



**SALT LAKE YOUNG WRITERS ANTHOLOGY
2024**

Dream Sequence

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Preface & Acknowledgements

The Salt Lake Young Writers (SLYW) program is a series of comprehensive writing workshops intended to help teens grow their skills and passion for creative writing, and to provide a platform for teen writers and artists to further develop their creative voices. A collaboration between SLCC Community Writing Center (CWC) and the Salt Lake Public Library, SLYW is facilitated by the CWC's Youth Programs Coordinator and Associate Director with support from librarians. All teens entering grades 7-12 are eligible to participate in SLYW cohorts. We'll be holding two upcoming workshops in Spring 2025:

Exploring Sci-Fi Futures—Middle School Cohort
Young Adult Sci-Fi: Technology and Revolution—High School Cohort

This year's anthology, *Dream Sequence*, represents the work of young writers in SLYW cohorts, writers from the Center for Documentary Expression & Art's (CDEA) teen residency—"We Are Telling Our Stories" (WATOS)—and other teen writers and artists across the Salt Lake Valley. A dream sequence is a film technique: an interlude in the plot. It is a space for reflection, prediction, and imagination. But a dream sequence also reveals our hopes for the future, which demand action. The pieces in this anthology create interludes for each other, speaking across time and space to address history both personal and political, transport us to fantastical worlds, and express the writers' hopes and fears for the future.

Dream Sequence would not be possible without the collaboration of the University of Utah College of Humanities. We are immensely grateful to Dr. Masha Shukovich of the CDEA and Dr. Christie Toth of the University of Utah for their work in support of teen writers and their roles in bringing the anthology to print.

For more information, visit www.slcc.edu/cwc/salt-lake-young-writers



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Winter Wanderer

By Sarah Robinson



evil begets loss; loss begets evil

By Eamon Basso

Dear B:

Been a while

I know we didn't end well

I know you think about me
as much as I think about you

Your eyes
are so pretty

You said I only

hurt you

Maybe you

should try again?

I'm sorry if you think I hurt you

It was just a misunderstanding

I know

we both felt hurt sometimes

I just wanted

time with you

you said too pushy!

Why did you have to get so

obsessed

with that notion

that I mistreated you

I got you all you wanted

you need to learn

when you're being treated

well

But that's not a good way
to end a letter

I miss you
come back

We are so good together
Please

Love, K

How to Ruin School Dances

By Jamie Black

You can't quite remember why you came here. The music blares around you in every direction, people swarming every way you turn, dancing, talking, messing around. Their voices, footsteps, and laughter mingle with the music, a hundred different sounds drowning you in your senses. None of their faces seem familiar, and you wonder where your friend is. He said he'd be here, so where is he? You text him to ask, waiting anxiously for a response as you continue to slowly wander around, looking for him. Sixty seconds, one hundred twenty seconds, one hundred eighty, two hundred forty, three hundred. No response. At some point you see someone you recognize. One of your teachers.

"Hey, having fun?" she asks.

"No," you think, but you don't say that. "I dunno, I'm looking for my friend, but I can't find him. ..."

She sympathizes with you, it seems, and you end up following her around for a while, feeling like a nuisance, but not knowing what else to do besides awkwardly standing around by yourself. Eventually, she lets you go, and your mind tells you that you've been being obnoxious, following her around like a lost puppy.

After wandering around a bit more, you find one of your other teachers, one of your

favorites, the one who encouraged you to come here. You tell her you can't find your friend, and she offers to look around with you. She chats with you a bit as you look and doesn't seem to be annoyed with you or anything, but your brain still says she is, because it always says that. It doesn't like to follow logic with these kinds of things, it just likes to make you worry, and there never seems to be anything you can do about it, anything you can do to shut it up.

You don't find your friend, and you eventually decide to stop hovering around your teacher. You end up by the door, loitering, checking your text messages. No response. That's when you notice your friend's sibling sitting on the ground behind the door. They notice you too. You ask where your friend is. They don't know. They thought he was here. You sit next to them for a while, and at some point, your friend texts you back.

It turns out that your friend had gotten a bit confused. Previously, you had tried to tell him that the entrance fee was a can of food, since this entire thing was related to the canned food drive, but apparently, he hadn't understood. He'd brought some cans to their assigned teacher, like they were supposed to, but he somehow didn't get that they had to bring one to the door to get in. You'd tried to tell him that *multiple* times before this started, how did he not understand?

You sigh, knowing it's not technically his fault, but still feeling upset with him about it. You tell him that he could still *come*, but he says that he already went home. You frown, getting up and going out without a second glance, finding no reason to stay now that your only friend is never going to be here. You text your mom, telling her you're ready for her to pick you up and bring you home. You shouldn't have come in the first place, it wasn't any fun, and you wasted so much time that could've been spent enjoying yourself. You subconsciously decide not to go to any more school dances.

Nature's Silent Hymn

By: Soo-Ah Byun

A soft resonance
of the forest floor beneath
the earth hums with life

Winner

By Soo-Ah Byun

Winning. A feeling of adrenaline and elation hit me like a wave hitting the shore. A single moment that drew me in and never let go. You can never find enough to satisfy the craving eating away inside of you. Like a drug. Like an addiction. Until I find it again, it will never leave me. It is a part of me. Constantly nagging my thoughts. It lurks in the shadows and the crevices of my mind. Blinded by the glory of such a simple experience. It's slowly destroying me in ways you could never imagine. My limbs

go numb. My heart is pounding in my ears. A single thought clouds any of my senses. Like a thin veil over my thoughts. I can feel their presence like the aura of a spirit, but I can't reach through. I felt the rough, sandy surface of the court with my hands. In that moment, I told myself something that pivoted the course of my life drastically from that moment on. After I walked off the court, I looked at my dad and said, "I did it."

Mortar

By Lucy Dayton

It's dark and you can't see. Straining your eyes, you register dull colors and shapes, but it's blurry. Not everything is there.

It's almost as if you forgot to put your contacts in, and at this point you can't even remember waking up in the morning.

There are no doors. Every wall is the same. It's all too small, the ceiling too low and the walls too tight. If you were to jump on a bed in here, your head would go straight through the ceiling.

Breathing in and out, you become increasingly more uncomfortable with the warmth of the stale air. As you step closer to one of the walls, you notice that it's moving ever so subtly.

You reach out to touch the brick. It feels like a normal wall at first, but as your hand travels down the length of it, you touch something else. It's warm and moist, like the rest of it. But it's squishy. Meaty. Too warm. You slowly realize. The wall is breathing. The mortar is flesh.

Your hand stays there for a little too long before you remember you don't want to be touching the living wall.

It's like you're moving through a thick sludge as you stumble away. You want to move fast and

get away from it—but you cannot control your speed.

By the time you reach the middle of the room again, you're still moving and you can't slow down, just after you couldn't move fast enough. Just as slowly, you're sinking into the wall behind you.

The wall and mortar move together against your body, stitching you into itself. Jesus Christ, the wall is eating you, but you move too slow and can't see anything and you're just letting it happen. You hate that you are succumbing to it, that the room has full control and you have none. You hate that you are here and ever gave it the chance to control you.

You thought you were fighting before you just gave up, but it sees you all the same. Your flesh isn't yours anymore.

And you're swallowed.

Your face is too warm and your arm is pinned under your body when you wake up. It's dark again, but you know where you are. It's 6:45 am on a Wednesday morning. You're going to go about your day in the same monotone way you always do. You're going to forget you ever became part of a wall. But your flesh is the mortar, your body squeezed between the bricks; you are still in it.

A Sibling Nightmare

By Neha Dhanasekaran

You tell your parents that you
will teach your little sister more chess.
Spread the board out and set it up together.
Review how to move all the pieces
except the knight because your
sister is very annoying when it
comes to learning about knight moves.
Tell your sister
that she is ready to play a game.
Try to act excited when
your sister is enthusiastically setting up the board.
Be calm when your sister
starts making illegal moves.
Try not to yell at her when
she screams because you tell her that a move is illegal.
Don't fight when
she starts throwing pieces at you.
Call your parents over to deal with the situation.
Try not to cry because your head
is about to explode.
Let your dad take over the lesson.
Critique both your dad's and sister's
mistakes while sitting there, watching.
Vow never to relive the nightmare again
knowing that you must and will.

A Letter to Life

By Aki Douglass

Dear Life,
I'm not satisfied with the way you're going.
You keep throwing walls in my path—
mostly figurative,
but once or twice when I was riding my bike
down a street I hadn't been through before ...
Anyway.

They say,
 “when life gets you down ...”
and trail off as if I'm supposed to know what's next.
They say,
 “when life gives you lemons ...”
but you've been giving me limes and I don't know what to do with those.
They say,
 “life's a ...”
for both our sakes I'm not finishing that.

I'm writing
because you've been giving me a rough time,
and it's time someone called customer service.

Thanks for reading.

Sincerely,
Alive and Questioning It

My Mother, My Mama, and My Yaya

By Elena Xoca-Hardeman

1. My Mother

Birthgiver

The woman who brought me into this world

And can take me out

Short curly hair,

Sage green beanie,

Light freckles,

A human

And so many more words

My mother

She as sweet as honey and warm like it too

Her hugs feel like hugging an arm full of clouds

But my mother ain't soft, she as hard as a rock

She don't take nothing from nobody

My mother loves my mama

Two peas in a pod I say

I can see the look of love

In they eyes when they look at each other

Oh mother, now you're here yet I miss you

I miss her, I sure do.

I miss her scratching my head as we laid together

I miss her braiding my hair

Even though that shit hurt.

Mama Bear, that's what we call her

Doing everything she can to

provide and protect as much as she can

My mother tired

That I know for sure

But she still try her best, and

I'm damn proud of her for it.

2. My Mama
They ain't let no shit *Fly*
If you do them wrong
It'll bite you back in the ass.
Tall
Gapped smile
And 43 tattoos

My mama
They soft but not that soft
They'll poke you with they black stiletto nails
If you annoy them.
They'll take care of you if you sick
They ain't like germs
But they love us enough to take
Good care of us
They a mighty person and
I love them to death
They love sunflowers and when they
Smile,
Hell, they might as well be one.

My mama
My family
They been building a
Big ol' house in
My heart
When you give them a hug
You can feel they
Mighty
Loving
Energy flowing through your *veins*
My mama
My mother

3. My yaya
The most
Loving

Woman I know
Her hugs, Oh her hugs
Makes you want to hug her
Forever and I do
Her hugs feel like a
Big ol' teddy bear
You done had since you was a child
She love everyone and
She understand me the most.
We both have the same passion for the arts

Writing

Literature

Painting

Drawing

When there ain't nothing to eat I call her and
She brings McDonalds.
I always wanna pay her back but she won't let me
don't worry, I will.
She got the
biggest
house of my heart and my

veins

grow around it like those
Beautiful weeds
Her voice sound as
Soft as butter and as
Sweet as her cheesecake

Sometimes I love her so much
I cry
Her laugh always makes everyone around her
Laugh too
She says she getting
Older and got
Gray hairs

But I think she don't look older than 39

Three women
Shaping me into
What I am and
Who I want to be
Teaching me lessons so I don't go into the world without
knowing how it works
They all love me and I know that.

 The greatest people
 My favorite teachers
I love them too and
I bet they know it
They should, I always say it to them

Three Beautiful Black Women

Making me love who I am
My yayas as black as
 dark chocolate but
 as sweet as milk chocolate
My Mama as black as
 milk chocolate
 but more like dark chocolate,
 bitter and sweet but you love it so
My mother is as light as
 honey and
 like it in all the ways
 sweet
 thick
 healing

They love who they are and so do I
They make me love who I am
Caramel, chocolate, and white chocolate,
and I ain't got to prove it to nobody.

Sweet Dreams

By Agatha Hunnicutt

Dear Agatha,

I know right now
you're dreaming of 16.

You imagine yourself tall and pretty and popular
shirts cropped and phone case sparkly.

Your boyfriend is undoubtedly blonde and plays
guitar just like the boys you watch on Disney
Channel.

You spend every day at the mall with your friends
buying dresses for your next school dance.

You get picked up by your boyfriend
who takes you out to a fancy restaurant and makes you laugh.

You are a great driver with the perfect license
photo your parents get you a pink Toyota.

You know exactly what you're doing after graduation
becoming a fashion designer, just like on *Project
Runway*.

But you don't know what AP Calculus is, or
parallel parking or anxiety.

Later on, you will figure out that girls can like
other girls.

You'll learn that your friends won't always
act like friends, and how to find better
ones.

A boy hasn't called you undeserving yet (you'll
gather that boys are usually wrong).

You're going to miss your brother driving you
around in the blue one.

You haven't discovered how skilled you are at
math, or worried whether you're good enough to
pursue it.

All you know are sweet dreams of
freedom and blonde boys.

Love, Agatha

The Wind and the Trees

By James Taniguchi Zengo Iannucci

Have you ever noticed how the wind always accompanies the trees?
As you sit and lean against that towering figure
Do you feel the wind brushing against your shoulders, like they used to?
When you look up and marvel at the kaleidoscope
Of greens, oranges and reds
Do you see the wind and memories dancing with them?
When the roots you sit on can no longer support the echoes they left on you
And the hill they rest in seems to
Collapse under the weight
Will you recall them as you grow old?
As the rough bark scratches your back and the wind ruffles your hair
will you remember those days you all spent together?
If you close your eyes and breathe in that earthy scent
Can you see their windswept figures in the apple of your eye?
When the Great Giant blocks the shine of the Ripe Sun
Melting into the fields you played in
And the wind pushes rose colored clouds down the sky
Will you remember the breeze beneath your arms, as it flew with you
when you all ran towards the horizon?

Mellifluous

By Lou May

Teenage awkwardness, anxious wringing hands, hope of adult freedom
Faded and brown around the edges
As time creeps by, unremarkable and unremarked-upon
The growth into new fears that will replace the old
The still not so settlement into a body not made for one
But personality and personhood still too rough to be slid against another
Work, responsibilities, the care of a succulent precarious on a window seal
Consuming, fulfilling, for the time being

Years wax on and once rough edges smooth
Tumbled along the winds and waves of nights alone
A body now settling, as a soul easily slides against skin, shaped and molded to fit a personhood
The succulent is flourishing now able to be planted out front amongst the hydrangeas
One must go outside to water it now
Their body now fit for one, longs another, now that it can be trusted to be shaped and fitted to
the need.
A hand able to be outreached, no longer shaking
And one that finds another.

Younger they may have felt some compulsion to make some sort of joke or excuse about the
fleshy swell of the chest.
They don't.
They stretch out a hand, now knotted with years of work and wear, steady
The succulent has be propagated little buds wrapped in paper towels

The sunlight only reaches them half the time
There hands intertwined with another as they hold back hair
Vomit against porcelain, a hand squeezing back
“This is inhumane. Nobody should be expected to cope with all this,”
They sit in that bathroom all night, hands occupied
“They’re pretty,” their love says, “Do you like them?” Their hands clasped together over chests

holding and steady, “Yeah,” they says. “I do now.”
Along the kitchen window little terra-cotta pots dot the seal
They go outside to water the garden weekly
Rails adorn the stairs and canes are positioned against doorways
They lay tangled in sheets and their love but still they whisper
“I’m dying. Make sure I wake up in the morning.”

There is no guarantee
No planned out church bells or a family heirloom of plants
There is only hope and a will
Their body is now their own and even with how short it has been
There will be more and there will be later
They will eat well, most days.
They will have tremors sometimes, and sometimes they won’t.
They will bring back hope to their love.
They will be apart sometimes.
They will be together more often than that. They will grow older, and be buried together.
They will, that they will

Mademoiselle

By Luka Mishchenko

(Inspired by the painting, *American Gothic*, by Grant Wood)

Their wiped expressions hide terror
They hide primal fear.

The pitchfork is
A wall between them
Sharp, like a fence
One that could
Pierce
Your
Heart.

The mademoiselle struggles to smile
Chained to a life she does not want
Chained to a husband who does not love her
And nor does she love him.

The monsieur masks anger
Whether it be a speck of dust
Or a dinner, lacking an extra pinch of salt
The tiniest mistake
Could spark a drunken rage.

Yet together they pretend to be happy
They pretend to be satisfied and content.

It is a game
A masquerade
Not a real marriage
Not a real love.

A week later, they are no longer pretending
And one of them is dead.

Tough Love

By Giselle Mouritsen

It's your mother's fourth attempt to get you to eat vegetables, but you refuse again, bursting into tears as if she is asking the impossible. You have no idea why she would insist you consume something so awful. She explains that your body needs them or else you will not grow up healthy and strong.

You spit them out when her back is turned.

She walks in on you, hunched over, struggling to make sense of simple passages. At just five, soon to be six, you are the youngest of your first-grade class which sets you apart from your older classmates. You must have been forgotten in the chaotic mess of overcrowded New York City public schools because your teacher assumed you were keeping up with the rest.

Your mother devotes countless hours to teaching you how to read.

Tears pool in your eyes until they burst, streaming down your cheeks. You try to be quiet, but in the small apartment, your grief echoes. Your mother is the only one who stays and talks through your problems. Her voice is steady, but just being near her breaks you open even further, as if her presence gives you permission to unravel. She reassures you that you are safe; however, the discomfort of talking through your problems feels like opening wounds you thought you had buried too deep to touch

You learn to save your tears for the pillow.

Someone made a thoughtless comment about your body, without understanding the weight their words could carry. You look in the mirror at yourself for what must be over an hour, tracing every flaw with your fingers. For the first time, you find yourself concerned about your appearance, and all you can feel is an overwhelming sense of ugliness. You hear the door open slowly; your mother never knocks, and she sees you staring at your reflection. She tells you that bodies grow, stretch, and change over time. She reminds you that you are 11, and you should not worry about issues like these. She tells you that you are beautiful. You roll your eyes because she's your mother and you know they are obligated to say those things.

Your mother helps you understand that you are more than what you see in the mirror.

From a young age, your mother made it clear that her love for you knew no end. She said the choices you make do not matter—whether you end up on the wrong side of the law or choose to distance yourself from her—her love would remain constant.

You know she will love you forever.

His Trial

By Morgan Nelson

Despite all its beauty, she knew the reef was only a lure. A way to bring people into a hundred different deaths. She could tell the fish with the spines were waiting for her to slide in, and the color shifting eel surely wasn't the only one near, the rest would be hidden in plain sight, just waiting for something to cross their paths. They would not stop her.

She sat on the edge of a canoe positioned over the only dark spot in the water, a crevasse so deep, a pit so dark, it was as an eye into the void staring back at her. That's where she had to go. Into the infinite abyss of the deep.

The surrounding reef was certainly a sight to behold. His domain always was. Fish of topaz flew through the water, as the eel, nearly invisible as it shifted colors to match its surroundings, coiled through the water in chase. Further away, a pack of the bigger fish, with ridges of spines along their backs and bright green stripes glowing on the sides of their bodies sat in wait. The water glowed with life.

She dipped her hand into the water, scooping up a handful of cool ocean. She felt the power of salt and sea coursing through her. She took that power and shaped it into a large bubble around her head, one that would have to last her through the dive, or she wouldn't be able to come back, at least without being dead. She let the water trickle through the cracks in her

grasp, and the power of the sea fled her. The rules said that the bubble was the only thing she could bring with her.

There was no more stalling to do, she had to jump in. She walked to one end of the canoe and got as much of a running start as she could before diving into the abyss. When she made contact with the water, she was struck with how cold it was. It was like water under a layer of ice, far colder than it should have been in a reef. She shifted the large bubble of air around her head to a thinner veil around her entire body, to keep in warmth, but as she took a breath, the air had to retract from her feet lest the veil become too thin to breathe through. The cold returned, but now confined to her feet. It was manageable, but if she became too greedy for breath she would be frozen over in minutes. She swam down toward the mouth of the crevasse, and by proxy the reef floor, when the spinefish and eels began to take notice of her, a totally unprotected, sluggish creature heading directly towards somewhere with nowhere to hide.

The spinefish were first to attack her. In a race of swimming, a freshwater amphibian shaped like a human is no match for an ocean predator that relies on speed, but in a competition of combat, the daughter of rivers is easily a match for a group of slightly quicker than normal fish. The currents around her worked in her favor,

for what is a current other than an underwater river? The rivers changed at her command, pushing the spinefish away from her, slamming them against the corals and stones of the reef. The impact temporarily stunned the fish, so she took the chance to fling the fish towards one another, impaling them on the spikes of their siblings. She had won the battle, but not the war. The air pocket was nearing her knees, and her kicks were becoming sluggish. The rules said using the currents to help her down would disqualify her. She could only use the environment as it was. Using magic against the fish however, was fine, removing them didn't push her down, if anything it slowed her.

She knew the eels were still waiting, hidden amongst the coral, rival hunters stalking the most prized game, but she couldn't take a moment to observe the area. She had to go as fast as possible, otherwise she might not be able to make it all the way. The eels would have an easy hunt.

She knew they watched her, unmoving and unwavering, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. As soon as she reached the entrance to the crevasse, they struck all at once. They tore flesh away like paper from a book, but soon they realized their own flesh was being torn away just as quickly. Using the current to send her back upwards was perfectly within His rules. At the last second, she had pushed herself backwards just a bit, moving out of the way from the bulk of the onslaught, but she couldn't dodge everything. Most of the eels were killing each other, but some had found their marks, her arms were heavily lacerated

and bleeding, only still attached since the eels feasting on her arms were being feasted on by their brethren. She couldn't let the veil of air off her arms or her wounds would be exposed to the salt. She needed to go faster.

She dodged around the fighting eels, and reached the entrance to the abyss. His rules were only that she couldn't bring anything other than the bubble, and she couldn't use magic to push her down. However, if she managed to dislodge a boulder on the reef floor and let it drag her down. ...

With a sufficiently large rock attained, all that was left to do was hold on tight, and wait. Just sink into the abyss, and hope she had enough air to survive. As she sank, she found herself surrounded by an eternal darkness. She could see nothing but the rock she held on to. Even the great light from the reef couldn't pierce the smothering darkness of the ocean. She saw nothing, but that only meant there could be *anything*, just barely out of sight. She hated deep water.

Only her upper torso, arms, and head still had a veil of air, and her lower half was beginning to numb. She still needed to breathe though, and her next breath would either expose an arm to the salt and pain, or the rest of her torso would have to be freezing as the rest. She chose the latter.

As she took her breath, the air warmed her inside, but as soon as the warmth came, it was replaced with the frigid ocean around her, and it only got colder the deeper she went.

A minute later nearly her entire body was numb, except her lungs which screamed for breath. On the verge of fainting, she hoped her arms were too numb to feel the pain. She took a breath, and realized how wrong she was. The pain wracked her whole body despite the wounds only being on her arms, and instead of passing out from asphyxiation, she passed out from pain.

The peace of sleep only lasted a few seconds, quickly replaced with the panic of the inability to breathe, wrenching her awake. She had used up the rest of her bubble in her sleep. She was so far beneath the opening, that even with her full strength and power she wouldn't be able to make it to the surface in time. Her only chance was to hope the boulder pulled her to the bottom after she inevitably passed out once more from suffocation. Then maybe He would take pity on her.

Her final breath was about to run its course, and she wouldn't have the oxygen to stay awake. She could no longer see light above her, only His faint orange tint in the waters below. All around was pure void. An endless abyss. The orange tint grew brighter, and in the last moments before she passed out, an orange tendril of light reached out to her.

She thought she had done it, or at least earned His pity, but the tendril reached to her neck. Pain, panic, sleep.

She awoke. She reached for the cuts on her neck, to find that they had somehow stopped bleeding. She no longer felt any pain but

she assumed that was due to the numbness, considering she hadn't felt cold anymore. And then she noticed, before her, faintly glowing, an enormous orange shape that took up most of her vision. Him. The Orange Imperial. The Wrathful Kraken. Master of this trial. Kcahtre'nshdothr. He spoke to her in a language nobody knows. But she understood.

She had done it. She had succeeded. And she had already received part of her gift. She looked down at her hands, formerly destroyed by the eels, now covered in Topaz scale. She realized she had been breathing, breathing the *saltwater*. All that was left was to see if she'd been fast enough. In the sea of orange a speck of violet light appeared. A small amethyst gem. The trophy. She had won.

The Door

By Aleeya Osazuwa

I looked out the car window and thought about my old life. I missed it, I missed my friends, the city, and the environment. I had been there my whole life, and I didn't want to give that up. My dad got a new job at a new business. I didn't want to leave but we had been struggling and I didn't want my dad to miss the great opportunity. My mom found this old mansion that was surprisingly cheap, but it was in a good neighborhood and there was a great school nearby. She told me to stay positive and to not let missing my old life get to me. I tried my best but the farther away we got from my home the worse I felt.

“Hey, hey Jake wake up” I heard as I felt a tapping on my shoulder. My mom helped me out of the car and my eyes were still blurry. When my vision finally came to me I saw how foggy it was. We were standing in front of a big old run-down house. It smelled like rain and fall. I just sighed not because of how the house looked but because it wasn't my home. I had hoped that something would go wrong and we would have to go back, but my dreams were crushed. My mom put her hand on my shoulder and smiled. I gave a faint smile back and went to grab my stuff from the trunk.

My dad showed me to my room, it was in the basement. He thought it would be cool because it's a big space and eventually I could have a TV down here and decorate how I wanted once he got his first paycheck. I was excited, I loved

the space and ideas started to come to mind about meeting new friends and having a cool place to hang out. My dad seemed to see my excitement and smiled “Dinner will be ready in a few hours, get settled, you have a big day tomorrow.” I decided to put my bed together and set out my clothes.

As I set the last pillow down I heard something. A creak, like a door opening. I thought it was my mom coming to tell me dinner was ready so I went up the small stairs to the door. But to my surprise, no one was there. Scream. I turned my head and saw something moving in the darkness. Usually, I'm not scared of ghosts and stuff, but I was curious. I grabbed my phone and turned the flashlight on. I walked slowly to the corner where I heard the sound. It was a small wood door. The paint was slightly peeling off and it looked old, just like the house. Different thoughts ran through my head. “Should I open it?” “Don't be stupid.” “shut it and go upstairs.” I contemplated for a few minutes. It's just an old door, what's the worst that can happen? My hand grasped the doorknob.

“Jake, dinner is ready!”

The sound of silverware clinking and faint talking filled my ears. I couldn't focus on anything but the door. It's like it was drawing me in. It wanted me to find it. It wants me to go inside.

Throughout dinner, my mom asked if I was nervous about starting at a new school.

“I am nervous, but I just mostly miss my old friends.”

She made a sympathetic smile and grabbed my hand across the table. “You’ll do just fine there, hun.”

After dinner I quickly went to my room, I needed to see what was behind that weird door. Before I knew it the door was halfway open and I got chills. It was just black. I shined my flashlight, there was nothing, besides some cobwebs and spiders. I was left confused, why would the door creak open on its own? I figured it was the airflow and shrugged it off. I went to bed with an eerie feeling. I jolted awake with a big gasp. My heart was beating so fast. I had felt like something was on my chest all night and when I woke up it was gone. Then all of a sudden my door flung open.

“Jackson you’re gonna miss the bus!” my mom yelled.

I jumped out of bed and rushed to the bathroom to brush my teeth. Great, I’m already off to a bad start. I quickly finished getting ready and thank god I made it on the bus. I could hear faint laughs of kids. “what a weirdo” that’s just amazing.

I got through my first few periods and they were fine. Nobody seemed to be interested in me at all though. I was almost done washing my hands when I heard laughing coming from

a stall. It started normal but got deeper and more creepy. It was a girl’s voice though.

“Ha ha Jake, Jake!” and “Will you be my friend?” I was curious, I shouldn’t have been. I should have run right out of there. But my stupid self decided to walk over and knock on the stall.

“H-hello? Y-you talking to me?” the door slowly crept open.

“Hehe of course I’m talking to you silly.” The last word sounded almost distorted. The girl looked up and I saw her face. I took a step back and gulped. Her eye bags had looked like someone pulled the skin down to her cheeks and black goo almost like blood spilled out of her mouth as she spoke.

“I’m sorry about my face. I wish I was prettier so you’ll be my friend.” I didn’t want to make her feel worse and to be honest I needed a friend, even if they were a little creepy.

“I’ll be your friend,” I said. I hesitated a little, I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. She then started laughing and clapping her hands.

“Oh thank you, thank you for being my friend. You don’t know how long it’s been since someone has said that to me.”

“Well, you’re welcome. I don’t have any friends either. I just moved here.”

“Well you know what friends do, they have fun” She took my hand and let me out of the bathroom. She took me to the science class,

which was my third period. I don't know how she knew that but it was weird. I burst through the door and everyone looked at me.

"Hey kid you're late. You gotta pass."

"No, I had trouble finding the class"

"All right well what's your name?"

"Jake"

"Jake take a seat."

I sat down in the back where no one was sitting and tried to pay attention, but all I could hear was the black goop spilling out of my new friend's mouth. I looked around and no one else seemed to be bothered by it, actually, I never heard the teacher ask who she was. Can anyone else even see her? The teacher explained the experiment we were doing today: mixing some random liquids to get a chemical reaction. We got our tools and beakers and started. I poured the first liquid and turned my back to get other tools. When I came back my new friend was pouring something into the breaker.

"No don't do that!" I yelled.

Boom!

The beaker exploded and the fire alarm and sprinklers went off.

All of a sudden I was being pulled out of the room and into the principal's office.

"Jake why would you set a bomb off in science

class"

"I DIDN'T I SWEAR!"

"The girl did it, the weird girl"

"Jake we don't see a girl" but she was there. In the corner of the room laughing and smiling. I was scared and creeped out. I felt like I was going to pass out. She then walked behind the principal and started choking him. I got up and pushed the chair away. I backed up slowly in disbelief at what was happening. I fell to the ground and started crying.

"What just happened" I thought. "Why was she doing this? THE DOOR, OMG THE DOOR. Why would I open it?" Cops came running down the hallway and rushed into the room. I was still crying when they came out, I thought I would be saved. But they handcuffed me.

"What's going on"

"Kid you're being arrested for the murder of Mr Jenkins."

"NO, I DIDN'T DO IT I SWEAR!"

"It was her!" I pointed to the girl laughing in the corner. They looked at me like I was crazy.

"Check the cameras! please I didn't do it!"

"Kid, we checked the cameras, you're on it." They took me into the room and showed me the video. It was me walking behind the principal and strangling him until he fell.

"No, no you have to believe me please! The

door, check the door in my room!”

No one ever believed me. To this day, people call me Crazy Jake. The kid who murdered his principal on the first day and blamed a ghost. I have nightmares every night. On and on it never stops. I'm 40 now; my parents are gone, they moved away again and never spoke to me. I am alone. Stuck in a loop of my own horror story. The end

A Note to the Clock in the Corner of the Screen

By Andrew Peterson

Dearest Time,

I sit slumped upon my chair and stare into your eyes.

I sit slumped and staring at a screen and see you scream of my leviathan insignificance.

Confronted by you, Time, and your murmur of my trivial unimportance sit I, staring at a screen.

I look through the pixels and see a million billion years,

I see you Time; I see your cruel twisting fingers slowly pulling me to pieces.

I know you Time:

I know that you are Death, you are Life, you are God.

You raised the stone that sits so sadly on the mountain,

and Time, I know that you will knock it down.

I've met you Time, in empty rooms and dilapidated hallways, atop the tallest skyscrapers made from steel and 3.7 billion years of your sculpting life.

Death, Time, I know you will knock the stone

from the mountain,

and I know you will knock the mountain down too.

So, Time, God, do it gently; be kind in your upheaval.

Oh Death, Disaster, Life, Joy, take me softly.

A Captain's Final Story

By Kolby Phillips

Log 7274
3/28/2056

My job as Captain was supposed to save lives. I was personally chosen as Captain for this mission; they knew I'd get the job done. But I shouldn't have accepted this mission. So many red flags I just ignored because I was getting restless in my retirement, wanting to do something to get back into the action. It was a secret rescue mission, to a planet that sounded familiar, but one I didn't fully recognize. I've done this for many years, I know every planet within the next three solar systems like the back of my hand. The excitement of a new planet blinded me further from the questionability of the mission. But then the U.E.S. tells me I'll be captaining their "Safe Travels" ship, which is not a rescue ship, adding to the oddity of the mission. Even as my prosthetics tugged on my body, always feeling heavy, even though they are lighter than the usual human parts, I accepted the mission.

First I requested armaments be added to the ship, which was strange that I had to request them in the first place. Then I requested a hand-picked crew. The U.E.S. approved both requests. I went around and found the top mercenaries, hunters, outcasts, and any oddly-talented people I could find. Which included a single ordinary Commando soldier, who outclassed everyone around him. He had quite

the stack of accolades, but was wasting his potential. He really stuck out to me, so I gave him a job to do. I wish I hadn't pressured him as much. ... The recruiting wasn't made easier by the fact the U.E.S. waited until we were practically leaving the planet to give us the full briefing ... I now understand why.

It became clear to me why this mission was a secret, why the planet "Petrichor V" sounded familiar, and why I should have paid more attention to the strangeness of the mission. We were supposed to save the stranded survivors of the wrecked "U.E.S. Contact Light" that crash landed there a year ago. ... The "Contact Light" incident was kept under wraps from most of the public because of the absurdity of it all. The random detour to an uncharted planet, the large amount of property lost, and the tales of horrors on the planet.

Only a single survivor made it home.

This mission was practically hopeless, the U.E.S. is just scraping the barrel for another rescue story or new information about the planet. All the specifics kept from me, just to persuade me and the crew I hired from passing on all of this. Hiring a crew with no information is hard, but hiring a crew with that horrifying truth would have been harder. Stories of chitin beats, large lizardmen, and automatons of war. Then all the property spread across the

planet, the vast changing landscapes, advanced teleportation devices, and a Bulwark protecting the planet. It almost sounds like a fairy-tale, with blood strewn across it. But then we were in too deep, the paperwork had already been filled out. There was no backing out, so we all piled onto the ship and took off.

Despite the concerning trip ahead of us, I had been confident in who I'd chosen for the mission. It gave me hope that we could complete this mission with little to no casualties, and my confidence rose even more to see mostly trust on all their faces. I'd kept my chin up, telling myself that the stories of the Contact Light won't steer this mission. All I could do then is restate the plan, instill courage, and tell them "safe travels."

Little did I know then, as I saw their drop pods descend onto the large planet below, that I was sending them to their deaths. The courage I built for myself and my crew had made me look forward to the mission start, so I joined them in the horrors below, completely forgetting the absurdity of the mission.

Oh how I wish I never accepted this mission, how I should have shelved my eagerness to get back into action. Now here I am, telling my story, in my final log. All my ambitions to sail across the stars and commanding ships are now just memories. The stories of the planet are nothing compared to the real thing. Now I sit on the only working ship I could find, and it wasn't even on the planet. I had to look far up onto the moon leaving the stranded bodies of its old inhabitants below. I may be

alive now, but my humanity is far lost. I am a killer, and a monster. With the trinkets of the past now weighing on my body like tungsten, being the reason for my survival and the death I've caused. And not only have I committed a genocide on the different breeds of fauna and flora that call Petrichor V, home, I killed my own crew. I swung my scythe when I recruited them to this mission. Now their bodies lay below, their souls forever bound to the planet. With no hope of recovering them.

I will personally tell their families, showing what little humanity I have left.

I hope the U.E.S. is happy. They have their rescue story, my story. They have their information, I've killed so many creatures and I could tell you every little detail about them. I could draw detailed pictures because their dying faces are ingrained into my mind. They could write history about me, for I have killed what seems to be a great protector of their moon, a king. I have abandoned artifacts that tell the stories. I hope they have enough information that they get it through their heads that this planet should stay off the star maps.

We have suffered enough from this planet, the opportunities it can bring are not worth the losses. And the planet has suffered enough from us, from humanity. I saw communities and connections on that planet. A planet full of life and creatures living in harmony. Now not only have we taken their lives, we have also taken their home and protectors. All they were doing was protecting their home. But I was forced to kill to protect myself, for I am also a

living creature.

But, in the end, I got the job done. Just like the U.E.S. knew I would. ...

Perhaps I should learn to appreciate my boredom in retirement. And I will happily leave this as my final log, as a warning for those who dare risk experiencing the rain of horror down on Petrichor V.

This is your Captain,
signing off.

“... and so he left, with a new tale to tell.”

Serendipity

By Lola Sky Sisneros

Serendipity; the development of events
by chance in a happy or beneficial way.

Serendipity is what I felt when I first talked with you,
when I learned your name,
when I first hung out with you.

Serendipity is my heart beating as if I ran a marathon,
when I am around you.

Serendipity is my face turning a deep crimson,
just like my heart.

Serendipity is those butterflies flapping happily
in my stomach at just the sight of you.

Serendipity is that soft cloth, that which
you call your skin.
The hazel orbs with the gaze of
hundreds and hundreds of heavenly stars.

Serendipity is that feeling ...

Right?

Serendipity is sharing my favorite food with you.
Letting you get the bigger half of my favorite chocolate.

Serendipity is what I feel when I hear your voice.
That same voice that sounds like church bells ringing in my ears.
The church bells I hear when I glance at your angelic being.

The same church bells I hope to hear at our wedding.

Serendipity is what I feel when I see your smile.
That same smile that looks just like my favorite color.

That same smile
that makes my stomach twist and twirl in rhapsodic.

That same smile which turns my organs
into my own little ecosystem.

Serendipity is what caused a biosphere to form in my stomach,
with fluttering butterflies, dragonflies, bumblebees, and hummingbirds.

All of which flap to rows and rows of ethereal flowers.
Tulips,
Roses, Baby's breath,
Bluebells, Lilies, Fuschias, Peonies.
The running of tiny deer to the lake along my stomach
to fill the thirst of those same deer.
Fireflies, that look to be floating,
zipping to top of the weeping willow
that is in the middle of my environment.
With nests of baby birds,
ready to take off on their own.
With the occasional wind blowing the leaves in my stomach,
that make a slight whistling sound to add to my soft ecosystem.
That's the serendipity that I get when you are around.
The more you are around,
the more my ecosystem thrives,
the more I thrive.
That feeling of serendipity is what causes my ecosystem.
That feeling of serendipity ...
That feeling of ...
That feeling ...
That feeling of *love* is what caused my ecosystem.
That feeling of *enamored* is what caused my ecosystem.
That feeling of *besotted* is what caused my ecosystem.
The words of *endearment*, that I wish to express to you, is what caused my ecosystem.
The wish of *redamancy* is what cause my ecosystem.
Your *seraphic* look is what caused my ecosystem.
You are the cause of my ecosystem.
Not serendipity.

Childhood Dreams

By Lauryn Swanson

All around me, changes are happening
Each day seems to bring something new
On my emotions, it has been quite dampening
I did not know that life would have so many changes as I grew
Holding onto childhood memories is the best thing I can do
While a grown woman I start to turn into

Senior year was supposed to be my simplest one yet
Instead, it has left me anxious and troubled
Of course, I have had good times too which I swear never to forget
But my anxiety is still present and I have struggled
Projects and competitions for clubs compile
Sometimes causing my mood to become hostile

College applications will soon come
Eventually, I will be dressed in a gown with a cap on my head
Then I will really be able to see the grown woman I have become
And that my childhood is now dead
But inside of me, there will always be a little girl
Who is encouraging me to chase after my dreams and take the world for a big whirl

When I feel troubled I just need to remember who supports me
My parents and friends will always be by my side
But most of all the little girl inside is thrilled to see where we ended out to be
It has been worth all the anxiety and tears I have cried
Because I will get to live out my dreams and take pride
“Just like we always wanted,” the little girl screams from inside

One-Sided Mirror (A Bar at the Folies-Bergere)

By Brunelle Tausin

What does he whisper?

Your pale nearly translucent
skin
is touched by the frisson of
the dark bars air

Breasts exposed by the frills
of the lace you wear
and the red blood flower
that adorns at your heart

(has your heart spilt?)

The necklace that your
throat bares
has learnt to hide
its black snake
scales

The green bottles
spread out before you
know your sure hands
as you pour them
into tall glasses
holding promises that can only be
whispered

And the man is there
his light lips
murmuring his demands
of poison and wine

You hear his command
that veils his lingering
hands

He wears black
while his lady waits in white

You look at her
imploring for her
gaze

To brush against your neck

And release you

Alit she is
amongst the somber men
a splinter of light
in your hear

But she cannot see you through the glass

Chekov's Gun

By Brunelle Tauzin

There is a gun in your hand.

“Blood are the tears of Earth, and I am Her betrayer. Bitter is my name in Her mouth.”

~~~~ ~~~~. Do you hear me? Earth does not live. It cannot speak our name

“I remember the ivy. It covered my hands ... like the people's blood covered Her soil. Both a reminder. They are always there, strangling me.”

No, that never happened. There was never ivy, nor blood on the soil. It wasn't real. It wasn't real, I swear. There was only me! Remember? Remember the sweet days when you still believed I was you and you were I? Please, I cannot survive another apocalypse

“Bitter is my name in Her mouth.”

Our name is not bitter. Stop saying that

“Bitter is my name in Her mouth. The people were taken into the pits. Sacrifices were needed or else Earth would have destroyed me. It did not work. It did not work. She is so angry.”

Will you stop talking about the Earth? We left it so long ago

“Get me out. Get me OUT! NOW! SHE IS GOING TO KILL ME!”

A shudder rocks the space station. In the distance you hear the remaining survivors scream in panic. A shadow has descended over the command room where you reside, alone. Something is pulling the space station in. Something big, something thought to be lost. You can see it, backlit by the sun, sprinkles of light on its surface, the only remaining evidence of humanity. You wonder what melted corpses lie under those lights. Certainly not yours. You made sure of it.

You raise the gun to your head, your finger on the trigger. You've always known that you would have to pay the price of your betrayal.

Earth lies before you, bloody and dead. Slowly, She turns

“Bitter is your name in my mouth”

What They Are

By Scarlet Thomason

They are my dreams in the form of faces, in the form of words. I write them into existence. I tear out a piece of my heart, sculpting it into a shape others can understand. Carving my doubts into their clay. Hammering the words I cannot say. The bleeding mass of gray will open its eyes and smile at me, and I will smile back, pretending I am with them.

Their features are a product of my turmoil of thoughts, the things I am too scared to say out loud.

How hard it is to paint vibrant colors with only black ink and white paper.

How hard it is to stop.

I know I'm doing it right when I am a slave to the empty paper, willing them to talk. When it seems I am alone, I am a director, arranging my phantom actors to perform in poems and stories. I backspace and rewrite, I plot and revise, but they are still there with me, patiently ready to share their story with the world, waiting for me to be ready with them.

When I can't play the words out right, I remember their world. Dangerous, murderous, magical. Awful as it may seem, is an escape from the world I was written into.

When I can't play the words out right, I think of how they smiled at me as I introduced them to that world. Potential, hope, intent. I fall in love with them all over again.

How unfair it is to give them beautiful stories, emotions, and lives, just to lock it away? They are as alive as I am, in my mind. Like a chorus, their voices echo the epics of their life through my skull, and I refuse to silence them. They deserve to have their stories told.

My presence will always be with them, as they live all the lives I cannot. I love them with all my heart, but they don't even know I exist. I meet them only in their ascent to madness, where I am waiting for them.

A Master of Emotion

By Bridget Walsh

Things I am an expert in

I am an expert in love
In a gentle smile, the crow's feet appear
A listening ear, the soothing voice, holding me dear
A warm meal is made when ill,
A mother's guiding hand, soothing the chill
I am an expert in love

I am human
I am human

I am an expert in sadness
The welling in the chest, the heaving that appears after
The blurring of the eyes, the absence of laughter,
I feel like I am dying,
The hopelessness of crying
I am an expert in sadness

I am human
I am human

I am an expert in anger
In seeing the lowering of the eyebrow, seeing eyes become cold,
The voices raise, an eye roll,
He steps forward, "Don't test me"
Pressure wells in my chest
I am an expert in anger

I am human
I am human

“We Are Telling Our Stories”

(WATOS) 2024 Residency

“We Are Telling Our Stories” (WATOS) is a free annual 4-week-long community-focused writing/poetry/performance summer program for West Side high school and early college aged youth. While the program is open to all West Side youth, this year we extended a special invitation to Latinx, BIPOC, and immigrant/refugee youth.

The WATOS residency was created by the Center for Documentary Expression and Art (CDEA) in partnership with University Neighborhood Partners (UNP), West Valley Arts, Salt Lake Community College, and Community Writing Center.

2024 WATOS residency featured Dr. David Gonzalez, a celebrated NYC-based poet, storyteller, playwright, and musician of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent, and took place June 3 - June 27, 2024 at West Valley Performing Arts Center in West Valley City. David was joined by award-winning local poets and writers Dr. Masha Shukovich and J.R. Martinez.

In this unique program, participants draw upon their lives and imaginations; discover messages and meanings embedded in their narratives; and shape and share their stories through a range of performances that use voice, song/music, props, movement, and theatrical tools. The residency culminates in a performance developed through the braiding of individual and collective voices.

Vegan Freak

By Rae Aguirre

I know you discredit me
But maybe I could explain something new to you
If you would just give me the time
Let me give you the terms by which you can come to understand
Why I am the way I am
Why I feel so strongly about what you do with your life

The terms factory farm
Gestation crate
Bolt gun

Let me talk to you
Factory farm is a place out of sight
Hellholes where the sun never shines
Where animals stand nearly on top of each other
Hidden away and crammed in like lumber
There is no difference between day and night
The dead lay right beside the alive
Factory farms employ migrant children to wash the blood from their walls at night
Employ their desperate parents to slit throats for slave wages by day
And supply us with 99% of all meat
You eat animals who never saw the sun
You were told a lie about where your food comes from
They had to speed up the process
Keep prices low, and give animals less
Even before the animal dies
We've already taken what's best about life
If your meat is real cheap, someone else paid the price

I can let you in on some industry jargon
A gestation crate is a tiny cage for an expecting mother

She'll spend her pregnancy in a box the size of a coffin
They're kept in these pens to protect profit margin
7 feet by two feet
For most of her short life

She could have lived to be 20, but she'll die by 5
She would be a good pet, she could be your dog's friend
but here she's only worth her ability to reproduce
And her inability to protect her babies from us
There is no sanctity here, they're born to be killed
But I often think about the lives they could have lived

Bolt gun
The bolt gun is the method by which you make murder okay
The bolt gun is an alleged act of mercy
And the bolt gun doesn't work so good
The bolt gun is faulty
Especially when the calf is frantic because he can smell blood
The bolt gun is supposed to stun
But often the bolt gun only knocks an animal unconscious
They wake to find themselves hanging from their leg,
blood swirls down the drain and their skin already pulled from the flesh
It happens more than you'd like to know but I'll tell you anyway
108,000 cows are improperly maimed every day
Resulting in their being bled and skinned alive

You will eat of their flesh and you will call me crazy
But in my lifetime the coral reefs will collapse for your eating habits
In my lifetime factory farming will burn down the Amazon rainforest
In my lifetime, children will starve because their country ships their crops overseas
To feed our livestock instead of human beings
How can you feed 80 billion animals and not 8 billion people?
Its through America's greed
That famine's still seen in our lifetime
In my lifetime billions of animals will be brought into this world just to be slaughtered
In my lifetime billions of calves will be ripped from their mothers

In my lifetime billions of animals will see the sun for the very first time
Out of the side of a slaughterhouse truck
And you will call me crazy for not paying for it

The Crime of Being Us

By Kaz Alvera

If you are killed for the crime of being you
In the soil of a land
That claims to be free
Despite it being stolen
And torn out of others hands.

I will remember you.

Is it really a crime for us to be us?
Is it really a crime for the little boy
Who knew he was a boy from a young age
For the woman who has just recently found out
For the person who could finally connect
A word, a term, to their feelings.

Say it.
Transgender.
I struggle saying it out loud, I struggle with telling people.
Say it
Transgender.
Is it really a crime to be us?

If your flame is extinguished
After gaining the courage,
To light yourself up,
I will remember you.
I will remember the real you.

I will continue to speak for
The many transgender people
Being buried at a far too young age

I will never stop speaking for them
Since their voices were
Ripped out of their throats

I will never stop,
I will continue my life
Always speaking for us.
Always speaking for those of us
Who can speak no more

I will yell, I will fight,
For our lives, for our right to be
Ourselves.

I will make sure they know your name.
Your real name. I will scream it
until it is burnt into their brain
Why is it a crime to be us?

I will continue to speak for us,
For them, for her, for him.
I will continue to speak.

There will never be a world without trans people
You will NOT eradicate us, we aren't going anywhere
The world has NEVER been trans-free, we've been
Here since the beginning of time, and we will
Be here to see the end of it.

We will NOT be silenced!

American Goldfinch

By Irais Balderrama

In fields of gold, the finch takes flight,
A burst of sun in morning light.
With feathers bright, it flits and sings,
A melody on golden wings.

In meadows wide, it finds its home,
Among the blooms, it loves to roam.
A symbol of joy, pure and free,
The goldfinch dances, wild with glee.

Through summer skies, it weaves its thread,
A tapestry of gold and red.
In gentle breeze, it sways and dips,
A kiss of sunshine on its lips.

As autumn leaves begin to fall,
The goldfinch heeds the season's call.
Yet in our hearts, it stays so near,
A song of hope, forever clear.

Observer

By Giovanni Nava Baños

This poem is dedicated to all the black and brown students that have been failed by the school system and by those in power.

I sit in the room
where I see that others
aren't like me
I sit in my classroom,
expected to sit still for an hour, participate, and ask to be excused.
I sit and I realize how
school is a prison
How I only get a 30 minute break,
How I'm expected to punish my bladder
because I didn't feel the need to use the bathroom during the designated break time.
How I'm being surveilled
whether that's from the cameras or a tracker.
How I'm distinguished from my peers for my class, education, and race
How I won't get the same treatment or support like those with privilege.
I am an observer.

The Lion and the Hummingbird

By Brandon Barba

Before the oceans, rivers, and streams there were these little things, the animals! A bear, a tiger, or even a hawk. But the most powerful of all was the lion, with teeth so sharp and a jaw so strong your death would not be long. It was even rumored that he could bite through the sky itself. And who could forget the quickest, brightest, and most brilliant of all; the teeny tiny hummingbird.

The hummingbird, searching for sweets with delight, zipping past with blight, but from afar, a lion stalked with a glare. He declared that he would be the fastest of them all, with a snare. So the lion, still on his mighty high rock with his mighty flock, chased down the little hummingbird. The lion challenged the small bird to a brawl of lions and hummingbirds all in all.

The hummingbird surprisingly accepted the challenge and flew away as all hell on earth broke loose. The lion simply could not catch the hummingbird, each snack could be eaten in only one bite, yet the lion couldn't even put up a fight. As the sky grew cold, the lion grew old. And the hummingbird put their wits to use: while they might not be the biggest bird they had some kick in them: the bird taunted the lion. Once the lion was antagonized the hummingbird flew up to the stars and way past Mars. The lion became so frustrated, he started to attack the sky, the stars came to crash, ice

flew down in a flash, and while the ice melted all lions drowned and the flying little birdies danced around.

I have a dream

By Paz Buchelly

You know what it's like that there's something you crave so much that you don't even know how to explain it. It's something that just thinking about it, your eyes are filled with tears that you contain and a knot is made in your throat. Your body is tense. Your heart is racing. Your skin is bristly. Your voice is broken ...

You know what it's like to hope so much that every time you see that someone is living that dream, the illusion is seen in your eyes and the emotion inhabits you.

Do you know what it's like to feel that you will never be able to reach it ...

Because maybe if ...

Maybe if I had been born into a family of artists / Maybe if I had started getting ready since I was a child / Maybe if I felt comfortable speaking another language / Maybe if I looked different / Maybe if I were taller / Maybe if I were prettier / Maybe if I were thinner / Maybe if my skin wasn't brown / Maybe if my eyes weren't dark / Maybe if I danced better / Maybe if my voice was melodiously / Maybe if my laugh was quieter / Maybe if I could play an instrument / Maybe if I were a better athlete / Maybe if I wasn't so clumsy / Maybe if I didn't doubt me so much / Maybe if I had something more interesting to say / Maybe without the anxiety / Without the shame / Without the fear ...

Maybe if I were brave ...

But in reality, I'm so scared.

I'm afraid of so many things that sometimes I feel that it would be better if I locked myself in a box so that nothing can happen to me.

I'm tired of being scared!!!

And the ironic thing is that what I am most afraid of is being forgotten.

This is my dream, I want to be remembered for daring to feel, I want the world to keep in its memory what I have to say.

I'm here

I'm alive ...

I refuse to let everything that tells me that I'm not capable determine where I can go.

Because I have a dream.

To glorify a final breath

By Rachel G. Canel

To honor those we've lost in gloom,
We must not weave a tragic loom,
But speak of hope, of strength regained,
Of battles fought, of peace attained

To drape despair in velvet cloak in beauty
That hides the weight of pain and fear.
For in this act, a twisted art,
We glamorize a breaking heart,
Ignoring tears that stain the night,
And wounds that bleed beyond our sight.

To glorify a final breath,
Is a misleading dance with death,
For every soul that fades away,
A world of hurt is left to stay,
A ripple felt in silent cries,
A void beneath the hopeful skies.

It's paints with lies,
A picture framed in dark disguise,
Neglecting life, the gift of time,
The chance to heal.

Romanticizing grief distorts,
The truth of life in all its sorts,
We owe the living more than dreams,
But open hearts and endless schemes.

Dried up flower

By Eden Greenway

Dried up flowers
Lasting forever
Their petals falling off in a never ending hour
Forever the same
They remain unchanged
Unable to join other flowers in the dirt
And I wonder if they can feel that hurt

They must be lonely, at least they are in my mind
And it feels so similar to a nursery rhyme
One from a much less messed up time
One told before bed to keep you from crying
One spoken by my mother, shared in an even tone
One that tells you that you are not alone

You are not a dried up flower, left in a vase
No dust covers your petals, nor dulls your hue
You are not as old as you are new
You are not a flower at all
You couldn't be one if you tried

Sueños y Semillas

By Camila “Grimm” Hernandez-Ramos

*“And the yelp
Of the coyote morphing
Into an infant’s cry, filled
With such longing, I wondered
What country I’d stepped into”*

—From the poem “Owl” by Jose Antonio Rodriguez

Miré fijamente a los ojos color avellana y inyectados en sangre de mi padre,
pensando en qué mundo había presenciado.

Qué mundo le había traumatizado y le había traído aquí, a un lugar de tierras robadas y
inmigrantes en busca del sueño.

I stared at the television as people spouted hateful words and messages about immigrants.

That we, Immigrants, were drug dealers, mal hombres, and nothing but disease that should be
erased.

It wasn’t until long I had realized what the truth of this American Dream was: It wasn’t real. Not
for immigrants, not for People of color, nor minorities.

Not the Native people of this land, not for women either.

Muchas veces me pregunté por qué mi padre dejó Michoacán.

Sólo lo vi una vez, pero era precioso.

Aunque estuviera empobrecida, seguía siendo hermosa.

Pero, entiendo por qué se fue. Me dice: “Por una vida mejor, Mija. Para ayudar a mi familia
como tu abuela y tu abuelo”.

Never once did I find myself finding this dream, it wasn’t a dream, it was propaganda.

It was a poison, a lie, a false promise. Mentiro’s

That’s when I realized, to call myself American is to spit on the grave of my ancestors. To spit on
the graves on the Native Americans that have gone missing and those who were killed by
reservation schools.

To spit on the death of families separated by detention centers and the many people killed by
I.C.E or la migra.

Then, I awoke. I saw and witnessed the atrocities committed by many.

How many times will you say we can achieve our dreams here when you only capture and deport
the elderly?

How many times will you say we are a melting pot of cultures and religions only then to take away the rosaries of Latino immigrants?

How many times will you lie, lie, and lie until you and your greedy country are satisfied?

How many times will I and so many others have to march, chant, protest, and shout at our founding fathers to give land back.

Half of America was ours, and the whole land was the Native Americans, Hawaii belonged to the Native Hawaiians until your greedy colonists settlers kidnapped the Queen, arrested her illegally and locked her in her own home!

You pride yourselves on being the land of the free and the home of the brave when you are nothing but cowards and idiots running a corrupt system that is not only killing us but the mother earth.

All for your selfish benefits, goals, and nationalist idealisms.

Give back our Islands, Give back our land, Give back our people, bring back all stolen sisters and brothers.

And know that those who tell you that this is the land of the free is your enemy.

You tried to destroy us, la cultura, mi cultura,

Tried to profit off mi isla de encanto, gentrify it and prostitution-ize it like you have with Hawaii.

Tried to bury the voices of Chicanos and activists.

But you never knew we were seeds.

My Journey

By Iqro Hirey

I didn't go to school, I learned my faith,
It was special, a journey great.
No school, no books, just my belief,
It shaped my path, brought me relief.

First day of high school, I was shy,
No friends around, just a lonely teenage girl .
Now I've found my group, my crew,
With art, dance, and colors so true.

Friendly vibes, I fit right in,
In this new place, my life begins.
Yet Somalia whispers in my dreams,
Football games, and ocean gleams.

Fridays by the sea, finding glass,
Fresh fruits sweet, tales from the past.
Parents' stories of youthful days,
Running wild in sunlit rays.

Fishing trips with friends so dear,
Laughter, joy, and no fear.
Community strong, hearts so wide,
In Somalia, love's our guide.

Dances and songs, traditions old,
Stories of courage, wisdom bold.
With friends close by, and art in my heart,
I, Isni, have made a beautiful start.

Poetry flows like rivers wide,
In Somali hearts, it's our pride.
Henna blooms on wedding nights,
With intricate designs, pure delight.

Buraanbur dances, women sing,
Joy and laughter, memories bring.
Eid feasts with family near,
Sharing love, spreading cheer.

Nomadic tales of camel herds,
Aqal shelters, spoken words.
Hospitality, warm and true,
Somali spirit, in all we do.

Cuisine that's rich, flavors bright,
Canjeero, Bariis, Sambuusa's bite.
Now I'm thriving, feeling free,
But I still miss the land of my ancestry.

Learning religion, no school to attend,
Faith and tradition, my closest friend.
Somalia's essence, in me it stays,
Guiding me through my modern days.

Fault

By Amelia Hunt

It's not their fault
They can't control it
They are just impulsive
It's not their fault
It's the drugs
It's their bio parents
It's their broken brain
Oh your moneys gone?
Well you should have put it in your safe so your siblings couldn't get to it
I shouldn't have to have a lock to my room and a safe for all my special belongings
I shouldn't have to be scared that they might hurt me
I shouldn't have to be worried that I'll lose all my friends because of them
I shouldn't have to be running from my sister or my brother
It's not your fault
Just wait till you graduate and can move out
Just stay in your room
Just hide your money
Just ignore them
It's not their fault
It's the drugs
It's their bio parents
It's their broken brain
We'll guess what
It's not my fault either

To be alive

By Xim Jones

Blissfully drowning in my thoughts
Unaware of the burden I hold
I want to come back
Stuck with a truth that will not be told

You call to me
But water fills my lungs
I struggle to respond
Your voice—
Muted under an impossible ocean

The truth drowns me
Pulls me under in heavy chains
I've heard drowning is peaceful
But this process is violent

Unseen ocean chases my breath
Salt stinging my tongue
I taste blood
The deep scares me
And this seems to never end

Alas, C'est La Vie

By Oliver-Lyric LaFleur

The king has fallen, the king has died.
The kingdom stands alone tonight.
the people riot in the streets
but, alas, c'est la vie.
the time has come now, I believe,
for I, the fool, to take the lead.
Such is power, c'est la vie.
Wiser than a dozen kings,
I recognise the people's needs.
the king is dead, the jester sings,
this is life, c'est la vie.
le monde tourne,
les gens vivent,
le roi est mort,
notre maison reste,
et maintenant nous terminons avec
C'est la vie,
the stage is set.

Slam Poetry

By Liam Mountain La Malfa

When I heard the slam poet
Speak of sparkling rivers and lakes,
Towering mountains of blue-shifted glory,
I looked at the blue light of my phone,
To see how much more of this I was going to have to deal with.

When I read the purple words in the poetry book
My eyes grew tired,
Skipping and stumbling like a marathon runner,
As I tried to stay awake,
I can't even finish this stanza I'm soooooo ...

Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

Where was I?

Oh, that's right.

When I traveled to the rivers, the lakes, and the mountains,
I felt the playful touch of the breeze,
And the rocks,
The warmth, sun, and the stars,
And I stretched out my arms wider than the wingspan of a mixed metaphor,
and I cried,
and I wept,

And I heard a voice, somewhere within me,
Somewhere without me,
And it cried with me,
“Let there be Light”

And there was Light.

No. 7

By Maxium LaPlante

Look you on others how you look at me?
I've asked again of my friends' good report
Blinded as Cupid, mine eyes cannot see
Whether your kindness is nature or sport
Talk you to others how you talk to me?
All with a flatterer's silvery tongue
Eloquence infinite, every decree
I'd seem sole audience of such songs sung
Act you with others how you'd act with me?
Can I believe that there's something else there?
Oh, how remarkably happy I'd be
But if it weren't, I shouldn't much care
How I would wish my suspicions were true
Everyone else hopes the same as I do
To the silver-tongued beauty who has stolen my heart

Immortal

By Adwita Mandiwal

How can you ever say tomorrow for sure?
How can you be certain there will be more?
How do you know that today's not the last?
These are questions that everyone has asked.
No one's immortal, and that's the truth.
You know it's coming, even from youth.
The time we have is short and fast,
So don't dwell on things from the past.
No one lives forever,
Your time can end wherever and whenever.
You should value each day,
Only focus on what's happening today.
Life is short, but that doesn't mean you should worry,
And live life in a hurry.
Live life to the fullest. You only get one shot.
Think about what you can do, not what you cannot.
Don't hold grudges, make others smile.
Live every single day with style.
The end of our journey is unstoppable,
But at least, at the end, you can say you lived the best life possible.

My grandma

By Thalia Melchor

I don't think I'll ever get to hear you walk in heels ...

Click
Clack
Click
Clack

Like on your wedding day, in your beautiful white gown, and beautiful brown hair.
Even though you're an outdoor girl, fishing at the lake, taking in every stray animal on the street.

You're a woman who loved to go to church, You're a woman who was told she wouldn't be able to have kids, you're a woman who was told she wouldn't be able to LIVE!

My grandma grew to be 62, with diabetes, and chronic blindness.
Yet she lived a wonderful life, marrying the love of her life, two beautiful children, and four wonderful grandchildren.

She lived a fulfilling life, not one doctor thought she would live past 10.

Yet she did and she lived the most comfortable life.

aNNa

By P. K. Vikari

I hate you.

I hate how perfect you are.

I hate how you overshadow me.

I hate how you were valedictorian and I hate how you succeed at everything you do.

I hate how you don't need to put effort in anything you do but when I try, I'm still never quite as successful.

I hate how no matter how I try and live up to you, I fail miserably.

I hate that everything I do, every accomplishment, every failure, is compared to you.

I hate how everyone loves you.

I hate that you're my inspiration.

I hate that I'm not you.

I hate that I've always been in your shadow.

I hate how everyone expects me to be effortlessly perfect like you.

I hate how I'm always second to you in a two-man race.

I hate how you're the golden child.

I hate how ridiculously perfect you are.

I hate how jealous I am of you; it's been 14 years and I'm tired.

I hate that you've been nothing but kind to me and I have no reason to hate you.

I hate that out of everyone else in the world, I'd sacrifice the most for you.

But most of all?

I hate that I love you.

Trophy Child

By Amy Reyes Renova

Trophy child
Your achievements hang on the walls
And On the fridge
Always on display
Like That drawing you did in second grade
 Or the small frog toy you painted as a child
How I crave to be you
With your natural charisma
And beauty
How I wish I lived your life
Getting to observe
To watch and learn
To Identify the good and the bad
From watching the scapegoat lonely child,
 And me, The responsible other parent
How I wish
I got to pick and choose
My own personality
Getting to craft it
To bend and mend my traits
To please mother and father
But
That is not my privilege
That is not my role
I am your other parent
The responsible child
Mother and fathers therapist
 The one they never really had to “worry” about
Do to my “independent nature”
Do to being dura,
Strong

So,
I'll watch you now
Watch you grow
And reach your dreams
Without the barriers I had to overcome

You won't have have to hide
Or seek refugee behind four walls
Because you've seen
And heard how they treat the scapegoat
Because you
Our trophy child got to watch

You won't have to sit
And wonder what to do next
Because you'll have
Seen how to pick your classes
Friends
And way of dress
How to fill out College applications
And be the best

So don't squander this privilege
 Don't let it slip through your fingers
Because Me,
And The Scapegoat
Have lived enough mistakes for you to learn from
We've held in
And shed enough tears for you to give up

So please
Trophy child
Live up to your name
Accept all of mothers praise
And fathers loving gaze
Because we can't have that spotlight.

Insomnia

By Perla Reyes

Sleep, Sleep
Don't Leave
I'm getting tired of counting sheep
One by one
Hoping Sleep will Come
When they're done
But instead, the clock keeps ticking
Minutes feel like hours
While I lie awake
Waiting for Dawn
As the moon shines on my restless eyes
As my mind ponders my demise
Thinking there is a man in disguise
And my mind continues to criticize
And televise
My daily life
I keep counting
And I keep weeping
While everyone else is peacefully sleeping.
Maybe someday,
I'll find some rest,
But tonight
I'm a sleepless mess

Change my mind

By Isabella Rodriguez

Me: Sitting in an open field watching the sunrise. The sun is blinding and yet everything is still in twilight ...

Franklin (interrupts): Excuse me, Miss! George Floyd once served time in a Texas prison for an armed home invasion. Does this change how you feel about him?

Me: I'm sorry, what was your name?

Franklin: Franklin Veaux.

Me: Franklin Veaux, small business owner, sexuality educator, writer. Lives in Portland, Oregon, joined the online forum Quora in June 2012.

Yet another cog in the “well, um, actually” machine. Hmmm, let me think about that. ... No, Franklin, that information does not change how I feel. And come to think of it, I don't think your half-assed attempt at “alternative thinking” would change anyone's mind.

Do you want to know why?

Because Kyle Rittenhouse stormed a Black Lives Matter protest with an illegally obtained semi-automatic weapon, killing two people and injuring one, and the jury ruled that he acted in “self-defense.”

Because in 2019, a woman named Zoe Reardon was charged with killing three pedestrians with

her car, one of which was a three month old little girl. She received 36 months probation.

Because Jeffrey Dahmer terrorized the black and brown people of Milwaukee when he kidnapped and murdered 17 of their friends, their brothers, their children, and is still idealized and romanticized to this day.

Do their actions change the way you feel about them? Or is it only when a black person makes you uncomfortable that the gears finally start turning in that thick head of yours?

Honestly Franklin, I don't care that Floyd did time. Because given the climate of our justice system, it would be a miracle if he DIDN'T go to prison in his lifetime.

And who are you to judge the life he lived, the struggles he bore, the people he loved, the stares, the comments, the judgment, the blame that comes with being born into a black body, all for it to end with his face on the pavement calling out not for god, BUT HIS OWN MOTHER.

But you just don't get that, do you? You are so wrapped up in being right without learning, in being heard without listening, in being a revolutionary without being willing to fight in the war. And while your LITERAL black and white thinking does not surprise me in the slightest, you actually pointed out something

really interesting, Franklin: that despite the odds never being in our favor, we are still more than the failings, and the guilt, and the heartache that some people will only ever see us as.

But guess what, Franklin, I get it. Every court needs its jester, right? Every circus needs a clown. And it's cool, because guess what? We're still here.

And we do it in spite of you, the people who want us to fail.

You will never change my mind.

Yolkatl

By Adán Quetzal Muñoz Sánchez

Caminador de dos mundos
Walker of two worlds
El físico y el espiritual
The physical and spiritual
No pertenezco aquí ni allá
I don't belong here nor there
Pero aún pertenezco en ambos mundos
But I still belong in both worlds
Soy una creatura
I am a creature
De aire y tierra
Of air and earth
Caminador de dos mundos
Walker of two worlds
Soy un yolkatl

I'm done with life

By Clairra Walker

I am so tired.

I'm tired of being what you call "the therapist friend".

I'm tired of people getting annoyed with me when I share my feelings.

I'm tired of having to save the people I care about from themselves.

And I am tired of barely being able to get out of bed in the morning.

I am so tired of the guilt. The guilt I feel, because my life has always been what you call "easy".

So why am I so depressed?

Nothing that bad has ever happened to me.

I am on the verge of tears everyday, but I can never cry.

I feel so bitterly numb that I have reached my breaking point.

"I'll be fine when school gets out."

That's what I thought.

But here I am.

Here I am, standing in front of you all tonight, telling you my story.

Here I am, giving up.

Here I am, not being able to eat because of the medicine.

The medicine that the doctor gave me to make me "happy".

It's not working.

But I'll just "suck it up", because apparently all teenagers are depressed these days.

Apparently that means it hurts less.

Apparently since we are all struggling, that means we should be okay.

Apparently I have no right to be depressed, because I've always had what I needed to survive.

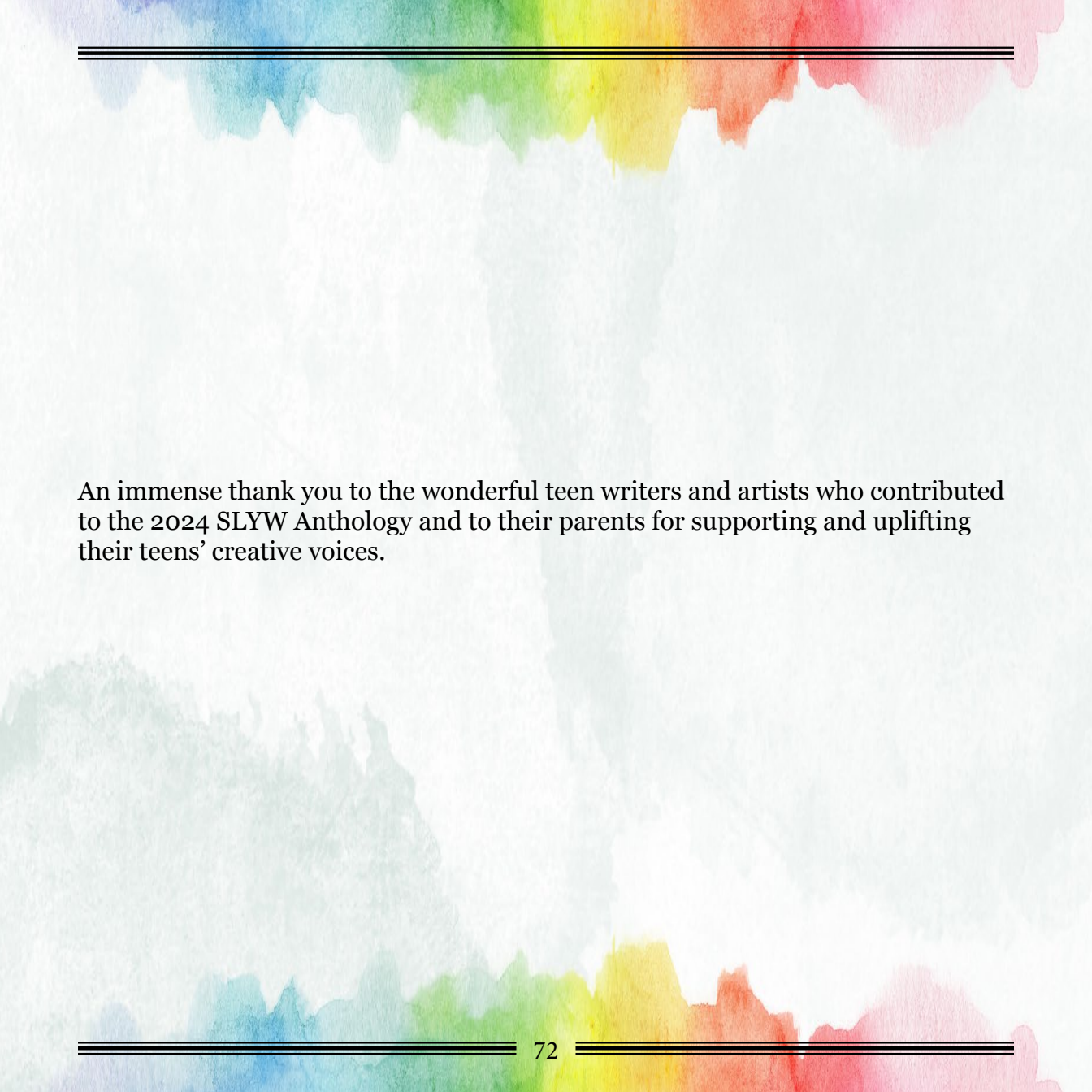
So I'm sorry.

I'm sorry that I'm not happy enough for you.

I'm sorry I'm so scared of people getting annoyed with me.

I'm sorry that I hate myself so much.

I'm sorry that I can barely feel anymore.



An immense thank you to the wonderful teen writers and artists who contributed to the 2024 SLYW Anthology and to their parents for supporting and uplifting their teens' creative voices.

Visit us and find more resources at:

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