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Satori 2022

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Cover Art – **Beauty in Simplicity** by Abigail Perlinger

Mission Statement

In Zen Buddhism, "Satori" is the Japanese word for enlightenment, seeing into one's own true nature. Since 1970, Satori has provided a forum for Winona State University students to express their true nature by sharing their creations with the university community.

A Note from the Editors

This edition of *Satori* was a learning experience for all involved. We didn't know each other, nor did we get to see each other's faces for the first half of the semester as we were still wearing masks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether or not *Satori* would be published was not in question; however, the means by which that would happen were unknown to us. Now, at the end of that journey, we can say we are satisfied with the results and we hope that you are too.

If you enjoy what you see in this edition of *Satori*, and you are a returning student next year, make sure to send in your work for the next generation of editors to consider.

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**Winona Prize* Winner

Page Sutton

If I Loved A Poet

When she sees green it's never just green, is it?
It always feels like it means something, doesn't it?

It's mid-april grass stains from dandelion-covered fields,
smudged into silky white t-ball pants, soon turned dingy.

I've heard her say it's the little sea glass dragonfly refracting
diamond
sunlight as it hangs from a curly black wire in her mother's
library.

It's late-may leaflets, accommodating ladybugs, on the reaching
white birch outside of her family's farmhouse attic window.

It's pistachio pudding salad for Easter at that same farm,
in 13 crystal dishes– the 14th was her Papa Sam's, and he ate
tapioca.

Sometimes it's the tealish green in her father's marbled
birthstone
ring, passed down to him from his granny. "They shared a
birthday, you know."

Often, it's the moss that grows both on the boulders at
Davidson's Park

in Westby, W.I., and on the sandy edges of Minnehaha Falls.

For a while, it was the shaved '90s carpet in her upstairs
bedroom,
in an old fading house, in an old fading town, where she often
felt bored.

After that, it was the tattoo ink in the shape of a daisy on her
mother's
back that was once black, but through time turned into the
"most beautiful pine."

Lately, it's been my eyes. She thinks they're the greenest green
of all,
even though my driver's license says 'Eye color: blue.'

Louisa Schirmacher – *Winona Prize* winner in Fiction

TRIPPING PONT

As Mattie walked behind the couple, she brainstormed ways to murder Jason.

He was currently holding Lydia's hand, their fingers interlaced. Just two months ago, Mattie thought, she had been holding Lydia's hand like that. But she'd been too slow, Lydia had said, and Jason asked her to go out with him, Lydia had said. *And he's so sweet and you'll be alright if we stay as just friends, right?*

Yes, of course, Mattie had responded. And it had been fine, up until Lydia started caring more about Jason than she ever had cared about Mattie, and Mattie's feelings only grew for each day they spent apart.

Jason squeezed Lydia's hand and whispered something in her ear. Mattie wondered how much effort it would take to snap his fingers in half. She'd read somewhere that if you had no nerves in your pinkie, biting it off would feel no different than biting into a baby carrot. She supposed the same logic applied to the rest of the fingers, and longed to test it on Jason. Maybe Lydia wouldn't like him as much if he had no fingers. The thought made her smile.

The tour guide stopped the group and began a spiel about groundwater. The chill of the cave seeped through Mattie's down vest and numbed her toes in her sneakers. She shuffled one against the gravelly rock floor, then the other.

"Mattie, hey! I didn't notice you there!" Mattie looked up to see Lydia turned to face her, smiling brightly. Mattie was a few inches taller, so Lydia had to crane her neck a bit to meet her eyes.

Jason was also looking, but not smiling. Lydia gestured Mattie forward. “C’mere, you don’t need to stand all alone.”

“Okay.” Mattie stood at Lydia’s other side, and Lydia looped her arm through Mattie’s. Mattie’s heart did a little swoop into her stomach.

Stop that, she told it.

Lydia patted Mattie’s arm with her gloved hand and gave her a little smile. She was warm and smelled nice. Like strawberries. Probably from the shampoo she liked to use for her curly hair.

“It’s a little chilly— this can help us preserve warmth.” Lydia laughed, until a classmate shushed her. She wrinkled her nose at him.

“I’m not cold,” Jason said.

“Of course you’re not,” Mattie said.

Jason glared at her. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You’re never cold. You wear shorts in the winter. Like a psychopath.”

“Guys, guys, c’mon. Don’t argue,” Lydia said, lightly slapping each of their arms.

Mattie and Jason stared murderously at each other behind Lydia’s back. She didn’t notice, or at least pretended not to. Her ignoring the obvious hatred between the two of them had become an unfortunate pattern in the past months—Lydia had never been one for confrontation, in all the years Mattie had known her, and the fact that her best friend and her boyfriend were at odds was likely the last thing she wanted to deal with.

But, Mattie and Jason hadn’t always hated each other. They had been acquaintances before Lydia was even in the picture, and Mattie might have even ventured to call them friends. She recalled

even thinking he was cute, a long time ago, middle school maybe: Most girls thought he was cute back then, with his floppy brown hair, slim build, and glasses. Mattie had fallen prey to the common consensus, probably giggling about him at a few sleepovers because everyone else was too. Those days were long gone. Now her thoughts of him consisted of listing his innumerable faults, making fun of his slightly crooked teeth, and wishing he was dead.

As the tour guide chattered on about old-timey iron picks, and Lydia began to whisper to Jason again, Mattie turned her attention to the cave the class was gathered in. Large and looming, the sound of dripping water echoed from some distant crevice. Electric lights threaded all along the perimeter emitted a faint hum. The air, crisp and cold as it was, felt oppressive somehow. Perhaps it was the fact that they all stood two thousand feet below the Earth's surface, and there weren't really supposed to be people walking around and breathing down here. Humans had chosen to ignore that fact for ages, shuttling crowds of men into the Earth to strip the rock of its goods and abandon it when it was empty. Almost to illustrate this point, mannequins fitted in time-accurate miner's uniforms posed in various working positions around the cavern, some on ladders, some picking away at coal deposits, all stock still. As if they had spent too much time down here, breathing in the ancient underground air, and eventually the Earth got sick of being poked at, choosing to still the breath inside their lungs and trap them here forever.

The group began to walk again, ushered into the next tunnel by the guide.

Lydia and Mattie moved forward, but their chain of three was held back by Jason.

“See that?” He pointed to a gaping hole in the wall, nothing but darkness beyond. An orange and white construction blockade sat in front, with a sign taped across it: DO NOT ENTER.

“Jason, if you go in there you’re going to die,” Lydia said. “Let’s keep going.” She tried to tug him along.

“What do you think’s down there?” he asked, taking a few steps closer and letting go of Lydia’s hand to peer inside.

“I don’t know. A collapsed mine shaft, maybe. Or a cave spider or something—”

“Like Minecraft,” Mattie interrupted. “Why don’t you go try to fight it, Jason.”

“Let’s just go, we’re getting left behind,” Lydia said, glancing back and forth between the quickly receding light of the group and Jason, who was drumming his fingers on the barrier.

He turned to face them both, a playful grin on his face. “I’m gonna go check it out.”

Oh, no. He wasn’t going to one-up her. *Mattie* was the spontaneous and exciting one, not Jason. And she was going to prove it.

“I’m coming too,” Mattie said, detaching herself from Lydia’s arm.

“Guys, come on, don’t!” Lydia protested. “We’re— we’re going to get in trouble, it says not to enter...”

“Catch up with the group, we’ll be back when we’re done exploring,” Mattie said, before Jason could butt in. “I’ll bring back a cave spider for you!”

Mattie flicked her phone flashlight on and stepped over the barrier. Jason wouldn’t be far behind, he couldn’t back down now; it would mean she’d won if he did.

She turned back just in time to see Jason lean down to kiss Lydia before saluting and following Mattie into the tunnel. The image made her want to vomit, so she turned back and focused on the floor in front of her.

The ground was less worn-down here, far from the footsteps of innumerable tour groups. It took significantly more effort for Mattie not to trip over her feet. Two minecart rails sliced through the center of the passage floor, rusted and flaking. Water dripped from the ceiling, pattering on her helmet every once and awhile. The sound bugged her, so she unlatched it and let it hang at her side as she watched. From the faint *click* behind her, she assumed Jason had followed suit.

After a few minutes of walking, Jason sighed noisily behind her. "This is kind of boring."

"If you're scared, you can just say so," Mattie said.

"Screw you."

Slowly, the light from behind them dimmed, until there was nothing but darkness behind, darkness ahead, and the small radius of Mattie's phone flashlight at her feet.

"Seriously," Jason grumbled again. "You'd think there would be something more interesting down here than just rocks."

"Hey, you suggested this, not me," Mattie said, swinging around to shine the light in his face.

He immediately raised his arms to block it out. "Screw this, I'm walking in front." He took out his own phone and switched on the flashlight, brushing past Mattie to lead the way.

Each time they came to a fork in the mineshaft, Mattie called out which way to go based on what tunnel looked the most interesting. Jason mostly ignored her suggestions.

“Shouldn’t we record which ones we’re taking?” Mattie asked irritably.

“Nah, I’ve got them down.” He tapped his temple. “I’ll Hansel and Gretel this shit when we reach the end, right back to where we came from.”

Mattie rolled her eyes.

After another stretch of silence and walking, Jason stopped. “This is boring. Let’s go back, I’m hungry.”

Mattie was secretly relieved. It would be more fun if Lydia were here, and wasting time tramping through a cold, damp tunnel with her last favorite person in the world wasn’t as impactful of a statement as Mattie had expected it to be. Wordlessly, she turned and began to walk back the way they came.

At the fork, she turned to raise her eyebrows at Jason. “Alright, Hansel. Lead the way.”

He faltered. His eyes flicked back and forth between the several tunnel options. “It was... this. This one.” He pointed at one of the tunnels. They all looked the same.

“You sure?”

“I’m sure. Yeah. Yep, it was this one,” He plunged ahead. Mattie followed, a sinking feeling in her stomach.

The next cluster of tunnels led to an identical reaction from Jason.

“Jason. Are you positive you know which tunnels we’ve taken?”

“Yes, Mattie. I kept track. It’s just. They all look similar, so I have to take a sec to remember.”

“Because if you got us lost down here, I’m gonna end you.”

“C’mon, they’ve got the whole system mapped out anyway. If we do get lost—which we won’t, because I know exactly where we’re going—they’ll find us in, like, an hour tops.”

Jason did not know exactly where they were going. Fifteen minutes later, they emerged into a cavern quite different from the one they started out in. It was slightly smaller, significantly cooler, with a gaping pit against one wall. Mattie, clenching her fists to avoid screaming in frustration, stormed over to the edge to peer inside. It wasn’t a straight shot down, more of a gradual drop-off, with crags looming out of the darkness below. She couldn’t quite see the bottom, but her phone flashlight was fairly weak, so it may not have been far. A small stream of water trickled over the side, and the rock around it was damp. It looked traversable, and would be cool to explore if she weren’t currently lost in a mine with the biggest asshole of all time.

She folded her arms and juted a thumb over her shoulder at the pit. “There’s your cool discovery. Ya still bored?”

“Jesus,” Jason said. “Lay off, will you?” He leaned against the wall next to the pit, tapping on his phone.

“You’re not going to get service down here.”

“I know that,” Jason said. “I’m playing a game.”

“Have fun wasting your phone battery, then.” Mattie rolled her eyes and stalked a few yards across the cavern, a safe distance away from the pit. “This sucks.”

“Duh,” Jason said, rubbing his arm with his free hand. He’d only worn a thin sweatshirt. *What is it with guys and never dressing for the weather?* “Lydia is gonna be pissed.”

“You’re the one who got us lost!” Mattie snapped. “Don’t act like she’s in the wrong for worrying about you.”

Jason pocketed his phone and squinted at Mattie. “Is that what this is about?”

“Is *what* what this is about!”

“Your weird obsession with my girlfriend! Don’t act like I haven’t noticed.”

“Your girlfriend,” Mattie said, voice thick with hurt, the same hurt that had been building up, unspoken, for months. She took a step forward. “My *best* friend— My ex-girlfriend, don’t forget.”

Jason pushed off the wall and crossed his arms. “It’s been ages, Mattie. Get over it. You only dated for, like, a week. It’s getting creepy, at this point—”

“Creepy to care about her? To want to spend time with her? That’s much less creepy than you, saying you wouldn’t want to be friends if she rejected you! How entitled do you think you are?”

Jason scoffed, speaking in the calm, condescending tone of his Mattie hated so much. “Stop pretending like you know every detail of our relationship. You don’t, even with what Lydia tells you. And I hate to say it, but I don’t think you two would have lasted, anyway. She never really liked you that way, she just didn’t want to lose you—”

The ball of anger in Mattie’s chest smoldered. It felt like someone had poured boiling water on her lungs, and the heat was crawling up her throat and threatening to bubble out of her mouth. “Shut up.”

“Don’t tell me what to do.” Jason said, anger seeping into his tone.

“I know you’re jealous,” Mattie said, curling her fists into balls so tight that her fingers ached. “That’s why you hate me so much. Because she still wants to be friends with me, even after we

dated, and you can't understand why. And guess what? After high school, when you both go to college, you'll inevitably have a terrible, horrible breakup and never talk to each other again. But I'll still be in her life. And honestly, I can't *wait* for when that day comes."

"God, you're so fucking bitter," Jason spat. "I don't get why she keeps you around."

Mattie had never hit anyone before, but she thought, in that moment, that she'd absolutely love to hit Jason. She wouldn't do it, because if she did it wrong, she would just embarrass herself.

But there, in that cramped cavern, with the irritatingly persistent *drip-drip-drip* of groundwater trickling into the pit and the chill soaking into her skin and the infuriating presence of her best friend's boyfriend, she felt a tug in her gut that she'd never felt before, accompanied by a small whisper in the back of her mind, giving her an instruction she very much wanted to listen to.

Drip.

Strangely, Mattie thought back to the tale of Hansel and Gretel. Two siblings, abandoned by their parents, traipsing off into the woods to find a cottage made of gingerbread and an evil witch inside. Mattie hadn't encountered a witch in these mines, and she would rather die than call Jason her brother— but she had to admit, their stories had some similarities.

Drip-drip.

Jason stood close to the pit. The darkness within seemed to be leeching upward, stretching its tendrils towards Jason's sneakers, wrapping around his ankles and winding up his legs. Mattie couldn't tell if the tendrils were real or a figment of her enraged imagination. She didn't particularly care.

Drip-drip-drip.

Jason's helmet sat abandoned on the cave floor. His brows and mouth furrowed into a frown, lit from below in the sinister glow from her phone flashlight. Mattie still couldn't understand how Lydia had ever found him attractive.

How had Hansel and Gretel ended? With a wide-open oven, and a well-timed push...

Drip.

She moved without thinking, surging forward, stretching her fingers out, poised to give Jason a solid shove into the pit below. Her fingertips were milliseconds from the shiny material of his sweatshirt, his face not quite registering what was happening, before she realized what she was about to do. She yanked her arms back, sucking in a breath, adrenaline coursing through her veins, and tried to take a step backward. Her sneaker landed on a patch of damp rock, her balance was thrown off as the traitorous foot slid out from underneath her body. As she caught a glimpse of her feet, she could have sworn she saw the same darkness wrapped around her own ankle. The sight frightened and unbalanced her further. She careened forward, feet scrabbling for purchase on the rock, course set to collide with Jason.

No no no nononono—!

It happened in an instant. Her body slammed into his, sending both of them tumbling to the ground and over the lip of the pit.

It wasn't really a fall. Not in the typical sense, the type Mattie remembered feeling in a dream where you wake up right before hitting the ground, or what she'd imagine a free-fall in an elevator would feel like. This fall was a lot less graceful, with more random body parts bashing themselves against the rock or Jason, the pain masked by her body screaming at her to not hit her head.

It also didn't last very long, just a brief whirlwind of rock and darkness and bumps before she landed, hard, on her side.

Stars floated in front of her eyelids, blinking in and out of existence.

Mattie lay there for a moment, mind foggy. What were you supposed to do after a fall? They hadn't really covered that along with "Stop, Drop and Roll" in elementary school. Her head didn't hurt or feel cotton-stuffed, just a little jumbled. She supposed that was the most important thing.

Blinking, she slowly sat up, noting the dull pain in her arms and legs. It was completely dark, save for the faint glow coming from Mattie's upside-down phone a few feet away. She swiped it up and felt foolish for immediately checking the screen for cracks.

Not really the priority right now, Mattie.

She ran the beam across her body, checking for blood or broken bones. Miraculously, there were none, just a lot of dirt and small scrapes. She then remembered that she wasn't the only one down there.

"Jason," she said. "*Jason.*"

For a long, terrifying moment, there was no response. Then a faint groan came from a few feet away, and Mattie's flashlight revealed Jason, curled up in fetal position, hands cradling his head.

"Thank Jesus," Mattie sighed, running a hand through her damp hair. "Are you okay? Have you checked your head at all?"

"My head's fine," Jason said, slowly pushing himself to his knees. "My arm hurts, but I don't think it's broken."

"That's a relief," Mattie gripped the wrist holding her phone with her other trembling hand. "Um. What do we do now?"

She tilted the flashlight up towards the mouth of the pit. The slope they'd tumbled down was damp and craggy, striped with

thin trails of slime caked underneath trickling rivulets of water. It wasn't a straight shot up, but it didn't look like a Sunday-walk-in-the-park, either.

She turned the flashlight back towards Jason. He was crouching now, eyes to the ground, rubbing his head.

"Any thoughts?" Mattie said.

Jason tilted his head up. His eyes gleamed unnaturally in the white beam. He had a few scrapes on his face, angry and red. "Did you just try to push me?"

Mattie swallowed. There was no way he wouldn't know, why *else* would she have fallen? Of course, she'd pulled out of it last minute, but it had been too late by then. *Jesus*. "Will you even believe me if I say no?"

"I don't know."

"I slipped." It wasn't a lie.

Jason stared at her for a few uncomfortable seconds, then let out a bark of laughter. "You slipped?"

Mattie's gut squirmed. "Yes. The ground was—it was slippery."

"You're unbelievable."

"Look, I'm sorry. But can we maybe just focus on getting out of here?"

Jason sighed through his nose. "Fine. Hold up that light, I'll climb out." He got to his feet and approached the ledge, moving his hands across its surface. Mattie dutifully held up the flashlight as he planned a course upwards, cowed by her own actions.

For several minutes, he tested different footholds, making it a few feet up before slipping back down or losing his trail. Mattie noticed that he was favoring his left arm, wincing whenever the other stretched too far.

“Wait, stop,” she said. “You’re hurt. I can try.”

Jason huffed and hopped down, stumbling a bit on the uneven pit floor. “Be my guest.”

Mattie passed the phone to him and tried the same path he’d been on, fingers clinging to whatever holds they could find. After a few sweat-inducing minutes of trying and failing to climb more than a few feet off the ground, she pushed off the rocky incline and slumped back against the wall.

“I can’t,” she said. “It’s impossible.”

Without the exertion of climbing to warm her blood, the chill of the cave began to seep back into her skin, biting at the tips of her fingers and her nose. Mattie stuffed her hands into the pockets of her down vest. She couldn’t feel her toes.

Jason shook his head and turned her flashlight to their surroundings, yielding miserably bleak results. The pit they were in was nothing more than a deep gash in the ground, rubble strewn about the corners and nowhere to go but up. The streams of water trickling down the sides filtered into miniscule cracks in the ground. Annoyingly enough, the sound of dripping was still quite audible.

Jason tossed Mattie her phone. She fumbled to catch it as he sat across from her.

“Watch it,” she snapped, shining it at him. “This is the only light we’ve got. Unless yours—?”

Jason dug in his sweatshirt pocket and extracted his phone, which displayed an intricate webbing of cracks. “Busted. From the fall.”

Mattie didn’t respond. What was there to say? *Sorry for almost pushing you into a pit and then changing my mind but still*

slipping and falling in with you anyway and then inadvertently breaking your phone. It was in a fit of rage, you understand.

“Maybe we should call for help?” she said weakly.

Jason shrugged, like, *If you say so*, but made no move to get up.

Mattie stood again, feeling somewhat responsible for their plight, and yelled as loud as she could muster.

“HELP! ANYONE! WE’RE STUCK!” Her cries seemed to absorb into the rock, not even reaching the lip of the pit. She cursed under her breath, then notched her volume higher.

“PLEASE! HELP!”

Jason joined in from where he was seated, and they both shouted and screamed and yelled for someone, *anyone* to hear them and help them until both of their voices ran ragged and dry.

Finally, Mattie rested her forehead against the cold, wet rock wall and held back a sob. The hysteria was going to get to her unless she kept her shit together. Her head ached from the screaming.

“This is useless. No one’s coming,” Jason said, voice hollow and raspy from behind her.

Mattie turned around. “Someone’s gonna come. Someone *has* to come. They’ll notice we’re missing, or Lydia will get anxious and say something... I think we just have to wait.”

“Oh, shit. Lydia.” Jason buried his hands in his hair, dipping his head between his knees.

“She’s gonna be pissed,” Mattie said, sliding down the wall to a seated position. It struck her then that those were the exact words that had started their fight in the cave above them.

The realization didn't seem to pass Jason by, either. He regarded her through the curtain of brown hair. "Or worried sick. I don't know what's worse."

Mattie let out a weak laugh. "*Worried sick?* You sound like my grandma."

Jason looped his arms around his knees, pulling them closer to his body. "You look like my grandma."

"Screw you."

They fell silent. Each of them slouched against their opposite walls, arms around their legs to contain the warmth they had. The only sound was the dripping from above and their steady breathing.

They stayed that way for a long time, both listening for the telltale scuff of a sneaker from above them or the beam of a flashlight.

After waiting as long as she could muster, Mattie checked the time.

"Two hours."

"Since we fell?" Jason asked.

"Since we left the group."

But that wasn't the only thing she noticed. Her phone battery, fully charged at the beginning of the field trip, was now dwindling at around 20 percent, drained by excessive flashlight usage.

"My battery's almost gone. Should I turn the flashlight off, or—?"

"Keep it on." Jason interrupted. "Please." His voice, usually so low and nonchalant, hitched up on the last word.

"Okay."

She kept it on.

Mattie stared at her sneakers. The laces were frayed.

Had anyone noticed they were missing yet? Had Lydia confessed? Or was she trusting they'd make it back, her boyfriend and her best friend?

18%.

They wouldn't die down here. The school would get into a storm of legal trouble if they did.

16%.

Wait, but hadn't they signed a waiver? Something about the tour people not being responsible for injuries or... anything else.

15%.

There wasn't even a way for them to die. Not cold enough for hypothermia, and they wouldn't be here long enough to starve or thirst to death.

14%.

Probably.

12%.

Mattie's mom was gonna throw a fit when she got home.

11%.

If.

10%.

"Jason?"

"What."

"I'm sorry."

"For?"

For pushing you. For almost pushing you. For hating you so much. For imagining your fingers were baby carrots and biting them off. For Lydia.

"Y'know."

"Okay."

8%.

"I'm sorry, too."

"For what?"

"Y'know."

"Yeah."

6%.

"How do you think she'll react when they find us?"

"She's probably gonna cry."

"Ha. Yeah. Then maybe punch us."

"Yeah."

4%.

"I actually don't mind that you two are still friends."

"Huh?"

"Even if it seems that way. I think, sometimes, seeing you two, I just get—"

"—Jealous."

A low huff of laughter from both parties.

"Yeah."

2%.

"My phone's at two percent."

"Awesome."

She tipped the light up to illuminate him. His once fluffy and perfect brown hair hung limp over his forehead, shadowing his eyes from view. He sat curled up with his back to the wall, arms wrapped loosely around his knees and looking altogether like a boy with no energy left.

Mattie wordlessly patted the ground beside her. He crawled over and sat at her side, their arms pressed together, pooling warmth between them.

1%.

They were quiet.

0%.

The cave plunged into darkness. Mattie felt Jason suck in a breath beside her. The absence of light pressed into them on all sides, soaking into their eye sockets, pulling at their clothes and worming into their ears. Cold and oppressive and thick, stealing time from their senses and hiding childhood closet monsters behind swaths of ink.

Five minutes, or an hour, or ten hours passed.

Mattie recalled the tendril of darkness she'd seen wrapping around Jason's foot. It had seemed so poetic to her, at the time, some manifestation of twisted justice for the hell he'd wrought on her life. But it had been around her own ankle, as well, winding up her leg and digging into her heart for the past few months.

Now, she was surrounded by that same darkness, arm-to-arm with the very person it originally took root against.

Jason's disembodied voice lifted from beside her, tremulous and thin. "There's no way for them to find us unless we make noise."

"I don't think I can yell anymore," Mattie said. Their previous conversations had drained what little volume she had left, and even speaking a few words left her throat sore.

"Me neither."

Something cold dripped on her head. She raised a hand to brush across her hair, searching for the source, and her fingertips met a small spot of moisture. Somehow, it felt different than the repetitive plunking she'd grown used to on the walk here, before she'd taken off her.

Helmet.

“Our helmets are still up there.”

A laugh from beside her, slow then building into a hoarse chuckle, cut off with a cough. At the sound, Mattie felt a giggle bubble up from her chest and burst from her mouth, joining Jason in a fit of crackly laughter until they both had to stop to catch their breath and relax back against the rock.

“Halle-fucking-luhjah.” Jason sighed, a smile in his voice.

They were surrounded by darkness on all sides, but as they slipped back into silence, it didn't press into them as it had before. Time rendered itself back into place, gently passing. Mattie could count the seconds in her own breathing and that of the boy beside her, and allowed herself to wait.

Impossibly, unbelievably, they heard footsteps above.



Trianna Douglas

Drama Queen

Elise Modjeski

The Record of the Earthen and the Alien

Once, a kindergarten teacher was teaching in her classroom. It was brightly lit and colorful, with photos of owl mascots, posters of ABC's, and reminders of the days of the week lining the walls. But today, the instructor was not teaching these things. She was talking to her students about a music "record." The students' little faces frowned confusedly, asking; "Teacher, what is a record?" How would you explain a record to a five-year-old? More importantly, how would you explain a record's function, history, and, most difficultly, its cultural importance? In 1977, a group of United States scientists and researchers did exactly that. Only, instead of explaining a record to a five-year-old human, they attempted to explain it to an alien.

In 1977, NASA launched two Voyager probes into interstellar space. Attached to the side of each probe is a "Golden Record," called so because of the gold plating covering the copper record. Encoded on this record are human greetings from 55 languages, 90 minutes of Earthen music, a 12-minute montage of nature sounds, and 155 images, including "printed messages from President Carter and U.N. Secretary General Waldheim" ("Pioneer Plaque"). The Record's cover attempted to explain to extraterrestrials how to listen to the music and view the photos on the Record, as well as give the date the Record was made and map where our solar system is in the Milky Way.

Some might view this record only as an attempt to teach aliens about humans. This is true. But it was also meant to be more

than that. It was meant to be -and currently still is- an inspiration for Americans to contemplate alien life and human culture.

The Golden Record changed humanity's perception of aliens; in other words, it inspired us to seriously contemplate the idea of alien life. This was done first and foremost through the scientists and researchers that worked on the Golden Record. The NASA scientists brought significant expertise and influence to the project, consequently giving the idea of aliens credibility in the American public's eye. Carl Sagan, the Executive Director of the Golden Record project, writes; "I was interested in the possibility of extraterrestrial life from childhood, long before I heard of flying saucers. I've remained fascinated even as my early enthusiasm in UFOs waned" (Sagan *The Demon Haunted World* 87). Evidently, Sagan was very enthused about the possibility of alien life- though being interested in aliens is not the same thing as considering the idea of extraterrestrials "serious." But Sagan had thoroughly written about the scientific possibilities of alien life in multiple letters, notes, and books kept in the Library of Congress. In one memorable letter, Sagan asked Steven Wall of the Langley Flight Instrument Division at NASA if it is possible to take long-exposure photos to capture possible nocturnal extraterrestrials on the moon. His exact words were, "Would it be possible to do an effective longer-time exposure (for extremely slow-moving animals!) by making several consecutive pictures with the longest time exposure and performing a digital addition? (Wall and Sagan) Instead of sounding ridiculous and fantastical, this quote uses professional photographic terms like "longer-time exposure" and "performing a digital addition" to show Sagan's scientific, realistic analysis of possible alien life on the moon (Wall and Sagan) This scientific analysis proves that Sagan took the idea of possible alien

life seriously. Furthermore, Sagan sent this idea to someone at NASA, who responded to the email thoughtfully and unamusedly, even giving Sagan names of others at NASA to speak to about this possibility. So, both Sagan and NASA were seriously contemplating the idea of alien life. However, was it really just NASA's influence on the public that brought the Voyager golden record (and with it, the idea of alien life) to the public eye?

This statement made in a college thesis accurately describes the leap of extraterrestrials from science fiction to scientific reality; "With the dawn of aerospace science, radio astronomy, and the ambition of the Voyager mission all intersecting and coming to fruition around the same time, such fictional conjectures of alien communication began to influence its more concrete possibility" (Schmitt 7). As Schmitt later mentions, the Voyager Mission was an "exceptional" part of the storm of scientific astro-achievements that made alien life a plausible, explorable idea (7). In fact, the Voyager Probes were the first with a mission to send our human culture to possible extraterrestrials. There were a few other space missions during that time with similar ideas; for example, NASA's Pioneer space probes had a small plaque etched with images of humans and a map to Earth. However, no other space mission had sent a slice of our human experience and culture to extraterrestrial life. This fact, combined with NASA's professional influence and the "space storm" of the era, launched the Voyager Golden Record into the public light, where it inspired the public to think about the possibility of alien life.

And how do we know that the public was influenced? Well, much of human culture is preserved in our art and media. A plethora of news articles, movies, and television shows during the

1970s and 1980s mention or even star the Voyager Golden Record. By far, the Record's most famous media debut was in the 1979 *Star Trek, The Motion Picture* movie (Stirone). In the movie, aliens find one of the Voyager probes (called "V'ger" in the movie) and make it sentient and intelligent. Thus, when the probe comes looking for its home, Earth, chaos ensues.

Even today, the Voyager Golden Record continues to inspire pondering on the possibility of alien life. In fact, just a few years ago the music of the Golden Record was released on vinyl records after a highly successful Kickstarter campaign raised over a million dollars (Peskovitz and Daly). Furthermore, multiple documentaries have been made on the Golden Record, and it still occasionally pops up in modern-day TV shows and movies. For example, in 2019 Amazon Studios released a movie called *Troop Zero*. Set in the 1970s, it stars a young girl who longs to put her voice on the Golden Record, greeting any aliens who might reside among the stars. The movie shows the inspiring effect the Golden Record had and still has on our thoughts of extraterrestrial life.

Yes, the Golden Record inspired us to thoughtfully consider alien life; however, the making of the Golden Record also inspired us to think about what "human culture" truly is. In fact, Carl Sagan writes "We [all members of the Golden Record project] believe that public availability of a two-record album identical in content with the flight record will stimulate listeners to examine our civilization and culture and consider how we wish to be represented to the Cosmos" (Lomax and Sagan 2). According to Sagan, the scientists and researchers working on the Golden Record project thought that it was equally (if not more) important to inspire contemplation of our own culture as inspiring contemplation of alien life. In fact, the Golden Record project would sometimes put

the interests of the public above the alien interpretation of human culture, since there is only a miniscule chance of intelligent extraterrestrials finding the tiny Record in the gigantic galaxy, but a certain chance that millions of humans would see and listen to the Record. For example, the committee choosing the photos decided not to include any religious photos. Religion is an important part of our culture that extraterrestrials should probably be informed about, but the committee would have to painstakingly describe every single religion on Earth to avoid excluding anybody, which would become; "a political sop to people on Earth viewing our work" (Lomberg *Murmurs of Earth* 76). So, sometimes humanity's perspective of the record interfered with the alien interpretation of human culture; but considering the human perspective is important, because one of the end goals of the Golden Record project was to bring about the public pondering of human culture.

We can see if such pondering has occurred by looking at our media and research; since the Golden Record was created, there have been numerous articles and research papers critiquing the contents of the Golden Record in many ways. As Schmitt suggests, "One could approach the content of the records via visual, sonic, material rhetoric ...the public reactions to the collection, its assertion of space colonialism, the historical contexts and the Cold War, feminist concerns of the patriarchal overtones... The list goes on" (Schmitt 10). There are many possible interpretations and perspectives of the human culture on the Golden Record to ponder and critique- and researchers and authors have taken up the challenge. For example, one research paper critically looks at the Voyager Golden Record, pondering the diversity of music, the role music plays in human culture, and how the Record raises and

answers these questions (Nelson and Polansky). Another research article mentions in its abstract that “This paper will chronicle and critically consider the architectural content of the Golden Record” (Sully 658). Furthermore, a poetry piece pondered the decision of the Golden Record Committee to not include “tempers” or “apathy” or sadness, which are parts of our everyday human lives and thus our cultures (Morín 55-56). Through all of these examples and more, we have pondered the nature of human culture and how we wish to be represented to extraterrestrials– through books, poems, articles, and quotes.

Perhaps the Golden Record started as a project for some galactic alien, to teach them of Earth like we teach 5-year-olds about the culture and history of a record. But maybe it became something more: an inspiration for thoughts of alien life and human culture. No matter your opinion of the Golden Record—a gilded danger, a biased record, or a cultural repository—it makes you ponder; it brings your thoughts among the stars, to a galaxy of aliens and life, and at the same time roots you “down to Earth,” exploring the culture of our humanity. And what comes of such pondering? Perhaps a kindergartener would know. After all, they are the ones who are taught the history and culture of a Record—who imagine the possibilities among the stars with fresh eyes and new insights.

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Grace Menke

Meeting Her

I am in no rush

For I am learning you slow

Dream of being you

Tell me, I had asked her, about our home and our future and our garden and our happiness, about the life we will one day have. Tell me, with her head beneath the glimmering moon with the stars hanging like decorations adorning the ceiling of the night sky. Cause they had both dreamed of all the things young dreamers want to do in life; sing in the car and read the stories and take pictures to tell the stories and pet dogs and laugh and have the butterflies forever floating in my stomach and give back hugs and write and tell people I love and miss them and smile at strangers and give out compliments and wear dresses and stay up all night and stay in all day and buy myself flowers. I was wishing to become her and in that light I wish to be my own kind of love. I find her in all the small things, the sound of "I love yous", sunsets, Sundays, brick streets, coffee shops, and computer screens. She is my future success, who I dream of becoming; she is that version of me.

I want to grab her

And run into tomorrow

She talked of our dreams

I will not apologize for choosing her. This time self-love and romanticizing my future is the chapter that I have always wanted to write. I have quieted my life enough to listen to the tapping of

the rain on the windowsill and the shimmer of the orange leaves as they coil; the familiar clicking of the keyboard and steeliness of a frigid afternoon. Each of these encryptions, reminding me of what matters and telling me where to go. And some days I forget what it is to be gentle with myself and look forward to her with kind eyes and soft words, but it is not always straightforward, it is healing. Because too often I forget that I am worthy of my own love too, but she knows that.

*Talk to her nicely
So she can grow beautifully
Choose love for yourself*

*Since I have known her
My life is so much brighter
So full of meaning*

I know that she surrounds herself with those who bring her up and has the ability to write me in her stories. She wrote me as accepting myself as a work in progress; a continuation of building myself into her; accepting flaws, accepting truths, accepting pasts. "Who taught you to unlove yourself so sweetly," she had asked me, "that you actually thought it tasted good?" Forgive her and she will forgive you too, no matter how many times I have asked her to break. Turn self-love into the fire and the flood, start the spark and let it become uncontrollable. So then, she told me, the excess will spill and ignite the lives of those I hold close. "But you," she emphasized. "Must. Come. First."

Grace Menke

McKenna Scherer

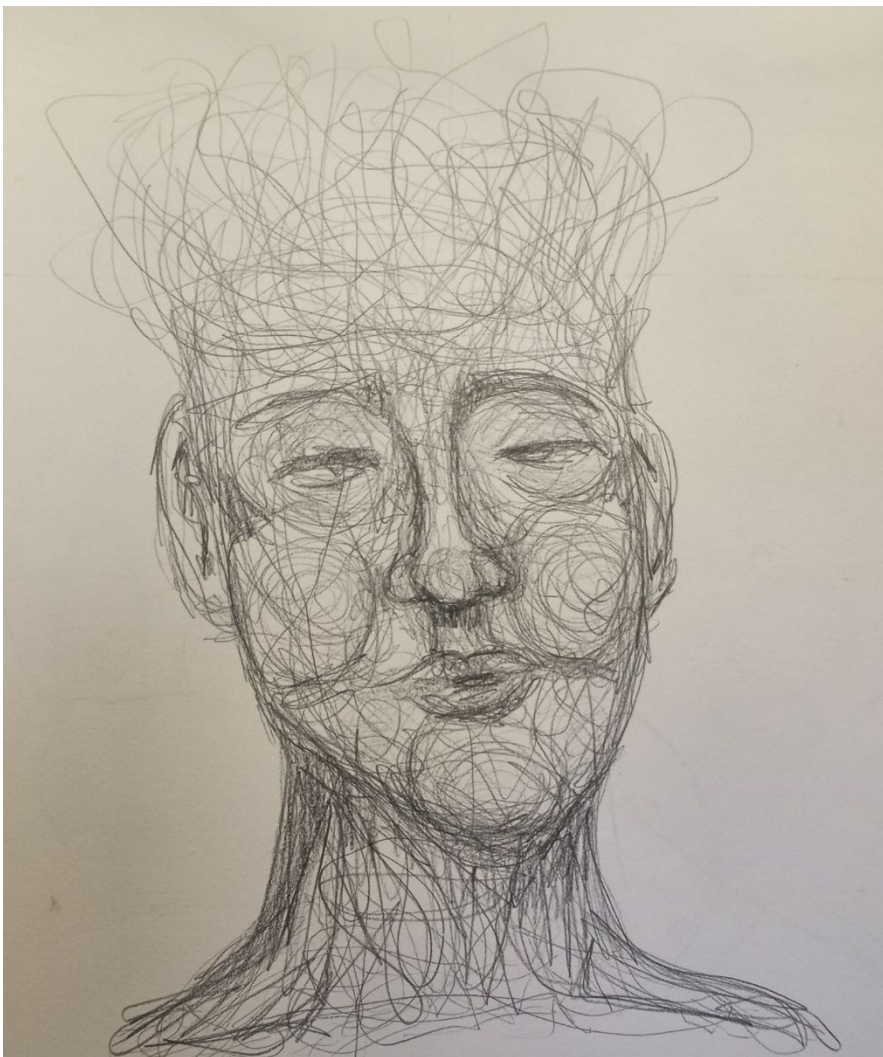
Family

I felt like a cup,
Being filled by all of these things
That weren't mine,
And no one stopped.
For years I overflowed,
But you didn't stop.
I was drowning,
All of these things falling off my edges,
And no one helped me up.
I was static in the background,
Soft splashes and droplets as you drove away,
I was his heart left in two,
Catching on the breeze,
Fading away.

Madi Bonebright

Puzzled

I don't know how to write a love poem for you.
In putting together this complex, million-piece puzzle,
I'm stuck on where to start, the corner, the edge,
the middle, never. How could I construct you,
every piece, quirk, tic, mannerism,
each is a piece, a sharp and beautiful piece
of you, the puzzle I could only aspire to complete
in this too short lifetime with you. I'm stuck
staring at the reference, the printed picture on the
box, put together perfectly, hiding the seams
I wish would jump out at me and show the alignments
so I'd be able to pick them apart and cherish
each individual piece, the fit of the edge,
how it builds and how it cuts to create the
confusing, amazing, mesmerizing, picture of you.



Keaton Riebel

What's Underneath

Jennifer Wendt – *Winona Prize* winner in Nonfiction

My Year with ET and Other Reasons Why I Have Anxiety

AUGUST

ET, the extraterrestrial moved into our home late the summer of 1982. My parents, younger brother, and I drove to the Mankato mall to see the movie. By that time, the film had already been out for a couple of months and everyone in the world was on their second or third viewing. It was such a big deal; film memorabilia and toys were everywhere. Not even the Claire’s Boutique was safe—ET earrings and necklaces, ET purses, scarves, and posters. Spencer Gifts even had fuzzy ET stuffed animals with glowing, beating heart implants in their chests. JCPenney featured ET and his long glowing finger on bed linens and advertised red hooded sweatshirts like the one the character Elliot wore in the movie. Even Neil Diamond had written a song for the movie, “Turn on your heart light, in the middle of a young boy’s dream. Don’t wake me up too soon, Gonna take a ride across the moon, you and me,” so you couldn’t even avoid the fervor on the radio.

That movie was pure torture. There was ET screaming in the cornfield, ET hiding in closet, and ET getting sick and being treated by people in bubble suits (who obviously knew the proper way to treat such a horrific creature.) Towards the end of the movie Elliot started to get sick like ET. The audience was supposed to see that Elliot and ET were connected—the best of friends, but I thought it was disgusting. ET was a disease that spread to everything he touched.

By the time the movie finished it was dark outside. While my family discussed the exciting parts of the movie, like Elliot and ET flying through the sky on Elliot's bicycle, I walked in silence. On the drive home, the silhouettes of houses, trees, and the occasional corn field passed across the window. The stars above, as far away as they were, represented the places that ET resided. As my mom and dad passed a cigarette back and forth, window cracked pushing back acrid tendrils of smoke mixed into the brisk early autumn air, I sunk down onto the scratchy Renault floor and tried to forget those awful images.

SEPTEMBER

After weekend suppers at my aunt and uncle's house, my cousins and I liked to make up dances to songs from the radio. We would gather a strange assortment of old discarded scarves, 50s and 60s prom dresses, and elbow length gloves and practice things that we had seen on the Solid Gold dance program. We believed ourselves to be very fashionable and "rad" as we danced and lip synched along to Olivia Newton John singing, "Let's get physical, physical, I wanna get physical, let me hear your body talk..." Our parents barely flinched when I declared that I had decided that I wanted to be a sex symbol when I grew up. "Ok, that's nice."

OCTOBER

Every night around 8pm my dad would say, "Go on upstairs and hit the hay."

Over time something had changed. The house, dark and creaky like the elderly home it was, started to feel more ominous than usual.

My brother and I started our usual race up the stairs, but I stopped short, letting my little brother win. “Ha, ha I beat you Jumpfer,” his grin twisted up in a too large Ronald McDonald grimace from the chapped red lick-line extending past his lips. Mark rambled off to the bathroom to pee all over the seat while I peered into my bedroom.

From the top step I could crouch down and see under my bed. It was clear, or at least it seemed so. Towards the corner of the room I could see the shadow of an outstretched bony arm, fingers extended and curling inward toward the palm as an invitation to enter. The creature’s feet scratched as it shuffled across the floor. Scritch, scritch, ssssscritchchch. The streetlight illuminated just enough of the beast for me to see the elongated neck curve over the perimeter of my bed where it hung for several minutes, resting itself over the place where I was supposed to lay my head.

“GET READY FOR BED RIGHT NOW! I MEAN IT!” Mom yelled.

Mark ran into his room and mom flicked the hall light on as she started her ascent. With the light on, and my mom on her way, I was able to safely scramble to the room, throw on a nightgown, and wrap the covers tightly around my neck before I could fully contemplate the danger that awaited me during the night.

LATE OCTOBER

By the end of October, I had perfected the night-time routine:

- 1) turn on the stairs light

- 2) sneak up the stairs
- 3) turn on the hall light
- 4) stay at the stairs and check under the bed from a safe distance of 15 feet away
- 5) carefully make my way to the bedroom
- 6) tentatively reach inside and turn on the bedroom light
- 7) check under the bed again (from the doorway)
- 8) scan the entire perimeter of the room (from the doorway)
- 9) walk around the room and check behind the curtains and in the corners
- 10) run hands under the covers and pillows

NOVEMBER

At some point it dawned on me that during the movie ET was hiding in the closet. While most people found that scene, with ET dressed up in ladies' clothes and a floppy hat, humorous and cute, I didn't see it. That is just the way he gets you. He looks nice and friendly and cute so you forget he is a monster. You give the ETs an inch and next thing they will kill you and experiment on your corpse.

So, it came to be that he lived part time in my closet. We lived in a giant square parsonage complete with the full basement and the requisite skeleton keys for the antique locks on every door. The walk-in closet on my bedroom was larger than many New York City apartments so for sure could contain an alien lifeform. Other parts of the day he spent under my bed. There was no bed skirt on my bed, or any other thing obstructing my full view of the undercarriage, but still, I knew that he was there.

Fortunately, I figured out that I could avoid ever opening the door to the closet by only taking clothing from my drawers. The door could be kept closed, securely sealed off on the bottom by old thin baby blankets and wadded up doll clothes, a real timesaver.

DECEMBER

Christmas is my favorite time of year. Just a whiff of glossy recycled magazine print and I am taken right back to the grandeur of the thick yearly Christmas wish books. We would get one from Sears, JCPenney, and the fancier one from Spiegel. This wasn't even including the smaller newspaper inserts from Dayton's, Donaldson's, Herberger's, Menards, Fleet Farm; there were so many. Of course, that was ruined too. Every other page highlighted a new item featuring ET. I figured that the aliens themselves were marketing and making bank on the branded paraphernalia. Years later, I would learn that these instincts were not far from the truth when it was revealed that David Ike and lizard alien people ran the world.

I grew up in the age of in school Christmas gift exchanges. A couple of weeks before school released for break the teacher would walk around the room with a bucket filled with scraps of paper each printed with a student's name. One by one a slip would be chosen and sent home with a letter to the parents outlining appropriate gifts and suggested gift price range. We were all told to keep the name secret until the day of the big reveal.

The day before winter break each classroom held their Christmas party. Students would bring in treats and snacks to share. We would play winter themed games and decorate

something to bring home for our parents. Last item of the day was the big gift exchange.

Students were required to open the gifts one at a time while everyone watched. Some of the naughtier kids got bored with the ceremony and would throw wadded up bits of tissue paper or pieces of candy cane, while others would snicker and make rude comments about everyone's gifts, making you feel more foolish than you already did.

"Oooo look at what Judd got. Judd hold it up so everyone can see." Judd would half-heartedly lift up a matchbox car and an already sharpened pencil.

"Very nice! Say thank you Judd."

"Thank you," Judd mumbled.

"Who is next? Ok Tracy you go. Open up your present and show everyone what you got. Hold up your present Tracy. You got a Christmas Lifesaver candy book! Say thank you Tracy."

Tracy complied, "Thank you Tracy," everyone else giggled while Mrs. Traxler tried to hide her annoyance.

It came to be my turn. "Jennifer, you get to open your gift next. Let's see what you got."

I opened the red and green paper, hoping against all hope that I too would be given a Lifesaver candy book, but instead found that the package contained a six-inch rubbery ET doll. The skin was friable with barely the slightest touch, and it couldn't sit upright independently so laying in its wrap it looked like the miscarried pig fetuses that I had seen in my farm friends 4H books. Averting my eyes, and trying to keep from crying, I squeaked out a meek thank you and folded the paper around ET like a shroud. On the way out of school I slipped ET into the classroom trash. At home I told my mom that my Secret Santa forgot my present.

JANUARY

The first day back to school after winter break I wore the new outfit I got for Christmas and brought a cache of fresh color crayons and pencils for the second half of the year. I opened up my desk to reorganize its contents and was disgusted to find that inside was ET's cold gelatinous body laid bare on top of my pencil box like Jesus in the tomb on Good Friday. Mrs. Traxler put her hand on my shoulder, hunched down next to me, and in her coffee scented breath whispered, "There must have been an accident, but I found him for you." With a wink she stood up and moved on. I never forgave her for that.

My mom asked what my Secret Santa had given me so at least I had something to show her. My brother quickly adopted the creature which led to its nearly immediate dismemberment and decapitation. Soon all that was left of the beast was the tan palm-sized body, which when missing its appendages resembled a lowly chicken cutlet. It collected fuzz and hair with the greatest of ease and left an oily spot if it touched the wall so mom took it away and tossed it unceremoniously into the outside garbage where my brother wouldn't be able to reclaim it.

FEBRUARY

For the next few weeks life went along as usual. ET kept to himself and I to mine. Only occasionally did he try to lure me to the basement or the attic, but I was on to him and could predict where he might be dwelling. I had, for the most part, moved on to worrying about the people that I had seen on the evening news that were strangling camels in the middle east, or the fact that,

according to my mom, “Ronald Regan is going to lead us into a nuclear war before he was out of office.” Knowing that nuclear annihilation would occur before I turned 10 was information that didn’t sit well with my eight-year-old sensibilities. I would have been able to just continue worrying about ET if it wasn’t compounded by the fact that we had scheduled war drills at school. These were very similar to the tornado drills, but instead of lining up in the designated spot in the hall against the solid concrete wall we would safely tuck under our obviously radiation protective open sided school desk, in the classroom, near the windows. I guess the school knew nuclear holocaust wasn’t worth trying to live through.

MARCH

By spring break chicken pox had begun to make the rounds at school. At first the school thought they were dealing with the regular yearly lice outbreak, and everyone was lined up and marched down to the nurse’s office to have Mrs. Buss pick through their hair with what looked like chopsticks, but soon the nurse found the first itchy pustules on the scalps of a couple kids and the classroom casualties started piling up. I was surrounded by people who had succumbed and desperately wanted to get diseased too so that I could stay home with canned chicken soup, luxurious afternoon oatmeal baths, and *The Price is Right*.

My brother did get sick. For him, the illness started with diarrhea which occurred as an accident in his kindergarten classroom. The school nurse had tried to call my parents, but no one answered, so she did the only thing she could think of which was to gather me from my room and drive me and my brother

home so I could clean by brother up and wait with him until my parents returned.

I plopped Mark in the tub and tried to peel off his soiled clothes without touching anything. We didn't have a stand-up shower, just a flexible tube connected to the sprayer that you could use to sit and spray yourself with, so Mark just sat cold and naked in the tub while I sprayed the wet poop off his body. I tried to get him to soap himself, but five-year-olds aren't yet coordinated to do a good job, and while I thought he was a terrible nuisance, felt bad leaving him to smell like a port-o-potty so I lathered up a washcloth and gently wiped down his pale feverish body. We both kept silent, watching the water turn from pale brown to clear, relieved that this would soon be over.

Mom and dad were of course surprised to see us at home but were both apologetic and grateful for my service. I too was pretty proud of having taken such good care of Mark. For the next couple of days my parents bragged about me to anyone who would listen; I got to go uptown to the coffee shop and my dad told everyone what a good doctor I was.

APRIL

It was early in the morning, too early for anyone else to be awake. I snuck out of my bedroom and silently slid along the wall like an eight-year-old ninja. The wall was cool and smooth and felt surprisingly nice against my skin. I push the wooden door open just a slit so I could peek inside the bathroom and see if all was clear, and there I saw him. Just like in the movie, ET was laying next to the tub, stretched out on the cream tile of the bathroom floor. His putty-colored skin frosted in a dusty white overtone of

sickness and loneliness. His breathing was labored, almost raspy and asthmatic as he stretched his long and lanky limbs so that his wrinkles smoothed out into bony appendages as they reached for something, or someone. His telescopic neck, impossibly long, carried the bulbous head containing his gigantic searching eyes, and at once, his gaze locks to mine, and he reaches out his boney, witch-like finger. I am immediately struck dead from fear.

Or not. When I woke up my skin was damp and clammy, and the room was spinning with a multitude of iridescent rainbow sparkles from stars in front of my eyes. I had slumped down in the hall halfway inside the bathroom, just missing the toilet by an inch or two. I could view the whole bathroom from this vantage point and saw that I was all alone. ET was gone.

Because the bathroom was close to Mark's room he must have awoken when he heard my fall because when I began to come to the realization of what had happened, he was already standing over me, bleary eyed and pock marked.

"Are you ok Jumpfer?" he asked.

I didn't move my body other than to peer up and nod my reply.

Mark left, shuffling off across the carpet to his room. I could hear fabric swoosh on his bed and the gentle pat-pat of his slippers as he clambered around. He returned a minute later holding a stuffed rabbit and a dragging a twisted-up Star Wars bedsheet. Using his chubby five-year-old fingers he found the seam of the sheet and gently pulled it up around my shoulders, tucking it in all around my arms and feet. He placed the dingy rabbit next to my face and plodded off back to his bed.

I don't know how long I was there before my parents found me, but it didn't matter. Laying there halfway between the hall and

the bathroom, the morning tile providing a welcome chill to my fever ravaged body, I felt a comfort and security that I hadn't felt in a while. Home was safe, and ET had disappeared in a flash of sparkles—returned to the stars.

Page Sutton – *Winona Prize* winner in Poetry

Meet Me Halfway

Let's meet somewhere outside time and space–

Around the corner, to sit on the electrical boxes that say
“CAUTION” on the sides.

Underneath the arms of the pinetree, where we left our
trinkets and
treasures in the dirt last spring.

By the lakeshore, to stare at the twisted weeds and say the things
we usually say.

In the tree in your yard, because we can spy on the grumpy
neighbor lady.

Let's meet somewhere outside time and space–

Where we can consume millions of sour gummy worms and never
get fat.

In your bedroom, where the single lightbulb flickers and we play
Connect Four on the bed until

I beat you.

Behind the shed when the sun sets, because they can't find us
there, and we have important
things to discuss.

At night, so our smiles aren't visible, but we can still see each
other's dusty shoelaces
and mosquito bites.

Let's meet somewhere outside time and space–

In your car, because I think I left my Chapstick on the seat last
night.

The snowpile near the school, we can crush ice under our sneakers
and pretend we aren't cold.

At the stop sign, to scratch our names in the paint really small so
only we can see them.

On the roof of the garage, so you can tell me you don't know what
you want to be when you grow up.

Let's meet somewhere outside time and space—

Where we can ignore the big picture; it's too much for now.

In your head, so I can see all the reasons I'll never understand the
"why".

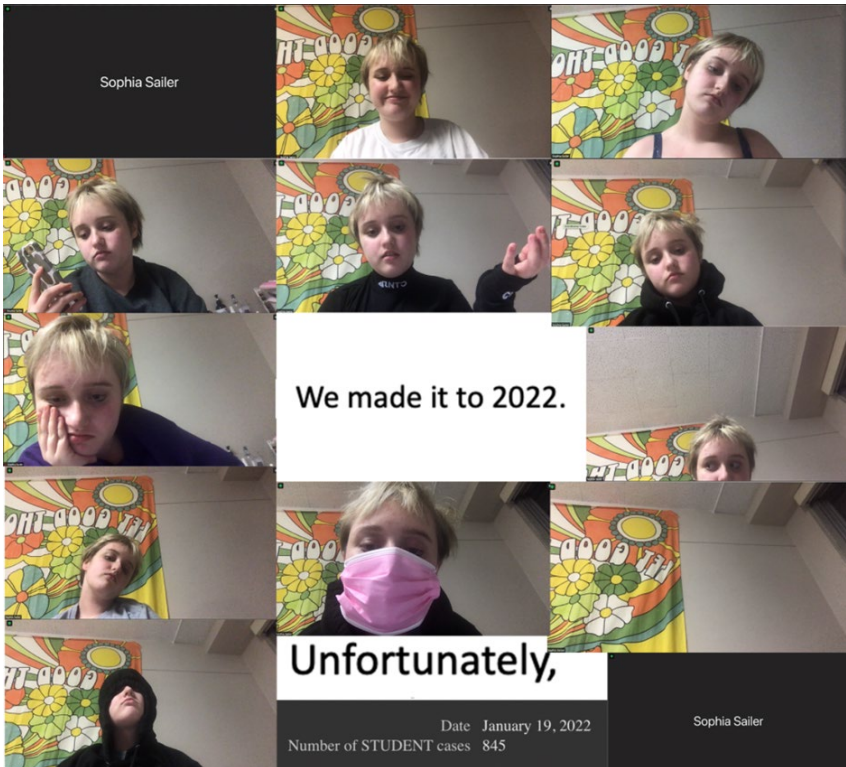
Between our dreams, to pretend for a while that our arms are
noodles, and we are in love.

Again sometime. Then, I can look in your eyes and take it all back.

Kaysey Price

Six Feet Apart

This sickness
knows
we are
human
only
exists
feeding on
idiosyncrasies
between us
knows
I am not
strong
enough
to leave
soup
simply on
the doorstep for
my father who
hid his cigarettes
from us
all his life
and now
at the kitchen table
sits coughing
into a paper towel



Sophia Sailer
2022

Rae Peter

Beside the Lake

A couple passed me on the bench today
two smiles, one leash, a dog

I watched them as they walked away
paws pattering left and right and right
a picture-perfect view

The path curved as I watched them
shrinking from my sight
then they were gone and out of frame
replaced by Golden light



Rae Peter

Beside the Lake

Gabriel Hathaway

Reflection

Blurry lights streak, an astigmatism,
and inebriation from shallow glasses
as shadow gain ground, I walk
boots thump puddle splashin'—
humming...humming, what's that
song? Oh—I've forgotten.

Like a childhood song or friend
make-believe now on the other side
of a foggy mirror—Oh brothers,
do you remember our childhood the same?
Our raving neurotic sister, all the pets, or
even our parent's divorce.

Each of us four years apart, a world it feels.
The eldest, Paul, did you know what
mother did or why we packed our bags?
Zack, how did you sleep when mom
and her second husband fought so loudly?
Cameron, we shared a bed or a room
most the time, is your memory the same?
Did you all take the time to memorize
the floor plans of every house we lived in like I did?

It is all so different now, and even as I

write this goose bumps spring up along my arm.
We've all grown and moved, left things unspoken.
There's a terrible aching, and my fingers have trouble
wrapping themselves around this pen as I write you.
Brothers, how do our feelings differ? I ask but don't
expect an answer, we were never ones to take sides.

Rae Peter

Four little lines is all they needed to take from Your corpse

as if all Your time here
was nothing more than 30 letters and some numbers

they don't care if You loved shakespeare
or laughed when things got hard

they don't care to know Your story
or who will love You when You're gone

Your name
Your number
Your blood-type
and preferred religion
is all they need to know
when counting up the corpses

and now you're gone and all that's left
are these four little lines
that hang around my neck

Savannah Egger

Haikus

silky pink worm creeps
he burrows in the warm moist soil
curious seeker

clumsy sweet honeybee
searching for some spring flowers
rests atop petals



Abigail Perlinger

Moth King

Brianna Strohbehm

The Map and the Explorer

I am the map reader--the one with the directions.
As I drag my fingers across his smooth skin,
I discover places I've never been--
Parts of him I've never seen.

His lips speak the truths he wants me to hear,
Yet his eyes show me what he could never say.
I trail my fingers down his neck and feel his
Beating pulse--my own constant.

The sharpness of his collar bones threatens to cut,
Yet I skirt by unscathed. I feel his heart once
Again--feel those who hurt him, who fatigued his
Beating drum. I promise not to do the same.

I trace through the muscle of him, marking my
Progress with the landmarks that cover him--
Freckles and cuts, scars and memories. He is my
Roadmap--beautiful, yet imperfect all the same.

I brush across his arms, the terrain jagged with
Sinew and strength. They wrap around me, reminding
Me that I am a part of the map, too. He says that the
Map and the explorer are unified--we are one.

One cannot exist without the other.

The map may survive alone,
And the explorer, too, but they complement
One another in ways no one else ever could.

I am the explorer and he the map, but together
We are unified as one. We are one journey, one soul,
One pair just trying to survive the unknown. But with
His directions and my knowledge, we might just survive.

Madison Grove

Splintered Dreams

“I’m sorry”

Is such a simplistic phrase-

But holds all the power.

I never knew how you planned to use it.

Were you sorry for the broken

Christmas ornaments?

Or for being late?

I never understood how deep your soiled

Roots went when you planted those words,

Because I never got an apology for the

Tarnished treasured trinkets.

You cooked me dinner in silence,

And said that you loved me from the hallway,

Too scared to cross over the doorway’s threshold.

But there was never a mention of why the

Angel no longer adorned the top of the tree.

Or why the ornament that I handmade for you

In Mr. Kube’s third grade classroom

no longer decorated the green bristles.

We packed it all away in boxes

And placed them in the basement of our memories.

When I excitedly showed my first love the angel,

He grasped it with one hand and closed his eyes,

Before smashing it against the walls
Surrounding us.
The sound of it collapsing echoed the halls
Of my memories.
After he left,
I picked up the now even smaller pieces,
And shoved them back into the box.

When I hesitantly showed my current lover
The third-grade ornament,
He took it into his hands and caressed its shards,
Before looking me in the eyes and saying,
“We can fix this.”

Page Sutton

Dauphin Island

The feeling I felt upon seeing you for the first time:
it was like your waves embraced me,
as if your foam enticed me, and
your salt did encrust me.
I was motionless and breathless
and you were sweating and eager
and you threw yourself harshly onto me
and my icy limbs were warmed in an instant,
I had never felt so accepted.

But I wasn't accepted.
It lasted but a moment.
You were cold and sharp when you lashed
out and you were salty and it stung when you
bashed against my shins in fits of rigidity,
an unwillingness to comply to my
inquiries: who are you?
You swirled yourself around in a
toddler tantrum beneath my feet as I tried
to free myself from your ire
like a woodland creature trying to escape a
forest fire.

You weren't what I expected.

It was the cloudiest of days, the sky a hazy shade of mildew blue and the wind flung airs haphazardly above us, separating us, loudly between my ears and I couldn't hear you and you were upset.

To express it you grinned an evil toothy seafroth smile and splashed salt foam in my eyes. Pieces of boney hand shaped driftwood washed up, reaching for the dry land and dry sand and whatever warmth they could grab... but you were too quick. I tried to touch them, but you beat me to them and they were consumed in your cobalt pride.

A feathery ashen osprey chick tried calling from the englazed water gum not far from shore and you mockingly roared back, barely letting her get out a chirp.

It hurt to see you like this. So agitated.
That chick will never sing as long as you proclaim yourself king of Dauphin Island.

Gabriela Wallberg

To Myself

and when you are at the brink
of giving up
having given everything to the world
reaping nothing but more anger
you have to remember to not believe the lies
because
you are just as smart
and you are just as capable
as the white students sitting next to you in university
the truth is
you have to work twice as hard for recognition
and they will never understand
what it feels like
to be continually bite by the tiger's tooth
nor do they understand the weight of double consciousness
in a country where black and brown bodies
are still shackled by systems bigger than
any of us can fully comprehend
so when you are at that place
bruised and beaten
you have to get up
and you have to keep studying
because the color of your skin doesn't just make
things twice as hard—
it also makes it twice as important that you finish
because education isn't just a degree

it's a power that your white counterparts tried to deny
your ancestors for years
knowing that when we became educated
social mobility was bound to follow
that you and your brown skin
would be a force to be reckoned with
so you need continue
because you are an early stage of a tsunami
that will cause floods and upheaval
that they are not ready for.

Gabriela Wallberg

Gentrification in My City

there is a subtle irony
every time a white woman
leaves the comfort of her suburban home and life
to drive to Minneapolis to go shopping
she will walk into some trendy shop selling
raw dog food or rare houseplants
and inside that store there are other women who look just
like her
and yet these shops in North Minneapolis
were not intended for the actual residents that live there
because they are preoccupied with a different set of
problems
they are trying to stay alive in a place were having brown
skin
can get you killed by the very same people who are
supposed to protect you

that same woman will always be sure to leave the city
before dark
and then she will get back into her car and drive back to
her suburban home
without ever understanding the magnitude of that privilege
and without ever recognizing that she is part of the
problem.



Abigail Perlinger
Campus Friend

Madison Grove

Stormy Consequences

We dance on top of clouds,
Filled with rain pockets.
Your eyes become lightning,
As mine screech out thunder.

We are opposites you see-
But together create hurdling storms.
I shake windowsills
And scare children,
While you lighten dark skies
And make people desperately chase you-
Hoping that they'll catch you in a bottle.

My loudness always scared people away,
While your quick desolating light
Made people curious.
You became a god of legends-
While I became the consequence of what follows.

Van Herman

If I could paint the world

If I could paint the world
I would still make it cold
My color would be full
Vibrant, not flat and dull
The sun would shine through blue
Upon faces who knew
Warmth and care from their home
All they need, all their own
Although the cold would reign
Joy could shine through the pain
Huddled around a fire
They would not catch any ire

If I could paint the world
I would still make it cold
Chill would burn their strong bones
And sink into their homes
Yet, they would cherish love
My palette would know grim
But they would sing hymns
Not about warmer days
But the promise of warm love

If I could paint the world
I would still make it cold
And make them know dark

To have them gather bark
Their fire and love would burn
They would see what they earn
I would make them all cold
If I could paint the world



Trianna Douglas
Atop Mt. Cook

**Abigail Perlinger
Brianna Strohbehn
Elise Modjeski
Gabriel Hathaway
Gabriela Wallberg
Grace Menke
Jennifer Wendt
Kaysey Price
Keaton Riebel
Louisa Shirmacher
Madi Bonebright
Madison Grove
Mckenna Scherer
Page Sutton
Rae Peter
Savannah Egger
Sophia Sailer
Trianna Douglas
Van Herman**