

Obscura

Literary & Art Journal
14th Edition



Red Rocks Community College
Lakewood, Colorado

Acknowledgements

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RRCC English Department
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Elyse Marsh

A Special Thanks to All Our
Contributors,
The Glucose Guardian,
&
The Dungeon Master

Obscura's History

In 2004, the *Obscura* club began meeting for the first time, drawn from quiet coffee shop corners, coming together to exhibit the creative work of Red Rocks' students. In the years since, with the help and guidance of mentors like Amy Braziller, Elyse Marsh, Leah Rogin-Roper and Paul Gallagher, *Obscura* has blossomed into one of the only student-run literary magazines produced by a community college in the country. Now offered as an official class for credit, *Obscura* encourages students to foster connections with their peers, creating a community of artistic and literary individuals, by working with fellow staff and contributors to produce the magazine.

Obscura is highly competitive. We receive over a hundred submissions yearly that are meticulously evaluated for acceptance into the magazine. We take into consideration a range of criteria, from the technical to the emotional. This year's staff passionately debated numerous pieces, many of which did not make the cut. However, we are confident that you will enjoy the selections in our 2017 issue of *Obscura*, possibly even enough to submit some of your own work for the next issue.

Students interested in becoming part of next year's staff can enroll in the "ENG 231, Literary Magazine" class in the Spring 2018 semester.

Staff Notes

Chris Ballard – Design & Publication

“Quotes are what you use when you don’t have anything creative to say yourself.”

-Anonymous

Maegan DeLucio – Art & Poetry Editor

“My pain is constant and sharp, and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape. But even after admitting this, there is no catharsis; my punishment continues to elude me, and I gain no deeper knowledge of myself. No new knowledge can be extracted from my telling. This confession has meant nothing.”

-Patrick Bateman, *American Psycho*

Cody Healy – Fiction & Nonfiction
Editor

“Do you know who the fuck you’re talking to? I am Mackenzie Zales! Head cheerleader, homecoming queen, part-time mothafuckin’ model! So open the goddamn envelope, and give me the crown that is rightfully mine.”

-Mackenzie Zales, *The Most Popular Girls in School*

Carolyn Nguyen – Marketing & Communications

“I’m going to put my quantum harmonizer in your photonic resonance chamber!”

-G.O.A.T., *Fallout 3*

Sam Shelton – Design & Publication

“Happiness can be found in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.”

-Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore

Elyse Marsh – Senior Editor

“And when I breathed, my breath was lightning.”

-Black Elk

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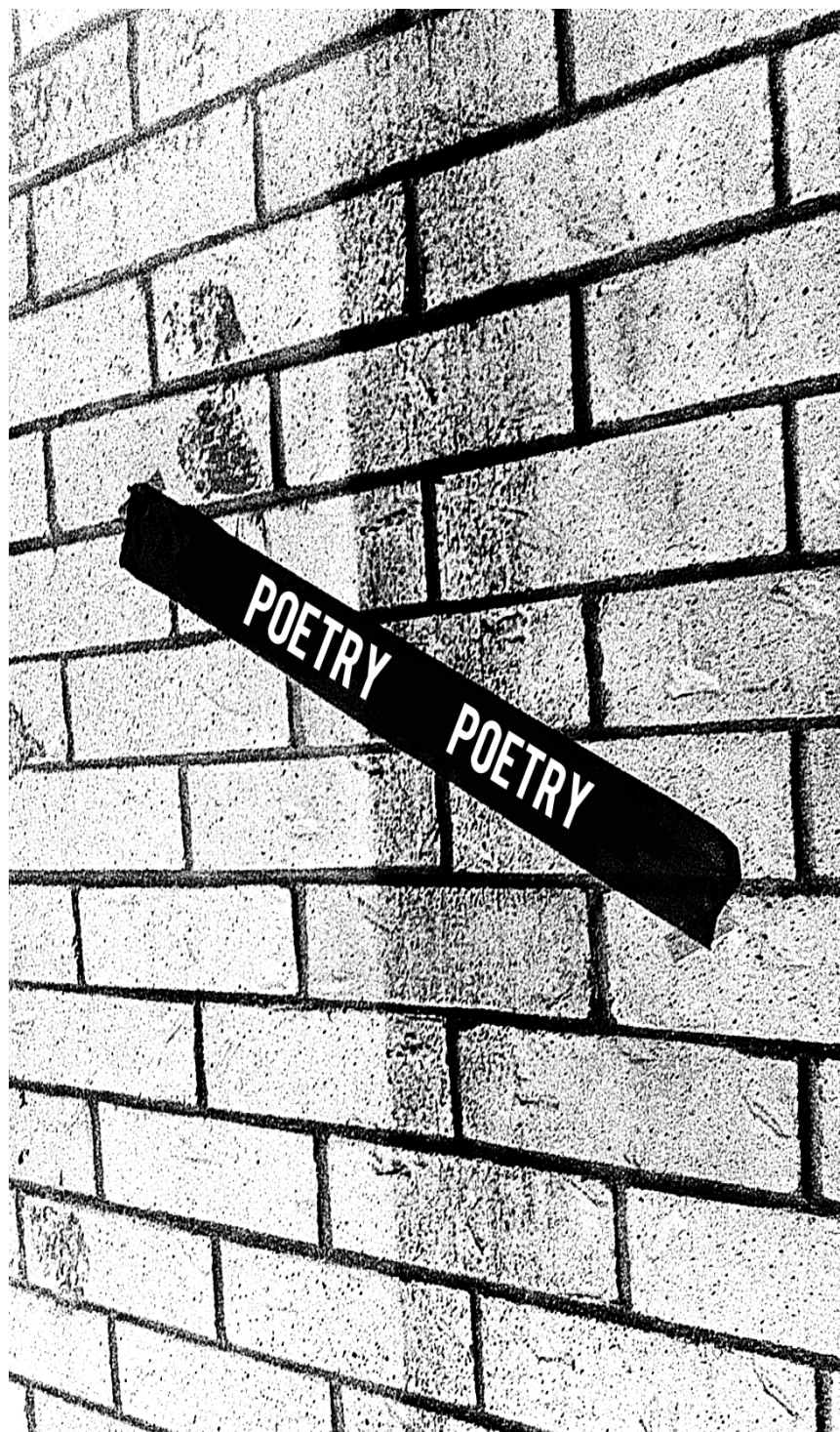
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It Must Have Been...

William Crispino

In my thoughts, I've seen the clouds melt into space.
Trees dance and bend with the wind,
A smile, a frown, and the look of amazement on a face.
I've committed mortal sin.
And I've heard spirits cry for love.

The mountains stand tall as the Sun begins to fall.
And the moon lightens up the dark sky again.

An autumn leaf falling from a tree.
A flower making love with the bee.
A cold winter stream flows so peacefully.

Stars sparkling with gleam, or so it seems,
Because one can ever see that deep.

Walk through the garden and see what you can see.
The statues so stiff,
Can come to life for you and me.

Stolen Light

Kelley Crockett

My anger's a diamond stone
I clutch with all my might.
I need my darkest fury—
it's my internal fight.
It cuts, it digs, it slices.
My days are full of night.
Diamond, you've compounded my loneliness
and stolen all my light

My diamond's large and glowing.
It shines with all my hate.
Beauty hides the ugliness
that's my eternal mate.
It's bright, it's clear, brilliant.
The luster it emanates—
helps to hide its devastating toll,
it's plan to seal my fate.

My anger's ever growing.
My diamond it lives within,
emerald cut and full of lies
the edges razor thin.
It feeds, it grows, it harbors
the darkness that's my sin.
If I just forgave, it would disappear
and allow me light again.

To Toss

AnnaLi Gilstrap

a light shines doubt
in tightest of quarters.

through spectators' eyes
are visions that dally
this wanderer's pledge.

forgetting the eyes
that seemingly scintillate

as one's mind
has caught
between hopes.

the holes are left
for a reason.
through spectators' soul,
it's bold to live out
in the game itself.

forgetting the roses
he left for you
is like butter in
raven's red plumes.

Red Lipstick

Grace Lloyd

How can I ignore you?
Faint hand around my heart
You linger in my lungs, as cold air fills inside of me.
Blurriness of intoxication comes as you bid.
The control you have over me is far more precious than
Rubies or pearl.
Frozen with you in a tango.
The furious dance has lost me in thought of despair.
Heavy breathing, and shaking hands is the cost of
dancing with you.
This is a love gone wrong and your hands grow icy.
Your grip is tightening now and choking out the last
breath.
Too few have felt you crawl inside of them.
My nails dig deeper in hopes of finding sanctity in my
own flesh.
The demons aren't the ones around me
But the ones spinning inside my own head.
Look forward, stay calm.
My hands reach for the plastic shield to protect me.
The raw jagged edges of the skin around my mouth
Screams in agony.
But I just reapply a layer of red lipstick to conceal my
anxiety.

Seeds

Grace Lloyd

You planted seeds in my lung and watered them,
with complements and words of love.
My lips had turned purple and bruised from the lack of
air,
Yet when you kissed them, you breathed life back into
them.
Flowers began to grow, sprouting from my lungs,
Filling my word with a sweet aroma.
You turned what once was a graveyard into garden.
Your fingers left trails across my skin and through my
hair.
When you looked me in the eyes I could see the spark
or the fire that consumed you,
Your soul ignited into swirls of passion.
You covered my body in sweet sloppy kisses.
My heart began to beat again and my cheeks had a
flush of color.
The flowers began to grow and spread farther than my
lungs.
My wounds began to be healed by the spreading of
wildflowers.

Famished

Mary Marlow

Regret wails endon, why didn't I heed?
Twisting your words into what my soul's plead.
You uttered, I heard with cotton-stuffed ears,
unknowing the future tidal of tears.
Dryly panting love, I beg for a bite.
Famishment settled in that was my plight.
Hands writhed around I faded away.
My diminished soul undertook the defray.
Expectation rots with odious air,
waking my dead senses out of despair.
I purchased my spade, dug a six-foot grave.
I dumped the corpse in, no longer a slave!
I bemoaned a bit, then brushed myself off.
I faded away with not doubt nor scoff.

Ageless Adolescence

Marie Price

Lived not so long yet a graced lover of time's agony.
Her mind, an owl within the wise willow.
Her body, an eager sapling struggling to keep root.
Her hair spreads to the wind's gentle touch
As she sheds one tear for the world that was lost.
Standing tall upon her magical mound among the gods,
Pointing to a bird flying before the sun,
She wishes to dance with it in the golden sky of dreams
And fly to the heaven she has not yet known.

Lena

Ryan Rindler

Hold me back—
with your eyes.
Hold me afloat in deep pools,
as the lapping waves rock us both to sleep

We'll run to the boat,
you carry a song and I a fiddle,
and point our bows to the storm.
With wool caps and no maps we'll laugh into the wind
and dodge intrepid raindrops

It's dad singing while doing the dishes
(even though we don't have to anymore).
Or the plums that squish between toes
on barefoot Sunday afternoons

But through wet locks I see the horizon—
beyond the sound, there's music.
And you wash warm pastels across the sky
pink and blue

The view fills up my senses,
schnitzel and cookies on Christmas

Hold me close,
don't let me forget this melody

Idiosyncratic

Sam Shelton

Fingerprints and tongue prints,
footsteps in the sand.
None like any other, unique.
Supply and demand.

One person, distinctive.
Perfection. Flawlessness unplanned,
unmatched. Every twinkle in the sky.
A new score on a music stand.

Not made for replication.
My thoughts unmannered, unmanned.
Connecting is hard,
so, you've got the upper hand.

Your eyes, lost at sea,
Alice falling into Wonderland.
Nothing but a nightmare in disguise.
Caught once again in quicksand.

Have to catch my breath.
Was this a mistake firsthand?
Trapped by the warmest embrace,
My heart at your command.

Monkeys

Brandi Williams

Mommy does a twirl
with a shiny brass
key in her hand.

She plugs it into our backs,
cranks it fifteen times,
then stands back to

watch as we
Clap
Clap

Clap! go our
cymbals as
our fuzzy little

monkey heads turn
left then
right then

left again.
My forced grin
only widens,

stretching until my
shiny little brass
teeth glimmer in

the fading light.
Clap! Clap!
My ears echo

as she smiles
and twists
twists

twists the key ever
tighter and tighter,
my eyes begin to

water. My hands
begin to tire.
My smile begins to

bleed.
Mommy dances and she
kicks about like a young child,

chanting a lullaby I've
not heard for awhile.
People peek in the

dusty window,
wondering what's about with
the commotion.

She peels back the walls
and pushes us forward,
giggling and clapping in

tune to our screaming banging.
People press forward
(the crowd is really beginning

to grow now)
in order to get a closer
look at Mommy's little

monkeys.

Decades

Brandi Williams

What happened to the
darling tow-headed girl,
with bright blue eyes and a
shy, quirky smile?

What happened to the
nervous teenager, with
long blonde hair and
aversive eyes?

What happened to the
anxiety-stricken young woman,
who compulsively twisted her hands
into neat, little knots?

What happened to the
lady battered by relentless,
crippling depression, who
struggled to rise from her bed each morning?

What happened to the
middle-aged woman lost in her mind,
locked in her home and crying
herself to sleep every night?

What happened to the
elderly woman carefully lining
orange bottles on the counter,
a glass of water in her hands?

What happened to the
ghost people thought they knew,
that really hid from the world
as she struggled to breathe inside?





Lips
Annika Chapleski

Pride

Annika Chapleski

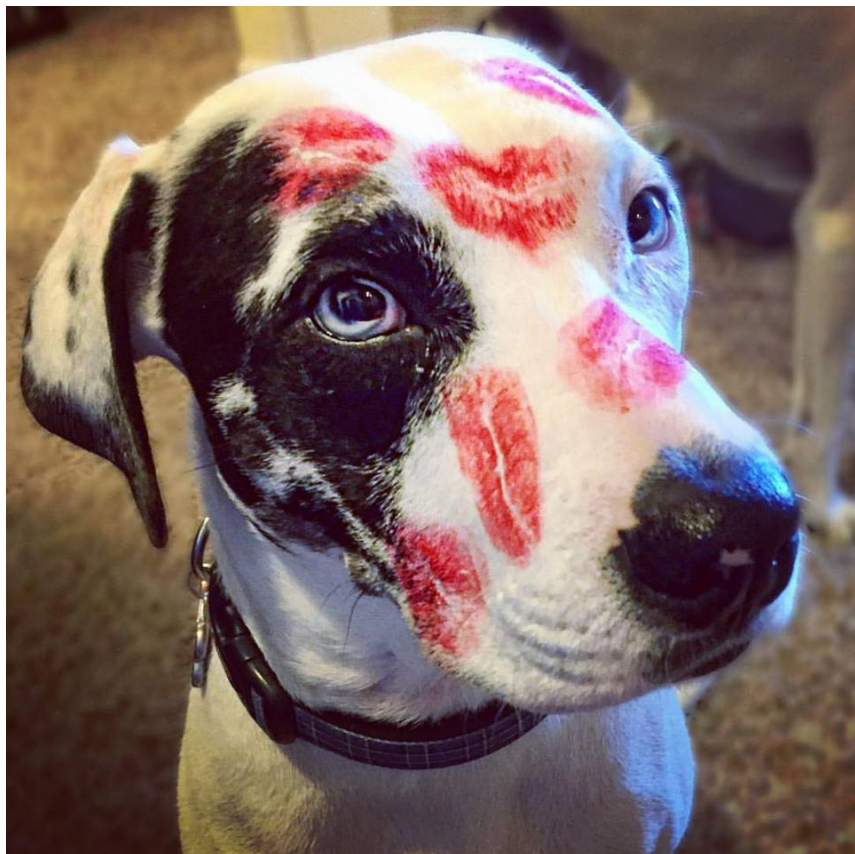




Underwater
Annika Chapleski

Effiel Tower
Francois Mailhot



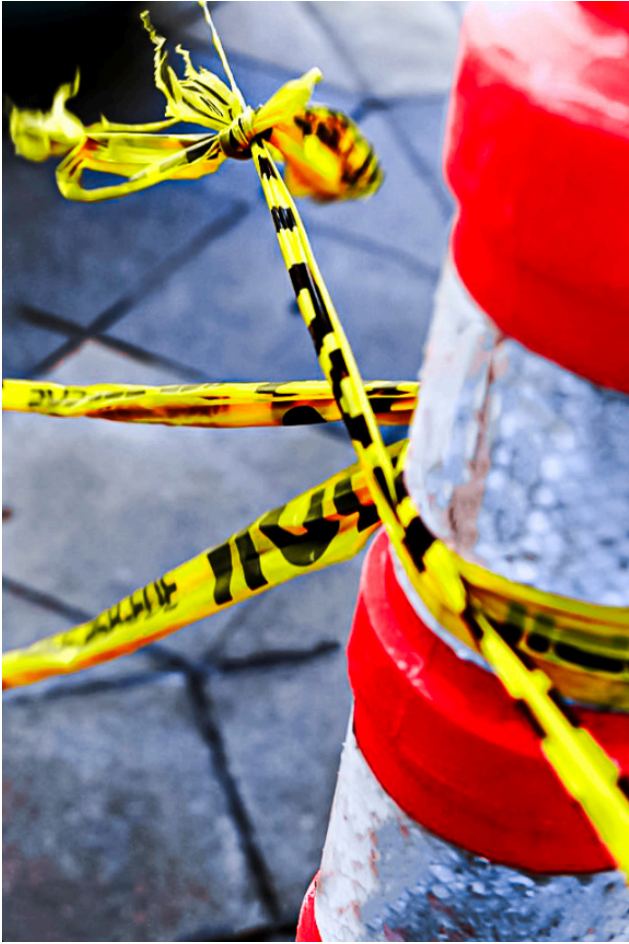


Valentine's Puppy
Francois Mailhot

Witch-Town

Sophie Mercer

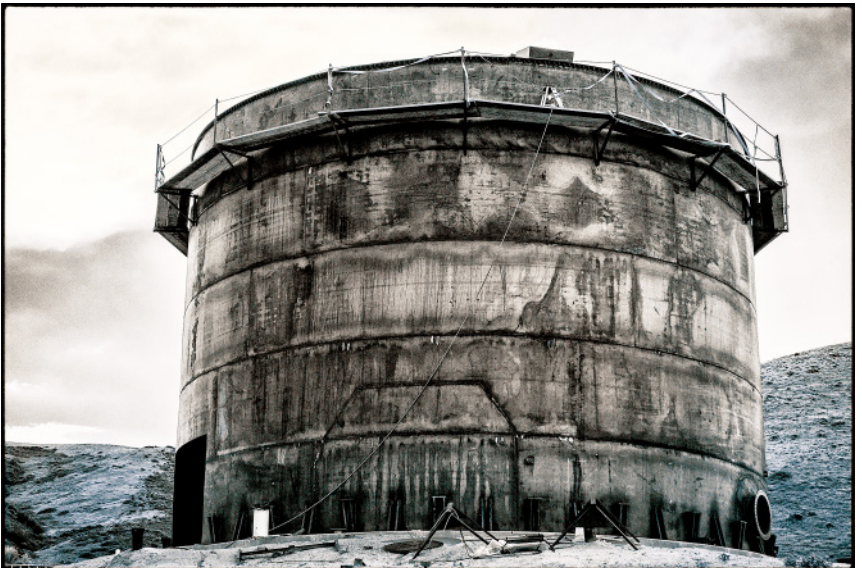


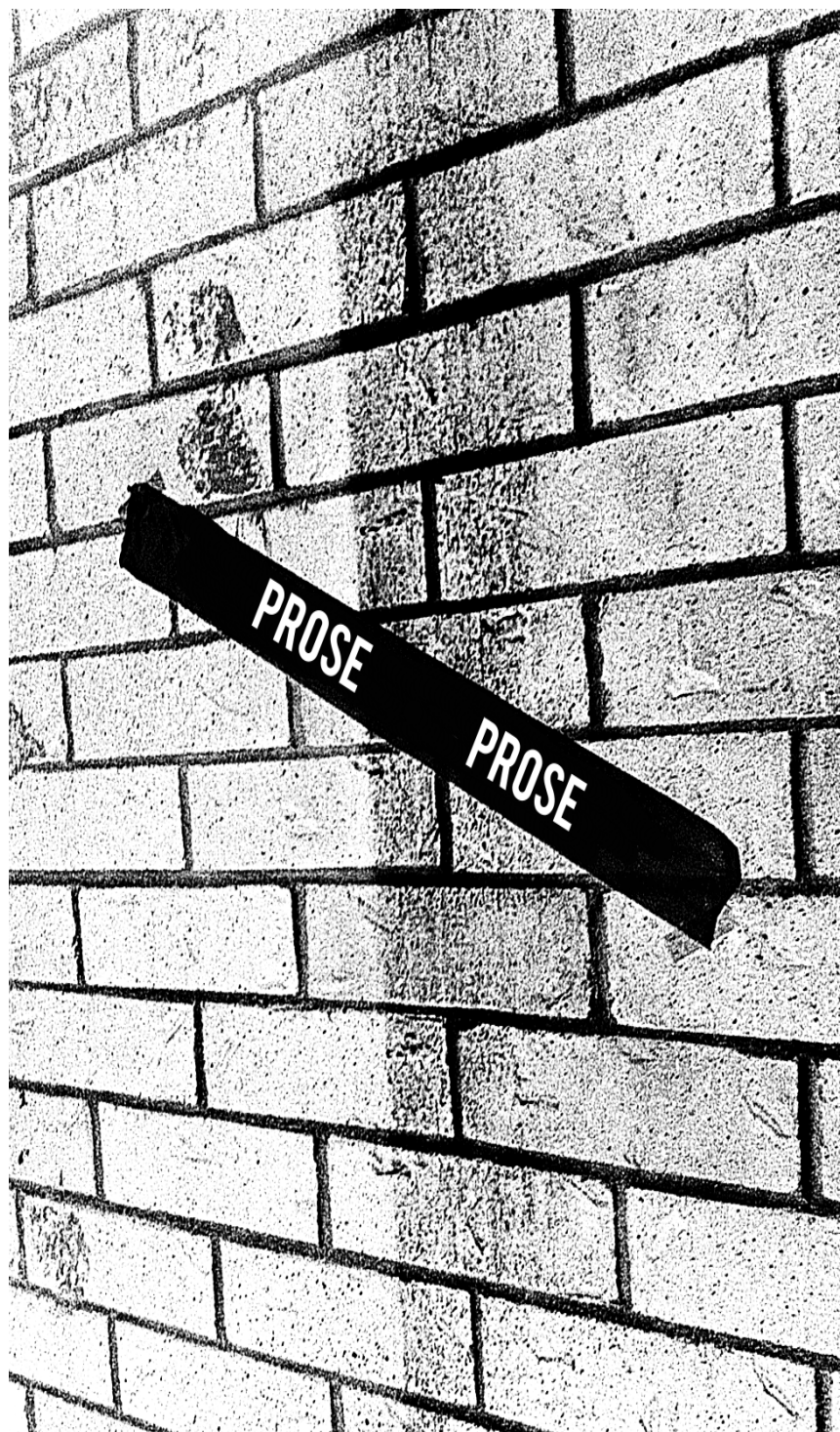


Cautionary Little Guard
Sophie Mercer

High Water

Rich Myrup





All The King's Men

Aryk Greenawalt

The family came to visit the house one warm Sunday, early May, the April rain lingering in parks, on sidewalks, in the cloudy skies. The afternoon sun filtered through the curtained windows, but inside the cool shadows lay heavy through the still house.

The bell echoed through the old house. Suzanne silenced the CD player's mournful strains of Elton John. In slippered feet, she shuffled down the hall. Photographs in wooden frames stood on the hallway table like soldiers at attention, uniform as Arlington. Suzanne trailed her fingers over their crisp edges, before folding each of them down.

She pulled open the door on a young family, a sharp-faced woman and a man in sharp business slacks. Between them a young girl, maybe eight, held onto the trim of her mother's jacket. They stared at Suzanne's matted hair hanging like Rumpelstiltskin's gold across the shoulders of a threadbare robe. A wraith, clinging to the doorknob. They stepped inside and brought the sunlight with them, and the door closed and trapped it there.

They introduced themselves as the McFarlane family, shrugging off their raincoats in the entry hall, and made themselves familiar with the house. The woman lingered in the hallway, staring at the folded-down picture frames.

The family uprooted her home, one room at a time, their footsteps like mortar shells. Suzanne clicked the door closed and slumped against it. When the footsteps had receded, Suzanne made her way down the

hall. She flipped over the smallest picture of an alert man in Navy blues, sparkling eyes staring out of the photo paper above a serene expression. Suzanne pocked this and kept a hand tight around it.

While Mr. McFarlane went into the backyard to survey the lawn, the flimsy screen door slamming behind him, his wife took careful note of every angle of the house. The sound of doors slamming chased the daughter's eager footsteps from room to room.

"How long have you lived here without him?" asked Mrs. McFarlane, pulling open the kitchen cabinets and peering into them. Suzanne leaned against the counter, watching.

"That's none of your concern."

"I couldn't help but notice—"

"The photographs? My family's life is none of your concern," Suzanne repeated. She stared away from Mrs. McFarlane, out the window. And Mrs. McFarlane didn't turn from her examination.

The little girl's voice drifted down, an airy tone that pulled at Suzanne's heart. "Mommy! There's a loft!"

"If we buy this house, that can be your room, dear," called her mother. For a moment, the house grew darker, as if a cloud had drifted over the sun. The closing of the cupboard echoed loudly; it sounded like an invasion, and Suzanne jumped.

When they left, she slumped against the closed door. The voices of the young McFarlanes still echoed against the walls of the empty house, and even the Elton John couldn't drown them out.

That made it real. Strangers' feet on the carpets her own family had walked across, after the military representative who had knocked on the door during

her husband's second combat tour, his hands shaking, had come inside and cried at her kitchen table.

That evening, she took the photo albums from the mantle and the pictures from the hallway and spread them on the dining room table. Her husband stared out of one of them, stoic and serene in his military blues. The three of them stood grinning in front of the Grand Canyon, the wind whipping at hair and loose clothing, the year he returned from his first combat tour. A little girl with pigtails, maybe five, sat on a bed surrounded by stuffed animals, grinning with a gap-toothed mouth at the camera.

The McFarlanes had been so close to touching these too.

Suzanne emptied the drawers in the kitchen. She laid out everything on the counters: ticket stubs, old letters, the pearls she'd worn at her wedding. A stack of photos on thick paper showed a second-trimester ultrasound. Mementos: a science fair award; an empty bottle of men's cologne; a child's pair of lavender glasses, one lens cracked. Suzanne held this in the glow of the skylight, so the sun itself splintered across her face. The glass blurred the light, or maybe she was crying.

The kettle wailed, the hesitant sound of a young child, and Suzanne ran her thumb across the cracked glass. Beneath her hands, cracked light fell across her pile of mementos. It was a memorial.

The kettle's whine rose to a scream, and Suzanne turned off the stove. She filled a mug with hot water, and the kettle's spout clattered against the china. While it steamed, Suzanne leaned against the counter, pressing her palms into the grooves between the tile. Everything around her, fractured and fragmented.

As she ate, she poured over the photo albums, soon to be stacked in boxes for the van going

cross-country. The single light above her flickered like the lighting of an intimate restaurant in some French film about loss, where everyone was beautiful and everyone learned to move on.

She took the boxes of her husband's things from beside the basement door and dragged them into the dining room, beneath the memorial on the table. For a long time, she just stared at them, considering uprooting them too. She drank her tea and the steam pressed into her face. In the end, she swept all her trinkets over the edge of the table, swift and precise, into the boxes.

She remembered the tiny picture frame in the pocket of her robe. The glass had weakened over the years, and the photo had slid out of place; when Suzanne lifted it, her husband's face tilted in its frame. She flipped it and popped the back panel, lifting the photo, and the glass splintered, snapped by the pressure of her hand clutched around it for hours.

The first piece of glass she touched sliced through her palm. She stared as her blood dripped over the curve of her palm onto her husband's clean military collar. Only then did she really see it; she ripped a napkin and held it against the cut.

Pressing her bandaged hand to her stomach, Suzanne dragged all the boxes into the room at the end of the hall, a bedroom stripped bare and filled again with folded linens. She stuffed the linens on top of the open boxes. She didn't pack the quilt her mother had made when Suzanne was pregnant. With delicate fingers, she unfolded it, letting it cascade through the empty room before her, all its vibrant colors almost bringing the room back to life. Surrounded by boxes of her old life, Suzanne pulled the quilt around her body, still draped with the threadbare robe. How many times had she pulled this quilt up to her daughter's chin to stave off

the chill of winter or fever? How many movie nights together, her daughter curled against her beneath this blanket, before the cancer had taken her? Suzanne sat down between boxes, back to the wall, and pressed her face to the fabric of the quilt.

She didn't cry; her body had become another of the empty places of the house. The bedroom was dark, and eventually Suzanne slumped over her folded linens, asleep.

The parents were arguing in the kitchen, the father almost shouting about their budget, about how much their old house had gone for in Winona, the mother's remarks low and calm.

In the room of photographs, open cardboard boxes overflowed with linens and quilts. A big window let the cloudy light pass over lavender walls. One wall stretched to the window with painted handprints growing in size from an infant's to a young child's, with ages written above them. They stopped at thirteen.

This was where the daughter took refuge while her parents discussed costs and benefits, and where she found Suzanne in front of the window. Suzanne hadn't closed the curtains, and while the light threw her long shadow across the room, it wreathed the little girl like an angel.

The girl fit her hands into the painted prints as she made her way across the room, dwarfing and then dwarfed by the life of Suzanne's daughter.

The girl put her small hand over Suzanne's, and looked with her out the window. For a long time, Suzanne didn't move; she let the silence and the daughter's solemn presence keep her heart steady.

"I had a daughter, just like you," Suzanne said at

last, her voice hoarse and heavy, with a hint of the lilt she had used when telling her daughter stories. "And a husband, just like your dad, who went off to war in crisp Navy blues and never came home."

The daughter stared up at Suzanne, wide-eyed and solemn. Suzanne realized that her face was wet with crying. Her whole family, spread out behind them in boxes on the floor, and all the empty spaces in the house that young McFarlane fit herself into. The handprints on the wall. The barren hallway table, where once photographs had stood like Arlington. All the things she'd lost here.

Suzanne sank to her knees before the daughter, wild hair across her face like a widow's shroud. She took the girl's hand and reached out to brush the girl's hair back. An understanding passed between them, sacred as a promise.

The door creaked. Suzanne looked up. The mother stood in the doorway, silent and still.

"Go to your mother," Suzanne said, and held her hands in the empty air for a long time after the door swung closed behind them.

Heartburn

Taylor Hunter

The phone rang for a second time; I sat in the corner staring blankly at the blinking light. After the fifth ring it went to voice mail and I heard the sound of my sister's voice. "Hey Maggie, it's Angie. I just wanted to check on you and see how you're doing since you haven't been returning my calls." A lump welled up in my throat and a tear escaped from my right eye. "I know, it's been hard for me too, but you can't just shut out your family and hold up in your apartment. It's not healthy." She paused for a brief moment. "Anyways please call me back. I'd really love to talk... I love you." The room fell silent; I could feel my heart beating faster than normal and my breathing began to increase. Sitting on my couch, I was surrounded by empty take-out boxes and empty wine bottles. I was never much of a drinker until about two weeks ago, when my nightmare came true.

The front door opened and my husband, Ryan, entered the room along with a breeze of cold air. "Hello dear," he mumbled as he came over to give me a kiss. He took off his jacket and went into our room to change out of his hospital scrubs. Ryan and I both work together at the hospital just down the street from our house, which happens to be where we met. I had always had a soft spot for babies since I was never able to have one of my own due to my pelvic inflammatory disease. It was five years ago when I first started as a maternity nurse and ran into him in the lunch area. We've been together for six years now and had succeeded in beating the odds and got pregnant on May

16th, 1996, but nothing could've prepared us for the battles that lay ahead of us. Ryan returned from our bedroom and we sat in silence until he turned on the T.V. and slowly drifted off to sleep. Insomnia had set in and I could no longer sleep through the night, but when I finally forced my eyes shut and fell asleep, that's when the nightmares set in. Visions of the white hospital walls, humming of the machines, and the stale chemical smell that seemed to consume everything, but this wasn't just another day at work. This was different; this was a memory that I've been trying so hard to forget, a memory that continues to haunt me. I woke up in a puddle of sweat with tears streaming from my eyes. All that consumed me was regret. Could I have done something different? Was this all my fault?

I began thinking of her final days, just three weeks ago, I could feel her kicking the inside of my stomach, doing back flips, and causing me to have some pretty bad heartburn. Ryan had looked at me with huge eyes and placed his hands on my stomach and grinned from ear to ear. The baby had never moved this much, and all I could think about was her perfect face and how those black and white ultrasound pictures never gave her justice to how beautiful I knew she would be. The pictures outlined her cute little button nose that reminded me so much of her father's. We deliberated for weeks on what to name her and narrowed it down to three: Josephine, Victoria, and Carly. We decided to pick one when we saw her to see which one felt right, but secretly I always liked Abby. I remember that day like it was yesterday, then I felt the pain in my chest, a pain that can only be described as carrying a life for six months only to realize that it's no longer moving. My mind came back from the memory that I had gotten lost in and I knew I had to get away,

and I went for a drive.

The lights blurred as they passed the car windows and the streets were almost empty aside from the few cars here and there. Water began to splatter on my windshield as the streets became darker and the water soaked into the gravel. I didn't know where I was going until I found myself turning into the parking lot of my hospital. I parked my car and began to wonder how Ryan was handling this all so well. My heart fell through my chest and I could feel it break even more with each breath I took. Tears began flowing uncontrollably from my eyes; I hit the steering wheel in anger, and screamed as loud as my lungs would allow. "Why me? Why did this have to happen to me? Have I done something to deserve this?" My faith in God had begun to falter in the past few weeks and I wondered how someone with such power could make such a cruel decision. I grabbed my work badge that was hanging from my rearview mirror, shut my car door, and began walking towards the front doors of the hospital and went inside. It was late and no one was at the front desk. My nose was filled with the familiar stale smell of the hospital. I followed the signs towards the maternity floor, where they kept all the new born babies and mothers. The hallways all looked the same, pastel blues and purples laid over cream wallpaper and white tile. I passed mostly empty rooms or rooms with sleeping patients and their loved ones. Soon I found myself pressed up against the glass of the baby center and my eyes were instantly drawn to a little girl named Abigale. She was perfect. Her nose the perfect button size, her hair was brown, and she was sleeping softly in her open crib. "Abby," I said to myself, what a beautiful name. From the corner of my eye I saw someone around the corner. "Maggie." I looked over to

find a co-worker of mine making her way towards me. I wiped the tears from my eyes and composed myself before she made it all the way over. "Long time no see, Maggie. How are you doing?" She pulled me in close for a hug and I could feel my heart begin to race. "Who are you looking at?" she said with a smile as she looked over at Abigale. "She's quite the little sweetheart and she'll be ready to go home tomorrow morning. Quite the little fighter, she actually had her umbilical cord wrapped around her neck." Maggie looked at me with her eyes full of pity and asked me a question that I had no idea how to answer. "So, when are you coming back to work? Everyone really misses you around here." I looked at her and put on a fake smile. "I should be coming back within the next few weeks." Suddenly her beeper went off. "Sorry Maggie, but I have to go. We're pretty low on staff tonight. Would you mind watching these little guys for a minute while I go and see what this call is about?" "Of course," I replied. She ran off and disappeared around the corner. I felt my badge in my pocket and opened the door to the maternity room, and then I blacked out.

When I opened my eyes and the dark shadow was lifted, I wasn't sure how I had made it back out to my car; the rain had stopped and there was nothing but a still silence. I looked down to find a blanket wrapped up in my arms with soft sounds coming from inside. Pulling back the blanket I found her, Abby. She was still sleeping as softly as when I saw her upstairs in her crib. Tears began to fall from my eyes again as I leaned in and kissed her head. Her sweet smell filled my nose and my heart once again felt joy. "Hey! You stop right there!" A voice screamed from behind me and I clutched Abby closer. A man in scrubs was running towards my car as he screamed for help into his

cell phone. It was in that moment that I realized what I was doing, and then got in my car.

Abby woke when I started the engine, and my car screamed as I reared it out of the parking lot; looking down at her, I cooed and kissed her forehead. Speeding down the road, I weaved in and out of cars like a game of Frogger, and when I arrived at my house, I put Abby down in the backseat. My heart was racing as I opened the door as quietly as possible so not to wake Ryan. I packed a few sets of clothes, my toothbrush, and other essentials while taking a few minutes to write a goodbye letter to Ryan. My tears stained the page.

*My dearest Ryan,
I just want you to know that I didn't mean to hurt you and I hope that one day you will understand why I had to do this, and maybe one day you would like to meet her. She's so beautiful and just as perfect as our little girl would've been. I love you so much Ryan, but I can't stay. Without her, I won't stand another day in this world.*

Goodbye, my love.

The suitcase was heavy in my left hand as I walked back out to the car. I grabbed a few blankets from inside as well as some of the formula that I had gotten while I was pregnant, and fashioned a bed in the backseat for Abby. A noise in the distance that sounded like sirens alarming me that the police were close. The sirens grew louder as they approached my street, so I got in the car and gave one final look at my house. Ryan was there standing in the window, emotionless. He looked at me with an intense stare that will forever haunt me in my dreams, and I could see that he was crying. I looked in the rearview mirror at the pile of blankets covering the small breaths of my new baby girl. The key slipped into the ignition and the engine roared as I drove away into uncertainty.

Sick

Danielle Parsons

I sat in the office. We were late; we were rushed. We should have taken the train, but I needed the comfort of my own car. By this time, I couldn't stand public places. The thought of finding a bathroom quick enough was terrifying; it was the very first thing I looked for when I entered somewhere unfamiliar. Instead of focusing on the task at hand, such as what I was going to order for lunch, I would frantically, obsessively run over the questions. Was it a bathroom that needed a key? Was it one with one of those stupid keypads? Was it one that could only fit one person at a time or did it have multiple stalls? That last question always was a horror in and of itself. These weren't normal things people thought about all day, but I wasn't normal anymore. I looked physically ill by now, and it wasn't just my invisible insides. My hair was falling out, and I always caught myself now; I didn't want to run my hands through my hair to adjust it because I would just pull out fistfuls. I was pale. My lips were pale. I was swollen to the point where I didn't recognize myself or fit into my clothes. I did not want to walk by a mirror, and I certainly did not want to run into anyone I knew. I did not want to explain what happened to me. I did not want to see the confusion on people's faces, and then of course, a look of sympathy for something they did not understand.

The surgeon was short with my family, rude. He said that we were already late, and how was he to fit all of these chairs in his small office? My family did not want to be an inconvenience. They wanted to hear

what this doctor had to say. They wanted to understand. I'm not sure if they could. It was something I lived with every day, and it had become my life, my every moment, managing my disease, and even I didn't fully understand it. My dad said he would stand. The surgeon didn't like that idea. We finally all sat down, squeezed together in the tiny, ugly office. There was a small window, and I knew if I were looking out on this cold, grey, Boston day, I would see the people on the street from 15 floors up. They would be walking into the hospital, stopping at Whole Foods to grab breakfast and a coffee before their day began. I wanted to be in that Whole Foods. I wanted to be one of those people who did normal things, ate normal things, and went about their normal day.

The surgeon sat at his desk with my file in front of him and I already hated him. He was a specialist in his field, and he was on the Board of Directors of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. He should be able to understand why we were late. I couldn't leave my house; I ran to the bathroom 5 times that morning and then panicked about the drive into the city. Once we arrived, I was already running to the lobby bathroom. I wasn't late because I was careless, I was late because I was sick. I didn't care anymore; this doctor was at the end of a long list of doctors who couldn't help me. The last doctor said I was going to die. I was so very sick of intake appointments, the forms, the waiting rooms full of old people, the questions, the uneducated nurses. Just maybe this time someone would know something that the others didn't. I didn't want to be sitting in the chair I was sitting in, surrounded by my poor family who had been living as bystanders to my illness for 13 years. The surgeon opened his mouth to speak. He was rushed. He said that he had looked over my file

and agreed with all the others that I should have surgery. He started to explain the details of the surgery, but all I heard was “best possible outcome,” that there still would be complications, but they would consider it successful because it would stop the severe internal bleeding that I was having. I was going to be 26 years old with a colostomy bag...no large intestine...pureeing my food...in the bathroom 5-7 times a day. I would have a stomach covered in scars. I would look ugly. I didn’t want scars; I didn’t want to wear a bathing suit showing off my wounds. I didn’t want my intestines sewn to the outside of my body. I didn’t want this wretched disease that took over my life. My entire life. I didn’t want the best possible outcome. I didn’t want to have a story.

I never went back to that office. I found someone who would use the hands they were given as tools to heal. I spent many, many weeks in the hospital recovering from a surgery I wasn’t sure I was going to live through. There were months that followed where the days passed and I could not get out of bed. I talked myself through the mundane tasks of the day, and convinced myself that I could brush my teeth today, I could get dressed, I could walk down my driveway to the mailbox. After being sick for so long, I didn’t have the patience with my body for slow healing and quite honestly, I was so fearful that I would not get there. I wanted to be better; I no longer wanted to be a burden to myself and others. I wanted to be out in the world with everyone else.

Looking back on this long stretch of my life where I wasn’t living one, I realize now that I was in fact, building a story. This life of mine is not about my illness; it is about strength when I had no power. In every doctor’s office door I walked through, I consid-

ered myself a failure because I did not find the key to my problem, and I would leave feeling so defeated. I thought I did something wrong because every meeting I had didn't have the outcome that I desperately wanted. There are plenty of things in my life that have not had a desired outcome and I sit and I cry and I feel terrified. These feelings are familiar to me. This life that I have lived by way of illness has made me tough, it has taught me that fair doesn't truly exist, it has made me beautifully resilient. In a way, it has prepared me for this world.

When there was a time that I could only hope to be included, I now realize that I am here. I am doing normal things amongst normal people. Every single time I experience hardship, there is no doubt in my mind that I will first hide out in bed, but I will get up every single time. I will try something else, speak to someone different, find another answer. I choose to find my strength that I thought my illness took away, but oddly, it is what my illness gave to me.

Heard You Knock

Hunter Sandoval

Liam checked his watch for the time, making sure it was correct—or rather, that it was appropriate—deciding he had waited long enough for someone to come and let him in.

He did not pretend to be here for a cordial visit, slamming on the door abrasively, only to have it swing open, already off its hinges from some other force. He had never been the subtle type, usually allowing his temper to get the better of him.

Liam observed the room around him, admiring the simplistic decoration, seventies curtains and carpet, the kitsch painting of a tiger riding around the sun in flames, then, finally, noticing the bathroom door hanging open, a spray of blood on its surface, prompting Liam to take out his gun.

There wasn't supposed to be anything like that here; it was only supposed to be the girl and the money. Alert, Liam carefully crept toward the bathroom, gun pointing in front of him, hoping this wasn't some sort of trick.

There did not appear to be any sign of struggle in the room or adjoining kitchen; for a moment, Liam considered ignoring the scene ahead and just searching for the money—if it was even still here.

As he neared, he could hear the faint hum of a piano, with a dulcet and motherly voice crooning over it, familiar to Liam, catching his memory. He remembered when he was younger, meeting the sweetheart that would become his first wife, with this exact song playing on the jukebox.

Why is there music playing? Liam thought, until his mind was interrupted, left foot tripping over a microwave appliance that was strewn about the floor. Liam hissed to himself, leaning on the wall, trying to remain silent and undetected. A bag of frozen carrots and peas leaked out of the metal mouth, half-cooked and half-crushed, while a splashing sound echoed from the bathroom.

Liam angled his gun, nearly gasping, still against the wall, waiting for another sound.

But there was nothing, so Liam began to grow impatient, feeling like an animal trapped in cage, stuck between moving forward or moving back, either way presenting to him a mess he did not particularly care to be in.

And either way, he needed the money.

Liam positioned himself beside the doorframe, taking a deep breath, kissing the two rings on his hand for good luck. This wasn't part of the plan, Liam thought to himself, wondering if the money was even here.

Then, Liam turned the corner, ready to shoot, but instead he was taken aback by a foul and filthy scene: a girl lay in the bathtub, her belly split open, innards

splattered across the tile, bundles of crimson-soaked cash floating in the low, dirty water around her body. Liam looked on, paralyzed, his face a repulsed stone, the reality of the situation slow to sink in.

“I heard you knock,” a voice from behind muttered before blasting a shotgun through his back, exploding the tension in his chest in a literal manner.

Liam grumbled in pain, convulsing on the floor. On his back, the stranger stepped, digging her heel into the hole, Liam wringing in agony, until her fun was done and she let up.

Liam’s nerves weren’t functioning enough to create pain anymore.

Consigned to his fate, unable to move in his final moments, he could only stare at the hand sticking out of the tub, a tattoo of a crow above its thumb, the same one his first wife had.

The stranger laughed, leaving without taking the money.

I Failed to Hide That Day

Hunter Sandoval

I failed to hide that day.

If they had never found me—if I had gotten away—I wonder where I would be now. Does my alternate self have the life that I don't? Do I have a home? On a beach or on a mountain somewhere. With a wife. A lovely one.

She's leaning against me with her morning coffee, resting her head on my shoulders while I watch the waves collapse.

Is there a dog, too? Running around the sand, barking at seagulls. Someday he'll catch one. But I know he'll let it go.

Is that a cry from the other room?

Of course. We have a child.

She's fresh and perfect. They say you shouldn't call your baby perfect, that it makes them have impossible expectations. So, when I tell her that she's perfect, I also tell her that her perfection is simply because she is, so she doesn't have to do anything. There are no expectations. Her very being is letting her be perfect.

But I failed them.

“You have a choice, Abioye. We can kill you, or you can join us.”

One of them shoved a gun into my face; the other held out his hand. It was a terrible choice, but I did not want to die then. I still don't, and probably never will. The first thing we did was burn the town to the ground. They went from house to house, hosing every corner and memory with flames. They built piles of sticks and trash, scorching those too.

I stood by the Jeep, my hands tied behind my back. I had joined them, but they didn't trust me yet. The captain sat with me, perched across the windshield, smoking a French cigarette. “They think we are animals,” he proclaimed, kicking my head with his boot to wrangle my attention. “But do animals make fires? When was the last time you saw a giraffe or a zebra make a fire, Abioye?”

I couldn't respond. I was afraid. But I was also angry. The captain didn't take it as a slight, and kept on cackling.

When they finally finished blazing, the sun was already receding. I thought it would be the last sunlight I'd ever see. The conflagration they bore was a nasty, hellish concoction. Even after all the buildings were ash, the flames still cawed. It was a devil's fire. It'd never go out.

We hopped on our Jeeps and drove through the shadow. The captain's men were drinking and smoking, celebrating something. It couldn't have been victory—who did they have victory over? One of them

pulled my head back and poured gin down my throat. I couldn't swallow it, spilling all over myself.

Our captain clapped. He thrust the butt of his gun into my shoulder. "Abioye," he screeched, "you have been given a second chance. Not even God gives second chances—if he did, then nothing would ever burn. But I have done what God could not, so now you obey me. Now, your soul is mine. Rest easy, friend, it is in good hands."

I guess I started laughing with them too, then, but all I really thought about was how I couldn't hide.



Contributors' Notes

Annika Chapleski

My goal as an artist is to promote positive self-images and foster self-love, while celebrating individuality. I am inspired by light, color, and visual representations of emotions. I'd like to give a huge thanks to my family and my friends, and above all to my mentor Benjamin Rogers for being such a great coach these past few years!

Kelley Crockett

This is my first year of college and my first real attempt at poetry. I was inspired to write this piece after a person in my life told me about their anger and inability to forgive as if it was their most prized possession, but I could see the pain it caused. "Stolen Light" is my attempt to capture, in words, that complex relationship within one's heart.

AnnaLi Gilstrap

AnnaLi Gilstrap was born in Wuhan, China. As a high school sophomore student, she attends Legacy Christian Academy and RRCC. Although she purposefully keeps her poetry enigmatic, "To Toss" contemplates humans' ability to lose themselves easily throughout life and their struggle to return or remember a past persona. Although every new experience discards a piece of one's former self, one shouldn't refrain from existing—hence the title: "To Toss."

Francois Mailhot

“Valentine’s Puppy”: “I’m Bentley, a puppy who is loved by my humans, especially when I woke to my masculine human leaving the house and to my feminine human smothering me with kisses while pointing her device at me. ‘This is what happens when I leave you home alone with the pup on Valentine’s Day,’ he says.” “Eiffel Tower”: I really admired this photo and its display of Paris’ cold, foggy, and eerie winter night.

Mary Marlow

An undercover poet her whole life, she states, “While pondering life with its twists and turns sometimes a poem is born.” I hope you enjoy reading “Famished” and that it inspires you to ponder your life intensely.

Sophie Mercer

Seeing past the obvious, close observation, and involvement on the subject is my process. The challenge is to see beyond the distraction of the conspicuous to capture its unique self. My choice of subject comes from my interest in ideas about beauty and emotional connections. Some of my topics are rather beautiful; others less so. My goal is to inspire those who witness my work to look more carefully at the world around them.

Rich Myrup

I'm Rich Myrup, a student and artist in the MGD department at RRCC. I came upon this water tower as it was being worked on by happenstance, and the incredible textures created by the rust and weathered steel immediately drew my eye. I processed the photo using sepia, cyanotype and black and white layers created in Silver Efex, using blending modes and masks to create the final image.

Danielle Parsons

My name is Danielle and I was diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis when I was 15. Writing this piece was the first time I've ever spoken about a moment during my illness. Being sick with an isolating disease and having to be an advocate for myself were two of the most challenging things for me. I believe one of the most important things you can do for yourself is to speak up!

Ryan Rindler

Ryan is a student in Fine Woodworking pursuing his Joiner certificate, and is an uncle.

Sam Shelton

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be an author. I'm that girl that loves the smell of the pages and is obsessed with the cramp of my hand while scribbling. My poem, "Idiosyncratic," started from a writing prompt; it turned into something cheesy and wonderful, and I fell in love with it. I hope you enjoy this ball of cheese. Never stop writing; it'll be worth it.

Brandi Williams

I am a sophomore here at RRCC majoring in psychology, and this is my second year of submitting to *Obscura* (and first year nailing it). "Monkeys" is rooted in my own struggles to define myself after spending my entire life submitting to an image created by my family, and "Decades" showcases a lifelong struggle with mental illness (specifically anxiety and depression), largely rooted in my own daily trials. Thank you and enjoy!

Submissions Guidelines

Contributors must be Red Rocks Community College students at the time of submission.

Each student may submit up to a total of three pieces.

We accept:

Fiction/ Creative Nonfiction up to 5,000 words

Poetry up to two pages

Art of any kind (drawing, painting, sculpture, jewelry, etc.)

Written works must be submitted in .doc or .docx form, single spaced with 12-point font

Art must be submitted as a .pdf with the highest image quality possible

We do not accept any copyrighted work.

**Please send all submissions to
rrccobscura@gmail.com**