

# Morpheus Literary Magazine



**Fall 2019**

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Kasandra Christner, Editor-in-Chief

Carly Evans, Assistant Editor & Layout Editor

Fletcher Grey, Poetry Editor

Melissa Risser, Art Contributor

Ivy Connolly, Art Editor

Lucy Biederman, Faculty Advisor

## Special Thanks

We would like to thank Melissa Risser for providing us with the amazing art featured on our cover and Haley Wulff for assembling the cover!

We would especially like to thank Dr. Kimmel, former English professor and Morpheus advisor, for judging our poetry and prose contest!

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## Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

Our Fall 2019 issue continues Morpheus Literary Magazine's goal to showcase the vastly different voices of Heidelberg students. With this in mind, this issue contains a wide variety of short stories, poetry, art, and photography. These pieces vary from traditional poetry styles to experimental forms of short stories, culminating to show the creativity of this campus.

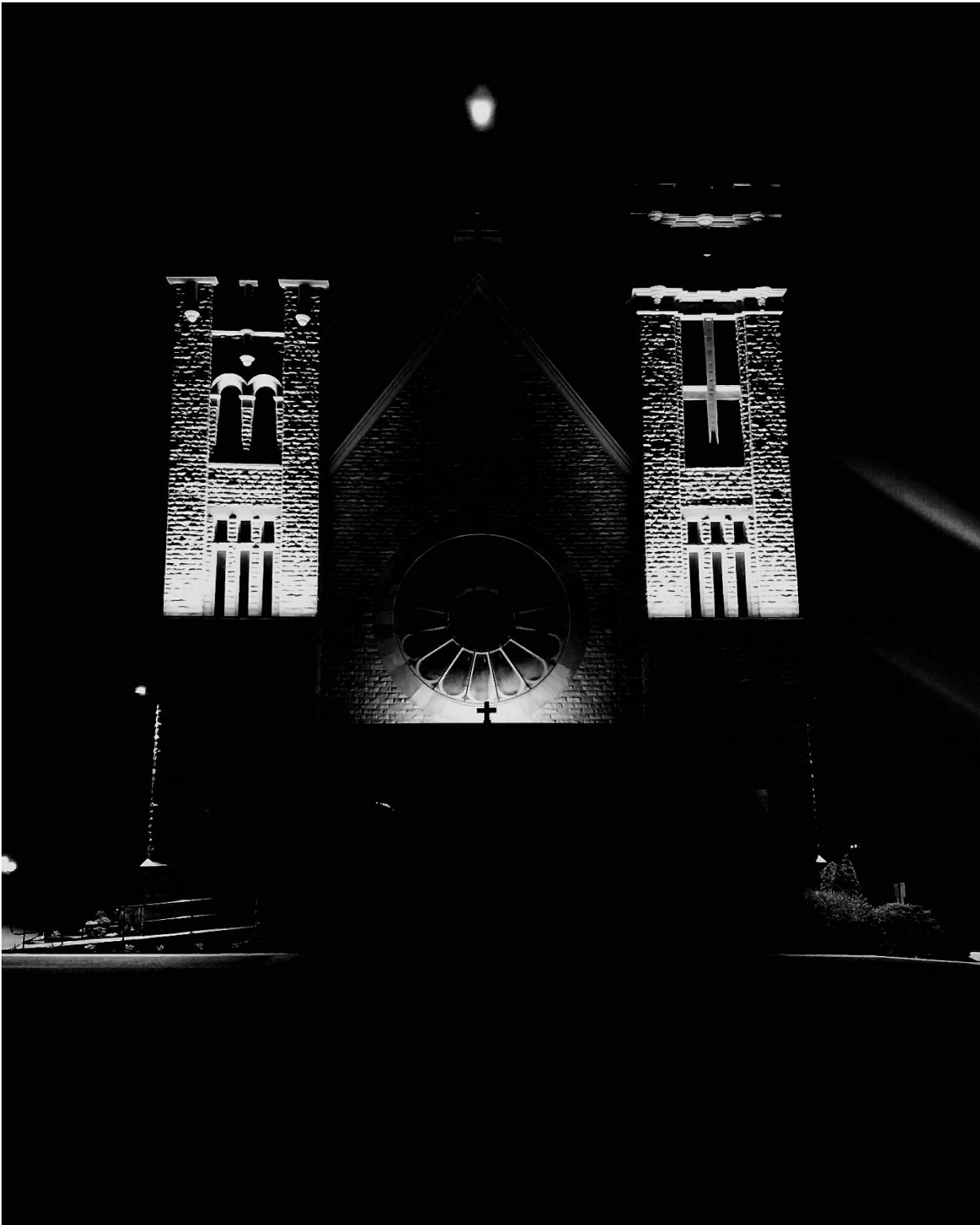
Featured in this issue are the winners and honorable mentions of our annual writing contest that we hold every fall semester. However, this year, we limited our winners to one for poetry and one for prose, with an honorable mention for both categories. We hope you enjoy these pieces, judged and chosen anonymously by retired professor and past Morpheus faculty advisor, Dr. David Kimmel.

We also wanted to extend a thank you to our faculty advisor, Dr. Lucy Biederman. She works hard to make Morpheus the best it can be, connecting us with English department events and to the visiting writers of the Jean Warren Gekler Writers Series. Thank you so much for your help this semester in facilitating our goals for this magazine.

Finally, as I graduate this December, I wanted to give a huge thank you to Morpheus's publication staff, every student who has submitted to Morpheus, every professor that's helped spread the word about our publication, and to anyone in general who has made this literary magazine possible. Thank you all so much for coming together to make my role as editor go as smoothly as possible. It's been a pleasure serving as editor-in-chief since 2018 and I'm excited to see where Morpheus goes in the future.

Please enjoy this issue and all of its wildly different forms of writing and art!

Sincerely,  
Kassandra Christner  
Editor-in-chief



*Photo by Jacob Wheeler*

## Nobody Ends Up Dead in a Bathtub, Everyone Keeps Their Organs

Carly Evans  
Prose Winner

Amon stared at the hotel room's carpet. It was ugly despite being in a fairly nice hotel. A brownish-red once-fluffy flattened into the floor after years of being trodden on. He couldn't imagine it had been changed or even cleaned in the past decade. It was an awful sight, but it was better than making eye contact with the half-dressed man in a wig and a skirt sitting across from him.

"This is embarrassing," he mumbled.

"Don't worry about it. This stuff happens a lot."

"I can't believe they did this to you."

"I've been hired for pranks before, sweetie. It's okay. It's not... unusual, and it's not the worst thing that could happen. Trust me, this isn't a big deal compared to some other shit I've Seen."

"It's still awful," Demario said and paused. "I'm sorry, I don't know your real name."

"It's Demario," they said, reaching out their hand. "Álvarez."

"I'm Amon Levi."

Demario smiled. They grabbed the sweater they had thrown to the floor only minutes before and pulled it on over their head. Amon had always imagined sex workers would dress in revealing clothing and not be subtle about their occupation. But Demario wore a modest outfit with modest makeup. Anyone who passed them wouldn't suspect what their job was.

And maybe that was a little judgemental of Amon. Maybe he watched too much TV that

poked fun at prostitutes who wore tacky makeup and tight dresses.

“It’s nice to meet you, Amon. Maybe meeting this way isn’t nice, but it’s better to meet a nice person through a sleazy prank rather than not meet them at all.”

“I guess? I think I’d rather have had this never happen.”

“I get it.”

“It’s just that it’s not every day your friends hire a cross-dressing prostitute to meet you for a blind date.”

“Okay, first, I don’t like being called a prostitute. It sounds cheap, and I’m pretty expensive. I’m an escort. I’m classy. I do dinner first.”

Amon hid his smile behind his hand. Demario seemed to relax at seeing him stifle a giggle. Amon hadn’t realized how they had been sitting with their shoulders tense until they pulled their hair out of their face and crossed their legs.

“It’s okay. You can laugh at that,” Demario said. “But don’t call me a prostitute. I mean, yeah, I am something like a prostitute, I guess. But it’s not a term we like. It’s ‘escort.’ And trust me, this hasn’t been the worst shift of my career.”

“Even though you’re not... working?”

“I still got paid, and you didn’t turn out to be a serial killer—that I know of. Your friends are generous tippers. They’re little shits, but they must know their way around this business pretty well. I don’t imagine I’m the first person they’ve hired.”

“Oh, God.”

Amon didn’t want to think about how his friends—no matter how little he considered them friends at that moment—being frequent customers of the escort services around the city even though it all made sense. They always bragged about their midnight activities but every

woman Amon watched come near them rolled her eyes or sneered.

“And it’s probably not my place to say this,” Demario said. “But they don’t sound like good friends. Not if they set you up with an escort for the night without telling you. Not gonna lie, that’s something I’ve heard horror stories about.”

“They’re awful friends. I don’t know why I put up with them. They’ve been joking about setting me up with a prostitute—escort, sorry—for a while now because they’re convinced I need something like that.”

“Have you got anyone else?”

“Not really.” Amon shrugged. “My younger brother, I guess.”

Demario beamed.

“I have a little brother, too! He’s my best friend. I don’t think I’m his best friend, but it’s fine. He’s young. He needs friends his age. Anyway, I can list a thousand reasons why your friends are shit, and I haven’t even met them. First, they thought hiring an escort who cross-dresses would be funny. Why? Because they think gender expression out of the norm is funny? Did they think it’s a sex thing? I’ve gotten that before. I always tell those people to back off. They’re freaks. I just like switching up how I look sometimes. Some people get me in a suit. Some people get me in a dress. Maybe one day I’ll pull a Hillary and wear a pantsuit! The possibilities are endless! It’s 2019, your friends have to think outside the gender binary.”

Demario waved their hands around and wiggled around on their chair as they spoke. Amon thought it felt wrong that he was beginning to enjoy the conversation. He usually liked stewing in his own misery for a few hours before getting over his problems. But Demario made it hard for him to pity himself. The light jokes and the eccentric movements made Amon feel more comfortable than he had been all night.



“They’re assholes,” Amon said. “I don’t even think I consider them friends anymore.”

“I think you deserve better. I know we just met, but I get good vibes from you. You’re nice.”

An awkward silence settled over them.

Amon didn’t know how to acknowledge the compliment. It had been a long time since he heard an honest-to-God compliment about being “nice.” His friends usually hurled insults at him that they would later claim were jokes, telling him how he needed to find someone to date and needed to get out of his apartment. They didn’t understand that his life didn’t begin and end with bars and girls like theirs did. He enjoyed spending time with his brother and listening to him talk about his classes—how much he was enjoying his psychology class and how much he dreaded going to tutoring sessions every Sunday just to get a passing grade in his math class. Amon didn’t want to leave his apartment when his brother was there.

Oh.

Maybe he understood what Demario meant when they said they were best friends with their brother.

“Do you like true-crime?” Demario asked.

“What?”

“You know, like all the podcasts? Or 48 Hours? Or are you more a cult person?”

“Sure?”

“I *love* true-crime podcasts. I was listening to one right before I got here. Oh, my God. I got goosebumps. It’s about this girl who goes missing, and the case is cold, right? So, these people find out—oh, wait. I don’t want to spoil anything in case you want to listen to it later.”

Amon wasn’t sure how he was supposed to listen to it when Demario had yet to give

him the title. He also thought it would be better to have Demario tell the story. He had heard how some podcast hosts talk. Demario was more entertaining.

“No, it’s fine. Tell me about it.”

“How about we get a bottle of wine or something and talk until your time is up? There’s still an hour left.”

“I don’t want to waste your entire evening—”

“My evening is already cleared for you. Think of it this way: your ‘friends’ put a credit card on this room. Room service is on them. And you’re not a serial killer, are you?”

“No.”

Demario tilted their head and squinted at him.

“You promise that in a couple weeks some guy in his basement with a mediocre true-crime podcast won’t be talking about police finding me dead in the bathtub?”

Amon laughed. He shook his head.

“How do I know you’re not a serial killer?” He asked. “Or what if I wake up missing a kidney?”

“I’ll let you in on a secret I don’t tell many people—I fainted while dissecting frogs in high school biology. I think you’re going to keep all your organs tonight.”

“Alright, you seem safe.”

“Cool. Let’s waste your friends’ money.”

Demario jumped to their feet and walked across the room to the phone. They picked up the wine list left by the hotel staff.

“What are you in the mood for?” they asked. “Red or white?”

Amon felt guilty for a second before he remembered how his friends had tried making

his evening miserable. He couldn't wait to see them the next day and tell them all about how much he enjoyed last night. He wanted to see their faces turn from smug smirks to confused frowns right before one of them realized there was a ridiculously large charge on his card.

“Red.”



*Art by Melissa Risser*

## Firelight

Caleb Hess  
Honorable Mention

Ash curled up into the sky and dodged the thinning branches of the trees which hung above. Orange light flowed across the tin cups and folding chairs and crept into the small opening of the tent tucked away at the corner of the campsite. Squirrels and skunks and raccoons and other unknown things cut through the brush just beyond the edge of the glow, curious but unthreatening as long as the fire stayed lit — when it went out, they became bears and wolves and men with knives. A cooler full of foreign foods hung like a trap from one of the shorter trees, just in case they were bears. And that rope would do no good against anything that was both hungry and equipped with a knife, so they kept the fire lit.

The fire had been burning for so long, now. There was enough wood to burn forever, but doing that was dangerous. The wood was shelter, and when it was fuel, it wasn't any good at hiding anything. So it stayed lit even during the day, to cook and for comfort and to keep the shuffling sounds at bay. The tin cups held water and coffee and beer and were always sipped on around the fire, and usually in the safety of the folding chairs.

Around the fire, most things happened.

She would sing the songs that she remembered from the radio, she would tell the stories of the worst movies she could remember. He would close his eyes and try to hear the guitars strumming behind her voice, imagine the explosions in bright red and yellow when she would make a booming sound with her voice. He kept his eyes closed when she talked. If he opened them, the colours would fade.

They would throw more logs onto the fire. The longer they stayed awake, the more vulnerable they became.

Daylight, of course, was safer — the cloud-blotted skies didn't require that they let the fire burn, but the fear that if it went out it wouldn't come back kept them stoking at it even as the Sun arced overhead.

The day was pitted with birdsong and locusts' chirps. It was a wall of noise different from the creeping and insidious whispered shouts of the night. The days swam in a warm, indifferent hum of high notes, like a waterfall plinking onto shale; constant and surprisingly deafening.

But the days were always so much shorter than the nights.

“Belle, I was hoping that you could sing a song with electric guitars tonight.” [a sense of reminiscence and distance from modernity; emulation of the past]

She did, and her voice carried across their clearing, bounced off of the soundproof trees bathed in orange light.

He didn't have much as far as stories went, but he was good for other things. He could draw, and make paints from things in the forest. He could turn dirt into deep ocean gyres with a few berries and time.

The woods were deep, a body crawling with creatures and laced with streams, networks that took the words from one clearing to the next. They sat somewhere near the center, the faltering pulse of their fire the forest's arrhythmic heartbeat.

They pilfered the forest's crevices, they stole fruits and grasses and fish which belonged to no one, and so they could not be stolen. But still, they feared being caught.

They feared being scooped up by something larger than themselves even more.

Their clearing was a ceremonial place, with stacks of rocks and effigies diffused around the fire ring, around the tent and the places where the light touched so that they would know if anything came to take their food or to peek inside their tent or to try to put the fire out.

They woke breathlessly and suddenly one night when the rocks tumbled.

One by one, as if a gust wound its way precisely towards their fire, the rock towers and sentries fell — seized by an unyielding force.

She lurched out of bed, in fear for the fire, and tumbled into the dim clearing.

A small rat, tousled brown fur jagged in the quivering light, was headfirst in the tin cup, tipped over far from the fire. It had stumbled, frightened, into the rocks. It was a threat to itself, but not to them.

She tipped the cup back over and the small brown thing scuttled away, back into the darkness beyond.

She turned to the tent, her heart beating slower, and saw his chestnut tan face in the tents' opening.

They were safe, for now. They were at home in the orange splay, the broken yolk that seeped into the trees. They were safe from whatever the mouse became in the shadows of the trees, in the twisted timber spindles, where leaves could be knives.



*Art by Melissa Risser*



## I Dream of Teryl

Fletcher Grey

When I went to sleep that night, I felt calm. I was frustrated, because that was the same night that I had relapsed into my own self-indulgent habits. Ones of lust crazed fury, and yet others simply said, “for the next time. For the next time.” And then they left, because lust is often confused with love itself, and nobody knows the wiser. Without that distinction, we would not be within our own definitions. Humanity has a definitive form, but Choice, is inevitable. I am a straight man, and yet I somehow dreamed of Teryl.

He came in with his group of friends. They were drinking. I sat alone. And while this may seem like the world’s difference to you, this (to me) made none. He was tall where I was short. Lightly tanned to my lighter complexion. Blonde hair with somewhat longer fringes, and I that darkened forest. He had a beard, and I had stubble. But from the moment he laid eyes on me, I couldn’t shake them. Piercing green with that dash of blue that ensnares ten or twenty men within the hour, and yet here I am drinking gin out of a small tumbler halfway down the aisle, the last seat at the bar. It was simply lit, and it smelled of ashen cigars and rusty tin-cans. Yet there I sat... and he came by to introduce himself.

We, talked. For so long. We talked as if the night was carrying us away, two strangers who loved each other but never noticed the first instance of contact. With heads on tails and spinnings of stories, of fighting, of treasures long gone. Of things loved and lost. Of passions gained, and fires lit. Of embers stomped out too soon.

Of adventures never to be lived out again because Joe Schmoe died in the next town over of a heart attack, which was sad, but allowed us to celebrate the life he lived anyways.

We carried on about Cindy Lou Who and the geese she kept by the creek, but lost them because the tide got too high and carried them off into the rocks. She had some eggs, but that lingering loss came in and wrecked her,

like the leftovers of Mary Neu's breakfast scraps for the pigs. Their greedy maws took everything in, but never gave one cent back to the owners. Yet she still loved them anyways, because of their dependency on her due to their own inabilities.

As if he himself were someone I could entrust every little secret in. Every vulnerable thought, every personable aspect into myself, I felt a pleasure unknown for so long. The pleasure of intimacy. The pleasure of love. And so... we kissed. Not for two few seconds and longed for something more. Longing for what others might compare a harlot to.

Am I a liar? Am I a cheat? Am I something that discredits the lot, I don't care! These were things I fought for... but sexually, I wasn't into him. None of this was for me, and just looking into his eyes for that split second, he knew also. And yet I was left with this sense of yearning, that maybe, Maybe this is all I have. That constant intimacy for others, and yet there was nothing left for me.

Where can I get my share, when it comes to the effects of love? I don't know.

I knew I'd get it in full someday, but... that wasn't the day. I was never given the answer I wanted, because he simply smiled, hugged me, and then left. During the conversations earlier, he wrote his number down on a ring stained napkin, his friends jeering him along with those

voices of drunken midnighters, party goers, ruined actresses who'd never make the final cut. Fellow harlots and prostitutes looking at me as if I was eyeing a prized slab of meat, but this was no mere morsel. No. This was intimacy. This, was private.

He waived it by them, and then he looked at me, stars in his eyes. He was looking with frenzied passion. He looked at me as if I were the one, but someone to keep and to hold onto. Intimacy, it seems, was in short supply; but I was left higher than any other kite. He put it down, looked at me, and simply walked away.

He didn't leave his number.

He left some advice.

“It's gonna be Ok. You can Walk. I do too.”

This... was love.

This tension that pulled me apart, limb from limb, came and went with the passing of mere seconds.

This wasn't lust.

This was intimacy.

This was Love.

... That, was the last time I thought about him, at least from that night onwards. I paid my tab. Walked away, crumbled up the note, and kept walking forward. Because, in all honesty, I was walking alone; and I didn't care who I ran into. Because I loved them all. I loved this marvelous, wild adventure, whenever a street and turn led me to someplace new. The

farmhouses, the cities, the towns and hamlets long since past. The way things just kept moving, forever onwards. I did too, because... where else was I supposed to go? And then, just like that,

I woke up.

I took a shower.

But I still look back and Dream.

I Dream, of Teryl.



*Art by Melissa Risser*

## Wholly Women

Kasandra Christner

Poetry Winner

With public restrooms as battlegrounds,  
opinion and perception are AR-15s.  
I am the enemy, as the soldiers question  
which side I am fighting for.

But I don't ask the dysphoric question,  
heart, brain, body, agreeing that  
I am wholly woman.

Urban but still with rural roots,  
women with wide hips and pink lips,  
do not look up from their menus as "sir" slips out,  
filling and spoiling the air separating us.

How can I fight for my side,  
when the rest of it cannot truly accept that  
I am wholly woman?

With suburbs as battlegrounds,  
hatred and bigotry have their AR-15s,  
despite the beautiful Subway employee  
slipping her number in my bag with dainty sly precision.

We are wholly women.

## The Sound of Silence

Amanda Overy  
Honorable Mention

You grab my tongue and tell me to speak,  
yelling at me to stop mumbling,  
saying you can't hear me.

You twist my arm when pictures are taken,  
"Say Cheese!"  
I don't want these memories.

My mind goes blank  
when the camera clicks  
and the light flashes  
my eyes don't even flinch.

You stand on my toes, telling me to jump  
"Higher, Higher, HIGHER!"

Laughing hysterically because you know,  
I am trying with all my might.

A might that is very slight and troubled.



*Art by Melissa Risser*



## Hummingbird Heart

Aliza Finefrock

Do not grieve for me, witness to history.  
Let not legacy reveal my invariance-  
The multi-faceted emerald in its prime,  
Speaking honeyed words to bide his time.  
Do not seek me in the salt of the earth.  
Come into the water, winged rapture-  
Desire is no soft force,  
And I am starving for cruelty.

## Angel

Chayenne Powers

Locks of orange, red, and brown.  
Eyes the shape of almonds,  
A distinct shade of burnt,  
Like brown glass absorbing all bright,  
Colors of content, tired, and gleam.

Face of an angel,  
White and pale as can be,  
Clearer than the sky on a cloudless day.  
A subtle curve of lip marks her face,  
Smoother than blended paint--  
A canvas of warmth and lovely.

Eyebrows arched in smooth,  
A shallow arc of soft and groove.  
Dark but welcome they plead  
To onlookers and gazers,  
She welcomes all to thee.

Pleasing in all aspects,  
Welcoming, Warm,  
Excellent host.  
She gazes faintly away,  
Unaware of her vision  
That she owns.

## An Empty Stomach

Amanda Overy

Their bones stick out  
While our biggest problem is weight  
Not whether it's about  
But having too much on our plate

Their eyes droop  
While ours glow with satisfaction  
We say we'll help them through the loop  
But yet we take no action

They plead on the streets  
We rush by in our cars  
While crumpled signs float in defeat  
What if that was a kid of ours?

They were war heroes, broken down mothers,  
lost children of torn-down homes.  
They are our own struggling brothers,  
We wouldn't turn *him* down on his own.

So why do we rush by?  
Without barely a second thought?  
Take those leftovers, piled high,  
don't brush them to the side like an afterthought.

40 million people go hungry in the United States  
It's our own blood we let starve  
What's the big deal of sharing one plate?  
The facts exist without a curve.

Pick out those lonely cans,  
The ones hiding in the back of your storeroom  
It never hurt to lend a hand,  
To assist in cases of sorrowful doom

What if that were you?  
If all your attempts had failed,  
after all you've done, it fell through,  
and your friends and family all bailed?

We wouldn't sit by without a blink  
if those we loved were in need,  
if they were beginning to sink,  
we wouldn't worry about the extra mouth to  
feed.

This world is starving, trying to survive.  
It's time we stop, quit rushing by.  
Lend a hand, keep the love alive.  
Even a simple smile, a short wave 'hi'.

It's time to take a stand  
to do more than turn a face.  
We are all sharing the same land,  
all apart of the same human race.

Their bones stick out and faces droop  
stomachs growl and remain empty.  
Let us become one big battle group,  
let us work to all be full, liquidate that  
empty.



*Art by Chayenne Powers*

## The Town at Midnight

Aedan Ginty

The bells chime in the courtyard none,  
“The day is finally done!”  
With froth on mouth  
And words to spout,  
The people made of Cain  
Come into the land of the sane.  
Their mellow tone  
Call the ruthians from their homes,  
With cheers of three  
Going to thee.  
The growl of the pack,  
A wry young man with lots of fat,  
And a tune of train whistles nigh  
All crescendo into a blinking sky.  
The people of the town  
Call for an end to the sound  
Of rough feet.  
Shadow’s creak  
On the courtyard square,  
Yelling out, “A cheer to take me there!”  
Black and tans  
Arrive from vans,  
Their posh attire  
Paralleling a jester squire.  
“Break it up you arrogant twats!”  
The bald bastards said from a box.  
A gurgle of silence arose  
From men and women as drunk as their foes.  
Then they beat their head,  
Like a barrel of lead,  
And rushed into the force,  
Which turned into a riot of sorts.  
In less than an hour  
The two groups diminished like a spring shower.  
The two went their separate ways,  
Knowing this will happen again the very next day.  
They were stuck in this endless routine  
By Yours Truly it seems.

I write of this town  
Where the people doth drown  
Their sorrows

In broken hallows.  
This riot happens every night  
When the clock strikes midnight.  
They can never get out of this rut  
Until the poet clicks the pen shut.  
Until then, they have no escape  
To free them from this hellscape.