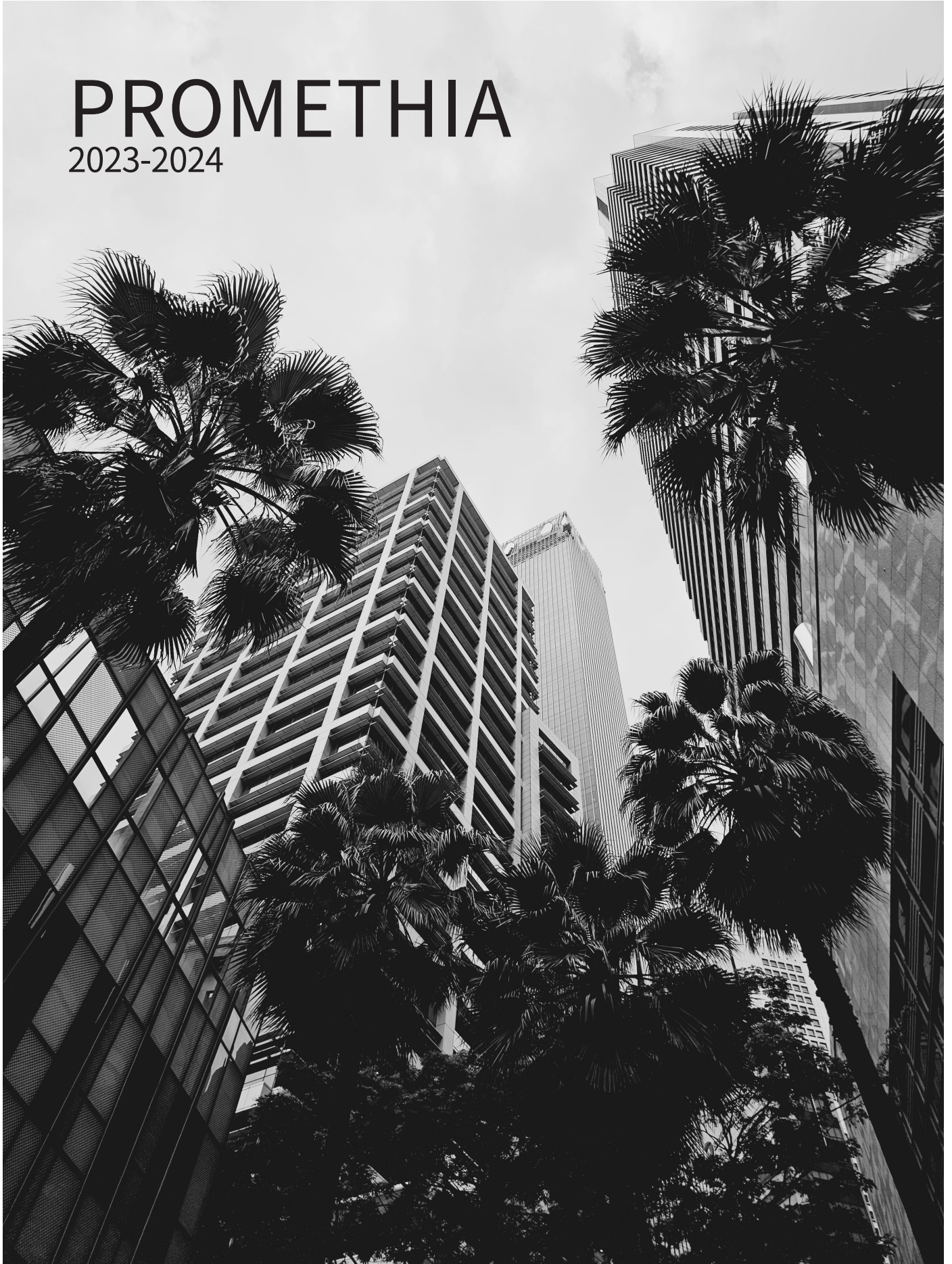


# PROMETHIA

2023-2024

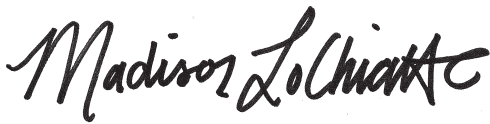


“I CAN SHAKE  
OFF EVERY-  
THING AS I  
WRITE;  
MY SORROWS  
DISAPPEAR,  
MY COURAGE  
IS REBORN.”  
ANNE FRANK

*Cover: “Concrete Jungle” by Denalyn Kwok*

# CO-EDITORS' NOTES

Within these pages you will find stories of heartbreak, love, misery, and life. While such stories often go untold, *Promethia* endeavors to provide the ORU community with an artistic outlet for creative expression. As this year's co-editor-in-chief, I have been deeply inspired by the vulnerability, artistry, and candor of our featured authors. Each poem, story, and photograph bears the image of God in serving as a reflection of our Creator's immaculate creativity. May this journal be a source of encouragement for aspiring writers to share their unique ideas and innermost desires as they dare to tell their own unique stories.



Madison LoChiatto

Welcome to the latest edition of *Promethia*. We proudly present a culmination of students, alumni, and faculty submissions, painting a raw and honest depiction of life's greatest joys, deepest sorrows, and everything in between. The publication would not have been possible without our talented contributors, university advisor, and dedicated staff. As this year's co-editor-in-chief, I have been profoundly moved by the creative sincerity of our featured authors and artists. Each piece exploring the depths of the human experience is a testament to the divine spark within us all. I encourage you to immerse yourself in *Promethia's* pages. May the words and images bring you solace, inspiration, and a newfound appreciation for language and the arts. To God be all the glory.



Denalyn Kwok

# PROMETHIA STAFF

## FACULTY ADVISOR

*Keith Gogan*

## CO-EDITORS

*Denalyn Kwok*

*Madison LoChiatto*

## STAFF

*Lucy Earley*

*Sydni Errickson*

*Jayleen Fermer-Colon*

*Vaviana Young*

*Emily Blevins*

*Christine Do*



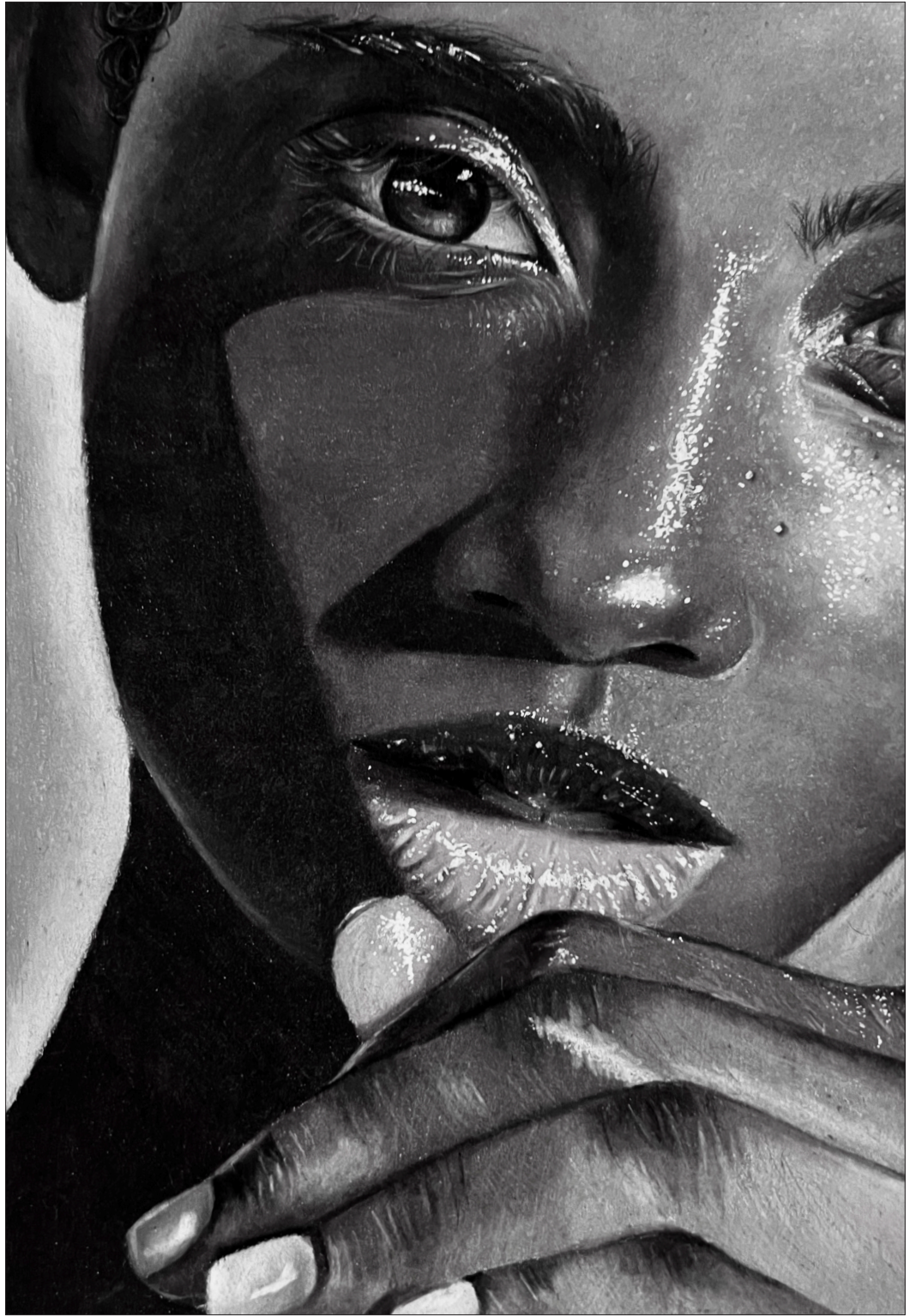


*"Concentration" by Nathan Opp*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- |    |  |                                |                                   |
|----|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1  | CO-EDITORS' NOTES  | 15                             | ABANDONED POEM                    |
| 5  | HANDS WERE MADE FOR<br>GETTING DIRTY                     | <i>by Delaney Campbell</i>     |                                   |
|    | <i>by Alexa Wickland</i>                                 | 15                             | IT'S JUST STUFF                   |
|    |  | <i>by Sarah Rasmussen</i>      |                                   |
| 7  | HOPE   | 17                             | HAPPY BIRTHDAY                    |
|    | <i>by Jordan Jewell</i>                                  | <i>by Vaviana Young</i>        |                                   |
| 7  | AUTUMN RAIN CHECK  | 19                             | GROWING PAINS                     |
|    | <i>by Jordan Jewell</i>                                  | <i>by Christine Do</i>         |                                   |
| 8  | A DAY AT THE RACES                                       | 21                             | SADNESS LOOKS<br>DIFFERENT ON YOU |
|    | <i>by Kathryn Lyles</i>                                  | <i>By Denalyn Kwok</i>         |                                   |
| 8  | THE LAST WORDS OF<br>THE CHICKEN WHO<br>CROSSED THE ROAD | 21                             | MY MOTHER REAPS                   |
|    | <i>by Joshua Evans</i>                                   | <i>By Delaney Campbell</i>     |                                   |
| 9  | FAST CAR   | 22                             | THE ANATOMY<br>OF THE SUN         |
|    | <i>by Lucille Earley</i>                                 | <i>by Antavia Mason</i>        |                                   |
| 12 | LONE STAR  | 22                             | I AWAKEN<br>TO PINK SKIES         |
|    | <i>by Gabriel Fox</i>                                    | <i>by Octavia Mason</i>        |                                   |
| 12 | COWBOY PRAYERS   | 23                             | COMET                             |
|    | <i>by Christine Do</i>                                   | <i>by Alexandra Baldessari</i> |                                   |
| 12 | CHURCH PEWS  | 23                             | A NOTE ON LOVE                    |
|    | <i>by Denalyn Kwok</i>                                   | <i>By Madison LoChiatto</i>    |                                   |
| 13 | THE SIN OF EXPLANATION                                   | 24                             | COLOPHON                          |
|    | <i>by Katheryn Lyles</i>                                 |                                |                                   |



*"Woman" by Mayah Welsh*



# HANDS WERE MADE FOR GETTING DIRTY

*by Alexa Wickland*

Oil stains, grass burns, and dirt-caked fingernails: the hands of a hard worker. The hands of a writer should be no less dirty, but rather than the earth staining flesh, the pen should inscribe meaningful letters on crisp paper crumbled after being hastily stuffed into a denim pocket while on-the-go. An aspiring writer may think of writing as something that he or she has seen in the movies. They think they will be sitting daintily on a plush maroon sofa, basking in the warm rays of a floor-to-ceiling sunroom with a sleek black pen twirling on their fingers and a yellow notepad on their lap. I disagree. Writing is to dormancy as pineapple is to pizza—incompatible. In an age where writing has advanced beyond paper books, the aspiring writer must adopt three principles to avoid the oblivion of forty percent-off clearance shelves and Goodwill storage bins: grow calluses that allow for criticism, weed out writings that are contrary to the overarching theme, and write—just write.

Calluses will heal. Tender palms will tear. That's basic biology. Handling criticism is not something that you can take on the chin (as the cliché goes). Criticism for your writing feels more like getting your entire face pummeled into a squashed tomato by Mike Tyson with a right hook of failed character development and a left jab of weak dialogue. Except your inner voice rebuttals every suggestion, so, in your head filled with denial, you are fighting a very inexperienced and incorrect and they-don't-even-know-what-they're-talking-about-have-you-seen-their-writing-style-it's-awful Mike Tyson. Regardless, it hurts. As a writer, though, you tighten the velcro straps on your gloves, wipe the red blood off your nose, and stay in the ring. Take notes on advice from those more and less experienced, since we've all been in both positions. Now, you don't necessarily need to adopt every criticism, but you need to be as open as possible without compromising your writer's voice or moral standards. Also, don't pick the scabs; they'll be needed for the next round of criticism. Didn't you know boxing has more than one round? If you don't get KO'd in the first one, that is.

While your hands are getting calloused taking criticism from others, feel free to spoon some criticism for yourself: I mean your writing. Don't let your sentences crowd with filler words or unnecessary descriptions. Every word plays a distinct role, and using one word too much or an ensemble of words unnecessarily is like drinking from a firehose to your readers. Do you want to waterboard them? I think not—so let them breathe. If a salesman knocked on your door and used your precious

time to monotonously ramble about the color of the vacuum cleaner for twenty minutes rather than show you the actual product in action, what would you do? Force a grimace and shut the door. I almost wanted to shut the door after re-reading that long question, so how do you think your readers would feel when they read your work? When you write, you're selling something: entertainment, morality, stories. You are that salesman, building your credibility from the hook to the conclusion. You have a short time to catch the reader and even less to make sure they don't wiggle off of the hook. Syntax, punctuation, diction: these are your baits. Once the reader bites, you have to reel and pull like an experienced fisherman. Don't keep useless bait—every decaying worm has to be discarded.

Speaking of decaying worms, the art of writing can decompose too. Writing requires a constant turn of the soil. Didn't you read the warning label before aspiring for this career? Write about anything, even when it feels pointless or futile. You may stare at the stream-of-consciousness jumble on your MacBook and squint your eyes in despair. I propose a challenge: don't just write daily, do something with your writing. Don't let your writing be an old treasure chest that you dig up for your college composition class to gain some inspiration for an assignment or be stuffed into your Ford Focus' compartment holder with melted Wintermint gum and registration papers. Putting your writing out in the public sphere is like throwing hardened gummies at passing cars—you may miss, you may hit the target, and you may get arrested. Either way, you took action. Paint your nails neon yellow and glow in the blue light of the room. If you were writing only to keep it to yourself, you'd just think about your thoughts. Give your writing to family, post it on social media, or enter a local library competition; just do something.

If this were all the advice that would skyrocket an aspiring writer to stardom, I would be a star already. Disclaimer: I'm not. So I would like to leave you a surprise fourth piece of advice. Imagine you are in your junior year of high school on the last day of photography class, as I once was. The rough chair underneath you is imprinting ridges on your thighs through your cream capris pants, and you behold the final blank page of your 30 Rules for Photography booklet. The teacher clears her throat, preparing to state the final rule for you to copy down. The classroom is tense with suspense—more so because we wanted to leave for the summer, but bear with me. Smiling mischievously, she finally speaks, "Alright, students. The last rule. Number thirty. Are you ready?" Her next words have stayed with me for the past five years. "The thirtieth rule: break all rules." So break the rules. Write what you know and what you don't. Write with too many dashes and too few adverbs and too long sentences. Make it your own. Your hands were made for getting dirty—so make them messy.



# HOPE

*by Jordan Jewell*

Hidden in the forest  
Under the shadows  
Behind the veil of trees  
So small you may have  
    to squint  
    to search  
    to dig  
    to see  
A little child sprinkled with sunlight  
Throws off the covers of the forest bed

If you're quiet  
If you're gentle  
She will greet you  
And walk with you  
    in rain  
    in mud  
    in dens  
    of vipers  
Until you reach the messy planet  
We call home

# AUTUMN RAIN CHECK

*by Jordan Jewell*

It's ninety degrees in October  
Hidden in boxes, mittens  
Wait for the world to be put back in order  
  
In our foolish youth  
We prayed for endless summers  
This isn't what we meant.  
I sweat beneath a tree and  
Beg the leaves to change their clothes  
They decline.  
When the wind blows next week,  
Their greens will crisp to oranges as they fall too late

Autumn took a rain check  
It's pushed back to Christmas  
Only Jesus can help us now  
Sweet baby Jesus, save us now

## A DAY AT THE RACES

*by Kathryn Lyles*

A roaring crowd of two  
A million silver steeds on a  
Foggy windowpane

Tiny hoofbeats rattle  
On the ceiling  
But we watch like mini magnates  
From dry, warm car seats,  
Betting childish joy or defeat on  
The elements from which we hide

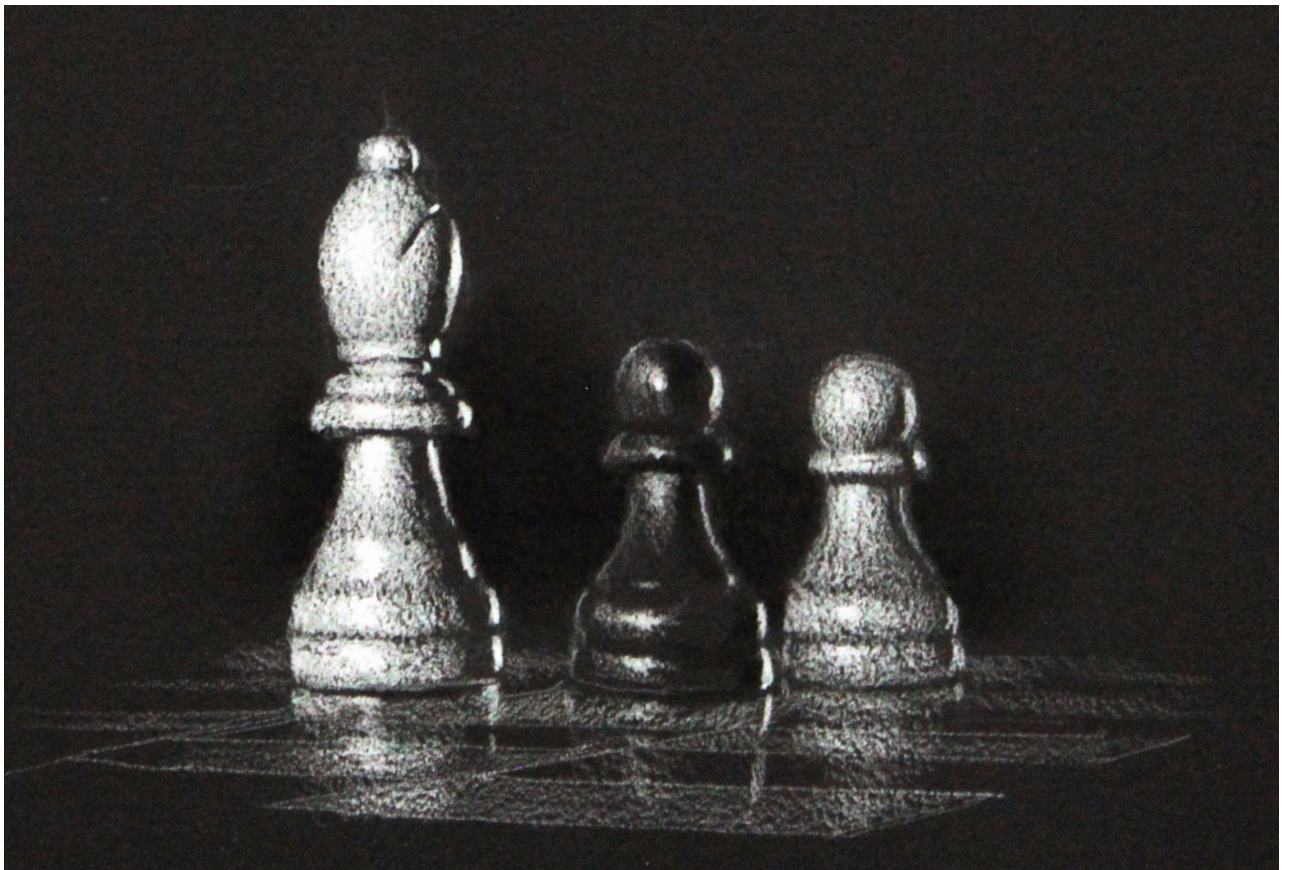
A roaring crowd of us  
That racer's mine, and that one's yours  
My raindrop reaches the window's edge  
I win,  
And we start again

## THE LAST WORDS OF THE CHICKEN WHO CROSSED THE ROAD

*by Joshua Evans*

They called me chicken.  
I, a hen, beak up, wings back,  
cross the road from end—

*"Isolated Pawn" by Anonymous*





# FAST CAR

*by Lucille Earley*

I never ever thought in my whole life that I'd run away from home. I just couldn't believe that some boys took off with a bag and left all they knowed behind. My Daddy ran away from home, and My Mama said it was "foul, f-o-u-l, just downright foul," so I promised I'd never do it. But then comes along my friend Russell Templeton, and he says that sometimes runnin' away from things can be considered as running toward other things, which makes it okay.

Though Russ is only sixteen, he knows about everything there is that's important: girls, money, cars, and, most of all, Luck. He always likes to say that Luck is his honey—that he knows every inch of her—and even though it's a dirty metaphor, I suppose he's right 'cause Russ never does get in too much trouble: not with teachers at his school, not with his Granny, not even with the thing known as Natural Consequences. He slips through the fingers of the Reaper like a slick lizard, and the law never has caught him, neither. Can't be nothin' but God, that's what I say, but he don't believe in God. At least, he don't say that he does. All he believes in is speed.

I'd have hoped his good fortune woulda rubbed off on us other boys some of the time, but we got about as much luck as a truck stuck in muck. Take my friend, Jubilee Macintosh, for starters. Lee is smart and swell at school, but he don't like his house. There lies his troubles: he never got on with his mama much after his daddy died. He sure hates being home when she has a new man over, so almost every week, he'll start up complaining as if he's accidentally taken up house in a brothel. Russ laughs about it most times unless Lee gets into a mood, gnashin' his teeth and crossin' his arms.

It's upsettin' to see either Jubilee or Russy upset. On regular days, the two of 'em is playful spirits, Russ most of all. He never yells—not real scary-like anyway—and even with all the cussin' he does, he's just a show pony most of the time. You know, I never even seen him cry. Jubilee cries once in a month of Sundays (maybe after a bad sports match), but not Russ. He has his problems, but he never wants to talk about 'em. Russ runs right on past like they ain't there.

And me? I guess I'm the most serious of the bunch. I ain't never cried much, but I sure do get into the habit of feelin' blue. And I guess that's on account of My Mama, the way that she is: nursing on The Bottle like a baby on mother's milk. She don't work none, so I work enough for the two of us at pecan groves and chicken coops and wherever gets me a dollar. I buy us groceries, and I cook as well as I can, but she don't like to eat much. Just a raggedy old doll, the state of my mama is enough to turn any dry eyes wet as a river because you can see she's barely got a sliver of life in her. She don't talk none. She didn't talk when we got kicked out of our house or when her old brown cat got eaten by coyotes. She don't even talk to pray. She don't even talk to say 'I love you'. I just got to assume things like that. She talks with her hands: pointin', hittin', and makin' signs that I can't barely understand.

All of these things—all of our problems—I think they started to drive Russ crazy. One night, we decided to go to the drive-in in Russ's fancy new car. It was late, with stars out and everything, and most of the town was sound in bed. I was drinkin' soda pop to stay awake, and Lee was counting sheep on my shoulder. (We're lousy delinquents, me and him.)

On the big screen, the two main people was kissing in the heat of danger.

Russ frowned, leaned over, and whispered, "Gosh, we oughta get outta this town and never look back. Good-lookin' guys like us could start up anywhere. Whaddaya say, Tone?"

Well, I didn't say anything. I sat there watchin' the movie like I was supposed to.

"There's nothing here for us, Tony. Nothing. Those movie stars up there, they probably come from towns like this, too, where everyone is miserable all the time, and the only way they could make something of their lives was to leave and forget it ever existed." Russ was talkin' serious, but I couldn't help but smile because I ain't never been any different than that same Tony he was looking at. I ain't never been bright or talented or burstin' with joy. I just been Tony With Obligations, a word I can't never spell, but I sure know like the back of my hands. Even with a hundred more chances, I don't know if I could manage to make something different of me.

The next day, I guess I thought Russ forgot about the whole thing.

Me and Lee sat in the back of the pretty red convertible once again. Russ'd skipped school to clean it up for what he called "the special occasion of getting us ice cream." While I was eatin' mine (vanilla flavor), I was real careful not to drip it on the leather seat because I knowed cars like his tended to go for about a billion dollars. It had a nifty radio with a bunch of stations to flip through, so we was flipping through 'em. Then, once we found Johnny Cash playing, we all agreed to stop there. I closed my eyes to keep the music alone in my head: just me, Mr. Cash, and good ole vanilla on my tongue. The song was sweet as ice cream (cold, too), and it sent a rush through me just to hear it.

All of a sudden, I could feel the rush outside of me: blowin' like wind through my hair and my shirt, and I could hear it roarin' loud as a train over the music. Jubilee hollered, and I opened my eyes; next thing I knew, the two of us was sliding in the seat as Russ turned fast as lightning 'round a corner! I nearly lost my ice cream.

"Hey, Russell! Slow down!" Jubilee smacked his hand to the head of Russ's seat to get him to listen, but he was laughing, and I was laughin', too.



Russ turned another corner. Second Street went by, then we shot straight on and on and on as we passed the Liquor Store and the Barber Shop and the First Church of God and the Post Office.

*And there's the Candy Shop going by, I thought. And there's the Park. And around that corner is where people says My Daddy lives. And there's the Gas Station, the Firehouse, the High School I wasn't never smart enough to go to.*

When I looked over at Russ with his red hair all ruffled, only one hand on the wheel, he was smilin' like something wild, fire in his eyes, and we just goed faster and faster with Jubilee gripping his seat for dear life. I felt so alive watching all the places I'd had troubles in just fly by, and I didn't think about nobody but the three of us and the cherry red of that car: how pretty it must look from the outside, how fast the wheels was turning.

Then the highway came to greet us, gettin' closer and closer, and the car took off for it like it was an old friend. It was like running after somebody you loved more than anything, the love that makes you go so fast you start to trip over your feet and you forget to breathe; and that was us, going faster than I'd ever gone in my whole life; and I could see Russ's foot slamming hard on the pedal, and his knuckles was white, and he said, "Tony. Tony, look. Look, Tony."

*This is it*, I thought, and I knew that if we kept going, we'd never turn back. I knew, I knew, I knew we would make it okay. I could hear God whisper it in my ear. But a bird cried out, and it sounded like My Mama on the couch, thirsty for a cup of water. And although I knew God'd forgive me for leaving her behind, my own beating heart wouldn't. So I leaned forward, and I tapped on Russy's shoulder, real gentle, and the car slowed and slowed and slowed until it sat rumbling right at the stop sign before a car'd get onto that big, holy highway.

Russ didn't say anything. He just stared at the empty road ahead.

Jubilee looked around and asked why Russ wasn't going, why we'd stopped, where we were headed. And then Russ laughed. He turned around to face us younger boys in the back, and his eyes were shiny as his sleek red car when he said, "Just got a little carried away, boys. That's all."

*Maybe next time*, I thought. *Maybe next time.*

# LONE STAR

*by Gabriel Fox*

800 miles from corner to corner  
Where people ride horses to work  
They claim she's cocky,  
But I call her confident  
That's my Texas

# CHURCH PEWS

*by Denalyn Kwok*

Drenched in tears  
of whispered confessions  
Warped with the weight  
of salvation and sins  
Paled by the  
stained glass painted sun  
Row after  
Row after  
Row after  
altar afterthought.  
Anointed by sweaty hands  
pressed in worship  
Stiff-necked  
Straight-backed in  
Silent servitude  
They cry,  
Holy, holy, holy  
is He.

# COWBOY PRAYERS

*by Christine Do*

"Good Lord willin'," cries the husky voice of a  
Stadium fillin'  
Jet plane ridin'  
Big boot wearin'  
Nashville native over the drawl of a guitar  
His girl has gon' and found another and  
His truck is on the fritz and  
His whiskey tastes as bitter as his  
Prayer  
Spark-like, floating into the cold air above a  
Cowboy campfire  
To a god who wanders from ghost town to saloon  
Heavenly dust coating his cosmic boots  
Smoking gun out of its holster  
He hears prayers like whispers on the wind  
And hesitates before he answers with  
A straight razor  
And a bottle of Jack

# THE SIN OF EXPLANATION

*by Kathryn Lyles*

Being a Christian in today's world is like being a second child: their reputation is inextricably linked to the practically perfect, or dreadfully disruptive, sibling that came before. As soon as many people hear the word "Christian," they're turned off. They associate pain, judgment, and boredom with that word and turn away before that view can be adjusted. So much damage has been done that Christians, even well-meaning ones, are suddenly feeling the need to explain. They try to explain the wrongs of their ancestors and their own shortcomings, but they overstep, trying to explain the logical reasons that secular living is wrong and the large questions in life like why good people suffer. The need to explain, rather than helping the view of the church, cements in people's minds the image of Christians as close-minded, insufferable know-it-alls with fire and brimstone on their tongues. For this reason, Christian writers must take the first step to healing by simply saying, "I don't know." When difficult questions arise in life, Christian writers must know when to explore rather than explain; otherwise, they risk sinning against themselves as artists, against their fellow humans, and against God Himself.

Regardless of religion, the need to explain, while natural, is detrimental to all artists. When comparing works of fiction to true literature, Richard Terrell writes, "Literature, [as opposed to just fiction], is an evaluative concept assigned to works that invite reflection and a return path. There is something, a presence in the words, that calls one back for a closer look, that haunts or gathers us in beyond a mere temporary encounter" (255). In other words, the writer's work becomes art not just by giving away the answers, but by inviting the reader in, encouraging them to revisit the idea and explore it on their own. If a writer simply gives up all the answers, they may still create an enjoyable and even beautiful work, but they sacrifice their place as a true artist. It is especially important for Christians to realize this, since they "have traditionally found it difficult to grant integrity to this world of imagination and have found ways to suppress or discredit the imaginary element of literature" (Ryken 24). To prove themselves as artists and show that they are more than repressed utilitarianists who only respect "holy" art, Christians must give up control and let the reader come to their own conclusions.

Even more important is that Christians maintain their humanity. One of the most destructive stereotypes of Christians, highly encouraged by the need to explain, is that they are cold and unsympathetic. A man who loses his child receives the cold explanation that this is simply a sinful world and God has a reason for everything. A woman who struggles with her gender is judged and ostracized, with the only answer to her pain being that she is sinful and broken. When talking about answering the question of evil, Susan Wise Bauer observes, "The very use of the word *evil* implies



that you refuse to enter into the experience of another, misunderstood person, or ethnic group, or sexual preference, stigmatizing them instead as allied with transcendent wickedness that can't be redeemed" (301). By trying to give solid, undeniable answers to difficult questions, Christians often become extremists without hearts. No matter how well-meaning, a writer, especially a Christian, should never sacrifice their love and humanity, especially for an answer that may not even be true.

Most importantly, however, Christians must recognize that by trying to explain, they risk sinning against God. The book of Job makes it abundantly clear that it is not the job of mere humans to have all the answers. As the Lord says, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand" (NIV Job 38:4). In fact, by trying to come up with answers to one of the most difficult questions of all time, Job's friends inadvertently sin against God Himself. They meant well, like many Christian writers today, and they were trying to represent God as well as they could, but since they attributed too much understanding to themselves, the Lord says, "You have not spoken the truth about me" (Job 42:8).

Christians have a responsibility, as artists, as humans, and as followers of Jesus, to not answer the difficult questions of life. As Daniel Taylor states, "Truth is as varied as it is elusive. Many people associate truth with intellectual or rational truth, especially the truth of propositions and the scientific method. But there is also the truth of keen observation and penetrating reflection" (424). Rather than treating difficult issues as science experiments, solid mixtures with definite instructions and outcomes, Christian writers should be okay with leaving them as questions, becoming better artists by welcoming readers into exploration, showing compassion by admitting they don't know any better than their fellow humans, and strengthening their relationship with God by accepting His great mystery.

## WORKS CITED

- Bauer, Susan Wise. "Three Faces of Evil: Writers and the Portrayal of Moral Evil." *The Christian Imagination*. Edited by Leland Ryken. Zondervan Publishing House, 2002. pp. 299-312.
- The Holy Bible*. Edited by Nancy Rue, New International Version, Zondervan Publishing, 2011.
- Ryken, Leland. "Thinking Christianly About Literature." *The Christian Imagination*. Edited by Leland Ryken. Zondervan Publishing House, 2002. pp. 24-34.
- Taylor, Daniel. "In Praise of Stories." *The Christian Imagination*. Edited by Leland Ryken. Zondervan Publishing House, 2002. pp. 407-425.
- Terrell, Richard. "Christian Fiction: Piety is not Enough." *The Christian Imagination*. Edited by Leland Ryken. Zondervan Publishing House, 2002. pp. 239-259.

# ABANDONED POEM

*by Delaney Campbell*

Ink blobs  
Forming puddling craters  
Dancing lines that swoop and kneel into words  
Crescendoing to a grand meaning  
Until  
With that dooming line of ink that slices it in half

Pages defaced by that word-gore and ink-sword blows  
An ink-soaked half picture  
A general grieving their fallen soldiers, above and beside  
the battlefield

This isn't working  
I think I'll give up  
This battle is lost

# IT'S JUST STUFF

*by Sarah Rasmussen*

I've found a place for most of it:  
After I folded your sweaters and pressed your blouses,  
I gave them to Corey.  
When she asked if I was sure,  
I said, "It's just stuff."

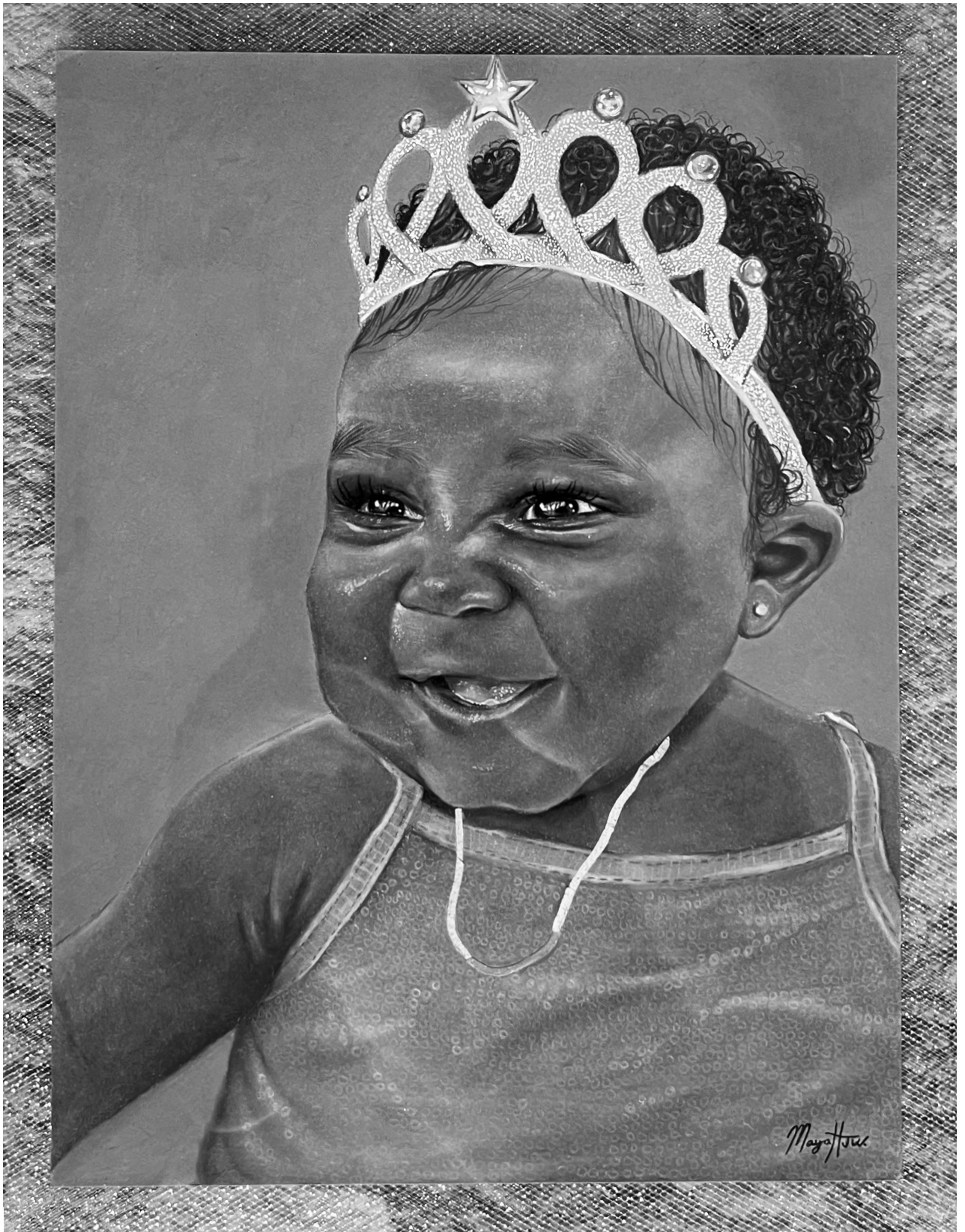
Your china, now chipped from years of  
scraping off unwanted Thanksgiving scraps,  
I stored in Aunt Betty's cabinets.  
When she asked if I was sure,  
I said, "It's just stuff."

After I cranked your music boxes,  
which still play your tinkling tunes,  
I sent them to Hannah.  
When she asked if I was sure,  
I said, "It's just stuff."

When I polished the anniversary jewelry  
that I bought you each year,  
I handed it all to Kathy.  
When she asked if I was sure,  
I said, "It's just stuff."

But your toothbrush

I keep  
that  
on the bathroom counter.



"Baby" by Mayah Welsh



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY

by Vaviana Young

Squealing laughter. Young limbs flailing across a fading yellowy-green lawn spotted with the first falling leaves of the season. The air is crisp and cool with only subtle suggestions of the seceding summer sun. A voice from inside the blue and red brick house interrupts the game of tag with the promise of cake and presents. The frivolity is forgotten as the players cheer and rush towards the propped door, but not a single one of them could possibly be more excited than I.

For it is my ninth birthday, and they are all here to celebrate me.

The tiny house in a tiny neighborhood in a tiny town is packed with familiar faces. Mom, dad, school friends, and early childhood friends are all beaming at me as I enter the decked-out living room. I cannot help but beam right back.

As I walk towards the kitchen after my retreating mother, I note that each decoration is tailored to fit what I like. Rainbow balloons litter the floor, and streamers spelling out my name and newly acquired age adorn the walls. Even the picture upon the split vanilla-chocolate cake is my current favorite animal. The heap of presents wrapped in shimmery paper fills me with tingling glee. I already know that the biggest gifts will have to be saved for last—the scrawl of my grandparents’ handwriting on the “from” tag signals that they will be the best ones.

I stand in front of the cake with nine symbolically lit candles just for me. My mom steps back with the red utility lighter and my surrounding friends take that as a cue to begin singing. They are slightly off-key and I can feel my face heat up the longer the tune continues, but it’s not a bad bashfulness. The truth is, I love it.

“Make a wish,” my mom’s sweet voice directs me as the performance’s end is signaled by clapping and a final cheer of *cha cha cha!*

My smile ever wider, I lean forward, close my eyes, and blow out the candles.

When I open them again, I am lying in bed in a different house. My bedframe is new, my hair is longer, and the sunlight that filters in through the curtains orders me to wake up long before my mom and dad come into the room to second the notion.

Both of them seem excited, though my dad is certainly trying to repress it more. My mom twinkles at me as she adjusts the glow stick headband on her head and urges me to get up, for the guests will be arriving soon and we have a long day ahead of us. “Rise and shine, birthday girl!”

Ah, that’s right. It is my sixteenth birthday, and people are coming over to celebrate me.

I haul myself out of bed and scamper into the living room. There, I take the initiative to help set up some of the decorations. Purple balloons with white spots, iridescent streamers, and glowsticks galore for party favors during the sleepover portion of the evening.

It doesn’t take long for the first childhood friend to show up, and the usual close circle crowd filters in after. The turnout is not nearly as large as it once was and there are some new faces among the herd, but the smiles I receive evoke the same childlike joy as always.

The rest of the party goes by in a neon blur. The drive to the Main Event, the massive laser tag battle royale, the pizza, the bowling, the drive back home, the laughter as the boys stuffed balloons into their shirts and filled the bathroom so full of them that one couldn't even open the door until a few had been sacrificed.... The next clearest thing I can see is the cake.

It's the prettiest cake I've ever seen, and it's mine. A two-tier stacked cake with purple and white frosting, edible glitter, a plastic silver tiara on top, and two candles shaped into a "one" and a "six." The lettered icing on the cake wishes me happy birthday before anyone else, and as mom lights the candles, the crowd joins it melodically.

I have to duck my head until the singing stops, and once more, my mom leans in to tell me to make my wish. I look up, level my eyes with the cake, lean forward, let them flutter shut, and blow out the candles with a smile.

When I open my eyes again I am alone. I am sitting at my desk in a bleak college dorm room, holding a little spice cupcake with an unlit glittery purple candle jammed into the center. It's falling apart between my fingers, icing haphazardly smeared across the top, and the trembling candle must remain unburned, for lighting it here would be a fire hazard and is thus strictly forbidden. Yes, the cupcake is sad, but it could not possibly be sadder than I.

For it is my twentieth birthday, and nobody is around to celebrate me.

Mom dropped the cupcakes off earlier before she had to return home. I remember the smile she gave me and feel the last kiss upon my cheek, and it only brings temporary warmth. Girls chatter and move past my closed door, but they don't care that I exist behind it, much less that it's my birthday. In fact, they all either forgot it or—like my roommate—completely ignored it when they were made privy to it.

I can count the number of friends that have texted me a happy birthday on one hand. The family number is less than that. Mom assures me that the ones that are still alive are blowing up her Facebook post about me, but they know very well that I don't have a Facebook account.

Pulling the wobbling treat closer, my eyes slip shut, and I can feel warm tears escape and drip down my cheeks. In the silence, I imagine my mom's usual instructions. I pretend she is here. I pretend the girls outside are squealing for me. I pretend there is a small flame burning on the cupcake's candle, and I blow it out and make my wish.

"Happy birthday," I whisper to myself.

The empty dorm walls echo it back.

# GROWING PAINS

*by Christine Do*

Sobs rattled my chest as I wept and wept and wept, stopping only to choke down enough breath for a sigh. I couldn't—I wouldn't—be soothed. Heat radiated from me, from my swollen eyes, from my damp cheeks, and I sank pathetically on the cool wooden floor, tempted to writhe and kick like a spoiled toddler. My burning ears pressed against the grain of hardwood, I heard boards creak around me, and above the racket of my emotional meltdown, the angry echoing in my head, my mother laughed gently at the sight. Twenty minutes later, tears mopped up and floor abandoned and now uncomfortably warm where I had lain, my desk shook with the force of my typing as I glared at the assignment that had pitched me onto the floor in violent frustration. Twenty minutes of gut-wrenching grief over a Halloween short story that couldn't be longer than three double-spaced pages. I was a freshman in high school.

Five months later, the short story long forgotten, I sat in front of an empty box of tissues. Snot trailed down my face as salt fused my eyelids together and made the Mandarin characters in front of me swim on the page. My throat closed around my words. How dare my Chinese teacher assign so much work so suddenly, knowing full well that half of the class would argue for an extension I wouldn't need. Why should I do the work if there wouldn't be a point in the end? Storm clouds brewed in my head as I glared at my clenched fists, muted by my own anger. Floorboards creaked behind my chair, and gentle laughter sent my blood into a roiling boil.

Years later, I ran up to the front door and grabbed my key just as my mother turned the latch on the other side and opened it for me. The sight of her apron, her smile, and her arms around me broke a dam within me. Her surprise was drowned out by my stream of consciousness, a violent torrent of emotions I hadn't realized I needed to feel. "There's a boy who doesn't like me back but oh do I like him why doesn't anyone I want to love want to love me back and why am I so tired and so unmotivated and so bored and so stressed and so confused and so worried for the future and so rushed to match everyone else's pace and so—" and she laughed.



Perspective is a funny thing. Everyone has felt, at one point or another, that the world was ending and nothing could be done, and not once has the world truly ended. My mother laughed each time I came crying not because she wanted to hurt me or because she didn't understand my pain, but because she understood all too well. Because she had stood where I stand now, felt what I feel now, and can laugh at it all from where she stands now. In every instance, perspective was something I had yet to earn.

"What's the point," I gasped through tears, "in feeling this way if it's all supposed to be fine someday?"

Chuckling, she handed me a tissue and told me, "They're growing pains."

Pain has a strange way of making space for something new. The raw, aching, tearing sensation that life inevitably inflicts when things get hard is all-consuming until, one day, it's not. One day, the three-page limit seemed like no big deal and the workload was suddenly manageable. One day, perspective became the scab I needed to heal. So someday, heartbreak and confusion will be proof that I've grown again and scabbed over, and someday I'll gently laugh at that thought.

# SADNESS LOOKS DIFFERENT ON YOU

*By Denalyn Kwok*

Heartbreak looks different on you.  
You wear it with a smile  
So convincing  
I'd think you were lying  
If you told me  
You'd lost sight  
Lost a lover  
Lost your mind.

Sorrow looks different on you.  
You wear it with a laugh  
Dressed in white  
Down an aisle  
With no one by your side.  
I'd think you were lying  
If you told me  
He left you at nine.

Mourning looks different on you.  
You wear it with a quip  
So quick  
No questions  
No qualms  
I'd think you were lying  
If you told me  
Your grandpa had died.

You dress  
In flashes of joy and veil  
The truth;  
Don't lie to me.  
I don't mind  
The truth  
Even when you wear it differently,  
Even when sadness looks different on you.

# MY MOTHER REAPS

*By Delaney Campbell*

Mankind has many pictures  
Many faces  
Many names for Death

We see Death  
Riding on a pale green horse at the end  
In a dark robe, wielding a scythe  
Stamping papers in a bureaucrat's office

As a mummified king  
As a skeleton woman  
As three brothers  
As a wolf on the prowl

Personally I imagine Death as mother  
A good one you see  
You know her all throughout your life  
She motivates you to lick your plate clean of everything  
life has to offer  
All her children, good or bad, famous or insignificant,  
she loves all the same  
She will never forget about you even when you forget  
her  
And in your final moments  
She will be there for you

# THE ANATOMY OF THE SUN

*by Antavia Mason*

June days beget sunlight  
feral and wild  
and hope in full bloom  
where petals shaped like  
last night's dream dot  
the horizon of reality  
And it all feels a little less heavy  
less like burdens begging for solace  
and more like the sky spreading  
itself open, bearing all of the poetry  
of heaven between aortic clouds

# I AWAKEN TO PINK SKIES

*by Octavia Mason*

I awaken to pink skies  
Like the dandelion to the sun  
Whose petals are not yet fully grown  
And brim with an uncertainty of what the day may hold  
But as sure as the sun teeters into the sky  
So my hope does rise

*"No Wisdom" by Nathan Opp*





# COMET

*by Alexandra Baldessari*

There once was a fox  
who leapt to the stars,  
the crisp twilight air  
drawing him skyward.

Listen close, hear him  
pad through veiled branches,  
across astral treetops,  
dense cloudy thickets.

A bright moon guides him  
through the midnight sky,  
he soars, star to star,  
leaving dust behind.

His paws turn into ice,  
tail freezing in a line,  
his limbs solid as rock,  
transforming among the lights.

Yet speed carries him,  
and by touching the stars,  
flurries of ice and dust  
leave trails in the air.

Further on he flies,  
streaking through the night  
in a frivolous dash  
through a vast sea of skies.

And so is he, Comet,  
flying through boundless space,  
running an endless race  
with everlasting time.

# A NOTE ON LOVE

*By Madison LoChiatto*

“How unfair!”  
I will one day stomp my foot  
And cry—  
As death’s eternal kiss  
Presses its lips  
Against the one who gave me life.  
How terrible it is—  
To be raised, to be born  
Only to walk you,  
Hand-in-hand  
to the bridge that cannot be traversed.  
Perhaps it would be a kindness then,  
To embark on the final path,  
First.  
How lovely it would be,  
To have the same hands who bore me,  
Lay me to rest,  
One final time.

# COLOPHON

The *Promethia* is published by the School of Liberal Arts, chaired by professor David Farnsworth, within the College of Arts and Cultural Studies, lead by Dr. William Curtis Ellis, Dean. Writing and artwork is created by students and faculty, with layout done by graphic design students. The *Promethia* is printed on 80# silk cover and 80# text paper, scored, folded, stapled and trimmed by ORU's Copy Services, Graduate Center 2A01. Special thanks to staff member Carl Nutt for his production assistance.

The design, layout and digital production of *Promethia* is handled by the students of ART 355 Graphic Design Studio and supervised by Professor Jason W. Howell, Director of the Institute of Design, Experience and Art (IDEA). Students included: Savannah Brown, Tiffany Collier, Deanna DeValve, Faith Eberwein, Kaylee Espinosa, Rebecca Gonzalez, Edgar Alejandro Hernandez Molina, Ceci Howell, Abraham Nap, Olaniyi Owolabi. *Promethia* was produced with Adobe InDesign, Acrobat and Photoshop on Macintosh and PC computers for assembling and editing the publication, with URW Baskerville and Source Sans 3, served from Adobe Type, for the body, headlines and byline fonts.

## SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

Housing art, design, history, humanities, modern languages, and writing programs, the faculty and students of the School of Liberal Arts endeavor to bolster the classical model of learning at the collegiate level. Housing multiple general education courses that serve the entire university, as well as hundreds of majors, the school strives to prepare all for professional expectations, as well as the critical thinking and communication skills aspiring leaders will need to influence culture for decades into the future.

## ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY

ORU is a Christian, Spirit-empowered, interdenominational university in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with over a decade of consecutive enrollment growth. Regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, ORU offers over 150 majors, minors, concentrations, and pre-professional programs at the bachelor's level, ranging from business and engineering to nursing, ministry, and more. Under the leadership of President Dr. William Wilson, ORU is preparing students from all 50 states and 142 nations (from 2019 to 2022) to be whole leaders for the whole world.

The *Wall Street Journal* ranked ORU as the #4 university in the nation for student engagement. This ranking is based upon faculty interactions, collaborative learning, critical thinking, real-world applications of student learning, the extent to which classes challenge students, and whether students would recommend a university to others. *Niche* recognizes ORU as one of the most diverse colleges in America.

*Promethia Literary Journal* is the property of Oral Roberts University School of Liberal Arts. All Rights Reserved  
© 2023-2024

“A WRITER  
IS A WORLD  
TRAPPED  
IN A PERSON.”  
VICTOR HUGO

*Back Cover: “Artwork” by McKenna Johnson*





# ORU

ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY • COLLEGE OF ARTS & CULTURAL STUDIES