


LITERARY
MAGAZINE

Morpheus

2025



yes,
please.

A red, textured hand, possibly a glove, holding a shallow bowl filled with red, pill-like objects. The hand is positioned diagonally across the upper half of the cover. The background is dark with some white scribbles on the right side.

"THERE WAS TRUTH
AND THERE WAS
UNTRUTH, AND IF YOU
CLUNG TO THE TRUTH
EVEN AGAINST THE
WHOLE WORLD, YOU
WERE NOT MAD."

-GEORGE ORWELL

Morpheus Literary Magazine

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader:

I am pleased to share the Spring 2025 issue of the *Morpheus Literary Magazine*! After a semester of ups and downs, the Morpheus staff has the privilege to present our readers with another edition. We thank you for your continued support and hope these pieces will encourage you to consider publishing in the future.

In this issue, we present a variety of poems, artwork, personal stories, and reflections on life from Heidelberg students. While we did not host a specific theme, several of these works focus on certain aspects of life and identity. Some of these include topics such as racism and homophobia, as well as violence and toxic relationships. We ask our readers to please keep this in mind, as your wellbeing is a priority.

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 Spring 2025 Edition of the *Morpheus Literary Magazine*.

Sincerely,

Rowan Gill

Co-Editor-in-Chief

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POETRY

Peace

Brooke Barnes

The only noise is that of the rustling leaves
On the soon to be barren trees.
Of the chirping birds
Calling out to the world
Speaking a language of their own
One that I wish I could learn.
These noises break through the veil
The veil the wind covers me in
A veil of comfort I only find when I'm away from it all
The wind covers this place, this safe haven
No words define me here
No one defines me here.
Here is a place nothing can touch me
Here I finally feel peace.

Thank You

Brooke Barnes

I have reached the bottom of my coffee mug
I have been sipping it all morning
Sitting on my childhood porch
Reminiscing.

I have reached the bottom of my coffee mug
And for once I don't feel like I need more
I feel at peace
With my memories
With my plans
I find comfort in both.
For while I have seen great grief
And loss
I can thank these experiences for the formation of me.

I have reached the bottom of my coffee mug
And I think about the person I would have been without the pain
Not much of a person I think
I head back inside and set my mug in the sink
I feel satisfied.

Doubt

Tristan Fanning

What if I fail

But what if you succeed

No, you don't understand

I don't think you do either

I'm not capable

But you are

How can you be sure

Because I trust you

Why

Because I want to

Don't make this so difficult

I'm Not

You Are

No, You are

How?

Because you don't trust yourself

You don't "*allow*" mistakes

You can't be perfect

But I should be

No you Shouldn't

Then What should I be

Your Best, nothing more

Give yourself a break

Hoping

Tristan Fanning

They ask do you still believe in love?
To which I say: How can I not?
Even at its worst it was still beautiful
How must it look when it's what it's meant to be
That is what I wait to see

They asked again but isn't it painful
To which I say it never stops hurting
But pain is a part of life
You must accept it to move through the strife

They asked again do you regret it
To which I say occasionally
There are always moments of uncertainty
When you wish heaven could last for an eternity
Already knowing it is doomed to fall

They ask once more do you fear it
To which I say with all my heart
The thought that I will never be enough
A constant whisper in my mind
A demon that demands my soul

They asked finally are you ready?

To which I say I am not sure

There is not telling what the future holds

But I will always be hoping

Paint

Tristan Fanning

When I asked you to Paint the sky

I didn't want it to be pretty

I wanted it to be real

I want you to Paint yourself and the world you see

All the good the bad and the ugly

All the light and the darkness

All your feelings

your emotions

and your fears

Paint, Paint and paint some more

Paint the melody of your pain and sorrow

Paint the chorus of your joy and revelry

Let the wind carry it,

Let yourself be known,

Paint Paint and Paint some more

No matter the story that it tells

Your truth deserves to be known

So I say again,

Paint!

Paint your story

Share your pain

It is not something you need to bear alone

Citrus

Ryleigh Gorman

Orange zests twists and rests

Between each lip that beckons guess

Peel, peel back your flesh

Expose the dust

That scars the mesh

dogfight

Ryleigh Gorman

I woke up to nothing.

The sky streaked with molten gold and fallen fumes.

There is no tomorrow. Can't you feel it?

Dirt ridden nails clawing out trenches, retching themselves upward.

There is no honor in a place like this.

But there is mud, the terrible mud. Sloshes beneath my feet. I can feel it seep and seep in my bones.

Men in the distance are no more.

My brother's ring tied round my neck twinkles in the fog.

There's a man behind me, under the ladder. His scuffed face doesn't match his eyes.

Nothing matches his eyes, anymore.

Have you seen this man?

Ryleigh Gorman

Mr. mirror man

buzzes like a fridge

He listens to the news

Trembling a smidge

Peering out the window

Drawing back the blind

If you haven't got a body

There hasn't been a crime

Once I Get a Testosterone Prescription

Elias Kreuscher

Once I get a testosterone prescription

- ☐ Go to planned parenthood
 - ☐ Ask friend (or mom) for a ride to appointment
- ☐ Get hormone levels tested
- ☐ Get prescription
- ☐ Find somewhere willing to accept coupon for testosterone because it's a controlled substance
 - ☐ ~~Kroger~~
 - ☐ CVS
 - ☐ Walmart
- ☐ Get the money for the prescription
 - ☐ Get a job
 - ☒ ~~(No one will hire me)~~
 - ☐ Keep working for your grandma's dying business
 - ☐ Don't think about the fact that you're taking money from them right now
 - ☐ Beg online for crowdfunding
 - ☒ ~~That's pathetic and everyone thinks it's pathetic when you do that~~
- ☐ Find doctor willing to put up with me being trans and not treat me like garbage
 - ☐ Hopefully a woman but that means nothing anymore
 - ☐ Acknowledges my PCOS

☐ Doesn't tell me I'm too fat for hormones

☐ Trust me I know my own weight, calling me fat to my face isn't
going to change that

and become a functional human being

☐ Go to therapy again

☐ Ask them to officially diagnose you with ADHD

☐ Two other healthcare professionals diagnosed you with it, said "this is
textbook ADHD," but they don't count

☐ Deal with two or three months of sessions before they're willing to do that for
you

☐ Get money to pay for ADHD medication prescription

☐ See Above section

☐ Get ADHD meds

☐ Find right dose

☐ Don't give up when you feel like garbage for a few months

☐ Feel like a real human being for a bit to get used to it

it's all over for you guys

Power In Change

Maddisen Mikkelsen

Change can come in many forms.
Though it may not be what we desire,
We must not throw it into the fire.
It may seem like a terrible storm,
Yet later, you will see its true end.

This year of the snake may seem like bad luck,
But hidden inside is a different cause.
This new change has left many in awe.
We have had more time for family, which brings good luck,
But most of all, we've had time for love.

This world may be different, but maybe that's not so bad.
It changed people for the better,
I know it has.
So maybe one day, maybe one just as dreary,
You will think of the things that made it less weary.

You may be crying now,
But I bet you will laugh later when telling your story.
This change has made an impact, a new chapter, a change.
So don't be afraid to accept it with grace.
This is your story, one that can change.

Night

Elijah Shiley

Orange street light reflects off of the empty orange pill bottle An all too familiar sight

Before Death,

Lay a man

He's not dead

Yet

The image of a man leaving this life just as he found it

Cold, scared, and shaking

Curled into himself for comfort

An all too familiar sight

Before Death,

Lay a man

Death knows him

Death remembers each of his goldfish that he cried over

Death remembers his grandmother who loved him almost as much as the bottle Death remembers his best friend who was taken by his own reckless behavior Death misses the boy who ran to his mother crying when Bubbles the Third died Death wishes things were different

Death wishes they didn't have to meet like this

The man shakes and sobs

Death raises his eye to the sky and cries

"Oh God in heaven

If this be your will

I defy thee
You show your children nought but callousness on this Earth They reach to you
And you let them fall
I walk among your people
And I will take them under my wing”
The man is still now
There is no one here
No one cares about this man anymore
A pile of flesh and blood
Once upon a time loved
Now lost to this world
An all too familiar sight

Before Death,
Lay a man
He’s Dead
“Take my cloak
It is cold
But I will keep you warm Take my hand
My long lost friend
I will lead you to the end.”

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Cold Water To a Freezing Hand

Anonymous

Written in September 2024

When I chose what college I would attend at the end of my senior year, the deciding factor was finance. After careful consideration, I had my list narrowed down to two universities. They were virtually the same: in cost, in size, and even in school colors. Of course, that doesn't mean I didn't have my preferences. Deep down, I hoped that my parents' alma mater, Heidelberg University, would win out. This wasn't because it was my parents' alma mater (although, to be transparent, I did get a scholarship for that). In fact, it probably isn't anything most students would give a second thought. It was because there was a visible queer community at Heidelberg.

When I took a tour at Heidelberg my junior year of high school, I instantly noticed the pride flags set up around campus, the Berg Allies posters on every corkboard, even the ally stickers on professor's doors. I doubt I entered a single building during my tour that didn't have some sort of queer presence. And I remembered that.

So when Heidelberg offered me over one hundred twenty thousand dollars worth of scholarships, I was elated. My other option also had a GSA, but I had only seen one poster throughout my entire tour. There weren't even any pride flags— those must have been beaten out by a campus church and a mandatory free Thursday morning for mass. The lack of queer people was palpable. I wouldn't have suffered there, I knew, but I knew at Heidelberg I would have a community— one larger than anything I'd known.

My high school was built in the middle of a corn field, right next to a busy highway. As such, it was very conservative in nature. Most teachers went to church every Sunday (or Wednesday) and the Christian club was well-attended despite the fact that it held meetings at six in the morning. Neither of those aspects inherently demand the presence of homophobia,

of course. The students did that job just fine. If you were visibly different, it was like flies to a rotting corpse. It was a very tight-knit queer community— one that kept quiet for the most part. There wasn't a GSA or protections in place. We never held protests or made petitions. If you asked a staff member they would give a vague "zero tolerance policy," but this wasn't ever enforced against homophobia. Thus, I looked to college to be my escape.

So in my first year of college, I joined the GSA, Berg Allies. I told strangers my actual preferred pronouns. I saw Rocky Horror Picture Show for the first time in my life. I went to my first pride festival where I carried my first pride flag with shaking hands. From those, I found and pledged a sorority dedicated to inclusivity, bursting at the seams with queer people. After every event, meeting, and show, I inexplicably found myself in tears.

It was all overwhelming. I had expected more support than my high school had given me, sure, but it was all just so much. I was used to my queerness being a rebellion, something that made me stand out, something rewarded with disgusted stares and whispered rumors even when I toned it down as much as I dared. But now I was forced to adjust to my queerness being accommodated, it being something I didn't have to fight for the right to show. I was chomping at the bit to fight because it was something I took as a given. With every push comes a pull. With every action comes an equal and opposite reaction. It was a matter of physics. A lived experience.

And yet, no fight came. I had kept my fists clenched so long, waiting for the fight that I was so sure was just around the corner, and it never came. I was confused, and not a small part of me was scared. That's something a lot of people get wrong when they write about homophobia: it's a pattern. And when that pattern is disrupted, even for the better, it creates discord. And discord is scary. I didn't want to pick up the pieces of my hard-earned beliefs and form them into something new. I didn't want to rewrite what I'd already known for so long. I didn't want to feel safe, because it would just hurt that much more when the dream ended.

And still, no fight came. I had to force my hands open and my shoulders relaxed. It took until late in the second semester before I was finally able to come to terms with this curious new dynamic. The fear clung to me like a scared child, even when it was proven to me time and time again that this place was different. That the professors weren't allowed to make homophobic comments. That I wouldn't discover horrible rumors about myself if I dared date a girl. That, in fact, was quite the opposite. Some of the most vocal allies on campus are the professors. That people don't look at you sideways for dating someone of the same sex. Queer people were welcome here— and it was more than just an empty promise.

It never occurred to me that this community— the one I felt smothered by when I first arrived on campus— was considered small by the broader world until I talked to one of the German exchange students the next year.

We were with a small group of people waiting until the clock struck one, when we would walk together to the annual pride festival. I didn't expect it to be a large group— it was a Saturday in a small town— but I was still pleasantly surprised at the seven or so people that showed. We got to talking to pass the time, and she was caught on the “odd” gender rules in America. (It seems that in Germany men and women can be friends without worrying about ulterior motives.) The conversation continued, and she made the comment, “Yeah, the queer community here is really tiny. I knew Tiffin was a small town, but I'm used to there being a much larger queer presence.”

I was caught off guard. The idea of attending a pride festival still seemed like a novelty to me, and to hear someone expecting more completely took me by surprise. What did she mean more? There truly was a place even more accepting than here? Tiffin was the most urban place I had lived, and thus in my mind was the best I could find. The only place that would offer more than Heidelberg would have to be a huge city like Los Angeles or San Francisco. And in my mind, places like that were just far-off daydreams. They provide the same unconditional acceptance that you find online, and everyone knows the Internet isn't

real life. It's a form of escapism, something I clung onto in high school to get me through. I had pipe dreams of finding a place as accepting as that like a little girl has pipe dreams of being a princess.

But her comment meant places like that do exist. And if they do, did that make the acceptance I found at Heidelberg– the same acceptance that threatened my world view and had me sobbing underneath my bed in joyful confusion for hours– small? Was it tiny? Was I truly not relishing in warm water on my hands but praising the slush because all I had known was ice?

I found my answer a few days later while sifting through Instagram stories. I was following Seneca Pride– the group that hosted Tiffin's annual pride festival– and they posted a link to a news article about the festival I attended that past weekend. "Ohioans determined to celebrate LGBTQ+ Pride in deep red counties," it read. "Dozens of LGBTQ+ people and their allies gathered . . . in an overwhelmingly conservative county . . . in the face of anti-transgender legislation proposed by their own Ohio state Rep. Gary Click." Once again, I was confused. Tiffin didn't feel conservative to me. It was the safest place I'd ever known. But what that article said wasn't wrong, and I knew that. Seneca County ends up giving votes to Trump, and thus it is undeniably a conservative county. But if Tiffin is conservative, then other cities have to be liberal.

And that means better places exist. That means I can make it even kinder for people like me. That there's still more work to do. That means in the future, no one ever has to feel scared to be loved as they are like I was.

Addendum: This piece was written, as stated above, in September of 2024. I hope after reading this piece you can understand the tragic irony in writing it, and the necessity in publishing it at this time.

just a game

Serria Allen

I think the first umbrella term I heard was “whitest Black person.” I was talking to a group of friends, and the topic of music came about. Everyone started talking about their favorite rappers. People probably argued about who was better. I think at this point, the topic was 21 Savage versus Lil Uzi Vert? I do not know . . . whatever rappers were popular in 2014.

Anyways,

I butted in saying, “I don’t listen to rap,” I think at this point I was into Melanie Martinez and Troye Sivan (who I still love). They probably gave each other a look and laughed, but I remember clear as day . . .

“Serria, you’re like the whitest Black person I know.”

I laughed, naturally, and I agreed. I fucking agreed. Now, at twenty-two, I know better than to laugh at such blatant ignorance. At twelve, I laughed, I played into it. I remember a time I asked my friends, “Do I act white?” They would answer “yes” without hesitation.

“Your music,” They said.

“Your clothes,” They said.

“The way you talk,”

“The way you act.”

It felt even worse when someone Black said this to me. Then imagine how I felt when someone said to me, *“Ashley acts more white than you.”*

Thus began my ongoing identity crisis . . .

I wasn't a "people pleaser" in middle school, but I went along with things even though I shouldn't have, for the most part . . . I wasn't going to let people bad mouth me, that's for *damn* sure. But when race got brought up, more so, how I didn't act like my own, I'd laugh. I'd even agree with them. Sometimes I even prompted the questions. What Black person listens to Melanie Martinez? Twenty One Pilots? Halsey? I couldn't name a single person at the time. When I spoke, the phrases came out eloquently.

"I ain' ev'n finna be all out like that."

Changed to:

"I don't think I can be out as long as I was last time."

I hated rap because it didn't make sense. Every word was jumbled on top of each other, and each song sounded like the last with the same theme: guns, drugs, killing people, making money. Maybe I have an old soul, that would make more sense. But telling me I don't act a color? Maybe if they said I didn't act my culture . . . no. I'm justifying things that don't need justification. Even if they did say that, whose culture would I be acting? White? Their "culture" is stolen from other people. You know who they stole it from? Black people. Indigenous. Pretty much anyone that isn't themselves. Ironic. Getting told I'm not acting like the same people that others rip off.

Thoughts such as these grew more and more from that fateful day. What others took as a joke caused a war between me and myself. A war that's never cold but at a stalemate. I wanted to "act Black." I already had the skin color, I just needed the personality. What was it? Take out the vowels from sentences? Put contractions where contractions aren't needed. Listen to words that I can't understand, with lyrics that mean nothing to me? The jokes subsided, but their ramifications still lingered. A Black girl who doesn't act Black in a world where everyone else

sees her as such. Black. I guess my acting skills don't come across when I'm looking for a specific beauty product at Walmart. I guess my co-star (the Walmart employee) didn't notice how I took a longer look at the container of foundation before I put it back. Telling her this wasn't my right shade and I *did* put it back. This was around the time I learned what "code-switching" is. This was when I realized what my double life meant. My "whitest Black girl" mindset that grew so grossly in middle school meant. An analogy. A synonym.

White: Proper, intellectual, well-kept.

Black: Unruly, loud, unkept.

No, No, No. Too loud. Too reckless. Too . . . ghetto. Ms Allen!? Do you really know how to play the game?

I do. I know the game all too well. It was taught to me from peers, from my grandparents, my mom, and myself. My life is an act. All of it is an act. I'm a performer.

Title of the show: Auntie Allen.

Come one! Come all! Watch as Auntie Allen does the tightrope walk of her life. Will she fall into her stereotypes or float above them all?

You probably want to know what happens? Does Auntie Allen fall? Or float? Neither. Each side grows more demanding, but still, Auntie Allen walks the tightrope. When I was younger, I was told I acted white. As I grow into adulthood, I have to shield my "Blackness." I can't give people a reason to find a reason. You can see how this would give a person whiplash. Going from trying to change something then having to hide that change. It's stupid, it's all so stupid. These thoughts would've plagued my mind eventually. Almost as if it's a rite of passage.

What social media refers to as a “canon event,” something that everyone goes through, may not be cut and pasted the same way, but similarities are striking.

Sometimes I feel like an impostor; most of the time, I am one. Before pictures, I’d practice my smile. I never liked how it always looked like my eyes were closed when I smile, my Black gums and white teeth taking up half of my face. Vaseline was my best friend as a child; every morning, my mom (grandma) would “attack” me, rubbing her hands down my arms, legs, and my least favorite part, my face. I’d complain. I was shiny and slick. But I wasn’t allowed to “look raggedy,” to quote my late mother.

“Can’t have you being a raggedy Black girl.”

My skin color puts me at a disadvantage. I know this. I knew this before I could even understand the complexities it grows into later in life. We’ve made leaps and bounds, but manage to stay stuck in the past at the same time. Appearances are everything to people, we judge based on the cover. Even if you don’t want to admit it. I had to make sure I looked put together. “Raggedy” was a luxury I couldn’t afford.

Now I will address you, the person reading this . . .

I can assume you’re white (most of). Some of this probably caught you off guard, maybe even shocked you. What about this shocks you? All of it? None? Some? Why does it shock you?

“They really said that?” You probably wonder. The answer is yes. They really said that. Ignorance is another luxury I wasn’t able to participate in. You, however, are probably rich in it. Ignorance.

Yes, I am calling you, the reader, ignorant.

This entire essay, underlyingly, is about your ignorance.

You aren't the group of people who said I "acted white," nor are you the little girl who touched my hair and said: "unique." So why am I calling you ignorant? You didn't do anything to me, not personally. The luxury of ignorance, something I couldn't afford and still can't to this day. Certain privileges come with ignorance. Let's go back to the girl who touched my hair and called it "unique." You probably thought that was a compliment. Sure sounds like one, doesn't it? This is where your ignorance, reader, comes into play. Calling my hair unique was not a compliment. Now I would consider comments such as these "Microaggressions." You've probably said them without even realizing. You may not mean it (at least I hope), and the person you said it to probably laughed. That laugh was probably out of uneasiness. They laughed to make what you said comfortable for you. You're probably thinking about all the times this has happened to you. "*But I didn't mean it like that,*" I know. Most of the time, people can tell the difference. Though I can't speak for others, most of the time I can tell the difference.

Now to my brothers and sisters . . . why? Why do we perpetuate this stereotype onto ourselves? It's easier for outsiders to attack us, find traits that our melanin has gifted us, when we take those gifts and smash them. They have the gun, but we are giving them the bullets. Why? Are you trying to make others comfortable for the sake of my unease? This question weighs heavily on my shoulders. Even now, sitting at my dark wood desk, reflecting on my growing mind over the years, this never made sense to me . . .

At the end of the day, my brothers and sister, we're all playing the same game . . .

Ms. Allen?! Do you really know how to play the game?

I do. I know the game all too well.

Then tighten up!

On Relationships

Serria Allen

Hands delicately dance along the outline of a person's figure. Eye contact. So intense that it feels like nothing else is there. Moments of passion so fleeting it's almost embarrassing how fast my face fills with heat. Why is it so embarrassing? It's human nature. From the dawn of time; animals, creatures . . . yet I'm embarrassed by it. Is it the vulnerability, the connection between two people? How the spaces between my fingers fit yours so perfectly. People always think of the act but never the moments. I forget about the moments more than I would like to admit. Sometimes I get too caught up in the act. I blame my generation for that. They equate the performance with love when that's not necessarily true.

What caused the shift from moments to performing? Even writing this, I ask myself, "When did this become our reality?" When did "Performance Evaluation" gain a whole new meaning? I can't say that I'm innocent in this. Like I said, I forget about the moments more than I would like to admit. But I don't disregard their value. How someone's moment is another's performance. There was a brief moment in my life when the lines between moments and performances blurred. I could see them begin to blur, but quite frankly, I didn't care, sometimes I smudged the line myself. I thought it would be easier if the lines were blurred, but it wasn't easier for me.

It was easier for you.

But this isn't about your careless performances. I've already made my peace with that.

What continues to be a mystery is how easy it is to perform. People have forgotten about moments, and how moments lead to performances. And, if you're lucky, you might just make it to the second act. I've made it to the second act once in my life. I was sixteen. He was filled with moments. Moments so innocent that, looking back on it now, fill me with a certain level of cringe. Why? Arms wrapped around my waist, I breathed in a scent so bold I thought I could get drunk off of it. Moments like this were something I lost in a world that only seems to value performance.

I blame my generation.

I blame social media.

Older generations valued moments more than performances. Their performances would be seen as our moments. Isn't that crazy? Intimacy. A funny word that has lost its meaning altogether . . .

Intimacy (noun): close familiarity or friendship; closeness.

Or.

Intimacy (noun; euphemistic): an intimate act, especially sexual intercourse.

When did one definition get replaced with another? When did I replace one definition with another? The replacement was unprecedented, unnoticeable. In a way, it's scary, how fast we lose the true meaning of words. Intimacy . . . a euphemism, because phrases like "sexual

intercourse” are “too much.” Too much for whom? When we held hands, fingers interlocked. Your thumb rubbing comforting circles on the back of my hand. Was that not enough? Is that an act or a moment?

Can’t you see how this is confusing?

I’ve started to hate moments . . . at least every once in a while. Mostly because I find it hard to differentiate if they truly mean those moments or if it’s just a warm-up round before the performance. I’ve made the line between moments and acts much thicker. I learned my lesson when I smudged the line between the two.

I digress.

This . . . “issue” makes everything else that much harder. Now I can’t take a second to live in the moment because I’m worried there is an ultimatum, and that’s all they want from me . . . the ultimatum. Because it appears that’s when I’m most valued. When I’m most vulnerable. Crazy how that works isn’t it? Baring my soul isn’t enough for you? I bet if I asked you what my biggest fear is you couldn’t tell me.

But if I asked you about my body. You’d have that answer in a second.

That’s the fucked up part.

It’s funny how messed up it is. Like honestly, maybe even comical. Because the same people that are like that are the same people to judge when others do the same thing. I’m just

leveling the playing field, giving everyone equal footing to mess up someone's psyche. If I'm going to get burned, might as well burn others. Nothing's really changed, so why be the one to change it? Everyone says they want an "old-school" version of love. People repost relationship quotes and pictures. But is anyone having those moments? Or are they longing for something they probably won't ever have because they are looking for it in performances rather than the moments?

If you found that or any of this relatable, I'm sorry . . . sometimes I relate to it too. If that makes you feel better.

Everything Changes

Malia Ervin

I struggle with the stubborn loops of my shoelaces as my mom's voice echoes from the front door, her voice sharp with impatience. "Hurry up or I'll leave without you," she calls, as she does every time I take too long to get ready. I mutter under my breath, frustrated at my uncooperative laces before I give them another go. I try again, the knot finally giving in to the final tug, and I dash to the door, narrowly avoiding the threat of being left behind. My shoelaces loosen and fall into sad, splayed strings onto the floor before I can even leave the house. I pretend I don't notice.

We head to the driveway, the familiar smell of fresh grass filling the air. I glance over at the small, do-it-yourself garden that my dad and I recently planted — potatoes, tomatoes, carrots — you name it. I hop in the back seat, dangling my feet over the ledge and laying against the cool fabric as my dad buckles my brother's seatbelt. The car grows to a rumbling start.

It's a long drive to the mall — forty minutes of nothing but road and sky. As she always does, my mom clicks the radio on, and the tunes drift through the air. It hums quietly, loud enough for my parents to hear but gentle enough not to wake my younger brother from his sleep. I stare out the window as each song washes over me; a new, fantastic scene playing in my mind for each. The moment "Little Talks" by Of Monsters and Men comes on, I'm swept away into a fantasy of pirate battles on a sinking ship within the stormy sea. This is one I've been obsessed with for a while, much to my mother's dismay, as I probably played it a thousand times every morning.

When a song I don't know or don't care for comes on, I switch my attention to the car window, and the world outside suddenly becomes more vivid. I scan the never-ending wheat

fields, a golden sea of stalks stretching for miles underneath the afternoon sun. I imagine a small

figure sprinting across the plains, his legs pumping furiously as he kicks and flips over the signs to keep up with our car. The thought makes me smile, and for a second, I almost wish I could stop the car to see if he could catch up.

At long last, we pull into the mall parking lot. I can hardly contain my excitement as I eagerly undo my seatbelt and jump out of the car, tripping over my laces and nearly planting onto my face. It doesn't deter me, though, as I swing myself around and hop in place energetically while I wait for my brother to be unbuckled. The moment we enter the mall, I'm overwhelmed with joy. I run down the aisles, staring at each of the shop windows with fascination. I can spin and jump and twirl in the giant hallways, the bright lights shining down on me like a glimmering castle filled with toys and games galore.

The first store we stop at is one that I'm uninterested in — Bath & Body Works, my arch nemesis. Every time we visit, my mom stays there smelling each perfume for about forty minutes straight, before finally deciding on one measly lotion. The amount of scents gives me a headache, so I've learned to wait outside by the kiddie rides. Although my dad refuses to put a few quarters in the little helicopter, I climb in and situate myself in the cockpit.

I'm swept away yet again, soaring through the air, the wind cool against my face. I'm at battle, chasing another helicopter through the bright sky. I jeer left and right, dodging and weaving through the clouds as I try to catch up to my rival. Unexpectedly, my helicopter is shot at and alarms begin to sound off. I start to plummet down from the sky, desperately pressing every button I can as I try to regain control. I shout into my headset for backup, trying to think of something, anything, to propel myself back into the air. Thankfully, at the last second, I'm able to gain enough momentum to send me flying back upwards at top speed. I soar past my enemy and block their way, preparing my final blow. I ready, aim . . .

“Malia!” my dad calls impatiently. Suddenly, I’m back in the mall again, inside the little toy helicopter. I turn and hop out in one swift movement before catching up to my parents. That’s when I see the holy grail — I make a beeline straight to Justice. The moment I step inside, my eyes grow wide. It doesn’t matter how many times I’ve been here, I’m rendered speechless every time. The store is a burst of color — there’s pink, purple, and blue everywhere like I’ve walked into a candy store. The shelves are filled with sparkly hair clips, stuffed animals, friendship bracelets — so many friendship bracelets. I can’t stop smiling as I bounce between the racks, my fingers brushing over the clothes and bags like they’re treasures. Everything is perfect. I slip on a tiara and look at myself in a nearby mirror, eyes twinkling. I twirl, imagining myself wearing this in front of my class. Everyone would stare in awe at how amazing I look. I bet they’d think I’m a real princess! I skip around, flaunting my newfound status as a royal. I can be anything here. I can make anything here. I pick up a stuffed unicorn from a nearby shelf — my new sidekick from a faraway kingdom. Then, I grab a sparkly necklace with an amulet that gives me magical powers. Every little thing makes me feel like I’m in my own special world. This store, this mall, is mine — my own kingdom to rule for the rest of time. It’s the best place on earth.

The drive to the mall feels longer now, even though it’s the same stretch of the road. The hum of the car fills the silence, and the sky outside is a blur of dull grey. My dad has a headache, so the radio remains off. I glance over at my brother, who’s too absorbed in his phone to engage in conversation with me. Was this drive always so boring? I stare out the window, barely noticing the fields or occasional houses as we pass. They all look the same — empty and monotonous.

When we finally arrive at the mall, I feel a heaviness settle in my chest. The parking lot is practically empty and desolate. I get out of the car, my tightly knotted shoes dragging on the pavement as I follow my parents in. The air inside feels stale and the lights buzz faintly,

flickering every now and then. I walk down the familiar hallways, but everything feels different. The once-glimmering shops are now tired and worn, their signs half-faded. Every other store has a metal gate closed over it, indicating permanent closure. They're all empty with dust smudged over the windows. The whole place feels still.

I make my way over to where the kiddie rides used to be, the place where I spent so much time pretending to fly or race cars, my imagination running wild. Yet all that remains is an empty stretch of tile, scattered with crumbs and spilled soda from some long-forgotten afternoon.

I don't even have to look at the directory to know that Justice is long gone. I walk over to what used to be the holy grail, only to find an empty shell. The giant posters with flashy cheetah prints and rainbows are no longer on display, instead covered by brown cardboard and plastic. There's nothing left to promise the same bright adventure it used to. I stop in front of the entrance. This place used to be everything. My kingdom. I can almost hear the sound of bad pop music and the laughter of other girls running around the shop. Now it's all gone. The space is silent, untouched. It feels like the whole store has disappeared into thin air, or like it never even existed at all.

I glance over at my parents. My mom is picking through a discount bin and my dad is already on his phone. They don't seem to notice or care how the mall has changed, how everything has lost its magic. They've probably been coming here so long they don't even see it anymore.

My heart sinks. There's nothing left to get excited about here. There's no magic. There's just a mall that's falling apart, bit by bit. It used to be a world I could escape to, but now it's just a hollow version of itself. I sigh, my shoes dragging across the floor, and for the first time, I realize: I'm not a little girl anymore. Maybe this place was never as magical as I thought it was. It's just a place people go when there's nothing else to do.

Make it Cinematic

Elias Kreuscher

For New Years I went to Springfield, Missouri so I could stay with my boyfriend. These plans were months in the making even before we got together. I jokingly said he should come visit me for the holiday and we'd hang out. I mentioned that it was a fun idea but unrealistic because I didn't have my own place to stay. He said he was serious, he had his own apartment. So we decided, New Years, me and him, best friend road trip. We ended up getting together about a month before the trip started. He would make the ten hour drive up to Ohio, stay the night at my parent's house, and we would drive back to his apartment the next day. I can't drive, so he would be behind the wheel the whole time. I told him he was crazy for how willing he was to drive for that long just to see me. Never in my whole life had anyone told me I was worth much, let alone driving seven hundred and seventeen miles to bring me home.

The first horrible thing about driving ten hours on a road trip to Missouri was driving through Indiana, or as we lovingly nicknamed it, "Fucking Indiana." The route from my home at the most northern part of Ohio to the most southwestern part of Missouri took us diagonally across Indiana. We spent entirely too long in that state. All of it looks like Ohio, but wrong. The only good thing about Indiana was the diner we stopped in. The food was really good, the place was empty and just off the side of the highway, and the waitress called me sweetheart. Beyond that? Horrible state.

The second horrible thing about driving to Missouri was passing through the major cities. When we got to the four and five lane highways, I shrunk down into my hoodie to avoid knowing. I've always had anxiety in the car, but Kai kept me grounded the whole time. I never really felt unsafe on the road with him. Until there was a car crash right in front of us. We weren't involved, but if he hadn't managed to thread the car between the two in front of us, we

would have been hit. The first thing he did was make sure I was okay. I had no clue what had happened for a moment, the sudden stop from eighty to zero practically threw me from the seat. The second thing he did was get out of the car and make sure the other people were okay. He was the one who called 911, and he was the one who crossed two lanes of now backed-up traffic to make sure the other people weren't hurt. When the police got there, he moved the car to the side and let them handle it. His hands never left mine after that. The way he stayed calm, took control of the situation, and made sure everyone was safe really made me reevaluate the other times I'd been in stressful or sudden situations. I was so proud of him. Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt. Unfortunately, it was now dark and we still had Illinois and most of Missouri to travel through.

We listened to music on the drive down to Missouri on a handful of CDs I had brought. I have a collection with many different bands, and I let him pick out the selection I would bring with us. I also made him a CD for Christmas. We have a Spotify playlist that the two of us built and I put my favorites onto a disk for him. I never thought about how listening to music I love with someone else would change how I thought about them. Now, I can't listen to "Francesca" by Hozier without thinking about him humming next to me in the car. One song I specifically made sure to put on the CD was "Naked in Manhattan" by Chappell Roan. When we first got together, he texted me one night and said "we're that but the opposite," referring to the lyrics, and I agreed. He made me feel like maybe love didn't have to be this huge big serious thing where I drag myself through the rocks and brambles emotionally all the time. Sometimes we're just two people in a Chappell Roan song.

When we got to his apartment, the first thing I did was introduce myself to his cat. Her name is Princess Diana, and she is the softest and sweetest little thing I've ever met. Her meow was more like a chirp or squeak as she stared at me with her big bug eyes. I miss her almost as much as I miss Kai himself.

Then, I put my duffel bag in his room near the foot of his bed. We barely got changed before we collapsed haphazardly into bed, and I got to sleep next to him, in his bed, in his apartment, for the first time. The sound of his heartbeat filled my chest as I laid my head on his shoulder and draped my arm across his waist. Usually, I'm sleeping far into the midday, dead to the world around me until about noon. That first morning, though, I was awake before my alarm at nine a.m. went off, and I got to look at him. He was so peaceful, almost angelic as he slept beside me. I knew right then that I wanted to wake up like this every day.

One of the things we did while I was down in Springfield with him was meet his cousin and her cats. He lived with her for a couple years before he got his own apartment, and they're really close. Personally, I think she is a lot personality wise, but she's a very lovely woman. We all know a woman who is high energy and puts a lot of passion into the things she loves. The two of us spent a few hours with her and I got to meet the cats Kai had sent so many pictures of: Pancake, who was a menace to the household, Snickerdoodle, who was very shy and didn't leave the upper floor, and Lexi who was a little queen. While we were talking about the plans we made for my stay, she brought up that they had a free guest pass to the Bass Pro Shops aquarium, and so the three of us made plans to go on the 31st.

I had never been to an aquarium before, so I didn't really know what to expect beyond big tanks of water with many fish inside. Honestly, it was one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. There were many different tanks with brightly colored fish, some that hid in miniature reefs. We made a game of finding different fish and pointing them out to each other, going "that one is you, this one is me," Kai also emphasised that this particular aquarium was voted best aquarium in America for many years. I, having nothing to compare it to, understand why. My favorite part of this particular date was watching him get excited about all the fish. In the section with large tanks of jellyfish, the lights glowed and made them appear fluorescent.

They were gorgeous, but nothing compared to seeing the light in his eyes when he looked at them.

One day for lunch, his parents took us out for Japanese food at one of their favorite restaurants. I felt very awkward meeting his family, but I have to say I think it went better than the time he met mine, in which my middle sister told him “You’re a lot shorter than I expected,” and my baby sister asked “So . . . when am I going to be an aunt?” I’ve never been very good at meeting new people, but his mother and father didn’t seem to notice.

Sometimes you can look at a person’s parents and understand why they’re like that. You know, why they act certain ways or pronounce words like that or the way they smile. I could see it in the way she looked at his dad. Kai looks just like his mom. Something about that made me happy. I look just like my mother, and she looks just like hers, and my boyfriend looks just like his mother. It felt familiar in a way I haven’t felt before.

To celebrate New Years, he got us champagne. I never drink alcohol. When I drink, my anxiety flares up and my brain convinces me I’m dying. I hadn’t drunk any alcohol for about a year before I went to his apartment. We sipped from colorful plastic cups, mine had orange juice because the stuff was dry and bitter and I am a weak man when it comes to flavors. It took me a while before I noticed, but I was a little bit drunk, tipsy at most, and I was so comfortable I didn’t think twice about it. We watched movies until midnight and I got to have a real New Year’s kiss. I was happy, and I felt so safe curled up on his couch, in his arms.

Most of the time I spent with him, we were on his couch watching some show or movie on his laptop. He would prop it on the arm rest, and I would lay against his side with his arm around my shoulders. We’d drape a blanket over our laps and lay there for however long. It was the most peace I’ve felt since I was a little kid.

Two or three nights before we had to drive back to Ohio, I laid in bed with him curled up next to me and cried. He held my head against his chest and spoke so softly to me, like a

breeze against the long grass of a field. I had never felt grief like this before. I have felt grief, I've lost many things and people before, but this hurt in a way I never wanted to feel ever again. It felt like I was going to be swallowed whole by this aching pain in my chest, knowing that I was going to have to sleep in my own bed in just a few days more. I would sleep by myself and he would be so far away. I have never been held so gently as he had those nights I cried into his chest.

On our way back to Ohio, we stopped in St. Louis so we could go to IKEA and get the adorable AFTONSPARV alien. We both got one, carried them all the way through the maze-like store with our hands intertwined. We walked through the displays and the showrooms together along with families and other couples. I could overhear some talk about what they wanted for their home, and it made me think about what it would be like to furnish an apartment with him. Obviously we haven't been together long enough for that to make sense. He has his own plans for after college and so do I. But I like to dream. I liked the idea of coming back from class to have him sitting on the couch with his cat. We would talk about school and eat dinner together and work on whatever it is we were into at the time.

We also ate at Waffle House for both lunch and dinner. There's something vaguely romantic and also not romantic at all about sitting in an Illinois Waffle House. We had nothing to talk about, so we sat and quietly scrolled our phones and ate our food. It wasn't even weird, and isn't that lovely? It's nice to be able to sit in a restaurant and look at the person you're with, without feeling awkward about it. No words need to be said, just enjoying being in the same place together.

When we got to Ohio, we had to go straight back to Heidelberg. Originally, we were going to my parents house; he would stay the night, and the next day I would go back to my dorm and get ready for class. Instead, we got snowed in. There were horrible ice storms

throughout our whole route, so we stayed in Missouri to be safe. I got three extra days with him, cuddled up on the couch under his arm where I wanted to stay forever.

But instead of going right back to his apartment, he was here, in my bed. In my dorm room sat the boy I met online, who I never really thought I'd meet face to face. He was sitting on my bed and looking at me with his beautiful puppy dog eyes and lovely smile, and I got to share a little bit of my own life with him. We slept in my bed (which was not made for two, but who cares), he met my closest friends, we worked on homework side by side, and the whole time I kept thinking about the fact that he had to leave.

I once read somewhere that you shouldn't borrow grief from the future, because then you've suffered twice. I can't help it though, I look at my partner and I know that tomorrow I will be seven hundred and seventeen miles away from him again. There's nothing to be done about it except hold him close for the night while I still have him with me. So I laid in bed, grief holding me hostage against the wall. With his arms wrapped around my waist, and his head pressed between my shoulderblades, I laid in bed and dreamt of the future where I won't have to let him go.

Before I met Kai, before I was in love with him, before I knew I deserved better than what I was giving myself, I never thought I would be in love. I really thought, at twenty years old, that I would be alone forever and no one would ever love me. Kai changed all of that for me. I lived with him. I slept in his bed and sat on his couch and pet his cat. I celebrated a new year and I realized that the world is so much bigger than I thought it was. The drive from Ohio to Missouri alone brought the thought to my feet, and I kicked it across the street with every new experience.

I really feel like the way he left was straight out of a romantic movie. I was standing in the parking lot in the snow, he was standing beside his car and we were stalling so he wouldn't have to leave just yet. I reminded him about the first time he had to leave me, it was pouring

down rain at the end of November, cold as hell and just miserable. It was cinematic, a perfect scene right out of a movie. He got in his car, and I cried as I watched him pull out of my driveway. Before he left this time, I told him that I felt like the credits of a movie were about to roll. That we just had a long, beautiful romcom happen and now I was going to be standing in the snow, watching him drive away while the names of the director and actors crawled up the screen in the foreground. He told me it didn't have to be the ending, maybe we're still in the middle part of the movie and we still had all of the exciting plot ahead of us. I think about it sometimes when I miss him.

It took crossing three states and sleeping in a bed next to the man I love to realize that I am not alone and I will not be alone. Right now, it feels like I'm going to drown with everything happening all at once. But I have an anchor to the shore and he will not let me go. I am not alone at sea, I am comforted, and I am held. I can start to tread water again. The world is so big, but those nights it felt like it fit in the space between him and me.

Anxiety

Sophia Madison

We all know how it feels to worry. Sometimes we worry about things we cannot control. Sometimes we catch ourselves worrying about something we aren't even sure if it is going to happen. Worrying is a part of human nature, something that is perceived as normal . . . but why? What makes us worry? Why do we imagine the worst possible outcome with everything we do? Maybe you are thinking to yourself, "I don't, I don't think any of these things." Maybe we are different, maybe some people are go-with-the-flow type of people. Maybe some people do not worry about getting into an accident every time they drive, or that they will get the flu anytime they schedule something important. Maybe some people do not need to check for an exit and an accessible restroom in every building they enter. Maybe some people don't see a period in a text message and think that their friend hates them. Maybe some people don't get shockingly overstimulated when they are running late to something. Maybe people do not have to get ready hours before an event just so they can ensure they are early. Maybe we are different. But what is it that's causing me to feel different?

From a young age I knew I was someone who carried a lot of weight on my shoulders. I knew that there was something about me that differentiated me from my friends, classmates, and even strangers . . . but I could never figure out what it was. For the longest time, I forked it up to just being different, timid, and shy. I was always worrying about how people felt about me and as if I made one mistake I'd lose them forever. I would catch on to tones and attitudes. Texting me was almost impossible, because if I misread the tone of a message, I automatically assumed they hated me and wished they had never met me. Long car rides were always an issue for me. I was always so uneasy and sick to my stomach. But I didn't have motion sickness, and I never understood why. Then I would realize that I'm stuck. I cannot leave this car. Oh wait..

There is no accessible restroom, or exit. What if I cried? Everyone in the car would see me? I cannot be the person that asks to pull over after five minutes in the car. My stomach is holding so much intolerable pain, oh no . . . what if I get sick? That's it, I am going to get sick. I can literally feel it. My skin is crawling and I have no escape plan. In my head, I thought this was normal. I thought to myself "Oh it's okay, everyone feels this way" when in reality it seemed like no one understood. I remember when I once spoke to a friend about these experiences that seemed so normal and relatable. I was so certain that this is something everyone experiences. She looked me up and down and just said "What?" with the most concerned face you could imagine. In that moment I got hit with the realization that something about me is different. I was so confused on how there were people who did not feel the same way as I did.

It got to a point where I realized not everyone feels the same way I do. I felt like an outcast. At this point, I was not diagnosed with anything. I had just assumed I was overthinking everything. I was still so young and maybe growing up scared me. Maybe the future scared me. I honestly am not sure what my issue was, but I needed some type of validation to not think I was going crazy. I felt like I was living in a fictional imagination that did not exist to anyone but me. I could not find anyone who understood me. I felt like the pure version of myself vanished.

With time my mental health declined drastically. I noticed after minor inconveniences I would become incredibly irritable. If someone said something to trigger me, I would respond negatively. If I was stuck in traffic and running late, I would need minutes to cool down so I did not act inappropriately. It became something that had consumed me so deeply to the point of no return. I found myself slowly recognizing these issues more and more every day. I lost so many friends throughout my childhood because I would grasp onto any slight change in attitude or tone. I would never be able to shake these feelings and any second I noticed a slight change in behavior, I had already mentally detached myself from them. I was so overly

observant of everything. Honestly, it was quite exhausting. I would pay such close attention to everything, like the words spoken to me and body language. I would panic at the thought of what my friends would say about me behind my back. It almost felt as if I was looking for a reason to not be around them. I was so overly sensitive to everything, because I took every single detail personally. I would feel the deepest betrayal when my friends would gather without me. It was always, “Why don’t they want me around?” or, “What are they saying about me right now?” It was so incredibly exhausting to over analyze every single aspect of my life. It led me to the point where I would isolate myself. I became comfortable with being alone. I thought If I was alone, I couldn’t get hurt. I tried to find a way to stop these overactive thoughts in my head, even for a short period of time.

As I grew older and had more time to educate myself on mental health, I was able to recognize more of these triggers within myself. I still was unsure why I was this way, and why I couldn’t control it. But I knew I needed to figure it out . . . just for my own well-being. This deep rooted worryness inside of myself caused me so many more mental issues that only declined as I got older. I grew a deep fear of being abandoned, I always prepared myself for people to leave even if they showed no signs of it. I always prepared myself for the worst possible outcome in every thing I did on a daily basis so that “whatever happens cannot be that bad.” For some reason, it would bring me comfort. If I had a presentation in class I would make myself panic the night before and the day of. I would tell myself I will most likely fail, and forget all of my lines. I always thought I would throw up in front of everyone or freeze up. I would replay the worst possible scenario in my head, every single time. I found comfort in this because when I did not throw up, or when I only forgot a few lines . . . It was not that bad. Instead of being confident in myself, I belittle myself so I wouldn’t feel rejected.

All of this began a very exhausting cycle for me. I did not feel worthy of love or happiness. I felt alone in a very dark place that no one could save me from. I was convinced that

for the rest of my life I would fear everything. I never felt good enough.. For anything. I thought that there was always someone better than me, and I thought everyone in my life would leave . . .At least at some point. I never felt secure because I knew that nothing stays the same forever. And I feared change. I hated change actually. The thought of change destroyed me so much to the point where I would not allow space in my life for change. I did not allow myself to do anything but soak in my own sorrows in my room. My life was a repeating cycle of worry, sadness, and fear. I did not want to worry about change, so I did everything in my power to prevent it.

Once I was about seventeen, I realized that I needed to get help. I was looking into colleges and I knew I couldn't live this way forever. I decided to look into therapy, something I was scared of. I was scared of how people would perceive me. I did not want to be seen as weak. Everyone around me seemed to have their whole life put together and mine was falling apart. I did not want to give anyone a reason to believe that I was weak. But in reality, I was weak. I did need help. Starting therapy was so scary for me, and it took me a while to find someone who worked for me. Even when I started, I never told my full truth. I would act so much better than I was feeling and never allowed them into my feelings. I did not want anyone to have access to that because that would require change . . . which I feared so much. I thought maybe if I acted like everything was okay, then maybe I would start to feel like it.

After about a month I saw zero progress. Why was I doing this to myself and punishing myself even more? I knew I was lying, I knew I was not getting any better, and I still chose to put on this fake persona. I finally told myself that I am doing this for me. Myself. I am going to therapy for the better of myself. No one else was benefiting from me lying. I was only slowing the process down. I was almost graduating and moving away, I needed something to get better so I did not need to live this way forever. So, I finally started to take it seriously. I put myself

first and knew I needed to change, even if I was afraid of it. I made my next appointment and started to make progress, slowly but surely.

I was scared of what they would say and how it would change me. I went to my appointment and was truthfully honest. I told her how worried I get about everyday tasks, how uncomfortable I get when I'm in enclosed spaces, and how triggers can make me irritable. Long story short, I was diagnosed with anxiety. But what shocked me the most was that it did not scare me, it did not make me sad, and it didn't stress me out. If anything, all I felt was relief. It was relieving to know that I am not crazy, or messed up. I'm not delusional, and I'm certainly not a monster. I finally got the validation I was searching for. I held myself back from so many things because I felt different from everyone. But knowing someone out there can relate to my struggles and understand how consuming the feeling is, was so unbelievably comforting.

I began taking it seriously and continued to show growth in my mental health. I started medication which made a difference, but also did not change anything about me personally. I have noticed tremendous growth within myself. Even when I was just diagnosed, I felt like that was a huge leap forward for me. I finally had answers, and I finally was accepting myself for my flaws. I am finally able to understand how to have better control over my emotions, and how to not stress over every little detail in my life. The biggest lesson this has taught me is that everything happens for a reason. I cannot stress over what I cannot control. Ever since then, I have felt so much more free, I am able to express my feelings to my loved ones in a way that is understandable. I am able to communicate how things can make me feel a certain way, and I am more open to meeting people. I do not worry about who is going to leave me, and if I am going to fail an assignment. Because at the end of the day, I am human. I am a person with a massive heart and a lot of love to give. I offer so many amazing qualities that I should treasure, instead of holding myself down to a certain level. Life is such a beautiful experience, and everyone is on their own path. Anxiety does not make you crazy or insane, you are not a

monster. Anxiety does not define my worth and it does not make me any less deserving of all the good things in life.

Hair

Maggie Reges

I grew up in a predominately white family. The only person that knew how to do my hair was my grandmother, but she passed away when I was five. I lived in a village where the bulk of citizens were white. In my elementary school, people would touch my hair and pet it without even asking. I knew I didn't like that, but I was so young I didn't understand why that behavior wasn't appropriate. People would always say my hair was soft or "puffy," sometimes comparing it to them petting sheep. I don't think I had a single person of color in elementary school. My girl friends had such pretty, long, hair; I always wanted that hair. It was silky and straight, they always had such cute hairstyles. And if their hair wasn't straight then it was looser curls, nothing like the spirals that I have. From what I saw, their hair didn't puff up, I was sure they didn't feel like a petting zoo.

I wasn't comfortable wearing my hair down to school, so pretty much everyday from kindergarten to the end of middle school I wore my hair in a high puff. There was usually only one time I'd wear my hair down, which was picture day, and even then I would sometimes put it back up after my picture was taken.

I remember one day, which turned out to be one of many, that shaped how I felt about my hair. It was picture day and I actually felt confident in my hair, all my girl friends liked it. But I was sitting at the same table as my crush and he just started laughing, pointing at a piece of my hair that wasn't behaving properly. I felt so devastated and self-conscious, way more than a fifth grader should feel about their appearance. After that day I never wore my natural hair down again, even for picture days.

Fast forward to eighth grade, I still wore my hair up everyday. I was at my D.C. field trip with my fellow classmates. We were getting a group picture and my history teacher told me to

move because someone in the back couldn't be seen because my hair was so big. He said it with such an annoyed tone, as if I should have known I'd be in the way. That was very detrimental to me because I tried to make my ponytail as big as it could be, it was one of the few ways I felt confident; so my teacher insinuating it was getting in the way really plummeted my self-esteem. I felt my face get hot with not only embarrassment but also anger because I knew that no other person on that trip would even have the opportunity of getting told that in their life. After that incident, I decided I was not going to be "embarrassed" by natural hair any longer.

The summer before freshman year I decided to get relaxers, a chemical that straightens your hair. I remember coming out of the salon and feeling a new confidence within myself, I had dreamt of this moment for so long. My grandfather didn't like it as much as my natural hair, but he knew it was important to me so he followed my lead. All of my close friends liked it, I think because they saw how excited I was about it. I was ready to go to school on the first day and see everyone else's reactions.

The first day of school hardly anyone recognized me, including some friends I had since elementary school. I looked so different from the Maggie they knew for over eight years, but they all liked my hair. That first year I developed such an obsession with ensuring my hair was "perfect" that I straightened it every day before school, which obviously wasn't good for my hair. My hair was so special to me that I watched what products I used on it, and didn't even let the rain touch it or else it would get ruined; which is all very ironic considering I was basically frying it off for 4 years straight.

My hair was straight all four years of highschool. I got more attention from guys and I felt more confident. But, at the same time, I didn't feel entirely like me.

At the end of senior year I started watching videos of girls doing their natural hair. It intrigued me, their hair was so pretty and looked nothing like mine did as a child. I felt a new

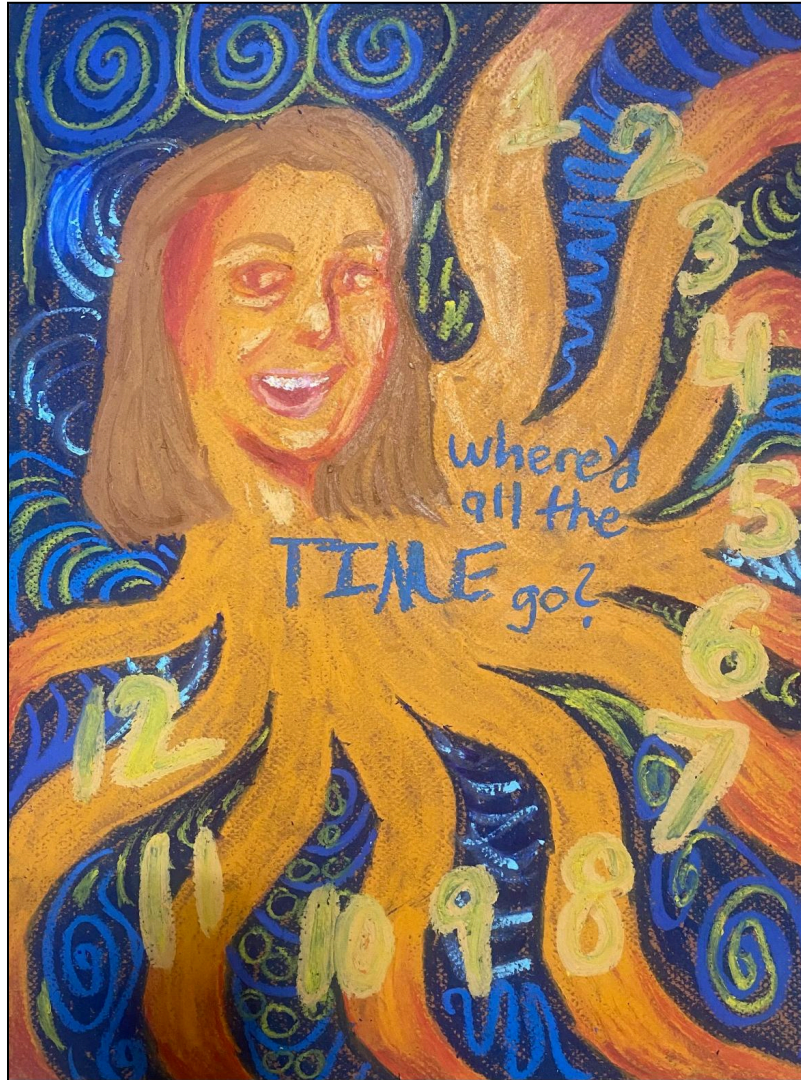
found sense of appreciation for my natural hair and realized I could actually figure out how to properly do my hair myself. I decided I would revert my hair back a week after prom. When hair reverts back that means it goes from its altered state back to its original, which for me was my hair returning to curly after being straightened for many years. I had to get a big chop in order to get all the dead, scraggly, pieces off my hair. A “big chop” is when someone cuts the majority of their hair off because it was dead or damaged. The hair will grow back healthier over time. I went to school and people really liked it, even the guys. Oddly enough I felt more confident, which I was worried was only going to be the way I felt with my straight hair. For senior superlatives I got voted for “best hair.” My family said they liked my natural hair more and wondered when I was going to revert back to it.

It was a good feeling to know that I felt like me with my natural hair. I know longer had the worry of trying to conform to the norms of my school, I was free to be myself. It was a long journey with feeling confident in my hair and my ethnicity, one that I still struggle with. But, I know that the journey of self-discovery and self-confidence is a continuous process, and I’m proud of the progress I’ve made.

ART

Untitled

Alyssa Kordish



Timeless

Ryleigh Gorman

Morpheus

SPRING

Literary Magazine

2025

Creativity is the essence of human innovation and expression. It is the ability to see the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, and to make connections between seemingly unrelated ideas. Whether through art, writing, music, or problem-solving, creativity fuels progress and inspires change. It allows us to dream, to imagine the impossible, and to bring our visions to life. Embracing creativity means embracing curiosity, experimentation, and the courage to take risks. It is a boundless journey of exploration and discovery, enriching our lives and shaping the future.

photo courtesy H. Armstrong Roberts



Creativity is not just about making something new; it's about seeing the familiar in a new light and finding beauty in the unexpected.

Creativity is the heartbeat of innovation and the soul of expression. It enables us to see the world from unique perspectives, uncover hidden patterns, and make unexpected connections. Through creativity, we transcend boundaries, turning dreams into reality and ideas into tangible outcomes. It is evident in every form of human endeavor, from art and literature to science and technology. Embracing creativity involves curiosity, boldness, and a willingness to experiment and take risks. It's a journey of perpetual discovery and growth, enriching our lives and paving the way for future advancements.

Fairy Forest

Raigan Staup



Author Biographies

Serria Allen

Serria Allen is a Senior English writing and Media major. This is their second time submitting to Morephus. Serria also works on The Kil! as editor-in-chief.

Brooke Barnes

Brooke Barnes is a freshman at Heidelberg University. She is majoring in A/YA English Education and is a member of the women's golf team here on campus. Brooke has a passion for reading and writing and can never say no to a cup of coffee with friends!

Malia Ervin

Malia Ervin is a first-year student at Heidelberg University. She is a Psychology major and Sociology minor. She is a member of the Philalethean Society, a writing coach at the Owen Center, and the secretary for Berg Allies. After graduation, she plans on doing Heidelberg's Master of Arts in Counseling program.

Tristan Fanning

Tristan Fanning is a transfer student at Heidelberg. He is a Psychology Major, but enjoys writing in his free time. This is his first ever publication.

Ryleigh Gorman

Ryleigh Gorman is a local oddball who dabbles in many forms of writing.

Alyssa Kordish

Alyssa Kordish is a junior AYA English Education major. They love to draw, write, read, and spend time with friends. On campus, they are involved in the Euglossian Society, Zeta Theta Psi, GAP Tutoring, and Admissions. He also has a cat named Sunny, who is her pride and joy.

Elias Kreuscher

Elias Kreuscher 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.

Sophia Madison

Sophia Madison is 20 years old. She is a senior at Heidelberg University majoring in Business Administration. She is graduating in May of 2025. She has always found a passion for writing in many forms. Writing is something she has always found peace within throughout her life. She tends to only write about real and raw emotions as a coping mechanism, and has been able to understand herself a lot more.

Maddisen Mikkelsen

Maddisen Mikkelsen is a freshman at Heidelberg University, where she is embracing her passion for creativity and storytelling as an aspiring author. When not crafting tales of fantasy and poems, Maddisen brings her energy and enthusiasm to the cheer and stunt team. Her love for literature and performing fuels her vibrant campus life as she builds her journey as both an athlete and a storyteller.

Maggie Reges

Maggie Reges is a second year student. Her major is in Criminology and Sociology. She is a member of the Women's Track and Field Team, CRU, is Vice-President of Tri-Alpha Honor Society, and a member of the criminal justice honor society Alpha Phi Sigma. She has always enjoyed writing, and felt like her essay was relatable in some way to any of those that felt like a minority.

Raigan Staup

Raigan Staup is a senior Biology major with a focus in pre-med. She enjoys working out and painting whenever she is able to.

Elijah Shiley

Elijah Shiley is a sophomore music education major from Tiffin, Ohio.

Editor Biographies

Lennon Amor

Lennon Amor is a senior English major with a concentration in writing. They are the co-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 an early alum of Zeta Theta Psi, a Euglo, and an Ap Lil Sib. They are co-editor-in-chief of Morpheus, participate in Berg Allies, and work at Beeghly Library. They have been writing short stories since the age of seven and intend to become a published author in the future. They have a special focus on queerness and identity in their works.

Cecilia Groth

Cecilia Groth is a sophomore Environmental Science and English Writing major. They are an editor for the Rock Creek Review, play oboe for the symphonic band, and are a corollary member of both Zeta Theta Psi and the Euglossian Society. Most of their work sparks from the sights around them, whether it be an abandoned church or a local park.

Elias Kreuscher

Elias Kreuscher 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.

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.