

# ***SPECTRA***

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2022



LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY—SHREVEPORT

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A close-up photograph of a person's hand resting on a silver metal railing. The hand is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the frame. In the background, a window is covered in numerous water droplets, creating a blurred, rainy atmosphere. The overall color palette is dominated by cool blues and greys, with some warmer tones from the hand and railing.

# POETRY

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*SPECTRA 2022*

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## **The Grocery Store Speech**

Aleea Murray

Look, Mary. When we get in this store don't touch nothing!  
That means the candy too because you always forget that part.  
I know how you like to sneak little taps on stuff when I turn my back but not today!  
You do that little thing where you run your hand along the stack to spite me, just don't.  
I shouldn't have to say this every time but maybe today it will sink in.  
Don't ask for anything either you know the answer is no.  
We are here for the house not for you so before you ask that's the answer.  
Okay now let's go, try to remember these instructions!  
Don't touch nothing, don't look at nothing, don't ask for nothing!  
Cause you ain't getting nothing.

**To Timothy or Augustine**

Annelise Dixon

My name, if I were a man, would be a distinguished one.  
Timothy or Augustine, something to be shortened  
into an endearing nickname. In my childhood,  
I'd have been a hero when the teacher needed two big,  
strong boys to move some chairs. When I grew up,  
I would speak out, loud and unapologetic, and people would lend me their ear.  
No more would others roll their eyes. If I were a man, I'd suddenly be  
reliable and impassioned, rather than obsessive and hysterical.  
And how funny is that?  
I would walk at night with a quiet mind, and when I  
breathe deep, the air is crisp, not tinged with  
the bitterness of fear. At least, not mine.

If I were a man, I'd see women fake-smile, averting their eyes.  
Do they feel safe enough to tell me "no" and "goodbye"?  
I'd watch movies, and I'd see myself the hero once again, and  
maybe I'd see the damsels in distress, trained since childhood  
to distrust those like me, lest they become a woman in a refrigerator.  
I'd try to reflect, as I'd never want to be part of the problem.  
But as long as I'd benefit, I'd contribute. Is there peace either way?  
Regardless, if I were a man, I'd get to unlearn these issues  
rather than experience them.

## **The Test**

Meagan Staton

You've got to move faster.  
The clock plays a similar beat-  
tick, tick, tick, tick-  
to that of my own heart.

Catch your breath.  
I remind myself as I find  
the worrisome parts of my brain  
spinning out of control.

Time is running out.  
Counting down the minutes, seconds, moments  
until I can escape the hell  
I find myself reentering,  
time and time again.

Everyone else knows more than you.  
Pencils bubble in answers while  
thoughts flow onto paper.  
Sweat fills my palms as  
bile begins its journey  
from my stomach to my mouth.

You can't do this.  
The hands on the clock wind  
round and round,  
until they find themselves  
intertwining their fingertips around my throat,  
suffocating me once and for all.

## **A Penny For Your Thoughts**

Brooklyn Oney

A penny for your thoughts, she said as I sat down on the bench.  
Well, to make a long story short, I said  
because I had to make this quick.  
I wore my heart upon my sleeve, and it didn't turn out so great.  
We didn't see eye to eye, and I think it's too late.  
Sorry to spill all my beans, I said when I realized she was quiet.  
You hit the nail on the head, she said as she wore her saddest smile.  
I used to have a love like yours, and they always drove me nuts.  
I thought it wasn't meant to be so I went and jumped the gun.  
We seem to both be in a pickle, I said when I realized we were alike.  
She was quiet for a second, and then she looked me dead in the eye.  
Love costs an arm and a leg, my dear. Are you willing to pay the price?  
Because only one of us here actually has the chance to make it right.

**Too Much**

Rae Schneider

Unnerving and undying it is for You,  
You who I have yet to meet.  
Maybe one day soon,  
Maybe in another lifetime.  
Maybe I need to be You.

Do I need to lose more weight?  
What about my face, is it pretty enough?  
Why haven't You come yet?  
I know! More conventionally attractive  
Things to add to my list of things to mutilate my body.

I am tired of waiting.  
Maybe I am meant to be alone.  
I share too much of myself with any soul  
I happen to meet, hoping they are You.  
I am tired.

Maybe I need to be You?  
In order to find You, I have to work on myself.  
BUT WHEN WILL THE WORK BE DONE?  
I am tired and ready to settle with never finding You.  
YOU who happens to have the key to my lock.



## **The Boardwalk**

Chris Carey

While hanging out at the Boardwalk,  
starting in the parking lot by Bass Pro Shop,  
wearing my favorite Levi's shirt and Converse sneakers,  
my friends and I decided to go to the Regal Cinema to see a movie.  
For the movie we bought popcorn, Cokes, and M&Ms.  
After the movie, we went to eat at IHOP.  
Following dinner, we wandered around the Boardwalk looking at all of the shops;  
we went to Rocket Fizz (and bought more sodas), Snax, and Levi's Outlet Store.  
Eventually we made our way back to the Bass Pro Shop parking lot.  
We said our goodbyes and we each went home, to which I left in my Nissan.

**To Call a Stutter**

Kaden Nelson

My wall is putty,  
a foxtail necktie.  
I'm a hanged coat  
in the Carpathians  
with each whisper a brick  
in the style of Monet.

A,E,I,O, and U, are  
the cracks on the table,  
the wet candle wick,  
the panting and the mirror.  
And someone left their smoke  
ring in my mind  
and it's a foggy night  
with a clock tower behind.

My throat is a pillar dry,  
its red rug swept  
and ready for god  
but there is no god of words.  
I'll call him dead,  
in his crown of black sky.

**Void**

Carter Wynn

I have given up once and for all on being the perfect son  
I cry and I bleed and I sweat but  
my efforts are in vain  
the pain that I go through multiplies  
when I shut my eyes I see nothing  
when I open them I feel nothing  
I wish for something  
The perfect son for my family is a breadwinner  
a martyr to the system  
what I want is the farthest thing from that  
have you ever wondered why stars shine  
because they don't have a care in the sky  
we don't see them anymore because of the smog of problems that the world has made  
I don't want to be a cog in that machine  
I want to bring joy to the world  
Peace  
Happiness  
but I find that those who get the power to do that use it for their own benefit  
the power corrupts  
yet we call them stars  
therefore I live in the void of a forgotten promise  
a time where all of humanity wanted a better future  
pavement we have set on time is a gravely tune that will consume all of us with no exception

**What I took to be**

Annelise Dixon

What I took to be a ghostly mist rising from my floor  
turned out to be a smudge on my glasses  
exorcised easily by a careful clean cloth.  
What I took to be my mother in the next room  
turned out to be my jacket draped over a chair,  
and embarrassment stopped my greeting mid-sentence.  
Those who know me say I'm gullible;  
we joke that my mind takes advantage of it.  
But some days I can't tell if I'm haunted or paranoid,  
for what I took to be the sound of a singing birthday card  
turned out to be the shriek of our dimensional fabric ripping.  
What I took to be an unripe banana  
turned out to be the floating, flaming contract inked in red  
that I'm fairly sure was Apple's terms of service agreement.  
Plagued by absurd types of terrors, I jolt from sleep at a tap on my window,  
and what I thought to be the dying stars and planets plummeting down to destroy Earth  
turned out to be a beetle crawling across the glass.

**The Catholic Coffee Connoisseur**

Rae Schneider

Quiet is the House in which the coffee lies.  
Except for the chatter and flirting  
Of young  
Titillated Students.  
Who stay up late in the night,  
Studying the eyes of the strangers across the room.

You sit on the couch across from me.  
I am dying to know,  
Just how religious you really are.  
“It’s a new brewery, you should come”  
Silence -

I want to embrace the smell of the coffee  
That comes from this House.  
I want you, I want you!  
Your eyes look longingly at every female that enters.  
Not so religious, are we?

**Venus**

Carter Wynn

Rain is falling softly on the roof and the Rav four outside the windows  
watering the trees the grass the flowers the waters  
it is accompanied by a smooth gentle breeze that allows the tree leaves to make a sound of being  
alive  
the breeze cools the earth and everything it touches as it smoothly flies through the grass the  
flowers and over the waters  
outside the moon is nowhere in sight but it is a time for sleeping  
it is a time to relax with a book for reading or a show for watching with the lights off and a cozy  
blanket  
No overhead lights needed but lamps like candles to capture the cozy mood  
just one or two in perhaps a corner  
the soft rain allows for sweet dreams  
the wind helps the rain tap on the windows as a gentle reminder that life is happening  
life like the animals sleeping or the world spinning  
the things we know are there but just don't think of  
just gently reminding us of our warm lit shelters  
the warmth making us cozy and sweet  
as dreams follow as we drift off to sleep

**No Laughter Just Lies**

Ariane Fletcher

Tap, tap on the mic  
I could ask if this thing is on  
The sound of my breathing reverberates in the room  
It was easier to do with family and friends  
Telling anecdotes and jokes from a past life  
A group of strangers watching you fall apart  
was not my idea of a good time

The man prior spoke words like silk to my skin  
The woman before sang a soulful song that made them roar  
They all comforted me like a warm blanket, and now  
here I stand with coldness seeping through my veins  
I search the room, but my eyes are blinded by the spotlight  
Searching for a glimpse of familiarity, I know isn't there  
Here I stand with nothing, nothing but pain in my heart  
and stomach as if I swallowed a million butterflies  
Not a sound to cut the tension...no wait, no  
no, there's a sound

The sound of murmurs and then laughter  
and booing hit me like a derailed train in the night  
When I got home, my lover surprised to see me  
an afterthought in his already conquered quest  
A deer in headlights with a fake smile, and I was happy  
Happy the spotlight was off me for the first time  
He stared waiting for an opening which I never gave  
Defeated, he finally asked how I'd do  
I smiled and told him I knocked it out of the park

## **The Innocence of Fear**

Kaden Nelson

At the end of the road,  
stood the green house lights,  
that you avoided better than the plague.  
That was what made being

a kid so much fun.  
Everything became a fear of its own,  
and time was always late  
to its own funeral.

The fear of your own shadow  
during the deep hours  
of midnight, or of the crawl  
of every insect

that passed by your windowsill.  
It made your blood run cold,  
but you knew you weren't going to die,  
you were too young to die.

And everyone called you a scaredy cat,  
but cats are only scared  
because of their own sick curiosity.  
You yourself were curious

and jumped at everything that  
had a different beat,  
like the green house lights,  
that for sure belonged to a witch.

As we grow up, the fears  
will be conquered or turned inward  
and we'll find our innocence was absurd,  
we'll even reach the end of that road.  
But, fear kept us immortal,  
and started our adventures.  
And If we were all still kids  
staring up at the moon

with piss running down our leg,  
maybe life wouldn't be so dull after all.  
For the death of innocence  
is the wonder of it all.



**Times**

Carter Wynn

People like showing off their Yeezys and their Apple brand products for internet clout  
I think we should show off our record players and walkmans and jam out  
the idea of personal fame from some Samsung bullshit  
is something I wish people would quit  
an Adidas brand shirt doesn't define you  
You might wear Gucci but your personality is worse than the flu  
I choose to have an outdated iPhone not because of a statement but mostly because of the  
character it has built  
The idea of having to appease TikTok to have an ounce of self-worth is not how life should work  
I see the new iPhones as a scam  
Samsung is no better  
having the next Fitbit or prize jewel doesn't make you icy it just makes you a fool  
I don't want to be a part of a system where I have to wear Gucci in September and Calvin Clide  
in the winter  
I just want to wear my Cloud9 shirt in peace and watch videos on the computer

## **Unwanted Diagnosis**

Rae Schneider

I sit in the room with a wave of  
Shame washed over me.  
Frozen in time -  
Wishing that I could turn back  
And make better choices.

I ache psychically, mentally, and emotionally.  
I am numb.  
I sit in the room welcoming my timely Death,  
With open arms and a longing heart.  
It is cold.

I am angry that I have to live in pain, meanwhile  
The person that infected me gets to live a life.  
Never screaming from the simple act of walking  
NEVER knowing what they put me through.

I sit in the room - frozen in time.

**Black Friday**

Hannah Lawing

I was making my way to JC Penny  
Through the Prada bags and Alexander McQueens of the mall's first floor  
When the earth shook and the roof caved in,  
And I fell into a pile of Valentino pumps.  
When the tremble ended, I then stood up and dusted myself off  
And kicked away some rubble with my Skecher-clad feet.  
I waded through ceiling tiles and concrete shards and Gucci belts dusted with concrete snow  
Until I came to the crossing of Chanel and Dior where lay a mountain of plaster and metal alike  
And at the summit a shelf lacking not in size or grandeur  
Except for its Burberry bags scattered round; all left was a price tag reading "\$1499".  
The climber of this mountain, or more like the climbee, lay on her back gazing at the ceiling of  
the second floor.  
On her hips lay the mountain, on her legs lay the mountain, on her chest lay a scarf checkered by  
Calvin Klein, and in her hand lay a crossbag checkered with grime and "D&G".  
I began to dig her out of the pile, and drag her out of the rubble. "No!" she cried as we neared the  
door monitors,  
And I tried to pry her fingers from the bag. "I cannot wait again till Black Friday!"  
We wrestled the bag, and sirens passed by three times. She died before they turned for the  
fourth.  
I wore my J.C. Penny skirt to her funeral. She wore Dolce & Gabbana.

**Always Remember, Never Forget**  
Meagan Staton

The skies are clear and welcoming,  
on a Tuesday morning in September.  
The faint coos and babbles of a blonde-headed  
infant fill the living room of the small home.

Passengers board their flights,  
anxious to reach their desired destinations.  
A father watches over his child,  
seeing his entire world in front of him.

Because of the conditions of the skies,  
no one could imagine the how or why.  
The sound of news reports on the television  
were drowned out by the father's racing heartbeat.

The World Trade Center, the Pentagon, a field in Pennsylvania  
all became targets of a sinister and insidious operation.  
The father jumped to his feet, grabbed the child,  
and left his pride and joy with her grandmother to face the tribulations before him.

We've just gotten word that one of the Twin Towers has collapsed.  
It is unclear what caused this horrific tragedy.  
"Something happened. I have to go"  
The words left his mouth with uncertainty.

The burning of supplies, jet fuel, and human remains  
filled the New York skyline with dread and sorrow.  
Buttoning his uniform and starting his police cruiser,  
the father made his way to Barksdale Airforce base  
to protect and serve the President of the United States.

The deafening rumble of destruction  
overtook the streets of New York City,  
as it was loud enough to be heard around the world.  
The father stood tall, putting on a brave face, while thinking about his daughter.  
The child remained cooing and babbling,  
remaining innocent, pure, and free of the evils of the world.

## **Hurricane Katrina in the Eyes of a Little Girl**

Brittney Lea

August 23, 2005

A normal day with some wind and rain  
Until it became the day  
Of Louisiana's biggest nightmare

174 mph winds  
80% of the city under water  
\$125 billion in damage  
1,833 fatalities

The Super Dome should've housed many  
But a house without food or clean water  
Is like a tree without roots  
It won't stand for long  
It's not super or a home or safe

A week later a four-year-old girl begins asking,  
"Daddy, why are you leaving?"  
"When will you be back?"  
She had a home  
Her dad knew many others did not

He goes down south  
Leaving his girl to clean up the mess another made  
Relocating people across the United States  
Georgia, Alabama, Ohio  
Wherever they could go to get away

Away from a place they once considered home  
Away from a place they now feared  
To a place that they could only pray they'd be safe  
To a place they'd be able to start over again  
With no sure plan of a rebuild or even return

He finally returns home  
Grateful that he had one to return to  
One girl, Katrina, had brought him away.  
But another little girl was his reason to stay.

### **My First Powwow**

Hannah Lawing

I think it was a woman  
Handing me a piece of frybread covered in honey,  
No, syrup. Or butter and powdered sugar?  
It was warm. And sticky.  
Or was it actually a taco?  
The music, the drumming, pounded in my ears.  
Was it Ricky at the drum?  
I think we saw him there.  
It was a whirlwind of friends, voices,  
Relatives I'd never met, relatives I had no relation to  
Except by heart.  
Prayers, songs, smoke from the fire,  
No, the burger grill.  
The fire was later that night.  
What I do remember clearly was  
Pushing the feather back in my unruly hair,  
And a new cousin leading me in the dance,  
When the queen and king smiled and passed by,  
Then later in the dark  
When the fire burned hot and bright,  
Leaning on Mom's shoulder falling asleep  
But not wanting to leave.

**You're Thinking It's New York City**

Sarah Wynn

You're thinking it's New York City,  
but maybe it's Chicago  
with the big buildings and Art Deco.  
You think you're here for an art show,  
well maybe not an art show, but  
a talent show of some sort.  
You see a tall woman,  
gazing amongst a crowd,  
but perhaps it's more of a crowd  
gazing amongst the woman.  
She probably had shiny blue hair,  
but maybe it was orange,  
shaped like a carrot.  
She talks about so many things,  
things you don't know about,  
but you assume they're important.  
You know she's left behind  
broken hearts and bra clasps  
or maybe hair ties and wet eyes.  
She seems guilty to you  
or maybe some sense of pride.  
You're not sure how she got here,  
but you're afraid when she leaves.

## **Contradictory Ghosts**

Brooklyn Oney

I see the ghost of my past selves  
wistfully staring back at me.  
The ghosts that haunt me  
are the ones filled with confidence  
while overcome with insecurity,  
decisiveness while riddled with uncertainty.  
and a wise soul that is prey to immaturity.  
These are the ghosts that haunt me day and night,  
I'm searching for one that can bring me back to the light.  
These are the images repeating in my mind,  
I'm searching for a time traveler with no concept of time.



**Autumn**

Sue Yacovissi

It is September.

Leaves are turning yellow  
like sugar cookies harden  
when they bake into bricks.

It is windy. The sun is shining brightly  
melting snowflakes as they fall onto the ground.

It is October. Pumpkins show the change of seasons  
as containers holding candles that melt away frost.

It is rainy. Black clouds up high let loose all that they hold,  
causing the dry earth to replenish.

It is November. Cold chills make people shiver outside  
as they witness what nature brings.

It is snowy. The season is moving to winter  
as flakes settle making snow angels playing in the leaves.

## **Worship of the Night**

Kaden Nelson

I pray to the night  
'please last forever,  
don't drop the seeds of sunlight  
it can only bring a heavy hand',  
but the tree always grows  
and gets chopped hour by hour  
until the night falls down again

Nights are aged wine,  
waited on for a taste all day.  
Days are hot,  
age,  
sound,  
fury,  
war,  
rising,  
sexless,  
and Icarus could have only fallen  
during the day.

So the lucky die at night,  
veiled at last slumber,  
awoken in timeless heaven,  
while the deaths of the day  
are doomed to a bright hell  
with wrinkled time  
chopping at the tree of sun.

## **Our Other Life**

Hannah Lawing

In my other life the baby sleeping in my arms  
Rests its head on my bosom  
While I gently rock the chair  
And a bottle is warmed in the kitchen  
When my husband comes home from work.

My days are filled with dirty diapers  
And alphabet songs on loop. Spit-ups on  
Freshly cleaned blankets and teddy bears  
Scattered throughout the wakeful nights  
And hazy days.

In this life my womb aches and bleeds,  
And a friend engraves a memorial plaque.

In my other life, we bring our baby  
To be welcomed by friends and godparents  
And baptismal water in the parish that in this life  
I hide within to cry because our baby was welcomed  
With nausea and the flush of a toilet.  
Top of Form

**To My Past Lover**

Mary Holley

Look, John, when you get to Poland, try  
Not to think of me too much by asking  
Yourself the same questions, repeatedly. Then go

Back home, where you claim your heart lives  
(Although it doesn't always seem that way),  
To tell that pretty girl who gave you  
So many precious memories (but of course

You don't remember one) that you're back.  
Even she, who you thought would never  
Forget you, won't be waiting.....Then go and tell

That poor girl Sandy, who you thought would be there  
When you arrived, waiting and basking in the sun...  
To mind her own business and get a life!

## **Happy Endings**

Aleea Murray

What I took to be a warm embrace  
Turned out to be a fist  
meeting my face with excessive force  
What I thought was an apology  
Was really a love letter from the devil  
leaving train tracks along the cracked pieces of my heart  
what I thought was a brand new day  
turned out to be midnight  
echoing in my mind  
what I thought was a rerun  
turned out to be an origin story  
what I took as manipulation  
turned out to be real love  
what I took as a choke hold  
turned out to be a hug.

**Fear's TED Talk**

Ariane Fletcher

As the Wolf Howls in the High Tide,  
along came Fear. He was dressed to the nines.  
Wearing clown clothes with a serpent tie.  
He has Eight legs to resemble she, who shall  
not be named. His newly polished horns glistened  
from his head. And deep-set red eyes shined in the dark.

It's hard for him to sit due  
to the stinger that sits high  
on his backside. He flies to each  
one of his boarded houses  
perch 10,000 feet in the air.  
Facing the ghosts of his past. His  
personal hell. Gathering his materials.

He flies to where everyone waits for him.  
A stage built just for him, but he's unable to speak.  
He stands in front of the  
crowd of 666 monsters who wait.  
He searches the audience and stares at one.  
Not a monster, but a person.  
Me.

Fear stared at me.  
A plain ole human who took an  
unexpected wrong turn. He feared me.  
Trembled before me.  
An unknown force he had yet to see.

**The End**

Rae Schneider

Quiet is the Universe in which my soul lies.  
Except for the murmurs of my heart -  
Be still and know.  
You have done your best.

I have fought demons both small and large,  
And yet, I still feel there is something missing.  
Be still and know.  
You are enough.

I am dying to know what life is like,  
Outside of these walls I call home.  
I am also afraid to know what lies ahead.  
Be still and know.  
You contain multitudes.

The future is no more uncertain than the present.  
You are here, you are now.  
Be still and know.

# FICTION

SPECTRA 2022

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY—SHREVEPORT



## Frozen Time

Jake Hunt

A lot of drama tended to happen under the Third Street bridge. The clash of blades that was about to happen would be the most recent spat to take place. Ricky Kent could feel the tension setting his nerves alight as he waited for his opponent. Under normal circumstances, he would've held an alarming amount of patience for an 18 year old, but he hadn't had the fortune of "normal circumstances" for the past few weeks. The young man ran a hand through his messy brown hair as he continued to wait. After the longest ten minutes of his life went by, his opponent finally appeared before him. He was a man in his late 20s, with short-kept golden locks neatly curled away from his face, and with a pair of piercing ocean blue eyes that stared coldly at Ricky. An ornate black sword with a fierce gold blade sat sheathed at the man's hip, and it seemed as though the sword itself was itching to be unsheathed. The opposing man crossed his arms as he spoke out to Ricky.

"I'll admit, I was not expecting you to defeat my sister in combat. I'm impressed you were able to do that, in all honesty." Ricky narrowed his gaze towards his opponent.

"You're not that impressed, are you Reginald?" Reginald let out a stern snort at the query.

"Astute as always, Richard. I know of the power you now hold. An arctic storm in the palm of your hand. When I heard of your victory, it made me curious. Did you defeat my sister by virtue of skill, or by virtue of your new power?"

"So what, you're here to test that out for yourself?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes, but I am also here on behalf of Riley. Make no mistake, this is not a duel of honor. This is a duel to settle a score." Ricky's gaze drifted down to the silver hued sword sheathed at his belt, its ocean blue hilt glowing against the sunlight.

"You care about her a lot, don't you?"

"She's the only family I have left. Wouldn't you do the same with either of your brothers if you were in my shoes?"

"Yes... yes I would."

"Then it is an even fight."

The two swordsmen drew their swords, the gold of Reginald's contrasting sharply with the silver of Ricky's. Both men readied their blades in front of them, their gazes locking as they shifted their feet, waiting for the inevitable first swing that one of them would cause. Ricky steadied his breathing as best he could as anxiety crawled up his spine like a ravenous tarantula, eager to feed on his nerves. "Stay calm... stay cool..." Ricky muttered to himself, repeating the mantra as though his life depended on it. Such an assessment wouldn't have been that far from the truth in all honesty. During the few weeks where he'd gotten to know Reginald, Ricky had caught on to one key trait of the older swordsman: his temper. As calm and collected as he liked to present himself, he was a man fueled by a righteous yet impulsive anger. Said anger often showed itself during any form of mistreatment aimed at his sister, hence why this duel was even happening. Ricky knew it, and in truth, so did Reginald. After a tumultuous, tension-fueled

minute of silence, a guttural war cry bellowed out of Reginald as the older swordsman leapt toward Ricky, his golden blade swinging down from above. Without a moment to spare, a cold slickness froze into place beneath Ricky's feet as he brought his silver blade up, parrying the golden counterpart as the younger man slid away from his opponent. The rage that now fueled Reginald's eyes was clear as day as a scowl settled onto his angular face.

"Relying on your ice already?" Ricky brought his blade close to his chest as he replied.

"You're not planning on going easy on me. That much I can tell."

"No I'm not." That's when it happened. That unsettling "blink if you miss it" feeling of being frozen in place washing over Ricky's body. With panic flowing through his veins, he turned to his left and brought his weapon up to guard, but his opponent's gold blade was able to graze at his side. The sudden, slicing pain seared Ricky's nerves as he hissed through the seething feeling, returning the favor with a flurry of fierce swings that cut across his opponent's arms. Reginald took an involuntary step back as he glanced down at the trio of cuts that made his right arm bleed. A small chuckle escaped his lips as his gaze locked with Ricky's once more.

"Three cuts of blood. Is that all you have?"

Ricky grasped at the cut on his side, a small wave of water condensing in his grasp and glowing as it glided over his wound, stopping the bleeding in its tracks.

"Gotta start somewhere."

With an unamused scoff, Reginald leapt at Ricky once more, his sword swinging wildly. Back and forth, Ricky glided on his ice, dodging, blocking, and parrying as best he could. His opponent fought in a traditional style, and that same style followed a pattern. Patterns meant repetition, and repetition made for easy prediction. Dodge the overhead swing here, block the follow-up side slash there, parry the thrusting stab when it happens. What he couldn't easily predict were the moments of frozen time. That one ability was Reginald's ace in the hole, and both swordsmen knew it. The only discernible pattern Ricky noticed was the rarity of its use. Intentionally sporadic, as to avoid a pattern. Speaking of, that feeling of frozen time warped back into being for the briefest of milliseconds. With his instincts at the wheel, Ricky spun on the ice as fast as he could, swinging his blade in front of him and blocking the sudden, violent strike of Reginald's gold blade. The two were locked by blade, each pushing back against the other in an attempt to gain some form of ground. Their eyes also locked gazes, blue against blue, and Ricky saw the anger that burned in Reginald's eyes waver ever so slightly.

"How...?" Reginald gritted through his teeth. Confusion laced itself into Ricky's voice.

"How what?"

"How are you still standing? You, who has never had to stare down an army of invaders frothing at the mouth over the thought of conquering your home. You, who has never been formally trained in the ways of the blade until now, relying primarily on instinct and power to survive. You, who has never had to defend yourself or others until you made the decision to do so when it was never needed. You, who is still so uncertain of your future. How are you still standing?"

Ricky's eyes widened in realization.

“That’s not what you’re asking, is it?”

“You speak as though you know me.”

“Look who’s talking.” The blades shifted against each other ever so slightly as Ricky continued to speak. “I’ve faced the Grimoire terrorizing Knightdale for months on end. I’ve been honing my skills long before I took up the sword I now hold. I knew what we would be facing right from the start, and I knew I was needed to help set things right. As for my future... I know what it is. My future is to keep this city safe. To keep my home safe. I’m still standing because I know, I finally know, who I am. That’s how I’m still standing. That’s how I’m still here.”

All at once, the anger that burned and fueled Reginald was lost, flooded by a cold sea of uncertainty that threatened to spill out as tears in his eyes.

“So, that’s the reality of the situation?”

The feeling of time stopping washed over Ricky once more, jerking the young man out of place. When time resumed, he involuntarily lurched forward, the bladelock no more. With panic in his veins once more, Ricky darted his gaze around the area, but to his surprise, Reginald was not to be found. His opponent had fled. The younger swordsman breathed a sigh of relief as he sheathed his blade. He stayed calm, he stayed cool, but from the looks of things, the same could not be said for his opponent.

## The Bot

Carter Wynn

I wake up in a room. Not a bed, but on the cold tile of a center. This center is where I have been for about seventeen years and is complete hell. While laying down there is a drone with an IV in my arm pumping fluids into me and using magic to heal me. I would destroy it if I could.

It means that I failed today. Or yesterday. Or last week. They don't have a calendar I can look at. This "center" is known as the State of the Arts Hope Center and we are probably 50 layers below ground because as the scientist would say, "They aren't allowed to do research or experiments on humans,".

I didn't get captured, no, my parents are the great people who decided to conduct this "great" experiment on their kid. The project name is Project Avalon because scientists lack the function to make creative titles. It's one of the top-secret projects of the center because of me. Not because of my wishes, but because if I ever get found out the Hope Center gets destroyed and arrested.

You would never believe how paranoid some of these guys are. They will talk about it to co-workers just because they think we can't read lips in here or understand English. That last part is a bit of a lie. I was forced to learn all the languages of the world so any scientist could probe and question me. Another one of those great ideas. I say us because the other top-secret projects involve other kids who are around my age. Why are they talking about this stuff in the open? I don't know but it makes me question how these people got here.

The rooms are all sterile white, not that we haven't had experiments of living through epidemics and such. The lights are fluorescent and stay on 24/7. We can't have a containment breach.

Now that I have described all of this you might be asking why am I on the floor.

Well, whenever I got knocked out, I was forced to try and lift 200 tons of Palisistia which is one of the toughest metals humans have ever made. Surprise, surprise, I was crushed. That means game over for most people, but that's where the fun happens. These people revive us or our magic does. This time Oz revived me. I don't know how or why he did, but that's Oz for you.

I don't know why he called me the Voidwalker though. Must be something to do with my powers. I guess I should mention 80% of this world has had the luxury of gaining magic powers. They are usually combative, but they can be any type of thing. The three categories that these lovely idiots like to put them in are Sorcerer, Arcanist, and Magic. Yes, the last one is called Magic because scientists aren't creative. Sorcerers can cast a single type of magic but they don't need circles, incantations, requirements whatsoever. These guys become hunters, a later subject, or villains. Arcanist can cast all types of magic but they need an affinity to it and an incantation or a circle. Then you have Magic. These guys can only cast one spell but it's usually really strong for no reason. Now that we have gotten through a whole semester of Magic History 107 let's continue the actual reason for Hope Center.

Hope Center on paper is a research and development facility in the Great Oakwoods for making weapons of mass destruction against monsters and villains. The reason they are based here is that some of the world's toughest monsters came around to exist when magic did spawn here.

The bot finishes its stupid revival thing and leaves. I get up and go back to my tasks.

## The Same Drive Home

Brooklyn Oney

Sitting in the 5 o'clock traffic has always been relaxing to me. Most of my friends call me sadistic and look at me like I have three heads when I say this but it's true. Most might hate the bustling "everyone coming home from work" traffic, but I don't mind it. It usually acts as a breather for me, a quick and simple pause from the stresses of the day. Whether it be an annoying and demanding customer, a new release not coming in on time, or just simply "one of those days" kind of days, the drive home usually puts my life into perspective for me. It reminds me of all the wonderful things I have in my life and how lucky I am to be able to have a job that I love and a car that is old yet still dependable. It's an extra twenty-five minute breather that I look forward to everyday, except today. Today, instead of thinking about what or more specifically who was waiting for me at home, all I could do was bite my nails and curse at the silence for taunting me with unknowns.

The drive home from Bailey's Bookstore is a drive that I could make with my eyes closed, if it was legal. I take the same route to and from work every single day, the cute bakery I pass on 9th street and the school zone that I always try to push my luck in seared into my brain and muscles. Like clockwork, I always see Mrs. Benton, one of my regular customers, briskly walking with her headphones in while her sweet yorkie tries to keep up. Like clockwork, I know that the second that I see the sweet old lady attempting to outrun her impending old age that I am exactly six minutes from home. Only one traffic light and a slight left until I am securely parked outside the East Oak apartment complex. The notion that I am only six minutes away from everything that I hold close to my heart without a doubt makes my heart beat just a little bit faster, or so my Apple Watch likes to tell me, but today, I don't look down at my wrist and smile at the fact that even my body knows that I am almost home, in every sense of the word. The six minutes fly by too fast and before my mind catches up to my body, I am turning the key into the lock. The sound of the front door closing rings like a gunshot throughout the silent apartment and I take my boots off as quietly as I can, not wanting to disturb the false peace any more than I already have. I stand completely still and try to listen for the telltale signs of human life that these four walls are never lacking.

"Hey." One simple word, three letters. That's all it takes for me to remember exactly why I wished the traffic lights would never change from red to green.

"Hey, I didn't know you were home."

"I told you I would be."

I pretend that I don't hear the snippy subtext to that statement and proceed with my usual light tone.

"Sorry. Do you have something in mind for dinner? I was thinking about trying a new recipe that I found on Pinterest. I know you love chicken -"

"Jess."

The sharp yet pleading lilt to my name stops me in my tracks. I knew the moment I pulled out of Bailey's that this would happen, as I sat in my car mindlessly driving my route home, I let myself pretend that everything was perfectly fine.

“Jess, we need to talk.”

As my mind processes every syllable, I can feel the walls that were so easily taken down by whispered promises and full-body laughter rising from their ashes. I can feel my vulnerable and already mending heart coming undone little by little with every empty word. From that moment on, all I can see are the dramatic hand gestures and the frantic movements, but I don't hear any sounds. I don't have to listen to know what the sounds are. The sounds that turn into words that turn into sentences that turn into tears that are all lies. I am not sure how long I stand there frozen in time but eventually the gestures cease and only the silent tears streaming down my face remain. My body knows that I hate crying in front of people, especially in situations like this, but it still betrays me. I can't really blame it. I know before the words leave my mouth that I am going to do the exact same thing I do every time I am faced with this conversation. My subconscious is screaming at me to fight back, throw something, or just walk away and never look back. To know your worth and realize that you don't deserve any of this but I don't listen, She is begging me to do something, absolutely anything other than say - “It's okay babe, I still love you. What do you want for dinner?”

As I lay in bed, wistfully staring at the ceiling hoping that a restless sleep will take me soon, I come to a startling realization. I realize that I know today won't be the last time that I hear the useless words slip from his tongue and I pretend to believe them, I know that it won't be the last dinner that I suffer through with a fake smile on my face, and I know it won't be the last time I kiss him goodnight and then feel like I need to take another hot shower or throw up my perfectly seasoned chicken breast, maybe a little bit of both. As I hear his endearing sleepy snuffles that I used to tease him about, but now just utterly annoying, I think about the 5' o'clock traffic and my twenty-five minute drive home. I think about all the cars I pass and the people in those cars and wonder if they like sitting in traffic too. I think about Nora's Bakery, and if Nora always wanted to be a baker. I think about the school zone I drive through and all the kids filling the classrooms that have child-like wonder in their eyes and don't yet know the feeling of real heartbreak. I think about Mrs. Benton and her little dog and wonder whether or not she has ever laid in bed and screamed to the silence and asked why she had to grow old. After I successfully crawl out of the rabbit hole of what-ifs and potentials that conversations like today always send me down, I quietly chuckle to myself when the realization dawns on me as I watch the sun rise in the sky: everything is the same, and I will be stuck making the same turns until I take a risk and decide to travel down a different route. By the time 8:30 rolls around and he gets up to go to the kitchen for his daily coffee with two sugars and a dash of whole-milk paired with his cream-cheese laden bagel, I am driving down an unfamiliar highway not knowing or caring where the roads lead me.

# From the Editor

SPECTRA 2022

As a dabbler in poetry and fiction, I was ecstatic to be offered the opportunity to work on this journal. I was blown away by the caliber of work presented, and I consider myself lucky to have such talented colleagues. Perhaps even more fun than reading everything was sorting it; this year's *Spectra* is a curious little puzzle, and each piece (pun intended) is an integral part of that whole work.

I hope that the authors included here feel the same honor and pride that I do in this showcase. I'm excited to see what work and writers, both new and returning, submit in the coming years. All of you deserve to be proud of your hard work!



*My name is Haley, and I am an MLA student here at LSU. Although I'm entering my first full year of graduate school, this is my sixth year on campus. After earning two Bachelor's degrees, I am proud to call LSU my home for academia. This is my first year working on Spectra, but surely not the last!*

**Editor:** Haley E. Cotten | **Staff:** Erin Stapleton | **Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Dorie LaRue  
Cover and inside photos by H. Cotten



## **Perception**

Haley Cotten

Everything fake is a smile. Teeth  
ground to flat edges are a joyous,  
expensive fate—the dentist's fare.

Compulsion is a red-hot sun, glaring  
in my eyes through the rear-view  
mirror. Nails are never allowed to grow.

The incessant movement of thought  
seeps out from fingers onto paper  
to pose as boundless creativity.

Success is that wide-eyed look  
that forces empathy onto tongues:  
honeysuckle and raw bitter melon.

Obsession sleeps in the same bed  
as both love and hate, all willing and able  
to turn comfort to danger, paranoia.