

# *SPECTRA*

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2023

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY—SHREVEPORT

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# POETRY

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**Flowers and Rain**

Annelise Dixon

Salvete, we are the ineffable poets of modern day!  
At least, I feel like I'm meant to speak like that.  
I think I have too much I'd like to say  
To pack in a velvet lined box, tied with ribbon.  
Hear ye! Mine own hand shall sing a tale of truth!  
Typing on my Chromebook, rather. Let me confide in you.  
Our grandparents will cry of poetry's looming demise,  
And they will beg, "Prithee, why hath art perished?"  
But I've never seen a grave or a hearse that hath  
Carried Shakespeare and buried his words.  
I can promise that poetry is alive and well,  
And if I were a better poet, perhaps I'd tell you where.  
I'd say "Look no further than thine own yard  
Where heaven's tears fall and carnations carol."  
Though poetry never mentions muddy messes  
Because they are the ugly kind of real. No petals  
To lament if she loves you or loves you not,  
Or dewdrops dripping from daffodils and daisies.  
My poetry is less frilly, more subtle than expected.  
I am less a haunted opera house echoing tragic beauty,  
And more of a short stubborn college kid  
With an iPhone I use to text my friends love letters.  
Alas, that's not classically romantic.  
Not like flowers and rain.

## **A Most Peculiar Airport Announcement**

Ashley Ezell

Paging passenger Bennet, Elizabeth Bennet,

arriving on British Airways flight 1813 from Hertfordshire.

As you deplane, your party is waiting for you with a letter at baggage claim,

hoping to comment on “what a lovely plane ride you had.”

Be careful when you greet him –

don’t ask him if he dances. You may not enjoy the answer.

Beware of the gentleman you encounter in the terminal. He may try to prolong your

journey with stories of all sorts, even though he is a scoundrel and barely

tolerable.

We hope you enjoyed travelling with us today on your way

to Derbyshire. Welcome to the best decision you ever made.

We’re so happy to be the first to welcome you to Pemberley.

## **Climate Change**

Sue Yacovissi

Ice caps melting, whether Arctic or Antarctica  
Extreme changes, temperature, wind  
Jet streams swirl; clouds race faster  
across the sky, night becomes  
day, twisters set down  
for a moment in time and leave  
as quickly as they appeared.

People shuffle over shattered debris  
Wind, temperature, extreme changes  
A dropped cigarette becomes  
an inferno through a mountain valley.  
Towns become ashes littering the ground.  
Life and death intertwine  
together; Remaking the world.

Many towns born into lakes  
Extreme changes, temperature, water  
Dots of people on rooftops  
traffic signs poking up through  
murky water; pieces of society appearing.  
disappearing; waves of  
change, remaking what was.

Climate Change Everywhere  
Wind, Floods, Droughts, Blizzards, Fires  
All Across the Globe

**The Rarity of Snow**

Hunter Thomas

Snow days are all so rare  
in the place I call home  
as a child they were a reprieve  
a chance to play in the yard  
to build snowmen not made of mud  
with no school for the day  
as an adult they are a miracle  
the chance to feel the unknown  
to see how snow blankets the swamps  
to look outside and to be in  
a hundred new places at once  
I am in the Alaskan wilderness  
I am sitting on a porch in Montana  
I am drinking a cup of tea in England  
I am seeing mountains in Japan  
I am not home but I am  
in the way the soul sees sights unknown  
that can be recognized in any life



**As the Sun Rivals the Darkness**

Kara Brown

Sun is shining down on the sidewalk  
and the weeds peeking through its overgrown cracks  
and on the flowers springing from the dirt  
and the doddering trampoline, making its dust glisten.  
On the woman with her sundress and lemonade—  
It's shining softly against her aging face,  
Covering the nearby park and neighboring shops,  
seeping through open windows  
that display shining, bright faces that rival the sun.

The sun continues to combat the darkness  
that attempts to swallow this already-darkening world  
with its anxious people and ambience,  
and the woman drinking her lemonade on the swing.

**A Poem About the Storm**

Mary Holley

The night sky is booming tonight.  
That's how a poem is supposed to start. But no one  
likes reading about storms — they want sunshine.  
Why don't you go outside and get some sun?

Don't say you watched the clouds flicker in the night.  
Don't say the thunder shook you all the way to your bones.  
Don't say you watched the windows break, and the moonlight  
seep into your porcelain floors.

Don't say the raindrops trickled through the glass,  
just as knives do on a chalkboard.  
Don't say the glass pierced your feet faster than a needle.  
And don't say the storm was the aftermath of a lost lover.

**Digging Up the Garden**  
Hunter Thomas

I still say I'm sorry for cutting down my mother's four o'clock flowers  
even though she asked me to, I think she missed them  
they sprouted everywhere, bathing the yard in color  
(they grew like weeds and looked about the same)  
I dug out the roots and planted roses and hydrangeas  
(a trade up if you ask me)  
somedays I think my mother feels guilty  
because they came from my grandmother's yard  
(I don't, grandma wasn't that fond of them either)  
now everyone who visits my mother's home  
sits on her porch and drinks sweet tea amongst the new blooms  
(I was so sad to see those four o'clocks go)

**Thank You**

Skye Kennedy

Thank you  
my little red flying friend  
for giving me a good ol' sting  
on the head  
I am sure I needed it  
After all, who was I to take care of the flowers  
you so desperately love  
The nerve  
The orange ones for sure  
did not need my care  
Who was I to step foot near the ground  
I worked so hard for  
Thank you for letting me know  
my garden is not really mine anymore

### **Golden Daffodils**

Lillian Penrod

The daffodils danced with the rhythm  
of my blissful solitude.

That's how a poem should start.  
But most people  
do not look for solitude in the daffodils—  
they are too busy existing.

Don't you have anything better to do?

Don't say that they make your heart  
flutter with pleasure.  
Don't say they shine like the golden  
rays of the sun.  
Don't say they out-do the sparkling  
waves of the sea.  
And don't say that the twinkling stems  
pierced your pensive mood with glee.

Say that everyone deserves blissful  
happiness found in anything that lives  
and exists.  
Say that it is okay if someone is missing  
their bliss of solitude.  
Say that they will find it, whether it is  
found in the golden daffodils or not.

**Melancholy in Space**

Hunter Thomas

Space has always held wonder for me  
when I was little I would look up at the stars  
and think of what possibilities were out there  
nowadays I still see the beauty and wonder  
but the sight also makes me a bit sad  
an all-seeing sky entirely ignorant of our troubles  
never to intervene in the tragedies of our lives  
but always present, an everlasting comfort  
full of ghosts and despair itself  
brave little barkers and sea sailors lost to time  
never to return to humanity's cradle  
yet always looking down on home  
while we can only look back ourselves

**Nearsighted Moon**

Sarah Rayburn

Sun, in all her majesty,  
Cast brilliant beams of light  
For all to receive.  
With a motherly tenderness,  
She washes the planets  
In soft, warm hugs.  
Never stopping to take a nap,  
Never ceasing to send her heat.  
Tirelessly, she works to meet the needs  
Of all the planets and their friends,  
Holding everything together  
Like the master puppeteer.  
Carefully, she shines,  
And easily, she's taken for granted.

Moon, a handsome mystique,  
Coaxing the tides to move as  
Earth rotates under his wing,  
Earth clinging to him  
And him clinging to Earth.  
Lovingly, he dances with his son.  
When Moon takes his snooze,  
Sun still works and worries  
To make sure all is done.

Moon waltzes around Earth  
Thinking he's done everything  
That can be done.  
And Sun asks for help,  
"Moon, my dear, won't you  
Lend me a hand?"  
"But Sun, my love, I've done  
All that I can.  
Can't you see I'm tired  
And worn to my core?"  
Sun smiles and nods,  
"Okay, I won't ask anymore."

For millennia on end, Sun  
Cares for the planets and holds them tight  
And worries and makes sure  
That everything's right.  
She's now truly worked herself  
Right down to her core,  
And now, Sun doesn't shine  
So bright anymore.

The planets are freezing.  
They're floating away.  
And Moon cries out  
To Sun, just to say,  
“Hey honey, I love you,  
But send a beam my way.  
Poor Earth cannot see me.”  
And Sun picks up her eyes  
That've sunk deep in her skull.  
She manages a whisper,  
“Moon, please, can't you see that I'm dull--?”  
“But, love,” Moon cried,  
“How tired could you be?  
All the work that was done,  
Was all done by me.  
Sure, you made the fire,  
And warmed up the sky,  
But I moved the tides,  
And stood watch at night.  
The tides have now froze,  
Because somebody here  
Is mad at a life they chose.  
You have to get over it,  
It's really no big deal.”  
With that, Sun decided  
She'd have one last meal.  
With supernova brightness,  
Summoning the power of a black hole,  
She swallowed up the planets  
And reduced Moon to charcoal.

Her final moments were held  
In guttural, echoing sobs.  
Why was She the only one  
Who could do her job?



**Twisting Serpents and Rocky Shores**

Hunter Thomas

What I took to be forget-me-nots in a flowerbed  
turned out to be a ship on the vast seas  
unrooted and adrift with no port in sight

What I took to be a night sky full of stars  
turned out to be knives in a drawer  
glinting, sharpened to pierce my heart

What I took to be the truth  
turned out to be grains of sand in an hourglass  
falling shifting twisting

What I took to be loss  
turned out to be a snake in the garden  
striking me like a ship upon the rocks

**A Poem About the Cold**

Ashley Ezell

*At last, Old Man Winter is settling in on West Mary*  
That's not how a poem should begin.  
Poetry like that won't pay the bills,  
and I'll be back to writing flowery sentiments about sunshine in the end.  
Don't say the cold wind cuts through like a knife.  
Don't say the bitter temperature feels like a welcome mat,  
or that the ice hanging from the eaves reminds you of the bars  
you've built around your heart. No, don't ever say that.  
Instead, write about warmer, happier times  
because, apparently, that's what sells.  
No one wants to be reminded of their cold bitterness.  
Even though I hate the heat, I'll sit here in my own personal hell.  
And in the end, I'll be richer, sure,  
but what price will it cost me to say  
what they want? Don't say anything about that now.  
Just give them what they want at the end of the day,  
and maybe someone will come along and know  
instantly that the heat pulls at my creativity as the temperature climbs.  
And they will appreciate the insincerity in my  
flowery words. But the moment they read my rhymes  
about the devastating cold, they will say  
*at last, I've found a kindred spirit* – In the most peculiar way.

**Fog's Last Kiss**

Amy Lynn Brown

Heavy mist lays a soggy blanket across  
the avenue, pitching diamonds  
into the eyes of onlookers.  
A gentle glisten from a lamppost, as droplets  
made from hydrogen and oxygen shimmer  
on black asphalt.  
Spiderwebs become repositories of exquisite  
spun silk, water beading on each strand,  
appearing as each night's dreamcatcher quietly guarding its inhabitant.  
Charlotte's stretchy abode is a trick,  
a hindrance, as her eight hairy legs  
slip off cascading layers of damp perfection.  
Mist transforms into fog, the calls of  
red foxes and croaking frogs fill the ozone.  
You can see your hand in front of you,  
but what lies beyond the abyss is enigma, mystery, fear.  
Swirling eddies of tiny tornadic forms  
catch your interest—no danger, just liquid  
residue and intricate configurations of sloppy tranquility.  
This phenomenon reaches across sleeping  
houses, dead cars, green lawns.  
Like tendrils of dead keratin, this visit from  
the quiet bayou down the way is no coincidence.  
Moving stealthily, spreading calm and  
beauty in its wake.  
It is hard to catch, ethereal, but easy to see.  
Mist, fog, bayou: such beautiful music they make.

**The Plant**

Lillian Penrod

Thank you for being present  
at all hours of the day  
and all hours of the night  
I woke up last week  
and watered the plant that was dying  
the old petals had fallen  
a beautiful beheading

I watched the sun shine in  
but little did she know  
she wasn't saving the ivy  
and she wasn't saving me

all that was left alive in that room  
was the same person that felt like  
a plant without sunshine

they say that  
real depression is when you stop loving  
the things you love  
but I loved that plant  
and I still do

thank you for being present  
at all hours of the day  
and all hours of the night  
but you are no longer welcome.

**A Poem about the Stars**

Savannah Foster

The galaxy is dancing tonight.  
That's how a poem is supposed to start, but no one  
Looks for the beauty in the night sky. They just want to sleep.  
Why don't you go to bed and get some rest?

Don't say you lay on the cool, damp grass at night.  
Don't say the stars burn with the unending desire to be loved.  
Don't say you are memorized by the sound of the stars  
Or that the moon dances, waiting to see the sun.

Don't say the morning will come and they will fade fast,  
Just like flowers that bloom in the garden.  
Don't say the show is over before it has begun,  
And don't say the galaxy was created to be studied and not adored.

Say the galaxy longs for a dance.  
Say we can keep them company.  
Say we can stay and listen to their conversations.  
Say everything deserves to be loved, even the things we cannot touch.

**The Beauty of Life**

Hunter Thomas

There is a beauty in everything I see  
it is in the bird's nest in the oak tree  
where care is present amongst the leaves  
it is in the way strangers share umbrellas in the rain  
in the way a mother cooks for her children  
in the way a cat curls up in the lap of its owner  
life is love and love is life  
it's in smiles and tears  
the sunset and the sunrise  
the way stars shine at night  
and how the rain cools the earth  
the beauty of life is everywhere and everything  
there to be freely enjoyed by all

**Toledo Bend Reservoir: A Man-Made Legend**

Kameron Self

Worn down billboards litter the broken-down roads  
like fireflies in a hot night  
New businesses are like a Christmas gift  
But just another that your dad promised,  
but you got sent a postcard instead

Most days are caked with humidity  
all year round, but particularly in the spring,

Families vacation in this nook of the woods  
They look forward to the sights,  
fishing with the kids, boating along the murky water  
in awe while they arrive,  
traveling along two-and-a half mile Pendleton bridge

Somehow, crossing the Texas-Louisiana border feels like a new world  
Vacationers love it here

But if you dig in a little deeper,  
all the old folks hate all 289 square miles  
of that old, man-made reservoir

They say that God didn't intend it,  
that men with shovels and some stagnant water  
isn't even considered nature  
They long for the old economy,  
a time where they could go out in the summer  
without being crowded by city-folk

But, me, just a young soul  
looks upon the expanse of bass-filled water  
full of awe,  
looking forward to visiting Cypress Bend  
to celebrate my eighth-grade graduation

Deep down, I know I will leave this place  
I'm not a southern girl at heart  
My family sees that, too, so they won't stop me

Though, part of me will always long for my childhood ways  
swimming in the humidity,  
fresh seafood boils,  
and going a little too fast on my friend's boat

I guess my soul knows where I'm from,  
and it leaves a lingering smile on my face  
when I finally visit home

**Journey to My Mother's House**

Sarah Rayburn

In April, East Texas smells of pine straw and water.  
The unpaved ground carries scars of rogue tires,  
And the air feels like a warm, damp rag  
Softly hugging your nose and cheeks,  
Giving them a break from the dry, winter air.  
The tree limbs droop from the frequent rain  
(And occasional tornado). A town so small  
You must zoom in to exactly where it is  
On the GPS. Sometimes miles stretch between  
Signs of habitation. Firey rust burns up the sides  
Of barn roofs and aluminum tool sheds.  
Emerald pastures separated by sometimes  
Neatly-kept barbed wire fences next to  
Well-traveled red clay roads lined with  
Rows and rows of overgrown trees.  
At a break in the evergreen trees, an old, dirty  
Little white house sits in a green pasture.  
Three pecan trees line the driveway behind  
A subtly-rusted black gate. The garage is  
The first to greet me as I drive around  
To the concrete patio lined with fragments of bricks  
—Leftovers from the foundation built over a century ago.  
A tall single oak tree stands alone on the acres  
Deep in the backyard, its branches stretched  
In all directions, welcoming visitors.



**Your Father's Eyes**

Kameron Self

As you try to remember what  
he looks like,  
he sounds like,  
how it feels to hug him

Looking further into the mirror,  
you recognize him on your face  
though you don't remember his looks

You long to see him again,  
to get just one call  
but in reality,  
you're just alone  
with your reflection

**My Mother Says**

Lillian Penrod

Your father goes golfing too much.  
Your father shouldn't say God's name in vain.

Bake the bread in the oven, and wait to see the perfect rise before it is done.  
Baking will help me feel better about my relationships with people;  
you know my love language is gift-giving.

I talked to the dogs this morning.  
They told me to tell you that you should come around more often because  
they miss you.

How is there so much fucking dirt on the floor when I swept yesterday evening?

Your father has always been a know-it-all.  
He wasn't my first choice, but he made me a cassette tape and brought flowers to my job  
after knowing him for a week.  
After that, I realized he was the first man in my life to love me correctly.  
I thought that he would love you correctly, as well.

You know my judgement was never the best when it came to men.

My plants make me happier than anybody can, because they let me talk to them for hours.  
You know they can hear you when you talk to them, right?

I stopped drinking when I found God.  
The pleasure I receive from believing comforts me more  
than a bottle of wine.

I wish you could believe.

Who put a red shirt in a load of whites?  
I guess I'll have to do everybody's laundry, now.

Sometimes I wish I didn't adopt a puppy.  
He is so small, I could easily just...  
nevermind.

You give me so many books, and I tell you I will read them.  
Sparknotes comes in handy.

I wonder what your brother would have been like.  
I think about him every day.

**Airline Announcement**

Hannah Brown

Paging passenger Brown, Hannah Brown,

Incoming on Southwest Airlines Flight 2510 from New Orleans.

Your party will be waiting to pick you up outside the airport by the back parking lot.

Your husband wants you to know

He hasn't done any laundry since you've been gone,

And he has let the dog sleep in the bed, as well.

He will also be expecting a souvenir from Yosemite Park

Along with an expensive sandwich from inside the airport.

Please understand he is still a child at heart

And needs you to get through life.

**Noise Complaint, 300 Block of Maple Avenue**

Ashley Ezell

At approximately 7:47 AM on 9/26/22 police received a call regarding a Noise Complaint. The reporting party told police they heard shouting coming from their neighbor's home in the 300 block of Maple Avenue. Authorities were dispatched and arrived to find the husband sitting on the patio. The wife arrived shortly afterwards following a walk around the block, "to cool off," in her words. The pair admitted to a shouting match which began in the kitchen and spilled over to the patio, beginning as a result of the husband "yet again, putting his dirty coffee cup on the counter instead of the dishwasher," as reported by the wife. This was apparently the last straw for the wife, who claims she has asked him repeatedly for 13 years to place his dirty dishes in the dishwasher, instead of just leaving his dirty cup on the counter. The husband vehemently denies this allegation. Neighbors reported the disturbance came to its most heated point when the wife shouted: "I tell you what – I'll just start putting supper NEAR the stove every day and hope it gets cooked!" This was heard from the patio area of the couple's home by next door neighbors, who thought authorities should probably be called at that point.

Advised parties to take a cool down breather minute in the future to avoid drawing such reports from neighbors. Husband was advised to put his used coffee mug in dishwasher from now on. No citations written.

**Deliverance**

Amy Lynn Brown

His hair was blonde and thin. Did  
it shine yellow like the sun's rays or was  
it the drab hue of a winter's dead lawn?  
He never knew what it depended upon.  
Does this make him a horrible son?  
His sister's chubby palms are open, waiting for food.  
Was she a successful adult?  
Did she flounder and flail with society's demands?  
He cannot recall this chorus. Is he an  
inattentive brother?  
Papa held himself proud, with lithe body and shitty attitude.  
Did a smile ever curl the edges of  
his papery mouth?  
Have his eyes ever revealed joy or tears?  
Did he cough up phlegm when he was sick?  
It's not his fault. Pondering these as a  
baby child was not his job.  
His mind is crammed with bits  
and pieces of everyone and everything.  
Is his brain protecting his fragility, or does  
optimism keep him afloat?  
He recalls what matters, not the superfluous.

**Nothing Like What I Expected**

Sarah Rayburn

Elsewhere my studious heart labors  
day-in and day-out on the degree to inspire other degrees.  
I wake in the mornings to smell the crisp, mountain air  
And race to meet my unmet friends at the meal hall.  
I care for my body and appearance to keep my vanity justified.  
I dye my hair in the communal bathroom,  
All a vain attempt to find myself and heal the child within.  
The ten-hour drive home is not too often made,  
With my assailant there, the desire to return escapes me.  
Many nights I will spend alone,  
A revolving door of people not worthy of my body and spirit  
Will leave their mark on my naive soul.  
One day, I will find my prince(ss) charming,  
and hopefully, one day will come soon.

But that is not the life I chose.  
Through arrest, divorce, protection orders, and secrets,  
I was met with a barrage of unfortunate circumstances.  
It created mud in my mind like the kind on dirt roads  
so that I would not choose the life that was not for me.  
Through a breakdown, relocation, miscarriage, and mistakes,  
I met the purest form of life anyone can ever know.  
You can sober up quickly when your life is no longer all about you.  
My body and appearance are never upkept,  
but my days are filled with laughter and "I love you"s,  
with warm embraces and "I'm so proud of you"s.  
I fall asleep next to prince charming and wake up just the same.  
Every morning, I breathe thick, hot Louisiana air and  
wake to the songs of little girls ready for breakfast.  
My studies happen in a far more muted way,  
at night and during naps in the comfort of my home,  
aspiring to show the next generation the comforts and beauties  
of the language they use every day.  
This is not the life I expected to love, but it is the life I needed.  
I am at peace.

**Generational**

Rayleigh Freeman

Children grow up to be what their parents are, and  
unfortunately, we can't choose our family,  
but we can choose the paths to take in life.

Despite my efforts,  
every path chosen reveals the same outcome:

That I am like my mother.

No matter how much therapy I go to, I will be like her.  
My blonde hair and blue eyes.  
My short stature and broad shoulders.

Even though I did not have kids at 18 like my mother,  
I am still seen as a whore.

It is because I am a woman that I am seen this way,  
being my grandmother's only granddaughter.

It is because my mother was her only daughter,  
that I must be raised the same as she.

You must raise a child sternly,  
pointing out only their flaws that seem to be hereditary.

Because children grow up to be just like their parents,  
we must prevent that from happening  
with harsh words repeated down to us from generations.

But I do not believe I am like my mother,  
no matter what anyone else says.

Our paths may have looked similar,  
but it has shown different outcomes.

And because of this,  
children are not destined to be like their parents.

**Airline Announcement**

Savannah Foster

Paging passenger Foster, Jason Foster,  
Coming in on flight 2223 from Greece, on Turkish Airways.  
As you get off the airplane, your family will be waiting for you at  
at the front desk in the lobby.  
Do not be alarmed when your daughter brings up her new fiancé.  
They met two days ago  
and plan to get married tomorrow.  
The wedding bill is waiting for you,  
Plus the plumbing you never got around to before you left.  
Oh, and your daughter just wrecked your brand-new sports car.  
My friend, I think you better just get back on this plane and go back to Greece.



## **Confirmation**

Hannah Brown

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Alone in my studio apartment,  
I sat up in my bed in tears.  
I couldn't do it anymore.

Financially, I was scared,  
and mentally, I was even more afraid.  
I hated my job, my apartment, my surroundings, my life.  
I was going to have to move back in with my parents.

Then, my boyfriend called me.  
I'm not the type to cry to people,  
but at that point, I was just so tired.  
I told him my worries, my fears, and my feelings.

Him living 5 hours away, he hung up the phone.  
A few minutes later, I was on speaker with his family.

"Come home."

July 10<sup>th</sup>-July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020

I quit my job,  
got out of my lease,  
canceled my internet,  
packed all of my things, and moved out.

I told my parents, and they agreed it'd be what's best for me.  
I stayed at their house that week, and a lot of healing took place.  
I told my close friends the news and spent time with each of them.

I cried a lot that week.  
Leaving was the hardest thing I'd ever do.  
I wasn't sure if I would have the strength to do it.

A man I'd known for many years came up to me and handed me a sheet of paper.  
He told me God had woken him up in the middle of the night with a message for me.  
I opened the paper, and it read:

"Are you ready to come home?"

**Marriage is More Than Love**

Destiny Nunley-Jackson

Kevin, I know I said that I would do the Laundry, but I just don't want to. I hate the process and the effort that it takes. I'd rather take out the trash and mow the yard.

Your underwear stinks, and your socks stand on their own. Yes, I love you very much, but laundry makes me question life. I'd rather pull off all of my toenails.

Why can't I do the dishes instead?  
We'll just call your mom and tell her I won't do the laundry. That is just another reason for me to not be good enough.

**Egyptian Sun**

Amy Lynn Brown

If she were born Egyptian, her  
name would be Khepri, which means  
"Morning sun."  
Family would be numerous. They  
would cherish her and teach her how to smile.  
Mut would tenderly brush her hair,  
Showing Khepri how to be desirable, a good wife.  
Baba would show her how to bait a  
hook, give her advice about safe living, be in her  
midst all the time.  
Sisters and brothers would be plentiful; Khepri would  
play stickball in the mud, fight off snakes with  
her bare hands.  
Khepri's existence would be full of love,  
hugs, peace.  
She would roam the desert sands, shop at an outdoor  
market, look across the vast horizon to catch  
a glimpse of Mer, pyramids.  
She would be ignorant of abuse, harsh  
words, neglect.  
Amun Ra would be her god, and his wife  
Amunet would be Khepri's goddess.  
Patron deities of Egypt, they would  
protect her life, lead her to greatness.  
All-in-all, Egyptian life would be simple, satisfying,  
carefree, special.  
Who would not enjoy life free of war,  
chaos, all work, and no play?  
Khepri, she, would.

**You Annoy Me**

Sarah Rayburn

Listen Charlie, and listen well.  
You're a weird one, (I know you can tell).  
We used to quarrel, but just for fun  
And to test to see how fast we could run.  
(I was faster, just keep that in mind).  
And you were always a little behind.

Though we all know how times change,  
We bear in mind that our relations strain.  
(I would tell you I wish you to take care,  
but that is a sentiment I will not share).  
So, tell mom that you're doing well.  
Lord only knows, she can never tell.

And let dad know you're better without  
his grump and his greed and his narcissistic pout.  
(Or don't, it's likely far better that way,  
Keeping him at a length, where he should stay).

But nevermind all of that, anyhow.  
Let's not think of him right now.  
Instead, let Sam know, she's also weird  
(but I blame you and the room y'all shared).

Now whisper to Kay that her outfit is nice  
( 'cause if you don't, at night she cries).  
Such a sensitive girl, but that's nothing bad.  
(Just super annoying, if you asked our dad).

And announce to Stace you're better than her,  
(it's surely not true, but she's easy to anger).

Now leave me alone, your breath smells;  
But please take care, and treat yourself well.

## **Airline Announcement**

Rayleigh Freeman

Upon a rocky landing to the most dreaded place she could think, Shreveport, Rayleigh heard a loud ring come over the plane's intercom:

Passenger Freeman, Rayleigh Freeman,  
arriving in Shreveport from Richmond  
on Delta flight 223.

Please stay at airport terminal A upon exiting the aircraft,  
and keep an eye out!

Your party will be holding balloons, streamers,  
and smiles will be beaming from their faces.

You'll see a limousine outside of the terminal parked behind the shuttles.  
For three long years, you have been away!

Your town has been less lively without you.

Please refrain from bickering over the blistering southern heat,  
or how your grandmother has on a peacock feathered hat from the flea market.

Celebrations are to be had!

It is okay that the North did not work out for you;  
we are glad you are not a Yankee.

Enjoy being back to your roots.

Your family is here to welcome you home and start the next  
chapter of your life.

**i love you, furr-ever**

Kameron Self

Look up at me, just a small kitty  
Your big forest eyes reflecting my image  
as you run up to the door, you meow  
I know you were waiting for me

Even so, you'll never understand  
my sentiments, my habits  
Keeping your fallen whiskers in a box  
Buying the expensive turkey treats you love  
Only sleeping if you're curled at my feet

Though you cannot show it like me,  
I find comfort knowing your love  
The way you watch me leave through the window  
The cry you let out when you want snuggles  
The way you taught yourself how to fetch hair ties  
because I couldn't afford toys

**Defecation Outside of Designated Facilities, Damage to Private Property**

Hannah Fewell

At approximately 4:25 pm on 09/24/2022, police received a call regarding unusual odor emanating from an apartment. The caller reported that her roommates were seen walking together out of the bathroom of said apartment, leaving behind what she described as “a stench beyond all humanity and imagination.” Caller further elaborated that she could not describe the horrors strung out on the bathroom floor, for to think of it further would cause her to lose her breakfast. Police and coroner rushed to the scene, only to discover feces and urine soaking “mommy’s favorite bathmat,” as reporting party elaborated. Suspects Harvey Boy and Si Baby were questioned as to their knowledge of the scene but provided no response to officers besides purring and leg-rubbing. Both suspects were let off with a warning in the case of the bathmat, but charged with misdemeanor damage to private property, as officers could not remove all hairs from their uniforms with even the strongest of lint rollers. Reporting party was subsequently ordered to clean out the litter box.

**The Best Boy**

Lela Robichaux

A tear slid down the young man's cheek  
Is how a poem about losing a dog should start.  
But many do not share their grief,  
choosing to buck up and soldier on.

Do not say he is now unburdened from the tethers of pain,  
do not say he lived a free and full life,  
do not say he no longer whimpers in the night,  
and do not say his unconditional love touched every heart.

He lived every day the same—  
Eating, playing, and loving his people—  
and when he got old, he died.  
He was a good dog.



*(Thank You For Speaking Over Me)*

Annelise Dixon

I tend to get ahead of myself,  
something that I am aware of.  
So, thank god you're always there to speak  
and keep me from rambling on.

I'm grateful, honest! It wasn't as if  
I had wanted to speak my mind.  
Your input is gold, a glittering gift;  
of course you repeat it and repeat it.

And repeat it you do! Thank you for that.  
It's a good thing you cut me off,  
so I could learn the true value of  
my freewill in your eyes.

I've always known you to be  
an open book of very few pages.  
But I'm thankful your font overshadows mine,  
being more won't matter if I'm smaller.

So, thank you for talking over me  
and ensuring I have to yell.  
Interrupt me more, please, I insist!  
What good is my voice if not strained?

And thank you, you made having a voice  
the most hellishly difficult fate.  
So, when other people regard me strangely?  
When they say that I'm mean and I'm loud?

I'll have them direct their thanks  
to you, as well.

**A Ruined Love**

Kara Brown

Come to think of it, I really don't remember anymore;  
I can't pinpoint the moment when things changed between us.  
One day we're fine, and the next, it's as though I'm talking to a stranger—  
One who is angry and unkind.

Hang on a sec—maybe, if I think hard enough, I can see it.  
I can trace the faded line back to where it all went wrong:  
The moment your love turned into something dark,  
Something ugly and sinister that I didn't want anymore,  
Something that makes me wish we could go back to before.

But why bother? Why go back to a love that sits tainted?  
I cannot yearn for something that no longer exists—  
I will not allow myself to.  
'Tis you who has the cross to bear, not I.  
I have problems of my own.

**My Love for You is Like a Flower in May**

Hannah Fewell

*My love for you is like a flower in May.*

It's what the lovesick dream of,  
it's what the teenage mind dotes on,  
and what it believes to be a most prolific piece.

It's the stuff that desperate Bella  
would profess to poor, pining Edward.  
It belongs in those dear movies  
and the fantasies of Meyer,  
but not to the realm of the poet.  
Not anymore.

Speak truthfully, speak earnestly,  
speak honestly, speak vividly.  
Tell him what is really on your mind!  
Speak to your own lives, your experience,  
to the real facts of what you have endured!

Love is not like a flower in May, not really at all,  
for the flower soon turns to wilt, to ghastr;  
is that not what the great Bard said?  
Speak to what is real and true.

Save the mush and gush  
for a Hallmark Valentine card.

**Do I Want to Know**

Hunter Thomas

Do I want to know the things you say  
or the things that you do  
would it comfort me to know  
or would it worry me even more  
you make me vulnerable in a way  
that no one else can possibly do  
somedays you make me feel like Hector  
standing on the walls of Troy  
on others, you're my Achilles heel  
or the arrow soaring through the air  
this feeling is bittersweet  
but I wouldn't trade it for anything  
because it means you have a space in my heart  
that would bleed without you in it

**Love, a Prisoner**

Kara Brown

I swallowed my feelings again today,  
The butterflies in my stomach turning to bile in my throat.  
I'm dizzy from this teetering—  
Back and forth like a seesaw,  
Never on even ground, always changing where we stand.  
My friends say I'm trapped,  
Locked away in a prison of my own creation—  
But when I see his face, my tongue becomes the prisoner,  
My lips the bars of its cell.  
Yet, I tell myself it's better this way.  
I prefer to hide behind the safety of words left unsaid.

So, I sigh, shoulders heavy, and greet him with a smile,  
Because maybe one day, that unsaid will speak louder than I ever could.

## **Gratitude Towards Death**

Savannah Foster

Death, my friend who has taken away so much misery,  
Who has ended the burden of my family and friends,  
Thank you for taking my laughter and turning it into tears.  
Thank you for turning my joy into misery.  
Tears were the replacement for singing  
While gravesites became a new home.  
Thank you for so many funerals,  
So many prayers,  
So many ghosts.  
You think you are so mighty, yet you end all suffering.  
So proud, yet so simple.  
Because of you, you make life worth living.  
In the end, you give joy to all.  
Thank you for releasing us from the cares of this world.  
Death, thank you for the pain you have caused and ended.

**Perseverance Unwilling**

Rayleigh Freeman

She is strong and will persevere.  
That is how I want my poem to start,  
and that is what some people want to read.

But I do not feel strong,  
and most of the time, I want to give up.

Do you think that is an appealing read?

Speaking of the urge to see the vines bleed on the beautiful rose during her summer shower?  
Watching as it suffocates from the raindrops, unable to uproot itself from the situation?

I cannot start a poem like that.  
Instead, I will say that flower is beaming bright amongst the rain  
and growing every day.

**we're only human!**

Kameron Self

in a life littered with hardships,  
we think we're struggling the most,  
who knows why?

my friend failed her midterm,  
but i'm behind on rent  
so, you tell me, who's worse off?

all together now,  
we mope, sob, and grimace  
wondering what could've been  
is that what life's about?

you see,  
with every individual trial,  
no matter how irresolute,  
we behave the same!



**Sometimes it is Right to Tell a Lie**

Lillian Penrod

Sometimes it is right to tell a lie  
to the woman checking you out in line,  
asking how you are doing,  
especially when the smile greeting you is  
brighter than the future ahead of you.

The right lie can lead you to fulfillment,  
satisfaction,  
prosperity, even.

Why tell the truth to a lover  
when you can lie  
and make them believe  
that they are better for someone new,  
someone better than you?

Sometimes it is right to tell a lie  
when the truth is too much to bear.

**Time and Quicksand**

Hunter Thomas

Time has always slipped through my hands like grains of sand  
I have spent my life always sinking into quicksand  
my life feels like it's been lived in a desert  
and the present is like a glass of water  
what I wouldn't give to be in a rainstorm  
instead I always sink further down  
the struggling always makes it worse  
sand burning my lungs and blinding my eyes  
while everything else passes me by  
the past is supposed to be set in stone  
but for me it's like being in an hourglass  
always fighting against the falling grains of sand

**My Best Friend the Ocean**

Kara Brown

What I thought to be a best friend,  
Turned out to be a forming tsunami—  
Swallowing me in destruction it could not understand.

What I thought to be a life jacket,  
Was actually an anchor—  
Keeping me rooted in danger I had yet to see.

What I thought to be an end to the waves,  
Turned out to be a moment short-lived—  
Before the chaos surged for the final time.

What I understood to be friendship,  
Was tragically just a natural disaster—  
Showing me just how strong the winds could blow.

**My Apologies**

Rayleigh Freeman

My apologies are never accepted, only met with responses of

“You say that too much. It means nothing.”

“Show it, don’t say it.”

I can forgive others easily when others apologize to me,

but I can’t forgive myself.

Maybe it will get better with age.

Or more therapy...

But my therapist says I should not say

“I’m sorry,” either.

One day I will thank her,

because I do not owe others anything,

even an apology.

**Dated Detective**

Kara Brown

You are trying to remember when things changed.  
You are trying to remember the path of the stringed line.  
The mysterious figure that faded into the shadows—  
You can almost hear their voice.  
The echoes of something that once was—  
At least, you'd like to think so.  
The story started in times long forgotten,  
But the narrator...  
You recognize them even less.  
Seeing a familiar story,  
Now from a distant point of view.

**Airport Intercom Announcement**

Skye Kennedy

Paging passenger Sandiego, Carmen Sandiego,  
incoming on American Airlines Flight 1532 from New York.  
Please meet your party at the gate,  
and try to stay discreet.  
They have been looking for you everywhere,  
and they won't hurt you.  
Don't make a big fuss.  
They just want to talk.  
Please do not try to run.  
You have run long enough.  
One last time, paging passenger Sandiego.  
Are you there?

**Gun Fire**

Hannah Brown

At approximately 3:00 am on 9/27/22, police received a call regarding a young woman saying a gun was fired in her home. The reporting party told police they were asleep in their bed when they heard a gunshot with glass breaking and immediately called the authorities. When police arrived, they investigated the scene, and officers on patrol surveyed the area around the home. The investigating officer found a broken window but no bullet. Upon further investigation, a roll of pre-made biscuit dough was located near the window that seemed to have exploded. It is believed the noises the young woman heard were the sounds of the biscuit dough exploding and it breaking the window. Police showed the young woman their findings, and the reporting party was relieved.

**Discard and Disappear**

Annelise Dixon

Paging passenger Doe, miss Jane Doe,  
Incoming from an unknown flight from an unknown  
location.

There is nobody waiting for you, but we can  
see you were here from the abundance of peanut packages  
abandoned in your seat. Thank you for that. Please,  
collect your very light suitcase from the luggage claim,  
and consider a suitcase tag from our gift shop.

You may find it just to the left of our postcard stand—  
the cheesy ones that my kids collect—  
run by a haggard old man with a trash can by his desk.  
Kindly take a gander.

Write your name down with the leaky, red pen.  
Your real name, please, do not ask to borrow one.  
And buy a lottery ticket. It will end up on the ground, I'm sure.  
Your lucky number is which bus stop you may  
take upon leaving this place. I cannot give better directions  
when you seem to have vanished.

Thank you for riding with us, take care,  
and be sure to dispose of your trash properly.  
Or at least own up to it.



**The Hairbrush Incident**

Rayleigh Freeman

Dispatchers responded to a noise complaint around 11:25 PM this Thursday. Upon arrival, officers could hear yelling from inside. Neighbors outside of the home claim that two women have been arguing for over an hour about something unknown to witnesses. Once the homeowner answered the door for the police, she was asked what this altercation was about. The woman claims that her roommate used her hairbrush and did not tell her. The officers then asked the roommate to come to speak to the police as well. While coming down the hallway she can be heard saying, "I cleaned it afterward; I didn't think it would be a big deal." The roommate was then asked to step outside to de-escalate the argument. The homeowner began yelling as she walked away, "No you didn't! That is so gross. I can't believe I used it after you." Raising his voice, the officer told the woman to stop talking unless she is asked questions herself. His partner told the roommate to find a different place to sleep overnight until the two could stop arguing. While leaving the home the officers made one last statement, "If this happens again, a fine will be issued. Do not argue over... hairbrushes." A warning was given, and no arrests were made.

**Suspicious Activity**

Lela Robichaux

At approximately 2:30 PM on 6/12/2003, police received a call regarding trespassing at a private residence in Madison Park. The reporting party told police they returned home to find a trespasser in a mask asleep on their porch. Upon approaching cautiously and waking the suspect, the suspect hissed at the victims, lunged at them threateningly, and ran away into oncoming traffic. Police pursued the suspect on foot and found him hiding in a large trash bin three houses away. The suspect was confirmed to be a homeless raccoon. The victims declined to press charges.

**Your Cell**

Marlana Daigle

Hey kiddo, where you at? Falling down  
the rabbit hole of infinite knowledge  
smut and nonsense provided  
by the cancer-leaking ion battery  
attached to you like a growing limb?  
Knowledge at the touch of your fingers, except  
the two-dimensional world you live in is so lacking,

Do you really comprehend?

Do you know day smells differently  
than night at sea? Can a phone  
teach you that? I know I've said  
humans are assholes, I'm not recanting that statement  
or even putting less importance  
on the fact. I'm just saying they are also so beautifully unique.

Their peculiar scents, soft or calloused  
skin with all the dazzling different tones.  
The way they move their finger when they lie,  
or dart their eyes to the side  
when unsure. The different energy in the air  
when a stranger cries on a bus or at the park... or bar.

You will never feel the tension in the atmosphere  
through your phone,  
alone in your room.

**State Fair**

Amy Lynn Brown

Donning pricey Ray-Bans, Duke slides into  
the turnstile of Shreveport's fall event icon.  
He lifts his rounded nose into the air,  
the heavy scent of fried Twinkies sneaking  
in through funnel cakes and barbecue.  
The Tilt-A-Whirl is in full swing,  
Duke's torso leads the way to anticipated butterfly bliss in the belly.  
His hair is in knots, too damn  
long to deal with autumn's strong gale.  
A cover band plays The Cranberry's "Zombie,"  
and it is number one here, too, so far.  
The lyricist's voice cracks and trills on high notes,  
dropping the local's interest as they run for cotton candy.  
The Big Slide is crowded, long lines and short children,  
screaming down Prozac's playground substitute.  
Dads are in NFL caps, moms carry a Vera Bradley,  
and Duke is carrying a bag full of handmade incense.  
Should he visit Queen Sheba, Tarot card reader?  
Her Rider-Waite deck will show him a future he doesn't want to see.  
This cacophony is driving him crazy!  
He never got bothered when he was totting around.  
Now, he heeds his nerves and exits to reunite with his Nissan Rogue.  
Till next year, he bids you  
Good day!

**burnout**

Kameron Self

Staring at the ticking clock  
Watching the time getting closer,  
I can't bring myself to begin

Should I have studied earlier?  
Am I a failure?

As the number in the grade book drops lower,  
I remember the times  
when I was the gifted kid  
who did math for enjoyment

Wallowing in my anxiety,  
I look at the clock  
I feel my pulse accelerate

11:30 p.m,  
Only half an hour left

In the end,  
I was never able to start  
I can never finish

I feel burnout eat away at me  
like a deep burn to my skin

What path is life taking me on?  
I have lost all hope  
Over a simple assignment

**Thank You**

Lela Robichaux

I waited  
for three hours.  
I was thrilled  
when I was turned away,  
trudging into the rain  
as I made the  
two-mile trek back to my car.  
It was so lovely to hear,  
“I’m sorry, we’re closed.”  
It made my day complete.  
I especially look forward  
to being the very next in line,  
knots of anticipation fluttering,  
and hearing,  
“All sold out!”

**A Life That Feels Off-Brand**

Kara Brown

I walk into the Walmart,  
My basket filling with every Great Value item I can find.  
My beat-up Converse squeak against the floor as I walk,  
The sound as melancholy as I feel.  
I longingly think of a life other than my own—  
A life filled with Gucci bags and Louis Vuitton,  
A life of magnificent meals and Michelin stars—  
But instead, I look to the McDonald's across from the store.  
I sigh and push my cart to the front,  
The cart somehow lighter than my heavy heart.

**Supermarket Trips**

Sarah Rayburn

I'm browsing the selection  
at the Walmart down the road.  
I could walk here if I wanted,  
but I'm not counting my steps.  
Like therapy and torture all  
wrapped into one melting pot  
of aisles of Great Value flour  
and Digiornio freezer pizzas.  
There's Farberware waffle makers  
and Pioneer Woman branded  
merchandise, from toilet plungers  
to cutlery and everything in between.  
If you need a Kotex tampon,  
it's next to the Meow Mix and Purina.  
If you want a box of Pepsi,  
you can find it with the Bud Light and  
Lipton Citrus Green Tea.  
If I want to hear a lady talking about  
hemorrhoids on speaker phone,  
I will go look at the Borden's whole milk.  
And if I want to get cut off by  
a robust woman near the meat section,  
to Walmart is where I will come.  
Something so soothing about seeing  
people in whatever state they're most  
commonly in, because for Walmart  
you don't have to change;  
come as you feel is appropriate.  
There's not a soul who can judge.



## **The Bread Aisle**

Marlana Daigle

Oh, girl, I miss you so much!  
A warm hug in the bread aisle  
down the street from home.

Her with her buggy full of Capri Suns, snack cakes.  
Me, with my wine,  
wrapped around her back.

We have got to get together; we've got to do lunch.

I'm broke this week, my house? Ugh,  
can't remember if the bathroom's clean.

Or next week, maybe? You tell me.  
And, oh, how's your mom?

I'll update you next week... Oh no, can't.  
Child's spelling bee, the week after?

Of course, of course,  
we'll figure it out.

Next month maybe, if the stars align.  
There's a million out there,  
we should make it work.

Reluctantly letting go of the embrace,  
a hug in the bread aisle,  
sometimes, has to be enough.

**emergency services**

Kameron Self

I sit in the waiting room  
I'm surrounded in despair  
that bounces off of the  
freezing linoleum floor

Some are helplessly bleeding,  
asking for just one Band-Aid  
Some shake through heavy sobs,  
wondering what could've been

But me,  
I feel fine, acclimated  
to this human flood of emotions  
to the Lean-Cuisine meal smell

I am young,  
but, I too, have experienced  
pain, loss, anxiety  
all of these emotions  
that soak this full,  
empty feeling purgatory

**In Another, Money-Made Life**

Kara Brown

In my other life, the rain is made of my praises,  
The trees are filled with the fruits of my labor,  
And the ground is paved with my stolen success.  
We'd never have to fear being poor again,  
And the sun would shine down on a money-made world.

I vacation in Cabo in the summer,  
With a drink in my hand. I smile brightly—  
Being blissfully ignorant  
Of monetary dread caused by a system I cannot control.  
Not once do I see in my reflection the girl I am  
In this life, whose shoulders, bogged down with worries,  
Carry the weight of a burden she shouldn't have to bear.

But in my other life, I come home to emptiness—  
Barren walls and floor—  
Nobody to fill the open space of my home or heart.  
I realize that the weight I carry  
Is one I'd rather share than lack at all.

**Basking in the Sunshine**

Vaquetta Hudson

Like I always say, every day is not sunshine and roses, and if today is not, seasons change. Speaking of change, life's perspective is a funny thing. It's peculiar, life, that is. Basking in the sunshine on a beautiful morning that wasn't promised is a daring adventure. Close your eyes, listen to the birds chirping, singing melodious tunes, and feel the morning dew.

Basking in the sunshine is invigoration, freedom, and peace, all wrapped up in one. Know what I'm saying?

Dark and gloom-ridden is pessimism, but perspective is a funny thing. My skin and facial expression could fit this description, if you want to put it like that. Yet I'm basking in the sunshine, propelling towards the future.

Choose to seize the moment or lose it. Cheer up, my friend. Bask in the sunshine; it's a matter of perspective. We'll understand it better, by and by.

**That's Just Life**

Kameron Self

Any time I am left alone,  
I find myself thinking  
Who would I be,  
if things were easy?

If I didn't fight to get out of bed  
If I didn't shut down at any inconvenience  
If my best friend wasn't my therapist

In a world where my childhood goals were attainable,  
I could shoot for the stars without wondering:  
Did I take my medication today?  
Why do I feel like this?  
Why am I stuck in place?

I may not be able to shoot for the stars,  
But, maybe, reaching for the clouds is enough.  
Making my daydreams a reality  
One small step at a time  
Is just how it will have to be.

**Me, Myself and I**

Vaquetta Hudson

I am who I am, love me or not, I'm not changin'.  
I am strong, brave and independent, because life is full of lessons.  
Optimism coupled with confidence fills my empty cup.  
Perspective is the internal battle I was fighting, but I won!  
It's me, myself and I, comfortable being uncomfortable and learning to embrace it all.  
Failure is not my victory, but it's been the bridge to bring me over to see the experiences.  
I've not dreamt of an illustrious life but one that inspires and energizes.  
Me, myself and I having the foresight to see life is not a bed of roses, or is it?  
Maybe my life isn't, but I won't be held captive to those thoughts and things beyond my control.  
Me, myself and I had to learn how to let go in order to grow.

# Sensitive Poetry

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*SPECTRA* 2023



The following poems relate to sensitive topics that may be upsetting or disturbing to some readers.

Please use discretion while interacting with this work.

**Content Warning: Child Sexual Assault****Am I Me?**

Amy Lynn Brown

Moms are nurturing, loving, and full of  
cuddles and kisses.  
Lisa's Mommy bit her, ignored her, scrubbed the  
"dirt" from her suntanned skin.  
Raw emotions and a bloody dermis.  
She deposited those in Lisa's soul.  
Dads are playful, hard-working, reliable.  
Daddy touched her all over, passed out drunk  
on top of her little girl body,  
after shooting heroin into his vein.  
Fear of embrace, a complete breakdown in reality—  
her Daddy loved her, didn't he?  
Little ladies dress up, play jump rope,  
pick flowers.  
Lisa lied, raged, morphed into Aphrodite.  
All the young ladies scream "love me"  
in "that way," right?  
Little ladies are princesses, polite, proud.  
You called her a brat, a freak, unbound.  
She thought we were all unique.  
Families are close, protective, available.  
Lisa's laughed, sneered, scoffed, shunned.  
They were right, she was weird.  
Validation tends to emerge, shine, normalize.  
Nobody cared, listened, believed.  
Acceptance was just a miracle anyway.  
Forgiveness is easy, seamless, inevitable.  
No, it doesn't fully happen.  
Her heart and emotions are flooded with shame.  
She was primed to be abused, neglected, rejected.  
Karma is a bitch,  
so, Lisa will recline back and watch it work.  
She would never attain strength, independence, the ability to love.  
She is alive, thriving, finding Lisa.  
What a wonderful discovery.  
Abuse, hate, labels become a chain.  
She broke it!  
Her children are smothered, understood, cherished.  
She is still learning to be me.



**Content Warning: Sexual Assault****My Perfect Room**

Rayleigh Freeman

my room was perfect, for me at least.  
you said you liked it,  
    but that I had too many decorations.

trying to please you, I parted ways with most of my belongings.  
    you never heard me complain,  
    I was just thankful to not be alone.

the decorations that still stood in my perfect room were  
    a bright blue tapestry that fell against the wall,  
    and the lights around it illuminated the memories we had made on polaroid film.  
    my dresser and nightstand were built by my grandfather long before I was born,  
and resting on top of it, a zen garden and my computer for school.  
    all the medals I had ever won hung above my head as I would sleep peacefully with the  
    stuffed animals that had comforted me since I was a child.  
my room was perfect, just as we were.  
you were always grateful to stay over.  
    and I was happy to have someone there to love me.

when we moved in together, and I let a boy I thought I loved share a sacred space with me,  
    my tapestry came down, and my room wasn't perfect anymore.

in its place was a blank, white wall staring back at me,  
no more bright lights hung around it  
    to keep the darkness away from me at night.

our pictures were still there, but the smile I saw in those old photos had vanished from my face.  
    and in my bed, a few faux animals remained, but you took it up mostly.

my medals still danced above my head, and you could hear them tossing back and forth from the  
wind the fan created.  
    I know it annoyed you, but I was so thankful to be able to still have these up as a  
    representation of my accomplishments.

and now, it is a representation of the worst night in my life.  
    I thought I was sleeping peacefully, until I wasn't.

the sound of my medals hitting the other screamed in my ear as I awoke.  
my eyes were fixed on the white wall next to me,  
    and my body was frozen.

I thought I would have missed my decorations in my perfect room, but I am glad they were not  
there that night.

I'm sure you were thankful through the whole night, thinking that I was asleep.  
    but you had taken my perfect room from me.

I'm thankful it was dark, that I couldn't see your face,  
and that you couldn't see how scared mine was.

now, I reclaim my safe space and am thankful for the life I have lived.

without you, I would have continued to settle for everything less than perfect.

I have a husband who doesn't make it a chore to love me.

we have made not only a perfect room, but a perfect home together full of love, laughter,  
and appreciation for all my decorations.

**Content Warning: Child Sexual Assault****Innocent Child**

Destiny Nunley-Jackson

I think I've seen him before,  
Or so my dreams seem to think.  
His face is far too familiar.  
I think I know that voice; I have heard it in  
The back of my mind before. The distinct  
Smell of his cologne sends shivers down  
My spine. I think the way he says "hello"  
Used to mean something wrong. His  
Stride haunts me day in and day out,  
But why can't I remember that growing  
Smile? I remember the alleyway that I  
Went down. I remember the pain in my  
Wrists as they were held down. But  
That face, I remember now. I pushed the  
Images of his face to the deepest parts  
Of my mind. I did this as the doctors  
Delivered my innocent child. I didn't  
Even know his last or first name. I, too,  
Was an innocent child.

**Content Warning: Smoking****Abhorrent Habit**

Amy Lynn Brown

I did a terrible thing.  
Something that has held me hostage for years.  
I stole my mother's cancer sticks,  
and I was only fourteen.  
Why not pick up the habit?  
Momma smoked when I was in her womb.  
I gasped for fresh air before my entrance into this world.  
Second-hand smoke plagued my childhood.  
Mom, dad, aunts—all polluted their lungs and their psyches.  
I had to breathe that crappy poison anyway.  
Why not try the real thing?  
I lit a long, skinny Capri cigarette.  
I was at the park, thinking I was being discreet.  
The coughing was unbearable.  
The head rush was therapeutic.  
Liquor stores started selling them to me.  
Bought a pack of Marlboro Reds with chump change.  
They burned my chest, my throat, my innocence.  
When I ran out, I took from momma.  
She never knew, so I considered her stupid.  
Goes to show she never paid attention to me after all.  
I am now forty-seven, and still take long drags off 20 cigs a day.  
Never in the house.  
I am a polite smoker.  
Why should I disable others because of my vice?  
My lungs have got to be black, tarry.  
This cough won't go away.  
I reek of the remnants of ashes and  
formaldehyde. I've tried to quit, so many  
times that I have lost count.  
I don't want to relinquish my dependence.  
At this point, they help me form my true self.  
I don't want cancer, asthma, COPD.  
But I don't know what to do.  
I am helpless to nicotine, addiction, cravings.  
Cigarettes are my crutch, my relief.  
Although my front yard is full of butts,  
I can't bring myself to be ashamed.  
I'm too old to hide from this self-induced disability.  
Will I succumb to the inevitability of forever  
suffering this nightmare?  
Who knows?  
Every day I ask myself: Why in the  
hell did being fourteen make me feel so grown up?

**Content Warning: Vaping****Crutch**

Kameron Self

i made a discovery!  
an easy way out,  
a fast-lane directly to my desires

as the cooling sensation entered my lungs,  
i felt a child-like joy  
a nostalgic world of comfort,  
where my adult anxieties hadn't manifested

as i slowly exhaled,  
i became engulfed in a sweet-smelling vapor  
that felt like grandma's homemade pastries  
oh, how i missed this feeling!

my discovery became an hourly ritual,  
where i craved more

i became greedy,  
just like with grandma's cooking

it made my heartrate rise,  
i became breathless  
i didn't know,  
how far i'd fallen

but, my discovery  
was just an age-old trap  
just like with grandma's smoke

the sickeningly fruity cloud took its course,  
abandoning me, changing me  
clouds of vapor formed into a dark abyss  
with no exit in sight  
i've been tricked!

# FICTION

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SPECTRA 2023

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY—SHREVEPORT

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## What Happens Backstage

Annelise Dixon

“Oh.”

The word fell from Arthur’s lips without his knowledge or consent. It was a completely unfiltered reaction to the scene that unfolded before him. Very rarely was he someone who found himself at a loss for words, even with the onslaught of strange occurrences lately backstage. As...*distasteful* as it was, he knew that their actors loved to roughhouse. It was easy for a few props to get broken and set back on their place like nothing happened. But this time he had witnessed it. He’d watched as their equipment manager grabbed their costume rack and pulled, only for the entire thing to fall apart and crash to the ground. The commotion had every student whipping their heads towards the source, staring in the slack-jawed silence that Arthur never allowed himself to indulge in until now. Until the fourth time in the past month that a piece of their frustratingly limited equipment had been broken.

Sierra broke the stillness. She scrambled away from the rubble of their rack like it was on fire. As equipment manager, she’d taken the brunt of their director’s frustration for all the damage. Arthur and the two other seniors had stayed late to help their classmate clean up the remains of their shredded curtain the week prior. It had been solemn. A funeral for theater kids. Even Laine had been quiet, and Arthur could count on one hand the times she had actually read the room that well.

Now seemed like a mirror of that evening as Arthur watched Sierra make a beeline for Sammy. She clutched onto her boyfriend’s arm as if he’d done anything to find answers. It was annoying.

Arthur took a deep breath. His hands clapped together with an echoing smack. A sigh seemed to ripple through the group of students at the familiar gesture. The club members formed their usual semi-circle around him. It was a shame that the box he liked to stand on for speeches had been the very first thing broken.

“Alright! As you all know, Mr. Williams won’t be out of his meeting for another 30 minutes, which means I’m in charge—”

“Is that what that means?” Sammy wrinkled his nose. Laine coughed to muffle her laugh.

“—and *since* I am in charge, I think it is far past time we addressed the elephant in the room.” Arthur decided to be graceful and ignore the way the freshmen rolled their eyes at him. “As a personal hero of mine once said, once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. The third time, it’s enemy action.”

His words fell on deaf ears. Or, at least, uninterested ears. Only his fellow seniors were watching him. The others were whispering to each other or poorly sneaking peeks at their phones. Arthur bit the inside of his cheek with frustration.

Really, he understood it wasn’t personal. As bossy as he knew he could be, his classmates only ever gave him a hard time as a joke. Laine had been his best friend as long as he’d known her. Sierra was rabbit-hearted, but she always took the time to ask about his weekend. And Sammy was a good guy, always doing whatever was needed to lift the club up. This was their senior show. Of course it made sense that they would be the most worried out of everyone.

Still, Arthur had to take a moment to smooth his darkening expression into something less troubled. His stress was far from over, because regardless of who was listening to him, there was a theory that he had been sitting on since the third week of destruction. Not just anyone at school could waltz into their auditorium, and even fewer had valid reasons to go backstage. There was only a select group of people who could be around frequently enough without being questioned. He cleared his throat in preparation for the bomb he was about to drop on his friends.

“What I’m saying is that I think the responsible party is one of us, and I think it’s on purpose with malicious intent.”

The hushed whispers stopped. All eyes were on Arthur once more. He watched the looks of dawning realization on his friends’ faces. Some looked confused, some angry. Sierra in particular looked like he’d stabbed her in the back, her doe eyes wide and teary.

“You think I’m doing this, don’t you?!” she cried, pointing a finger in his direction.

He didn’t. There wasn’t a mean bone in her body. She’d been inconsolable the time that she accidentally stepped on Laine’s glasses, even after being reassured that she had a spare pair at home. There was no way. He didn’t think it was Sammy either. He would never put his girlfriend through this kind of stress. But Arthur couldn’t show his hand yet, or else his suspect would know whether he was on the right track or not.

Well... once he found a suspect. That part was probably going to be harder than he’d like.

He shrugged. “Maybe.”

“Watch it, man!” Sammy snapped, wrapping an arm around Sierra. “Why would you accuse her of that? You know she’s been losing sleep over this—”

“I’m not accusing her specifically. I think all of us are capable of breaking equipment. I’m just not sure why,” he confessed. Sammy started towards him just as the backstage door creaked open and their director walked in with a large stack of papers. The tension seemed to break as heads turned and students called out greetings and ran to help.

Arthur only realized he’d been clenching his fists when Laine hooked an arm around his and tugged him away from the others. He fell in step without hesitation and let himself be led into a more private corner.

Laine turned to face him. “First off, did you quote James Bond out there? You know you’re not James Bond, right?”

“Goldfinger, ‘52,” He corrected automatically.

“You know the exact year. Of course you do,” Laine rubbed at her temple.

“Secondly...you’re sure it’s one of us?” she frowned.

Arthur crossed his arms over his chest. “Well... I don’t have proof. But it *has* to be. And don’t tell me I’m overreacting; you know the same as me that this is turning into a problem. Pretty soon we won’t have the equipment to put on our show.” He pointed a finger at her. “Do you want to graduate without one last production?”

“Not like we were gonna have a flashy show before, with how old all our equipment is,” she rolled her eyes. She put a palm up before Arthur could protest further. “Chill. You know that I’m always with you. If you’re gonna do that Gold-digger thing and go sleuthing, I’ve got your back.” Her hand found Arthur’s shoulder and squeezed. It was a comforting gesture. He unclenched his hands and felt his fingertips tingle with the sudden release of tension.

“Goldfinger,” He corrected, with no real bite to the words. It was a relief to know that she trusted him like he trusted her. Laine was the only person he knew with certainty couldn’t be responsible because they shared the exact same schedule.

...and maybe because she was a good friend, too. Or something like that.

Arthur mentally shook himself. That didn’t matter. Now that he’d come out with his suspicion, all he could do was wait to see what else happened. The culprit was bound to be panicked now, and panic is enough to make anyone messy. He just needed to wait.

Waiting, as it turned out, was a special kind of torture for Arthur Collins.

The days passed at a snail’s pace. He was distracted and antsy in class because all he could think about was solving the mystery. Maybe he played it up a bit in his own head, imagining catching someone in the act and heroically saving the club. On a certain level, it was exhilarating. This was the kind of thing that happened in stage plays or books that he loved so much. He couldn’t help but imagine the reaction once he figured everything out. Laine would



probably lose her mind. Sierra would realize he hadn't been accusing her, and they'd be alright again. Sammy would start talking to him again, and they'd be better friends than ever before.

It was a nice fantasy. But Arthur realized fairly quickly that things were going south. Fast. Things started breaking more rapidly. Everyone seemed unsettled by the development, with some of the freshmen even skipping out on rehearsal sometimes because of how tense things had become. Arthur had made someone angry. If it wasn't made clear through the change of pace, it was made into a grand spectacle when he entered the auditorium one day to see everyone gathered on stage around a pile of... *something*.

Arthur hurried up the side steps. "What's going on?" He demanded. Laine's head jerked in his direction. Her expression had Arthur stumbling to a halt. She'd been stressed out lately, but now she looked like she might be sick. It was like all the color had drained from her warm complexion and left her paler than Sierra. Cold, heavy dread made a home in his chest.

"What is it?" he pressed. He shouldered his way through the crowd to find a pile of rubble, shards of black plastic and different colored knobs and wires all scattered around—

It was the audio mixer. He sucked in a breath on instinct, a bastardized version of a gasp. He couldn't lose it over something like this, no matter how much he wanted to. He had been the one to follow their director around for half of freshman year begging for a soundboard of some sort to level up their productions. He'd been the one to teach himself how the confusing machine worked before teaching their tech crew, because nobody was as obsessive as he was. The audio mixer was the biggest impact he'd been able to make on their club so far.

To see it destroyed was a personal attack on him. And everyone knew it.

*Screw* keeping it together. He whipped his head up. "What... what is wrong with you?!" He hissed. Everyone was avoiding eye-contact if not turning away completely. Anger and hurt were fighting to win inside of him, but it all felt the same. It all felt red-hot in his veins and made him want to dig his nails into his palms until he bled. "When I find out who did this, you're gone. Out of the club, out of *school* if I can help it!" he announced to a dead silent room. There were some wide-eyed looks, but mostly people just seemed to ignore his outburst.

Arthur stepped away from the rubble. He kept his face down. Nobody needed to look at him. He wasn't sure what his face looked like but it probably wasn't good. He felt an arm wrap around his shoulders and pull him firmly against someone's side. The smell of Sammy's body spray stung his nose.

"I'm sorry, man. I know that thing meant a lot to you," he sighed. Arthur squeezed his eyes shut, because this was just making him feel *worse*. As far as Sammy knew, Arthur blamed him, but he was still trying to comfort him. He was a bad friend, wasn't he? All he'd done is stir up distrust and make the whole situation worse.

Arthur kept his mouth shut for once. He felt Sammy give him one last pat on the shoulder before he left for the backstage door. The door creaked open, and he could see the flood of sudden light reflect onto the shiny stage floor. Before he could give it any more thought, Laine's dirty purple converse stepped into his view.

"Hey," she coaxed him to look up at her. Her face was stone cold. "You saw that, right?"

He felt his brows draw together in confusion. "Saw what? Me blow up on everyone?"

"No! Backstage. The door has been shut the entire time, and I know I turned them off when we left the last rehearsal, but the lights were already on." Arthur snapped to attention as he realized what his friend was implying. He looked around to make sure nobody was listening. Thankfully, anyone who hadn't gone backstage yet was still gathered together talking. Probably plotting his demise for yelling at them.

He looked back at Laine. "You're saying we have a time frame. Late after hours, or early before." It wasn't a question, but she still nodded. That also meant that their suspect pool had become smaller. Someone would need a key, and only the staff knew where their ever-forgetful director hid a spare. Arthur would have been thrilled to learn this the day prior. It was a big clue

they'd been missing. But now, he just wanted to end it. No big spectacle, no heroics. He just wanted to stop this person before they ruined his last show any more than they already had.

So, he was ending it. "Laine, what are you doing tonight?"

"Oh, god. Nothing, why?"

\*\*\*\*\*

The auditorium was a daunting space. Arthur had seen it from every angle, packed to the brim with bored students and proud parents while a spotlight shone down on his stage. He'd stayed late plenty of times to help clean up after rehearsal. But somehow, seeing the building completely empty in the dead of night made it seem more frightening than he'd ever imagined his safe haven could be. It was *cold*, colder than he'd expected after coming in from the cold autumn air. He felt a tug on his jacket as he slipped the key he'd snatched back into his pocket.

He glanced behind him. Laine always wore her emotions on her face, and right now she looked like she wanted to either cry or hit him. "I don't like this. I'm getting bad vibes," she hissed. Her voice echoed, shattering the still silence. Arthur waved a hand in her direction. *Focus*. He peered around, taking in the deserted rows of red-cushioned seats before the stage side door caught his eye. If they were going to find out who was breaking all the equipment, they needed to beat them at their own game. He started towards the door without warning, his brisk footsteps failing to cover up the infuriated sigh of his friend. "Isn't every theater haunted or something?! Why did we need to come this late?" She complained, but Arthur heard her jogging to catch up with him. The vastness of the room seemed to swallow them whole as the door opened with a notable creak and the two students crept inside.

The lights were off this time. Arthur groped blindly for the switch, flicking it upwards the moment he felt it. Light flooded the space, and it took a moment to fully process the scene in front of them.

Arthur was someone who very rarely tasted defeat. He was relentlessly ambitious because it worked. It got him places, and it ensured that he would never fail. But now, his mouth tasted bitter and he understood for the first time in his life why someone might want to give up on a goal. This was their last and only opportunity, and they had failed.

Laine groaned. "We're too late."

The space was *trashed*. Posters were ripped from the wall, chairs were missing legs, and even their costume pieces from last show were shredded and strewn about. It was a wreck, and Arthur wrapped his arms around himself because he felt like he may physically fall apart if he didn't hold it together.

Wordlessly, he knelt and started to pick up the remains of the costumes. He felt Laine's presence hovering behind him, probably searching for something to say. In the end, she just helped him pick up the pieces in silence. They put them away in the closet to be thrown out later. He didn't think he had the stomach to throw them away himself.

When the two finished, they sat together on the ground with their backs against the wall. Arthur picked distractedly at his cuticles as he tried to muster up something to say. Anything to say. When did he start struggling with that? He was meant to be a leader.

"I'm tired," Laine mumbled. She was ever the reliable friend, speaking when he couldn't.

He huffed out a humorless laugh. "Me too. In every way. I just don't understand this," he confessed. Laine raised an eyebrow at him, and he could have sworn her lips twitched upwards for a moment.

She nudged him. "That must be eating you up. I thought you were Mr. Know-It-All. Mr. Future Valedictorian. Mr. Class President," she teased him. Arthur rolled his eyes, but admittedly, it helped to fall into their usual banter. It was familiar territory.

"I didn't get class president. There was a smear campaign against me," he reminded her.

Laine laughed out loud this time. "Somebody calling you out for proposing a 5-minute allotment for bathroom breaks is *not* a smear campaign."

Arthur smiled despite himself. At least this would never change. He leaned back and shut his eyes, just with the intention of breathing and gathering himself. He really was exhausted. Emotionally, from the events of the day. Physically, from coming here so late. It wouldn't matter if he closed his eyes for a moment.

The next thing he knew, he was being shaken awake in a way that was much too gentle to be Laine. He scrubbed at his face with his palm before peering upwards at the blurry figure. Sammy's face slowly came into focus, his face scrunched up. "Dude," he said. "Did you guys sleep here?"

Ah. Well, this was awkward. Arthur sat up and groggily waved Sammy away. He could hear Sierra's voice now, and he looked over to see her steadying Laine as she clambered to her feet, clearly still half-asleep. She looked down at Arthur and reached out a hand to pull him up.

"Nope. Bad idea," Sammy pulled Arthur up himself before he could take Laine's, which would have likely ended with both of them on the floor. He brushed himself off, feeling the warmth of embarrassment that he'd been caught in such an odd position. If the plan had worked it may have been justifiable. Now, he just looked like he'd broken into the auditorium to pass out backstage.

He cleared his throat. "Um...we tried to figure out who was...you know. It doesn't matter. What time is it?" he asked. Sierra averted her eyes. She mumbled something inaudible and gestured to Sammy. Arthur realized for the first time that the other boy was holding a stack of papers under his arm. Noticing the look, he grinned. He hadn't looked this happy in a while, especially not towards Arthur.

"It's early. Classes haven't started yet; everyone is still getting here. And we've got good news," he said, waving the papers around. Arthur perked up. He needed any good news he could get. He leaned over to try and sneak a peek at the papers, stretching on his toes. Sammy held them above his head. "Confidential. But I can tell you what the principal told me," he said.

He held still for a moment, glancing between Arthur and Laine as if holding for suspense. Did he want a drumroll or something? What could be worth such a big reveal? Finally, he spoke. "Our director has been reporting everything to the office. I guess the audio-mixer was the last straw, though. I went to the office this morning to ask for help, and he agreed that things have become severe enough to warrant school action."

Arthur blinked. "Action?" He could feel a swell of hope in his chest, and he tried to swallow it down.

Sammy nodded. "He's agreed to buy the club all new equipment. Brand-new, high-quality stuff," he said. Before Arthur could even react, Laine had rushed over and lifted a terrified-looking Sierra completely off her feet, spinning and laughing like she'd just won the lottery. Sammy rushed over to save his girlfriend from Laine's infamous bear hug as Arthur was left standing shocked.

"Oh," he whispered. Sammy had just given him amazing news. He should be happy. He should be jumping for joy and laughing with his friends, but something still felt off. He'd yet to figure out *why* someone would do this. And even if they got new things, how would that prevent the culprit from just destroying those things too?

He'd never been a math kid, but it didn't add up.

Arthur felt Sammy return to his side, bumping their shoulders together. "What's wrong? Everything is okay now. We'll get you a new crate to stand on, a new soundboard, all of that good stuff. We'll replace those costumes, too. Don't sweat it, dude," He reassured him. Arthur slowly turned to look at his friend.

Then, his heart dropped into his stomach. All at once, everything seemed to freeze while he looked at his friend's face. He didn't want it to be true. Never in his life had Arthur wanted so badly to be wrong about something.

But he knew he was right. Arthur took a deep breath, his heart pounding. "Sam," he managed. "How...how did you know about the costumes?"

The mask cracked. The panic that flickered across Sammy's face was there, visible to anyone looking. He tried to cover it up with a nervous laugh. Arthur stepped away from him, pointing an unsteady finger accusingly. "We put them away because we didn't want anyone to see. Because *we* didn't want to see. So, tell me how you knew." He insisted.

The others had fallen quiet. Arthur looked over to see a horror that matched his own on Laine's face, and tears brimming in Sierra's eyes. He put a hand over his mouth to hold on a shocked noise, because god, Sierra *knew*. With the past weeks recontextualized, he realized that her attitude hadn't been sadness. It was guilt that kept her avoiding him.

She caught his eye and put her palms up. "I was just—he said—he was helping us!" she choked out.

Arthur turned on Sammy. "Helping?!" he shouted. "The club is in the worst state it's ever been in! How is destroying stuff helping us?" Sammy looked hurt by his tone. He didn't flinch, though. If anything, Arthur felt like he was the one who wanted to run away from this confrontation most. But his need to understand outweighed anything else.

He watched with a painful lump in his throat as Sammy straightened the paperwork in his hands. Stalling.

"I swear that I got no pleasure out of it. I even tried to warn you, several times. All you had to do was be quiet, and this could have all gone a lot smoother," he said. The words had Arthur bristling. Destroying the things most important to him was a warning? And did he really expect Arthur to be quiet? Of all people?

Sammy continued on. "You know why I did it. Even if you don't agree with my methods. We both know that the arts are severely underfunded, and they always will be if we don't make them do better. With everything we're getting, this will be the best show in years," he smiled. "And it'll be our senior show. Our final bow. Don't you want that?"

Of course Arthur wanted that. He'd been trying for years to get a word in with the school. And it was true that his efforts the normal way had not paid off. But...putting everyone through this? Was it really okay?

He heard Sierra sniffling. She had her arms crossed over her chest while a bewildered looking Laine stood next to her. "Please don't say anything. It sucked, but it's over. We already got the funds. Please don't make this worse," Sierra begged. Arthur couldn't believe that after everything, there was pressure being put on *him* not to ruin things. He was the one who had to make the decision.

Sammy sighed. "I get it if you tell. But please don't. You know I would never do anything like this if I didn't believe it was the right decision," he said earnestly, and the worst part was that Arthur did believe him. He couldn't imagine there being any malice from Sammy. But could he really just keep this secret?

He looked at Laine, and she winced. "Arty...I'll back you up if you talk. But otherwise, I think I'm gonna stay out of this one. We kind of broke in, too, and I don't want to take the fall for that."

In some ways, the whole situation was silly. It read like an episode of *Glee*, or *Degrassi*. Years down the road, this probably wasn't going to define him as a person. But his sense of right and wrong was important to Arthur. He was having a genuine moral conflict, and he didn't know what to do. He had thought he was prepared to discover a club member's betrayal. He hadn't been ready for it to be a classmate. A friend. It left him feeling queasy and confused.

They didn't get to talk anymore. They heard the bell from the next building over, and Sierra was rushing towards the door in an instant. They had to go to class.

The day went by in a haze as Arthur tried to reason with himself. What was he meant to do here? He didn't even bring anything to class, simply sitting quietly, lost in his own head. The day had ended before he knew it. He had to go back for rehearsal and make a decision.

The director was already talking when he made his way in. He was sharing the news about the budget, and the club seemed happier than they had been in weeks. Laine poked his arm, leaning in close. “Hey. What are you gonna do?” she asked in a low voice.

Arthur shrugged. He looked around at the club celebrating together and felt an ache in his chest he couldn’t put words to if he tried. “Everything is resolved,” he answered. Laine didn’t argue. He felt her arm hook with his, and he was grateful for the contact helping to ground him.

He was tired of not knowing. He felt like he’d been living in a bubble of unarguable truth his entire life, and someone had taken a needle to it. As much as he didn’t like it, there was no easy answer. He had to make a choice between the rules and morals of truth he loved and standing with his friends.

If it made him bad, then he’d just have to be bad. He wouldn’t hurt anyone else. Except maybe himself for a while. What happened backstage would stay backstage.

## The Beginning

Lela Robichaux

“Liam, wait up!” Mila hiked her skirt up a bit higher so that she could run to catch up with her brother. The spring air was cool, but it felt good on her skin as she ran. The basket she carried swayed precariously, threatening to spill its contents.

“I have to make sure the way is clear!” Liam yelled back at her while he swung the short sword his uncle had given him before they left Rowlet Village.

Although their parents had decided on the move to Val so mother could take the position of Master Herbalist for the Mages, the rest of the family had stayed in the small village just to the west. It was half a day’s travel, if that, and the children made it frequently to visit the aunts and uncles and many cousins they had left behind.

Today they were running late. It would be dark soon and Mila wanted to hurry so they arrived as soon after dusk as possible. The roads were getting harder to travel after nightfall these days. Highwaymen had been spotted in these parts only a few weeks back: one reason why their Uncle Garth had given Liam the sword.

Liam swung the short sword around in front of him, coming into a stance he had seen the swordsmen training in Val do. He led too far with his forward foot and lost his balance, stumbling and ending up on the ground.

“You’ll cut your *own* head off before you ever even see an enemy approaching,” Mila giggled. Offering her hand she said, “Here, get up.”

“I’ll have you know I intend to be a great swordsman one day.”

“You’re barely in your fourteenth year.” His older sister rolled her eyes. “There’s plenty of time for that.”

He stuck out his tongue. “You’re only a year older than me.” He took her hand anyway and let her help him up.

Mila would follow in her mother’s footsteps as a Mage. She had already shown promise in her classes on beginning magic. Spells came naturally to her. The move from Rowlet Village had been of opportunity for the whole family. The only bad thing about it was now the children had more schooling. Mila loved learning new things but Liam would rather be running free in the countryside, slaying the imaginary enemies that had plagued him since early childhood. The two couldn’t be more different than night and day but they both loved their family with all their hearts, so they made this trip at least once a week.

“Let’s stop to eat,” Liam suggested as the two walked along the well-grooved road that lead between the larger city and the smaller village.

“It will be dark soon,” Mila protested.

“We’re almost there. I’m so hungry, Mila! We haven’t eaten since lunch and Aunt Darla put sweet cakes in, I saw her.”

Shaking her head, Mila knew she wouldn’t win this one. Liam’s stomach usually won out. She slowed her steps and lifted the side of the cloth covering the large basket. Right on top, there they were. Sweet cakes. Her stomach rumbled.

“Fine. Let’s sit over there, under those trees.” Pointing to a spot not ten steps off the road, the children made their way to sit beneath the canopy of the tall oakwoods. The large trees were very smooth along their trunks, rising at least fifteen feet before fans of gigantic leaves showered out in a perfect circle. The leaves were easily the size of a person and stayed green all year long. There weren’t many but there didn’t have to be to offer shade on a hot day or cover from rain.

The children laughed readily when Liam brought up their mathematics teacher and did his best imitation of the stodgy old man. Mila didn’t want to poke fun, but the professor was rather dull. As Liam teetered around her, Mila giggled while eating the wonderful cakes.

After they had each devoured three, Liam stretched back against the tree and put his arms behind his head.

“Mila, do the dancing light trick you learned!” The sun was retreating, and the dusk was creeping in making just the right setting for the beautiful colored lights.

Smiling and letting out a sigh, Mila agreed. “All right. Don’t tell Master Pennybaker, though. I’m not supposed to be practicing the spells alone yet.”

Nodding, Liam smiled as his sister started reciting the crackling words of the spell, bringing multi-colored lights the size of fireflies to her hands. The lights popped into existence. Mila abruptly changed the inflection of her voice to one that sounded more like singing and directed the lights to spin and tumble over one another like they were dancing.

“Wow, Mila! That’s five lights! Last time you could only get three!”

She smiled and concentrated on the shining orbs, letting her words and hands direct them along their paths. A sharp snap behind the trees made her gasp and look around.

“What was that?” The lights shimmered and disappeared; her concentration broken.

“Probably just some animal,” Liam answered, but his hand moved to his sword anyway.

“We should probably get going, Liam. Mother and father will be worried that we’re not back yet.” They started gathering the remnants of their snack and packing the basket so they could be on their way. Another snap behind the trees made them freeze. It was louder this time, closer.

Liam looked at his sister. She swallowed the knot of fear which had suddenly formed in her throat. Her mouth felt dry.

“Forget the basket,” he said. Sword in one hand, he grabbed Mila’s arm with the other and pushed her behind him as he faced the trees. “Back away slowly. In case it’s a wild cat or something.”

Mila took only two steps before the monster burst from the trees, a shower of wood falling over them as it landed right in front of Liam. She couldn’t even scream. Every part of her body, including her voice, had frozen and she could only stare, wide-eyed, at the creature before them.

Its huge head was the most dominant part. Standing upright on two legs that ended in three clawed toes, its bulbous arms hung to the ground and it dragged its knuckles as it slowly moved to Liam’s right side. When it turned, Mila could see three large razor-sharp boney protrusions along the spine. It opened its mouth, revealing teeth the size of her fingers but pointed and sharp enough to rip her limbs from her body in one bite. Shaggy hair ran along the top of its head, between the tusks, around its face, and under its chin. That was the only hair on its body, the rest was a leathery brown skin that pulled taught over the bulging muscles that ran over every inch. But the most frightening thing about this creature was its eyes.

Mila locked her gaze with the snarling beast in front of her and couldn’t tear her eyes away. Pure white orbs sat just above its cat-like snout. When it cocked its head to the side, as if considering the two of them, they glinted in the last light of the falling sun. The short snout curled back as a scream erupted from deep in its throat.

A Gnor! She had only ever seen pictures in books of this beast. It was a myth; a story told to bad children to make them behave. A made-up tale between siblings to see who could frighten the other more. But this thing was real, and it was right in front of them and looked for all the world to be very hungry. Saliva dripped from its open mouth. This creature was not supposed to exist!

Liam raised the sword in front of him, but his arm shook so badly that he couldn’t keep the weight of it up for long. His arm fell again to his side.

“Liam,” Mila whispered. “Run!”

It would be their only chance, she knew. She didn’t think they could outrun this thing, but what else could they do? The two of them turned as one and darted toward the road in the direction of home.

Pushing off the ground with a massive leap, the Gnor landed right in front of them before they had gone even a few strides. Tears ran unchecked down Liam's cheeks.

"Mila," he whimpered.

She began a chant; one she remembered seeing some of the master Mages practicing. They had summoned small dots of light shaped like a throwing dart, then sent them flying into a target placed at the end of the room. When they had hit, the wood of the target had sizzled and popped as the electricity from the darts had struck. Two tall glowing darts appeared in front of her outstretched hand.

They wouldn't do much good, so she had to make them count. She aimed for its eyes. Changing her voice to make the lights fly at her target, Mila stuttered over the words. The darts wavered. In that instant, the Gnor charged her brother, Liam letting out a scream which tore through her heart.

"Liam!" she heard herself yell as the monster pinned him underneath its massive hands and dove in, biting at his neck. Her knees went weak and she sank to the ground, hurling screams at the beast as she fell.

Looking up, the Gnor snapped its head around to focus on Mila. Blood ran from its chin, mixed with spittle, and fell in drops to the dirt. Her breaths came in short gasps but one thought hit her: Get away!

Scrambling to find her feet, Mila felt a stinging pain slide down her left leg. Sparing a backward glance, she saw the Gnor had raked one of his massive clawed toes down her leg in an attempt to catch her before she got away. Searing pain shot up her leg into her thigh, leaving the leg limp as she managed to crawl out of its grasp.

The monster left her brother's broken body and turned all of its attention on her. Her eyes clouded with tears she could only see a blurry image of her brother lying on the dirt path, a red pool spreading out beneath him. Frantically trying to gain her feet, her hand came over something solid and round. Instinctively curling her fingers around it and bringing it before her, she saw it was her brother's new short sword.

The Gnor lunged at her. Closing her eyes and holding fast to the sword, she thrust it out. A cry like a wounded pup came from the Gnor. Mila's eyes flew open just in time to see she had wounded the beast, right in its chest. It snarled defiantly at her but did not lunge again. Taking a step back, Mila saw droplets of blood fall from the creature onto the ground. She had stuck it deep. It growled again, then turned quickly and sprinted back into the trees.

Shaking uncontrollably, Mila's arms fell to her sides and sobs wracked her body. Her only thought was getting home to her mother and father. They could come to get Liam and help him back, there was too much pain in her leg for her to do it alone. Her leg burned so badly. There was no way she would be able to rise to her feet, so she started crawling along the road. As she dragged herself down the path, she kept one thought in the forefront of her mind. "Home, home, home..."

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Magister Artiese sat with his hands folded over his eyes. He was so tired and the late nights he found himself keeping lately did nothing to help. White wisps of hair fell around his hands, framing his deeply wrinkled face. The words on the parchment in front of him blurred and swam together, making it hard for him to decipher the report.

Standing in the far corner, the messenger, a young apprentice just coming into his twentieth year, watched anxiously as the Magister rubbed his eyes, brought the parchment close to his face, and silently read again.

"Do you know what this says?" Magister Artiese asked without looking up.

"Y-yes, sir," the young man stammered. "Trouble in the Rachnor Pass. The dwarves claim a band of goblins attacked their three main cities. They state it was a calculated raid, sir, but..." he trailed off.



“Come, come. But what?”

“Well, Magister,” the man said, taking a step in. “Goblins have never done anything calculated. They are not intelligent enough to bring themselves together to form a community, much less an army.”

The Magister waved a spotted hand at him. “Of course, you are right. There has to be some other explanation. Perhaps the dwarves embellish the telling of a small tribe of goblins attacking a traveling caravan.”

“The dwarven Provicaries would like to know if we are to send magical aid.”

Taking in a long breath and then letting it out in an audible sigh, the Magister shook his head. Everyone wanted magical protection these days. He had already dispatched four representatives of Val to investigate suspicious activity on the Faery Isles.

Tales from the inhabitants of the island included sightings of sprites and nymphs, creatures that were forbidden to cross the barrier into this world. A barrier that dragons, another creature the newest generation was regarding as myth, had held in place.

“Send Master Dorange. She’s been aching to leave the city again.” Dorange had only been back at Val, the magical hub of Cantor, for a month. She was a restless sort, though, and if the Magister had been a younger man, he would not have hesitated to investigate strange and exciting lands.

No sooner had the young messenger left him to finish his daily reviews from the University, a frantic knock sounded on his office door.

Waving his hand and murmuring a few words, the door swung open to reveal one of his Circle. Master Forth strode boldly in and positioned himself directly in front of the Magister. He was grave and a sense of urgency flowed about him. Forth was always grave, however and urgency seemed to be the norm as of late.

“Yes, Master Forth, what can I help you with so late in the evening?”

“You must see this, Magister.” Forth held out a small parchment, folded and tied with a dark blue ribbon. Artiese cocked a fluffy white eyebrow. It was from a priest of Sirrah, given the color of the ribbon used. His eyes were much too tired to read another missive. He gestured for Forth to proceed.

Untying the ribbon and unfolding the smudged parchment, Forth cleared his throat and scanned the document. “It is from Sarga, the Temple of Sirrah. ‘We have experienced the most unusual of circumstances. The spirits of the Dahrst Hills, bordering the city of Sarga, have become most unsettled. Never has there been cause for alarm in their presence, as they have ever been only quiet observers. However, at the turn of the new moon, a group of priests traveling to the port city of Mor was attacked by these spirits. Only two of the seven priests survived and told of a frightening occurrence. The ghosts attacked without warning and the fallen priests rose at the behest of these spirits to fight alongside them. Please advise if arcane assistance can be provided to calm the citizens of Sarga and investigate the cause of such a sudden change in the demeanor of normally docile spirits.’”

Chewing a thumbnail, the Magister regarded Forth with a critical eye. “Do you have thoughts on this Master?”

Forth shrugged his boney shoulders and his maroon sash, trimmed in gold which delineated him as a member of the Circle, billowed with the movement. “Spirits are always unsettled. To realize you are dead would be a most unwelcome bit of news, I would imagine.”

Artiese tapped a slender finger on the dark black wood of his desk. As of late, these reports of strange incidents and creatures had become much too frequent. He was sure the world was going mad. Of course, after as many ages as he had lived - one hundred and three - perhaps it was he that was going mad.

Only yesterday he had pulled out the old prophecy that was now regarded largely as myth as well. It fell to reason these unusual things were happening because the dragons were no longer here to stop them. The evil creatures which had been banished and kept at bay were

figuring out no one was stopping them from running rampant throughout Cantor. A shift in the balance of the world had started when the dragons left and had continued to teeter ever since, or so the old scholars had written. In these times, Magister Artiese would agree something was amiss but was it time to seek out the Descendant?

Just as that thought crossed his mind, a flurry of activity at his door caused him to look up. Two more members of the Circle had arrived in a breathless frenzy. The Magister stood, his bones creaking with the effort it took.

“What is the meaning of this intrusion?”

“Sir, come quickly. There has been an attack.” As an afterthought, the man bowed.

“An attack?”

“Yes, Magister. Children. The situation is dire.”

“What in the name of the gods attacked them?” The Magister had made it around his desk and Forth reached out to help him steady his steps.

The two men cast uneasy glances at one another. Neither wanting to answer the question.

“Well,” the Magister raised his voice, “has anyone called for the healer? And why is this news of such import that you would need to burst unannounced into my office?”

“The healer has seen to the surviving child. They are the children of the new Master Herbalist, Jessa Broom,” one of the men told the Magister.

The other coughed and hesitated until a stern look from the Magister spurred him on. “Sir, the girl claims she and her brother were attacked by a Gnor.”

“A Gnor?” Another creature which had not been allowed to venture into this world for hundreds of years. And this one right at his own back door. He contemplated only a moment, before telling them, “Let’s get there quickly. We will use the roads of magic. I don’t think these old bones could make the trip any other way.”

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A blur of images came to her as she floated in and out of a sleep-like consciousness. Voices were ever-present each time her focus came to her surroundings. Did she hear her mother?

“Have they found him yet, Richard?”

There was only silence and Mila felt as though she was floating above herself. Her leg itched. Gods, it itched so badly. She tried to reach for it but gentle hands stopped her every time, then soothing words would follow but she couldn’t remember what they had said.

She dreamed someone was screaming; calling her brother’s name over and over as if they were searching for him. But he’s right here, she tried to tell them. She reached down to scratch the annoying and persistent itch in her leg. Restraining hands again. Then she fell back into a deep, fitful slumber.

The last time she came awake, the room around her came into focus. She heard someone crying and low, deep voices.

“But what could have done this?” someone was saying. “What kind of creature could take off half a boy’s chest and rip the girl’s leg from her body? No highwayman did this!”

“An animal of some sort?” It was a question from another.

The image of a creature came to Mila, eyes stark white and blank, opening a huge maw to let out a scream so wild it froze her blood. She screamed with it. Suddenly hands were all over her and she saw the monster’s claws coming for her. She thrashed and kicked to get away but she was held fast.

“Gnor!” she yelled. Why didn’t they run? Why were they just standing there? “Run, Liam! Mother, father, run! Gnor!”

“Hush, child,” someone said as a hand found her head. “You’re dreaming.” The voice was soothing and calm and the hands were warm.

Her breathing evened and she opened her eyes. White hair wisped around the most wrinkled face she had ever seen. Shining honey-colored eyes looked down at her from the folds

of skin around the eyes and a smile so full of compassion broke through, revealing a set of perfect teeth.

Of course, she recognized him instantly. But she had never been this close to him. “Magister,” she whispered. Her whole body relaxed and the only thing that existed was his face and his soothing smile.

“Your parents are here, child,” he said to her.

The faces of her mother and father appeared above her. Her mother’s eyes were red and puffy as if she had been crying and her father’s face was crumpled with worry and sadness.

“Oh, Mila!” her mother sighed and fell over her, hugging her the best she could while Mila lay prone in the bed. She looked around the room. This was her room, but she didn’t remember how she had gotten here.

Her brow wrinkled with confusion. “Liam?” Where was her brother?

There was hesitation on her father’s face and her mother continued to sob over her chest. “I...I can’t breathe...mother.” She looked for the Magister again, but he had moved to the side and was circled by three other men. She couldn’t see their faces.

Her father spoke then. “Mila, your brother...he didn’t...he didn’t get away.” Sorrow broke his words and understanding came slowly to her. A memory of the monster that had burst from the trees flitted through her mind. She gasped and all heads turned toward her.

“We were attacked,” she said. Tears burned her eyes as the memory flooded back. “A Gnor.” She looked to the Magister. “A Gnor, Magister! It wasn’t supposed to be real.”

He moved closer and laid a hand upon her brow. “Easy, child. Are you sure?”

“Please, I’m not lying! My brother is dead, isn’t he?” She looked at them one by one, each one breaking their gaze, eyes trailing to the floor. “He is,” she whispered. Tears flowed freely now. Oh, Liam. He had tried to protect her.

Then she could no longer ignore the stinging itch in her leg. “Gods, my leg itches! Why won’t it stop?” She was yelling and it was complete madness, but it just itched so badly! She pushed her mother and reached down to dig her nails into the flesh and scratch away. Her hands met with the soft coverlet of the bed. Moving her hands about trying to locate the spot that itched, she became more frenzied. Her father caught her hands in his iron grip.

“It’s gone, Mila. The leg is gone.” His voice was full of sadness but it was final.

She shook her head vigorously. “No, no, it itches! I can feel it!” Trying to break her father’s grip, she heard voices rise again as her heart thudded in her chest.

“She’s losing her mind,” her mother’s worried voice said.

“Just the mind’s way of dealing with the trauma,” the Magister said softly.

“Mila,” she heard the old man say, “Mila, calm now, child.” Again, she felt a wave of warmth cover her from head to toe; her heart slowed and her body started to relax. Her breath came easier and she just wanted to lay her head down and sleep. “What did you see on the road home?” The voice was so sweet. She could let it just lull her into slumber.

“Gnor,” came her soft reply.

A flicker of something passed through his ancient eyes. Fear? Gods, this man had to be at least two hundred years old, she thought.

*It’s just a dream. All of this is just a dream.* But as she felt herself drift back to sleep, she parted her eyes just a bit. She watched the Magister move to the other three men with him. She heard them talking. The last words flitted through her mind before she slept again.

“It’s time,” the old man said. “Find Thom, bring him to the castle, and convene the Circle.”



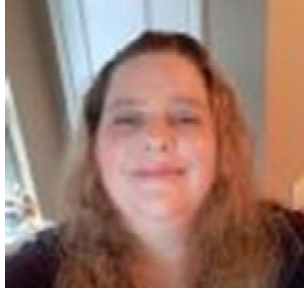
# **MEET the AUTHORS**

*SPECTRA 2023*

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LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY—SHREVEPORT

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**Amy Lynn Brown**, native of San Diego, California, currently resides in Haughton, Louisiana, with her husband, Mark, and two children, Arielle and Adam. Amy spent 10 years in the Air Force, working as a radar operator. She was stationed in Iceland, Saudi Arabia, and several U.S. States. She has been married for 24 years and enjoys reading nonfiction, crocheting, gardening, and watching horror movies on Netflix. She has had a love for writing since grade school and has been told on numerous occasions that she needs to write a book. She had an 8th-grade Honors English teacher, Mr. Carl Cato, who believed in her ability to write creatively. She is a published poet and never finds writing a chore. She finds plenty of time to spend with her family, and her two fur babies, a dog named Jackson and a kitty named Princess Leia.



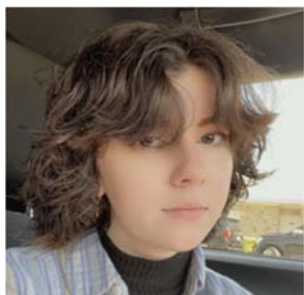
**Kara Brown** is a Junior Psychology major at Louisiana State University Shreveport. She was born and raised in Shreveport, Louisiana- having previously attended Riverside Elementary, Caddo Middle Magnet, and Caddo Parish Magnet High School prior to her enrollment at LSUS. She will be graduating in Spring of 2024 with the intention of going into the master's in counseling program at LSUS after graduation. Some of her favorite things include video games, reading, baking, and spending time with her two cats.



**Hannah Brown** is an aspiring English Educator at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. She is married to her husband, Clayton Brown, and she takes care of their dog, Daisy. Hannah is from Mandeville, LA, and enjoys eating sushi. She loves to read and write and has been since her high school years. She hopes to one day inspire other high school students that reading and writing don't have to be dreaded. She wants to inspire the kids who say they don't like to read and try to find them authors and novels they would like to read. She hopes to one day publish her own book filled with her poetry from her journey in life.



**Marlana Daigle** is a single mom with an addiction to to-do lists and crossing items off her bucket list. She is currently a full-time student majoring in English. She hopes to cross off her next bucket list item by becoming a published author. She is a bar manager in her spare time, and sleeps in three-hour increments. Her favorite pastime is taking impromptu trips to anywhere. When that isn't possible, you'll find her listening to music and reading.



My name is **Annelise Dixon**, and I am a 20 year old English major attending LSUS. I am from Logansport, Louisiana. I enjoy writing stories and creating worlds, as well as appreciating the stories told by others.



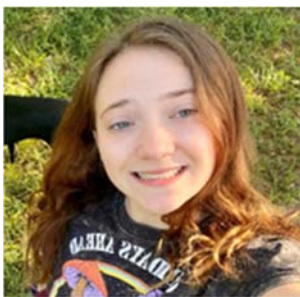
When **Ashley Ezell** has free time, she enjoys reading and writing, cooking and baking, coffee with her husband, and spending time with family. She is wife to Eric, and mama to two boys who are the light of her life: Jake and John Michael. Ashley is currently completing her undergraduate degree at Louisiana State University Shreveport and looks forward to graduating in December 2023. Ashley lives with her family in Vivian, Louisiana.



**Hannah Fewell** is an undergraduate English student at Louisiana State University – Shreveport. She resides in Shreveport with her husband and their two cats. She is a mom to an angel baby, and another baby on the way. Hannah enjoys spending her free time going out with her husband, reading, cooking, and, most importantly, engaging with her Roman Catholic faith. She aspires to become a high school English teacher.



My name is **Savannah Foster** and I transferred from BPC to LSUS last fall with my associates degree in general studies. I am now majoring in English and plan to graduate in the spring of 2024. After that, I plan on going to seminary and getting my Master's in Divinity so I can become an Orthodox Missionary. I have always loved English and writing. However, I also love traveling, rock climbing, painting, reading, ASL, and singing in my church's choir. Writing has always been my favorite part of school and I hope to use the information I have learned in this class and apply it to my everyday life when I write. It has changed my view on poetry and I love to write even more now.



**Rayleigh Freeman** is a Junior majoring in Secondary English Education at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. Being an educator has always been this author's dream. After graduating from LSUS, Freeman wants to apply for the Deaf Education and Hearing Sciences Master's Program in San Antonio Texas to continue learning skills that will assist in being able to help every student possible. When Freeman is not writing or doing coursework, she is drinking coffee with her two cats and two dogs while listening to true crime podcasts during her spare time.



**Mary Holley** is an undergraduate student at Louisiana State University - Shreveport studying English. Mary resides in the quaint neighborhood of South Highlands in Shreveport, Louisiana, where she was born. She is currently a junior at LSUS and works at the City of Shreveport Courthouse as a deputy clerk of court. Her dream is to one day attend law school and become a civil litigant attorney. In her free time, Mary enjoys writing poetry, painting birds, drawing, listening to music, reading mystery novels, and spending quality time with friends and family.



I'm **Vaquetta Hudson**, pursuing a BA degree in Mass Communication with a concentration in Public Relations. My goal is to return to the healthcare field and bridge the communication gap in my community through content strategy, data analysis, campaign management, advertising and copy writing.

When I'm not learning, I enjoy spending time with my family and friends. I'm a native of Los Angeles, CA, who was blessed to live in Austin for 25 years and Houston for 2 years. Now, Louisiana is my forever state. I'm married to my life partner and soulmate of 30 years,

Robert. We have three children, 3 grandchildren and one fur baby.

My personal mantra is life is full of lessons and blessings, we just have to look for them. I hope you've enjoyed a glimpse into who I am and what I try to represent.



**Skye Kennedy** is a graduating student at LSUS pursuing a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Spanish. She fills a number of roles including full-time student, student worship leader, SLP in training, and student of Christian ministry studies. She is planning on pursuing a Master's in Speech and Language Pathology at Louisiana State University Health and Science Center in Shreveport after her bachelor's. She is currently planning a wedding with her future husband and is looking forward to living in Shreveport and practicing Speech Therapy with children.



**Destiny Nunley-Jackson:** I am 32 years old and married to the most wonderful man. I met Kevin at just 18 years old and my mother didn't like him because she thought he was too old for me. He is 7 years older than me but I didn't care. He treats me the way a man should. I am currently studying to receive my doctorate in Pharmacology. Even though I am studying medicine, I have always loved the written word. Books are my passion and I have always wanted to write a book. Somehow, I just never found the time to do it. I love to go fishing to get away from the hustle and bustle of life. I am currently working 50 hours a week as a lead Pharmacy Technician and District sore trainer for CVS Pharmacy all the while going to school full time. I have been with CVS

for 10 years and ready to expand my career. I am happy with my life and couldn't have asked for more.



**Lillian May Penrod** is a writer from Shreveport, Louisiana. Since she was a child, her love for reading and writing continued to grow; thus, she decided to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in English from Louisiana State University in Shreveport. To further her love and admiration for English Literature, she will attend LSUS in the fall of 2023 to pursue her Master's in Liberal Arts with a focus on English Literature. She intends to share her love for literature and creative writing with students by becoming a university professor.



**Sarah Rayburn:** From my earliest memories, I lived in Bowie County, Texas. Sometimes in Texarkana, sometimes in Miller County, Arkansas, sometimes in New Boston, but the majority of my life was spent in a small community called Simms, Texas. I grew up with four younger sisters, usually in houses far past their maximum capacity and life expectancy. As unfortunate circumstances would have it, we never had much money and police did not respond well to the town that was 30-45 minutes away from hospitals, grocery stores, restaurants, and basically everything else. When I turned 18 at the height of the pandemic, I foolishly made the decision to move to Shreveport with my boyfriend whom I had only met a handful of times and mostly talked to online. I began working and deferred two semesters at Berea College, where I had a full-ride scholarship and decided in that moment that college was not for me. As luck would have it, I chose the right stranger off the internet to move in with. Now three years and two beautiful girls later, I am currently a student at Louisiana State University—Shreveport and still with my boyfriend. I am studying to get my Bachelor's in English and hoping one day to be an English professor.



**Lela Robichaux** is the author of *Reborn*, the self-published first novel in a series of novels set in her own created fantasy world of Cantor. She has also written role-playing game modules with her husband that correspond with her fantasy world and is a contributing writer for local publications in her Northern Louisiana hometown. She has been a fan of writing and reading fantasy and science fiction since she was a teenager. She graduated in 2015 with her Bachelor of Arts in English from LSU-Shreveport, where she was a member of the English honor society, Sigma Tau Delta, and the History honor society, Phi Alpha Theta, and served as a research assistant on the local history of prominent figures in her hometown. She loves spending time with friends, reading, writing, and “nerding out” with her husband and son.



**Kameron Self** is a 19 year-old college student attending Louisiana State University in Shreveport. Though she is majoring in Sociology, she has always had a passion for creative arts such as writing, drawing, and painting. She currently resides in Shreveport, Louisiana, but she is very proud of her roots. Growing up alongside the Toledo Bend Reservoir in Many, Louisiana, she was always in awe of nature and the beauty of making memories. She implements her love for these in her poetry.



My name is **Hunter Thomas**. I'm from Natchitoches, LA and this is my third year at LSUS. The nature near where I live inspired many of my poems. Before this class, I was quite inexperienced in poetry but have since been inspired by this class to write.





**Sue Yacovissi:** I went to school in the 1960s through 80s. I was born in California, raised in Arizona, and moved to Louisiana in the 80s. In those decades, it was about learning things that you did not know and building knowledge on what you have been taught. Both directions were important because it taught one to try and experiment with something new to build confidence in the unknown. That persistence is what gets me to try and improve myself in the current day. When I graduated with a Bachelor's degree of Accounting in 1986 at LSUS, I did not expect to be back in college 35 years later. But here I am. In 2019, I applied at LSUS to become a student again. Currently, I am working on a bachelor's degree of General Studies – Humanities Concentration. I only go part-time as I am as much a *Senior* in more than one way. One of the activities I am enjoying is writing free verse poetry. There are no rules except not to rhyme. Coming up with vocabulary that speaks emotion in as few words as possible is, to me, an art form that I am still exploring....

# From the Editor

SPECTRA 2023

As returning editor, I am thrilled to bring you all this year's *Spectra*. The students here at LSUS have managed to knock my socks off once again! I consider myself lucky to be surrounded by a community of such talented and creative colleagues. It is an honor to not only read but also curate the pieces presented in this journal.

I hope that the authors included here happy and proud to have their labors of love published in *Spectra*. I am eager to see what work we receive for next year.



*Hi! You can call me Haley or Hunter. I am an MLA student working on my creative thesis. After earning two Bachelor's degrees here at LSUS, I am proud to call our campus my home for academia. This is my second year working on Spectra, and I hope to keep this honor for one more year before I graduate.*

*If you would like to submit your work for consideration in Spectra 2024, please e-mail [cottenh27@lsus.edu](mailto:cottenh27@lsus.edu) or [dorie.larue@lsus.edu](mailto:dorie.larue@lsus.edu) with the works you want considered, a photo of yourself, and a short author's bio. We hope to hear from you!*

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Cover and inside photos by H. Cotten