing. He contemplated turning back until he came upon a large cavern with a ceiling so high it extended beyond the reach of his lantern’s light. There was a presence there, something that cut through the stillness of the air and made the knight’s hair stand on end. He opened his mouth to call out but was interrupted by a sudden gust of wind that ripped the lantern from his hand and smashed it into the wall, enveloping him in a suffocating darkness.

Instinctively, the knight drew his sword and slowly backed up until his back touched the wall, poised to strike at whatever presented itself. The roaring wind subsided and turned into a deep, menacing chuckle that made the knight shudder. A light then appeared his left, and he was shocked to discover that it was his mangled lantern somehow still producing a flame. He crept towards it and just as he reached out to grab it, it flew upwards as if held by an invisible hand and drifted toward the center of the room where there stood a pillar with a basin full of a dark liquid. The lantern was dropped into the liquid which ignited instantaneously. The flame then traveled down the pillar, through the floor then up the wall where several sconces ignited at once, illuminating the cavern with a pale orange light. Beyond the pillar ascended a set of marble stairs that lead to an immense throne where sat a man, dressed in an eclectic mix of greens, purples,

golds in what had to be the most extravagant outfit that the knight had ever seen.

"Sir knight!" He exclaimed, the tone of his voice matched the flamboyancy of his outfit, "Welcome! I've eagerly awaited your arrival! Come closer, let me have a look at you." To bewildered to know what else to do, the knight did as he was told and gripped the hilt of his sword a bit tighter.

"My, my, look at you," he said as the knight came to a stop before his throne. The man was a mystery to be sure, but there was something about him that was uncanny. Some sort of faint familiarity as if the knight had shared a drink with him a great many years ago.

"You don't know who I am do you? Shame, we've been so close for so long! I had hoped that you'd at least have an inkling as to who I was," He sighed, "No matter, I am a man of many names. Some call me a friend, others a fiend, some a saint and most, a vice, but you sir knight, you know me best as man's greatest weakness. Your greatest weakness in fact..." The man leapt from his throne and stood before the knight, "...Pride." He assessed the knight, who reacted with little more than a twitch of the cheek.

"And, I must say sir knight," he continued. "Given all I've heard about you with tales of the beast you slain, the maidens you've bedded and the battles you've won, seeing you in the flesh is rather..." Pride searched the ceiling for the proper word, "...disappointing." The knight narrowed his eyes as Pride begun circling him. "I mean, look at your armor! It's dented and scratched and a little tight around the midsection I must say. And is that - is that rust I see?" The knight followed Pride's gaze to the area under his arm where, to his surprise, was a small patch of reddish brown rust.

"This is hardly acceptable for a man of your fame! Of your legacy! And your sword!" Pride reached down and lifted the blade to his face "Here I come to find that the legendary blade of a king's champion is nothing more than an old, piece of iron in desperate need of a sharpening. Then look at you sir knight," he let go of the knight's sword arm. "You're unshaven, your eyes bloodshot, your hair is thinning and whatever hair you do have left is gray. Your posture is atrocious, your fighting stance is lazy, your muscles have grown soft and - I mean no offense when I say this but - I assume that your member doesn't work the way it used to?"

The knight's nostrils flared, but he remained still and stoic. "Truth be told," said Pride, evidently feeding off the knight's rage, "I am quite insulted that you thought you could come in here, into my home and defeat me in this state. It's simply-" the knight felt something tighten around his waist before he was lifted into the air "-pathetic" he hissed.

While glaring at Pride, he failed to notice that the man's legs had transformed into black, wisp like tentacles that were now hoisting him upward. The knight was slammed against the rocky ceiling and felt the air rush from his lungs as he begun plummeting back toward the ground. Pride then swung him sideways and smashed him against the wall before letting the knight drop onto the ground beside him.

"I don't know why I expected so much," said Pride, kneeling next to the gasping knight. "You were, after all, my greatest pupil." He picked the knight up once again and set him, not so gently onto his throne. "We accomplished so much sir knight! Why throw it away now? Sure, you've grown old and slow but you're better than all the men that prance around the castle courtyards and care more about pageantry and bedding the latest nobleman's daughter than they do honor and skill. No sir you are a real warrior! A man born for battle and for victory!" Pride's legs returned to their normal state as he sat himself on the knight's lap.

"But, once I had heard you'd begun hunting for my kin, I knew. After you killed Fear, then Lust, then Greed, I knew." Pride sighed dramatically, "I knew it would be me you'd come for next. It's a shame really. A tragedy some might say." He shook his head and clicked his tongue while gently caressing the knight's scalp.

"But!" he exclaimed, leaping from the knight's lap and jabbing an elbow into his cracked ribs. "before I kill you my friend, there is just something I simply don't understand." Pride started pacing back and forth before the knight as if working through a complicated problem of arithmetic. "Killing someone like myself is not done without great effort, that much is known. And if someone, like yourself, wanted to kill the likes of Fear, Lust and Greed, what reason must you have?"

The knight opened his mouth to answer but Pride held up a finger "Now, before you answer sir knight, remember that I know you better than anyone else. And I know your answer will be some riveting display of gallantry about protecting the innocent from the evils of this world. But let me ask you this, does the starving farmer not still fear the winter's frost? Does the old, committed man not still lust after the young virgin? Does the wealthy not still wish for more coin? In essence, you've done nothing for the innocent, the poor, the helpless. Instead you did it for the same reason you've done anything. To add a verse to your tavern song, to add a chapter to your fable, to appease me."



Pride suddenly grew three times in size and loomed over the seated knight. “But, now you are here. And I cannot understand why,” his voice was harmonized by an inhuman growl and his eyes begun to glow a sickening green. “With whom would you celebrate this victory if not with me? What do you have to gain by beating me? Why sir knight, are you here?” He let the question linger, allowing the knight to consider his answer carefully. Finally, the knight met his eyes.

I cannot understand why,” his voice was harmonized by an inhuman growl and his eyes begun to glow a sickening green. “With whom would you celebrate this victory if not with me? What do you have to gain by beating me? Why sir knight, are you here?” He let the question linger, allowing the knight to consider his answer carefully. Finally, the knight met his eyes.

“Why you ask?” The knight struggled to his feet and drew his sword. “It’s because you are right.” He let the sword clatter on the ground. “You are my greatest weakness, everything I’ve ever done, ever seen and ever loved was because of you.” He unclasped the straps that held his gauntlets to his arms. “I have grown old. I’m slow, weak. I tire easily. And yes-” He too let the gauntlets fall, “-my member does not work like it used to. I’ve got no family, no sons to raise, no daughters to see marry, no wife to hold in my arms.”

With each sentence, the knight discarded another piece of his armor, and with each piece, Pride reduced in size. “Because of you,” he said as slipped his chainmail over his head, “I have nothing. Because of you, I am tired and I am-” He cast the mail aside, “-pathetic.” The knight stood before Pride in nothing but his small clothes. Peeking out from beneath the thin fabric were scars of battles both recent and long ago. “Now, I’m here to ask you,” he said, taking a breath. “What is a knight without his sword, armor and steed?” He did not wait for Pride’s answer, “Nothing. And that is what I choose to be for however many years I’ve got left. I’m tired of fighting, of killing and of running. All I want now is to rest.”

Pride collapsed to his knees and held the discarded sword in his trembling hands. He regarded Pride once final time before walking back toward where he entered the cavern.

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“Before I go,” said the knight, turning back to the demon. “I must thank you.” Pride gave him an incredulous look, “Why?” His voice was soft and empty.

- “Because of you, I’ve seen the world, fulfilled a dream and done more than I’ve ever thought possible. But,
- like me, you’ve grown old my friend and if there’s anything I’ve learned, it’s that with too much pride comes disdain. Farewell.” With that the knight entered the narrow passageway from which he came and began, what would have to be a blind journey back to the temple entrance.

To his surprise, he found himself at the temple gates after only a few turns and, as he passed through, he saw that the rain had ceased. He reveled in the warmth of the sun against his skin, the weight of the armor no longer on his shoulders and for what felt like the first time ever, he was simply content. All that was left for him to do was make the simple decision of which direction to head. He knew that no matter his choice, no matter if he lived or died, he knew that he was now just a man, a free man.

## THE END



**Noah Finco**  
*Steps of Himal*

# AUGUST 7, 2010

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**MAKAYLA KELLNER**

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The people are still, the lights hum their shaky tune, the fans blow a gentle breeze, and if you listen carefully you can hear the animals amble across the cool hardwood floor, unaware, oblivious, under the impression that life is still good. Out the hand-printed window the overgrown grasses wave effortlessly to the rising sun as a thanks for bringing a new day. A passerby trots in minimal clothing producing droplets of hope expecting to trot into tomorrow's arid heat.

To be in a different life and not curse this arguably beautiful day. To be the preadolescent kid sleeping in, ignoring the countless robin chirps and rustling of the morning paper down the hall, only waking to the smell of french toast hot off the steaming griddle and the undeniable internal growl. To be the kid that gets to go on with their day with nothing to do, idling on the front porch with two of their closest friends dreading together the end of the last three weeks of summer as it will bring back the exhausting 6 o'clock mornings. To be the kid that knows they will see him again.

Down the hall two black figures stand in the distance at the square wooden dinner table, my mother right beside them. The hall grows longer and longer as if time is on my side. My heart begins to mimic that of a hummingbird's and my limbs become victims to gravity. *Something's wrong. Something's not right.*

I'm escorted to another room and accompanied by family friends whom we've known since we moved here eight years ago. I sympathetically admire my young, innocent sister. She doesn't know what awaits. She's just happy to see our friends. *Will she understand, or will she simply accept and live a lie?*

It wasn't long until I found myself being taken to my parents' room. My mom wanted to speak to me. *Don't panic, don't panic.* The energy in her eyes and her smile has dwindled. Her soft aged hands suffocate mine and quivering sobs advance. I knew what was coming, but I couldn't, I wouldn't let myself believe it until I heard the words. I need my assumptions to be wrong. *It's too early. We need more time.* My chest and wrists begin to shake unknowing how my heart will take it.



It's true.

Our bodies collapse and sink into one another comforting each others' souls, attempting to keep them from becoming broken China never to be put together again.

He will never be there for my first date or the first breakup. He will never be there for my high school graduation, or even college and graduate school. He will never meet my boyfriend, fiancé, husband. He will never give the guy in my life the "You hurt her, I'll kill you" talk. He will never walk me down the aisle, and we will never have that father-daughter dance. He will never meet his grandkids, or teach them things grandparents teach them. He will never again be there to hold my hand and comfort me during a time in need, and he will never again be there to make me smile or tease me like he always did. I will never again hear his soft, strong voice, or his infectious laughter. I will never again feel the engulf of his warm, secure embrace. I will never again feel his scruff on my cheek, or his rough calloused hands on my shoulders. My mom won't ever be able to kiss his lips in appreciation, or have him to keep her warm on the cooler nights. No more date nights to her favorite restaurant. No more weekly impromptu gifts he would surprise her with. No more fights over the socks he aimlessly left around the house. No more. She will never grow old with her love and enjoy what life would bring them. My sister may remember his presence, but not like us. She will never get to appreciate his protective nature. She will never know of the numerous third-shifts he worked just so he could spend his day with us, dismissing his need for sleep. She will never know how approachable others found him with his full-bearded smile, and how compelled they were to tell him their story.

My mom's hands glide away from mine and find the door. As she quietly sniffles and wipes her exhausted tears, she floats her way back to the figures, and I am left in despair. Not only do I fear my father-less future, I fear one day he will fade.

*If I speak of his time with us, my memory cannot fail me.*

*If I speak of his time with us, my memory cannot fail me.*

*If I speak of his time with us, my memory cannot fail me.*

# Dream

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**JAHNI BRANDT**

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Red and white tennis shoes move automatically across the gray cement, the soul scraping on the ground to a beat. Headphones in the ears dangle down; singer's voice curls down the canal of the ear. Deep into the membrane that catches the vibration, deep to the bones that vibrate the fluid in the cochlea and the hairs catch the bass of snare drums and guitar and mouth and tongue. Tickling the ears of a hooded person, walking through the rain to the beat. Heels of the shoes dragging up the water gathered underneath into a beautiful arc that curves up just enough to break and drop tiny droplets on the back of the shin. The walk, oblivious to the world and to the dreary gray sky, oblivious to those who hide from the rain with umbrellas and backpacks, who run indoors to save their bodies from the bone chilling wet. Embrace the rain, snare the rain in hair and face and smile. The sound of rain drops echoes to the beat of the song in ears. Footsteps skillfully tap the chords of the guitar and splash the upward motion of the rain against the backdrop of the sky. A glance through the tall square buildings, beautiful but ugly, a look towards the mountains of home, not nearly as tall, but just as majestic. A dragon moves through the swirling gray mists that blanket the hill. Steps turn, mesmerized walk by the doors, around the building to keep watching the swirling movements of the dragon. The dragon's eye has its own crimson iris. The drums beat... beat... heartbeat... louder... heartbeat... slower... heartbeat... deeper... eyes close for an eternal second, drum beats match heart. You are the gray dragon. Instead of fire, spit water on the land. Gray body is dissolving to cover the trees and green grasses of the forest in a gentle haze, belly splits open and releases. The deer and rabbits race for cover, the fox hides in its den and the birds stop chirping and flee to their nests. Alone as the forest stretches up to meet and a tear slides down cheek, snout, and joins the millions in its fall to the earth.

## Drag/Drop

A simple task/favor/idea.

'click' pick up the file

slide the mouse

'clack' release the file.

Submit and you're done/finished/accomplished.

So simple, yes,

so very/extremely/dispassionately simple.

As simple as dragging your body out of bed, as dragging your dog on his morning walk...

*He's been unusually obstinate lately.*

Obstinate is to stubborn is to assholery is to stick up the you know what is to irritating is to the moment you drop your dead dog in his freshly dug grave.

As simple as the wind dragging on the hummingbird's wing beat and lifting it high before dropping it low to drag it back up again.

*An endless cycle drag and drop.*

Witches dragged to the river and dropped in where the water washed over their heads and dragged at their hair as they sank/dropping faster than a stone, to the silted bottom of their life source.

*Oddly, water is as comforting as a blanket/shroud/tomb in death*

Comforting is to heartwarming is to gentle is to warmth that isn't too warm is to familiar is to the moment arms wrap around your shoulders and someone drags you into a close hug from behind.

An infant's first cry, the simple drag of air the tiny/small/petite lungs pull in, dropping the diaphragm to its highest tension

before it snaps like a rubber band to push the wail out.

The hands of Pharaoh's soldiers dragging children from their mothers' arms and dropping them in the Nile;

*Mouths sucking down liquid in desperation, no air, no air.*

The arms of firefighters' dragging someone's daddy from the house and dropping him coughing but alive into the arms of his wife and children.

And as the firefighter turns toward the inferno the hand of the mother latches onto his arm.

The Dragon fire roars and drops the house to its foundation.

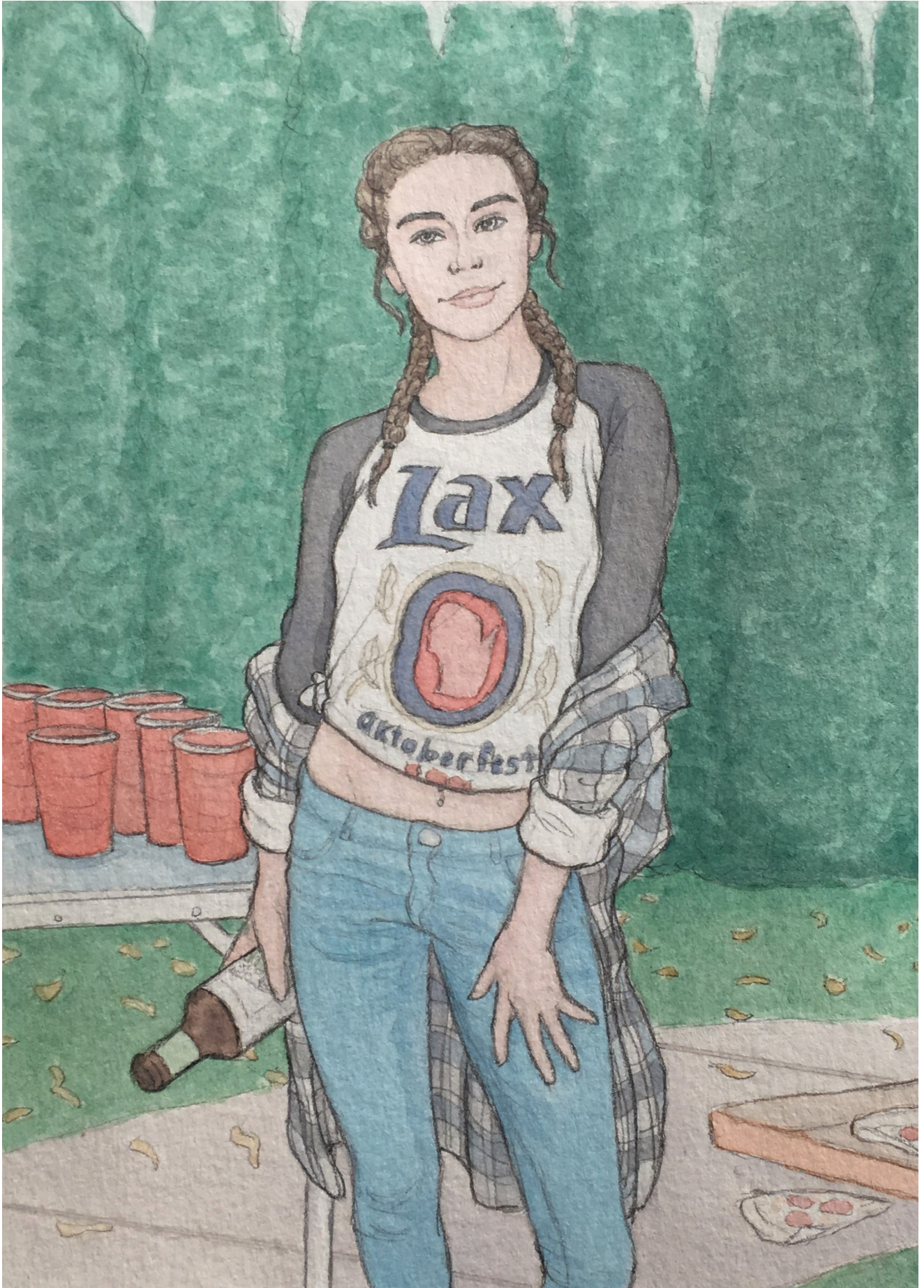
*Thank you.*





**Matthew Sirgist**  
*White City Bauhaus - Tel Aviv*





**Matthew Sirgist**  
*Oktoberfest 2018*

# Midwestern Niceness is a Hoax

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**ABBY WALKUSH**

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“How is everything tasting?”

i almost forget to tell him my meat is undercooked because I  
don't want to come across as rude  
but I do, and he smiles in way  
that I can almost believe.

“Enjoy your food”  
“You too”

i want to believe we were built off  
niceness —real niceness— as if our  
geographical location had some rare  
pixie dust or flowers or oxygen  
that made us that way.

“Everyone here is so nice” they say  
but are we really so nice or just really good at bullshitting  
good at being conditioned  
to hold doors and smile and say thank you  
like pretty brainwashed robots  
of ugly-niceness.

is it really so nice if the nice words  
have un-nice intentions  
dressed up in their best attire  
tainted by habit  
and romanticized by praise?

i once googled why we're so nice  
“because of the settlers”  
Scandinavians and German Protestants

“the Golden Rule”  
treat others as you’d like to be treated

or maybe it’s really because being nice  
guarantees someone to jump your car  
in the dead of a Midwestern winter  
and someone to lend you a Busch Latte  
when the Packer game starts.

what is “nice?”  
but a symbol that  
assumes action over intention  
and performance over reality  
a symbol constructed outside of  
nature and entirely  
inside of our human minds?

can we even spot niceness anymore  
or is the cast so big  
that not even the director  
can decipher his own phony actors  
as lines have branded themselves into our brains  
unable to unlearn and un-recite the script?

when we ask someone how they are  
do we really want an answer  
and when they give us much more  
than an “I’m good”  
do I really care to listen  
or is the niceness-paralysis taking over  
and we simply don’t know how not to?

the same way we say sorry to them  
for running into us.

“Ope, Sorry.”



# If Bumble and Tinder Went on a Date

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**ABBY WALKUSH**

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“Hi, you must be—“

*Oh god, he looks 10x worse in person.*

“And you must be—!”

“Shall we find a table?”

*If it weren't for the free meal, I definitely wouldn't be here.*

“Yes, the food smells delicious.”

“So tell me about yourself.”

*I've used dry shampoo in place of a shower for the last two weeks and I once danced on a bar for money.*

“Well I'm a big family girl, I love travelling...”

“And you?”

“I'm a biiiiiig Sci-Fi guy, and I love meeting new people...”

*I can just tell he's one of those that claps at the end of a flight. Oh god, he definitely is one of those.*

“No way, me too!”

“It seems like we have a lot in common!”

*The most we have in common is ass—  
You a dumbass and me looking for someone else's to take home tonight.*

“I agree, that's so crazy.”

“What are you thinking of ordering?”

*A bottle? Maybe two? Depends on how much worse you can get.*

“The salad sounds good. Yourself?”

“The meatloaf is great here. What kind of music do you listen to?”

*I bet he looooves missionary.  
Oh shit, what did he just say? That TV show behind him is my favorite.*

“No fair, that's such a hard question!”

“

I'm really glad we finally got to go out.”

“I was thinking it wasn't going to happen, but I'm happy it did.”

“I'll walk you to your car.”

*I swear to god, if he tries to kiss me.*

- \_ -

“I had fun tonight. Let's do this again sometime.”

“I'll call you!”

*Ahhh, thank god that's over. It's so nice to finally be home. Let's see who's active on Tinder tonight...*







# Artist Portfolio

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**JULIA MIELKE**

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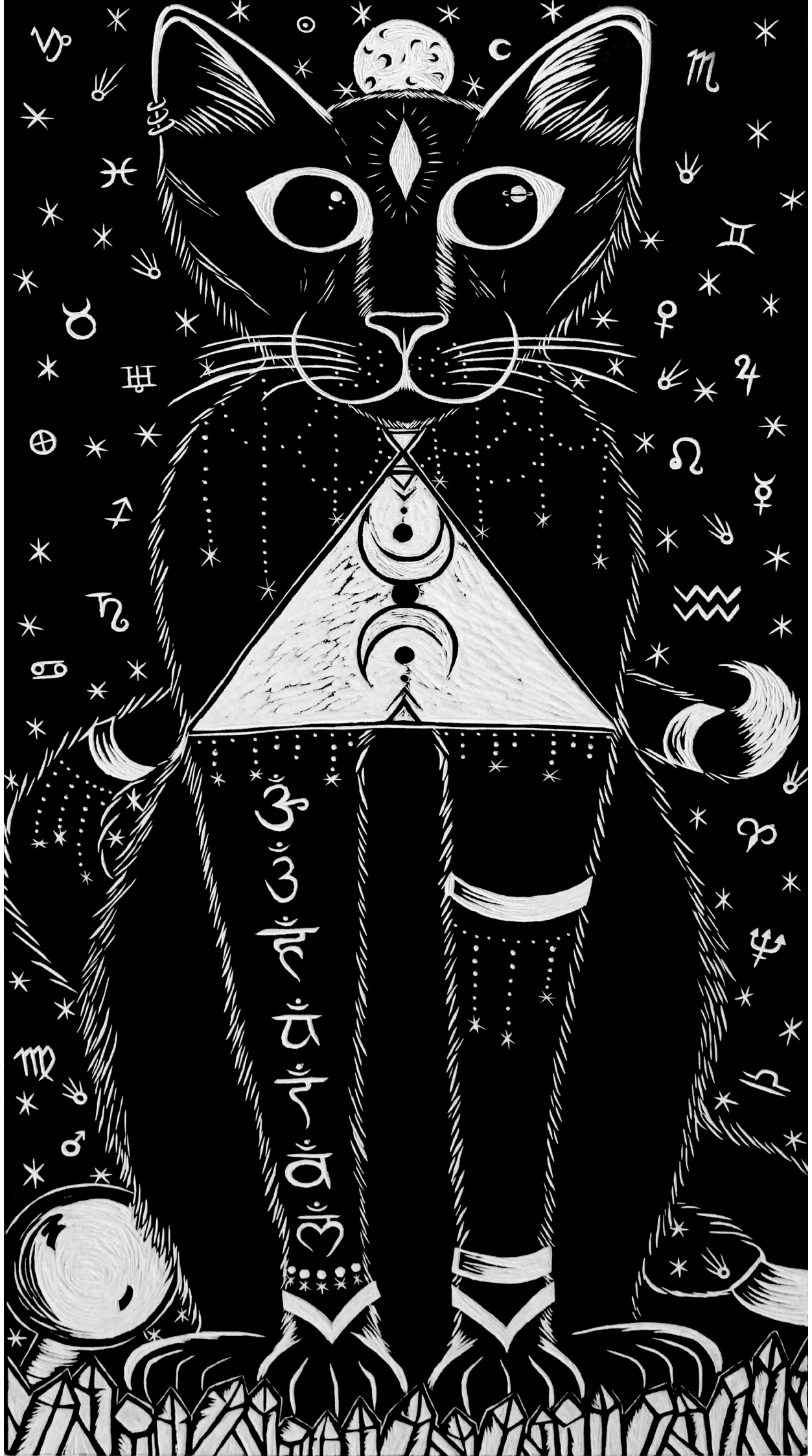




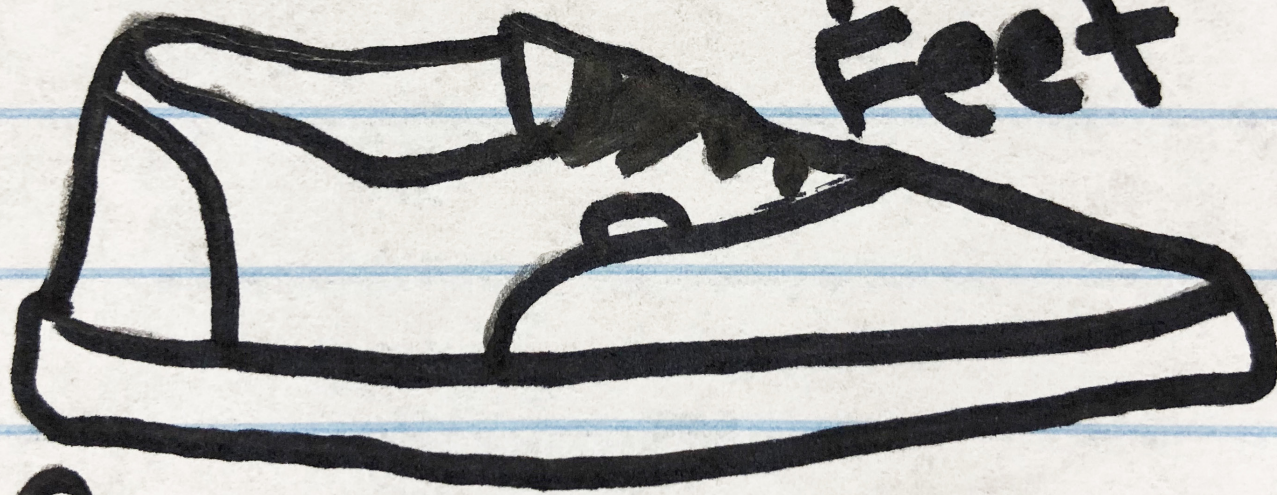
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Vans  
On  
My  
Feet



Cameron  
Marshall

**Cameron Marshall**

*Vans On My Feet*

<https://soundcloud.com/iamcameronmarshall/vansonmyfeet>





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**Jacob Greenberg**

*Not so Special*

<https://soundcloud.com/jacob-greenberg-286920102/not-so->



# Artist Bios

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**Cortlyn Kelly** - "Watering my plants and saving the world"

**Matthew Sigrist** - fifth year student at UWL seeking a biology major and history minor.

**Julia Mielke** - Everything I create I try to relate back to nature. Humans and our environment aren't as separate as people like to pretend they are. We need to be kind to our surroundings, and take care of our Earth.

**Alainna Justine** - I am a 26 years old mother to an amazing baby boy, two dogs, and a dragon. My favorite food is walking tacos, but that will probably change in a week. I enjoy short walks on the beach and have a binge watching problem but am still leading a healthy lifestyle. I graduate in December with a degree in English rhetoric and writing. Reading and writing have my heart because they let you experience different perspectives, thereby, becoming a more accepting and open minded person.

**Makayla Kellner** - I am a junior majoring in Exercise and Sports Science, Pre-Professional track. I am hoping to become a Physical Therapist. I'm not much of a writer but it is interest of mine. Thought I'd give this a shot!

**Noah Finco** - Noah is an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UWL) studying English with an emphasis in writing and rhetoric with a minor in information systems, He is the Editor-in-Chief of the UWL's student newspaper The Racquet and is a member of the Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society He is the author of numerous short stories, a dedicated DM, and hosts the storytelling podcast One Thing Led to Another. When he's not "working", you can find him running, biking, swimming, playing video games, watching movies, and doing his best impression of a folk musician.

**Greta Durst** -Greta is soon to graduate with a B.A in both English Rhetoric and Philosophy, a minor in Creative Writing; thus far has not been published but is diligently looking to begin her unleashing. Born and raised in the Driftless valley of Wisconsin, her inspirations reside in the forest landscapes, the abject of the unspoken, the dark and looming forces that bid forth the intrinsic natures of the human condition. Writing from a young age, she has kept close eye on her prose, and believes she is ready to affect readers and draw out a necessary element of perplexity.

**Jahni Brandt** - My name is Jahni Suzanne Brandt. I'm a senior at UWL with a biology major and chemistry and creative writing minors. I'm hoping to graduate in May of 2019, and I hope to go into environmental research as I leave school. Though I've learned much, I'm excited to see the end of the horizon. It won't be easier after college, but life is an opportunity; it's a lesson in growth. I'm excited and afraid to face life's lessons, but I'm hoping that my writing can help me reach out to others as I walk and learn. Thank you for reading.

**Abby Walkush** -I came to UWL fully expecting to become a Physical Therapist, however one biology class later, I'm graduating next semester with a major in Interpersonal Communication Studies and minor in Creative Writing. I have my high school soccer coach to thank for it, as his voice telling me "I better see you in the NY Times one day" was probably the reason I'm currently pursuing my dream of writing. I'm moving to a bigger city after graduation in hopes of creating something rad--publishing a book, creating a podcast, becoming a movie star. I'm really open to anything. When I'm not writing, you can find me spending time with my family and friends, participating in water sports in the summer, camping/hiking, or listening to music.

**Marissa Widdifield** -Marissa Widdifield is a student at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse studying English and German with minors in Linguistics and Literature. This would be her first publication. As for the future, she hopes for an epiphany while continuing her novice rock climbing, avid fossil collecting, and dedicated reading of David Sedaris during her last year and a half of undergrad.

**Seth Polfus** - My name is Seth Polfus and I am a sophomore from Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I am studying Exercise and Sport Science on the Pre-Physical Therapy track with a photography minor. I enjoy taking pictures of nature, my friends, and my life in general. This semester I am taking my first photography class and I have learned many new ways of thinking about the art of photography. In my spare time I enjoy reading, playing sports, traveling, and volunteering in the La Crosse community.

**Elizabeth Roberts** -My name is Elizabeth Roberts and I am an undergraduate majoring in MC-EA. The images I submitted are some of my favorites I took at various US National Parks. It is my life goal to travel to all 58 US national parks and capture all of their beauty to share with others. I hope you enjoy!

**Jacob Greenberg** - I am currently a Jr. at UW- La Crosse studying Public Health and Spanish. I write, produce, and perform music in my free time. I find it very important and meaningful to express yourself through any sort of creative outlet. My track "Not so Special" is all about the importance of realizing your self-worth, while at the same time not trying to focus too much on physical perfection, and becoming something that you aren't. Along with my song "Not so Special" you can find more of my music on Soundcloud under the name "Jacob Greenberg", or Spotify under the name "Jacob Slade". Enjoy!

**Cam Marshall** -My name is Cameron Marshall, and I make hip hop music.

**Luis Acosta** -Luis Acosta Jr. is a first generation Mexican American english student currently pursuing a career in law. He has been writing for most of his life, while also having interests in making music and other artistic forms of expression. Having grown up in Madison, WI Luis was able to immerse himself into a culture of art and music that surrounded him while also having the support of his wonderful family to keep pushing him as an artist. He likes short walks on the beaches and long hours in front of his computer writing short stories and listening to new music, while also enjoying the occasional social gathering of different kinds.



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