

The Catalyst

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The Catalyst is a student-run creative journal of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, publishing prose, poetry, photography, art, music, and all other creative works by the students and faculty of UWL.

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The Catalyst

Esther Hammen / Give Way

It was a beautiful fall day. The campus burst to life with red, green and gold colors. I walked past the library, biting my lip raw. The wind caused it to sting, and I sucked thoughtfully, tasting that familiar iron. Then I heard the screech. I paused only slightly; it was a squirrel. I had only learned recently that squirrels even made that noise. Actually, I didn't know they made any noise at all, but they did, and it was oddly disturbing. I turned my head to locate the noise, and then stopped fully at the sight in front of me.

A beautiful autumn tree, its leaves brilliantly orange. A brown squirrel sat on one branch, screeching as it watched a falcon eat its friend. Stringy red guts were strewn down the branches below the carnage, and the branch itself was covered in pulpy crimson. The falcon greedily pecked and pulled at its innards, not even acknowledging the cries of the squirrel, grieving at the graphic murder. Littered on the ground were tufts of brown fur and pink flesh.

It was one of the most breathtaking things I had ever seen. The people around me barely gave it a second glance as they continued walking. I didn't dare move from my grounded spot, fearful that any sudden movement would startle the falcon and cause it to leave. She was so powerful. So fierce and timeless. She was hungry. And she could eat however much she pleased.

A girl with long curly hair was suddenly by my side, giving me a smile. It was my friend, coming to watch the carnage with me. Her nose was slightly wrinkled at the sight, but I knew she was enjoying it too. A rare display of nature such as this was a treat, after all. We took our time drinking in the sight, talking quietly to each other as the squirrel continued to wail, and the world continued to spin.

The moment couldn't last forever. The falcon, seemingly annoyed with the audience, scooped up the remains of the corpse and flew off, as gracefully and beautifully as I knew she would. Bits of the squirrel fell as we watched her go, and then the screeching stopped. The show was over.

Esther Hammen / She Sings

*He calls me lovely
Intelligent, talented
Attractive baby bird*

*I call him as crazy
As he makes me feel*

*With his hand on my back
He touches me right where my wings
Should be*

*Ghostly handprint
Pushes me out of the nest*

*Featherlight touch
That makes me chirp
I give him a good show*

Evie Stoeckmann / *Daylight*



Evie Stoeckmann / *Dawn*



Felix Froh / Elementary School Propaganda

I was a jaded little bastard
in middle school.
I couldn't help it, I felt lied to.
Cheated.
Get this: the dude in the boat,
he missed India,
they named a holiday after him,
then they realized how fucked
that was and changed it.
But when I was in Elementary School,
they told me he was a hero.

And, I mean, what the hell?
Why would they lie?
What else were they lying about?

For so many years,
I've held this deep frustration
with anyone involved
in the deliberate meddling of my brain.
And I feel conflicted because
I want to like people
but I get so frustrated with authority
because who put them in charge?
Liars, liars all the way up.
If they believe they're above somebody,
they believe in a lie.
And they act on it.
And that makes me mad.

The issue is that they grew up
with the same lies I was told
if not worse.
Can I really blame them?
I can't blame them,

but they make me mad,
the weight of those truths are
unimaginable because
what am I supposed to do about it?
Weighed down under this
pressure that builds every day
until one morning I realize it has
condensed itself into
something cool and shiny.
A cold diamond of insight.

Don't trust the person who says they're above you.
It means they don't care about you,
not really.
And that's okay because you can't care about everyone,
not really.
They want you to keep formation,
and they'll say anything to keep you there.

Felix Froh / Poser

I felt so out of place. It was because I was a kid in a bar. But I wasn't the only kid in the bar, and that wasn't the first time I had been in a bar. I wasn't alone, my friends were there with me. The vocalist, the guitarist, and the bassist. We weren't playing yet.

The vocalist is my brother, and if I'm with him, I can hide behind him and chill. I didn't know it when I started, but being in a band involves a lot of mingling at shows, talking to people who might be able to get you more shows, talking about your band, talking about other people's bands—lots of talking. And I don't really like talking, but my brother's good at it. He doesn't acknowledge it (or maybe he doesn't know it), but he's got a way with people, and he knows a lot about metal.

Everyone knew a lot about metal, it was a metal show. The way they talked to each other blew my mind. Everyone else listened to so many bands, knew all the albums, knew all the songs. They could summon metal trivia at a moment's notice, but I never paid attention to the names of the songs, and I didn't listen to that many bands.

But I loved the music, and I loved my friends, and I loved playing shows. I always felt a little sick before we played but I liked it. The feeling of rhythm and synchronicity is cool, and metal is cool, and being on stage adds an edge to the experience, which is also cool. And I never beat myself too badly if I messed up a song because I knew I didn't practice enough. I wasn't really committed. But it seemed like a lot of other people were.

Anyway, this band called Shithole was playing before us. They took the crusty doctrine of "Fuck art, make noise," to its extreme, bestowing the crowd with the most mind-blowing set of the night as they teetered in and out of time with one another. They had merch with their logo spraypainted on a shirt, and I thought that was cool, but they sucked. In technical terms. Art is subjective, but each one of the members played at a different tempo for most of their set, I swear. I'm not sure if anyone was really into it, the crowd was a little dead.

When they were loading out, everybody got everything offstage except for the drummer, who left everything behind. So, I had to wait to set up, and I had a lot of things to set up.

The man had walked outside with his friends, maybe to smoke a cigarette, maybe a cigarette with a dash of devil-lettuce. Which is fine, I'm so happy for him, but all of his shit was still on stage and I had to set up. It didn't really matter, anyway. It was a metal show in a bar, the crowd was drunk, having fun, and in no hurry.

He came back in and started taking his stuff out item by item, which is wild because he has two hands. Carry two cymbal stands. Whatever, it doesn't matter.

The last thing he took down was his bass drum. As he hopped off the stage, his fingers slipped and the thing came crashing down, rolling away. The side of it had split open. The universe had smitten him for taking too long.

Then we were up.

I don't remember how we played, but that doesn't matter. We played, I know it was fun, we loaded back out, which was never fun. After that I was super tired, and there were still more bands after us in that small room crowded with metalheads talking about metal. My bandmates and my brother were in there, socializing and talking to people.

And they know me, so they get why I dipped. I didn't want to talk to people, I wanted to sit outside by myself and maybe look at the stars.

I was reading horror stories on Instagram next to the MomBomb, our guitarist's minivan, which we had just stuffed with all our equipment and instruments and cases and wires. I was sitting on the cracked concrete behind this bar in Green Bay where a few stragglers hung around and spoke and smoked. I had my phone between my legs, which were up against my chest. My head rested on my arms; I looked like I was sleeping or something.

A member from another band came outside and started walking over to the MomBomb, he had parked near it. He saw me hunched over with my head in my arms and said, "Are you good?"

And I was like, "Huh?"

"Are you good?"

"Oh, yeah."

"Okay. Are you sure?" And I think he meant it.

"Yeah. Thanks though," and I meant it, because I was sitting by myself, outside, reading horror stories on Instagram in the dark, which were grammatically unsound and tried too hard to be sickeningly disturbing. And I'm appreciative of that guy, that he seemed to really want to know if I was doing okay. And got me thinking about why I felt a little outcasted in a crowd of outcasts, and what that made me.

I thought posers were this super lame thing, so I tried not to be one. And I thought playing metal but not knowing a ton about metal and not practicing a lot made me kind of a poser. But even if I was one (I'm not a poser, we played a show at a skatepark once, I swear I'm metal, I swear), my friends were inside, having fun, talking about metal, and there were still two sets left, which meant I had a ton of time to read ghost stories.

Caden Lien / Pewit's Nest



Caden Lien / Pewit's Nest (detail)



Cecilia Ahlers / Untitled

I noticed her following me long ago;
Catching glimpses of her from the corners of my vision.
She tried her best to stay behind me, out of sight,
But sometimes it was impossible for me not to know.
She watches me, careful to never cause a collision.
Nimble as a bird in the sky, she moves with the light.
Her presence warms me as much as the morning glow.
her conversations are something I can only envision,
And when she is gone, I catch myself wondering where she hides in the dark of the
night.

Does she think of me too, when the lights are too low to follow?
When the last candle is put out, does she wonder where I go?
Does she look for me, then, in the sunlight?

Cecilia Ahlers / Untitled

The swell of each hill crest, crashing one over the other,
somehow convinces the most steady city dwellers to leave everything and wander.
The shallows of each valley bed, the stillness of the humid air,
and the quiet living the prairie promises reaches deep into the soul of every passer
through.

The golden grasses, contrasted only by the large black silhouettes of the cattle,
its only inhabitants.

Riverbeds flow like trenches throughout the prairie,
providing just enough lifeblood for small trees to grow along the banks.

In the dimming of the sunset, the shadows of horse drawn carriages of the old world
begin to ride along,
slowly dragging their occupants towards the Great West,
towards an unnamed gravestone along the side of a road that won't be tread on for
another decade.

The stone will lay, lost and eroding, the only remnant of the beloved bones that sleep
in the dry sand just below it.

Allie Norgord / *Three Squiggle Ribbon Mugs*



Allie Norgord / *Topography*



Laurie Leick / Fuck, I wish I was better at writing poetry...

I have an idea for a poem. What if I attribute human emotions to every color of the rainbow, like in kindergarten? Each stanza could start with a description of something in the scene that's the same color as the emotion being talked about. It could be in rainbow order too, and that could be another metaphor for... something. It definitely wouldn't come out as infantile as the concept sounds if I find just the right words to describe the indescribable nature of human emotion.

Better yet, what if I write a poem called THIS POEM IS PLAGIARIZED LOL and actually plagiarize each line by taking it from a different song I like? I could arrange it in just the right way so that it's about feeling the need to take a risk because you are inadequate. Then it becomes this whole metacommentary about taking risks because submitting something for a publication that you admit to plagiarizing is a risk unto itself. I don't know if I listen to enough songs for that. Also, I don't want to get in trouble for plagiarism.

There is this similarity to cancer cells and guerilla warfare. You can't just destroy cancer cells because they are surrounded by healthy cells just like how soldiers will surround themselves with civilians. If you destroy the guilty, you also need to kill the innocent. That sounds like it could make a good poem concept. I don't quite know what the theme of that would be, but the comparison exists, so there has got to be something there, right?

Okay, maybe the real winner is a palindrome poem about moving. That inherently has the mirrored actions of packing up your shit just to unpack it at the new house, so it fits the format. The only problem is that it's a new style I never tried before and full of a ton of nuance, and every time I try to write it, it sounds really vapid and devoid of any substance. It still has that mirrored aspect though. I think I could get it right one of these days.

I've also got this idea for a poem called Home Sick, and it would be about how weird it felt to come back home for the first time because everything felt empty and gray, and my family seemed to fall apart when I wasn't there. It would be this really clever play on the word "homesick" because I didn't miss home, the home seemed like it missed me. That sounds like it could be very impactful. How do I go about writing something like *that*?

Laurie Leick / Untitled

I don't need you to break my heart:

I have Mitski songs for that and
a penchant for imagining things in great detail.
I have grief for things that haven't happened
and probably never will because life isn't
a brutally bittersweet break-up ballad.
And it's getting to the point where there is this
ominous undertone to our relationship, like the
Titanic was always going to find its way to that iceberg.

I have the empty tables I expect to plague my lunches
for the rest of time because I convinced myself
it's better to be alone than to be left alone.
Sometimes I like to contemplate the nobility
of solitude I already know doesn't exist.
And it's getting to the point where I'm making myself
a mockery of a martyr, like Julius Caesar
welcoming the ides with open arms.

I have a perfect view of the cemetery from my
bed to provide the most awkward pillow talk topic.
I've gotten into the habit of trying to rationalize the
inevitable as if death is open to constructive criticism.
It's harder to accept it than it is to live in synthetic ignorance.
And it's getting to the point where I think I deserve
my peace, am owed it even, like a diplomat
at the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

Maiya Brandt / *Remnant*



Maiya Brandt / *Release*



Maiya Brandt / *Fleeting*



Abigail Schoepke / [Free Dog Cosmos]

Sirius, the constellation, you are known by names and origins different across time and geography. Laelaps, hound of Procris,

Diana's Nymph, Alpha Canis Majoris, Orion's dog, guardian of Europa. Bark, bark, bark. You truly rival the three headed

Cerberus, the suns and stars formed your joints, and the flush streaks of space cloud formed your fur. The heavens of all are

Guarded by your bravery, tough guide of souls, when Mars' Rover Opportunity felt her metallic body shutting down you took

her by her synthetic paws and ran her through the skies, a beautiful place to rest, *don't worry, you're a good girl too.*

Laika, the street dog, little curly mutt of Moscow, on a mission for mankind. Albina and Mushka wait for you on the ground.

I saw them running to your funeral, they chased your comet tail 2,566 laps after the warmth blanketed you, the only thing cold

Was your nose, which each scientist had kissed as you laid still, *umnitsa, spite spokojno vie beskonechnoy nochi.* Had you

Survived, I would have seen to it that you had a large room and a full stomach for the rest of your days. A mulatto melting pot

Of loyal dog blood and the red of a true Soviet, your statue's nose will be rubbed gold by millions to come.

Toby, the hurricane rescue, abandoned and sheltered, underneath your name sat those words. *'To be euthanized'*. Your name

is not known or imprinted into history quite like years of mythology or an international title, rather it is known in the heart of a

little girl of 9 years age who used to sit on her side with her legs bent, and you would curl into a ball with your head on her

knees keeping the backs of her bent legs warm. She waits for you, she sits and watches as you play among the stars. You, Laika,

and Sirius chasing me, circling me, running in orbit as if I was sitting on some uncatchable ball. Cosmonaut me, I'll float

until the day you grab my sleeve with your teeth and pull me in.

Meg Alaimo / Mortal Coil

You sing to me with your trumpet howl.

You turn the wind black which
Whips around the
Musk, the
Fatal smell of
Petrichor.

You sing to me with your trumpet howl.

You lure me out of the
Cellar, yes, the
Underground is beckoning too, and
Yet-

Your arms of nimbus smoke,
Your arms colored a cold gray-green,
Your arms they
Pull me like a
Wolf pulls a deer toward its
Mouth.

I lean away from your storm,
Your callous howl, but
You are immovable,
I sense you are closer.

I hear you.

Go ahead,
Tear down my foundation,
Shatter my windows,
Make splinters of my door,
Sing to me with your trumpet howl
In my home

In my home that has now become your
Fodder.

Eat me up in your squall,
Release me from this mortal coil with your
Own
Coiling
Body.
Then,
Swallow me.

Take me to the sky, then you will no longer
Sing to me with your
Trumpet howl.

Take me away from your plains that
You crawl on and I used to
Live on.

Take me and
Destroy all that
I am.

Meg Alaimo / Soul[mate] Effigy

Hold me close like a
Bandaïd pressed up to a
Wound.

Kiss me like a
Medic resuscitates the
Near-dying.

Tell me all that you want to,
Right now, and not in my
Eulogy.

Look at my face before
I become effigy,

Caress my skin like it'll turn to
Ash at
Any moment.

Sleep with me
Like
Our endless dream is
Now.

Whisper to me
You love me
Before we become
Rotting.

Brevin Kruse / *PXL*



Avery Ostrenga / Fall Hoodies

As summer turned into fall,
Shorts became sweatpants,
T-shirts became hoodies

She was finally able to hide.

She never had to see
Her bare skin
Her rib cage beginning to show
Her muscles shrinking

The number
was just on a scale

But
If she could never see it
Was it even a problem?

Avery Ostrenga / Winter Coats

Fall rapidly turned to winter
and the layers only grew
Sweatpants became snow pants
Hoodies became coats

She could hide even deeper
Layer upon layer
Not an inch of skin in sight

She could feel the breeze
On a negative degree day
sending an endless chill up her spine

As it continued to get colder
She could hide with no excuses

She was excited to be so covered
But became wary of how numb
She had become

Avery Ostrenga / Post Covid Fear

I entered the outdated building
The musty, hot smell
Met me at my nostrils
The hairs in my nose stood up
As I hadn't remembered this smell

It had been 2 years
Since the last time I encountered
That familiar must

I hurried up the stairs to my first class
Of the first semester back

This was no ordinary classroom
It was an auditorium spilling out 150 students

I walked to find a seat
I couldn't help but feel my heart falling into my stomach

This is my nightmare.

Exhaling fresh air
Inhaling Covid

I sat down
And could feel the walls slowly closing in
I suddenly couldn't breathe
The breath surrounding me was as loud as the blows of a hammer

The professor began instructing
All I could focus on was the hammering blows of breath
The walls continued to come closer and closer
I sat there helplessly holding my breath

All of them around me
Inhaling fresh breathable air,
Exhaling Covid
And soon
there would be no fresh air left

Ciara Haws / *Bayfield*



Ciara Haws / Untitled



Anonymous / A Poem for Furkan

You still smell like chlorine.
And the moonlit sky reflects the water droplets across your body.
I see you in all my thoughts,
As I take myself back to the night we met.
On the day everything that was about to end,
Had just begun.
To the sound of your voice,
And your deep brown eyes
I still feel your touch,
Between the water in the crevices on your pruned fingers
Flow across the small of my back.
Laying me atop the water,
And pulling my soul out of my breath.
We name the stars and
I hear your Turkish tongue,
Rolling soft R's in my ear.
And I fall for you every time.
With my heart dropping to the ground,
As two thousand miles separate us,
And two thousand years of culture forbid us.
Making us two bodies,
That can never understand each other.
I relive this night,
As billions of stars fill the night sky,
Each one named after you.

Tori Horman / *Summer Nights*



Tori Horman / *Flood*



Jada Graham / Imagine

Your garage. Small, dark and dingy
same as the small town it sits in.
I walk past the same flag I have seen countless times.
A flag
One name
four numbers
blue and red
You know the flag, you've seen it before.
Might even have one of your own.
Trump 2020.
You see a flag
I see my rights being taken from me.

Seeing this flag hanging
on an old friend's wall
pulls me out of reality.

My imagination
now creates a world of its own.
One in which everyone accepts me for who I am.
I walk down the street
hand in hand with my girlfriend, and nobody gives it a second glance.
I kiss her in public
and I don't feel the need to
look over my shoulder to check who saw us.
I live on, not afraid
that my right to marry her may one day get taken away.

For me, my relationship is love.
My relationship is growth.
It is the healthiest form of love I have witnessed.
For you my relationship is a problem.
For you my relationship is politics.
Seen as something that should be taken from me
simply because you don't approve.

But who even are you? You don't know me
You don't
know my relationship.

Imagine having little to no rights,
having to fight
just to be comfortable in your own skin at night.

Imagine not having to be scared
of politics.

Imagine having equal rights
for all.

Imagine all the people, sharing all the world.

I imagine this world every day.
In between the glares from onlookers
as I grab my girlfriend's hand in public.
I imagine not having to be aware
of what others are thinking when I lean in to kiss her.

Then I snap back to reality
with that blue and red flag
staring me in my face
pressuring me to stay in line.

Jayda LaFleur / Untitled



Jayda LaFleur / Untitled



Brandon Showers / COVID

Covid will get you.

As we're told, all the news channels and so we wait.

Daily, the toll will eventually wash upon our shores just like everything else: bad and good. So, what makes Covid any different? Afterall, for years we enjoyed the Chinese enterprise and their cheap goods. It was only a matter of time, and the goods would come at a price.

Covid will get you.

Throughout the pandemic, I kept continuously working and so I never truly did enjoy the unemployment benefits, yet the government surpluses not totally understood were appreciated for I had for the first-time, extra money; and so I invested in America: an economy that might turn the tide on the Chinese enterprise and its capitalist ills.

Covid will get you.

Sooner or later, it all had to come to an end. The Trump Presidency that is. The lies, the false campaign promises, the corruption. Eventually, just as the rising sun sets another shore, this pandemic can't keep ensuing us?

Covid will get you.

After a late winter of hope, the virus continued inflicting its rage. Yet its duration started to wean. Even a concentrate gets diluted; just like that dark mass inflicting its rage that fateful day on the Capitol.

Covid will get you.

That summer, final shots in the arm, a certain overriding confidence exuberated the nation. Or maybe it was distractions from the east once more and troubles with Russia and Ukraine. Needless to say, it had appeared Cov-id was finally disappearing.

Covid will get you.

Little kids are “germ factories,” and coincidental; young college students are not much better. And the latter’s most likely where I got the covid. Yet, why did I think I was impervious to it?

Covid got me.

It’s odd taking shelter after the fact the enemy has already decimated your battlefield. But covid got me. That’s what the test showed. Like an encroaching summer storm, I was fortunate to have taken shelter when I did. But the future remained unknown. And besides, what would be my defenses to an invisible foe?

Covid got me.

Feeling alienated from society, it’s in a deep daydream I get hope. In a raspy voice first comes Doctor Fauci. He explains how I am a national hero—did my part, got shots in the arm, and protected my community. But out of comfort, just as my pillow shifted my head was Mike Lindell. The Devil’s advocate, telling me that I’d lost the battle. Lindell disappears, and I’m lost in a dazed headache.

Covid got me.

Like a bad daydream is Tucker Carlson explaining the lost Liberal agenda this nation. It was just yesterday, and I could go places. It’s summer, hot outside and I decided to go to the local diner. In the air conditioning, get a dinner and seat upon a hard booth. On the television is Fox news, there to rouse an example, I sit on listening to it. Suddenly, there is a presence from behind. I know it: the little old Asian lady. I am not one to be racist, but there was this one time, upon Fox news. There, a border crisis ensuing and all she could do was complain how death was on President Biden’s hands. Then, she looked at me. However, before I could mention a word, she grabbed my hand. She looked at my palms. My veins though were blue in contrast. Good she mentioned. All I could see of her arm was a growthy mast, much like that of an oak tree inflicted by a gall wasp. If I had told her that I was democratic, I imagined suddenly she would’ve grabbed her crossword pen and jabbed my arm. SEE! You too bleed red, blood gushing like that of a derrick. Yep, she’d come to the realization that I also bled red.

Covid got me.

One day towards the end of the week and covid, decided that fresh air was needed. So, I went to a local cemetery. There's something about a cemetery that gives you a fresh perspective on life. Like so many local cemeteries, it begins with older graves and eventually newer ones. Upon an older family plot, the names and identities of an earlier settler family. On the stones were dates inscribed. Mostly, children reared had died not long after birth-most likely typhoid, deliria, some form of the common cold virus. And yet covid we're told, a manufactured disease of the modern era any similar? Past various graves, a large oak tree had recently lost a huge limb; probably about a fourth of its size. What's interesting is that upon losing limbs in the warmer months, oak species can develop oak wilt which is a virus ailment of moth carrying the spores. Towards the end, fresh earth covered the ground of a recent grave. It was from the previous winter, but one had to wonder, why she too died so suddenly when her husband had died some thirty years prior?

I overcame covid.

Now I'm back to life but things will never be the same. President Biden just declared an end to the pandemic after he too suffered just prior that summer. Yet, there's those that still admit it don't exist. And in a local diner-Fox News airs on.

Brandon Showers / Packard Hill

Once upon a time, they sat new, a dealership row
Clad in the latest style
Chrome bumpers atoning.

In the day-lite, they dazzled awaiting a home
With models: Mayfair, Patrician and Caribbean
Post-war America was here.

So, the hi-ways they took
Those Eisenhower bi-ways
Upon new roads a lease on life.

A distant horizon they could speed towards,
But never outpace
Soon came their demise
As they became dated by society's stance.

Those mighty engines
Cast block inline eights
Soon idling to a steady roar.

They're great chrome grille,
It's trademarked coffin facade

Set the tone for what to come...

Like unmarked plots a graveyard
They wound up here,
One-by-one...
Towed upon Deppe's junkyard lot.

Now upon a hill they rest
Perched about like silhouettes
But in their decay
If you listen
That great Packard shall roar once again.

In the end...
Those hi-ways in the sky.



Charleigh Hanson / *A Portrait on a Bad Day*



Isabella Krall / Excerpt from "Cabin 13"

"I wasn't lying when I said there was a thirteenth cabin, there really is. But the story behind it isn't the exact same as the one I told the kids," Weston admitted at last. We reached the edge of the woods and came to a stop again.

"Which way do you think they went?"

"I think the cabin is somewhere that way," Weston pointed his flashlight into a vat of darkness. The woods looked endless and non differentiable. Every tree looked the same as the last. "If they haven't made it there yet then we can branch off from there." He continued. I nodded. The idea of scouring the woods in the middle of the night seemed terrifying, especially by myself. "Carter was calling the directors when I left to get you so hopefully more people will be out helping us too."

"Good. We need to find them. Soon."

"We will," he assured me again.

"So are you going to tell me about this cabin story or what?" I asked as we trudged through the moss, undergrowth, and leaves that covered the forest floor. Weston was doing his best to see if there were any footprints or indication the kids had gone this way but the ground was so sporadically covered it was hard to tell.

"I think they went this way," he said, slightly changing the direction we were walking in.

"Weston?" I prompted again.

"It's nothing too crazy. In a sense. Mostly just a lot of superstitions. The building was never actually a cabin at camp but just happens to be on the grounds. It's old, from some of the first settlers in this area, probably sometime in the early 1800s."

"I didn't realize we had a historical building on the grounds."

"It isn't near the rest of the camp. And not by any of the hiking trails either after campers started messing around by it. Plus it hasn't been kept up or taken care of so my guess is the amount of money the camp would have to put into it to access and use isn't worth it."

"So how did you hear about this place then? No one has ever mentioned it to me," I said, a little annoyed that I hadn't even known about the building's existence, despite having attended camp for so many years.

"My dad told me about it actually. He used to go to summer camp here when he was a boy. The old hiking trails used to lead right past the cabin. It was a camp rumor that it was haunted by the ghosts of the original settlers. It started as just a campfire story but soon the campers started trying to pull pranks on one another to convince each other the place really was haunted. Well one night my dad and his friends snuck off to the cabin to see for themselves if the place was really haunted or not. My dad said he agreed to wait outside and be a lookout for when the counselors realized they were gone. His other two friends went inside. A couple of minutes went by and he hadn't heard anything but then his friends started screaming. They rushed out of the door yelling about ghosts and witches and dead animals but my dad never got to see what was inside because just then the counselors caught them."

Weston stopped for a second, examining the ground under him once again for footprints. "This way," he said, pointing to his left before changing his mind and pointing right. I raised my eyebrow, he was going to get us lost, and then they would have to send out a search party for us and the kids. "I'm sure of it," he said, starting to walk again. Something told me he had no idea where he was going.

"Weston, we need to hurry up and find them," I said, worrying again about my little brother.

"I'm sure they are fine Audrey. They're probably just messing around."

"Just like your dad and his friends?"

"Exactly."

"What if it is really haunted?" I asked tentatively, feeling stupid. I knew realistically it wasn't but any old historic building already gave me the heebie jeebies, let alone one that was rumored to be haunted.

"If it makes you feel any better my dad said he was 95% sure his friends were lying," Weston chuckled. "They refused to even tell him what was inside."

We walked in silence for a while. Listening for the voices of the kids or sounds of them running. The woods were so dark, the leaves of the trees were blocking out most of the light given by the moon making the flashlights our only light source. It gave me goosebumps up and down my arms thinking about all the animals that could be lurking in the darkness. Not only could those kids be hurting Seth but nature itself could be. I couldn't stop worrying about him. From somewhere behind me I heard something snap. I whipped my head around searching for what or who could have made that sound.

"What was that?" I asked. Weston squinted through the darkness, trying to see if the kids were running somewhere behind us.

"Probably just an animal," he said at last, turning around again. I tried to hold the flashlight steady in front of me but my hand was shaking. Suddenly we heard screams in the distance. I jumped. Weston looked over at me, his eyes shone with concern and worry, completely dropping his carefree attitude.

We started sprinting towards the voices, the leaves crunching under our feet. The screaming stopped but I could hear something running in the distance. We followed the sound and soon saw multiple figures sprinting towards us in the darkness. The kids. They

shrieked again when they saw us, not because they were afraid of getting in trouble but because they truly seemed terrified.

“Woah woah,” Weston said, holding his hands up “it is just us guys.” Once they saw it was Weston and me they stopped running but they still seemed pretty shaken up. As we got closer I could see that there were only three of them, not four. Just Aidan, Bryce, and Liv. Seth was nowhere to be seen. Liv was crying and practically hyperventilating. Her hands were visibly shaking. Bryce and Aidan were shaking too, and tears gleamed at the corners of Bryce’s eyes though you could tell he was trying to hold them back.

“Where’s Seth?” I asked them. Liv just kept crying; Aidan and Bryce tried to avoid looking up at me. “Where is he?!” I could feel my own tears threatening to spill over.

“At the cabin,” Bryce muttered under his breath.

“Okay guys, we need to all calm down,” Weston said. I wasn’t sure if he meant that more for the kids or for me.

“What happened?”

“Well after we heard your story about cabin 13 we wanted to see if it was real,” Bryce said, recounting what had happened.

“We asked Seth to come along because, well, we thought it might be funny to scare him,” Aidan said. The anger boiled up inside of me, they wanted to make fun of my little brother, but I had to remind myself that they were only kids themselves.

“He didn’t want to come at first but we kept egging him on until he agreed,” Liv added, still crying, her curly blonde hair sticking to the tears on her cheeks.

“We all went out into the woods together and searched for a long time. We almost gave up but after what seemed like forever we finally found the cabin,” Aidan said. “We sent Seth inside to check it out first. Our plan was to scare him when he came out of the door.”

"We didn't think your story was real," Bryce added. "We didn't know it was actually haunted. Seth went inside. And everything was normal for like a minute but then he started screaming." I felt my whole body tense. Seth wasn't okay, I needed to find him.

"And th th then," Liv blubbered. "We heard this huge noise from inside the house and Seth screamed so loud." I was shaking now, bad.

"That's when we ran away," Aidan finished.

"What kind of noise?" Weston asked them. They all shrugged.

"Like his bones all cracked," Bryce guessed. Aidan kicked him. I stared at him in horror.

"We need to find him. Now," I said to Weston, trying not to break down crying.

"Yeah," Weston nodded. "I can go search for him if you bring these three back to camp."

"No," I shook my head. "I'll find him."

"Are you sure?" Weston asked.

"I need to find my brother. Which way was the cabin?" I asked the kids. Bryce pointed straight ahead of us.

"Right through those trees," he said. The irony was that there were tons of trees and they all looked the same. I nodded and started walking in the direction he had pointed. I heard behind me as Weston and the kids turned and left, headed back towards camp. Before I knew it I was all alone in the woods. The trees around me loomed like dark figures, waiting for me to turn my back on them. The thought made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up and I had to assure myself that the trees weren't plotting my demise. The woods were eerily silent at night. The only sounds were the leaves brushing up against one another in the breeze, The occasional rustle of brush on the forest floor, and my own footsteps. I kept

listening for signs of Seth, hoping he would be shouting out and running past me but I had no such luck.

After what seemed like an eternity of walking I saw something looming in the distance. A big dark figure that grew as I approached it. The cabin was built of wood and looked like the ones you would see in history books or movies. It seemed strangely frozen in time despite being so old. I couldn't imagine it had ever looked anything different than this. A wooden box built of logs and a simple shingle roof set atop it. As I got closer I saw a couple of windows built into the side. It was too dark to see through them. I thought back to Weston's story and thought about the possibility of the cabin really being haunted. By angry colonial spirits. It seemed like something I should view as childish but I couldn't shake off the possibility of it somehow being legit. Paranormal things happen to people all the time. Who was I to say ghosts weren't real? Although for the sake of Seth and myself I was really hoping they weren't.

I walked up to the entrance of the cabin with a false bravado, trying to pretend I wasn't scared. It didn't work. The flashlight in my hand betrayed me. Its light flickering from side to side as directed by my shaking hand. The door to the cabin was left partly open. "Seth?" I called out shining the light through the doorway. There was no response. My heart beat loudly in my chest, threatening to break through my rib cage. *What if he's dead?* I tried to tell myself I was being stupid. Seth was fine, maybe he wasn't missing after all. Maybe he had run out after the others and had headed straight back to camp. I took a deep breath and crept toward the door. I put my hand on it. The wood felt weathered and ancient under my fingers. I gave it a light push and tensed as it opened with a loud creak.

"Seth?" I whispered into the darkness. I took a step into the cabin and was greeted by an earthly musky smell. Like it had been sitting for a long time. *Or something died.* The cabin

was dark and the only light was coming from my flashlight. I swept the narrow light around the room but couldn't move fast enough to disperse the shadows that crept in the corners.

"Seth!" I shouted, louder this time.

"Audrey?" A muffled response came. My heart skipped a beat. I ran over to the side of the room that the sound had come from. "Careful!" he shouted, seeing my flashlight come into view. I froze and looked down at the floor. There, in the back corner of the room I saw Seth peering up at me from a hole in the floorboards. He gave me a weak smile. My eyes filled with tears, he was here and okay!

"What happened?" I asked him, carefully walking over to the hole. He had fallen into some sort of basement, about four or five feet under the flooring.

"The floorboards under me, they just snapped and I fell through," he said. Bryce's comment about bones cracking suddenly came back to me. The sound they had heard was the floorboards giving out under Seth's feet. I took another breath of relief.

"Let me help out," I said, lowering myself to the floor and extending an arm. "Are you hurt?"

"No, not really. My butt hurts from falling down but other than that," he responded. I chuckled. Seth took my arm and I carefully helped him up and out of the floor, trying my best to not break away the rotting floor I was sitting on in the process. As soon as I got him out I gave him the biggest hug.

"I'm glad you found me, I was beginning to worry I was going to be stuck in this creepy house all night," he chuckled.

"I was so worried about you! Why did you run off with those stupid kids anyway? I was so worried they were making fun of you or going to hurt you or..."

"Audrey!" He cut me off. I stopped rambling. "I'm okay, see," he said, motioning to himself. "I'm not a baby anymore. I can take care of myself, at least socially that is. I knew

they were playing a prank on me so I decided to prank them back,” he explained. Seth’s eyes shone through the darkness. “When they sent me in here I decided to scare them. So I pretended I saw something really scary and started screaming. I was going to run out and convince them to look for themselves and scare them in the process but then the floorboards just broke under me and I fell down!”

“Well it worked,” I laughed. “They were scared out of their minds, running through the woods crying.” I could see Seth’s smile break out into a large grin through the darkness.

“I can’t believe you actually came out into the woods in the middle of the night to find me,” he said.

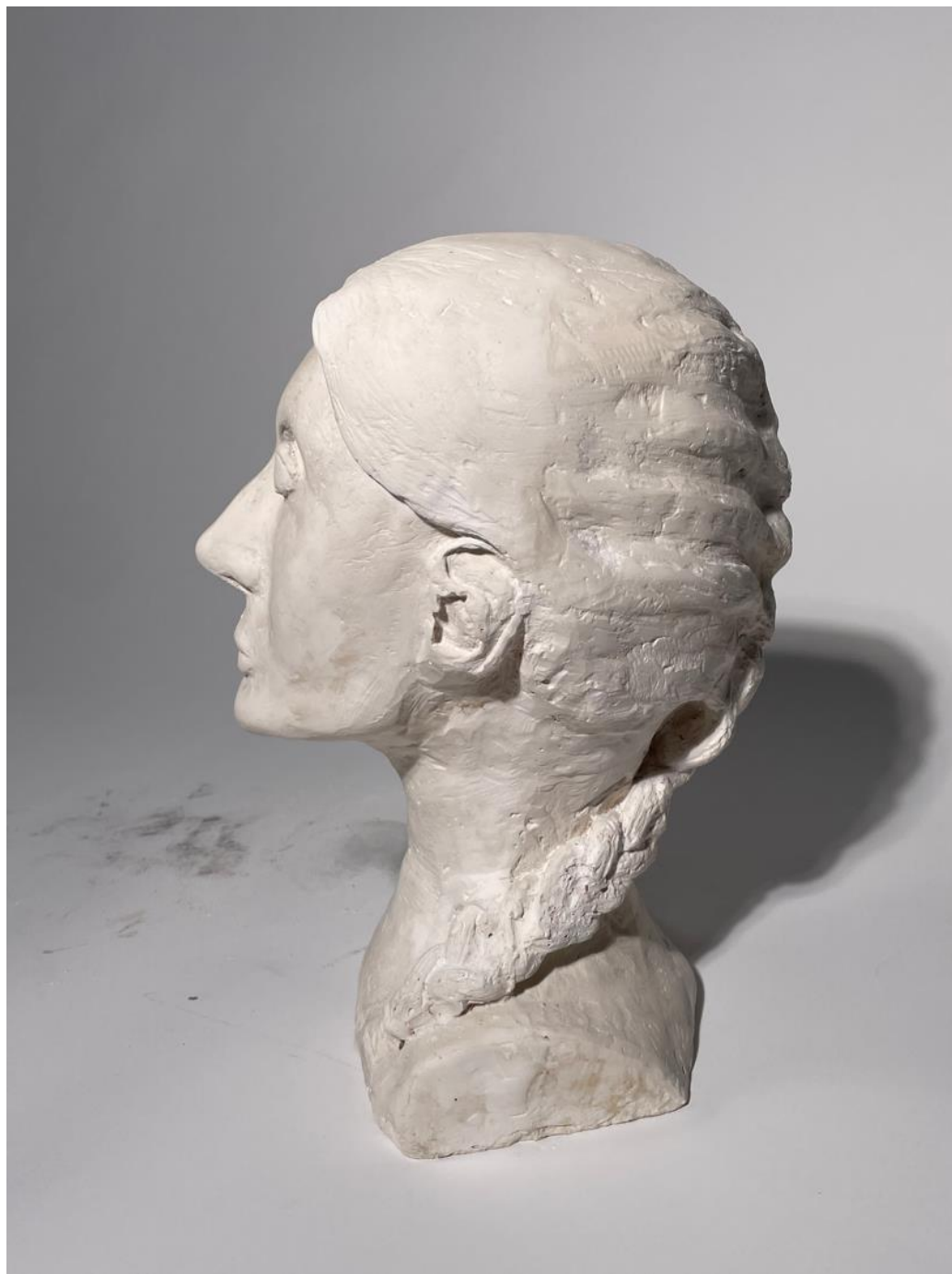
“Of course! You are my little brother, I’d go anywhere for you.” He smiled at that too. “Let’s get out of here,” I said standing up from the floor. We carefully walked out of the cabin, doing our best to avoid pieces of the flooring that looked extra weak, and headed back towards the direction of camp.

“Hey Audrey?” Seth asked me as we walked. “Can we tell everyone that the cabin really was haunted? That seems like a cooler story than me falling through the floorboards.”

“But then you won’t get to laugh at Bryce and his friends about how scared they were,” I pointed out.

“Eh, that’s okay. You and I will still know it. And who knows, maybe they will treat me better if they think I survived a haunted cabin!” he exclaimed. I smiled to myself. Seth had grown up in many ways and I had to remind myself that. He could stand up for himself and make judgments about others intentions. He would always be my baby brother, and a kid at heart but he could take care of himself. Well, at least when he wasn’t falling through floors he could.

Bailey Long / *Self-portrait*



A complex collage titled "THE NEW BEAUTY" featuring various artistic elements. At the top left is a black and white illustration of a woman's head and shoulders. To its right is a vibrant pink and red abstract shape. Below the woman's head is a branch with red raspberries. Further right is a blue and white abstract pattern. On the far right is a large, stylized red letter 'S'. In the center, there is a close-up of lips. Below the lips is a hand adorned with multiple gold bracelets and rings. To the left of the hand is a circular, blue and white pattern resembling a cross-section of a fruit. At the bottom left is a white classical statue of a woman. At the bottom center is a pair of black lace sunglasses. At the bottom right is a close-up of a person's face. The collage is composed of various textures, colors, and styles, creating a rich and eclectic visual experience.

Yia Vue / Why should I cry for you?

Why should I cry for you
you who marched under an ashen sky
you who swam the torrents
you who crawled on his belly
and hid in the thickets to save his people

Why should I cry for you
you, a father who spent his youth
lost in wounded jungle shadows
you, a father who never knew tender touch
who carried guns before you could tie your shoes

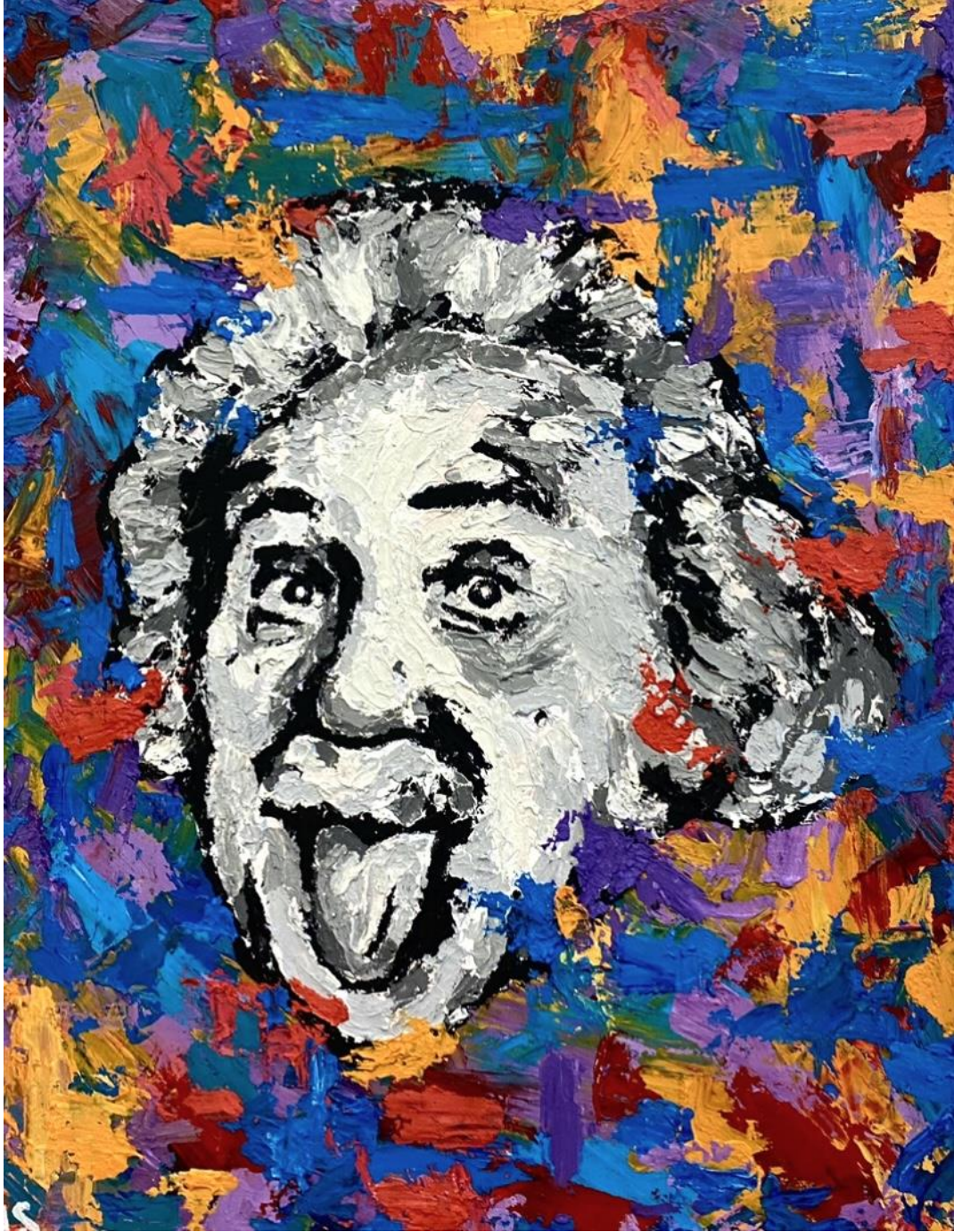
Why should I cry for you
you who lived your life blinded
by the memory of bullets and bombs
you who couldn't see me
and the blood I inherited from you

Why should I cry for you
now that you're gone beyond where memories can follow
you who's left it all behind for me
broken pieces scattered around
for me to see you now

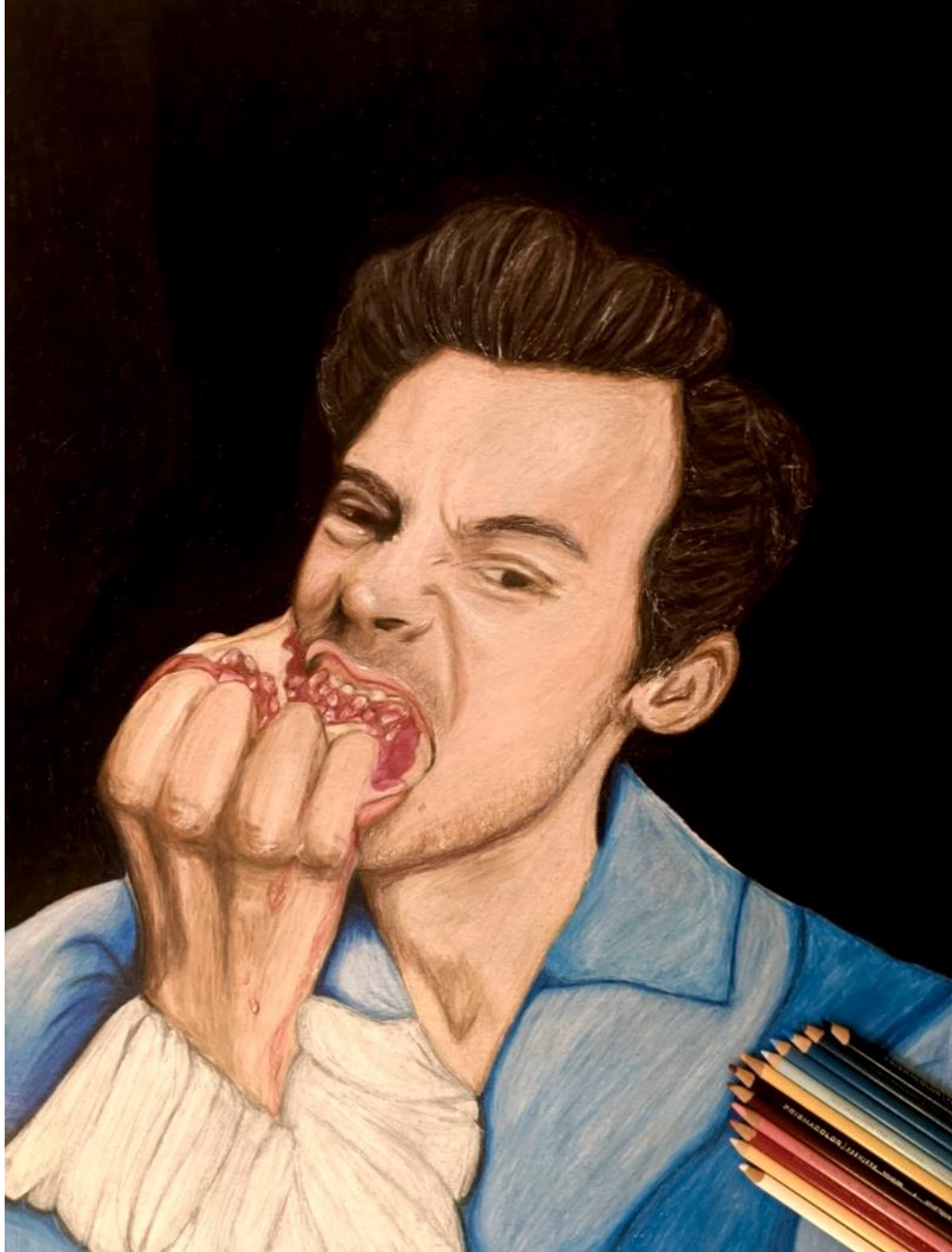
Kylie Stelter / *Amongst the Butterflies Self-portrait*



Kylie Stelter / *Colorful Chaos*



Kylie Stelter / *Pomegranate*



Contributor Biographies

Esther Hammen is a past editor of *Catalyst*. She's thrilled now to be a contributing author. She hopes you enjoy her pieces as much as she enjoyed writing them!

Evie Stoeckmann grew up in Hartford, WI. She found clay during her third year at the University of Wisconsin La Crosse while getting her undergraduate degree in Art Education. Not only does she love the materiality of clay and the process of making ceramic art, but she also loves the community that clay cultivates. She was able to experience the clay loving community at a national level when she attended the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, or NCECA, conference in the spring of 2023., where she won third place. It was an influential moment in terms of her confidence and recognizing her passion.

Felix Froh is a fan of horror movies and angry music, An English major and a sociology minor at UWL, Felix hails from Holmen, Wisconsin.

Caden Lien grew up on a farm in the small town of Spicer, Minnesota but currently lives and works in La Crosse, Wisconsin. He is graduating with a Bachelor of Science majoring in Art and minoring in Digital Media Studies and Design from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. He works in a variety of mediums such as printmaking, drawing, and collage, but appreciates and experiments in all forms of art. Moving on from higher education, he plans to incorporate artmaking practices in his life no matter the circumstance.

Cecelia Ahlers is a plant and fungal biology major and art minor. She finds passion and inspiration from being in nature and loves to create.

Allie Norgord grew up in Madison, WI where they have been surrounded by craft and functional artworks for their entire life. Their biggest influence on their art is their mother – Helen Wasylyk – who has encouraged art and creativity through example, their house always being filled with art, crafts, and other projects.

Laurie Leick is a sophomore from the Madison area. They enjoy writing, watching movies, hiking, and playing Dungeons and Dragons. When they grow up, they want to be superhero!

Maiya Brandt is a ceramicist and photographer who grew up on a small hobby farm in the town of Merton, WI. While attending UW-La Crosse, she began pursuing a degree in art education, which evolved into an art major with a minor in photography. Currently Maiya spends the majority of her time in the ceramics studio or hiking the surrounding bluffs with her camera in hand. When she is not creating artwork, she enjoys camping, trail running, and cuddling with her two cats.

Abigail Schoepke is a first-year student at UW La-Crosse, and she switched her major from Mycology to English after rediscovering her passion for writing both technical and creative. She likes to explore the artistry that lies hidden in the macabre and ordinary unattractiveness of everyday life, expressing her thoughts primarily through the poetry medium.

Brevin Kruse is a conceptual artist who explores the history and present culture of consumerism through repurposed and found objects. His work aims to give new life to disregarded objects and ideas by reconsidering their purpose or context.

Ciara Haws works in various forms of media, focusing on painting and ceramics. Through focusing on color and movement, the artist hopes to invite viewers into the composition.

Meg Alaimo is an English major at UW-LaCrosse and hopes to graduate in the spring. Her work can be found in the 2021-2022 editions of The Windy Hill Review and in Volume 27 of The Catalyst. When she is not writing, Meg likes to play video games and spends time fantasizing about having a cat of her own. She is currently residing in Rochester, MN with her loving partner (and not a cat...yet).

Tori Horman is a senior English Writing and Rhetoric major graduating this December. Whatever you do, don't ask her what her plans after graduation are because she has no idea,

although she does hope to one day become an editor. Tori enjoys photography, graphic design, playing and attempting to write music, reading, and spending time with her pets.

Jada Graham is a psychology student here at UWL. She is the vice president of the Women's Club Basketball team. She enjoys playing sports, doing anything outdoorsy, and she loves animals. Jada enjoys writing in her free time and aims to write stories from her perspective as a minority, in hopes that it may inspire others to share their voice as well.

Jayda LaFleur is a junior at UWL taking a bunch of art classes until she can teach some of her own.

Brandon Showers is a non-traditional student and senior at UW-La Crosse pursuing a bachelor's in marketing. In his free time enjoys woodworking and meeting new people. He loves pizza, strolls in the wilderness and is a hopeless romantic propelled to write.

Charleigh Hanson is a sophomore at UWL studying psychology and art. In her free time, she likes to psychoanalyze people and make art.

Isabella Krall is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. She is studying Elementary Middle Education and minoring in Creative Writing. In her free time she enjoys reading, writing, playing tennis, and spending time with friends and family.

Bailey Long made this self-portrait sculpture of plaster in the spring of 2023. This project took her many months of carving and sculpting oil-based clay around a wooden dowl structure. Don't check the measurements super closely, but the sculpture should be exactly the size of her face and mathematically correct to her actual facial proportions and features. Her favorite feature of the sculpture and process was making the French braid out of clay and then translating that into the soft plaster cast, and finally the hard plaster final.

Sofia Hemauer is a Psychology major and Literary and Cultural Studies minor at UW La Crosse that loves to explore other creative outlets!

Yia Vue is a senior at UWL majoring in English Writing Rhetoric on the pre-law track. When she's not wordsmithing, she spends her time as a producer, creative director, and public historian. She worked and lived in the New York City area for twenty years before deciding to return to college to change her career goals. She enjoys being in the wilderness, traveling, learning new cultures and languages, and feeding people. Hang around long enough and you'll eventually get fed.

Kylie Stelter is a current sophomore at UWL studying Art Education. She has a passion for inspiring youth through art and enjoys being involved in the campus art community.