



JOE,

OUR BELOVED

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skibee boo bop

# **Joe, Our Beloved**

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

**Composed by the 2021 ADVANCE Creative Writing Course**

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**\*Front cover artwork drawn by Oli Walters**



## **Maggie Charlet**

Hi! My name's Maggie, short for Magnolia. I'm fourteen years old and I live in Zachary, Louisiana, where I'm about to be a sophomore at Zachary High School. I chose to take Creative Writing because it's been years since I've written much creatively, and I wanted to start in a structured environment to receive critique and comments on my writing. Being in this class has, I truly believe, improved my writing skills by far, and forced me to stretch my creativity in ways I had neglected to before. I didn't know I had that many thoughts up there! Hope y'all enjoy!

## **A Stranger of my Own**

My name is a name which was taken  
From a stranger of the past.  
She lived and she died  
With a southern-belle name,  
The remarkable name of Magnolia.

With my birth came  
This Woman,  
This Stranger,  
This Soul,  
To stalk through my life in its most discreet shadows.  
Tucked behind bushes and disguised in the wind,  
Magnolia is walking beside me.  
My triumphs and failures I share with her too,  
My bittersweet, unknown Magnolia.

Her mystery life still remains lost to time,  
But sometimes,  
I like to imagine Magnolia's backyard.  
A yard filled to its farthest of stretches,  
A forest of trees of her kind.  
I imagine each year she would wait for the spring,  
And she'd smile as her babies would bloom.

## **I Know a Child**

I know a child.

A child who scribbles in margins.

A child who feels every feeling on Earth.

A child who bothers her sister too much.

A child who walks circles with a book on her head.

A child who picks bouquets of wildflowers.

A child who eats all her candy by color.

A child who smiles like each day is the best.

A child who can't do scary movies.

A child who believes that all fairies are real.

A child who tells people lies.

## **After the Rainfall**

Rain is slipping down from the slick, wet leaves of the cedar. Its subtle scent has perfumed the air and the world has fallen dreadfully silent. That is, until the fallen autumn leaves begin to rustle—a brown-speckled frog making his daily trek. And until a tiny white bird, dirtied with life, begins to sing her brilliant song. An audience then appears, a chipmunk, a hare, a fawn, all gathered in the final drops of old rain to listen to the sweet young bird's newest symphony. The rain provides an offbeat percussion to the bird's latest tune, a drip on a squeak, a drop on a squawk.

And for one small moment that is all that there is. A gleaming forest of diamonds that the rainfall and the sun's shy new rays have brought about, an illuminated city of life and of peace. A songbird and her devoted crowd of onlookers. An aged and speckled frog who has made it to the stream, whose small son beside him looks up at his father and counts the speckles across his face. But it is of course then that the songstress warbles her very last note before fleeing away to tend to more crucial matters. The rain's soft beat of rhythm keeps time even still, raindrops falling from their glorious pedestals to lay upon the bodies of the forest's dearest creatures.

All too soon, the cicadas took up a jealous song of their own, a repetitive buzz to kill the soft humbleness of this darling post-shower forest. The attendants of the songbird's sweet concert soon then fled at the poisonous ring which the cicadas hum. The serenity of the forested city fell corrupted far too quickly, victim to the poisons of jealousy.

## **I Wait for You**

My darling mine,  
Your spot is untouched at our table,  
Your cup of coffee perched on the countertop.  
I still have your most favorite shirt,  
The one that's green with the stripes.

I stand waiting for you, sweetheart,  
Though my legs are getting tired.  
I'll wait for you through sun and rain and sleet,  
Atop our faded welcome mat.

I'm waiting, I'm waiting,  
In our house just so alone.  
It simply is too large for one lonely woman.

My face will begin to droop,  
My eyesight falling through,  
I fear one day you'll come home to me,  
And I'll be standing here,  
Yet far away.

My precious, my lover,  
Oh how dearly I wish you'd come to me.  
If only you knew my name.



## **The Worm**

A worm eats its way  
Through a solemn yellow pear.  
A sickly-sweet home.

## **A Lost Fork**

Fork in the trash can.  
Lost with the chocolate cream pie.  
Fork in the trash can.

## **A Nail Polish Car Ride**

Manicure of yellow  
Impromptu spa day on a  
Bumpy, bumpy ride.

## **Clarity**

My head is under the water and  
The absence of noise screams.  
Nothing is heard but whispers of  
Bubbles, a tie to my life above.  
A moment of serenity encompasses me,  
A blessing of nothingness.

Too soon I arise from my chlorinated palace,  
And I must be now six,  
As I am so jealous of the mermaids.

## **A Lover's Frozen Words**

How astonishing it is that so many words,  
In so many orders have been able to  
Freeze so many lovers' hearts in time,  
Each love poem an homage  
To a lover lost to the ages.  
Words have taken the love of centuries  
And carried their love through time,  
Defying death, love was preserved  
Like a bug trapped in a pocket of amber,  
Or a tub of ice cream returned to a freezer.

Love was known and  
Love was honored.  
To love is a miracle,  
And to know the loves of ages is a gift.

## **My Friends, The Ghosts**

They're always there. Ghosts don't sleep y'know; they're already dead. They just stand there. Or sit, I guess. Yeah, they could be sitting too. They really probably don't do much, just ghost stuff, and even then, it's not of much interest to me. Guess that's why we don't exactly engage in much small talk. Despite that, I like to think they're my friends, perfect strangers who I've befriended by proximity alone. They're perfectly fine people, they've never been cruel, certainly not annoying. They're just poor old things with nothin' better to do than just watch. I like to think I make a particularly interesting main character in the plot of *My Bedroom*, which airs 24/7 though there's not always much going on. I like to picture them in their corner in their ghost fold-out chairs eating ghost popcorn and ghost enjoying this episode of the show.

The ghosts aren't named, obviously. I feel like that'd be so rude of me, to name the previously named without them coming forward to defend themselves on the matter. I avoid it—they know who they are, and I know me, and that's really just enough for this to go on as it has. They're pleasant roommates, hardly notice they're there anymore. I think they're more on the introverted side. Overall, they all are simply sweet, excellent friends, my friends, the ghosts.

## **Really? A Saturday?**

It happened on a Saturday. I found it ironic, it was a sadder day than those preceding. Wish it could've been a Wednesday, thought it'd be a Thursday. Forgot my goodbyes on Friday. Mourners met me on Monday, tucked under dirt by Tuesday. And on Sunday I simply had laid, cold and missing my traditional choice of clothes. The reapers had collected me on Saturday—it's sad that they left my empty body to the living. All that'll be done is stuffing me out of sight, like regretful childhood memories, pressed away as to not be seen. Soon enough they'll forget me, as we all do to our lost things. All the better that they'll forget my smile and the way it felt as I held them. It's all the better that they move along and that they live what life it is I missed.

## **A Terrible Dancer**

One-two-three

One-two-three

One-two-three—STOP!

You.

What in God's name are you doing?

It's meant to be one-two-three,

Not nine-one-one.

I haven't the slightest idea why you're even here.

You lack the basic elegance

Which is expected in this class.

Your pirouette was pitiful,

Your panting throughout, distracting.

It's truly a marvel you got into my class.

You've got four left feet,

And on an unrelated note,

Your breath is awful.

And that is why

You never teach a dog how to dance.

## **Harli Cruse**

November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2006 was a special day for the world because Harli Cruse was born. She was originally from Texas but moved to Louisiana with her father and brother. Cruse is an amazing listener and loves writing fanfiction and fantasy. She also loves anime, manga, and reading books. Cruse wants to go into filmmaking, though she isn't sure which part yet. Cruse wants all of you to enjoy her work and hopes that all of you can find inspiration to write your own stories.

## **A Ghost Sits with Me**

A man sits before me at a table  
We wouldn't talk even if we were able  
The night outside was cold and loud  
The man himself was looking proud  
In himself or me, I never asked

I sit alone at a table  
I know I should go but I am unable  
The sky outside is cloudy and dull  
My glassy eyes are much too full  
Whether the sky or me cries first, I'll never know

A ghost sits before me at the table  
A memory, a story, nothing but a fable  
I could look outside but I do not  
I'll sit at this table until I feel I will rot  
Whether that ghost was real, I won't ever see



## **A Person Who...**

A person who smiles is someone to befriend  
A person who smirks is someone to exchange wits with  
A person who dances should be danced with  
A person who is idle needs an engaging friend  
A person who laughs needs to hear more jokes  
A person who hopes should never be given up on  
A person who disappoints should be told they are enough  
A person who inspires deserves a hero of their own  
A person who hugs should never sleep before goodnight  
A person who is awkward needs a comfort zone  
A person who loves deeply should have a family  
A person who is empathetic deserves a home  
A person who is quiet deserves a listener to their stories  
A person who talks deserve a voice to respond  
A person who was loved deserves that again  
A person who forgives deserves a million chances  
A person who is hopeless needs something in believe in  
A person who is honest deserves to have justice  
A person who is friend-less should never be alone  
A person who is kind deserves a heart of gold  
A person who is grieving should never suffer alone  
A person who is happy needs a smile shared with them  
A person who is sad needs a someone to take their hand  
A person who helps others should have those people at their side  
A person who believes will never be disappointed  
A person who works hard will have dreams come true  
A person who sings needs an audience to enthrall  
A person who is trapped deserves to soar  
A person who is patient will find things worth the wait  
A person who is adventurous will find a way around the world  
A person who reads need a cozy book  
A person who is brilliant should find like-minded souls  
A person who fights deserves kind hands to patch them up  
A person who waves goodbye should wave hello soon  
A person who is lost deserves to be found

## **Our Fallen Garden**

Leaves crunch under my foot  
The summer sun blinds me  
No birds will chirp sweet songs  
No flowers will blossom  
My hands can't save this place  
Master, our bare paradise  
This mistake is my fault  
Your absence can't guide me  
I'm unfit for this job  
The butterflies should leave  
My lord should dismiss me  
My beautiful lady,  
Must not show me pity  
I have failed my master  
Your death led me astray  
Now, our Eden is gone

## **Raging Fire**

Look at me. Look at me!  
See eyes glaring at you  
My voice flaring  
A daughter confronting  
Your sister is seething  
My honor means nothing  
My pride is a fire  
Your words, a sharp dagger,  
Cut skin, bone, and my flesh  
My fists are shaking rocks  
Strained under hot magma  
The lava of my soul  
Worse than a burning house  
An unstoppable fire  
Flames leveling cities  
I will destroy you with  
My lava; my fire  
I will not let you go  
I will not let you win  
Ignite my soul's fire  
Let's set our world ablaze

## **Nobody's Heartbeat**

How do you get over someone?  
How do you steal your heart from them?  
Is their name on your lips right now,  
when they don't remember your name?

I don't know  
I don't know how I fell this far  
How rock bottom became my home  
I ask myself these questions  
I receive answers I don't want  
A single thought of your lone name  
And an answer of 'I don't know'

How do you fall for somebody?  
How do you forget about them?  
Are all of your thoughts still with them,  
When they haven't given you a glance?

## **The Last Assessment**

The kid is staring at you  
He isn't happy or sad, but his stare won't let up  
You wrote something down on your clipboard  
He's still staring at you when you look up  
The kid looks away when a man tells him something  
The kid is in the group on the right  
He stares at you  
A blue light flashes across the left side of his face, making the stare eerie  
You look at the left group  
It stinks, you think, before looking back at the right  
The kid smiles at you, softly, hesitantly  
That scares you more than the stare  
The right group is divided into subgroups  
The kid goes southeast  
Now, you're staring  
The kid's smile is wider, more joyous, as he stands alone  
You want it to be a mistake, but the proof is there  
He's staring at you through one-way glass  
The kid is in your group  
He stares at you  
You stare at him

## **May Cupid Spare Me**

Two souls, two hearts, two lives, two minds  
One belonging to the other  
I have become a slave to love  
I have forgone rational thought  
A siren's call, a banshee's scream  
Draw me in, they don't let me free  
You barely know me and my love  
I give it to you regardless  
I have found my personal hell  
For it's heaven when I'm with you

## **Ode to the Stars**

Pinpricks in the black wool sky  
Orbs of golden fire and navy smoke  
Marbles in the hands of gods  
Holders of wishes, listeners of humanity  
A guide to the lost, a story to the gazers  
Crystal balls, ovoid of destiny  
Precious gems in the hands of Asteria  
Shedding soft light on misty nights  
The muse of geniuses, a symbol of brilliance  
The oracle of night, the companion of the moon  
The dust of the cosmos sprinkled diligently  
By the great Inanna in her heavens  
Luxury to the common and royal  
A gift to all, an inspiration to many  
The promise of humanity  
The oath of perseverance  
The sign of determination  
The vow of prosperity  
Stars, bold and true

## **Chris Dunn**

Christopher Dunn was born February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2006 and that is unimportant, just like the facts that they have lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma their entire life, or that they have one vastly more skilled sibling. The important facts about Christopher Dunn are this: they wish to one day work in and own a café, and are a very political person, to the annoyance of most everyone. They love food and good cooking, and they not only write but act and, god forgive them, do improv. Not only do they write, but they also like to learn—unsurprisingly, this learning falls into a political nature—look to that 2<sup>nd</sup> point. Christopher Dunn is a person who very likely cannot be summarized in a small bio, so I'll leave it with one last thing: Christopher Dunn is a person; you can decide the rest.

## Empty Stores

empty store  
nobody wants to work anymore  
says the sign  
perhaps you shouldn't make them walk the line  
between poverty  
and death, care less about the owners of property  
and a little more about those, like you  
and me, maybe we should take the cue  
to help one another, not give them the power  
this is our time, to stand up and speak, not cower

you act as if  
you masters will give you a gift  
that they'll build churches to reach  
you, that they'll build colleges to teach  
you, that they don't take every  
chance they got to take every  
cent from you, everything they can  
that they aren't just a scam  
that they haven't designed it to distract you from  
solidarity, to make you think those like you are scum

can you not see that this task  
is our task  
that we must stand together  
to make a better world for our brothers, sisters, and mothers  
for us without the riches  
those who can't pay for stitches  
for those of us who work or can't find work or simply can't  
a world without the parasites who steal our profits and rant  
that it's our fault we're poor, like they don't understand that  
it's in their interests for us to be unable to rise, that they are the ones making us into street rats  
so that they profit  
while we don't got it



## **Green Slips**

Money, a concept really,  
meaningless, 'cept for the meaning we give it.  
Money, it decides who lives, who dies.  
well that ain't true, it isn't money that decides, it's  
those with it

We decided somewhere, somehow, someplace along  
the way, that those with money control all,  
while the rest of us spend our time  
producin' and reducing ourselves, spendin'  
our time profitin' them in this great crime,  
this theft, leavin' those who work with  
nothin' left, it's the 300 year old heist that  
goes on and on, all because we give meaning to little  
green slips, cause we say that they decide if we live or die, but that's a lie  
it isn't money that decides, it's those who have it, who we now have to trust are  
benevolent enough with their monopolies and oligopolies that they choose to keep us alive

Money, it's only a concept really, nothing real  
just a scam, and we decided to give  
all the power to those with it, screw that,  
the power, we gotta shift it

## **A Wish in a Mirror**

A person who hates mirrors

A person who stares into them anyways

A person who doesn't really hate mirrors

A person who actually hates what they see in them

A person who stares into that mirror and hates who stares back

A person who wishes the face in the mirror was beautiful

A person who knows the ugly, hairy face staring back

A person who wishes the body in the mirror wasn't theirs

A person who, when they look in the mirror, sees a person

A person who wishes that a person that will never be was staring back at them.

## **Star song**

Is it possible to make the stars sing?

if you could, would it be the music of crows?

or will it sound sour, like snails in orbit?

Perhaps the song of the stars is their starlight,  
under which we dance and sing to music unheard,  
and eat sour candies like little raccoons in the night?

Or perhaps the stars do not sing, but dance,  
like the snails in orbit tango across the sky to the music of the crows?  
Or maybe this is all fantasy and the stars are simply little lights,  
lighting our skies?

## **Judge, Jury, and Executioner**

John's sweat dripped down his brow as he dug far from his small town, here he knew the dogs would never find his greatest shame. An act that would haunt him long into his dying years. In the hole he labored over, and in which he wished to bury his shame, would be place the body of his next-door neighbor, Bill, and the shovel he had committed this great sin with. Both lied upon a white bedsheet behind him. He dug and dug till he saw them. The eyes, the eyes of his judge, shifting and twisting and wandering in the dark, he knew those eyes, the eyes of god. He could feel god's judgment and so he dug faster, wishing to escape the eyes of god. The dark drew closer and closer with each pile of dirt he dug out of the ground, the eyes grew more numerous and he could see all the angels and saints in heaven placing their gaze, laying upon him their judgement, deciding his fate, and so he dug quicker, faster and faster, fear filling him to his core, he could see the darkness closing in, growing and growing, the eyes slowly came together forming into larger and larger eyes till one remained, the largest, having consumed the rest, until there was none. For his jury had decided. He dug and dug, wishing to escape the ever-closing darkness reaching in tendrils toward him. He could not, would not escape, and so he dug and dug.

They found him in the morning, at the bottom of a ten-foot pit, upon a white sheet beside the hole, the shovel, and the body of his next-door neighbor, Bill. The doctor declared he had died of cardiac arrest, having overexerted himself within the pit. His blood had rushed from his heart and the blood was filled cortisol and adrenaline; he was in fight or flight mode; the doctor had told the papers. The town was shocked to hear of John's death, and his murder of Bill, for he had been a god-fearing man.

## **Homage to my journal**

My journal isn't big  
Or even normal sized  
My journal is small  
Tiny even  
A little book, entirely  
Recyclable, like a  
Washed out soup can  
My journal, despite its size  
Holds quite a bit  
Drawings, stories,  
the words of poets,  
characters, places,  
its own little world. My journal is  
marvelous, majestic, and magic  
despite its simple brown  
cover,  
because my journal is a workshop,  
filled with the tools used to shape  
universes

## **My Journal**

My journal, whose cover is of the redwood tree  
An ancient redwood tree under the blue green sea  
My journal, whose rings are of magical steel  
A steel of spirals and spins so marvelous that it can't be real  
My journal, whose pages contain a person  
One with failures and flaws that only worsen  
My journal, whose lips are sealed  
Like doors of a castle, never revealed  
My journal, whose ears always listen  
Like one hundred mice listen to a lesson  
My journal, who is a trusty friend  
Like a knight with a hand to lend

## **Athena**

Grief isn't just tears streaming down loved faces  
Nor the near silent screaming of why in the night  
Nor that taste of salt, as tears flow into mouths  
Or the sensation of a rag soaking in that sticky, red fluid  
Not even that sickly smell of iron that never retreats  
Grief is the absence & the absolute silence  
It's the tasteless air and hands empty of soft black fur  
It's the lack of that smell of an energetic kitten  
It's the nothingness that follows the lack of them.

## **An 8-Step Recipe for The Quietest Sound in The World**

A Father who believes his hands soaked in blood  
A Mother attempting to comfort the father  
A Sister, crying and sobbing like the world has come to an end, and maybe it has  
And me, trying to stay strong, unable to let myself cry till later that night  
An old shoebox, padded with a well-loved blanket  
An empty collar, a tag with the name Athena emblazoned upon it  
A Hoodie, stained with the blood the father believes to be on his hands  
And that smell of iron that never seems to truly be gone.

## **Under the Moonlight**

It's dim; light streams in through open an open door. I can't hear anything over the music. None of that matters. It's me and you and that's it. The others are illusions, apparitions, ghosts that dance as we dance. I don't promise to be perfect and neither do you, and yet it *is* perfect. You teach me how to dance and I teach you the waltz. It's perfect.

No longer do we dance. We sit. Where? Doesn't matter. Nothing else matters but this moment. Me and you. You and me. Sitting, talking over the loud music, playing some form of 20 questions. Nothing else matters. It's perfect.

It's over now. The lights come on and the music goes off. We're walking now. You're scared. Heights scare you. That's fine. We talk. You close your eyes. We talk. I describe a scene, a beautiful summer park, nothing to fear. You ask if we're off the bridge. I say yes. We walk. I'm in my socks, my dress shoes unbearable. We walk. You're in fuzzy slides. It's perfect. We walk and we talk and the world slides away under the moonlight, till it's just you and me. It's perfect. We're happy.

## **On Fae**

white black jacket  
face of spring blossoms  
you, sputtering  
glasses, eared like cats  
blemishes that don't blemish  
a perfect fae  
a perfect fae  
vivid & witty, vibrant & poetic  
perfect in every way

## **An Ode to You**

You

You are the summer sky, bright and vibrant, almost blinding to look at your beauty

Yet

Yet I can't look away. You're an old soul, through and through. To you dresses should be long and puffy, and wore with a bonnet, your partner should lay their coat upon puddles for you to step across

And I love every bit of that.

I love every time you proudly declare someone or something to be "The love of my life"

I love the way you inflect upon your words in that unique way that adds such depth that I will always listen

Every time you declare that something is terribly this way or that, I find myself draw closer and closer to you

You

Ignore what I said before. You aren't the summer sky. You're moonlight, drifting through dark clouds in the night, lighting the way and making the world a better place with your simple existence.

Your Hands

Your hands are beautiful and such amazing things. The way I feel when you hold my hand, pulling me closer into your shoulder as you hold onto me with both hands? Absolutely amazing.

You

You lean on my shoulder, always tired, your body heat mingling and dancing with mine. It takes my breath away every time we sit together because I can feel how lucky I am to have your love.

You

You are indescribable, I know, I just attempted to describe you. And I will continue to, but you really are

You

You are confusing, terrifying, nerve racking – no, no you aren't. You never could be.

We

We are confusing, terrifying, and nerve racking. I don't want to fail you, because you are so perfect, and I am nowhere close

But

But despite that fear that I will hurt you, that I will mess up, that I will do something wrong, because oh god is this something I wish to never lose, I try anyways.

I

I try anyways because I want to, because seeing you happy, seeing your wonderful laugh, or you roll your eyes, or that way your eyes scrunch up when confused, or that way when you're thinking and you look to the skies, as if you know none of the answers and are cheating off the sky.

You

You hold my total attention, you are amazing and so I wish I could write an ode each day to you, but I'm sure you'd find that annoying after a while so, I'll keep to this one.

You

## **Dearest Erin**

Each time the wind bangs or the milkman knocks upon our door  
fear strikes me that you will not return from that foreign shore  
that they have come to tell me of your death in battle  
and that you will never hear your sons rattle  
The only thing keeping me sane  
are your weekly letters saying you remain  
among the living, covered in black marks as they may be.  
Oh, I do so wish they'd send you home to me  
Daniel, your son, is two now, he walks and talks  
just like his daddy, though he got into the chalk  
and made a mess of the garage, you'll have to store it better  
when you get home. I love you darling and look forward to your next letter

Sincerely, Angelica



## **A letter in the earth**

The sky darkened  
    long ago  
    yet no stars seem to have appeared  
we had believed, when the sky began to fall,  
    and drifted down, down, down to earth  
    it to be snow, we know better now

The sky darkened  
    long ago  
        we don't know why  
we don't know how. Now, as the ashes fall to earth  
    and the plants wither and die, as has humanity  
        we have sought the comfort of god, in our darkened skies  
            in the ashen and frigid earth, in the churches of himself  
we find no god, only a uncaring cosmos as cold as the earth

In the early days they believed this to be the second coming  
    how stupid they were, to think god cared, we know better now  
        in the early days they had prepared us for nuclear war, how stupid they were  
            to think that our end would be from our enemies and not humanities  
                failures on a whole.

When the sky darkened  
    Long, long ago, across this ashen earth had rifts appeared, cleaving stone in two  
        and leaving horrors in their wake. Some believed it the product of human  
            curiosity, the inability to leave well enough alone. We know better  
                now.

Long ago, when the sky had just begun to become dark  
    we had believed ourselves able to survive till it was all gone  
        we were fools to think it'd simply be over and gone so soon  
            now we understand, there will be no end, and so we have taken our way  
                no one survives forever, we can only hope for a painless death  
                    so we're ensuring ours, we only hope you are less cowardly  
                        than us.

## **Beauregard Loucious**

All my titles are in some way Car Seat Headrest-related, which tells you everything you need to know about me. November 9<sup>th</sup>, remember the date. I'm thirteen, and I go to Many Junior High School. I liked this one person's shirt—it was hot pink and long sleeved—and wrote a poem about him and now it is part of my legacy. Though of course, not all my poems are about the wash boy. Most of them are about me and the world and our many disagreements.

## **I Shall Keep Breathing**

Because my mother would be heartbroken if I did otherwise

Because it is harder to stop than I thought

Because I have dreams and wants and plans

Because I do not want to be thought of as a coward

Because I got flowers and card from my friend one year and I can't stop thinking about it

Because there is always another way

Because someday I can tell someone else to do the same

Because I fear the unknown of the afterlife

Because I want to.

## **Open-Mouthed**

Take your time. It's ok. It's not your fault. You're not in trouble but don't do it again, ya know?  
It's ok. You're ok. Let's sit here. Let's chat here. What're you thinking? Where are you? I know  
it's not my place, but I care. Are you crying? Tell me why. Talk to me. It's ok. You're ok. Let it  
out. You don't trust me? Go away? No. Oh. Why? I miss you. I love you. Call me. Text me.  
Let's talk here. Let's walk here. Because I want to help. I'm not helping? Oh. I'm sorry. I love  
you. It's ok. You're ok. You're not in trouble but don't do it again, alright? It's not your fault.  
Take your time.

**anthony**

and you helped me into this earth  
you expected better for me  
you wanted amazing things for me  
you wanted the world to be perfect for me

and that's not possible  
we argue all the time  
we spread hate to each other more than we do love  
we can't be civil

and i am sorry  
i am a terrible child  
i love you  
i hope you can forgive me

## **Nigga.**

Said 169 times in a book written by a white man about a little white boy and black slave running away,

Said a thousand times more in the everyday dialogue of a white family, down in the deepest parts of the deep south,

Said a million more times by a black person addressing another,

It is thought of as a dirty word. A curse word. And it is. It is angry and hurtful and ugly and gross and—it isn't. It isn't any of that.

There is comradeship in it. A sense of love woven into the letters of the word. N-I-G-G-A. It is a beautiful word. It is loving and happy and comedic and friendly and it is both.

Coming from the white man, it is a slap to the face and a punch to the gut. Coming from the black man, it is a calling card for millions of people.

Nigga, Negro, Nigger. They are beautiful dirty words and I will say them with pride.

## **haikus but they're all about you**

leaves fall outside and  
your hair catches my eye and  
oh, hi!

burnt popcorn  
cold room  
you.

the bitter taste of departure  
on my tongue, i shall not cry

a giggle from you  
makes me smile; it's endearing  
should be in the louvre

purse full of hair  
my arm aches  
i need to finish this

curly hair  
big smile  
the sun shines on

## **Silver: Shiny and New**

By day five, I knew  
You smiled, a wonderous thing  
And I knew  
I smiled back

The river is stagnant, now  
(Oh, why won't you jump inside?  
Dip a toe?)  
And the lily pads are dying

Day eight, and even the doors laugh and giggle  
The river flows well  
And your smile is a wonderous thing  
Your hand feels tiny and soft beside mine

Pillows are overrated, anyway  
Your hair is wild and everywhere and wonderful  
Who cares if I see more of it than I do the screen?  
Ten out of ten, huh?

Day three, and a tree is planted.  
Cherry Blossom. This is where it begins.



## **My Back is Killing Me, Baby**

I didn't know I loved you. No, I would say, they're just a friend—a wonderful amazing marvelous darling angelic friend—and my audience would moan and groan and roll their eyes, because they know that's not true, even if I don't. I didn't know I loved talking about you, then. I didn't know I loved thinking of you. The carpet beneath me gnaws into my skin and my hand moves in a flurry. "You are, you are," it writes, and my brain is nowhere to be found. The heart's the conductor, now. My back hurts from sitting up straight, from leaning over, but that's ok. That's ok because I didn't know I loved being so near to you.

I didn't know I loved being the reason you smile. Your laugh is maniacal and abrupt and amazing and wonderful to hear. It always sends me to hysterics and tears. My audience is moaning and groaning and rolling their eyes right now. I didn't know I loved sharing a laugh with you.

I didn't know I loved writing about you, either. A litany falls onto the paper, and it's nonsensical. It is nonsensical but that's ok because you end up liking it, anyway. Because both poems are in my purse right now, tucked safely away under pounds of hair. Because I didn't know I loved you.

## **Makenna Perkins**

I am Makenna and I am 14 years old. I was born in Shreveport on September 20, 2007, but I was raised in Many, Louisiana. I like to ride horses and go cart racing. I also like nature and singing; my favorite color is yellow, and my favorite animals are wolves. I also have an interest in rings and bracelets. When I grow up, I would like to be a veterinarian. I'm going into 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and in 4 years I will be off to college, and I'm planning on going to Louisiana State University.

## **Relatable (to Some)**

It's green and made of paper. They can have twenty on them or even five. The order is 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, and 1000. They can be used to buy food or clothes, or even accessories for your house or room. People refer it as "money"—money is luscious and difficult to get, especially if you're a kid. What was that saying? Oh right! "Money don't grow on trees." Let's take a moment to imagine what that would be like. Oh yeah, and have your parents ever told you that you had to have McDonalds money in order to get McDonalds? Mine do a lot. If you have money, use it wisely—let me warn you now, because money will run out faster than you receive it, and that's based on experience. Do you ever get that feeling that you want something else instead of "the food at home"? Yeah, me too, and all I can say is... you better save that money or you will be eating leftovers each night.

## **Rain**

Rain makes no sound  
as it falls from the  
clouds above. When  
that rain hits the  
surface of an object  
it creates the steady  
sound of relaxation.

The droplets on the  
leaves and the droplets  
on the spider's web  
all came from rain.

Rain is what quenches  
the plants' thirst. Rain  
gives them the ability  
to live another day.

The steady sound  
of rain is enough to put  
someone to sleep.

Rain makes home time  
with cookies, movies, and  
blankets better.

## **My Eyes**

These eyes are dark eyes.

They need light in order to grow.

They don't show much glee.

These eyes are mysterious eyes.

They hide from reality and from  
the glares of others.

They see hate, love, sadness, and loneliness

These eyes are mysterious eyes.

They hold the deepest secrets

They hold the deepest emotions

These eyes light up when a loved one  
is in sight.

They are common.

These eyes are my eyes.

And my eyes are dark eyes.

## **Rainy Day**

The rainy day was dark  
and gloomy, the thunder  
sounded like war as its  
sounds got louder.

The boy—half asleep—got  
up and looked outside,  
memories of his childhood  
made the room darker.

Thunder and lightning raging  
in the night, the house shaking  
like it was dancing to the rhythm  
of the storm. So vivid—so alive.

The steady playing of the music  
brought harmony and peace,  
the darkness began to fade as  
light gazed upon the room  
with a smile full of glee.

## **Nature**

Don't you love it?  
the sweet chirping of  
birds and the lap of the  
river. The elegant trees  
with bark that looks  
like chocolate, the  
leaves a very luscious  
green. The animals  
that drink from  
water holes and  
ponds. Animals that  
prey on the living,  
different regions  
all with new  
special of plant  
and animal. The spider's  
web after it rains,  
the butterflies and  
frogs, eagles and falcons  
fly high above. Both  
looking for a meal,  
the circle of life  
dangerous but balanced.  
This extraordinary phenomenon  
is called nature.

## **Colorless Sky**

Makayla woke up one morning and looked out the window. She sighed and got dressed for the day. As she was fixing a bowl of cereal, her mom Rebecca entered the kitchen. Makayla poured her cereal and said, “Hey mom, what color do you think would match this cereal?” Rebecca gave her a soft glance and responded, “I don’t know, dear. What do you think the color would be?” Makayla put her left arm across her chest then rested her right elbow on top of her left hand. She put her right hand on her chin and said, “Hmmm, maybe it’s like a yellow?” Makayla opened her front door into the garden. “Mom, I bet the flowers would be very pretty.” Rebecca came up and hugged Makayla real tight. “I bet they will, my beautiful baby girl.” She then kissed Makayla’s forehead and watched as two rabbits ran across the garden.



## **Dying Love Flame**

There it is, the time where love could be shared and friends could be made. With happy times come dark times. Two lovers—they were deeply in love with each other, staring into each other's eyes ever so sincerely. Most people would think their love would last forever. But in the depths of it all, the raging fire that brought the two lovers together started to fade and dim until it was nothing but a spark. Then that spark went out and the two lovers... were no more. The light from the sun begins to fade, leaving the world in utter darkness and despair.

## Woodland Bridge

There I was, sitting at the docks of the Woodland Bridge. The flowers behind me were red and pink; there were roses and water lilies. To my right was an old cemetery. I stared at it for a long time. I wanted to know more about the people from the past, so I ventured away from the docks and took a trail into the cemetery. The tombstones were covered with moss and algae. “Jessica Robins,” I said, reading one of the tombs. I placed my hand on the tomb and moved the moss from the dates. “Woah, you were twenty when you died?!” I got up from my knees and made my way down the trail. As I got to the end there was something that caught my eye: there was a tomb stone by the Woodland Bridge. “Why are you alone?” I said as I made my way to the tombstone. There was a reflection in the water—one of a woman. I jumped back and fell right onto an ant pile. I screamed and got up and looked at the water again. There was nothing. I sighed with relief and turned to go the way I came. When I turned around a girl with black long hair and a white dress stood in front of me. Her hair was over her face and her hands were grey and pale. I stood there frozen in fear. The girl lifted her head and she let out a terrible shriek. I ran so fast—the ants biting me gave me so much pain—the girl was chasing me but she wasn’t running normally—she was running—or you can say crawling on all fours—she was climbing up trees and walls. I saw my car just up ahead, so I picked up my pace and used the last bit of energy to get to my car. The ant bites were burning now. When I got to the car I jumped in and locked all of the doors, but I struggled to start it. The girl was banging on the windows and screaming bloody murder. I finally got the car started, and I pressed all the way on the gas. That was five years ago. I don’t know what happened but all I know is that I never went back to the Woodland Bridge again. I moved cities, paranoid that I was haunted after going to the cemetery.

## **I Didn't Know...**

I didn't know I loved the darkness, until I realized I didn't run to my room after I turned the lights off.

I didn't know I loved sad music, until I understood the lyrics.

I didn't know I loved when my brother would abuse me, until he would get in trouble all the time.

I didn't know I loved the sound of rain, until I actually laid in it.

I didn't know I loved it when people made me feel loved, until they actually made me feel it.

I didn't know I loved dead grass and plants, because they will grow back one day.

I didn't know I loved school, until never.

I didn't know I loved writing sad things, because they are more interesting and I can relate to them the most.

I didn't realize I loved to socialize, even though I don't like it and I'm not good at it.

## **Oli Walters**

Hey, hey! I'm Oli. I'm 14 years old and I use they/them pronouns. Some hobbies I have are drawing, playing video games, ~~being addicted to Diet Coke~~, *drinking* Diet Coke, and listening to music. Speaking of music, some artists/bands I like are Dazey and the Scouts, Queen Chimera, Gorillaz, Nirvana, Poppy, Cavetown, and Mother Mother. Please listen to Queen Chimera- they're so good. The cover art with our beloved Joe on it was drawn by me. I currently live in San Antonio, Texas. I was born in California, but I spent most of my earlier years in Eugene, Oregon. I like to consider myself an Oregonian at heart. Remember to drink your meds and take your water, everyone!

## Everybody People

A person who sleeps.

A person who thinks.

A person who writes.

A person who paints.

A person who reads.

A person who sings.

A person who composes.

A person who draws.

A person who dances.

A person who fights.

A person who tries.

A person who fails.

**A person who cries.**

A person who dies.

A person who loves.

A person who hates.

A person who speaks.

A person who can't love.

A person who can't hate.

**A person who won't cry.**

A person who won't die.

A person that overthinks everything.

**A person who underestimates themselves.**

A person who can't remember anything.

A person who gets into trouble.

A person who likes to watch movies.

A person who loves every single dog.

A person who wakes up every morning refreshed.

A person who cooks for all their friends.

A person who always listens to their favorite song.

A person who stays up late studying for finals.

A person who binge watches every show they can afford.

A person who volunteers at their local animal shelter regularly.

A person who does a nightly skincare routine just for fun.

A person who handmakes little Halloween costumes for their pets.

A person who always sings along to their playlist in the shower.

**A person who pulls an all-nighter because their dog is scared of fireworks.**

**A person who has read every book at the library by their house.**

**A person who watched Mean Girls tenfold only because their younger sibling loves it.**

**A person who flies out to another country just because they miss their friend.**

**A person who lives thousands of miles from their soulmate but still makes it work.**

**A person who stays home all day with their cats because they're sick of people.**

A person who rereads the same book over and over again just to relive the experience.

**A person who lives.**

## **Homage to my cat**

to the fluffy  
white and grey ball  
of happiness  
who can't see for  
the life of him  
but loves to explore anyway  
who doesn't have a  
single thought  
behind those crystal blue eyes  
and who will sleep on the couch  
all day  
unless he's outside  
rolling around in the sun  
or jumping over the fence  
to the neighbor's backyard  
and who can  
make anyone  
a cat lover  
with just  
a glance

## **Three Strikes, You're Out**

Three times was too much. They didn't think she'd do it more than once. They were wrong. They caught her with some random guy at a bar. They just left and walked home. They couldn't bear the thought of even staying there to see just for another second.

Ly felt completely hollow. They couldn't cry, even if they tried to. Just done. Gone. Poof. Bye, see you later. All they did was lay in their bed and occasionally go to the kitchen for food or the bathroom. Tei tried to call them. On the third time, Ly decided to put their phone on mute. One, two, three times, then you're out.

Tei stopped calling and gave up. She knew Ly's rule all too well. But one tiny kiss couldn't have meant anything. Shel, the guy from the bar, walked up behind her and turned off her phone. "Come on, babe. Just drop it." So she did.

## **A Hollow Body**

The seasons will change with the orbit of the Earth  
The world will change with each passing second  
Seconds seem to go by like a walk of snails  
Their slimy paths telling a story  
Of sidereal music playing in the next room  
The starlight symphony making you forget it all  
As the bows slide across finely tuned violin strings  
It becomes possible to lose all you know  
The sweet and sour taste of the past  
Fade from view and you become a hollow body



## Haiku Rhapsody

Broken fingernail  
Black nailpolish will shatter  
I should cut my nails

Why do I feel sick?  
Stomach churning inside me  
May be just hungry

Spots on a white wall  
The AC is super cold  
Don't think I can sleep

My fuzzy fox socks  
I wear hoodies and sweatpants  
Want some hot chocolate?

Time flies WAY too fast  
I think it hit the window  
Why'd I throw that clock?

Green and clear pencil  
I keep ripping off the grip  
The plastic's broken

Lemon strawberry  
With raspberries and cocoa  
Only \$8

It's so bright outside  
Too hot out, way too much sun  
I'll hide in my room

## **Bouquet**

Matthew stood at the door, shifting on his feet. He gulped and brushed a bead of sweat off his forehead before cautiously ringing the doorbell.

The seconds before the door opened felt excruciatingly long. He tried not to let his nerves get the best of him but the bouquet in his hand had the urge to escape.

Then the door opened.

And there stood Gio, looking like he had just gotten out of the shower. His damp hair was combed back out of his face. Matthew could feel his face heat up at the sight but tried to ignore it. The keyword here is “tried.”

“Matthew! You’re here a lot earlier than I thought you’d be. What’s up?” Gio asked innocently, having no knowledge of the chaos in the other’s head.

“Um. I got this. For you.” Matthew held up the bouquet, averting his eyes nervously and his face going red. Gio’s face mirrored the expression. He stumbled a bit on his own feet but quickly caught himself before he could fall. He took the bouquet softly from Matthew’s hand and stared at it for a moment.

“Thank you...” He whispered, smiling. Matthew smiled back.

“Anything for you.”

## **Nobody**

What if the roses sang like sirens?

In a way, they did. At least to you.

The soft yellow petals in their criss-crossing ellipse shape drew you in, though you knew it shouldn't have.

The slender green stem stood holding up the flowering bud. In the dim crystal light, it appeared to be safe.

The scent wrapped a rope around you, pulling you towards it and beckoning you to pluck it from the ground to get a better smell.

Your hands followed the command without bothering to ask you. Your right hand took the base of the flower to pluck it. It was smooth.

The other moved to hold it properly by the stem, wishing to stop treating the flower like a wine glass. You desperately tried to pry your own fingers away, to drop the flower, anything.

You were too late.

A sharp thorn sunk through the skin of your left pointer finger. You cried out for help again and again and again and again, hoping and dreaming that someone would come to help in time so the curse wouldn't swim its way through your bloodstream and spread itself across your body.

*But nobody came.*

## **The Elongated Muskrat Probably Doesn't Pay His Taxes**

Capitalism just sucks.

The poor only get poorer,

The rich only get richer,

The billionaires ignore,

The whole working class is doomed,

But honestly, aren't we all?

## Rolling Girl

It was always the same. Wake up, struggle to get out of bed, get dressed for school, maybe even take a shower if it's one of the better days. Make bad instant coffee and eat a cheap power bar. She'd reminisce over her dreams if she had any the past night. They were usually nice. A good life. Friends, actual food, a better job, a decent house. They always felt so real. But then she'd wake up to her lonely, run-down apartment and remember that those nice dreams wouldn't come true, at least for a long time. Her thoughts seemed to spin around in her head, sometimes travelling to her stomach to make her sick.

Some teachers always asked if she was ok. She'd always mutter "I'm fine," then turn away. The bandages on her face and body seemed to contradict her failing words. The other teachers scolded her for missing homework, low grades, and late assignments. They'd call her a failure. The words added more to the tornado of thoughts and made her obsess over schoolwork, sometimes forgetting to eat or sleep because of it. Whenever she made a mistake, she'd obsess over it for weeks. Sometimes she'd have rests and her mind wouldn't be as chaotic as usual. Then, all of a sudden, another mistake would be hurtling towards her and the thoughts returned to their twirling state.

Some people called her a rolling girl, with her spinning thoughts and how she'd roll after falling or being pushed down. She liked to think of it as a sort of metaphor for how she somehow kept going. Every morning, she'd say to herself, "I'll roll again one more time." One more time was a popular phrase in her vocabulary. "I'll roll along today." She'd tell herself as she'd arrive at school or work. With every sentence, she tried to breathe life into her words. Her classmates and coworkers would berate her constantly. She desperately wanted to stand up for herself but her subconscious told her, "Not yet. We don't know what's ahead of us, so hold your breath for now."

A rolling girl felt that she was at the end. Her world felt monotone. As she tied up her teal hair in twintails, she couldn't help but notice they seemed more grey. The light brown of school uniforms turned into a beige and the brown eyes and hair of her classmates turned black. The hallway in between classes really wasn't that loud. But when the voices of students and teachers overlapped with her thoughts, they blended together and made a nightmarish symphony of *noise*.

More teachers asked if she was ok. She'd still mutter "I'm fine," then turn away. The words fail when put next to a hunched over girl with bandages covering almost every part of her body, injuries seemingly overtaking her figure. She didn't exactly care anymore how things turned out. While she was nearing the end of the school year, her grades got better. It was an uphill climb to any outsider looking in, but it only made her more worrisome of her mistakes.

A rolling girl stopped speaking those sentences to herself, at least out loud. They played over and over again. "One more time. Please, get me rolling." Her silence screamed volumes to everyone who saw her. The bullying got worse. She asked, "How about now?" Her subconscious answered, "Just a little more. We should be seeing something soon. Until then, keep holding your breath for now."

School was over. No more waking up at 6am, no more constant berating. Well, there was still a little bit. She still had to work. But mistakes were fewer now. Her mind was clearer now.

She stood on the rooftop of her apartment building, watching the sunset. She had a smile on her face for the first time in months, maybe even years. She finally repeated a sentence out

loud, "I'll roll along again today." With every word, a rolling girl breathed out laughter. "How about now?" She asked again. "Ok, you can look. We're both exhausted, right?"

A rolling girl stops holding her breath.

