

# Morpheus Literary Magazine



Fall 2024

# Morpheus Literary Magazine

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Cover By Rowan Gill, Designed in Canva



## Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

I am pleased to share the Fall 2024 issue of the *Morpheus Literary Magazine*! Our former editor-in-chief, the lovely Emma Wright, has since graduated and moved on to bigger and better things. We thank her for her years of dedication, as well as her ongoing support. Lennon and I hope we fill her shoes when it comes to the newest issue.

In this issue, we've curated a variety of poems, artwork, photographs, personal stories, and fiction pieces from Heidelberg students. While we do not have a specific theme for our works, each and every one of the works we feature are gems.

To our contributors, thank you for entrusting us with your words and allowing us to share them. Your stories enrich our pages and inspire us. And to our readers, thank you for embarking on this literary journey with us.

We thank you for your support throughout this school year as we've continued to expand the publication and the group's presence throughout campus, and we hope you enjoy the Fall 2024 Edition of the *Morpheus Literary Magazine*.

Sincerely,

Rowan Gill  
Co-Editor-in-Chief

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# POETRY WRITING COMPETITION

Judges: Rowan Gill, Opossum Kreuzscher, and Emma Wright

Writers were given 30 minutes to write a poem based on the provided prompt.

“Write down a number between 5 and 100. Then write a poem using that number for your word count.”

## Untitled (45 Words)

Third Place Winner: Rachel Shulaw

They are crying  
no not physically  
but mentally crying  
they scream for help but there's no one  
only them in their head to feed the cries  
They are crying but no one will ever know  
the reason as to why their eyes are never dry

## 50

### Second Place Winner: Payton Kearney

A percentage in our lives when we feel halfway there,

We feel as if we know so much yet still

Never enough though it seems, but do we really care?

Life is complex and we can not know everything completely

But instead grants us the chance to view it briefly.



# Twenty

**First Place Winner: Kathie Albright**

Twenty years

It feels wrong

So I count

7,316 days alive

Thirty teeth lost

Twelve first days

One childhood over

# POETRY

## deer and wolf

Alyssa Kordish

every day since i was 13, it's been about you.

you appeared and now i can't get rid of you.

you consume my thoughts, my feelings, my deepest desires, like the sin of gluttony themselves.

i don't have any thoughts any more.

freeze, fight, or fly.

i freeze.

it's all about you.

nothing else but you.

and anything that's "left" of me is wrong.

i am the hunted deer and you are the rabid wolf ripping out my insides for a snack, until there is nothing left of me but my eyes to see you walk away, looking for your next victim.

i am who you are.

we are together, unfortunately and unforgivingly.

*we* are gluttony.

*we* are the deer and wolf.

every day since i was 13, it's been about *us*.

## clouds

Jasper Chapman

As I think of the distance in front of me,  
Clouds blocking my path as far as the eye can see.  
Peace of mind and desire to be free,  
Is all that I wish for someone like me.  
When the world is dark and I cannot breathe,  
Will you be there to guide as my light to be?  
The world is cold when I begin to seethe,  
Why can't the clouds let me be free?  
Free to follow my own destiny?  
Free to see there's more to this life than misery?  
Why won't the clouds let me be free?  
The clouds blocking my path as far as the eye can see.

## flower

Jasper Chapman

Touch me in ways you think you need to,  
Sad that all of me hates everything you do.  
Not that I don't like you but this is a bit new,  
And to be honest I wished you saw me from my view.

I'm not a pretty *flower* incapable of power,  
Objectified because of someone I'm not in this hour. In other cases I would enjoy this  
'love' that you shower, But in this hour or any other I am not your *flower* to devour.

## **limerence**

*Anonymous*

you've never understood me.  
but I tried so hard to understand you.  
we lay skin to skin  
it's only when you decide you need something  
from me.  
tomorrow you're all i'll think about.  
but I know I won't even cross your mind.  
we walk past each other in public like we've  
never met.  
isn't that sad?  
I hate myself for letting someone consume me  
like this.  
we lay skin to skin  
why do I feel so connected to someone I barely  
know?

# Hero

Opossum Kreuzscher

Who am I to you but a pretty face  
Immediately smitten by my looks  
Not a word spoken yet you stand there  
And tell me that you love me  
And do you?  
Yet when you spy my window from afar  
Did you even stop to think that maybe  
Maybe you were mistaken?  
Did you mistake someone else for me?  
As crazy as insane as strange as it seems, since it was in fact my window you spied that  
night  
Did that not occur to you that my unfaithfulness was equally  
As crazy as insane as strange as it seems  
What little faith you have in me  
Do you love me? Or do you love my pretty face?  
I died for you  
I died that day  
I died dressed in my wedding gown  
Died of heartbreak  
Your forgiveness did not bring me back  
Our vows did not bring me back  
Your tears and wallowing can never bring back the betrayal

That night you thought I had betrayed you, yet

It was I that night that was betrayed



**20.191.817.161.514.131.211.109.876.543.210 stars**

**cover me**

**Ryleigh Gorman**

Fine gravel once covered these tires  
with gracious hands i give you my body  
Past bridges that curdle with fires  
To planets that loved all of my faults

You held me when I didn't have skin  
Now I don't know where to begin

Slowly they carry me gently  
With years they loved me so dearly  
Weary they lay me and hug me  
Forever my home, forever my home

## Sweet nothing

Ryleigh Gorman

Feel it between my lips

Against the wall i swear

If worlds collide i would

Tango with a centipede

Along the pavement floor

## Hunter's Ode//Deer's Lament

Ryleigh Gorman

Try, try your whole life

To be righteous and good

Have you shot a gun?

Is your blood authentic

Is your blood authentic

Try, try your whole life

To be righteous and good

I've shot a gun

My blood's authentic

# FICTION

## My Mother's Elephant

Serria Allen

“How is she today?”

That was the question Rosemary asked every time she came. The answer would often vary. Sometimes the day would be good, sometimes it would be bad. Rosemary liked the good days; although that's what everyone says. It's the obvious answer.

The lady at the desk looked over her purple-rimmed glasses. “Not good,” she said. “She's been asking about you though.”

“She has?”

“Sort of.” The lady took off her glasses. “It's not all the way there but I know it's you she's talking about.”

Rosemary scribbled her name in cursive font before giving the desk lady a small smile. Every time she walked down these halls all she could remember was the first time she visited. It took her three weeks at first. She didn't want to see her mother like that, no one does. She was sixty-two; the other day Amanda helped a sixty-two-year-old woman find lingerie for a “fun night”. How could two women of the same age experience life in two vast differences?

“Hi Mama,” Rosemary said, knocking on the door frame.

Her mother's room looked just like everyone else's: bland. There was the standard decor for the rooms, the only personal decor was a picture of Amanda, her older brothers, and their mom. She also had a scrapbook, it was recommended she have one to try and help her memory.

“Rosey-babe,” her mother said, turning over her shoulder. “It's you!”

“Hi Mama,” Rosemary repeated with a smile.

“No sweetie,” her mother said in a soft voice. “You seem like a sweet young lady but I'm not your momma.”

Rosemary couldn't help but let her smile fall. It was a bad day. Her mom walked over to her bed and grabbed a bundle of blankets, in the center was a brown baby doll. She picked it up and started rocking it, a wide grin spread across her face. The younger woman watched.

"Isn't she beautiful," her mother said. "Beautiful little girl."

"She's beautiful," Rosemary said. "What's her name?"

"Rosemary," her mother said. "People thought I was crazy naming my daughter after a plant but," she looked up at Rosemary, "little do they know the prettiest ones grow flowers... this is my prettiest flower."

Her mother started singing to the doll. It was a nursery rhyme that her mom would sing to Rosemary and her brothers. She'd sing it when they were upset or when they wanted their mother to sing to them.

"Mama-."

"No," her mother said. "Celeste, dear, I'm Celeste. I'm not your mama."

This part never got easier. Every time she'd say she wasn't Rosemary's mother felt like a knife in the heart. Celeste was almost offended every time Rosemary called her mom but talked about her as if Rosemary was the best thing since sliced bread. It felt like whiplash. Rosemary tried her best not to cry. Sometimes it was hard to tell the disease and Celeste apart. Sometimes it was as if they were the same.

"Celeste," Rosemary said. Her voice cracked slightly. "How are you?"

"Rosey-babe," she said. "It's you!"

Celeste walked over to her rocking chair and sat down before beckoning Rosemary to do the same. The two sat down, looking out the window.

"How are you, Celeste?" Rosemary asked.

"Oh my goodness," Celeste said. "It's wonderful here, and my daughter visits me all the time! You know she's in school for her master's? What was it for..."

“Medical science,” Rosemary said.

“Medical science,” Celeste repeated. “My baby is going to be a doctor, can you believe that?”

Despite her memory being in fragments, Celeste’s love for her children never wavered. On days like this Celeste would often talk about her kids and the accomplishments they have done forgetting that one of them was sitting right in front of her. It was a bittersweet moment. When a friend would ask Rosemary “what it’s like” being around someone like this she often described it as a hurricane, but every once in a while Rosemary found herself in its eye.

“You seem really proud of her,” Rosemary said.

“That I am... that I am...” Celeste said. “But what about you sweetie, how are you?”

“I’m good,” she said. “I graduate from school in the fall.”

Celeste clapped her hands together. “That’s wonderful sweetie,” she said. “What are you studying?”

“I’ll have my master’s in medical science.”

Rosemary could feel tears in her eyes. She’d seen her mother like this countless times, each time was harder than the last. Knowing that there would be a day when her body was here but her mind was gone was torture. How does the human condition make sure a horrible thing? Watching the mind of a person you love wither away. The smartest person in the world becomes “dumb” all because of a chemical imbalance.

The younger woman tried to wipe her tears before her mother could see them but it was no use. Celeste grabbed Rosemary’s hand and held it in hers. Sometimes it was scary looking at her mother, knowing that in thirty or so years this could be her. Her mind withered and memories came back in flashes that were out of order.

“Rosey-babe,” she said. “Why are you crying?”

“I just– I really love you, that’s all,” Rosemary said.

“You know what, I think I have just the thing.”

Celeste got up and walked over to her bed. She got down on all fours, looking underneath the bed before grabbing something. It was a box. Rosemary never remembered her mom having a box hidden underneath her bed. By the looks of it, it was old. Celeste brought the box over to Rosemary and placed it on her lap.

“Well,” Celeste said. “Open it.”

Inside the box were pictures. They were pictures of Celeste as a younger girl. She looked a lot like Rosemary when she was her age. There was also jewelry that looked way older than both Rosemary and Celeste. One picture in particular stood out, it was a picture of young Celeste holding a little bundle, a baby, Rosemary.

“The day I came home with you from the hospital,” Celeste said. “They told me it was a miracle that I was able to have you so late.”

Rosemary looked up. “Mama?”

“Yes Rosey-may?”

“Who am I?”

“My daughter of course.”

Rosemary let out a small laugh and hugged her mom. There weren't many times when Celeste was coherent and when she was it never lasted long. This was the eye of the hurricane Rosemary was talking about. Times where it felt like she was the daughter and not the parent. She never realized how much she took advantage of her mom's clear mind.

“I love you, mama,” Rosemary said, pulling away.

“I love you too sweetie,” Celeste said. “But I keep telling you, you aren't my daughter. I'm sure you're a good girl but you aren't my Rosey-may.”



Rosemary's smile fell once more. Just as fast as her mother was there, she was gone. It wasn't a surprise anymore but it didn't make it any less painful. It was more of a reminder to Rosemary, that time is fleeting.

"My memory box," Celeste said. "I've been meaning to give that to my daughter."

"I can bring it to her," Rosemary said.

Celeste smiled and nodded her head. Rosemary looked back down at the box, one of her brothers probably brought it for their mom. She continued looking through some of the items; most of them being pictures and jewelry. There were a few hand-drawn pictures that the children gave her. Rosemary was surprised she kept some of them all these years.

"Rosemary," a voice said, it was one of her mom's aides. "It's time for your mother's nap."

"Alright," Rosemary said. "Bye, mama." She kissed the top of her mom's head and started to make her way toward the door.

"Rosemary," Celeste had said. Rosemary turned around.

"My daughter's name is Rosemary."

## Saskia

Rowan Gill

“Papa, what is that?” I pointed to the faded picture in the book my father held. The creature looked like the horse picture from earlier but with black and white stripes and shorter hair.

“That is a zebra, an animal that used to roam the savannah in Africa. They disappeared shortly after the Blast.”

“How do you know? You said nobody has been able to check over there for years.”

“Well,” He glanced at me with a serious expression. “Most things didn’t last here, so I imagine it would be the same everywhere.”

I felt the corners of my mouth droop as I ran my fingers down the dim photograph. If only I could have seen one of these up close. It wasn’t fair that I never got to see such cool things before everything was swept away by the Blast. Papa explained years ago that the world used to be much warmer. There used to be a lot of animals and plants around then, including zebras. He also told me that people could go outside without being bundled up with masks on. They didn’t have to be worried about getting sick because of the bad air. He didn’t know what it was like either, but my Opa and Oma did.

“Why don’t we-”

“I think it is time for bed, Apphia,” He cut me off with a look as a protest swelled in my chest. “Tomorrow is a busy day. We need rest.”

I sighed, crawling into the cot. Hunting day. Papa told me I had to go with him and learn to fend for myself in case he got sick from the air like Mama. I didn’t believe him. He had been around for years and never got sick. I didn’t even remember Mama; she was already sick when I was born. Papa had never been sick, so it didn’t make sense that he would start now.

I watched him crouch before the fire, adding fuel with some sticks he found last time he was out. Every stride he took across our little cabin was muffled by the dirt floor as he worked effortlessly to keep us safe. Marching door to window with his gun and outside, only to turn around and do the same. He repeated the process six times always, and I had to be quiet, or he would mess up and have to start over again. He only slept once he was absolutely certain nobody was outside, but I never saw anyone anyway. The sound of his methodical lookout lured me into sleep against my will.

\*\*\*

Papa chose my name from an old book my Oma gave him. It told weird stories about a man in the sky who created all of us and let his son die for us. Oma tried to read it to me once, but Papa got angry. I was little then, so all I remember is that Oma believed in the book, but Papa didn't. I once tried to ask why he chose my name from the book, but he didn't answer and left for the day. He didn't return until it was dark out, and I never asked again.

\*\*\*

“No, no. Apphia, you're not-”

“I'm trying! I'm trying!”

“If you shoot it like that, you're going to miss! Anything you're trying to hit will know you're there!”

I fought back the tears welling in my eyes. It had been hours at this point of me struggling to hold a gun properly. Papa wouldn't let me fire unless he were certain I would hit something useful so we wouldn't waste any ammo. The weapon was heavy in my arms, practically weighing me down. I wondered when I would actually need to use this – if I ever could. Papa looked me over with a stern expression. A tear slipped and ran its little course down my face. He sighed and rubbed his face with one gloved hand.

“We’re done for now. I’m taking you out again tomorrow. For now, let’s go find anything we can use in the old houses.”

\*\*\*

Scavenging was my favorite part of hunting days. Even before Papa decided to train me to hunt, I would join him in going through these giant houses that were emptied right after the Blast. It was nice to warm up a little from the nonstop freeze in the air. Papa combed through the buildings, looking for any supplies or scraps that could be useful. I chose to flip through the old books and pictures around the house and see what everything was like. It was funny seeing how people lived when my Oma and Opa were young. They were already married when the Blast happened, but my Papa hadn’t been born yet. I wondered if any of these houses were theirs. I remember asking him why we didn’t live in one of the houses, but he only muttered something about it not being safe anymore.

\*\*\*

For weeks, Papa took me outside and trained me on how to properly hold and use a gun. He referred to it as a rifle, but I didn’t understand the difference. At the time, I had only seen that one and a couple of images from old books depicting many different variations. We once stumbled upon a similar rifle in someone’s house, but Papa only took the ammo. According to him, if you’re good enough, you only need one gun to get the job done. I just think he didn’t want me to have my own at such a young age. He wasn’t ready to see that the world had fallen enough for a twelve-year-old to have access to a weapon at all times.

\*\*\*

Papa grabbed and pulled me down to the ground, covering my mouth with one hand. I let out a muffled noise of shock, which he responded to with an intense stare of ‘be quiet.’ We watched in silence as the group of people stumbled through the woods, sticks crackling. They wore bright clothes that hurt my eyes, standing out against the trees and dead plants around us.

I froze as they came closer to us. For once, I was grateful that Papa would always turn me down when I asked to wear the vibrant clothes we found in old houses. The drab jacket and pants blended in well with the decayed and snowy world.

The group walked by us, brandishing various weapons. They scoured the landscape but skipped over us, miraculously. All except for one. A young boy holding a rifle far too big for his grasp paused and looked down at me. He seemed a few years younger than me, but the fear in his eyes told me he had experienced things well beyond what I understood. Papa and I stayed put, staring back. The boy looked back at his group, contemplating something. Papa tried to raise our gun, but I grabbed the barrel and shook my head. The boy noticed, making the silence grow longer.

The standoff finally ended when a woman called back to him.

“Daniel, whatcha see over there?”

He made eye contact with me again, and after a beat of hesitation, he shouted back.

“Nothing, Mama! Thought I saw an animal or something, but I was wrong.”

“Then get your ass back over here! We’re not here to sightsee!”

I let out a breath I was holding and whispered before Papa could stop me, “Thank you.”

The boy nodded and scurried away to his mother. We watched as the bright coats faded enough to be out of earshot. Papa smacked the back of my head.

“Don’t ever do that again. Those people are dangerous,” he whisper-shouted in my ear.

“That little boy included.”

“He didn’t look dangerous.”

“Give him a few years, Apphia. He won’t hesitate to aim and fire once he’s grown.”

“How could you possibly know?!”

“I just know, okay? People out here aren’t like your books. They’re out here to do what’s best for them and their group.”

“But-“

“We’re going home. We won’t catch anything now that they’ve gone stomping through.”

“Not like we do anyways,” I muttered under my breath.

Papa shot me another look. I shut up.

\*\*\*

I don’t know when it occurred to me that Papa was sick. It wasn’t when he started having recurring migraines or when he sometimes couldn’t get out of bed because he was so exhausted. I also didn’t notice when he would get sick and throw up, assuming it was because he ate something bad even though we ate the same things. Even when he lost hair, I didn’t really process what was going on. I think I realized the day he fired the rifle and missed.

The Blast messed up a lot about the world, including the animals. The deer weren’t the deer seen in books anymore. They were bigger and meaner and often had more antlers than they should have. I don’t have a name for what they became, so I called them deer-things. This deer-thing was young, unsteady, and unprepared for the world. Judging from its size, it had just been weaned from its mother’s milk and was still learning how to exist on its own. Unfortunately for it, we needed meat badly enough to not be forgiving of its naivety.

Papa only let me fire the gun on smaller things, but the bigger game was his. On this day, I would say I was about 14 or 15 by then, I noticed he couldn’t seem to focus much. His grip was unsteady. I leaned forward to help him out, but he shooed me away.

“Girl, I’ve been doing this long before you were born,” He jokingly scolded me.

“Guess you’re getting old,” I replied.

“Oh, I’ll show you old,” He leaned forward, aim steadying as much as he could. After a moment of silence, he fired. Papa didn’t always manage to kill the prey, but he always hit it. Deer-things were huge, too, making it hard to miss. The shot hit the tree to the left of the

creature. It turned, realizing our presence, and bounded off before a second shot could be made.

We stood in silence. Papa lowered the gun, staring off at where the bullet hit. Slowly, gravely, he handed me the rifle. He gave me a weak smile.

“Guess you’re right, kid.”

I looked over the rifle, noticing how well it fit in my arms now. So much different than when I first held it. I couldn’t smile back.

\*\*\*

Papa lay on his cot next to the fire, staring up at the wooden ceiling. I fed him a bit of meat from the whatever-the-hell I shot today. Looked vaguely like a groundhog, but who knows what it could have originally been. He barely ate, pushing away my hand.

“Apphia, you’re the one who needs sustenance. I’m just an old man. Don’t waste your food on me. You’ll need it.”

“Papa, I’m not letting you starve. Would you have let Oma and Opa starve? Would you have let Mom starve?”

He sighed and then opened his mouth for another bite. Once he swallowed, he cupped my cheek and looked me over.

“You look so much like your mother.”

\*\*\*

Saskia. That was the name my mother wanted to name me. It supposedly means ‘savior of mankind’. Papa couldn’t bear to look at me much when she died, let alone use the name that came from her lips, so my Oma named me. He feared my name would’ve been a burden. Declaring your child a savior of a dead world like the one we’re trapped in? He thought it would be too much for me to handle. He thought a name from his mother’s book would protect me more. I wish it did.

\*\*\*

I wish I could say Papa passed peacefully in his sleep. That he got to fade off happily. He instead was forced to go down fighting. He had been burning with a fever that night, and I spent so much time caring for him that I didn't do his required check of the outside world. The fire started while we slept. I awoke to the sounds of shouting and dove to my father's side. The side of the cabin with the fireplace was practically engulfed in flames. I ripped him from his bed and dragged him out the door, hacking my lungs out. I didn't even have time to grab any protective gear, let alone the rifle. The bitter chill bit me the second we made it outside, draining all of the heat the fire brought.

People were circling around us, laughing and shouting. They held a torch, clearly the source. I turned back to the cabin in time to see the roof collapse. The books, clothing, everything was gone in an instant. A woman approached me with yellowed eyes and a large grin. The crowd went silent. She grabbed my arm, trying to pull me from Papa, but I yanked myself from her grasp.

“What the hell are you doing?! That's our home!”

“Do you really think it's fair you and this old man get to hog resources all for yourself? We've heard stories about a man and girl wandering around these woods, taking all the meat for themselves. Skilled hunters, they say. Well, we need that, too! You're coming with us, girl.”

“I don't know who you people are, but my father is very sick! You just burned all of our gear, including our gun, so how do you expect us to do anything for you?!”

The woman looked down at my father, who did his best to send a burning glare at her. She chuckled to herself before turning to the crowd.

“The hunter's got radiation sickness! He ain't gonna be able to help!”



The crowd murmured, clearly upset. I shivered, looking back down at the man who used to be the most terrifying force I've ever known. He did everything to raise and protect me. I couldn't let him down, let him freeze out here. I turned to the woman.

"I'll hunt for you, okay? Just... just help my dad. I don't know what radiation sickness is or how to treat it. If you help him, I'll help you."

The woman looked me up and down, thinking. The crowd silenced themselves again. She nodded, cracking another sickening grin.

"Sounds good to me, sweetheart. What's your name?"

I opened my mouth and hesitated. A feeling in my gut told me never to tell these people who I really am.

"I'm Saskia."

"Saskia? Now, I've never heard that one before. You've got some real old-school family, huh? Well, Saskia, time to show you to your new home with your new family."

Someone grabbed my arm, and I felt the cold sting of metal against my side. I turned, realizing it was the boy I had seen so long ago. Daniel, was it? Hard to forget the only other person I've directly interacted with's name. He forced me forward, causing me to drop Papa. He grunted, and I tried to spin in Daniel's grasp.

"Wait, you said you'd help him!"

"They are helping him," Daniel spoke with a raspier tone than I expected. "I'm real sorry about this."

As he dragged me away, not firing the gun despite my struggling for reasons I never figured out, I saw the woman pull a pistol from her waistband and point it at my father's head. The next few seconds lasted forever. The scream barely left my throat when the shot rang out. Red splattered the snow in a pattern that was my Papa's beautiful mind. I ended up in the

snow, Daniel next to me. He whispered in my ear, “There isn’t a cure for radiation sickness. This is the best we got. He’s in a better place.”

I closed my eyes, the image of my father’s death replaying over and over. Someone other than Daniel lifted me up, far more roughly, and dragged me away.

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The people laughed, cheering for another ‘successful’ harvest. Each person grabbed fistfuls of my recent hunt as it was still roasting over the fire and devoured it like wild animals. It almost disgusted me the way they wouldn’t hold back for even a second to think about the long-term consequences of such indulgence. They ignored every warning I had about burning through food too quickly. They had no rations, no extra food in case I wasn’t able to catch anything. It made me wonder how they managed to survive at all until I showed up. Is this how my father felt, why we kept away from others? The chill of that day haunted me, no matter how close I sat to the fire. Daniel sat next to me, grinning ear to ear. He lightly punched me in the arm.

“See, it’s not so bad here. When you know any sort of survival skills, you’re useful. You’re practically a goddess here.”

“Why won’t they listen to me then?”

He seemed startled by my words, the smile vanishing and being replaced with furrowed brows.

“What do you mean?”

“They won’t preserve anything. I keep trying to teach them how to plan for the long term, but they won’t listen to me.”

“Well, would you rather we starve?”

The question startled me with its accusatory tone. Daniel stared at me, clearly irritated.

“That’s not what I said. I just-”

“Well, all I see are people trying to enjoy a meal. Don’t behave like you’re superior to us because you had food to spare.”

“We didn’t. We just didn’t fill our stomachs with every single meal to save more for later.”

“And look where that got you,” Daniel scoffed. Silence filled the air between us. His face changed quickly, horror consuming him. He opened his mouth, but I cut him off, standing sharply.

“Don’t say another fucking word.”

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I looked down the barrel at the deer-thing a few feet away. I had the advantage of the wind blowing in my face, meaning it couldn’t smell me. I clicked the safety off, pausing in case it took notice. When it didn’t, I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, ignored the mist that appeared before me, and fired. The beast fell over, not even time for a pained moan. I fixed the safety, spun the rifle on its strap so it would be against my back, and walked over. Steam pooled off of its body from the bullet wound. The smell of iron and death made me chew the inside of my cheek as I pushed back memories, grabbing it by one of 5 legs and dragging it to my camp. Daniel sat by the fire and looked up at me with a smile, his face rosy from the cold. I didn’t return it. He still was trying to force my forgiveness for the week prior. I could barely look at him.

“Nice find! Everyone will be so pleased. Ready to take this to the rest of the camp?”

I dropped the leg of the deer-thing and looked at it. I couldn’t ignore the way it died the same way as my father, a bullet to the brain. How many people have died the same? How many by this group’s hand? Daniel ran up to me, eager. He had been so kind to me, but that fear in his eyes was gone. That little boy who refused to call out to his group that he found the hunters they were looking for was gone. He observed the deer-thing. His eyes were that of a predator’s,

ready to pounce the moment he could. Why did we spare him? Why did we spare any of them? You only need one gun if you know how to use it.

Before I knew it, I was holding the rifle and had it aimed, safety off. Daniel threw his hands in the air and nervously laughed.

“Hey, hey. We’re friends! You’ve known me for a few months now! It’s me, Daniel, right?”

“We’re not friends.”

“Look, I get it. When my parents died, I had a couple of memories here and there that would scare me, too! You should’ve seen the way I fought when I was out of it! It’s normal out here. I know I said a shitty thing about your dad, and I am genuinely sorry. Just put the gun down, and we can go home.”

“That’s not my home. My home is gone.”

“Saskia-”

“Shut up! I am leaving, and I am never returning to those monsters. Turn around and walk away if you know what is good for you.”

“I- Fine. Just give me the food.”

“No, fuck you. I need it.”

“But everyone is expecting us. If we don’t bring something back, we’ll starve-”

“Do you think I care? That’s on you. Should’ve planned, like I said.”

“Please.”

“I will shoot you.”

“Go ahead. Just let them eat.”

We stood at a standstill, Daniel with his arms up and me with my finger on the trigger. He stood for everything I hate. He complied with the people who killed my Papa. He didn’t once seem guilty for his death, only showing remorse for upsetting me. My finger twitched, my

heart pounding. He stared at me. No fear, just acceptance. Acceptance of the world around us. I took a step back, then another.

“Come after me again, and I won’t give you or anyone else a chance to open your mouths.”

I clicked the safety on and turned on my heels, sprinting away. Glancing over my shoulder, Daniel didn’t move in my direction. He merely gathered up the deer-thing, and sat next to the roast we had set up in case we caught anything. I hoped he would be okay for as long as someone could be okay out here.

## The Boreas Brain

Cecilia Groth

People always seemed to enter Sabrya's office at the worst time. They'd come in and demand a refund, claiming the parts used to repair their nanovan were *too old* or *too cheap*. She would rethink her entire career as she carefully guided them to the padded chair in front of her desk, pushing a bowl of mints toward them as she stated how "we can't give refunds, I'm sorry," that "taking the parts out would be more labor that would have to be paid for," and "we truly do use the best quality parts." She gave that speech at least once a week, and it never worked. Once the customer left Sabrya's office, she would wallow in blissful silence, wondering what it would be like to work at a beach resort or massage parlor instead.

This was not one of those times. A man was seated in the padded chair but was professionally calm. His arms were folded across his chest, with his suit jacket customarily unbuttoned. He had laid an ID badge on Sabrya's desk.

"I'm Agent Aarom with the FBI," he said. Sabrya checked, and the ID corroborated his claim.

Still, it left her unsettled. "Why are you here?"

Before responding, Agent Aarom pulled out a folder from his suit jacket. "We have cause to believe that a cryogenically frozen brain left in our care belonged to a deceased family member of yours. Are you familiar with the name Isaac Morton?"

"That's my last name, but I don't know an Isaac," Sabrya said, shaking her head. "Isaac is a pretty old-sounding name, though. Are you sure I would have known him?"

Agent Aarom smiled. "Oh, no, you wouldn't have. Records say he died in 2030."

"2030?" Sabrya asked, balking. That was almost one hundred years ago! But... "Wait, you said he was cryogenically frozen?"

“Yes, ma’am. The company that was in charge of the upkeep dissolved a few years ago, and their records were... less than satisfactory. Isaac’s was the first brain we were able to identify and track down a next of kin for.”

“Oh,” Sabrya said. Something tingled in the back of her mind. Hadn’t she heard something remarkably similar to this before? “What was the company, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Boreas Industries,” Agent Aarom replied.

That was it. Boreas Industries was on the news a few years ago, right when they shut down. They used to sell cryogenic chambers for the terminally ill and elderly years and years ago, but laws against complete cryogenic freezing forced them to simply keep up with the care of the bodies and brains they already housed. Of course, their money could only last so long, and in 2121, it finally ran out.

“If you didn’t have any records,” Sabrya said, starting to sift through the folder on her desk, “How did you find me?”

“DNA testing told us the brain belonged to Isaac Morton, and we went down through government records until we reached you,” Agent Aarom said. “Isaac would be your great-great-great-grandfather.”

“I... see.”

“And as such, any decisions about his future are currently under your control. Seeing as this is the first brain we have been able to connect with next of kin, there is no precedent for us to suggest. I would be happy to meet with you later to discuss options.”

A thousand thoughts whirled through Sabrya’s mind.

“Yeah. Yeah, let’s do that.”

Two weeks later, Sabrya called off work to see Isaac's brain hooked up to a screen through various cords. A camera sat atop the screen, and a switch lay in lieu of a keyboard on the table.

Agent Aarom said that since this was the first time it would be used, Isaac could name the device.

If it worked.

All of the scientists had left the room to give Sabrya privacy. "Just flick this switch, and it'll send a jolt through the brain to stimulate activity," they had said. "It may not work on the first try. Give it three attempts, and if it hasn't worked, call us in."

That was ten minutes ago. She still hadn't flicked the switch. Her stomach churned each time she reached toward it. What if it didn't work? What if it sent too much electricity through the brain and burned it to a crisp? What if the ghost of Isaac returned to haunt Sabrya for the rest of her life?

Sabrya turned her gaze to a weathered journal sitting on the table directly beside the switch. Her mother had given it to her just before she died. "It was handed to me by my mother and her mother to her," she had said. "It's an old diary from the 1980's."

Sabrya had taken the journal, softly sifting through the pages. *The handwriting is so delicate*, she thought. "Whose was it?" she asked.

"That's the thing. The name was worn off," her mother had said.

The wonder of that journal never left Sabrya's mind. But what was there to do? After her mother's death, Sabrya had no way to trace her lineage back. Whenever she tried getting her hands on a document, she had been told they were sealed. Her mother was little help, either—she refused to talk about her parents, even up until her passing. She assumed the journal's author would always remain a mystery.



At least until now. Maybe – just maybe – Isaac could tell her who the journal belonged to.

Reluctantly, Sabrya grabbed the handle of the switch and took a deep breath. Isaac had signed up to be cryogenically frozen. He wanted this.

Closing her eyes, she flipped the switch.

A surge of light coursed through the brain, and Sabrya jumped. The computer lit up, a blinking cursor appearing in the top left corner of the screen.

The room was painfully quiet for a moment as Sabrya held her breath. How long did she need to wait before trying again? How would she know it worked? What if–

“Where am I?” A voice emanated from a small speaker on the corner of the table. It was clearly computer-generated, but a hint of emotion made it clear that Isaac was less than pleased.

“Oh my god,” Sabrya breathed. She pulled a chair from the side of the room and sat down as she felt her head get lighter. It had *worked*.

“Hello?” The voice spoke again, louder than before, and clearly worried.

“Oh! Uh, Stockton. In California.”

A small crackle from the speaker made Sabrya jump. “Who are you? Why can’t I move?”

Sabrya’s heart started to pound in her chest. This was *real*. Isaac was really here, talking to her. He had been *brought back from the dead*.

What could she say? Sabrya had been so focused on whether the device would actually work that she didn’t think about what she would do after.

“I’m Sabrya, your great-great-great-granddaughter. You... you were cryogenically frozen, but we brought you back. You’re the first frozen person to come back.”

More crackles sounded from the speaker, almost reminding Sabrya of groans. “Take me back,” Isaac said.

Sabrya's heart skipped a beat. "What?"

"Take me back!"

"Why? I mean, you must've—"

"*I can't move.* I have to go back. You have to take me back, I—"

"No! No, this, *you*—"

"That man was a scam artist and a piece of shit! I was told when I came back, it would be a second chance at life. Instead, I'm in excruciating pain, and *I can't fucking move!*" More crackled groans emitted from the speaker, and a blurry mass of red flashed across the computer screen.

Sabrya felt her blood go cold. She wanted to run, to turn the computer off and set the place ablaze. But just like the entitled customers she dealt with on a weekly basis, there was no running. She couldn't just turn the computer off—this was a scientific breakthrough, and turning it off would halt progress for years to come.

"Listen, you— you're the first person to use this device. You can name it! And I'm sure we'll have full-body devices in no time!"

It didn't work. Sabrya could only listen as the groans eventually quieted, leaving them in a discomforting silence.

"You're Sabrya?" Isaac asked, calm for the first time since he woke.

"Yes."

"My... great-great-great-granddaughter."

"... Yes."

"I'm—" The speaker crackled again, but it wasn't a groan. The computer generation clearly wasn't finely tuned to the intricacies of human communication, but to Sabrya, it sounded like... a sob. "I'm sorry you have to see me like this. I didn't... I wasn't..."

“I know,” Sabrya said, eyes turned to her lap. “It just doesn’t feel real to me, talking to you. I... never knew anyone in my family other than my mom.”

The screen faded to a twisting labyrinth of muted blue. “I’m truly sorry. I don’t want to hurt you, but... I’m in pain. Immense pain. I don’t know how that’s possible since I’m just a brain, but I think something happened during the—” a vague shudder sparkled from the speaker— “the dethawing. I just want to go back. I can’t even remember what I want to go back *to*. It just... calls to me.”

A pang hit Sabrya’s chest. She didn’t *want* to let him go. “I understand. I just have so many *questions*. I’ve wondered about my family my entire life, and I finally have a chance to know more! You’ll get accustomed to being here, I’m sure of it.”

Purple lines suddenly shot through the blue screen, like a spider web growing between two trees. “I’m sorry— I really am,” Isaac said. “But this just... it feels *wrong*. I can’t live like this, and I... I need to go back. I feel like a whale that hasn’t gone up to breathe or... or a sailor lured by a siren song. I don’t belong here. Not anymore.”

Sabrya’s gaze turned away from the computer, lingering on the journal beside it. It would be cruel to leave Isaac here, isolated and in pain for who knows how long. She knew that. But... “Do you know who wrote this journal?”

“What?”

She traced the cover with her finger as she spoke. “My mother gave me a journal, and apparently, it’s been passed down for a while. But I don’t know who wrote it. Maybe— if you can tell me who wrote this journal, just tell me a few stories... I’ll shut the machine off.”

Another silence permeated the room. The computer screen flashed a blurry, vague image of a journal very similar to Sabrya’s.

“Absolutely,” Isaac finally said. “Just... hold it up. I think I’m seeing through a camera, so my eyes can’t move.”

Sabrya quickly lifted the journal with the cover facing the screen. The image of the journal on the screen intensified, and a translucent, unidentifiable portrait of a woman appeared behind it.

“Who is she?” Sabrya asked.

“I– what do you mean?”

“The woman on the screen.”

Just as quickly as the image appeared, it was replaced by a raging orange. “How can you tell what I’m thinking?” Isaac asked, the speaker cracking as his volume increased.

A flush rose on Sabrya’s cheeks. “Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you earlier! From what I understood of what the scientists told me, the wires scanning your brainwaves also detect any images you may be thinking, so those are shown on a computer screen to supplement your words in replacement of hand gestures. It’s complicated.”

The orange slowly dulled, eventually turning to black before the blurry woman came on the screen again. “Oh. Okay. Well, that journal was written by Nora Hall. She wrote in it until her hands shook so badly from old age that she couldn’t write anymore. I think the last time I saw it laying out when I came over was...” Isaac stopped. “I can’t remember. It’s right there– I know that I know it, it’s just... gone.”

Sabrya had been warned about the memory loss. It was impossible to prevent *all* damage, the scientists had said. Cryogenics gave the ability to preserve life much like a coma, but like comas, they carried a heavy chance that the person wouldn’t be exactly the same after.

Still, it was information. It was a *name*. A smile spread across Sabrya’s face as she relished in the idea of the mysterious Nora Hall. “Thank you. Thank you *so much*. You don’t know what this means to me.”

“It was the least I could do.” Isaac paused as if considering. “You know, I do have one story I remember about Nora if you’d like to hear it,” he offered.

“Yes!” Sabrya answered immediately, hands gripping the sides of her chair.

“Well,” Isaac began, “It actually started at a funeral. Nora was, oh, around 60 or so, and her uncle Thomas had just died of pneumonia. He had an open casket funeral, even at the cemetery. Everyone could see him, and the plan was to close the casket when everything was done, and he was about to be lowered into the grave. But there were still religious rites to perform before that, see, and it was a windy day. The tent flaps were about to fly off, and the priest clearly had a little of the ceremonial wine, so to speak. He had his hands lifted, and he was leaning over Thomas’ head, and *whoosh!* A gust of wind blows through the tent, and he falls over into the casket! And poor Nora, she was so close to Thomas that she was in the row of seats closest to the casket, so she had to go over and lift the priest off of Thomas! It was horrifying in the moment, but we all knew Thomas would have had a good laugh at it all. It was told at all the family reunions even after Nora passed.”

A groan came through the speaker, and Sabrya's joy from the story quickly faded. *This all will end soon*, she reminded herself. *I made a promise.*

“Sorry,” Isaac said softly. “I’ve been trying to push through.”

Sabrya waved her hand. “No, it’s... it’s okay. I know it’s painful.” She cleared her throat. “Thank you. You held up your end of the bargain, so I guess... I guess it’s time.”

No one spoke for a while. Sabrya could hear people milling about in the hallway, voices that had spoken to an entirely different version of her just a few minutes ago. She stood up, pushing the chair behind her.

“I’ll go grab someone. They’ll know what— how to...” She sighed. “You know.”

“It’s okay, Sabrya,” Isaac said.

Sabrya turned to face the door but didn’t move. “Where is your body buried?” She asked, voice barely audible. She couldn’t even tell if the microphone had picked up her words until Isaac spoke.

“Pleasant Wood, West Virginia,” he said. “I bought a plot there when I reached Stage IV.”

“Stage IV?”

“Liver cancer. It was quick.”

A shiver ran up Sabrya’s spine. *Knowing how you died before... I couldn’t imagine being given a second chance and just knowing.* She gave a slow nod before leaving to track down a scientist.

It took a lot of convincing for them to agree, but legally, Sabrya knew they couldn’t turn down both her and Isaac. It was written into the cryogenic laws.

When they walked in, the computer screen was a rainbow of colors. Reds, blues, purples, greens, and yellows all mixed in a bright and beautiful display. *I’m killing a human life,* Sabrya realized. *That’s a person in front of me.*

And yet, he had asked her to die again. Was it right to kill someone just because they asked?

“It’s okay, Sabrya,” Isaac said.

“What?” Sabrya walked up to the computer and grabbed the journal that was still lying on the desk.

“You’re my granddaughter. I may not know *you*, but I knew my kids. You’re doing the right thing.”

Warmth flooded Sabrya. “Thank you.” She stepped away from the desk, letting the scientist take over.

“Before I go, I just want to ask one question,” Isaac said.

“What is it?” Sabrya asked.

“What is your mother’s name?”

She stood still, images of her mother floating through her mind. Kind, funny, beautiful, caring... “She was called Claudia,” Sabrya whispered.

“Funny. That was my mother’s name,” Isaac said as a scientist pulled a cord from the wall. The screen went dark.

# **CREATIVE NONFICTION**



## A Single Seed

Tara Shahsawar

My father told me once about an old saying from his home country. I will not attempt to translate it, but I remember it was about pomegranates and how, when you eat them, no seed is to remain untouched. He told me you have to eat every single seed because one of them might be the key to Heaven. As he expressed this to me, he had a curious smile on his face, one that seemed to laugh about the absurdity and silliness of such a notion but, at the same time, appreciated its beauty. I found myself mirroring his expression and adapted the thought into my life.

From this day on, I began to approach every pomegranate that I intend to consume with gentle care and almost pay obsessive attention into making sure that every single seed finds a way into me. It became a ritual, a quiet act of devotion to some invisible, unreachable Heaven. I told myself that I couldn't risk missing that one seed that might open its gates.

If you've ever tried to open a pomegranate, you know that it is a delicate and tedious task. It requires patience, a light touch, and the willingness to stained hands. But after years of trial and error, I'd gotten it down to an art form of itself.

I would gently slide a small, sharp knife around the crown of the deep red fruit, just enough to create a circle, and then down each of its natural ridges, dividing it into sections like rays of the sun. Once, I removed the now loose, leathery skin like a dress, and opened the chambers one by one, the chambers where the seeds, tiny, glistening rubies, waited to be exposed.

With a tenderness reserved for special things, I would pick and gather each seed, one by one, and place them in my bowl. Now that they'd be all shiny and proud to be seen, I sometimes would sprinkle a bit of salt or dried mint over them to enhance their flavor. Then,

without delay or hesitation, I'd lose all the work to my taste buds. I'd let the seeds squirt in my mouth like artery cuts and they'd release their sweet blood-like juice inside me. The taste was always an intoxicating blend of sweetness and tartness, something I could still feel lingering on my lips hours later, the pink-tinted stain of the juice marking my mouth like a kiss. I loved the way it stayed with me throughout the day, a small reminder of the effort I had put in.

One quiet winter afternoon, after a long, exhausting day at school, I came home feeling too drained to follow my usual routines. Normally, I would have prepared a *sofre*, the traditional Persian spread we use to eat over. But that day, I was so tired, I didn't care. Instead, I just flopped down on the living room carpet, letting the television drone in the background, and opened my favorite forbidden fruit<sup>1</sup> right then and there, in the middle of the carpet. For a moment, I forgot about the meticulous care I usually put into eating my rubies, lost in my fatigue and desire.

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<sup>1</sup> At this point, it might be useful for me to mention that the pomegranate wasn't just a pomegranate. Perhaps an attentive (or queer) reader could have already sensed this, but at the time, even I hadn't fully grasped its meaning. In retrospect, it became clear: I was in love. She was the most graceful and yet the most chaotic, wretched human being I had ever encountered, a paradox wrapped in beauty.

Whenever she made a joke, I was always the loudest to laugh, as if her words held a secret magic that only I could fully appreciate, typical delusional behavior. I found myself hanging on her every word, desperate for any small piece of her attention. She'd call me her best friend, and while she would say it so easily, so casually, as if it were just another phrase to her, the words felt like lava pouring over me. It was intoxicating and unbearable at the same time.

But I was trapped in the space between the sweetness of her friendship and the sour ache of my longing. I was convinced that somewhere, hidden in the countless moments we shared, was the seed that could unlock everything, the key to transforming our bond into something deeper, something closer to the Heaven I sought with every bite. I couldn't tell her, of course. I couldn't risk breaking the fragile skin of what we had. Each encounter with her felt as precious and fleeting as the jewels in my fruit. Oh, and how I hoarded them, devoured them; hoping one of them might be the one that changed everything.

In a way, the pomegranate was always her. Beautiful, impossible, and full of promise. But like the seeds that left my hands and lips stained red, loving her came at a cost, one that I wasn't sure I was ready to pay.

I should have known better. My mother always warned me about eating on the Persian carpets. They were precious to her, family heirlooms passed down through generations, intricately hand-woven and steeped in the memories of our ancestors. But in my state, I just wanted the comfort of my beloved pomegranate, my small, promising taste of Heaven.

I was halfway through the fruit when I heard the door open. *Maman* had returned from work and found me, surrounded by a sea of seeds and a red-stained carpet. It probably looked like my mouth was bleeding onto the ground. Her face twisted in anger, and the room fell silent except for the low hum of the television. She exploded. Her voice filled the room, echoing off the walls as she berated me: How could you be so careless? What kind of daughter makes a mess of something so sacred, so valuable? Don't you know better than to ruin a carpet like this? Do you think I raised you to be so thoughtless?

To this day, I have never felt the heat of shame rise in my cheeks so quickly. I tried to tell her about Heaven, but it went right over her head. She was having none of it. My words didn't matter. All she could see was the stain spreading across the carpet like a pandemic; the shameful symbol of my carelessness.

What followed was an hour of scrubbing, kneeling on the floor with a wet cloth in hand, trying to erase the mess I had made. The deep red stain refused to come out easily, as if it, too, was clinging to the centuries of tradition woven into it. I scrubbed harder, my hand going raw and wrinkly, but the harder I worked, the more futile it seemed. The pomegranate's juice, once so sweet in my mouth, now seemed like a curse, infecting everything it touched. I felt as if the carpet itself was mocking me, as if the hands that had woven it were laughing at my foolishness.

At that moment, the idea of Heaven seemed absurd. The ritual I had so carefully built up over the years now felt pointless, reduced to nothing more than a stain on an old carpet. My hands ached, my knees hurt from bending over on the hard floor, and my mother's

disappointment hung heavy in the air. Maybe, I thought bitterly, Heaven wasn't worth it. Maybe there was no magical seed, no gate waiting to be unlocked.

But even as I thought it, there was a part of me that resisted. Some quiet voice deep inside, as stubborn as the stain I was scrubbing, whispering that I couldn't give up just yet. Heaven or Hell, there was something sacred about all of this. The slow deliberate care of eating each seed, of honoring the fruit like a deity. Maybe that was the key all along, I thought, not to Heaven, but to a secret third thing; Something quieter, something softer, something that didn't need to be named.

## Reasons to Try

Kathie Albright

Dear Me,

Things get better. You don't believe that right now because you're 13 and you hate everyone and everything. I know that you're dark and edgy, you wear fake gauges and paint your fingernails black, and nobody understands you. You want to give up because everything is so dark and that light at the end of the tunnel is so far out of grasp. But it's much closer than you realize: you just have to hold on. Of course, it's so cheesy and overdone, to write a letter to your past self, but I've got a secret for you: there comes a time when you stop caring about that kind of stuff. Shocking, I know, when you feel closer and closer to the end of the world every moment. And you won't believe me when I tell you this, but soon, you'll fall in love. It's not always the kind of love that you think, no roses and kissing and dates (well, sometimes). Loving something isn't always the same love that you see in Disney movies, and love isn't always between two people. You haven't realized this, but you love things a lot. You love things so deeply that sometimes it makes your chest hurt like there's a little fluttering bird inside your ribcage. Someday, you'll fall in love with being alive, and everything that comes with it. And what greater reason to stay alive can exist besides one's love for it?

You'll fall in love with your reflection. Not in the way that Narcissus did, but in the way that your ancestors loved the people that led to you. You're what remains of thousands of years of love, and when you look in the mirror, you'll spot pieces of your grandmother, and her grandmother, and her grandmother staring back at you. You'll stop caring so much about the pudge on your arms and that wrinkle on your forehead that girls at school sometimes pick on you for. You won't love those things, but you'll forget about them. Or, at the very least, you'll realize how little those things matter. Instead, you'll look in the mirror and see instead the

things you love. Someday, you'll love your frizzy, unruly hair. You'll love those freckles that you swear look like zits, and you'll love your cheeks and how they grow round when you smile. And you won't love them because they are loved (although that certainly helps), you'll love them because they are yours and no one else's. You'll love them because they are proof that there is blood in your veins and breath in your lungs.

You'll fall in love with a boy. Which will scare you right now, when all boys are scary creatures reeking of Axe body spray, but don't worry. You won't see it coming and you won't recognize him at first, that kid from the children's musical who had goggle glasses and played a pirate when you played Peter Pan. You'll meet him again Junior year and he's a lot taller now, but still has that same crooked smile that your mom always said was so cute. And it'll be awkward, you'll both dance around the fact that you like each other until he finally tells you that he's had a crush on you since forever. Then, suddenly, years later, when you're writing this essay, he might be sitting next to you working on his own writing. In those years, he's gonna teach you what it's like to be loved, and you're gonna grow together. You're gonna get taller and fill out, gain more stretch marks and experience. But he's still gonna love you the same way he always has. He's gonna make you feel less scared. He's gonna make you so grateful to be a human because it means that you got to meet him.

But he's not the only one. You're gonna come to love the experience of interaction, of forming relationships and meeting new people. You're really not the introvert that you think you are! Right now, you hate everyone because you're scared of everyone... what they think about you if they'll judge you. But nobody cares about what you're wearing or if you sometimes have a stutter. One great thing about you is that you can find a reason to love anyone you meet, even people that you kinda don't like. You can appreciate the way that that one acquaintance is so eloquent, or how you know you always have a seat next to your sorority

sisters. (Yeah, you joined a sorority. Try not to pass out!) You'll find yourself grateful for your tongue, that you can speak and interact and smile with others. You smile a lot more now.

And that's why you have to try. You have to hang in there because there's so much light at the end of the tunnel. It's not gonna be easy, and it's not gonna happen right away. But in the same way that dandelions force their way through the cracks in asphalt, you're gonna dig your way back out of that grave. Afterward, when the light shines on your face and your bare feet step onto the warm concrete, you'll feel that little bird fluttering in your chest. You'll remember how beautiful it is to be alive. To be human. You'll fall in love with that feeling. There is so much good waiting for you if you just try. So lift your head as the weeds lift theirs to the sun, and see that the world isn't gonna end when you're thirteen. If you're reading this and you're not me, that's okay too. You probably relate to at least some parts of this letter. Hasn't everyone had a moment where it felt like the ground was slipping away from beneath their feet? Chances are, it won't. And if things feel like they'll never get better, they will. It takes time, effort, and willingness to try. So if you feel that way, do me a favor and go outside. Take off your shoes and stand in the grass, or on the concrete. Take a deep breath, and fall in love with being alive. Like I said, what greater reason to stay alive can exist besides one's love for it?

# ART



## Untitled (1)

Hazel Stone



## Untitled (2)

Hazel Stone



## Untitled (3)

Hazel Stone



## Untitled (4)

Hazel Stone



# STAY

Alyssa Kordish



# RISE

Alyssa Kordish



# FALL

Alyssa Kordish



# Imposing

Rowan Gill





# Rock Creek

Rowan Gill



# Changing

Rowan Gill



# Inhospitable

Rowan Gill



## Author Biographies

### **Alyssa Kordish**

Alyssa Kordish is a junior AYA education major with minors in art and gender and identity studies. They are involved in Morpheus, Berg Allies, Zeta Theta Psi, the Euglossian Society, GAP Tutoring, and an Admissions Student Worker. They have been doing art and writing all of their life, and it is one of their favorite hobbies.

### **Jasper Chapman**

Jasper Chapman is the oldest of 13 children, and is the first transgender member of his family. He spent a majority of his teenage years developing his writing style and learning more about himself as an artist.

### **Opossum Kreuzscher**

Opossum Kreuzscher is a second-year English major and Theater minor. He writes poetry as a hobby and traditional plays hoping to one day produce them. He's a member of Alpha Psi Omega and loves working as an editor with Morpheus. He writes about gender, sexuality, and society's interaction with queerness.

### **Serria Allen**

Serria Allen is a senior English and integrated media double major with a business minor. She also works on *The Kil!* as editor-in-chief. Serria has submitted art to Morpheus but this is their first time submitting a piece of fiction.

### **Rowan Gill**

Rowan Gill is a junior English and Media double major with a concentration in Writing. They are a traditional member of Zeta Theta Psi and a Euglo. They also participate in Morpheus, Berg Allies, and work at Beeghly Library. They have been writing short stories since the age of 7 and intend to become an author of a published fantasy series in the future.

### **Tara Shawsawar**

Tara Shawsawar is a senior from Germany who is studying American Studies with a focus on literature and politics.

### **Kathie Albright**

Kathie Albright is a sophomore AYA English Education major with minors in Theatre and Business. She is the 2024 editor-in-chief of the Rock Creek Review, a corollary member of Zeta Theta Psi, and a regular participant of the Theatre program.

### **Cecilia Groth**

Cecilia Groth is a sophomore Environmental Science major with minors in Literature and Writing. They are a traditional member of Zeta Theta Psi as well as a Euglo, along with participating in marching and symphonic bands while writing on the side. Most of their work centers around the relationship between family and time.

### **Hazel Stone**

Hazel Stone is a second-year Primary Education major who is very active on and off campus. She mainly creates multi-media art using fabric and paint to create her portraits. Her favorite art type is paper mache, as it has so many possibilities.

## **Ryleigh Gorman**

Ryleigh is a Heidelberg University junior majoring in Media and English with a minor in Psychology. They are involved in Greek life, specifically Zeta Theta Psi and the Euglossian Society, and are part of campus organizations, including Berg Allies and the Berg Body Positive Association.

## Editor Biographies

### **Lennon Amor**

Lennon Amor is a senior English major with a concentration in writing. They are the editor-in-chief for Morpheus, an active member of the Euglossian Society, and a Zeta Ember. Their end goal is to be a professor and published author.

### **Rowan Gill**

Rowan Gill is a junior English and Media double major with a concentration in Writing. They are a traditional member of Zeta Theta Psi and a Euglo. They also participate in Morpheus, Berg Allies, and work at Beeghly Library. They have been writing short stories since the age of 7 and intend to become an author of a published fantasy series in the future.

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**Tara Shahsawar**

Tara Shahsawar is a senior from Germany who is studying American Studies with a focus on literature and politics.

**Alyssa Kordish**

Alyssa Kordish is a junior AYA education major with minors in art and gender and identity studies. They are involved in Morpheus, Berg Allies, Zeta Theta Psi, the Euglosian Society, Dance Team, GAP Tutoring, and an Admissions Student Worker. They have been doing art and writing all of their life, and it is one of their favorite hobbies.

**Desirae Matherly**

Desirae Matherly is in her third year at Heidelberg where she teaches writing. Her essays and fiction appear in several literary magazines and she is the author of *Echo's Fugue*, a collection of personal essays published in 2019.