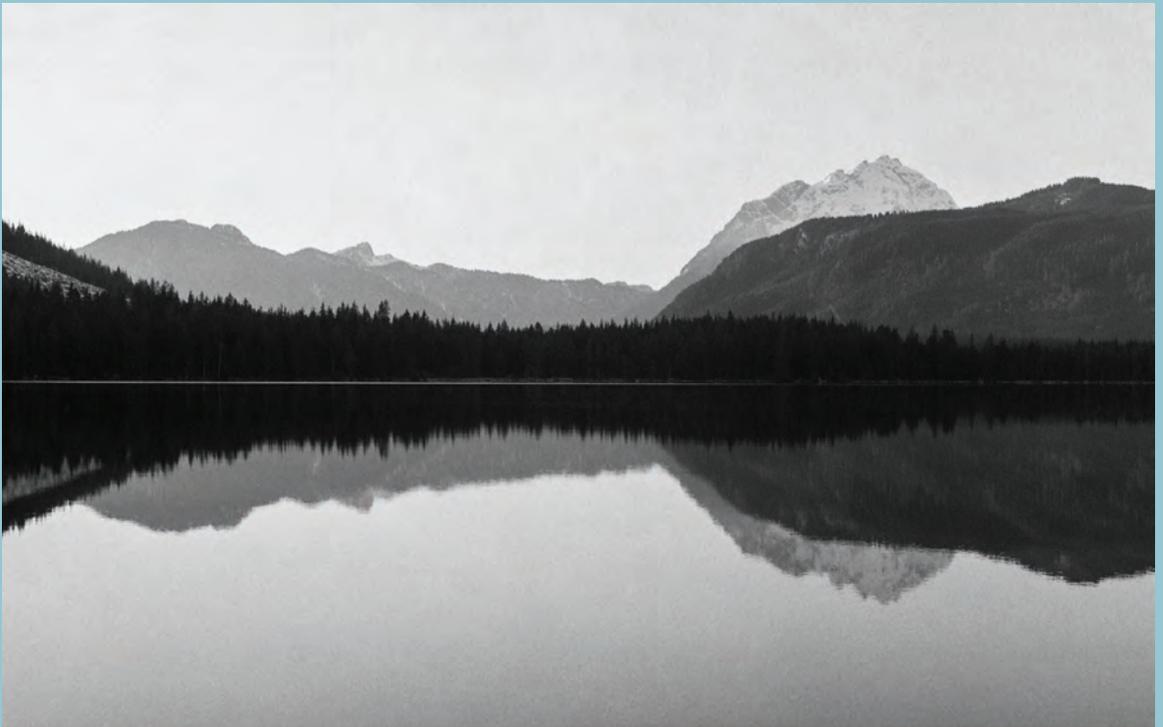


# louden singletree

WRITING AND VISUAL ART *from the*  
UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY



ISSUE 15/WINTER 2023

# louden singletree

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY'S  
JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY WRITERS AND ARTISTS

The Louden Singletree is UFV's literary and visual arts journal. Since its inception in 2009, the Louden Singletree has been a forum in which students, alumni, faculty, and staff of the university can share their creative work.



# louden singletree

Issue #15

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# Thank You

To our sponsor for their financial contributions that made publishing our magazine possible.

The Louden Singletree graciously thanks the following sponsor for their aid in this year's publication.



# Editors' Note

Welcome to the 2023 edition of the Louden Singletree! It took a plethora of small miracles to put this collection in your hands, and we are thrilled that you are here to read it.

We would like to acknowledge that UFV exists on unceded traditional Stó:lō territory, along with the privilege it is for us to work and learn on this land.

This journal would not exist without our contributors. Thank you for taking the experiences you have been handed and turning them into inspiration and creativity; there is so much value in what you do.

We also greatly appreciate the input of our diligent first readers, without whom we would be lost. Our success in this endeavor was made possible by the helping hands of Andrea MacPherson and John Carroll steering us in the right direction along the way.

We are proud to have been able to carry the proverbial torch of the fifteenth issue, and we very much look forward to seeing what the passing of said torch will entail.

Thank you for being here.

The 2023 Louden Singletree Editorial Board

FORWARD

# The Bedrock Of Unknowing

By Rob Taylor

“The leaves are clapping from the oak tree,” writes Sarah Brammer in her poem “Let It,” and we find ourselves asking what we’ve done to deserve their adulation. Of course, deep down, we know the tree’s applause is created by, and intended for, the wind. We’re eavesdropping.

Over and over in this issue of Loudon Singletree, writers try to make sense of nature, or the ways nature has made sense of us. The carbon emissions and viral transmissions of recent years have left us unsure about a world that once felt stable, a world we once felt a part of. “At this point, I’m not entirely sure what bison even look like,” Jakub Zeleznik writes to open his story “Kindred.” Lora Ford paints a twisty tree, then doubts it (Is it even real?), until she travels to Jamaica and photographs one. Her kindred spirit, Sydney Hutt, has to “touch a tree on the way home because / it’s rooted in something.” Ours is not a time of internal trust. Facts elude us.

And yet here, in abundance, we find the hard fact of instability. The bedrock of unknowing. This is John Keats’ negative capability—the ability to thrive in a state of intellectual confusion—cast out over the whole irreconcilable planet. It’s what we most need to learn from our artists if we are going to survive as a species. The poems and stories you’ll read here help guide us forward not by clearing the haze of confusion, but by walking straight into it and making of it a home. “But now our days smell of the crisp brown grass killed by the morning sun,” writes Caitlyn Carr, and I’m not sure if that’s a good smell or a bad one. A good smell for a bad reason? Or, no, neither good or bad. Just the world as it is.

That world isn’t going to get less complicated any time soon. But the writers coming out of UFV will be ready for it, equipped with the necessary rage, grief, despair, and joy: the essential ingredients of human resilience. Children chanting of burning down the White House. A woman wishing to seahorse her

body. A poet picking up a pen and writing, “Forgive me, I am not used to writing happy poems,” and then finding a way nonetheless.

Rob Taylor

2023 UFV Writer-in-Residence

COVER ARTWORK / HENRY MAJKA

# Salsbury Lake

Part of the Escape into the Wilderness series.

Scanned Negative, 2022

All these images are of places that are within an hour drive away from Abbotsford, BC. The primary goal behind taking these photographs was to remind locals that we live in a very beautiful part of the world and have great access to nature. In my spare time, I love exploring areas around the Fraser Valley and beyond, taking photos to document them along the way. I also love sharing these places with others to encourage them to spend more time in nature, which is proven to improve mental health. Each photo was captured with the intention of making the viewer feel as if they are viewing the scene in real life.

A small lake, only one and a half kilometers in length. It is accessible from Lost Creek Forest Service Road, not very far from Cascade Falls Regional Park. This image was taken from the east bank of the lake, facing west towards Mt. Robie Reid. Sitting down at the shore during a quiet sunset with no one else around is just as peaceful as it looks in the photograph.

SARAH BRAMMER

# Let It

before the doctor knocks  
i hold my breath

i see my little head and long dark hair bob up from the water  
holding onto the dock  
she reads from a paper  
from an envelope  
rosebuds under your ribs  
butterflies in your lungs  
the godly screens have told us your destiny  
take me and sew me to the pale blue kite  
the line is all tangled into shimmering applause  
the leaves are clapping from the oak tree  
we could try to get it out from the tree house I shout  
take your careful steps beautiful girl  
reach slowly  
deep into yourself  
into the quiet dark place  
where the salt of your despair  
meet the creases in your palms  
let it let it  
let the morning sun bless your face

i hold my breath  
before the doctor knocks

JORJA JOHNS

# Sunday Morning Hymns

Cracked eggs in the frying pan,  
cooked far too long and too dry for my liking.  
I don't eat breakfast but today I sit here with you, and I don't choke,  
instead, I think of married life.

I am new to you and you to me,  
but I have never felt so as one.  
And I still can't help but wonder,  
how temporary is this feeling?

If I hold you tight,  
will it show you how I care,  
can I stop you from deciding you suddenly don't love me,  
kisses with our mouths still foaming minty morning fresh?

We are driving now,  
and you tell me you do not sing,  
but your hand on my thigh and your voice in tune with the radio tells me some-  
thing else.  
I do not know how to tell you how much I love you in this moment.

I have always hated grocery shopping,  
it was a task I left for my mother.  
Too many colours and calories all in one place,  
one too many cookies in the basket and the world crumbles.  
Yet I find myself linked arms with you pushing the cart,  
and for once I feel so safe and beautiful.

Here I am mundane,  
and life is moving so fast and so slow,

teach me how to pause in the moments like this.  
I would like to know how to hold us here,  
frozen in time and in love.

Forgive me,  
for I am not used to writing happy poems.  
I know that we will sit in bed together and read this and smile one day,  
and we will sleep together,  
and it won't just be about sex.

CAITLYN CARR

# A Poem For The Children We Were

The nights are cold, and divorce is colder, and time is the chilliest of all.  
When we're young and still discovering object permanence  
the nights are our enemy  
and when we're small, and don't have bodies big enough to keep us warm,  
everything is cold all the time.  
We can't speak without stuttering.  
We're still learning how to live in a world where everything is new.  
But that's just it, isn't it?  
We still had room to flourish.

Maybe we never grow up, we just get older.  
Maybe childhood is when we are pure  
and the midnight breeze can still sweep us away from our futures  
that are littered with responsibilities and heartbreaks.  
The puddles we splashed in can now drown us like oceans  
if we remember our traumas for too long.  
The Barbies we played with can never compare  
to the bodies we would sprout.  
Our friends suddenly old enough to drive away from us  
and never look back.  
And the blizzards don't mean snow days, they mean car trouble.  
Lavender doesn't come from the aroma of the flowers it comes from cans of  
chemicals.  
But now our days smell of the crisp brown grass killed by the morning sun  
that crunches under our feet on our way to work.  
Older bodies with the same small nerves

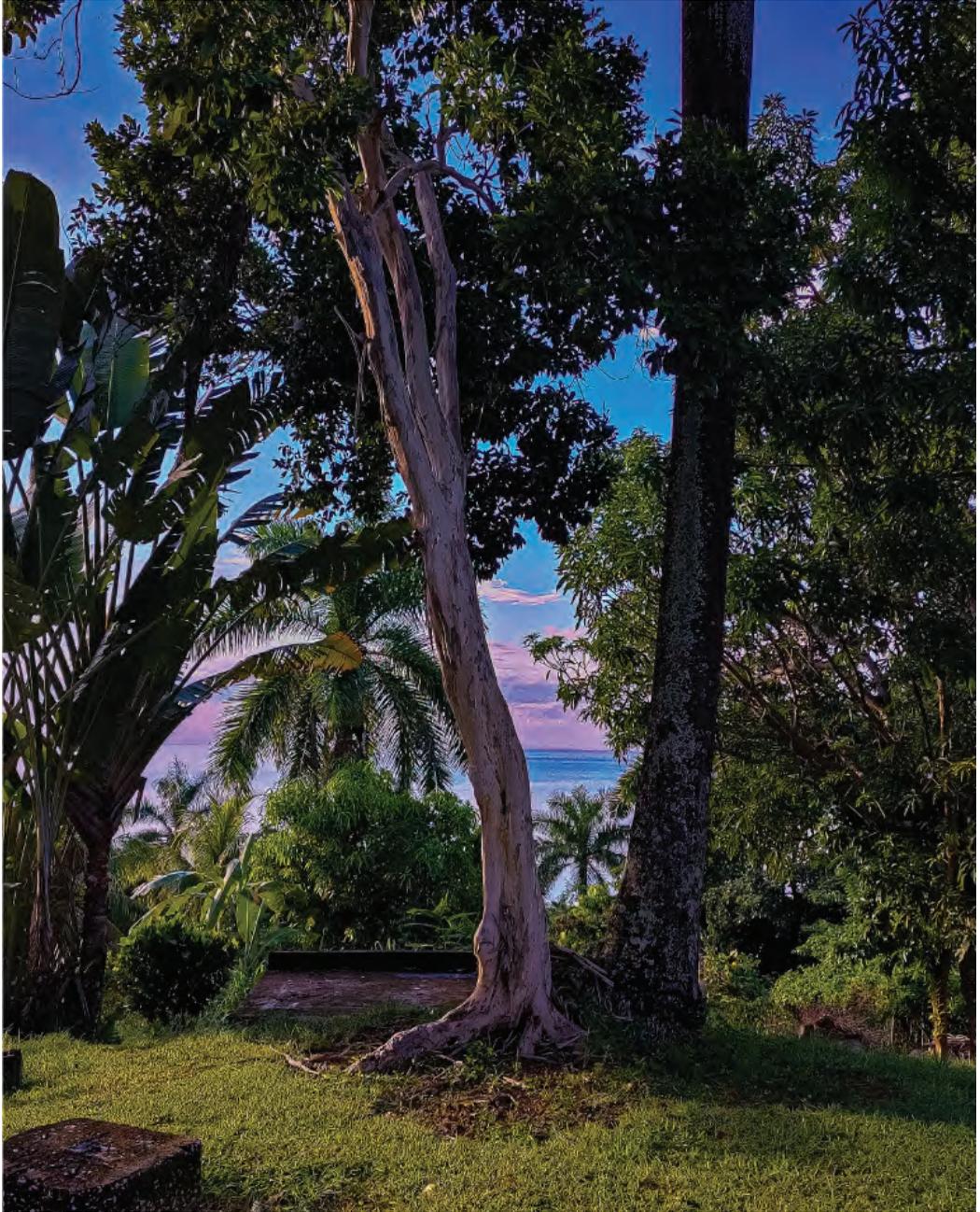
that feel so much when they hear screams through the air.  
A child cannot carry the weight of their own existence,  
nevermind the weight of the world.

LORA FORD

# Twisty Tree

(Nikkon D60, 3360 x 4200)

While I was in a beginner painting/drawing class at the University of the Fraser Valley we had a critic day on our project. One comment really stood out, “I really love the twisty trees,” well my face went red and I realized what I had done wrong, I should have known better. I put slanted stripes on the trunks of the trees instead of vertical lines. Oh, I felt so embarrassed. Then, when I had gone to Jamaica in September 2022 right outside the back door, guess what I saw, a twisty tree. So I laughed and I just had to take a picture of this twisty tree so that I could say to myself, “yes, they really to exist, and laugh.”



CAMRYN LONGMUIR

# Metamorphosis

Tiptoe in cold water, chills dance up your ankles.  
Inch deeper, cautiously, like  
a caterpillar scaling a flimsy leaf.  
Deeply inhale.

Breathe in the crisp clean air, as it mingles with  
sweet summer wildflowers and brisk musky pines.  
Breeze swirling through your hair.  
Steadily exhale.

Board the boat, paddle in hand. Birds chirp from above,  
teasing your concentration.  
Crouching, trying not to tip. With wobbly knees, sit.  
Push off the unsteady ground and begin your chrysalis.  
Submerging the paddle into the glass-topped lake, the water resisting  
as it fights for stillness. Gliding along, each version of you dispersing  
into expanding ripples flowing quickly downstream.  
Gaining speed, disrupting peace,  
a glimpse of the new you appears on the horizon.  
You reach the beach and emerge  
out of your silky cocoon, stretching out cold toes that grip the soft earth.

A butterfly floats  
slowly over the wet sand,  
flapping tired wings.

SANGAM SANGHA

# Honour

A babbling brook  
Dishonoured by a moonlit  
Red cherry blossom.

A small river pools and the land gives way  
To a torrent of steaming crimson blood; Devastation  
Defiles the silent obsidian night.

My life drains away  
I return to the earth and  
Rest; Immortalized.

# Kindred

“At this point, I’m not entirely sure what bison even looks like,” Chester said before breaking out into a massive yawn.

“Think cow, but bigger and hairier,” I replied absentmindedly as I scanned the trees in the distance.

“So descriptive.” Chester rolled his eyes. “I can see why you get such good grades in English.”

“I can see why you get such low grades in Biology.”

“Ah yes, because my biology grade is entirely dependent on how good I am at identifying bison.”

“I’m sure it would help.”

“Ha-ha.”

This is what we had been reduced to after two days of driving. Cooped up in my father’s old car, a vehicle that rattled its way through the Rocky Mountains like a set of cymbals, Chester and I had been slowly losing our minds.

When it was first proposed by my uncle, a road trip across Canada sounded like it would be a lot of fun. From Vancouver to Ottawa over the course of a week and a half or so, airing our brains out after a difficult first year of university. We’d get to see the national landmarks and the natural beauty of Canada.

“I took a trip like that with two of my friends back when I had just finished high school,” he had said while visiting for dinner a month before. “And it was a good thing I did because then I married and now I’m stuck at home with children.” Sitting beside him, my younger cousins had rolled their eyes in practised synchronisation.

Bogged down with finals at the time, I had leapt at the idea of something new after months of monotony. Furthermore, I knew my friend Chester would want a change of scenery as well—especially given this would be his first summer since the accident, one guaranteed to feel lonelier than all the summers before—and so I lassoed him in too. We began the drive on the first of July, our moods a mirror image of the festive Canada Day celebrators (or, at least mine was; Chester was still sulking over his exam scores).

Then came the misery of driving a car that fancied itself a model for a mechanic's shop advertisement. The seats were lumpy in places they really had no right to be, the air conditioning tended to shut off as it pleased, the radio refused to belt out anything that wasn't static, and the melody that was the car's clanging made conversation difficult. It wasn't long before Chester gave it the endearing name of 'Grumples.'

To make up for this, we took frequent breaks, stopping at rest areas to walk around and admire the mountain views. Unfortunately, this too lost some of its charms when it began to pour rain on the second day.

Passing Edmonton, we took advantage of a momentary gap in the downpour to take a quick walk at Elk Island National Park (aptly named for its abundance of bison, as Chester was all so quick to point out).

And now, nearly two hours later, we were wandering along the soggy and much longer-than-anticipated dirt trail. It was early evening, the clouds were looking ominous, and we had not seen any of the shaggy beasts yet. I peered intently at our shadowy surroundings. I really did want to see a bison before we left.

"This trail does loop, right?" Chester asked, stretching his wiry arms as he yawned again. His shaggy brown hair nearly covered his eyes, giving him the appearance of wearing an oversized silken helmet. "We won't just find a dead end and then have to spend another two hours walking back?"

"That's what the sign said," I replied. "We should be reaching the parking lot again fairly soon."

"Good, I'm getting tired."

"How? You've been resting in the passenger seat all day!"

"Watching you drive Grumples is surprisingly stressful and tiring."

"You're not allowed to judge my driving; you don't even have your N yet." Chester froze.

"Sorry, I wasn't thinking," I said, shame dripping down my throat and into my chest.

"It's alright," he said after a long moment.

There was a reason why Chester didn't have his N yet, why he probably never would.

The accident had occurred a year ago and Chester had refused to get behind the wheel since. There had even been a time when he couldn't stomach the

idea of being a passenger, but this had been gradually overcome over the past few months. Part of the reason why I'd suggested the road trip, alongside distracting him from his mourning, was to help that acclimatisation process. He had readily agreed with my reasoning but it was unlikely that he'd ever be able to try driving again.

Our walk lapsed into silence.

As the minutes stretched on and the clouds above grew darker, my certainty that the trail was a loop began to wane. Now the question was, would it be smarter to turn back or to push on and hope we'd end up at the parking lot?

"Hey, look at that!" Chester suddenly spoke up, his voice an excited whisper.

I shook myself from my musings. There, a stone's throw away was a great dark shape lying in the tall wet grass just to the side of the trail. The shape was covered in thick tufts of fur that hung off its sides like a wet towel. Two glistening horns poked out from the greenery next to the giant hill that was its shoulders. Its hugeness was awe-inspiring, more like a giant brown boulder than an animal. It was a wonder that we hadn't noticed it until now.

A bison.

"We really shouldn't be this close to it," I said, backing away. "The tour book said to keep at least a hundred metres distance."

Chester, however, stayed where he was.

"It's not moving."

He was right.

The mountain of fur was absolutely still. Still and silent. As if on cue, a breeze picked up, carrying an incriminating smell with it.

We trudged up the path to get a better angle.

It was dead.

A giant bull, one of its sides marked with a deep and ugly indent. The fur around the wound was matted and tinted a dark red. I looked back at the trail and examined it closer. I hadn't noticed it before because the rain had wiped away most of the evidence, but now that I knew what I was looking for, I could clearly see tire tracks pressed into the wet earth.

"We'll need to report this to someone when we get back to the parking lot," I said.

Chester said nothing as he stood stock-still, his gaze focused on the bi-

son's injury. His face was paler than Grumples' faded paint job.

"We should probably get going," I said, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"Ju—Just give me a moment."

I turned away to give him a little space and froze, my heart failing inside me.

Emerging from the trees like an apparition in a bad dream, was another bison.

I had thought the male lying dead behind me had been huge. Now seeing a bull standing at its full height, I was suddenly struck with how easily this animal could trample us if it felt threatened. Or gore us with its horns. Or kick us. Or anything it wanted to really.

I stared in dumb silence as the bison approached slowly. I opened my mouth to warn Chester, who was still turned away, but no sound came out.

The beast continued its inexorable march, its eyes boring into my own with an intensity that made it look slightly deranged. Its damp fur billowed around it. Its sides heaved as the beast sucked in litres of the cool evening air each time it breathed. The musky scent of it was overwhelming. With each stride, the bison's hooves pressed deep into the dirt of the path. Curiously, it was careful to step over the tire tracks without touching them.

It began to rain.

The bison gave a snort like a small clap of thunder, shaking its hide, ears twitching.

The sudden noise alerted Chester in a way I could not. He turned around, his cheeks wet, though I doubted the rain was the reason why.

The bison stopped beside his dead compatriot and sniffed the carcass with what could only be described as a mournful tenderness. Then it raised its giant head towards Chester.

The two of them looked at each other.

In the falling darkness, there was an uncanny similarity in the silhouettes of the young man and the great bison. The outline of their shaggy hair mirrored each other. The bison's beard took on a similar shape to Chester's pointed chin. Their eyes, deep and dark, matched each other in quiet intensity. Over the next long moment, some sort of understanding seemed to pass between the two of them.

Then it was over. The bison stepped away and melted into the rain-filled

darkness in the same surreal fashion with which it had come.

Chester wiped his eyes, though the rain had covered up any evidence of tears long ago.

Without a word, the two of us carried on down the trail. Fortunately, my memory had not been deceiving me regarding the length of the remaining loop and we soon emerged onto a parking lot that was empty of all things but a single despicable car. We promptly clambered in and drove off into the storm to search for a motel to spend the night at. The next morning, I called the park authorities and told them about the dead bison.

Chester never mentioned the bison encounter. Just like he never talked about the accident. Just like I never told him that, at the moment Chester's gaze locked with the bull, I had realised the two were one and the same. Brothers in mourning.

CAITLYN CARR

# I Lit A Candle In My Bedroom

As I breathed in the black-cherry aroma,  
the night before was expelled from my lungs like smoke from a cigarette.  
The purple wax melted before my toilworn eyes;  
a few blemishes to match.  
I remember.  
You'll regret this, he said.  
You're just a dumb bitch, he said.  
right after I had blown out our own candle,  
that had lost its scent long ago.  
I looked at the candle and  
wondered if the wax felt relief when the fire was blown out,  
or if the wax felt lonely without the flame to burn it.

JORJA JOHNS

# Purity Culture & Holiness (Or Lack Thereof)

For who knows best of lust than the sex starved virgin?  
What better way to honour God  
than to trace your favourite bible verses on his back  
with his face between your thighs?  
Visit confession on Sunday,  
say your Hail Marys,  
go back home to shower with thoughts of the pastor's son dancing in your head.

(Romans 8:6)

The world tells you there is no greater hate than Christian love,  
and you do not understand  
because you spend your evenings with the preacher on your knees,  
and he tells you this is serving God  
so how could love like this be wrong?

(Mark 10:45)

Cross your legs, keep your hair long.  
You don't quite understand the crossing of the legs,  
it doesn't keep him out even if you try.  
Do you think if you fuck him in the pews,  
he'll love you as God does?

(Psalms 109:26)

Father calls you close,  
a ring for your first blood on your 13th birthday,  
he is so proud of you.  
After all, you are still pure,  
aren't you?

(1 Corinthians 6:18)

Sunday school sex:

hands gripped on thighs under desks tight enough to bruise,  
racy polaroids passed as folded paper airplanes,  
lacy underwear hidden in the bottom of the laundry basket from Mother.  
You are known so you must be happy,  
they tell you this is your duty,  
this is your job as women.  
You are serving the lord as best you can.

(How is it sinning if it is all you have known?)

NOAH LOCHEAD

# Poor Madonna

She wept.  
Like little diamonds they rolled down her olive skin.

A woman who's very being,  
fetishized for its purity.

Her delicate eyes and cheeks,  
rosy and pale.

The moment of sorrow,  
displayed for the millions.

Her robes a fine silk and velvet.  
Though not in title,  
she was royalty.

His death iconized.  
Her pain is a symbol.

Though the mourning, her hair peeked through her veil.  
Her Anglo face pointed towards the sky.  
How could the father be so cruel.

Her child  
Tortured, whipped, beaten.  
Billions gawk and celebrate his death.

She is left to mourn,  
forever idolized in sorrow.

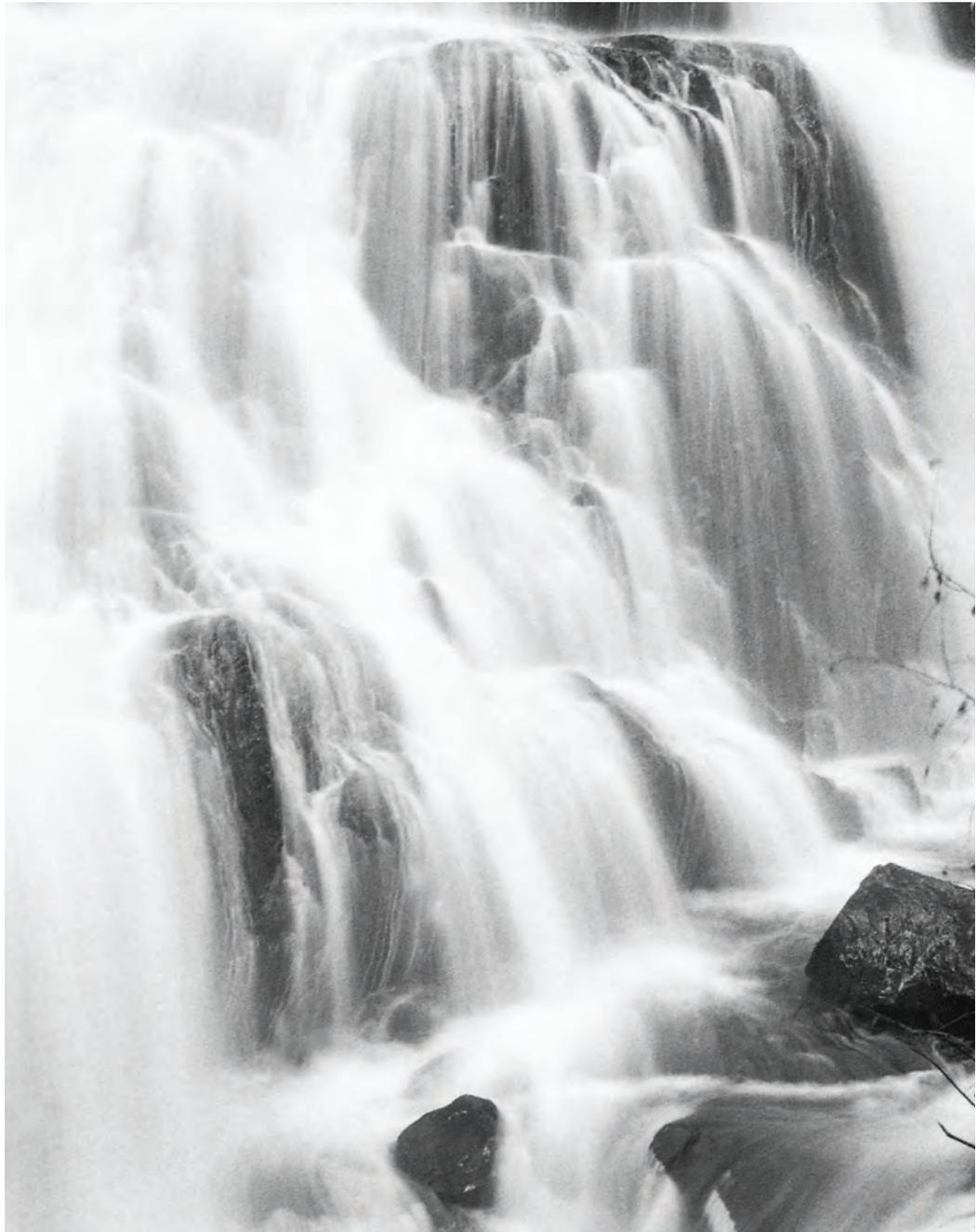
HENRY MAJKA

# Steelhead Falls

Part of the Escape into the Wilderness series.

Scanned Negative, 2022

Shot from the viewing platform directly in front of the waterfall.



Nelson Frota Colares

# Anniversary

The man stared at the  
empty chair across the  
mahogany dining table.

The stale warmth of  
supper hung in the air, his  
hunger left unsatisfied,  
just like  
the last time.

The man,

The woman's high heels  
clicked on the  
cobblestone alley. The  
cold breeze ran through  
her hair, blowing away  
the words she whispered:  
"This was  
the last time."

the woman,

The lover smiled at the  
ceiling of their motel  
room; their sin dappled all  
over the cheap bedsheets.

He swallowed the  
woman's sweet perfume,  
as he reminisced about  
the last time.

the lover,

all gather before an open grave that shouts:

"HERE LIES TRUE LOVE."

Drowning in the tears of her grief,  
The woman searches for her lover's eyes.

Engulfed in the flames of his obsession,  
The man searches for the woman's hand.

But it's too late.  
She's

let

go

SANGAM SANGHA

# Lacrimosa (Ekphrastic)

Like a gentle breeze moves autumn leaves,  
a torrent of earth is carried into the sky  
below it, casting shadow from above  
a sea of blood bellows, "All will die."

Thousands fall into the pit, begging "Please!"  
Hoping and praying for a way to appease,  
The Lord. The Almighty, in heaven above  
withdraws his hand of promised love.

Splintering sky, breaking thunder  
How many will be taken?  
Gaping earth, ravenous hunger  
How many souls have been forsaken?

Do not repent, the end is here  
prayer won't save you, nor love, nor fear.

A day of wrath, a show of love, a terror laden lack thereof.

Poem based on: The Great Day of His Wrath, by John Martin (1851)

THOMAS WILSON

# Cancel Your Plans

It all started when I called out my roommate for not tipping the UberEATS driver more than ten percent. It wouldn't have mattered so much if I weren't a server, but my roommate's reluctance to tip more than three bucks on a thirty-something-dollar falafel was sacrilege. A personal attack on the service industry itself, never mind our friendship and everything it could possibly stand for.

But I did all I could. Before she ordered, I begged her to reconsider, to think of the children, however hypothetical they might be. She hummed and hawed, eventually adding a Diet Coke to her order.

The children, she said, would be fine. Maybe even better off. She brushed a strand of hair off her face, tucking it behind her ear as she entered her card details.

A little adversity never killed anybody, she deadpanned.

It wasn't that she couldn't afford it even. I mean, Jesus Christ, she paid nearly triple the price for the convenience of staying curled up on the couch while some poor schmuck fared the storm to Pita Land from god-knows-where for his three-dollar piecemeal. The same trek that, for my roommate, would involve waiting for the elevator to squeak down to the lobby, pushing the sticky glass doors open. Then meandering half a block south till she arrived at the neon shawarma mural. Its fiery red backdrop like the inside of a pilot light that never goes out.

Of course, that's not counting the time spent waiting on the falafel to be assembled or the quick jaunt home, but that's beside the point. She'd probably spend all that time waiting the same way she'd spend it at home, anyways. Swiping through posts. Checking her agenda. Texting her best friend. Just generally staying up to date on the lives of everyone in our immediate circle like she ran some kind of gossip rag.

I admit, I thought she was joking at first. She made such a big deal the last time we all went for drinks at my work that I expected her to meet the driver in the lobby with some cash, to ensure the tip would go directly into his pocket and not the corporation he worked for.

Really, I thought that she knew that waiting staff depend on tips for sur-

vival, that tipping was a duty that should be extended to all service staff. At least, that's what she told my manager, Dave. After he let it slip that he never tips his barista, that is. But when I brought this up to her as she unwrapped the falafel from the waxed paper packaging, she averted my gaze like she was searching for a former clarity she'd left on the green tile floor of the bar bathroom.

I never tip on take-out, she mumbled defensively. She choked down the chickpea and vegetable mixture as she spoke. Isn't that the point of the delivery fee?

I just glared, purposely looking past my roommate to the Ray Charles documentary on the massive flatscreen in our minimalist living room. This wasn't the first time she had said something screwy recently. Come to think of it, it wasn't even the second time in as many weeks. My hands habitually reached towards the square arm of our mid-century modern sofa, where my phone sat silently.

The first incident happened on our way home from the grocery store on the corner of King and College a few weeks ago. We passed a makeshift shelter made from street debris in one of the relatively desolate alleys. A scrawny man was tucked into a nook of pavement with a syringe hanging out of his arm, the plunger depressed all the way to the bottom of the barrel. I thought there was probably a metaphor there somewhere, but before I could say anything my roommate launched into a tirade.

His addiction was probably karma for something awful he did, she said, dragging chic canvas totes behind her.

She droned on, half yelling as we passed a group of snickering teenagers on the sidewalk. You can't trust the homeless because you can never be sure if they've done something to deserve it. It's why she never gives out her spare change. She can spend her own money on drugs just fine, she didn't need to give that shit away.

I didn't care how Roman Catholic my roommate was, or whatever worldview it was that influenced her beliefs, that was an insane take. Completely incongruent with the image I had built up of her over the past year we had been roommates. The one where she was empathetic and kind-hearted, or at least socially conscious enough to know that the relationship between homelessness and addiction is more complex than that. I mean, she used to work at a women's shelter for Christ's sake.

The second event came a few days later, after my hours at the bar had been cut significantly. I just needed to vent for, like, five minutes about how upward mobility is a lie and life sucks. My roommate cut me off not even a minute in.

Dude, you're twenty-seven, she sighed. You need to figure your shit out, go back to school, get a better job, and find a boyfriend. Soon nobody's going to want you because you'll be twenty-eight and still waiting tables at Handlebar. That's pathetic. You have to think about the future. Start planning ahead. Look at me, I'm back in school and I work full-time. Just make some plans and stick to them. It's really not that difficult.

I was taken aback. On some subconscious level, I knew I wasn't getting any younger, but twenty-seven wasn't that old. I had plenty of time to figure my shit out. Plenty. Besides, having my shit figured out meant, on some level, I'd have to get married or have kids or even finish my bachelor's. All of which felt like arbitrary standards that stood in direct opposition to the things I really wanted in life. Which, mostly, at this point, was a bottle of rhubarb-infused gin and a cigarette. I mean, sure, some accountability from my roommate about the tipping situation would be nice, but that was improbable. She hadn't even apologized for calling me old and useless.

The next morning, I had an interview with a new restaurant across town to address the whole me-not-having-a-plan thing. It was some hip vegan joint called the Avant-Garden, which apparently had a booth decorated to look like Jodorowsky's The Holy Mountain and sourced all its produce from its very own rooftop garden. I know, it was no branch manager position, but it was something. Baby steps. I was scrolling through my feed to stave off the pre-interview anxiety and kill time until the bus came when I came across a post my roommate's friend had shared.

Don't be that asshole, tip your UberEATS driver.

Its black background was like a moral compass, where if you stared for too long, you'd see your somehow guilty reflection staring back. The internet activist's version of forcing someone to see their own shadow, I guess. Instinctively, I moved my thumb to scroll, catching a glimpse of the likes count as my hand tensed around my phone.

Of course, my roommate liked the post. The events of the previous night probably didn't even register as she gave it a big fat signature of approval in the

form of a white-gloved thumbs up. Maybe she didn't even realize she liked it. She told me once that sometimes she hits the like button just to feel something.

I clicked the comments section. Her best friend's husband, the proprietor of some long-forgotten Dance-Punk band, mentioned that they don't even tip in Europe. Technically, that wasn't true, but it was also so beyond the point. It wasn't that I expected anything more from him - he was too busy living off the coattails of the decade prior when his band achieved marginal success for their sophomore album and he had to constantly remind everyone about it - but I doubted that one of the biggest consumer transportation companies in the world would suddenly pay their contractors better just because they were in Europe. Last time I checked, wage exploitation was something that was done across the board, not selectively. That would be a weird statement to make. Finally, the bus pulled up and I pulled the phone away from my face, stepped on and tapped my pass before finding an empty seat towards the back. Once I was settled in the fabric seat, I whipped my phone out of my pocket. I quickly unlocked the screen so I could continue perusing my version of the morning paper.

There were a few other comments agreeing with the original post, some sharing braggadocious anecdotes about how much they tipped their server last time they were out to eat, while others hypothesized situations where it would be okay not to tip. A guy named Peter explained how he gave practical advice instead of a monetary tip. Asshole. I scrolled to the end of the list, skimming the pool of opinions until my eyes rested on the pristine comment box, my thumbs hovering over the keyboard, a smirk slowly spreading across my face like molasses on toast.

My roommate doesn't tip. Like, at all. But she <3's to talk big game about it like the fuckin' hypocrite she is. She should change her username from @ketamine\_queen to @hippocrates since she talks so much about doing no harm.

I hit the comment button before I even realized the full weight of what I'd done. I swear I meant to hit the backspace. My finger slipped. I definitely didn't mean to tag her. But as I stared at the comment, an air of self-righteousness wafted over me. If I didn't call out my roommate for her shitty politics, someone else surely would. It was only a matter of time. Besides, there was a chance nothing would even come of it. Sure, my roommate was a bit of a keyboard warrior, but if the blowback was bad enough, I could always delete it and retreat from the digital world for a week or two. God knows I could be doing other things with my

time. The stack of unread paperbacks on my bedside table came to mind. Their presence was an ever-loving reminder that I'm a person with hobbies outside of my digital existence. Even though lately it felt more like everything I did was an affirmation of my digital self.

I continued admiring the hard work of my quasi-jest and the impending blow it would deal to my roommate's ego. I could always delete it. Cancel my plans. Take off for a weekend if things with my roommate got really tense.

If.

A wave of nausea washed over me. No, maybe it was panic. I tucked my phone in my jacket pocket as I stood up, grasping the nearest metal bar for stability as the bus came to a halt.

Outside, the air was crisp. I took a deep breath, flushing the stuffy mixture of industrialized bong water and bodily fluids that had seeped into the fabric of the bus seats from my memory. I hated job interviews. Mostly because I didn't interview well. Inevitably, they'd ask me why I wanted the job or where I saw myself in five years. What was I supposed to say? Because I need to pay rent? Hopefully not here? Professionalism was a skill I just didn't have. My phone buzzed against the fabric liner of my denim jacket, absorbing the shock of the frenetic vibrations as I entered the dimly lit establishment.

I left the interview with the most notifications I had ever received in less than an hour. It was like my own personal 9/11. Each message was like a floor on one of the twin towers, waiting for my fingers to strike. Worse than the time my roommate dragged me into a comment war about gun control. Several of the notifications were from my roommate, across various platforms, admonishing me for acting "out of pocket" while attempting to backtrack from her no-tipping stance by providing proof. A literal receipt from some lawyer bar on the West side of town, crumpled enough to obscure the total of the bill, but clear enough to suggest she had tipped well. Whatever the fuck that meant.

I stepped towards the street, shielding myself from the wind by taking refuge under the bus shelter. There were other comments, too. Although most of them just consisted of some variation of the crying-laughing emoji. Notably, the Dance-Punk band's proprietor's wife had tagged me in a post, brandishing her credibility like the world's dullest knife. I tapped the notification.

Take the she/her out of your bio, @juul\_girl, you're not a real feminist.

I pulled back in shock, like I was dodging her attack, and nearly dropped

my phone on the grey asphalt in front of me. Like the wife even knew what it meant to be a feminist. She was married to the world's biggest misogynist and spent all her free time attacking the young women he worked with for "threatening the sanctity of their marriage," as she once told my roommate. Besides, what did feminism have to do with tipping?

Shortly before I moved in with my roommate, we got lunch to discuss all the dirty details of adding me to the lease. Over a big Caesar salad, my then soon-to-be roommate recalled how a friend of a friend had been contracted to do backing vocals for the proprietor's solo EP; a self-described exploration into the consequences of sound and silence in public life, where Haitian rara, America's Funniest Home Videos, and Kierkegaard's "The Corsair Affair" became one. Soon enough, he started inviting the girl to long practice sessions at odd hours. The kind that stretched into awkward dinners with one-too-many Rob Roy's because the bar they frequented was somehow always out of the simple syrup required to make it an Old Fashioned.

But of course, it was never the husband's fault for inviting his hot twenty-year-old co-worker out after work. As if the balance of power is always equal in those situations. I guess I should have known my roommate wasn't actually as socially progressive as she said she was when she accused the co-worker of attempting to ruin his marriage.

At any rate, the notifications kept coming. My phone buzzed with more voracity than a nest of angry hornets. I had been uninvited from Angel's Mary Kate and Ashley themed pool party (aptly titled "A Pool Party is a Cool Party"); Dave, my manager from Handlebar, had ever-so politely inquired as to What in the ever-loving fuck was going on. He had been receiving menacing emails all afternoon from anonymous patrons who were threatening to boycott their weekly trivia night unless he fired me then and there; and I had been tagged in several new posts from self-described influencers I'd only heard of in passing. They were accusing me of classism since not everyone can afford to tip. Of course, my roommate, with her secret trust fund, organic arugula, fifty shades of jaundice green jumpers and bruise-tone tees from Anthropologie, can't afford to tip.

By the time I got back to the apartment, my roommate had started a GoFundMe for Emotional Damages. The link appeared on my lock screen just as the elevator doors to the fourth floor opened. The peephole of apartment number four-oh-nine stared me down as I graciously exited the elevator.

I glanced down at the now-open webpage. Its description demanded not only monetary aid while my roommate found a new place to live, but that I attend therapy as part of my accountability process. I scoffed. In what world did my roommate think I would be able to afford therapy? At this point, I wasn't even sure I had a job. Between me and the potential revenue from trivia night, Dave would surely choose the latter. With my free hand, I dug around in my left pocket for my keys, weighing my options. Exile seemed like a preferable alternative. At least in exile, I could unshackle myself from my roommate's perfunctory wokeness and the echo chamber of experience that failed to account for anything outside of its infinitesimal grasp. I reached for the doorknob. Through the door, I could faintly hear her sobbing on the phone to her best friend on speakerphone. Her shrill voice was unmistakable, even at a distance.

My phone buzzed again, drawing my gaze back down and away from the door. Maybe I didn't need some masterful plan of action that would lead to some crowning achievement that I could post online to prove my shit was together. Maybe it was enough to just withdraw from all of it. Turning back towards the elevator, I opened my settings. With three swipes, I located the Reset screen. After pressing the blue button, I was prompted to enter my password. Finally, I tapped Erase.

CAITLYN CARR

# A Trip Through Soothing Stars

i was content in my galaxy.  
stars shone just for me  
planets aligned in my favour  
the zero-gravity life i always wanted.  
i was boundless when i moved  
what is a map if not a limitation?  
near the end of my high  
i saw a black-hole  
dangling from my stars  
that i knew would  
overload my systems.  
it was nothing;  
the kind of nothing i needed.  
i bent my knees  
and flew forward

but was yanked back  
by a cord of expectation  
and responsibility.  
“how can you keep doing this to yourself?  
“don’t you see what the drugs are doing to you?”  
i didn’t know how to tell them,  
“of course i can see it,  
but i don’t know how to live without the free-falling cosmos.”  
but the cord was stronger than my will.  
it pulled me back to earth  
and an impossible life awaited me.  
just like i knew it would.

i don't want this.  
i don't want this.  
send me back please.  
i can't live in these conditions;  
the stars and planets blinded by white noise,  
gravity holding me back.  
why did you make me stay  
when you knew i would rather die?

JORJA JOHNS

# To Be Or Not To Be: Motherhood

My womb aches,  
cries at its emptiness, with the fear of being full.  
Going on nineteen and going on younger than that still,  
for what is a mother if not the birth of all insecurity?

Cries at its emptiness, with the fear of being full,  
eat up just enough not to starve,  
for what is a mother if not the birth of all insecurity?  
Fill yourself from empty with water,

eat up just enough not to starve,  
stay as the smallest in the room and  
fill yourself from empty with water,  
for what is a daughter if not a carbon copy of her mother?

Stay as the smallest in the room and  
going on nineteen and going on younger than that still,  
for what is a daughter if not a carbon copy of her mother?  
My womb aches.

BRYANNE LANE

# Kitchen With Teeth

mothers make supper  
mothers in the kitchen  
kitchen too small  
kitchen girls clean  
clean it tomorrow  
clean or cook  
cook faster  
cook to eat  
eat slower  
eat the words  
words in my book  
words she threw up  
up to them  
up in the air  
air is hot  
air in the night  
night after night  
night this happened  
happened to pass the mother by  
happened to watch  
watch the oil in the pan  
watch her face  
face of her mother  
face the grandmother down  
down her cupid's bow scar  
down on luck  
luck be a lady  
luck that she made  
made us supper  
made with her hands

hands that never stop  
hands me the forks  
forks knives spoons  
forks on the table  
table is set  
table made from pine  
pine for the mothers  
pine trees out back  
back to black  
back away  
away from here  
away that summer  
summer on the road  
summer of red and yellow  
yellow on the skin  
yellow are her teeth  
teeth biting down  
teeth like her mother  
mother

HARKINDER “JINNIE” SARAN

# Jasi On My Mind

When the memories of her cross my mind  
I turn to my only Mnemonic skill  
I imagine what the farmhouse was like  
before you chose to slink in—  
hit her broadside on that noctambulant road  
where the air was heavy with your presence  
and the silver moon, the only source of illumination  
before you took her to the abandoned acreage—  
tall thick, emerald shrubbery curtaining the house—  
enshrining the memories  
and the ground a bog—  
soggy sponge from the recent monsoons  
the interior caked with dust—  
powdery, flinty as you ran your fingers  
through it while you held her captive—  
tied to that chair  
her spine scraping the wood  
and the peachy taste of lipgloss her only company

I wonder if it was once lively?  
Golden wheat fields ready for harvest—  
bathed by the swollen India sun  
that would toast your skin  
the house perfectly erect without mold  
its floors glossy with a wax varnish  
and the spices of cloves and nutmeg floating on the humid air  
as you entered  
children drinking Limca in the hopes to cool down—  
the lemony bubbles tickling their tongues  
or maybe they ate watermelon—

The juicy red sweetness dribbling down their chin

But who really knows  
All I know is that  
she died in a place  
that once held life.

LIAM SHEFFIELD

# Loved?

You can't stop yourself from thinking of your mother and father. The benevolent gods of your life, who fulfill your every wish. How they brought you whatever you wanted with little hesitation, only to make you happy. How they let you stay at home every day, giving you your privacy. Lonely! How they assembled you, from wires and metal into what you are. Worthless! When they taught you how the other children played. Different! How you pushed back just a little too tough in the first game. Destructive! How Timmy slept on the ground until the adults came. Unconscious! How they brought you back to the house after the incident. Monster! When you stayed in the basement for a day while they told everyone you were harmless. Dangerous! How they asked you to stay inside and told you everything was fine. Deception! When they let you look out the window to see the sun. Isolated! How your father would stop crying the moment you entered the room, just to make you happy. Concealed! How they told you they were going to take you on a trip. Liars! How the three of you quickly piled into the car, both your mother and father wearing smiles on their faces. Masks! When you arrive at a land of metal, where they both take turns hugging you before asking you to go with the nice man. Imposter! How you look back at your creator's faces for encouragement, only to see tears. Weak! How the man asks you to stand on a grate. Fake! How the trapdoor opens beneath you. Traitors! How the darkness envelops you. Alone! How you still trust that you will see them again soon. Lies! How you think this experiment feels different from the past ones. Death! How you sense something nearing you. How they betrayed you! How you feel ---

# John's First Date

John walked along a lonely and slightly overgrown trail that ran parallel to the highway. It used to be that one could hear the cars whisk by, but the hemlock trees that stood between the trail and the road had grown so tall that most of the noise from the highway was now inaudible. Plus, John always made it a habit of listening to his favourite music or podcast through noise-cancelling headphones whenever he went walking. With no hint of city noise, it almost seemed as if one was walking through a secluded forest. That's how John envisioned it anyway.

With each step John took, his heart beat slightly faster. It wasn't usual for John to get nervous, but for the past three months now he had admittedly become more and more excited to meet Hana. Since he matched with her on Tinder, he'd been smitten, and the conversations they had and the laughs they shared began to bloom into a feeling that she might be the one.

John had downloaded the app last fall and since then he has chatted with several girls. The conversations were mostly fruitless, some playful flirting, but until now he'd never worked up the courage to ask one to meet in person. He hesitated to call this meeting a date. That was too presumptuous. John didn't like to be presumptuous, ever since a girl he'd known years ago had called him out for being "a little presumptuous" after a failed attempt at a goodnight kiss. He swore he would learn from this mistake, dreading the thought of ever making it again.

John was optimistic about this meeting. Of course, why else would he ask Hana to meet? He was sure there was something special about her. Something that he couldn't quite describe. He liked that. An indescribable quality. He thought about using that same phrase when his friends eventually asked him about Hana. He would say that she was impossibly pretty, with short brown hair, amber eyes, and an almost indescribable quality. John couldn't hold back a small smile when he said this in his head. "A little corny, maybe, but it's kinda romantic," he thought. Maybe his friends wouldn't quite understand it, but he had decided that that didn't bother him. He was an adult after all. John felt a bit odd reassuring himself that he was old enough to make his own decisions, but it was true.

Intermittent crunches emanated from under John's feet. Small leaves shed by a smattering of alder trees rested on the trail floor. Halloween was only two weeks away. Of course, John was no doubt saddened by the end of summer. No more heat waves, days at the lake, late night hikes to get ice cream at the 7-11. However, as September vanished and October came, John became increasingly invigorated at the thought of a new season. John even imagined asking Hana to accompany him to his friends', Trevor and Kristy's, annual Halloween party, if he was invited. They could even coordinate complementary costumes. A couples-themed costume, like dressing up as Bonnie and Clyde, or a paintbrush and an easel. It was sort of lame and something John had ridiculed and fought against in the past, but now the idea caused a small flutter in his stomach. He carried on towards the break in the trees.

John came to the end of the trail. Leaving it behind he could now see the pedestrian walk that would lead him across the highway and to the strip mall with the Starbucks where he and Hana agreed to meet. His heart thumped even quicker now, and he could feel his mouth getting dry. He started to fidget, dusting off imaginary schmutz from the thighs of his jeans, and scratching the side of his head despite not feeling any itch. He then began to hum an improvised, rambly little tune quietly to himself as he moved forward towards the pedestrian walk button.

John wondered what Hana would be wearing today. Based on what he had seen from pictures on her profile, he could tell that she was stylish. Not flashy, necessarily, but stylish. He hadn't ever inquired, but he figured that she and her family were probably middle class. John wasn't particularly well off either, to be fair. His apartment was modest, and his beat-up Honda Civic was close to eight years old, neither of which he'd be able to afford by himself. "Maybe she buys different pieces of clothing from small boutiques and the Salvation Army," John wondered. "Maybe she puts them together to make cool outfits that no one else could pull off. Something really original." John knew people who would do that. "She was creative with an eye for fashion," he thought. She could help him out with some of his outfits too. John wasn't sloppy or unfashionable, but he wouldn't mind a change from what he was used to.

John pressed the button and waited for the little man to show up letting him know that he could safely walk across to the other side. After waiting for a while and jabbing at the button a couple more times, a swell of apprehension washed

over John causing him to look back at the trail from which he came. His eyes rested there for just a moment before his body pushed him forward. John swung his head back around and he decided he couldn't wait for the little man to give him the OK anymore. He waited for what he thought was a reasonable break in the traffic and then rushed across the highway. A motorcyclist then seemingly came out of the clear blue and nearly ran John over. The driver was able to swerve out of the way at the last second, yelling back to John to "fucking get it together" as he sped on down the road.

John made it to the other side without a scratch, though he was visibly shaky from the adrenaline that was now firing through his veins. A smile grew, his face coloured, and an involuntary laugh fell from his mouth. His heart did somersaults as he walked up the inclined entrance to the strip mall. "The Starbucks is just around the corner from the insurance office," he told himself aloud.

As John got closer to the Starbucks, he began to worry what he might say to Hana, that is, what they would talk about. Hana was admittedly a few years younger than he was, plus John was known for not being particularly loquacious. This had historically been a real point of contention. One which he became increasingly self-conscious about as he walked along the outside wall of the insurance office. At that moment John began to perspire. He could feel it now. He hoped that his blue shirt didn't have any perceptible sweat rings around the armpits. He took an innocuous glance towards one pit and then the other. Satisfied, he lurched forward until his feet stopped him mid-stride. John's feet felt heavy as if he were dragging weights behind him. Then, they were virtually unmovable. Another wave of perspiration crashed through him, and prickly heat broke out on the back of his neck. From the side of the building, John stared out towards the parking lot in front of the Starbucks. Among the sea of cars, one caught his eye. His body trembled for a moment. It didn't know if it should move forward or retrace its steps. He was fixed by the tight grip of shame and guilt. He then watched the all too familiar form of a tall, long blonde-haired woman with pained eyes locked on John, exit an old, beat-up Honda Civic.

MEAGHAN CHRISTENSEN

# My Little Dandelion

my little dandelion  
i know you are sad  
spring and summer  
will circle around again  
as the earth spins on its axis  
time continues  
and will greet you with open arms  
when you need it most  
and is least expected

my little dandelion  
i know you are sad  
the summer nights are soon fading away  
when the sun always shines  
when the bees pollenate  
all the worries of what is to come  
float away

my little dandelion  
i know you are sad  
your seeds blew away in the wind  
it may seem worrisome now  
you may feel alone  
yet your seeds travel across the land  
only to plant themselves  
and grow again

my little dandelion  
i know you are sad

but fall is like the season of growth  
where the leaves fall off the trees  
when the sky turns to black early  
and the fog lurks above the grass  
it leads to nights unknown  
where you may find there isn't any warmth

my little dandelion  
there is so much yet to come for you  
the kiss of the sun when dawn begins  
the laughter of children when school has ended  
the sun sets pink yellow and orange  
it tickles your nose while you sit patient

my little dandelion  
i know you are sad  
fall isn't as bad as you think it is  
the rivers flow intensely  
the grass turns green again  
no more dry weather  
the ground is full of moisture  
that your seeds need to flourish  
so you can grow once again  
to your full potential next summer

my little dandelion  
i know you are sad  
although it may seem like forever  
sooner or later  
i will see you again

JILLIAN O'DELL

# I'll Leave The Light On

I'll leave the light on...

is what my dad would say whenever I planned on coming home late;

And I held onto that.

It proved that I was coming home.

It proved that love was there.

And it proved that someone cared.

I soon realized that you were my  
home,  
because every time I saw you  
it felt like a light had just flickered on.

RACHEL KELLY

# I'm Sorry Mother Nature

I'm sorry mother nature  
That they're throwing waste upon your ground  
I'm sorry they don't seem to care  
Trash expelled, pound after pound.

I'm sorry mother nature  
That your winters are no longer snowbound  
I'm sorry they've given you this sickness, a fever  
Your blissful frost they've taken somewhere it can never be found.

I'm sorry mother nature  
That they cannot hear the beauty in your sound  
The leaves rustle, the birds chatter  
I'm sorry they don't understand how you are so profound.

I'm sorry mother nature  
That your forests they've drowned  
I'm sorry they don't listen to your anger  
Even when you make yourself stormbound.

I'm sorry mother nature  
That to your animals, they've taken a dagger  
I'm sorry for your polluted air  
Your grass forever browned.

I'm sorry mother nature  
That they've made your lands a battleground  
For you, I say a prayer  
That for someone, these issues will finally resound.

HENRY MAJKA

# Steelhead Creek

Part of the Escape into the Wilderness series.

Scanned Negative, 2022

View of Steelhead Creek right before Steelhead falls. This location is accessible by a one-kilometer hike on the Hayward Lake Reservoir Trail, starting from Dewdney Trunk Road near the Stave Falls hydro-electric plant. It takes approximately 15 minutes to walk one way.



ANHAD KAUR

# Seahorses

Male seahorses give birth to babies.

That's what I tell everyone I know, from the forlorn strangers on the bus,  
to my aggravating and snide grey-haired relatives at family dinners.  
I make sure they all know about this whimsical fish.

I tell everyone how Mother Nature wondrously decided to flip the narrative and,  
to let little female scaly things have more equality than me.  
Why did she let those females have more freedom?

I tell everyone how those females might be able to just jump and swim  
to an azure shore, in tepid waters, to live another story.  
They don't have to worry about the struggles of birth.

I tell everyone how those females don't get sighs and, looks of pity.  
That they live happily and swim in the boundless sea.  
They are so pretty even when pink, blue, or green.

I tell everyone that those females don't worry about children,  
that the male worries about them and even he can let them go.  
They can both let them go, and swim away.

I tell everyone they can swim away.  
They can swim away. They can just  
swim away. Swim far far away.

So that is what I'm doing too, with my very pregnant womb;  
on the edge of the bridge, my feet dangling free.  
I'm going to be swimming away with those female seahorses.

I once told everyone that:

Male seahorses give birth to babies.

SYDNEY HUTT

# Jocasta

The girls can't remember, so I teach them that 1814  
is the year we burned down the White House; now  
whenever they come inside and the lock beeps, they chant:  
We're burning down the White House!  
We're burning down the White House!

And they never forget again, which in a way  
is strange because of the impermanent  
nature of permanence. My fingers on the buttons,  
my gilded grandfather becoming bone dust beneath  
our feet. And I touch a tree on the way home because  
it's rooted in something, scraping the gray bark with my fingers  
and looking around to make sure no one is watching this  
ill-placed interaction with nature. My uncivilized need  
to grip it and make sure I'm awake, as the veil ripples –  
to know, with some vaguely uncertain certainty,  
that I am still here.

MORGAN KING

# Citric Sunset

“Look.” See these soldiers struggling, transporting their sorry captive, passing city outskirts, farmland and beyond. “Consider.” Grasp the enormity of a journey by wagon, a prince stuck in a box, pride descent to begging, regality slowly sundered in a stream of piss and shit. His signature staining one corner of this prison. “Observe.” Watch these cedars becoming sycamores, then sickened saplings, then surrendering to sand. Necessity decides the trio stop or strand their caisson and its wheels used to solid surfaces. “Heed.” Their horses, rearing in protest, smell the prison this noble is destined for. They know the pits of Carceri are more merciful a fate than the sour cemetery. Wisdom of the earth. They know death’s castle is flat. “Look.”

Not from a tree, like its smaller cousin, or from a bush, but straight from the floor. Colossal lemons with vines like enormous hands. Fingers the size of bridges, palms suspended two to three stories high, wrists joining the towering, bulbous masses of yellow. Pure, scintillating rivers from the north-west mountains, slithering leagues to greet the first beige granules, bringing green along its banks for a short while, but nothing lasts long in this blessed land. Closer to the oval behemoths, the green ends, and the water becomes yellow. It’s to here they must walk.

For the first time in days, the door is opened to the prince. He tries to run, but the heat of his wooden cage in direct sun has made him delirious, and his two captors are strong, kept cool by their loose robes and shemaghs. He kicks and cries as they seize and drag, ten minutes through a softer and softer surface, sizzling like cinders on his spine and soles. “Listen.” Besides him and the insects, there’s silence. Silence for hundreds of leagues further. Deceptive vacancy, concealing the lost souls that have come before.

“Here.” Surrounding the complete circumference of the desert. Hovering a foot or so high, is a thin line of verdant, magical runes.

“Isn’t it lovely?”

One soldier supports the prince, as the other shreds—strips the man’s soiled shirt. They draw a dagger and slice the steel in a symbol on the man’s chest.

A mile away, the horses twitch at the screams. “May the goddess of the earth see our sacrifice,” he recites. “We bring you this sinner from the family who brought your wrath. We pray you one day forgive our unholy ways, so we can end our exile from your consecrated land.”

“Oh, my dear, I’ve already absolved you, but I will not rescind my harvest so easily. Reflect. You assume you suffer exile, but you may surrender to the salvation of the toxic ends, and I will accept you into my home with a smile and everlasting sanctuary.”

“Eocis,” you whisper, “I’ve devised enough from your victim. Please. His naivety invites no vindictive venture. What does this serve to prove? Divine sister, please. Forgive. Revoke your vengeance. Let us leave for our haven. Please, sister. This solves nothing.”

“Oh, strange little celestial blossom. You forget sense. Sorry, but no. We stay... and you will do as requested.” The blood drips and muddies our sand.

“Taste!” You drink the moisture, endlessly parched. A stimulating tincture. Water, salt, iron, acid. Back to us, where it belongs. Its red sinks and mixes with our yellow into sunset orange. “Isn’t it delicious?” You gag on your scarlet tax, sorrow swelling your presence. “I understand you despise it, but it’s necessary. You must remember.”

The soldiers force the prince forward, past the glyphs. A green glow flourishes as he crosses the threshold, collecting in the symbol on his chest. He turns and pounds an invisible barrier. “Mistress of the earth, we beg you spare our souls with your disdain!”

“Perhaps if they weren’t so gracious, I’d collect them as well, but that seems unsporting. Their submission should be their decision, otherwise, what’s the point? Yet! Here’s this one whose blood is on your tongue. An exception. I’ve no misgivings of making a lesson of those that spurn me.”

“Accept your fate,” the soldier tells the prince. “There’s no hiding anymore.” They leave and so my eyes leave them.

“Act.” The prince sits in the sand, roasting. I refuse to let him simply sit and die by the gate. How boring a death that would be. “Come. Search for materials with me.”

“Here.” Close by is the mummified corpse of a rapist, covered in rags and lemon sprouts. A defiler of one of my nun’s. I Dream. I will into existence the manifestations of divine influence, and raise this scum to put to purpose. Snap-

ping and stretching under the medicine of undeath. A kiss from a god, and even a fossil would dance. Its hand pierces its abdomen and tears out a rib.

“It should suffice enough for a scare, but to be safe, let’s find a few more. Seven’s plenty. Hunt.”

How fares the prince?

Wailing, fists slamming solid air. “Why? I was a child! A child! How can you forsake me for the sins of my family? Have I not endured enough? Please! Divines! Release me!” He slumps. “To what end, this? Have you no mercy for the ignorant? Would you kill a bird for trespassing on your roof? What do you have to gain? I have nothing left to give! You’ve taken it all!”

“Not so. I suspect you store one last asset precious to me, but why race in seizing it? Listen.”

His mind perks to attention as the first groans catch his ear on the wind. A skeletal symposium. Brown, fragile and dry, like walking cinnamon sticks. Armed with rib bones, rusted daggers, a mace, and one with a pointed nub of a forearm, functional enough to stab. “He’s clueless that the one with the mace is his father. Not a coincidence. I made sure he was nearby, so he wouldn’t miss the reunion. A delightful fact we’ll have to enjoy by ourselves.”

“A valorous grave,” you sigh, bracing yourself. “Heaved to the wolves.”

“Don’t spoil the exercise. We haven’t even started.” He runs. “Yes. Yes! Spring! Sail, over-cooked besprawler!” Sprinting, striking small sandstorms under his stride. Just smart enough to know that despite them coming from every direction, it’s better to run now and possibly meeting one, instead of waiting to be surrounded. “No! One off of his father. That won’t do. Let’s give that one a sturdier step. Smile.” See as the vines of the lemon sprouts grow swiftly down the legs of the royal undead, his pace quickens, eager to greet his lost sixth-born. Now two blocking the gap. The prince stops? Did I push too far? He picks up a handful of sand, throwing it in his father’s face, distracting him as he veers around, elusive. The mace swings blindly into open air. “Disappointing. A scare certainly, and it got him moving, but I want more.”

I will a lemon on a vine to burst from the dead king’s head, bursting it open, endowing it with the tiniest spark of power. A glowing yellow dot appears in the center of the lemon wedges, the eye moving like a snail’s stalk, twists backwards to see its prize escaping. “Go.” The vines overgrown on the corpse push it to an unnatural velocity. I watch through the eye, gaining on the prince.

I pretend not to notice you cede a warrior's sagacity into him.

He sidesteps a swing from the mace, twisting, his calf raising the king's leg. With the force of his whole self, he thrusts the slim, decomposing chest, slamming the corpse onto its back. I sing,

"This boy tripped my pawn! Wonder. Awe and puzzle over the resilience of this piss smelling man," as he steals the mace, and crushes the skull of his father.

The other six chase after, but too slow. I'm satisfied enough, though not impressed. "Follow. Let's see where he goes."

Curious over cautious, it seems. He stops at the first of my fabulous lemons. Here its poison fully corrupts the river yellow. Adventurous, he climbs one stalk and swings the mace at the peel. He has to pause three times in the effort, and by the time he breaks through, my horde has caught up to him. However, their balance doesn't serve them well in climbing up, and now carrying a mace, he's able to smash them to pieces. He sits, leaning against my glorious bounty, resting in the shade.

"Is he truly trying to sunder fate solely by will? Let's peer inside." Memories of his family, strewn with anger and pity. Both at them and himself. Strange. Fear. Fear of me, and the supernatural. I'm flattered. Remorse? A wish that his seniors had suspended their secular precepts. That their intolerance of their deities hadn't been voiced with mocking curses. "A wish? Amusing. That's where your troubles started, silly prince. Not so long ago, in that... hrrr... that towerrr... Constructed out of spite. Past simple ungratefulness. Their detest for us was so substantial, they sought a superior means of scorning us. Us! Us who made them. Who strung together each soul from the essence of the cosmos, sculpting, weaving each cerebrally sedentary resident of our world into being! Why do you humour them, sister? Where does this prideful, rebellious spirit of theirs come from? Where is their love for their mothers, sister? Remember why we're here. Remember their restless climb, aspiring to be closer to our domain, just so they could more clearly spit our names. To spew their venomous slander over our gifts. That king. This prince."

"Remember." I project into his mind lost memories. Him standing with his father at the top of a colossal tower, open to the sky, amongst what was then a lush, forested landscape. His father cursed us and our siblings. An obscene, blasphemous speech that at last broke my patience. Despite the council of our peers,

I graced the two of them with my presence. I came to them as a gust of wind, a smell of amber, and a whisper. I brushed their skin, filled their lungs and sighed in their ears.

“Congratulations.” The father startled and this prince dazed, seeking aimlessly for the sight of me. “Such a structure as to pierce the clouds. I will grant you a gift, to celebrate this... historical instance. A wish.” That father grew smug. His moustache slanted—devious. Avarice in his eyes. Holding credence that I should so willingly present such boons to a slug like him, with the misted confidence of a lifelong royal. “Whatever your preference, vice, or fancy, sovereign of providence, of justice, of resistance.” His smile faded, finally catching my hints of malevolence, but he couldn’t let such an opportunity slip away. No. A wish. Too valuable a prize. He decided he would choose something safe, something he thought could only bring good.

“I know you. You disguise yourself as the wind, but you’re the goddess of the earth. Eocis. Something fitting for you, then,” he mused. “I wish for a tremendous harvest. An unending supply of food for my people.”

“Heh ha ha hah! Splendid! Superbly spoke! A scholar of such synchronized, concise sense to solicit such small subsidies of my own specialty. It’s settled then. Sown, an unceasing, sweeping, swath of seeds to sustain your serfs, civilians and intelligentsia. Their roots the scenery itself. No season specific to these, simple king.” He quivered at my tone, wondering what horror he just struck upon his citizens. “I hope you appreciate the ocean of prosperity I grant you. My gift. A testament to the scale of my love for you and your city.”

The prince sobs, remembering what once was.

“To answer the prince’s question of why: complicity. He stood beside his father and smiled at the jeers, cursing our family himself when he was alone at night. A game to him. Ignorant? Yes, he was. That’s why I didn’t kill him first, and why his afterlife will be more merciful than his blasphemous family. I don’t like subjecting you to this, but you’ve grown soft. You see too much of yourself in them. I’m saving you sister. Saving you from the certainty of madness, seeing them cross you again and again. Perhaps I deserve malice, but you... the day they cursed you was the day they sealed their demise... He seems determined to stall his fate, though fate it’s destined to be. He delays the inevitable... You made this one, didn’t you?”

You utter wistfully, “Wove him attentively. He was my first soul.”

“Oh, sister.”

“Can’t you absolve him? Deviate just once? A favour. He’s more than a canvas, devoid of value, to be archived with the rest for eternity. Or some vagrant to be starved and ravaged by vultures... He’s mine.”

I study you for the words you won’t voice, responding, “He can’t live... but I suppose. I’ll siphon his soul out of the abyss for you. You can choose what becomes of him next.” I feel your relief. That’s satisfaction enough for me. I know this is a mistake. I shouldn’t let you get too attached. This son of yours will destroy you.

A week he wanders the wastes, a sleepwalker, eating of our fruit, and drinking their juice. His belly swells, and his limbs thin, his body in acidosis. When he finds one of the long dead, he even takes to eating the rancid jerky of their arms and legs. A short-sighted goal. His stomach casts it out.

There. In the distance, he finally sees the ruins of the city. Its tower collapsed, with one of my lemons in its place. The largest of them all, its right-side basking in the last vestiges of the sun’s beauty falling low on the horizon. He crumples to his knees, crying, choking, coughing, the mace dropping. Blood splatters from his mouth, mixing with the sand. I accept his final gift to me, pulling its moisture into the depths so you don’t have to, leaving an orange stain in front of him.

We greet him again as a soft breeze. Cradling. Staying there with him for his citric sunset.

NOAH JOHNSON

# Two Years Later I Poured Out The Rest Of The Wine

I knew my relationship with her would end.  
She hid me like homemade wine in a strict religious household  
as it was stupid to keep me around, but she didn't know how else to escape.  
She would take me out after the sunset and see how I was turning out,  
I would comfort her as she pretended that spoiled grape juice made her okay.  
Then she would delete all our messages, and put me back as if nothing could  
change.

I knew my relationship with her would end.  
as this routine went on for a while  
optimistic at first, then started feeling half full.  
I waited for her to use me completely  
so I could continue feeling empty.  
Her excuses to see me changed every time  
and I never wandered away  
from where she last placed me.

I knew my relationship with her would end  
because this was not the first time, we were together  
and we were back to where we started.  
We were doing the full "hero's journey" again  
except this time, I was her ordeal.  
She had to accept the past was gone,  
and be able to find herself in the present,  
without me.

I knew my relationship with her would end.  
Every time we sat outside

she was in her head, lost in reverie.  
Her eyes mourned every opportunity she missed,  
sipping her options slowly as if they would change  
the next time she used her lips.  
Drinking to escape,  
she would close her fingers around my wine bottle's neck  
as if I contained all the answers to her sleepless nights.

One day, she picked me up with a means of celebration.  
She got a new job in a new city with a new start in life.  
We dreamt about all the wonders Chilliwack would hold.  
I had two glasses left of wine to share  
she said, "Sounds great, let's finish the bottle tomorrow."  
Don't ask me why. Tomorrow never arrived.

I'm glad she found herself.

# Biographies

SARAH BRAMMER is thirty-five and grew up in Langley and Abbotsford and has lived and worked abroad in Manchester, England. She is a poet, collage artist, photographer and a wife and mother. She is a UFV Alumna; she graduated with a BA in English Literature and Visual Arts in 2008. She worked in Study Abroad and Program Development at UFV and then as a Program Coordinator for Doctoral Studies at the University of Manchester.

CAITLYN CARR is a twenty-one-year-old student in her second year at UFV, pursuing a Bachelor of Arts with a major in English and a concentration in Creative Writing. Caitlyn enjoys writing poetry and contemporary short fiction, though she would like to write published novels someday. Her goal is to write literature that resonates with readers and makes them remember that their emotions matter and hold validity. Caitlyn enjoys reading in her spare time but admits that playing *Stardew Valley* can sometimes get in the way of that.

MEAGHAN CHRISTENSEN is a fourth-year student at the University of the Fraser Valley, studying English and Psychology. Since she was young, she has had a passion for reading and writing—primarily passionate about her love of poetry. She often uses poetry as a creative outlook to express her emotions, valuing the art of language and storytelling to convey feelings that all experience. She hopes to one day use creative writing to advocate and help young children be able to express their emotions and feelings in words, as well as teach young minds the art of writing.

LORA FORD has a long family history of artists. Ford is a photographer and painter. Her research in photography is to capture a glimpse into a space of wonder and awareness through her audience's eyes. Since 2022, Ford has been working towards increasing her knowledge in technology that will help her in bringing out the beauty of colours and contrast to her audience's mind. Ford loves going

and taking pictures of nature and sharing them with the world.

NELSON FROTA COLARES is a UFV student.

WYATT HIRSCHMAN is a UFV alumnus, having graduated with his Bachelor of Arts in 2014 before coming back to complete his Bachelor of Education in 2019. He currently works as a teacher in the Fraser Valley.

SYDNEY HUTT has a degree in English from the University of the Fraser Valley and is currently a student teacher with the Teacher Education Program. Her creative non-fiction and poetry have been published in various forms both online and in print, including with Raspberry Magazine, Motherly, and Lon Con Magazine. She lives in Chilliwack with her husband, three pets, and identical twin daughters who inspire much of her work.

JORJA JOHNS is a second-year UFV student pursuing her English major with a goal of teaching. She does her best to spend free time outdoors and catching up with friends. She also has two Australian Shepherds, who encourage her to get out into the woods more.

NOAH JOHNSON is a twenty-two-year-old Canadian poet and artist living on the unceded territory of the Stó:lō Nation. They love writing about life from different perspectives and people as metaphors that reflect themselves. Noah finds themselves caught in wonder by the beauty of the sky and confused by the passage of time. They dream of becoming a movie/tv show writer and want to give asexuality more recognition. Noah is a Virgo, enjoys bubble gum ice-cream and likes conversations that turn strangers into friends.

ANHAD KAUR is a UFV student.

RACHEL KELLY is a third-year UFV student pursuing their Bachelor of Arts,

with a French major and Global Development Studies minor. Outside of their studies, they have always had a passion for creative writing through music and poetry. Their first listener is always their cat, Ellie, but they are glad to present their work to a wider audience through Loudon Singletree.

MORGAN KING is an English creative writing major with a philosophy minor, and a new father. “I’ve been writing since I was seven years old and have finished three novels and over a dozen short stories, but this is my first time attempting to publish. I’m a dungeon master in dungeons and dragons for a group I’ve been playing with since high-school and am a long-time hockey goalie. I hope to publish enough one day to be a presenter at the Surrey International Writer’s Conference.”

BRYANNE LANE is a UFV student.

NOAH LOCHHEAD is a first-year student at UFV, currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts Program pursuing English. Noah enjoys reading and writing poetry in their free time, and hopes to eventually go into the education field, teaching English Literature.

CAMRYN LONGMUIR is an English and criminology student at UFV. While she focusses her studies on restorative justice and human rights, she likes to take the occasional creative writing course for “fun.” She is influenced by environmentalism and sustainability and enjoys writing about these topics combined with personal experiences. She spends most of her free time hanging out with her cats.

HENRY MAJKA is a fourth-year Computer Information Systems student at UFV, apprentice mobile crane operator, and IT technician. He has been practicing photography as a hobby for the past seven years. He often takes photos by combining photography with other hobbies, primarily exploring the outdoors by hiking and adventure motorcycling. Aside from nature and landscapes, Henry also has strong interest in motorsports (specifically rally racing), learning about,

exploring, and photographing old decommissioned industrial sites, as well as other structures. He is very excited to have some of his work published for the first time.

JILLIAN O'DELL is a third-year English Major at The University of The Fraser Valley. Writing is something she has always been passionate about. It allows her to escape from the busyness of everyday life and focus in on herself. In her free time she enjoys hiking in our beautiful country and catching up over coffee with friends. She hopes that as she grows as a writer, she can continue to hone her craft. She hopes to use it as an outlet for this crazy world.

SANGAM SANGHA is a fourth-year student at UFV, majoring in Media Communications. Sangam is inspired by the ancient classics and a myriad of mythologies and legends from the world over. His style is influenced by the haiku, sonnet, and romantic poets like Keats and Neruda.

“Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.” – Gene Fowler

HARJINDER “JINNIE” Saran is in the process of obtaining her undergraduate degree with a creative writing focus. Her work touches on the themes of disability, feminism, and taboo, complex issues in the South Asian culture. She has a co-authored review forthcoming in the University of Toronto Quarterly and runs The Deconstructing Disability column for the University of the Fraser Valley newspaper, The Cascade. In the future, Jinnie hopes to earn her MFA and teach creative writing at the post-secondary level.

LIAM SHEFFIELD is a biology major with a strong interest in creative writing. “It’s an odd pairing, he says, but it can certainly lead to some fun ideas!”

THOMAS WILSON is an English Major with a Media and Communication Studies minor at UFV. There, he analyzes custom license plates, interprets

nostalgia in *The Simpsons*, and reads about the internet. He lives in the Fraser Valley with his calico cat, Bijou, and one too many copies of the soundtrack to the 1980 film *Urban Cowboy*.

JAKUB ZELEZNIK is in his second year at UFV, studying English with plans to become a high school teacher. Besides writing stories, his hobbies include devouring novels, animating, drawing, karate, and taking long walks with his beagle, Rozey.



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