

An aerial photograph of a desert landscape, likely in the Southwest United States, showing a vast expanse of light-colored sand and rock. The terrain is marked by a complex network of dark, branching lines, which are petroglyphs. A person in a red shirt and dark pants is lying on the sand in the upper right quadrant, providing a sense of scale. The overall scene is one of ancient artistry and natural beauty.

*the*  
**PETROGLYPH**  
*review*

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The works herein have been selected for their artistic and literary merit and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Menaul School, its administration, faculty, staff, or students.

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## **Ode to Spice**

*Malachi Flores*

Fragrance wafting through the air,  
Indian developed complexity,  
Origins of the trade spanning miles  
And miles of road.

Such simple powder,  
Yet powerful to a dish. Colors  
ranging the sunset spectrum,  
Producing various tastes.

A mysterious substance to any  
Whiter than the color of an 8 by 11.  
A known substance to those that aren't.  
Salt and Pepper aren't the only way to make  
Something taste better.

Interesting assortments introduce  
Dissimilar flavor either pleasant or crude.  
Spice... the world of the ancients,  
Bring such life to the present.

## **It's Always in the Corner**

*Malachi Flores*

Sunlight peered in through dusty curtains. He woke up, something most people take for granted. Sliver framed spectacles sit on the nightstand, a sort of gravitational pull that attracts the man's hand every morning. He puts on the glasses, wobbling towards his wooden kitchen counter in search of an energy boost four feet away from his bed. He pours freshly ground coffee beans into a Keurig pot. Flashing blue and green lights accompanied by a sweet aroma and an audible deafening tone produced by the coffee maker indicate a freshly made cup. He puts a lid on a white porcelain cup and leaves it on the counter to cool down. In the meantime, he gets ready for his 9-5. Depressed, he lethargically slips on his torn, rough jeans and tee. He grabs the cup and off he goes, locking the door on his way out. He walks down the street to the subway; the bustling of New York City brings a bit of pep in the man's step.

The man works his job, and right at 5 on the dot he clocks out. He did not want to spend any more time there than he had to. Off the subway he walked and straight to his apartment complex. Walking up the steps and waving a hello to his next-door neighbor who he has not seen since last month, not that she was away for vacation or anything. He gets to his apartment and walks straight in, locking the door behind him. He makes an instant cup of ramen for dinner and falls asleep right away.

A dimming light awakes the man during his sleep. Shadows of the moon enter the man's apartment, highlighting the center. The man looks to the other side of the room to make out a humanoid shaped figure, more shadow than anything. He notices that everything is quiet, he did not hear the normal honks of cars and nightlife of New York as he would normally through his cracked wooden windowsill. He now stared at the figure more intensely trying to see minute details. He notices that the hands of the figure extend at least five inches from the base of the hand creating claw like outlines in the moon lit room. He notices that he, just like the figure was not moving. Not that he was

scared or anything, just that he physically could not command himself to sit up.

He heard about this one time watching the Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, one of his few pastimes. Jimmy was talking about how he slept the other night, saying he woke up in this paralyzed state, that it was the freakiest dream he's ever had. The man thought that what was happening this very moment was something like what Jimmy had experienced. He did not think much of it and before he could make out any more details of the figure he seemingly woke up.

The same routine as the days before. He puts on the glasses, wobbles to the kitchen counter to make coffee, leaves the coffee to cool and gets ready for work, grabs the coffee on the way out and off to the subway to his 9-5. The man was still thinking about what happened the night before, if what he experienced was real, or imagination. The pattern repeats once more, 5 on the dot he clocks out, subway home, walk to the apartment, no hello this time, into his apartment, locking the door behind him, ramen for dinner, then straight to bed.

He awakes, just like the night before, the moonlight from the dusty curtains invades his room. He tries to move... he can't. He looks to the other side of the room, the figure was stood in the middle of the room now, appearing to get closer and closer. No sound to be heard from outside. He can now hear the creature breathing unsteadily. Almost excited to meet him face to face. Shaking and drooling on the carpet below. The man now increasingly paranoid.

He wasn't thinking logically; fight or flight kicked in. He didn't care that what he was looking at was all just a dream. He just wanted to wake up safe in his bed the next morning. All he could think about was how the creature was getting closer and closer, the breathing louder and louder, the shaking more aggressive, and the drool flowing down like a river. Before the creature could get within a foot of the man's face,

he awoke. This time, he stood straight in his bed with sweat dripping down his chin and under his arms. He felt sick, calling in to work to tell them he would not make it today.

He turned on his 39-inch TV, one he got at a garage sale for a bargain price. He switched the channels to see what was on... nothing good but the news. He sat on his couch thinking about his dream. His hair stood up straight, the couch was shaking, he thought one of the legs might have been broken until he looked up at the TV to see himself shaking in the reflection, his hands clutching his arms tightly. He was paranoid. He did not want to fall asleep that night, making cups of coffee to stay up. Fast forwarding a bit, it was midnight. Insomnia and paranoia consumed the man. The shell was breaking ever so slightly. He was drifting off, dosing in and out of consciousness. He did not notice, but his eyes had been closed for well over ten minutes now.

A dimming light would wake up the man. He noticed that he could move. "It was all just in my head," the man convinced himself. He got up off the couch to make himself herbal tea to calm his nerves. He would reach for the Keurig to open its lid, his fingers stumbling to catch a hold onto the machine. He grabbed the machine; it was wet and sticky. The man looked up to see if he had a leak, being that it was an old apartment. White eyes stared back at him in the corner of the ceiling. Heavy breathing would envelope the room, from both the man and the creature. One was excited, the other was petrified. A loud crash sounded as a porcelain coffee cup fell to the floor. The white porcelain was now painted red. A loud death curdling scream echoed throughout the apartment complex.

The man's next door neighbor heard the commotion and decided to check up on the man. She went outside her apartment and scuttled over to the man's. She went to knock on the door, but the force of her knock opened it, she thought it strange the man had not locked his door. With slight hesitation she called out to the man, "A-are you okay



in there?” No response. She ended up investigating further, turning on the light of the man’s apartment. A heavy metallic stench coursed through her lungs. She looked to see a room decorated with blood, no signs of a body. The only remaining part of the man was what appeared to be half of a femur bone sat dead center in the room, as if it were chewed off. ▲

## **Purpose**

*Hali Nguyen*

When you ask what people's biggest fear is, they would probably  
respond with something like

Sharks  
The dark  
Heights

And although I'm scared of things like that, my fears have always  
been much more abstract.

What if I never figure out why I am here?  
What I'm supposed to do for the rest of my life,  
My true purpose.

I wonder about the adults in my life and constantly worry if I would  
ever be in the position to settle for less instead of being someone I  
am meant to be.

The truth is,  
The hours of reading  
And writing  
And listening

No matter how many equations I must memorize  
And lessons I learn,  
I am still unable to know anything about myself  
Yet it is expected in the matter of four years.

Fears are meant to be conquered  
Fears are meant to be grown out of  
Fears are meant to disappear

So I will wrap both of my arms around myself  
And fall  
I will swim in the deepest of oceans  
And I will figure a way out of this maze  
With all the lights out.



**When in Rome...**

*Malachi Flores*

## **The End Times**

*Oliver Gibson-Kramer*

September 11, 2025. I was 20 years old when the world ended. My name is Vincent, and I am a survivor of an apocalypse not seen before by humanity. It all started in 2022, when Russia decided to invade Ukraine. In late October of that year, Ukraine had pushed Russia out of their land and to the Russian-Ukrainian border. At this same time, a revolution was starting to ramp up to overthrow Putin with the support of a few NATO countries. In a last ditch effort, and in his insanity, Putin ordered the targeting and launch of the full Russian nuclear arsenal; 5, 977 nukes. This was the beginning of the end. Of course, one of the first Russian targets happened to be my home: Albuquerque, New Mexico. Due to a large stash of nuclear warheads near the city, it was a Russian priority to neutralize Kirtland Air Force base as soon as possible. Of course, that is not where the destruction ended. An hour following the launch, the United States entered DEFCON 1, the highest state of war readiness. The United States and pretty much every other country armed with nuclear weapons fired at each other. This resulted in the biggest man-made extinction event in human history. In the middle of the 500 million estimated survivors across the globe was me. The bombs dropped 2 years ago. I am now 22 years old, and have been scouring the rubble that was Albuquerque for survival for all this time.

Currently, I am walking through the crumbled ruins of my old high school. As I entered the battered and crumpled down building, I said aloud, "It's a miracle I've survived this long." It really was. Luckily for the survivors of Albuquerque, the nuke that hit the base was a tactical nuke, meaning that it emitted no radiation. I had survived by hiding in a drain underground, eating canned food and drinking bottled water for two days. As I walked through the destroyed building, I kept adjusting a crackling radio that I found in a pawn shop a few months earlier. There hadn't been a radio communication since a few hours after the bombs fell, which was President DeSantis speaking from his bunker listing off the cities hit and the casualty estimate. "Damn useless radio," I swore under my breath as all that emitted from the radio was static. I

ended up leaving what was left of Menaul after recovering a burnt and tattered American flag from the rubble. I gazed in deep thought at the star spangled banner in my hands, and whispered under my breath, “never forget.” My goal was clear; I had to make it to the land I grew up on. There, I was certain, would be a safe place to be. If the water well was still intact and the electrical lines were still protected, I could make a settlement. It was a long way to Placitas, though, and I was not the only group of people roaming the city, as there were pirate gangs that stole from lone survivors, and occasionally small wars would be fought between city gangs and scavengers. I had managed to avoid most of these gangs, but I reminded myself to be vigilant at all times. I had one more thing to do before setting off on this journey; I had to recover my dad’s .301 cal. Rifle from my old home. I started walking up Menaul Blvd., being careful to stay out of the road to avoid being seen. After half a day of walking, I had made it to my old house on the corner of Constitution and Richmond, although the signs were rusted away and half melted by the bomb. Surprisingly, my house had stayed in relatively good condition despite the nuclear bomb dropping. As I walked through my broken glass door, I was hit with a flashback of the day that the war started.

*“RUN!” A voice ripped through the neighborhood as I stared out of the kitchen window of my friend’s house, listening to the air raid sirens ringing loudly. “What is going on?” I asked my friend Sigurd. He was staring at his phone at an alert reading -WARNING-BALLISTIC MISSILE INBOUND-FIND SHELTER IMMEDIATELY-. “We need to hide somewhere. Stay here, it’ll be safer,” Sigurd demanded. I stared at him silently as he climbed, fully clothed, into the bathtub filled with water. “That is not going to protect you,” I said, to which he replied with a simple, “Yes it will, it will prevent me from being burned.” Sigurd had set up a shelter for me too, which was just a large Tupperware box filled with water. An alert popped up on my phone reading -ONE HOUR UNTIL IMPACT-. I told Sigurd these last few words before I sprinted out of the house, grabbing his backpack with supplies in it. “You are going to die here.” I ran as Sigurd yelled after me, demanding me to come*

*back. I ran until I saw a missile streaking across the sky, coming ever closer to Albuquerque's airspace. I ran until I found a drain along the sidewalk, which I climbed into and waited for the searing heat and deafening boom that ended the world.*

I staggered back in my kitchen as I remembered this traumatizing moment. "You left him," I said to myself as I regained control over myself. "No matter, I must continue. I survived, and he did not." I reached my father's old bedroom, where I ripped open the closet and found the dusty rifle sitting in the corner, surprisingly intact. I grabbed the rifle and all the ammo that we had, and walked towards the front door. As I was about to leave, I looked out the kitchen window and spotted a group of green-clothed men walking down the road past my house. I ducked down, but I must have made more noise than necessary, as the men turned around and started walking towards my house cautiously. I gritted my teeth as one of the men peered through the window right above me, and slowly started creaking the window open. "Now or never," I whispered to myself. In a flash, I popped up and slammed the butt of my rifle through the window into the cloaked man's face, knocking him out cold, which immediately alerted his 3 other companions. They burst through the gate in my backyard, so I swung around and took aim at the first man, and pulled the trigger. I managed to get a two-in-one shot, but there was still one last combatant that I had to take care of. I dropped my rifle and tackled the man to the ground. He grabbed a shard of glass to stab me with, but I smacked it out of his hand and knocked him out too. I quickly searched through one of their backpacks, finding a compass, picked up my rifle, and then left immediately before the knocked-out individuals woke up. "Now starts the long walk to my land," I said to myself as I ran away from my old house for the last time.

I must've run for hours, as I reached Alameda and ran out of breath. I estimated that it would take me two days to walk to Bernalillo from Albuquerque without being spotted. As I set up camp a mile off the

Bernalillo highway, I gazed up at the stars from my sleeping bag. As I laid there, everything was fine, however I forgot one thing; I never sleep anymore. I had been experiencing nightmares since the bombs fell, and tonight wouldn't be any different, especially following the fact that I had killed a man today. Before I knew it, the sun rose over the Sandia mountains and I packed up my gear and continued my journey. By noon, I reached the old town of Bernalillo. Bernalillo wasn't affected so much by the bombs, but it was abandoned completely, allowing vegetation to invade the old town. I walked through and found all the stores empty of any supplies. By nightfall, I had made it through Bernalillo with no trouble and started the incline up to Placitas. I set up camp, but again could not sleep. This was exasperated by the fact that coyotes were everywhere now, but had no prey to hunt. I kept one eye open and my hands clenched on my rifle in case one of the beasts decided to take a peek at my camp. As the sun rose, I looked down upon the Rio Grande valley for the last time, and turned my back to it, continuing towards my childhood homeland. I decided I wanted to look for my mom's friend's house, and found it after about an hour. I went inside and found everything rusted and corroded except an old katana made out of stainless steel. "Good find," I said to myself. "I'll keep this one for a rainy day. After all, my ammo is limited." Although there was another empty slot where a second katana should have been, I ignored it and continued. By the end of that day, I had reached my old land. I scanned the area and took a deep breath. "I made it!" I yelled, as my voice echoed across the empty lands. I managed to reactivate the well and turn on the electricity after a few hours, and started building a more permanent campsite there. Placitas was deemed safe, and no one found me. Ever.

Five years have passed since I arrived in Placitas. I had dug out a section of earth and made myself an earthship-style home with running water and working electricity. When I arrived in Placitas, I had buried my rifle 4 feet underground so that I would never have to kill another person, but I kept my katana out as a souvenir out on



my porch. I sat out on the porch as the sun went down, observing the road that my porch overlooked. Everything was peaceful for me now, and I started to doze off. My eyes snapped open as I saw a figure in a black cloak walking down the middle of the road in the distance. I ripped my katana off of the wall display and threw its tattered scabbard aside. I walked down my steps onto the road as the cloaked figure walked down the center, stopping around 10 feet away. Like a western showdown, we both stood there, silent. As the stranger took off the hood of his cloak, I stared in horror as Sigurd's cloak flowed like waves in the wind, revealing a sword similar to mine in his right hand. "How," I whispered under my breath. *This is not possible; he couldn't have survived. How?* I thought to myself. As I raised my katana, I stared at him. He was covered in dark and tattered robes. His right hand was burnt and scorched, and there were no signs of other burns except that his left eye was completely white. He took a few steps closer to me and raised his sword up, glaring at me with unmatched hatred in his good eye and empty death from the other eye. As we stood facing each other, old friends turned enemies, on my childhood homeland, katanas in hand, Sigurd spoke for the first time in 7 years, reciting the last words I had spoken to him all those years ago: "You are going to die here." ▲

## **The Truth About Growth**

*Rylan Wickwire*

I am a Hopeless romantic. A People pleaser. Answers your texts right away and hands out trust without a second glance until you've lost it. Falling in love with the type of people who needed healing more than romance. Always sees the good. Making excuses for your unkindness. Loved you too much. Couldn't walk away when I knew I should. Second and third chances, fourth and fifth and sixth. Beginning to unravel the lies and words you told me, now I know they meant nothing. Realizing empty hearts deserve empty hands. Trying to take back who I was before all of this. Realizing that I am worth more. I will continue to be my favorite person before I was ever yours.



**Patroclus**

*Gracie Cooper*

## **A Beautiful Lie**

*Axelle Karake Niyo*

Unconditional love is defined as “affection without limitation.” Unfortunately, this type of love is utterly unattainable. The following paragraphs will further demonstrate the futility of love and affection.

Firstly, love does not exist. It is simply a concept created by the brain. Love is expressed differently across all cultures and there is no concrete evidence that everyone experiences love in the same way. Being the unstable cultural phenomenon that it is, love simply cannot exist.

Secondly, this is against human nature. Humans are self-absorbed creatures that always put their own interests before the interests of others and this applies when looking for a partner. People seek to receive unconditional love more than they want to give it. The idea of not having to change anything about ourselves while still being loved and cared about is more pleasant than having to accept our partner’s imperfections. We want people that we can profit from in some way either emotionally or materially.

To further prove this, it’s also been scientifically proven that love doesn’t last long when there’s no sexual attraction between partners. Therefore, the feeling of love boils down to a simple sexual impulse and this strongly emphasizes the fact that unconditional love is not real.

Finally, it’s important to consider the image that a lot of romance movies portray as love. A magical feeling that when found, life is fulfilled. This raises the idea that love might just be a cultural phenomenon that arises as a result of social pressures and expectations. And due to this, many who claim to be in love usually aren’t.

Many may argue that unconditional love is attainable, and their basis for that argument is their own experience with love. This argument is weak because as previously stated, everyone experiences the concept of love differently. Therefore, it is highly likely that those attempting

to prove the existence of unconditional love are simply hopeless romantics hanging onto anything that will comfort them at night.

Love is but an immaterial concept. It does not come without a price and others should simply accept that fact. ▲

## **The Day of My Death**

*Paula Sofía Galindo Muñoz*

How far can a lie go if it doesn't stop when it touches your eyes,  
and how hard can your eyes cry if the lie deeply goes by,  
by what means can lies be shields fighting against pain  
if they're always too weak to preserve,  
too tiny to hold but thick enough to cover up?

Why is everyone always talking so much but never enough,  
how can rumors now see and words make you bleed while lies are no  
longer mean?

How can a friend lie and then say it was for you,  
and how come they have no mercy,  
and let the secrets grow too?

The day of my death was written before my birth,  
Secrets are getting into my head.  
Am I lying to myself?

Everything seems to be alright  
But there's always something behind.  
What was once exciting has no impact now  
Time slows down and tears spread out.

Is it selfish to be the one who finishes this?  
The road has been long,  
My goals are all gone,  
And I feel I don't belong,  
But my last breath is yet to come.

There is blood on the floor,  
The time has come,  
Summer is cold,  
flowers are death,  
rumors are gone,  
but no one is there.



**Success**

*Tayah Reaves*

## **My Name**

*Savannah Mora*

Let's go back in time. A time when my name wasn't laughable.  
A time when life wasn't complicated and full of the rough.  
The time I first heard my beautiful great grandfather call me "Mija"  
gliding off his coffee-stained  
tongue and soothing raspy voice.

The first time my mother called me "Sweet Pea" after giving her a  
small sticky kiss before bed.  
The first time my father sang "You Are My Sunshine" to soothe me to  
sleep.  
And every other time after that he whispered "Sunshine" as my name.  
How about the time when my grandma exclaimed, "Raynie Taynie,"  
as I ran towards her hardworking arms when I came over to her little  
house on the humble  
Nambe street.

A time when my brother was so little, he couldn't pronounce  
my name,  
so, he called me plain and simple, "Sana."  
The little giggle after pronouncing  
my complicated name in his own unique way.  
My little sister's waddle over to me screaming, "Savannah,"  
with her squeaky baby voice and short ponytail that the hair tie  
barely holds.  
When the clock hit five and the smell of dinner floating toward me,  
carrying my mother's voice, "Sugar." The food may have been savory  
and salty but  
the words, sweeter than cake.

But fast forward a couple years. The day I started wearing glasses.  
The day my identity was my sight.  
The day when I was no longer "Savannah," or "Raynie Taynie,"  
but "Four Eyes" and "Nerd."  
The day I no longer had a personality,



I was just “smart,” and “better than everyone else.”  
But who were they to tell me who I was?  
They don’t get the privilege of telling me who I was or who I will be.  
My name is my name, nobody else’s.  
It’s mine and mine only.

## **A Beautiful Flower Was Once a Seed**

*Faith Toledo*

To love and be unloved is something I know too well.

Watch carefully what you take for granted because it could be something you wish to know.

Levitating on the possibilities through pain within the depths of the heart.

Stay standing strong as I've seen a quote that states "there's not one tree that has not yet shaken."

Through my heart you find different doors that hold all the aspects of my spirit.

My spirit is resilient, but I portray optimism through my belief of better days. Hopefully time will have time for me.

To be love and be loved is a seed I plant desperately, for it'll grow quickly like how a seed becomes a flower.

To make a beautiful flower you need good seeds.

So, plant good seeds.

Although good doesn't mean perfect, for imperfectly beautiful is known too well within the depths of all your spirits.



**Ozzy the Fantastical Merbunfairy**

*Gabriella Encomienda*

## **A Crumby Story**

*Nicole Kelley*

“Once upon a time,” the elder began, “there was a land where we roamed freely, where the mere idea of fear did not exist. Our kind lived happy lives. We never had to worry about the Life Sucker.” I could see the young ones’ eyes light up in fear when the name “Life Sucker” was mentioned. It must have been amazing to live in a world where we didn’t need to fear that creature. That horrible beast brought terror upon us and would haunt us for the rest of our lives. I don’t think we will ever be able to escape it. The damage it did to our lives is irreversible. It would just appear every month or so and suck up our homes, our weapons, our rings of wheat, our fish, everything. It was unstoppable.

My name is Conrad and I am a soldier sworn to protect my homeland from that horrible beast. I sat watching the young ones listen to the elders warning about the edge of our land. The edge where the darkness met the light. We had lost countless loved ones. They had wandered too far into the light. Out from the cover of darkness. I remember being their age and fearing the edge. I never went close to the edge. I wish I could scream out to them that the warnings won’t help. Eventually you’ll be curious and approach the edge and you’ll lose everything. But I refrain because I understand that by being curious the young ones would learn. They would learn the terrors that haunt us at in the light. It will make them stronger better soldiers.

“ALL SOLDIERS REPORT TO THE EDGE! THERE HAS BEEN A BREAK. I REPEAT THERE HAS BEEN A BREAK.” I’m suddenly ripped out of my trance as I hear the speaker’s loud voice booming out instructions to the villagers. I hate hearing their screams. These words only mean one thing, our new hideout had been discovered by the beast. I run as fast as I can to the edge, praying that we haven’t lost a ton of villagers. When I arrive, I see one of the worst sights. I see my family home being sucked up by the Life Sucker. I try to run over to help anyone who is inside, but I’m stopped. As I turn around, I see my

mom and sister. They're safe. But where's dad? I ask my mother and the words that escape her mouth would haunt me for the rest on my life.

"He's...he's gone," she wailed. I don't even feel myself start crying. All I could think about was *what if I got here sooner, what if I stayed home on my day off and didn't go on that stupid walk?* The "what ifs" flood my mind. I'm again pulled out of my trance. Screaming is all I could hear when I came to my senses. People were losing families and I'm frozen. I pull myself together and began to get our people as far away from the edge as possible. "Retreat to the back — away from the edge!" I screamed.

This was one of the worst attacks yet. So many people were lost, my father included. It was hard to see so many broken families. Their cries were heartbreaking. The pain from losing my own father has turned into numbness and disbelief. The numbness quickly turns into rage as I think back to the invasion. We didn't fight back. We ran. We ran like cowards. We are like sheep about to be slaughtered. And someone needed to put a stop to it. We needed to do something about the beast. Someone needed to brave enough to fight back. And that someone would be me.

"You can't leave!" my mom cried out. "What if you don't come back? I don't want to lose you too! Please stay here! Stay here with us and stay safe." "STAY SAFE!?" I yell. "Last time I checked, running every other week from death is not staying safe! We're living in fear! Is that what you want? To live in fear for the rest of your life?" I regret yelling at my mom, I really do. I understand that she just lost the love of her life and now her one and only son is going to fight the beast who took him away from her. She's scared she'll lose me too. "I can't stay here and continue to be a coward when I could go out and put an end to our suffering.," I say as I hug her.

"Please stay safe. I don't want to lose you." She replied. "I will. I promise."

And so, my mission began. One of the hardest journeys of my life. I was going to travel to a whole new realm and fight one of the most dangerous beasts out there. I gathered as much stuff as I needed: food, water, and weapons. I was all set and ready to go. I was going to go beyond the edge to the massive gate that opens somewhere around 7:20 every morning and exit into the other realm. It would be dangerous because the one who controlled the Life Sucker entered through the gate. I would have to be cunning and quick and slip through silently. It would be terrifying, but it would be worth it.

I waited patiently at the gate. “4...3...2...1 go!” I thought to myself as I watched the gate to the other realm open. I sprinted as fast as I could, but when I got to the gate, I realized there was a huge cliff! I started panicking. “How was I going to get down to the ground?” I thought. I remembered that I had packed a rope. It wasn’t the longest, but it would get me close enough to the ground that if I jumped, I’d be okay. So, I securely fastened the rope to the gate and prepared to climb down. My smooth, white rope allowed me to slip silently towards the ground. As I approached the end of the rope, I braced myself and jumped. Success! I was now in the other realm. I saw another gate. That gate would take me into the main realm. That is where the Life Sucker sleeps.

I stayed on the path leading to the main realm. On the way, I continued to convince myself my mission would be a success, but all I could do was worry. Then I remembered my mother, my sister, and all the young ones and I felt inspired. “I need to protect them,” I whispered as I approached to gate to the main realm. I waited patiently for my chance, but because it was night, I needed to set up camp. The gate would not open until morning.

I awoke the next morning to the sound of the gate screeching open. My time was now, and I ran into the opening. As I arrived, I was greeted with the horrible sound of the Life Sucker. Even if the sound scared me,

I had to stay strong. I needed to remain brave for my family. I should probably explore the realm before I fight the Life Sucker. I need to know my surroundings if I want to stand a chance at defeating the Life Sucker. As I scouted out the land, I noticed that the Life Sucker was chained to the wall by a thick black rope. I decided that that might be its source of power! “Aha!” I thought. I figured out the Life Suckers’ weakness. Now, all I needed to do was wait until it was at rest and then I could strike.

So, I waited and waited, and waited some more, and waited just a little more until all the light in the realm had gone out and the Life Sucker had gone to sleep. It was my time to strike. I snuck up extremely quietly, wielding my best sword, and began hacking and chopping on the rope. I had to cut off its energy source. All of a sudden I saw a light reappear and heard the booming steps of a large creature. My heart started pounding. I was freaking out! What if the beast caught me? I would fail! I raised my sword high above my head and stabbed it in between the barrier and the end of the rope. I pried it toward my chest. I heard a plop! Then a spark, then a buzz and fizzle sound. In disbelief, I looked down and saw the rope was no longer attached to the barrier. It worked. I was in shock, my plan worked! I couldn’t believe it. My courage had brought an end to my kind’s suffering!

On the journey back I was the happiest I’d ever felt. I had succeeded in my mission. My mom would be so proud of me. I succeeded and was still alive! I had ended our suffering. But I remembered all those we lost because someone wasn’t brave enough to fight instead of run. But because I was brave, I brought an end to it all. No more losing people we love. It’s over.

When I got back to my realm I was praised for my bravery with a giant feast. All was good that night. We danced and sang beautiful songs. It was the best night of my life. I wish I could have stayed in that moment forever and never have woken up that morning. Because

when morning rolled around, we heard that dreadful noise again. The Life Sucker was back. Alive. Its horrible sound rang through my ears. Everyone was running in every direction possible. Running. They were running again. We were being cowards again. We all were going to die if we didn't do something now. So, I stood my ground and shouted "STOP!" and everyone stopped. "We must stop running. Running will only postpone the inevitable. So why not fight?"

Be brave!" I shouted as loudly as I could and surprisingly, they listened. We began fighting the Life Sucker, but our attempts meant nothing. Eventually we began to lose more and more people.

And then everything went black.

I was woken up by the most comforting voice ever. "Conrad! Conrad are you there? Wake up." As I opened my eyes, I saw my father! "Dad?" I couldn't believe it. "Where are we? Do you know?" I asked. I looked around and saw old friends, my family, old blocks that were parts of our homes. "You were sucked up by the life sucker," Father replied. "But I am very proud of you, son. You fought as hard as you could, and your bravery paid off. Your suffering is over. We're safe now." We feared the Life Sucker, but it brought us to our real home. We are all together now.



"Dang it! WHO UNPLUGGED THE VACUUM?" the mother of the house shouted. "Y'all need to get outside and help me clean the car. There are crumbs everywhere and the crumbs are bugging me. They make everything look messy. ▲





**Untitled**

*Paula Lima Robert*

## To Be

*Aleighah McShan*

It seems I measure my worth on this square platform  
I measure my worth on my meal the day before  
Why can't it just be my worth the only thing I measure  
Instead of the width of my wrist and my thighs  
Or the size of my waist and the amount of space I take  
But I can't help to spend an hour on switching my clothes  
And looking in the mirror every time I get close  
Or staring at the cake on my plate  
Thinking how much I could possibly gain  
I can't help to go directly to my seat and skip the line  
Because I feel as though I'm being judged  
I know,  
I know,  
I know!  
And it kills me to be so aware, but I can't stop  
To be so easily provoked and feel "those" words creeping up in my  
throat  
Yet never making it past my lips because I know  
And to love something so much just to let it go  
To feel so alone because no one understands unless they've been  
through the war and is either fighting or they've won  
To want to scream at that voice and walk away  
But can't because it's in your head  
To wish someone was there to hold you and distract you  
Instead, it's all kept inside for another year  
And with each passing moment, a part of me falls quickly  
Yet slowly but suddenly, like a tear slithering down your cheek  
It's disordered for a reason and can't easily be fixed  
Telling me something I know and forcing that bite just breaks me  
more and more  
The guilt and the cons do more harm than good  
Because I know,  
I know,  
I know!

But still, I seem to measure my worth on this thing that shouldn't  
matter  
Still nothing hurts more than seeing the number get higher  
And the more it declines, the happier I get  
But only for five minutes because I seem to forget  
My mind is programmed to reset after a goal is met  
And my smile disappears as I neglect all wants  
It keeps going,  
A never-ending cycle  
See, I know  
I know that I'll never be satisfied until I accept  
And that begins with trust and moves forward with love  
Whenever I can trust, is when I'll be ready  
But what holds me back is that I know the journey will be scary  
There will come a time when courage takes over  
And I will not hesitate in that moment to wait one minute longer.

## **Just a Memory**

*Evan Morgan*

The years following the infamous 2020 Covid-19 pandemic have been an interesting time. On the upside, many people came together to rebuild what they lost during the horrible year, but it hasn't really been getting better for everyone. Some have still not recovered, and may never do so. Jake Westing was a young boy who had felt the worst of the shockwaves of the dreaded year. It seemed to many that the year was "cursed" in a way, not only but because of the pandemic, but also the fact that almost every piece of bad luck seemed to fall on so many that year. Family members and friends were dying, mental illness skyrocketed, and tensions ran high for almost everyone, causing them to be more separated than they already were. Jake was convinced that the year was cursed, and for good reason. He started out the year feeling pretty good. He had family, friends, and a good life at school. On the first of March, both of his parents died in a car crash. There was no extended family to support him, and society all but forgot him. He was still able to go to the same school, but nobody paid attention to him. This was just the beginning of what was to come.

The smell of grass swept through the air. A slight breeze grazed the tip of the grass in the field, followed by a few leaves that had been swept off of the trees from the fall season. He walked past the old gym and into the building in the back of the school. The campus was rather small, but had recently expanded in the last couple years. It had always felt like his home. The first buds of the new season could be seen; the colored leaves, the typical fall smell in the air, and the oddly growing sense of comfort and fellowship among the school community.

For this man, that wasn't the case. His pace quickened, the blood of his heart beating in his ears. He felt like breaking down, but he couldn't. He could make it. He kept walking, almost to a jog now, gaze fixed on nothing but the building. His life depended on it, or he believed that it did. He tried to focus on things that would ease his mind, but it was past the point that anything would help. The doors were the only hope. The faster he walked, the more his anxiety rose.

He broke the gaze, looking for any company near him for help, even though he knew he wouldn't ask them for it. Nobody was nearby. The sun split through the clouds, casting a few lonely streaks of light over the campus. The fear did not stop. The silence was deafening, a silent plea of help for the mentally tormented boy. By the time he reached the door, he was shaking. He slammed the door. The musty smell of dust filled the room. He dropped his bag and slammed the door; the sound echoed throughout the room, his gaze quickly fell on the piano in the corner, and he sprinted to it. He could feel them trying to get in, closing in on his mind. He struggled to remember what to play. The sound seemed to make them leave him, giving him the most freedom he had had that day.

A small dawn light slowly crept through the room. The light cast a reflection on each of the small specs of dust in the attic. His eyes slowly began to open further and further. He was late for class, again.

The door slammed shut and he quickly paced to his next class. The sun was almost in the middle of the sky. He would have to go to science, one of the worst classes. He didn't want to be late, but what did he care. Nothing mattered anymore.

"You're late."

"I'm sorry, Ms. Sherman," Jake replied.

The class was staring at him, giving that burning feeling of embarrassment inside. He sat down in class, and almost fell asleep. He was thinking to himself when he saw a dark thing in the corner. His eyes bolted across the room. His anxiety shot up. His breathing quickened...It was just a black towel hanging in the corner. He was free, but only for a moment. Then he remembered everything. He remembered the reality of his situation. They were coming back. All of the demons.

“They found me,” he thought. And a feeling that can only be described as complete and utter doom came over him. He could feel them in the room. They were back to antagonize and torment him. He struggled not to break down in class. Nothing helped. He sat there for another 20 minutes in torment until they were excused. He wanted to leave, he wanted to run, but he couldn’t. The sound of the bell split the air.

“And with that...” Ms. Sherman shouted, “you’re all excused. But I want you to remember one thing.” Her tone deepened as the whole class looked to listen to her. “Because Jake decided to be 15 minutes late today, you are all getting twice as much homework for the week.” The class erupted in cries of anger. Luckily for him, Jake was slowly pacing toward the door while she was talking. So, when she really did dismiss them, he was already out the door. He couldn’t deal with it anymore. He left the campus. He just wanted to go home.

Within a few minutes, he was where he wanted to be. His house, where he lived before his parents died. It was now in a part of town that nobody lived in. The house had been in a fire since it was abandoned and nobody ever paid any attention to it. He couldn’t even get completely in the front doorway of the long-abandoned house before he broke down; tears ran down his face. His hands were shaking with barely any energy left in his body. He had nothing left to give.

“If anything can hear me, anywhere. Please make it stop. Please. Please. Don’t you see me? Don’t you hear me? I have nothing left to give. Please have mercy,” he cried.

The only thing he was met with was silence and a ringing in his ears. It was a distinct sound, a dreadful one, even. It was the sound he feared most. They were back. The demons, they were closing in on him, and he had nowhere to run. The darkness shot through his spine. He couldn’t think. His entire being was filled with pure fear. He tried to say something, but no words left his mouth.

He opened his eyes. And the dream came back to him. It felt as if gallons of sweat had poured onto him in the night. He glanced at the clock. It read 6:15. He jumped out of his bed and the next thing he knew he was getting out of the shower. The dream disturbed him. His parents came out of their room.

“Did you get me that basketball?” he inquired as soon as he saw them.

“No honey. We checked our paycheck, and I don’t think we can afford it.”

What ensued can only be described as loud screaming coming from Jake. He went to school, complained to his friends about his parents, and took the bus home, not wanting to talk to his parents. Luckily for him, they weren’t home when he was there. When he was around the corner from his home, he saw flashing lights. He didn’t know why, but something told him to go toward it. It was a car crash, and the moment he saw his parent’s car, everything in his mind started to go blank. He pushed by the police officers, almost fainted from the pressure of the pounding blood in his head. The image he saw would forever be burned into his mind for the rest of his existence. Blood poured down his dad’s lifeless body and he couldn’t even recognize his mother’s face from the damage she sustained. This wasn’t the way he imagined his parents dying. No opportunity to say goodbye, no opportunity to say sorry for how he had treated them, and no way to talk to them again ever. He screamed and cried as the officers pulled him away from the wreckage. The whole time he couldn’t shake the thought...The dream. ▲

## **Kiss Marks**

*Seeun Choi*

I don't want to tempt you  
But I don't know how  
I have your kiss marks

This affinity is like  
Gravity for you  
I have your kiss marks

Every Summer  
You sing a song in my bed  
I have your kiss marks

Though I can't accept you  
you keep coming to me  
I have your kiss marks











*the*  
**PETROGLYPH**  
*review*