

WE

ADVANCE 2022

COULDN'T

?

THINK

OF

TITLE



# **We Couldn't Think of a Title**

## **A Collection of Prose & Poetry**

**Composed by the 2022 ADVANCE Creative Writing Course**

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**\*Front cover artwork drawn by Natalie Weatherington**



## **Indifference**

*Composed by the 2022 ADVANCE Creative Writing Course*

What is a home?

29 pigeons in a small, enclosed space.

What's the most popular favorite color?

Nothing but a small starfish who happens to have eyes.

What is the toll that the moon takes on the land of the frogs?

All that matters in a timeless existence.

What is god?

The difference between the meaningless past, unimportant present, and all-knowing future.

What is real?

It is unimaginable.

What is life?

A girl having fun.

What is the ocean?

Millions of raccoons stacked up in a trench coat trying to infiltrate a grocery store.

What is a money tree that doesn't grow hundreds?

A half-eaten cookie.



## **Rachel Albert**

Hi! My name's Rachel. I am from Zachary, Louisiana. I am fourteen years old, and I attend Liberty High School. These three weeks have been amazing, and I am so proud of my classmates and me for being able to expand our knowledge and skill sets together. It has been such a thrill working to critique and grow as writers independently as well as collectively. NSU's Advance program is amazing, the Creative Writing class has been wonderful, and I hope to be in attendance next year!

## **Not to Cry**

I prefer not to cry  
Even when my emotions become oh so heavy  
But something in my mind  
My thoughts  
My feelings  
Force the dam to part  
The dam that I've built upon for years; now still  
Fragile  
Weak  
The lakes and stream converse into an oasis  
I can feel the dam detonate  
I ache, my eyes heavy  
My sour tears began to fall  
And drop by drop the water in my dam is released in all



## **Mechanical Wings**

Metal screws  
Plied planks of wood  
Joints and knobs  
They build those wings

The ones over there  
Yes, you may stare

Those wings have flown far  
This is no wish upon a star

Your absence of mind of thought has left you blinded  
You could be flying too

Your mechanical wings are not yet bound  
Bound to your mind

Your brain does the mending  
The sending of the pending  
Ideas you've left behind

Because you didn't believe  
Your hearts left aching

You could have mechanical wings too  
Trust me they will take you far

Far along the rivers  
The streams leading you to  
The metal screws  
Plied planks of wood  
Joints and knobs  
They build those wings

## **The Me I May-Be**

The me they see may certainly not be me  
Or maybe it is, although I don't know how that'd be  
They observe what I wear, how I talk, how I walk  
But that certainly isn't me, the me that they see  
Or maybe it is, although I don't know how that'd be  
They all see me differently, so who exactly am I  
Maybe I'm everyone and no one  
To some I'm just a folktale to show one  
They will never see my thoughts, they only see what I showcase  
And everyone perceives differently  
So, I'd say I'm everyone and no one

## **“Momma Said,” a Short Story**

As an adolescent, my mother told me that “the outside” was a dark and very unpleasant place. She often told me that the people in “the outside” wanted nothing more than for me to be dead. They wanted to erase my memory of home, they wanted to stab me and leave me for dead, or maybe they’d feed me to their dogs, or something along those lines.

But now that I’m older, I know that none of that is true. Momma was a sick woman. Momma’s mother had been killed, more like brutally murdered, when Momma was about twelve or so, and I’ve taken it upon myself to believe that her trauma caused her to behave in the way that she did.

When I was younger, me and Momma lived up north in Chicago, Illinois. The projects, to be exact. We really never had more than our studio apartment. One bedroom that we’d share, and a gas stovetop that we hardly ever put to use. Mostly because Momma only bought those little chicken and beef flavored ramen packs from the convenience store downstairs for us to eat.

To be honest, I don’t remember much about our apartment. All that I can remember clearly is being locked in the bedroom we shared while Momma went off into “the outside” to do whatever it was that she did. She’d leave me with a small cotton towel that I never used because of the proliferating green-ish gray mold it had grown. And sometimes, if I was “good,” she’d leave me one or two of those Lil’ Debbie cake snacks.

Speaking of Momma, I haven’t seen her in a while. One night she left our apartment and never came back. She told me she was going to cash a check, but apparently she had gone to the avenues to get an ounce or two of marijuana. The pure kind. I didn’t know any of that until the police broke into our apartment. Knocked down my door, picked me up, and just took me away. My heartbeat was heavy at the moment, but I calmed quickly. The only thing that I have from that apartment is the small Lapis crystal that I wore around my neck. It’s plated with sterling silver. Couldn’t be worth more than 100 bucks, so I thought I’d just keep it.

Anyway, I said all of that to say that maybe Momma was right. Maybe “the outside” people are crazy. I live in a small town down south in Georgia, and right now violence is interminable.

A broadcast on the news a week or so ago said something about the world coming to an end. I have no idea how reliable the sources are, but since then, everyone has been going wild. Scientists say that we only have forty-eight to seventy-eight hours before “The End,” whatever that means. So I thought I’d just write this just in case I did find a loophole in the system, and I did find a way to get around violence, poverty, my anxiety, the world ending, and just a few other problems that I’ve managed to gather along the way.

I’m currently sitting on my small brown leather reclining chair that I got like a year ago from a Goodwill downtown. Once again, the news is being broadcasted. This time they say that people are robbing and killing innocent families for their food, non-perishables, and water. Supposedly, they’re headed toward my block, but it doesn’t bother me much. No, I don’t wanna die or be killed or whatever, but there’s not much I can do. So I’ve boarded my windows, the two in my room, with wood, and I’ve pushed my small wooden table up against the front door of my apartment. I hope this’ll stop whatever’s happening from happening. The timer on my television that is supposedly counting down time before the end of the world is on two hours, a good one-hundred twenty minutes. So, I guess I’ll go now to eat some chips or something before I die or combust or whatever. Endless are the possibilities.

## **Ode to My Mother**

My mother, whose eyes are tinted with a ray of sunlight  
That shines through a green stained glass  
Whose words are sharp but sweet like cinnamon  
Whose mind is an eagle soaring, always reaching new heights  
Whose optimism is a roller coaster with lots of twists and turns  
Whose presence is the sun at dawn  
And the moon at dusk  
Whose touch is a breeze of lemongrass and lavender  
And the gentle breeze you feel on the prairie  
My mother, whose aura is a warm colorful sunset over the water  
Hints of pink, blue, purple, and yellow galore  
Whose protection is a bear protecting her cubs  
Whose ideas are their universes' boundaries

## **That Summer Night**

Oh that summer night  
The sunflowers bright

The daffodils smiled  
Marry as a child

The moon peered down  
On me

I once did see the world so bright  
Oh that summer night

How the wind blew slightly  
The sun warmed my skiing

Oh that summer night, when I felt so light  
Oh so bright  
Just that summer night

## **Claire Bertrand**

Hi! My name is Claire Bertrand, and I am going to the 11th grade at Washington-Marion Magnet High School in Lake Charles, Louisiana. I love to read and write, and I want to be a child psychologist with my own practice in the future. This is my first year at Advance and I plan to come back next year for my last year and as a staffer.

## **Girl**

Learn how to be very neat, otherwise nobody will ever like you. Wash the dishes and learn how to cook. Never date anyone that makes less than you, they need to be the provider. *But what if their dream job doesn't pay a lot?* It doesn't matter, they need to have more money. Don't wear crop tops, dye your hair, or get piercings; it will make you look grown, inappropriate, and a target for creeps. Don't be dependent on anyone but yourself. Don't be independent; men don't like that, be submissive. Don't show a lot of skin, that means you don't respect yourself, therefore nobody will. Don't wear loose clothes, you'll look like a boy. Don't wear tight clothes either, like leggings or short shorts, it means you just want people to look at your body. *But what if it's more comfortable?* It doesn't matter, that's disrespectful to yourself. Don't eat too much, fat people aren't attractive. Make sure you eat enough, scrawny people aren't attractive either. It's okay, boys will be boys. Don't let them disrespect you, it means you don't respect yourself. Be smart, you can't fight a boy off yourself. Be safe; if anybody does anything to you, fight them off. Make sure you dress up so you can look nice. Why are you wearing that? You must want attention. *But what if that's just my style?* It doesn't matter, you're a girl!

## **Life**

What moments could we have died,  
but didn't?

Why is everyone different,  
but we're all the same?

Why are we told to dream  
just for disappointment?

How are humans so powerful,  
yet so small?

## **My Dog**

My dog, whose fur flows in the wind like leaves  
with black curly locks that consistently smell like Fritos  
My dog, whose rosy tongue is always licking someone  
My dog, with sharp nails like tiny swords that'll scratch you  
Always tapping against the floor like dripping water when they need to be cut  
My dog, whose fluffy tail is always wagging  
Whose tail instantly wags when he sees you with food  
My dog, with a voice as high as a skyscraper  
Always obnoxiously barking as much as birds tweet on a sunny morning  
My dog, who's as cute as a chubby infant



## **I Couldn't Believe My Eyes**

I couldn't believe my eyes. After five long years, he was gone. After five long years of him haunting my life, I was finally free. I cried as I watched the police car drive off down the street. After five long years of him torturing me and holding me hostage! Flashbacks of all the things he'd done were running through my mind. All the things that would never happen again. I thought about all the times he'd beaten me, starved me, threatened to kill me. I thought about all the times I saw my face on the news. I couldn't handle all the emotions I was feeling at the moment. I just started screaming and crying as the officers tried to comfort me. I was brought to the hospital where my family visited me. I was thought they gave up on looking for me. I thought everyone forgot about me. I thought they'd already just accepted that I was dead. I couldn't believe it when I got home and saw that my room was the exact same. They really waited for me! I turned the TV on and saw my face on the news again. But this time it wasn't because I was missing; it was because I was found.

## **Comfort Zone**

"Do things that you love," they say  
But I prefer not to  
Maybe someday  
Doing things that I love is fun,  
But for now, I want to challenge myself,  
Find more and new things to love,  
Until then I am not done.  
So for now I prefer not to

## **The Jewelry Lady**

She works hard every day to make a living.  
Working all day and night.  
Stringing each bead tediously like threading a needle.  
Hoping that someone will value her work.  
Hoping that she won't have to struggle anymore.  
Some people value it,  
But maybe not enough.  
So she works even harder,  
Even though it's really tough.

## **Ode to Butterflies**

A beautiful creature always capturing my eye,  
Entertaining me, when I watch it fly in the sky.  
Your wings fluttering continuously.  
Flapping fast like the wings of a bee.  
Flourishing out of your cocoon, representing growth,  
After starting out with your caterpillar coat.

## **Home**

I wish to be home

Where I can sleep on my uncomfortable bed

Where I can be smothered in blankets

Where I can be petting my fluffy dog

Where I can eat delicious food nonstop

Where I'm not obligated to drink a cold glass of water

Where I can sit in my rocking chair with the wind blowing on me

Where I can take walks in the burning hot sun

Where the wasps and dragonflies fly around buzzing everywhere

Where I can have the AC on at night and feel the cold air blowing on me

Where I can sleep all day, dreaming of getting everything I want

Where I can hide away in my room whenever I want

Where I don't have to talk to people all the time

Where I'm holding my baby brother, spoiling him more than he already is

I wish to be enveloped in the warmth of my family.

## **My Name**

I was named after my grandfather Clarence. I was named after a man that I don't even remember, but that's okay because I'm not him. I am my own person. Claire is an introvert, nice, but short tempered, caring, but only to certain people. Claire is a girl still figuring herself and life out. Claire is a devoted Christian that struggles with sin, a girl with social anxiety. Claire is not a people person and but would be if she knew how. Claire means a lot of things for me, but most of all Claire is not Clarence. I—Claire—am my own person.

## **Memories**

I remember when I ate Mardi Gras beads every day

I remember when I didn't care about how I looked and acted

I remember when we used to play on a playground at school and have fun instead of being on our phones

I remember when I used to read and write for fun every single day

I remember when I didn't cherish anything because I never actually thought I would grow up and miss it

I remember when the fire alarm went off and I got pushed on the ground because I was so small and I thought I would die.

I remember reenacting Pawn Stars and recording it on my tablet

I remember when I used to cry every time I heard a loud noise.

## **Anger**

People make me angry.  
The things people do,  
The things people say,  
When people talk to me,  
Or even the way somebody sits down could make me angry.  
But I'm not an angry person,  
Unless I am.

## **Whispers**

In the evening she was calm, watching  
The horizon. Never wanting  
To look away, because it was the only  
Thing that kept her sane.

And when she wasn't, that's when the voices would start  
Their whispers, telling her all the  
Wrong thoughts to have. If you could see her face when she  
Cried, fear would be in her eyes

So she hardly ever looked away from the water. Not wanting this  
Invisible torture to continue.  
Her garden of thought was gone.

## **Fear**

Fear feels like the inability to breathe.

Fear tastes like the blood coming from your lip from biting it so hard.

Fear sounds like the voice of someone pleading for their life.

It smells like the breath of an alcoholic that won't hesitate to hurt you.

Fear looks like the face of someone that you were dreading seeing so much that you cried tears of joy once they were gone.

## **Learning to Love Myself**

Because I'm made this way for a reason.

Because I no longer care what people think about me.

Because my melanin is a prized possession.

Because what's inside is what really matters.

Because it's only MY business to worry about myself.

Because I can dress how I want.

Because I can act how I want.

Because I can look how I want.

Because I can be who I want.

Because if other people can then so can I.

## **Parents and Children**

A bond that should be unbreakable,  
Yet sometimes it isn't.  
This could be because of many reasons,  
But it's all an excuse  
Because those reasons shouldn't exist.  
You were made by these two people.  
So they should be the ones to teach you everything.  
Teach you how to love, and what that looks like when it's in a healthy way;  
Teach you what being a parent is supposed to be like, and even more things.  
But that doesn't always happen,  
With parents and children.

## **School Shootings**

Gone really young,  
But not from their memories.

## Jealousy

I crinkle another paper up and throw it with the others on the floor. I need this to sound good, sound believable. I can smell my Sharpies as I begin to write another letter, this one seeming like the one I'll use and show to the police.

Once I finish the letter, I put the Sharpie and paper up, and take my gloves off. I already have my girlfriend's body set up so everything will seem believable.

"You poor thing, you didn't have to die this early," I say while stroking the hair of her corpse. "You just HAD to look at the other people, didn't you? You know I'm too jealous for that, come on now, sweetie," I say with a slight chuckle.

It isn't time to go on with the rest of my plan so I leave our—well, MY—house and head for a small town that's on my phone map and is supposedly two hours away. I take my poison with me so that there's no proof and just in case I have to kill someone else once I make it to the town.

I start walking in the direction of the woods and continue for two hours, hoping I will find the town soon. Once I've walked for two more hours, I realize that I'm lost but I can't use my phone and let people know where I'm at. So I just need to keep walking and hopefully I can find a place before it gets too dark.



## **To My Father**

I love you, but I don't think you feel the same.  
It's okay though, I guess.  
I witnessed you do bad things to the people I love,  
And dealt with everything you put me through.  
Yet I still love you.  
I let you treat me however,  
Because I knew you were hurting inside,  
Even though you hurt me in the process.  
Yet I still love you. But I don't think you feel the same.

## **Elise Mowbray**

Elise was born in the Houston Heights but has lived in Katy, Texas for the majority of her life. When she was ten, she moved to Keller, Texas, a suburb of Fort Worth. She currently attends E.A. Young Academy and will likely be doing so until she graduates from high school. She will be entering the eighth grade next month.

## Ten

Chocolate brown hair, always unruly. That came from her dad's sister. Light skin, rarely without a sunburn. Just like her mother's, or so she was told. Long legs that could carry her to any finish line. A trait inherited from her dad.

But that was the catch. Her dad hadn't been fast enough. The bad guys had caught him. She tried not to think about it, replacing the thought whenever it came with the sentiment that he hadn't been caught yet, only cornered. Because she, Jamie Acosta, would be the one to save him. No matter what methods the bad guys would use, she would outsmart them. Like when they lied. And, my god, they lied. Like when they told her that he fought people, that he would drive drunk, that he would have killed people if not for them. But she wouldn't, she couldn't, believe that.

There were a few other beliefs she had that were also of great importance at that moment, such as that child protection services would soon arrive at their house. And that was why she had to leave, and quickly. In a matter of two minutes and fifty-seven seconds, she strapped her baby brother to her back and gathered a box of food that, if they were lucky, would last a month. You see, this wasn't her first time having to do this. She threw open the back screen door and ran through it. Leaves crunched beneath her bare feet as she ran six kilometers, only stopping for a breath of air once. She had come here many times before, so this distance was nothing new to her. The run-down strip mall she had arrived at had become a safe haven for her. She ran in a half circle to the back of the building before climbing an electrical ladder that must have been placed there at least a decade ago. With her brother still strapped to her back, she dropped down into a cold, empty, windowless room that smelt like fresh mud. It had one sleeping bag on the floor that her father had placed when showing her this room five years before. He had never come back.

Once her brother had been put into a light slumber, Jamie pulled a beaten down notebook out from her pajama pants' pocket. She called it the Book of Plans and it was full of, well, plans. Every last one of them was focused on keeping her father and, more recently, her brother, safe for when the inevitable happened. And the inevitable had happened. Her dad hadn't come back after forty-eight hours, bringing with him the less-and-less upsetting statement that they had to move again. This probably meant that the bad guys had caught him. But flipping through her book, she noticed that the plans she had once worshipped suddenly seemed impossible. That was fine. She would keep her brother and herself safe until her dad came to tell them that he was safe. They were okay.

Eight days later, she was already running out of food. She had minimized her eating to one miniscule meal a day. Meanwhile, her brother was still eating three meals a day; he was young, so she didn't want to malnourish him. She had become increasingly tired and had begun taking around four naps a day. But, before she fell asleep, she would always make sure her brother was fed and either calm or sleeping. If he began crying, she would quickly wake up and calm him. But what woke her up this time was not crying. It was footsteps. She froze, scared that it was the bad guys, having finally found her. They would kill her brother first, and then her. She didn't know what she would do if that happened. She had no plans for this scenario. How didn't she have a plan? She had to have a plan. Suddenly the source of the footsteps dropped into the room she was sleeping in. It was her dad! She was truly safe. This week's fiasco was over.

But why was the thick scent of alcohol still stuck in his breath? Why were his steps so arbitrary and unplanned? Why did his eyes hold a bright glimmer? Why did he have a knife? And why was he holding it so? He limbered towards them without a word, without setting his sharpened pocket knife down. What if they were truly the bad guys all along? She held her eyes closed tightly. You know, she was only ten.

## **Dominoes**

Click.

A polaroid.

An empty room.

The picture fell to the carpeted ground, landing next to an excruciatingly similar photo. The only difference between the two was that one had captured a young girl, fourteen at most. By the time of the second picture, the girl had thrown her life off of the top of a Ferris wheel. The tallest in the state. Her mind had been stolen in the effort to murder her body, but a lucky few of her more poetic thoughts had been forever preserved through a deceitfully cheerful-appearing diary.

### **Five years later**

The girl's older sister was now twenty-one, but she was already caught in the sticky trap of a loveless marriage. It had been secured while one side loved the other more than words, even pictures, could ever convey, while the second merely hoped to someday be able to love again. But in the two years since the marriage, the latter had found no escape to the nihilistic corn maze that she called her mind. The only thing that could lead her to the much-coveted exit was her sister, who was long since gone.

And so, the woman would read her late sister's diary over and over and over again. By now, she had memorized its every word but she wouldn't, she couldn't, stop. It ripped her apart, both internally and externally, but she was nearly oblivious to this. She had even brought the diary with her when she climbed the Ferris wheel that her sister had thrown herself off of five years before. She held it tight to her chest with a grasp that quickly grew white. The main difference, the only difference, between her suicide and her sister's was that she was instead killing her body in order to murder her mind.

Her death was seen as a tragedy, as a silly, poorly thought-out decision. Family she never even knew mourned her death and even more pretended to. And, yet, nobody held a funeral for her. Not her parents or her spouse, not her second cousins from China or her Dad's aunt from Australia, nobody. Together, they had decided that she wasn't deserving of one, with convoluted explanations that she chose this for herself and that she must have wanted this. That she wanted their tears, their sadness, their anger. These words were lies, of course, but there was no diary in her sloppy handwriting that could prove them wrong.

## War

It's so funny. We only have one life. It's filled with millions of choices, but they're all lies. They're only there to distract us from the truth. We have no choice but to succumb to the truth, whether we choose to ignore it or not. Most choose to ignore it. Ignoring it is the only way to access true happiness. But doing so will mean that the only life you get will be spent lying.

But not me. Perhaps "everyone but myself" is a thought that most people have at the age of nineteen. Everybody thinks that they're somehow better than everybody else, better than the system. And I know this, yet I still think of myself as some form of a chosen one. Or, I guess the opposite of a chosen one. I know my fate is no better than anyone else's but maybe I'm the only one able to outrun, to outlive, my fate.

But I live in the life that's expected of me. I'm attending an Ivy League college that I didn't really want to go to, although choosing it was the only sensible choice to make. I've never received a grade below a B in all my years of schooling and have earned myself a truly outstanding resume. But none of this is what I wanted. Maybe that sentence makes me sound like a young child. I don't care. I don't care about much anymore, honestly. I guess I'm becoming disillusioned. That's a word I heard on the news broadcast last Wednesday. Or was it Tuesday? Or was it even last week? Of course, I knew of the word before then, but hearing it made everything make sense. It was an exact match to the hole I feel in my chest. The hole still bothers me, of course, even though I've put a name to it. How am I supposed to alter my fate and be the chosen one when I struggle to get dressed in the morning?

I've already written so much about what I don't want, and yet I don't even know what I do want. I don't want to walk down the overly cheerful and yet painfully grim halls of my college with an agonizingly heavy backpack strapped to my shoulders. I don't want to enter a room where I'll be taught the excruciating ins-and-outs of statistics, knowing I'm only learning it to eventually become stuck here teaching a new generation of students the very thing that I hate the most. And, most importantly, I don't want failure to be as untouchable as a treetop, gently swaying in the wind. And yet, failure is so easy to fall backwards into. I know I'll reach it someday, but I want to delay that for as long as possible. Or, perhaps, my fate is to never fail, only raising the bar higher and higher. I don't want a fate no matter what it is. Half of me thinks that I can escape mine while the other half knows I can't. I think the second half has won.

Maybe what I don't want is a life.

## **Silent Noise**

The quietest thing I've ever heard was a scream echoed by death. I had felt the shock twirl down my spine like a fireman on a pole. And I had felt the tears dry my face in wobbly, straight tracks. Even the sirens, the shouted murmurs, they were all silent. We were all just background characters swimming in the wake of a disaster.

## **Flicker**

They wanted me to leave; why do they cry?

## **Neverending Commotion**

Pen ink dripped from the boy's pale fingers. It slipped through the cracks in the floorboards, a gift of food to the mysterious, inky black creatures below. But this was not known to him. His life already had such a lack of order, even when the truths he had been taught agreed with one another. He was sitting with his legs crossed on a stark white bed placed in a room with not a single element of color. This room was the only true place in an Earth filled with lies and much-too-bright neon colors. His spine bent in odd parts and his neck turned much too far to the right, but none of this was odd to him. When he looked in the mirror, he just saw himself. The only thing he would change about that was for him to be a version of himself who could make sense of the world. That is, a world without frogs seemingly from myths, colorless rooms, and pen ink from unknown sources. But sense did not belong in his world and he didn't belong in a world of order.



## **The Stench of Fear**

Fear is a monster,  
Stabbing your brain  
With his long, thin fingers.  
You try to fight him,  
But he reforms,  
Evading every possible attack.

He doesn't speak,  
But he echoes your every thought,  
As if you were in a forever empty hallway.  
And there's nothing you can do  
As his scaly fingers stab  
Into your fragile brain.

You feel it squish,  
Turning to mush in his firm grasp,  
As he takes control.  
You are now powerless.  
There's nothing you can do.

And his breath,  
It's metallic,  
Like the blood  
From his previous victims' throats.

## **The Left Behind Ideas and Right Decisions**

Dissect myself in order of insecurities;  
Decide which goes with which  
And which to kill.  
Choose which is saccharine,  
And which stabs in your heart.  
Which tears are made of moonlight,  
And which could be of knives.  
Ending worlds, closing doors.  
It's not all or nothing anymore.

## **Lace Dice**

Roll the dice,  
Pick a new me to entice.  
Let my personality be a heist.  
Hide myself in lace,  
If you have a different taste,  
Fix the cracks with thin paste.

## **Thoughts**

Trying to live within the truth,  
Attempting to keep it within my grasp.  
If I am to do what you say,  
If I am to stay who you think I am,  
My truth will not be a lie.  
Right?

## **Never**

Does the past exist, if it's gone and never coming back?  
Does the present exist, if it becomes the past so quickly?  
Does the future exist, if it hasn't happened and never will?

## **Orchid**

A thought that grew like the roots of an oak tree,  
Quickly outgrowing the planter  
That it had begun in. Now rapidly breaking  
The confines it was meant to live in, escaping.

Sprawling onto the concrete below, hunting water.  
Growing bigger than its holder.  
Cannibalizing thoughts, devouring water. More.  
Covering the long lost core.

Still invisible, but as wild as a cruel rumor.  
Now outgrowing the garden it  
Was created for. Now alike to candle to a tree.  
Finally, a voice, a fearful whisper, sets it free.

## **(Try And) Stop Me**

I will consider your feeble life  
For I have stolen ownership of it  
For I have taken it to fulfill my petty needs  
For I will pretend to listen to your pleas  
For I always do  
But my answer never changes  
For I know my actions are uncalled for  
For the choices I've made were not mine to make  
For I know you were once but a young boy  
For frolicking upon the grassy hills of your youth  
For I know you have a mother and a father  
Who will sob and cry and scream  
For I have grown to love the fear that guilt brings  
And the guilt that fear brings  
For I have lost all sense of empathy  
For you mean nothing to me  
For "you can't stop me!"  
For never loving  
For never valuing life  
For becoming infamous  
For love

For I hold a sharpened blade to your thin neck  
For a tear mingles with the first drop of blood

## **Korie Smith**

I am going into the 8th grade. I am 12 years old. I live in Lake Charles, Louisiana, and I go to Oak Park Middle. I enjoyed being at Advance because I got to meet new people and everyone made me feel welcome. I enjoyed being in Creative Writing because I got to be creative and learn new things. I also love how Mr. Ralph taught; he is very nice and so is our TA, Reid. If you like to be creative and love to write, then you should take this class.

## **Ode to a Sunflower**

The prettiest thing you have ever seen

So bright

so yellow

I catch everyone's eye

I remind them of happiness

I stand out

Never shy

I let their true colors shine

I let out a slight whisper

Of sweet silent melodies

Quiet

Peaceful

Calm

A sunflower is what I am called

## **The Forest**

She watches the clear blue water pass through  
As she's walking through the forest  
The tall green trees shining in the sun  
She smells the wild flowers  
She hears a slight whisper  
She thinks it's the voices in her head  
They talk to her silently  
She ignores them and moves on  
But the voices tell her to turn around  
There grows a fire  
She tries to run but it's too late  
And she awakes from her dream

## **Reflection of Love**

I look through the shinning glass while my reflection fades  
While thinking about all the lies you've told  
All of my feelings are getting old  
At one point I had an addiction to the love  
But I have to realize there's more creatures above  
As I fade the sun radiates and I start to think more  
I am glad I'm not hurting anymore  
You have finally left and left me alone  
You are gone  
No worries, no doubts to think about



## **Home**

Home can be a place or a feeling.

Home is quiet.

Home is cozy.

Home is beautiful.

Home is where you feel safe.

Home is where you sleep at night.

Home is family.

Home is peaceful.

Home is warm

Home is laughter and fun.

Home is love.

## Epistle to Be Left in the Earth

...it's quiet

the sunflower fields don't sing sweet melodies

even the birds stopped singing

no one knows how long we'll be  
everyone just has to believe  
someone will find us one day  
under these big tall trees

we let the grass take over us

I don't think he is ready to take us

No thunder no rain just sunny days near

we know it is our time

the trees don't whoosh in anymore

the river isn't as clear

while the earth still rotates

So enjoy your time here

When we start to rise and that's when

## **A Girl Named Zoey**

I remember in my early years watching Mama surf near our beach house. While Father was cooking in the kitchen, he had asked me to get Mom to come and eat dinner. So I did... but it was too late. She was gone. The ocean was blood red. Crying, scared, I screamed, "Mom...! Where are you...? Hello...? Mom!" My dad rushed out of the house.

"Something's wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"The ocean is bloody and Mom isn't there." I started to have a panic attack. My father called the police. I was in my room watching out of the window when I saw my father fall to his knees, bawling. I've never seen him cry before. And that's when I knew she was gone, gone for good....

### **2 years later**

I can still see her beautiful blonde hair blowing in the wind.... I miss her. Father had changed a lot since then he started to hit me, abuse me, I didn't know how to describe it but I just know it hurt. I never fought back when he hurt me because I figured he was just sad because he had just lost his wife. He would lock me in the basement when my chores weren't done. He would apologize and say it's only because I look too much like Mama but I thought it was a good thing. He started to drink and smoke. I believe a whale or a shark had killed Mama; he never told me. I just knew she was dead. We moved out of the beach house and into the country during the beginning of this summer. I guess Dad had to get away from there. I would always catch him sitting by the beach staring at the water.

One day, Father had gotten really mad at me so he punched me in the face. We both had a shocked look on our face. "Don't give me that look, Mari." Father called me by my middle name when he was mad. He pushed me into the basement and locked the door. I cried, hoping things would get better. A few hours later I hear the door opening and the smell of a cigar. Father had walked in with a knife in his hand. FATHER HAD GONE INSANE. He started to chase me around the house with it. I got really scared so I grabbed my bag and ran out of the front door. Into the woods. "Get back here Mari!" my father yelled. I didn't want to go back home.

I found myself in the middle of the woods crying and breathing heavily. I fell to my knees while crying and begging god to change my life or make Father better. Hours went by and it was getting dark. I decided to get comfortable. I pulled the blanket that was in my bag out and laid it on a pile of leaves. I had nowhere else to go. All my family was back near the beach house and so were my friends. My mom was gone. And I was just stuck with a crazy abusive dad. I had nothing else to give or live for. My life was officially over.

## **Nobody but Somebody**

I don't really know who I am

I feel empty

Like a ghost

Almost like I'm not there at all

Most people look past me

Like I'm not important

But I don't blame them

I've never understood me either

I always felt basic or like a nobody

But I know I'm somebody

I just have to find her

## **I am from**

I am from books  
From bookmarks and highlighters  
I am from the peace and quiet  
(white, peaceful, silence so loud you can hear it)  
I am from sunflower fields  
Whose petals are as bright as the sun  
I'm from smartness and movies  
From "stop arguing" and "don't be shy"  
I'm from church on Sundays  
I'm from Lafayette and the Smiths  
Crawfish and gumbo  
From my sister going to the military to getting pregnant  
The crazy old school stories my grandma would tell  
On the entry table lies old Christmas pictures  
I am from love.

## **Girl**

Keep your legs crossed while sitting down; don't wear anything too short; "It's not too short, it's only a little above my knees!" "Too much skin showing"; do the dishes; present yourself like the young lady you are; work hard for what you want; "I'm trying!" "Try harder next time"; don't be shy; speak up; respect your elders; stop having an attitude; why are you so quiet; you're too soft; smile more; stop talking so much; don't touch that; nothing's wrong with you, you'll be fine; calm down, it's not that deep.

## **Korie**

Korie is a beautiful name, at least to me.

I don't think there is a meaning to it, but it means something to me.

I believe that's what makes me me.

To me, Korie means amazing. Smart, kind, and beautiful because that is me.

## **Madelyn Taylor**

Madelyn, also known as Maddie, is a young girl who just decided to take Creative Writing. She found no interest in any other classes, so she just chose this one. She wrote some very slay boss poems and enjoyed her time at the Advance Program.



## **The Necklace**

I was rummaging through my jewelry box when I realized it had gone missing. It was the necklace my mother gave to me before she went off to join the army. I was seven at the time, and now I'm eighteen. I was born in 2000, so I'm a 2000s baby. I was raised by my father after my mother left, and he's loaded so I've gotten anything I've ever asked for. Except to see my mother. I haven't seen her in nine years. She's still alive, we call regularly, but we haven't seen each other since she left.

I can't find my necklace anywhere. I got our butler to help me look all over the house, but it wasn't anywhere. I finally remembered how I had it on at my ex-boyfriend's beach house. He was having a beach party, and I got drunk. I wanted to go swimming so I took it off and sat it somewhere. I don't remember where I sat it, all I remember is that I walked in on him cheating on me so I broke up with him. I've been crying over him so the necklace didn't cross my mind.

Later that day, I heard a knock on the door. It was him. I opened the door and he said, "Kasey, here's your necklace. I was cleaning up the beach house and found it in the pool house by the couch. I know it's important to you." I took the necklace from him and mouthed, "Thank you," and then closed the door.

## **Epistle To Be Left in The Earth**

For whom may find this  
That water is useful, but dangerous  
The grass grows because of the star in the sky  
Buildings were man made

The earth cries, be prepared for that moment.  
The flowers were once colorful  
The trees had leaves  
That the birds sung on

For whom may find this  
The earth once thrived.

## **All a Plan...**

“Running through the woods, I felt violently ill. Hot tears were streaming down my face. I couldn’t see, which caused me to trip and break the compass I was holding. It smashed into pieces. ‘Stupid tree branch!!’ I yelled as I sat up. My head was pounding, I hit it so hard on the ground. I ran my hand across my face and pulled it down only to see blood on my fingers. I got back up on my feet and walked to the nearest stream there was, which was only like five minutes away. I slowly removed the piece of windshield glass out of my forehead and threw it. I cleaned myself up and began walking straight, until I found the nearest road. I followed that road for about an hour until I found a house. I asked the person if I could call the police, and they said sure, so now I’m here. Anyways, I got into a wreck. A very bad wreck. In Shoresburg, at intersection 69. My son was in the vehicle with me. He was sitting in the back in his carseat. He’s only two months old. I was on the way to the store to get a few things, and decided to bring him with me. Well, he started crying, so I reached back there to give him a toy and let him know that I was there. But as I was looking back, I didn’t realize that the light was red, so I accidentally ran it. A black 2022 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 hit my car. We tumbled into the woods, and once the car was still, I got out. I knew my son didn’t make it, so I just ran to get help. And that’s the story...” I told the police to get them off my back. Nobody needs to know that I murdered my son and I was going to dispose the body. I became pregnant with him as Roe v. Wade went into action, and I didn’t want him but I couldn’t get an abortion. So I had to wait nine whole months. I then needed to recover before I did anything so I waited two before I actually killed him. And now here I am, sitting back at my house, knowing that the kid I didn’t want is dead, and it worked out for me.

## **Learning to Love My Body**

Because it was the one given to me

Because it is the perfect one for me

Because it is beautiful

Because it is unique

Because it fits me

Because it was made for me

Because it supports all my needs

Because it stores my food

Because it allows me to do things

Because it is mine.

## **Ode to the Sun**

Ode to the Sun  
That gives us great light  
And provides warm delight

Ode to the Sun  
That helps the plants grow  
Making the green grass glow

Ode to the Sun  
That is a ball of gas  
That helps us see color through glass

Ode to the Sun  
That provides playtime  
During the daytime

Ode to the Sun  
That helps us see color  
And my loving Mother.

## **Invisible Man**

On this lovely evening, she sat in the field.  
Listening to the calm water,  
Whispering as it passed through the tiny hot spring.  
The red wildflowers were blowing.

The wind on the horizon blew out the candle,  
The garden of flowers swayed.  
The voices of the wind were crying peacefully.  
The roots of the tree were bulging.

The face was invisible from the eyes of hers.  
As she sat were his bones lie  
Picking at the flowers be planted perfectly  
Where he went missing long ago.

## **I Wish to Be...**

I wish to be a butterfly  
Where I could fly away at any time  
Where I could be admired by others  
Where I could hide at any time  
Where I could fit in  
Where my beauty is appreciated  
Where flowers of all kinds are my diet  
Where I came from an ugly creature to be pretty  
Where I am not judged for how I look  
Where nature is my home  
Where I am left at peace  
Where I have no limits  
Where I can be free  
Where I can be the perspective of a butterfly  
Where I can feel the way a butterfly feels  
Where boundaries don't exist  
Where I am not seen as weird  
Where the sky's my limit  
Where I don't have to deal with the real world  
Where it can all just be a dream

## **Royal Wedding**

The crown sat evenly perched on the silk pillow.  
Showing the polished pinky-purple gems.  
No other flowers could compare to lotuses.  
The queen has carefully picked the pink ones.  
The wedding venue was surrounded by fireflies.  
For Aspen was ready to marry his bride.  
As she walked down the perfect aisle, shots were fired.  
The shot wounds were made on the royal prince.  
The wedding was ruined by the most loyal woman.  
It was the beautiful bride, walking down the aisle.



## **Brian**

I couldn't believe my eyes when the people were rioting in the street. The townspeople were protesting about getting rid of the library to put in a fast food restaurant. The library had been there since the town began so it was very important. The people were furious when they found out so they all got together and began rioting in the street. The riot lasted for hours until one of the men of the change ran outside and ripped up the contract. Everyone began cheering: "Brian! Brian! Brian!" He was praised for days. People brought him food and bought him gifts. They had a party and made him the new mayor. They even bought him a new house and car with the money that was for the restaurant. Brian had an awesome life. And guess what, I'm Brian. Little did those idiots know that it was all a big scheme. I am currently sitting in my new house's garage, staring at my new car, and going through all these stupid gifts I got. Some idiot bought me a bidet. These people are fools. I hope you enjoyed. -Brian <3

## **Lady**

“Change your shorts, they’re too short.”

“Don’t eat with your mouth open.”

“Quit smacking.”

“Clean your room so it looks nice for our guest.”

“Stay away from him, he’s bad.”

“Don’t do that, it’s not ladylike.”

“Don’t say that.”

“Quit laughing like that.”

“Dress properly.”

“Take your time at work.”

“Go change.”

“Don’t spend your money on stupid things.”

“Quit acting like a floozy.”

“Don’t talk back.”

“Do it again.”

“Clean the house by yourself.”

“Dress like a lady.”

“Act like a lady.”

“Eat like a lady.”

“Laugh like a lady.”

“Don’t wear makeup.”

“I’m watching you.”

“That top is too revealing.”

## **Addison Victorian**

Heyo, my name is Addison. I am an ADVANCE student of 2022. This year I took Creative Writing, and it was so much fun! I highly recommend this class, especially if you're a first year since you're so new. Both Reid and Ralph are super chill and amazing. My favorite color is anything pastel. My favorite TV show currently and will forever be Pokémon. May Eevee always protect you and the courtyard. In Eevee we trust. U-U.

## Where the Wildflowers Shake

At 17 years old, I was always lost. Not physically, but mentally. I remember the horrific sound of doors opening and closing because every time they did, it was always the cousin I was closest to. Carson. Now here's the thing about Carson, he was always so protective of me. Too protective. Now you see, he killed both of our parents on my seventh birthday. He killed everyone I loved. Everyone in our family to where it was just me and him. He always took such good care of me, in exchange for my silence, of course.

One day we watched the movie Cruella, in which I found my new role-model. I've been plotting my revenge on Carson ever since. So now I sit here in my room, writing down ideas of murder. I got an idea. I ran to the living room and begged Carson to drive me to the store so I could get new ramen. He set his tea down and gave in eventually. He told me to go start up the car so he could grab his wallet. So, I ran outside and did as I was told. I jumped in the passenger's seat as Carson slid in the driver's.

Once we made it to the store, I jumped out and ran to the flower section. I grabbed white roses then ran to the pasta section, grabbing the ramen I wanted as well. Now Carson, he's allergic to flowers; however, it gets deadly when it's wildflowers. He saw me with the roses and raised an eyebrow, sneezing into his arm. "Excuse me, what do you have those for, silly?" I looked him dead in the eyes and hugged the flowers tight. "Mom and Dad's anniversary is today. I wanted to get the something." He laughed but nodded. We made our way to the check-out line, and he paid for my stuff.

After a while we drove to the cemetery. I replaced the lupines that were in there with the roses and took the lupines home. I grinded up the wildflowers and sprinkled every piece in his tea, bringing it to him and placing it on the coffee table. He smiled at me then took a sip. I smiled at him with wrath instead of love as he dropped the cup. I watched as his eyes rolled out and the purple liquid drooled from his mouth. I laughed a bit and went to bury him. I spent three days picking lupines to put in the vase of his grave. I read the writing on the tombstone. "In loving memory of Carson Yumenneix. 2000-2022." I added a bit onto it in my mind. "Cause of death, me." I cackled at the thought of it as I kicked his grave and walked off.

## **Advance**

Sleepy but,  
    So fun, writing and speaking  
        So much Love, peace.

## **My Broken Tune**

Outside I play a butterfly's piano, Oh  
Fly, the rain putters against the keys, Oh sigh  
Thou please come, music shall invade ears, Oh my.  
The sky cries in sorrow of my broken tune.  
Oh cry, oh cry, a disgrace is my tune.  
A book of melodies, I write for my piano.  
Butterflies shall weep when they hear my tune, Oh Joy.  
My fingers play a majestic sound, Oh My.  
A sound, a song, a tune, a rhyme, my time.  
Upon this butterfly piano, I play a broken tune.

## **Field Trip**

Dragonflies soar over the historic fort.  
Cold coffee and tea on a hot, sunny day.  
Tired, and honestly, bored and numb.  
Haiku? Nah, not today.  
Hot, hot, hot, bored, bored, bored.  
Poetry to get my mind to focus on something,  
Anything!  
Sound of coffee being made.  
Rocks being kicked.  
An untitled poem to pass the time, and yes, it's made by Addison.

## **My Parents**

My parents are full of love and pride,  
I love my parents more than they think.  
They're always here for me, and I'm grateful.  
I love my parents.

## The Majestic Turtle

At the age of five, my dad always told me, “Mike, never ever lose this map. Ya hear me?” Of course, I said yes, but me being five I was watching monkeys fight and scream on National Geographic.

By the age of ten, my dad sent me out to go follow the map. I was now fourteen and still trying to follow this dumb map. I found this beach place and decide to just chill out for a bit.

I stayed here, tanning for at least a good while. “This is fine.” I told myself, enjoying the sound of waves crashing. That didn’t last long when I heard feet patting against the sand.

I jumped up, grabbing my spear. I saw a little turtle and dropped it as quickly as I picked it up. “Hey there little guy, you lost?” I scooped up the little turtle and smiled at it. I used to have a pet turtle, when I was seven. Until my dad stepped on it, then I cried. The little turtle tried to waddle out my hands, but I caught it just in time. “Let’s go explore.”

So, I took the turtle with me on the journey. I was so close to the end, I could feel it. Once I did make it, I came across a cliff. “Are you kidding me?!” I almost screamed. A siren was what I heard a moment after. “Come join the rave! All you gotta do is jump down!” I took a step back, holding the turtle close. The siren screamed as she disintegrated.

‘I’m gonna name you Gerald,’ I told the turtle. The turtle closed one eye and then the other. “No? How about Trevor?” The baby turtle began to waddle out my hands and down the cliff. I gasped, about to cry as it did, until emerald green smoke surrounded me.

Then low and behold, a six-year-old magic turtle girl with magenta hair and sapphire blue eyes stared at me, smiling. She had on a green robe with a little turtle on the sleeve. “The name’s Lana, and I’m your guardian spirit.”

I stared at her in shock. “Absolutely not. Nope, not today,” I said as I went to jump off the cliff before she caught me. I sighed. “Why?” I ask. “This is so weird.” She laughed at me. “You gotta fix yourself up, toots.” I rolled my eyes. “Where do I start?” She looked at me for a bit, staying quiet. Then she told me, “Trust.”

## **An Ode to Stars**

The light that is just enough to fill up the sky.  
The hot burning gas that are miles away and will dance for you.  
Just enough and more to count off to help yourself sleep.  
Stars are like people,  
Just are, and even then,  
We still cannot compare.  
For we are all still too noisy.

## **Let the Stars Dance**

I prefer not to fixate on the big,  
Instead, I'll showcase the small.  
I have seen the Sun; I have seen the Moon.  
Now I shall showcase the stars.

Read the lines I say aloud,  
A story is told through the star's formation.  
Dippers, and belts, and shapes.  
Each has its own line to speak.

Let the planets gossip about Earth.  
Let the Sun and the Moon bicker like an old married couple.  
The stars will speak on their own, each night.  
Because every time it falls, the same story is never told twice.



## **Family**

My eyes light up with love and stars when I see them,  
My parents I mean.  
I run to them with open arms, a warm embrace is what I crave.  
From my family, and they all read my mind.  
They do what they can to help me,  
And I do what I can to help them.  
My brother is never bored,  
He always cares.  
So bright, so fun,  
Every time I return, he has a story to tell.  
I love my family.

## **Words**

Words, words, words.  
The world could go without them, yet we need them.  
Honestly, it would be better if everyone were silent.  
Take a moment to meditate, fixate on nothing.  
Words are careless yet cautious,  
Unimportant yet we need them,  
Noisy but quiet,  
Dangerous but helpful,  
Hurtful yet meaningful.  
Yada, yada, yada, etcetera, etcetera.  
All people do is go on and on with words.  
The world should be quiet,  
Maybe then we'll have peace.

## **Homage To Me**

Homage to me and my time,

Homage to my body, and soul, and words, and shape.

I am both curved and carved beautifully.

For each scar is a star, a beautiful shimmer.

My lips shall hold stories for the youngin's to listen to about me in my past.

My mind works with my mouth to think about what I say to everyone before I can say the wrong thing.

For that might just get my life killed.

For I am a beautiful flower which will never wilt nor shiver at the slightest of touch.

For I am a beautiful Lupine where I stand tall and strong, growing wildly.

Though I have been tamed all my life, no one can stop me now.

For I will be myself, my beautiful self, and hold it up for others to see, not touch.

So, homage to me, and my beautiful self.

## **For I Will Consider My Time**

Time is not for me,  
Time is for all,  
Yet I need it desperately.  
Not as much as others do.  
For all my time has been wasted on trying to be the perfect daughter in life,  
For what?  
Just to get into some college.  
For only four to eight years?  
To get a job in which will be temporary in life.  
Just so I can waste away my precious self over other things, having no happy memories.  
No memories of childhood, and play.  
Of time being wasted foolishly.  
No, my time has been wasted tutoring and being tutored the same things I already know,  
For I need something new.  
For my time has been spent, trying to bring pride and honor to my family's name.  
Yet pride is one of the most seven deadliest sins.  
For I will stop being envious of others and consider your time.  
For my deepest apologies to all I have offended.  
For first I shall consider you,  
Then secondly myself.

## **Natalie Weatherington**

Natalie Weatherington is a sixteen-year-old from Shreveport, Louisiana. She has moved around her whole life as a military brat and writes about her experiences as being a military kid as well as experiences many others can relate to. She enjoys writing stories the most and dreams of being a webcomic artist when she is older, as well as a tattoo artist.

## Morgan

Emily wasn't entirely sure what she was doing or why. She'd been in that house for twelve or so years. She was fed, sheltered, et cetera, but she knew that it wasn't right. Her mind blocked out the day she was taken there—she must have been five at the time, since he told her she was seventeen now—and she doesn't remember her life before him either.

Speaking of him, now that Emily was out here, barefoot, running on the asphalt road through the perfect cookie-cutter suburb, she felt guilty for leaving. For running away.

It was so easy. He left the key in the front door when he came back from his job. He simply walked past her, barked that he wanted some goddamn dinner and a beer—it was most definitely a bad day, normally she would have been greeted more kindly—and went to change. So she left.

It wasn't all bad there. The two of them had some good times. Like the first time he let her watch TV. She was ten years old. She ended up changing the channel to a documentary about tiger poaching. She felt so sad for those tigers. They were hunted and used. She ended up crying and sobbing incoherently. He held her and stroked her back in that way he always did. Emily realizes now that she was—still is—one of those tigers.

She had to keep going, she thought, shaking that memory off. She flung off the apron she was using to make his 'goddamn dinner' to the side. Maybe it'll throw him off, she thought.

Emily's feet were bleeding now—she could feel it. But she had to keep running, to find someone, anyone. Her eyes burned with tears, so she squeezed them shut. Her brain was screaming at her: *Go back! Go back! He'll find you, and when he does, he'll kill you for sure!*

Emily was just about to listen when she felt a different sensation on her feet and stopped. Softer than asphalt. She fell to her knees, finally realizing how exhausted she was, and opened her eyes.

Lavender. Lavender and lilies. She was in some sort of garden, it seemed. A *zip* flew right past her ear and she flinched. When she turned to find the source, she was met with many bumblebees, all flying about. The sun peeked over the horizon, letting her know how long she had been running. Emily had the urge to pick up a flower, so she did, and smelled it. It was a beautiful smell, like how relief feels.

Emily looked around again. The flowers, the bees, the sunrise. It was like a dream she had: that she would be free of him. She wasn't one of those tigers anymore. She was wild and free.

Emily couldn't help but sob at that thought. *Free*. A word she never thought would refer to her.

"Ma'am?" Emily flinched at the voice behind her. "Are you alright?" The question was not filled with malice. It was a genuine inquiry of Emily's wellbeing.

Emily turned to face the voice. A middle-aged woman was standing in front of her. The woman's expression quickly changed from worried to pure shock.

"Morgan?"

## **Free Kittens**

A box of kittens  
Filled with freshly fallen snow  
Lives taken too soon

## **Under the Bridge**

Daisies bloom under  
The bridge where they soundly sleep  
A bed of flowers

## **Rain**

Rain, rain, go away  
Actually, stay for awhile  
Need some company

## **Funeral Rites**

What is life  
If not the absence of it?

Why do we weep for the departed  
If they are somewhere better?

If the hot fires of hell are punishment  
Why must we burn our corpses?

Why do we stay  
Knowing death is out to get us?

## **Cycle**

Why does the sky weep  
For the ones that make her so?

Why does the rock crumble  
Under the tears that he holds?

Why does the tree grow  
In the rock she so avoids?

Why does man eat the fruit  
That the tree grew for the sky?

## Star-Crossed

*This was a mistake*, Andrew thought, staring up at the ceiling. It had to be about three AM. He was lying next to his wife, Keira, who was fast asleep. He looked at her now; she was peaceful, unhindered. He brushed silky hair away from her face.

Andrew swallowed bile and slowly stood up. He should have never let himself get so attached. The truth was: he was cursed. Every single one of his lovers had died a horrible death. His first girlfriend died in a car accident driving home from a party in high school. His second girlfriend died from complications with an illness. After three more girlfriends died, Andrew decided he had this curse. He stopped looking for love long ago.

But then there was Keira. Andrew fell fast and hard for her. She was beautiful in mind, body, and soul. Everything had happened so fast, and now here he was with her, married for almost thirteen years with a son of their own.

Andrew threw on the first clothes he saw and grabbed a bag he had packed a few days before. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath before giving one last kiss to Keira on the forehead.

Andrew walked out of the bedroom and started down the hallway when he heard laughs. *Alex*. Andrew opened the door to his son's room. The twelve-year-old was on his computer.

"Oh...hey, Dad..." Alex said, taking off his headphones. "Sorry, I was playing a game with friends. I know it's late—"

"It's fine. Just don't let your mother find out."

Alex smiled. "Thanks. Where are you going with that bag, by the way?"

Andrew grabbed a couple chips and ate them to stall his answer. "...Emergency at work."

Alex frowned, thinking for a moment. "Does Mom know?"

Andrew bit his cheek. "I... I didn't want to wake her. I... sent her a message."

Alex didn't seem to believe that answer, but didn't say anything. "Okay. Well, call us when you get the chance."

Andrew sighed. "Alex."

"Yes...?"

"...I love you."

"I love you too, Dad. What's going on?"

"Nothing's going on. But you know that I love you, right? And Mom?"

Alex gave a look of confusion. "Of course."

Andrew gave a soft smile. Quickly, he gave Alex a hug and a squeeze. "Don't stay up too late, bud." He walked out the door and closed it softly before Alex could respond. God, he's so glad Alex can't see him crying right now....

Andrew wasted no time in walking out the door. He had gotten his hopes up thinking this time would be different. But after the dream he just had... he wouldn't be able to live anymore if Keira or Alex were hurt. Andrew was mistaken to think this ever could have worked in the first place.

Andrew reached his destination before he even realized he had started driving: the beach. It simply felt right to come here. The salty ocean air made him feel at peace. But it also made him hurt.



He remembered going to the beach almost eleven years ago. Alex was so young. So were Andrew and Keira. The three of them were sitting on the sand, Alex in Keira's lap. Andrew held his camera, recording Alex's reactions.

"Look, it's Daddy over there! You want to say hi to Daddy?" Keira spoke in her soft voice she always used with Alex.

It was with that Alex stood up. The two parents waited with bated breath as Alex began to walk towards Andrew on the fluffy sand. The two were ecstatic. Alex giggled along with them.

Come to think of it, Alex's first words were at the beach, too. Keira's mom was there. She asked Alex who he thought Keira was, and he gave a soft "mama" in response.

Andrew realized how much he had been crying once he came back to the present. He sat on the short, feet tickled by the tide. Andrew froze for a second, trying to calm himself down, but it only made him cry harder.

He so badly wanted to stay with them, his family. But he had to let them go, for their own sake. God, what he wouldn't do to get rid of this evil curse he had.... Andrew had no idea what would happen now that he simply ran away. Would the curse still affect Keira since he still loved her? Would the curse break? Andrew hadn't a clue.

Andrew kicked himself for leaving. Keira was an understanding woman, surely he could have explained this to her. And after thirteen years? What would she think when she woke up alone?

The sun began to rise. It reflected onto the water almost like a painting. It reminded Andrew of when he proposed.

He checked the time on his phone: five-thirty AM. Keira should be waking up soon.

Andrew shook his head, his tears stopping. He couldn't bring himself to leave, not after all this time. Maybe the curse had broken, since it had been thirteen years. He stood up to head back home.

Maybe his real curse was that he couldn't stop loving.

## **Beating Heart**

My pen, whose ink is a story  
Each stroke is a new chapter.  
Whose barrel is a boat  
A vessel for my emotions.  
Whose cap is a womb  
Birthing places never traveled  
People never seen  
Knowledge never known.  
Whose tip is a blade  
A scalpel cutting into heart and soul  
Creating scars that last a lifetime  
Like an autopsy, a lobotomy of my inner thoughts.  
An organ,  
A beating heart.  
My pen whose barrel is bone  
The tip a vein  
Giving life to the ink.  
My pen whose tip is a finger.  
Whose barrel is a hand.  
My pen, whose ink is blood  
Spilling over paper like skin.  
My pen, who's an extension of me.  
My pen  
Whose heart beats as mine.

## **The Turtle and the Hare**

Time is a turtle:  
Tapping your feet and your pen  
Yawning and nodding your head  
Waiting for it to reach the finish line.

Time is a hare:  
Trying to catch it speeding past  
Seeing the dust settle behind  
Wishing you could chase after.

You never know which it'll be—  
The turtle or the hare—  
You just know they take shifts  
And you have to be ready to follow both.

Time can be too much or not enough.  
You can be rich;  
You can be poor.  
It always seems like there isn't enough to go around.

Some run out too soon,  
Some have plenty.  
Some try and get rid of theirs,  
Some try to get more.  
It slowly ticks away with every breath.

It's unfair you know,  
But they don't care.  
They're just doing their jobs  
As the turtle and the hare.

## Chrysanthemum Fields

Being lost in a field of flowers was not how Elliot wanted to spend the last—and possibly next—six hours, but yet here he was. At least he wasn't alone. His friend, Lana, was lost with him. The two of them were driving around looking for their other friend, Ashton, who went missing forty-eight hours earlier. Sure, the police were looking for him, but in this small town, not a lot gets done. So, Elliot and Lana drove around by themselves. Of course, by some stroke of bad luck, the engine stalled and Elliot's car broke down. The two settled for going on foot.

It was 4 AM now—10 PM when they got to the field—and the two had to get out their flashlights to see even just a few feet in front of them. The field was Ashton's favorite place, so if he was nowhere else in town and hadn't left yet, he would be here. But without their car and no service to look at their phones' GPS, they were lost.

"Haven't we been going straight the whole time?" Lana inquired. "Surely we can just turn around. Try again when we can get your car fixed."

Elliot shook his head. "We've been weaving. Besides, Ashton could be anywhere by the time it gets fixed. We have to keep looking."

"If you say so... we don't have any food, or water, or, you know, anything else—"

"Shh. Keep looking."

And so they did. The smell of various flowers—chrysanthemums, Ashton's favorites, were ones Elliot could identify—filled their nostrils, and the only sounds were the occasional animal or cricket and the grass beneath them.

Elliot was only thinking about Ashton. He was the same age as Lana, and Elliot was a couple of months older than them, so they were eighteen and nineteen respectively. High school had been rough for all three of them, and Ashton was always really excited to go to college. He got into MIT, for Chrissake, and was planning on majoring in robotics. He wore the same hoodie every day since he got in, an MIT one of course, and sewed patches onto the sleeves. Ashton wore these big round glasses and had brownish-blondish hair, which is how the missing person's reports described him. Elliot always thought of him as being extremely kind.

On the news, people said that Ashton going missing was just a simple run-away case. It didn't matter compared to missing children in the county. But Ashton *was* a child. Barely eighteen. Not only that, but anyone who knew Ashton knew he wouldn't ever run away, at least not without telling Elliot or Lana first.

"...liot... Elliot? Elliot! Earth to Elliot!" Lana waved her hand in front of his face.

"Hmm?" Elliot turned to her.

She grabbed his shirt to get him to stop walking. "Do you hear that?"

Elliot strained to listen. There was a rustling noise coming from behind. It stopped shortly after he heard it. "It's probably an animal. Or just the wind. Come on, let's keep going, we can't keep wasting time."

Lana didn't seem convinced, but followed after Elliot anyway. She walked faster than him, forcing his pace to match.

After what felt like another hour, Lana sat herself down, seemingly to take a break. Unwilling to continue on his own, Elliot sat down next to her.

Lana held her face in her hands. "Elliot... I don't think we'll—"

"No! Don't say that!" Elliot threw his flashlight down and grabbed Lana's hands. "We *have* to find him. We can't give up now!"

Lana shook her head and stood up. “This is ridiculous. We’re lost with no service, no car, no water. We should’ve left this to the police.”

“Last I checked, *you* suggested we go on foot.” Elliot stood up as well, taking his flashlight with him.

“As if! I said we should turn back five hours ago!”

“Yeah, because *you* can’t finish anything you start!”

Lana scoffed. “Oh, so we’re going there! Maybe if you weren’t so overzealous, we wouldn’t have gotten here in the first place!”

“Are you serious?! Sorry I want to find my *best* friend! Do you just not care or something?”

“I care! I care too much! That’s why I think we should leave this to the professionals—”

“If you really cared about Ashton, you wouldn’t have waited to look for him!”

“Then what were *you* doing the last fifty-something hours, huh?!” Lana stomped forward towards Elliot.

“I was texting! Calling! Contacting his family! Trying to figure out if *anyone* had heard from him! What were *you* doing?!” Elliot moved forward as well.

“I was beside myself! I couldn’t handle it—”

“Ashton would’ve dedicated his *life* looking for either of us! Maybe you should’ve gone missing instead!” Elliot froze. He wanted to take back what he said as soon as it came out of his mouth.

Lana seemed just as shocked. The two stood there frozen for a second before Lana’s eyes got wet with tears. She turned around in a random direction, walking faster than they were before.

“Lana—Lana!” Elliot called after her, following as fast as he could. “I didn’t mean it! I’m sorry! Please, you’ll only get more lost! Lana!”

She broke into a run, and Elliot followed suit. Eventually, Lana stopped, and Elliot wasn’t sure why, until he got close enough behind her. There was a rancid smell. Like rotting... something. Definitely worse than trash, puke, swamp... it was so disgusting. Indescribable, even.

“What *is* that?!” Lana said with a cough.

“I have no idea...” Elliot whispered, covering his face with his shirt-collar. “Do we... follow it?”

“You’re insane!” Lana said.

“Well, if we find whatever it is, it’ll at least give us *one* landmark we can use.”

“Fine, fine, but I’m leading this time...” Lana began to walk in the direction the smell was strongest.

A few moments of silence while trying not to sniff later, Elliot cleared his throat. “I really am sorry. I didn’t mean any of it. I just—”

“I know. I’m sorry too.” Lana left it at that.

The smell kept getting worse and worse, and the two were losing hope.

“Where *is* this thing?” Elliot whined.

“I hope it’s clo—” As if on cue, Lana tripped over something. Elliot shined his flashlight onto it.

What they saw was something neither of them expected. A person in an MIT hoodie with patches, round glasses broken next to their face. This face was completely missing. Blown off, to put it simply. Blood stained... everything. It was Ashton.

Lana let out a blood curdling scream, shuffling away from him. Elliot dropped his flashlight in shock, turned around, and promptly vomited.

Lana was mumbling through her hands, which she slapped over her mouth. Her breathing was labored, heavy.

“Ashton...” Elliot whispered. “Oh my god...”

The same rustling sound Lana pointed out earlier became louder. Elliot whipped his head around to see the source. As his back was turned, Lana let out another scream.

Lana was being attacked by a hooded figure in all black. The figure held a gun, and was currently trying to grab Lana.

“No!” Elliot chucked his flashlight at the figure, hitting them straight in the face. They let Lana go, and Lana immediately began running. The figure chased after Lana, and Elliot chased behind both of them.

*I can't let another one of my friends die!* Elliot thought, sprinting. Of course, he no longer had his light, thanks to his brilliant idea of throwing it.

Oddly enough, the figure seemed to know where they were going. Lana had been making zigzags, but the figure was going the same direction straight on. *Why hasn't this guy fired the gun?!* Elliot was afraid something bad was about to happen.

Eventually, they reached a clearing. Lana stopped, and the figure cocked their gun. Both Elliot and Lana put their hands up.

Elliot was panicking. No one would find them out here! No one!

“Put down your weapon!” Elliot turned around. A man in a suit held a gun, pointing it at the figure. The figure begrudgingly obliged.

Now, here he was: in the interrogation room of the local police station, recounting everything that went on. Elliot felt numb. None of that felt real. He saw his best friend's face blown off, for Chrissake.

“Thank you, Elliot. Your statement has been extremely helpful. You said you have no clue if the figure was the one who killed Ashton?” The man in the suit—a detective, Elliot found out—asked.

“No... I'm just assuming. Why else would that guy be in the field, and why would they want to hurt Lana—or, us?” Elliot shook his head. He couldn't bear to think about it.

“Trust me. We'll get to the bottom of this, kid. You better get something to eat, it's been, what, eight, nine hours you were in that field?” The detective walked out without another word.

Elliot let out a shaky sigh. He was glad that he and Lana survived that encounter, but their friendship would never be the same after what happened. He just hoped that Ashton wasn't mad at them for being too late.



