

THE BELL TOWER ARTS JOURNAL

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The editorial board for the journal is comprised of full-time faculty members from the English Department, the Visual Communications Department, and the Fine Arts Department. The editorial board has the final approval on all selections and publication decisions.

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About the title

Just as the Bell Tower at Tyler Junior College chimes on the quarter hour to mark the passage of time, it reminds students of the harmony which surrounds them in their educational pursuits. Music, dance, theatre, art, athletics, and academics blend to make Tyler Junior College a beacon to the community, the state, and the world at large. As the echoes of the chords filter through the oaks, their vibrations tremble far beyond the confines of the brick archways and winding walks where students gather. Tyler Junior College is a lofty tower of educational opportunity for students who have come from all parts of the world. The Bell Tower Arts Journal proudly hails the accomplishments of its hallowed halls and beckons those who would seek both its traditions and the promise of tomorrow.

~Judith Bateman, 2006

Editorial Policy

The Bell Tower Arts Journal is sponsored by the Psi Gamma Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society. We accept submissions of poetry, short fiction, non-fiction essays, photography, and fine and graphic art by current Tyler Junior College students. We accept submissions for consideration only during the fall semester each year for possible publication in the subsequent spring semester. The Bell Tower Arts Journal is entirely student generated and seeks to provide a publishing venue for the rich artistic expression of TJC students.

Our goal is to create a publication that is a high quality, content-rich source of literary and artistic expression on a wide range of topics and themes. Therefore, we seek unique, insightful work displaying vivid, lively language and artistic skill.

All submissions **must** be the original work of the student writer or artist who submits it for consideration or publication. **We do not accept previously published or plagiarized work.** Every attempt is made by the editor to assure originality. All literary pieces will be submitted to turnitin.com for an originality report. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of each student to submit only his or her own literary and artistic work.

Moreover, while we strongly support intellectual freedom as the right of every individual from all points of view, we do not accept work deemed pornographic, profane, exploitative, or that seeks to cause injury to an individual or group.

Tyler Junior College gives equal consideration to all applicants for admission, employment and participation in its programs and activities without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability or veteran status.

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THE VASE ON HER SHELF

Abigail Rogers / Tyler / Akua ink on BFK Rives

BACKYARD BOTANY

My mother will always have a garden.
They call to her from out of the earth,
and whisper their secret names:
Anthurium, Dracaena, Heliopsis, Vinca Minor,

singing with the sighing wind.
Waxy verdant leaves and dramatic showy blossoms.
Seasonal beauties and shy late bloomers:
Clematis, Amaryllis, Dianthus, Verbena.

Paths made of pine straw and effort.
Wielding trowel, shovel, and shears.
Pruning, tying, trimming, harvesting.
It feels like so much work.
Phalaenopsis, Heliconia, Anthurium, Forsythia.

Toll to the power of good growing things.
Knees that can no longer kneel.
Stiffness in the back and thumbs.
Acanthus, Brugmansia, Liatris, Alstroemeria.

Ladylike with a wide brim bonnet.
Up with the dawn before the day bakes.
The smell of April and the smoke of August.
Planting all spring and resting in winter.
Nasturtium, Delphinium, Gladiolus, Hyacinth.
Always something alive.

Kristin Hoover/Alto

MESSAGE TO A FRIEND

Hey. Yes. Hey keeps it casual. Hi is too nerdy. Hello is too formal.

It's me. Me, a person who loved you. A person who cared. Me, meaning your friend.
Your best friend.

I know this is really weird, but I kept going back and forth about how to say this without putting any pressure on you to reply, or... or doing something cringy and this was the only way. Because feeling things is embarrassing. Because missing someone is childish. Because needing closure is wrong. Stop it.

Sorry it's so late. I know that's weird, too. It's late because I waited. Because I held onto hope.

I waited for you. You never came back.

I know our friendship won't go back to how it was but, God, how badly I want it to. I'm not going to beg you. I still have pride. I still have worth.

But I want you to know you really were my best friend—my only friend and I appreciate everything you've done for me the past 6 years or so. You never made me feel stupid or weird, even though I was so annoying in middle school (and still am).

I'm still me. I'm still the same person. I know deep down you're still you, too.

I'm always going to remember all our sleepovers and hangouts, and all our silly future plans. I always thought you were the coolest person I'd ever met, and I'm so grateful that I knew you, even though it hurt me. It still hurts me.

I miss you all the time and I'm so sorry that things became like this between us. I really thought we'd be friends forever, but life sometimes doesn't work out. But it did turn out how you wanted it. It was only me who cared at all.

And I totally respect your decision to stop talking to me. I'll always remember you. I wish I had the guts to just end it here. Somehow, I'm still so focused on how you see me that I bend to your invisible judgement, even now. So, I can't. I can't be truly honest. Because that makes me vulnerable. It makes me feel weak. So, I have to end it in a way that's easier for YOU to swallow.

Even though that's really weird to say. LOL.

Jaiden Craig/Tyler





CHEERS

Edgar Ramirez/Tyler/Graphite, Ink, Color Pencil



SELENA

Barry Jacobs/Tyler/Acrylic on Canvas

AFTER THE BATTLE

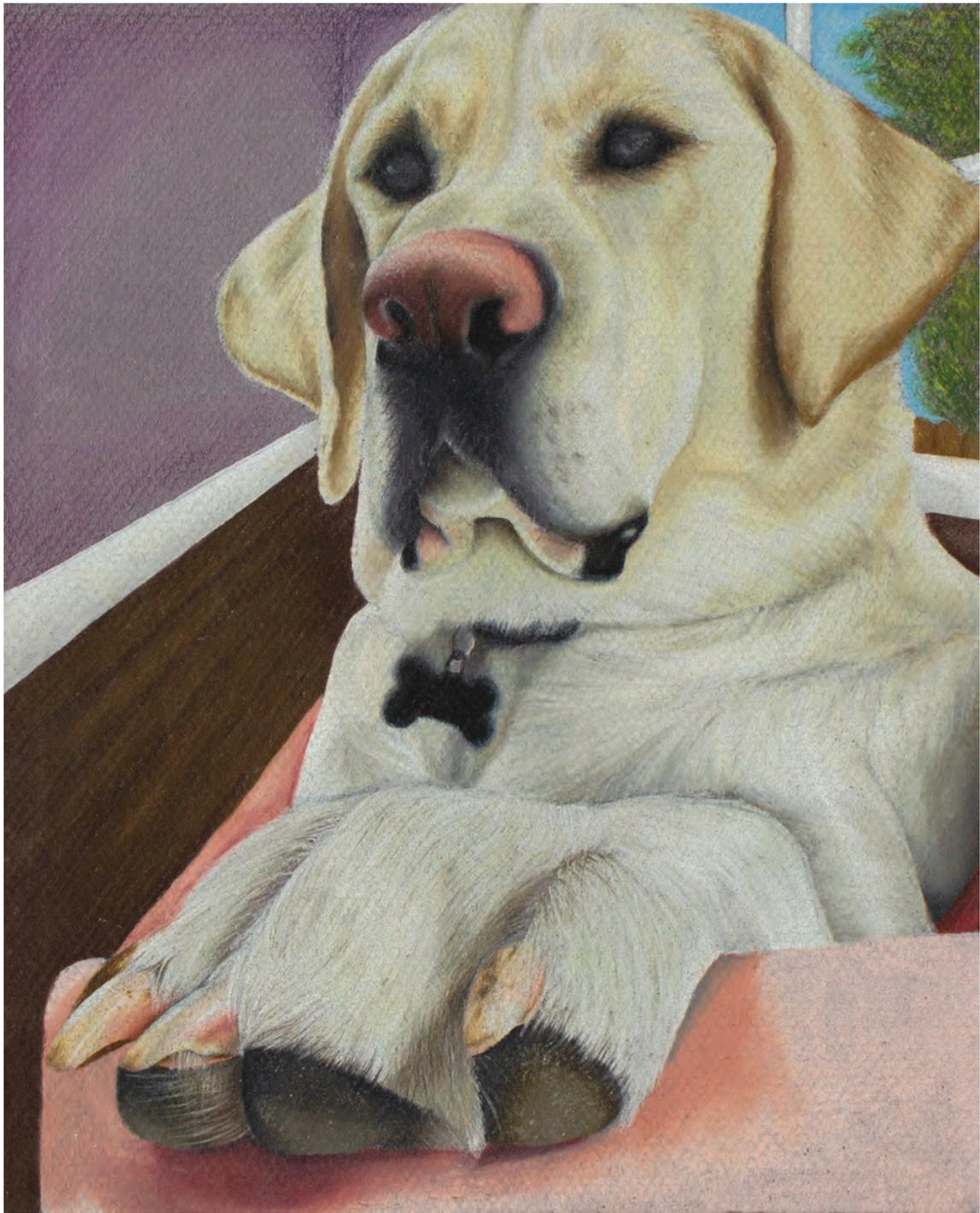
After fleeing from creation,
the blade and brush still wet
with the sorrow seeped from her skin,
the grass cushioned their heavy hearts.

Again now, stumbling down paths, abandoned
strangers seek solace; sunbeam soothing souls
of a barelyman ill with grief; pierced by mistakes.
And the Knight resolute as his memories fade into time.

Long ago, as eldertrees said, their brother gave unto himself
the burden of Words, page after page in gracious return
in case the need should arise for one
to travel in-between where not even the roots had known.

So, she watched them: her spirit still in the breathing breeze
wandering her green sea, and chlorophyll sky built by branch
that Guardian entangled with the earth-sewn hearts
in the Bastion.

Jordan Booth/Rusk



SAMPSON

Lauren Mullins / Tyler / Prismacolor Color Pencil



THE DOME ON PARK AVE

Barry Jacobs/Tyler/Acrylic on Canvas

AN EMPTY ROOM

I finally decided to take a seat in Grandma's room again. It's weird when no one else is in here now. Everything is dark, save for what is lit by my computer. Everything is quieter than it used to be.

I used to never have a problem coming here. Daylight, or otherwise, it always seemed so bright and welcoming. It would always smell faintly of Grandma's favorite perfume—Japanese Cherry Blossom, and the weird powders Grandpa put on in place of cologne. Now, it just smells faintly of the Black and Mild's my mom smokes when she works here at Grandma's old desk, and it has become stuffy since the windows don't get opened like they used to.

I could hear myself sigh. It sounds too loud in this room. There's no ticking clock, no buzzing air conditioning, no late-night TV shows going on in the background, just this deafening silence. There doesn't even seem to be sounds from the crickets and other night creatures that would usually be lurking about at this hour. Why is this room so empty?

Physically, it isn't. Grandma's handmade paintings are still on the wall. Also hanging, the one portrait I did of her on a piece of drywall when this section of the house was being built. I think I was nine at the time. Ha! I even laminated it in packing tape. And then there's Grandma and Grandpa's big bed in the middle of the room; empty, save for Skyler's old baby bed and a basket of laundry mom folded on top of it. Grandpa's side of the room—the left side—was a mess, filled with all the things he'd forgotten to take with him to Houston.

Grandma's side of the room? All that was left was her big, comfy massage chair, the blanket she liked to sit in her lap when in it, her throw pillow, her lamp, and her fan. Where were her computer games? I think we threw those away... Where were her colored pencils and coloring books? I had her pencils but didn't keep her coloring books. I regret that now. At least I kept her laptop and her case. Something to remember her by, I think. I kept a few more of her things. Her knitting needles used to sit in her cabinet by her desk. They got more use with me, I think. She once said she hadn't used them in years.

Another sigh escapes me in the darkness, followed by a sniff and a sob that seem to echo off of the beige, barren walls. I think... I think this is the first time I've cried since the night she died.

Cheyenne Adkins/Tyler



A SILHOUETTE OF THE BLUE

Jane Camp/Longview/Photography



DYSLEXIA

Grace Veitch/Rusk/Mixed Media, Body Art, Photography

ANOTHER DAY

Your hair is like a sweet summer breeze
flowing gently in the wind.
Your eyes, likewise, are bright and radiant
like the sun.
No wait.
That doesn't sound right.
Your eyes are emerald green,
not unlike a comforting brook or stream.
And your hair, your hair is...
No, no, no.
This is awful.
A collage of foolish phrases
of utter gibberish.
It is best,
I believe,
to wait 'til another day
to say how much I love you.

Joseph Hamm/Whitehouse



ENTROPY

Kristina Crawford/Forney/Ballpoint Pen

INSECURE HOME

Someone, please, explain to me
why I feel like my body
is a prison
instead of an altar.
Why do I feel trapped
in a place I am meant to be at home?
Why do my hands shake
when I look in the mirror?

I want to burn this house
to the ground
and rebuild it into
someplace safe.
Isn't this supposed to be
my sanctuary?
I am trapped in this skeleton
within the confines of my thoughts.
My insecurities.

This body of mine,
that I am supposed to love,
feels more like a cage
than a safe haven.

Melissa Lopez/Van



FAV BOOTS

Angelique Basile/Tyler/Charcoal on Rives BFK

BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Left

A way forward?
Can we be trusted?
When everything changes?
Path ever turning and branching
Isn't this always the way?
Wings thrumming.

On the one hand, hope

Or

On the other hand, duty

On the gripping hand

Purpose

Reason

The silence of wings
Comes from the butterfly
If we rely on the way we know,
We believe in the goodness and light?
Turn our faces to the warm sun
The future is bright before
Pulling us forward
Is there meaning?
Are we free?
Chaos

is

the sound of waiting.
still in our hollowed bones.
can we say we made a decision?
Courted by madness ever in the dark?
Hide our secrets in the moonlight
The past is always lurking
Pushing us backward
Is there choice?
Are we bound?
Order

Right

Is this correct?

To find the solution?

When the way is hard?

Map devoid of clues or scope

Or is the meaning hidden?

Flood water rising.

Kristin Hoover/Alto

HOUSE OF WORDS

I am building a house out of words,
but they're not my words; they're the words of my imagination.
Words that spew out all my mistakes.
Words that rattle out as sadistic jokes.
Words that showcase all of my fears.
I am building a house out of words,
but I'm not sure if it's my house.
Maybe it's a new place to wander hopelessly around,
a different scenery from the walls of my room and the colors of my covers.
It's not my house at all, but a hollow shell for others to look at when I have finally expired,
a place they never would have entered if I was alive.
I am building a house out of words, but they're not just my words.
They're the words that sprouted out of familiar faces.
Words that left traces at my doorsteps
as I walked in from school.
Words that fill in the cracks of my walls.
Words that traveled as wind through close ears.
I am building a house out of words.
Won't you come in and take a look around?

Katelyn Carter/Tyler



FUNERAL MARCH

Isaac Belota/Bullard/Pencil & Ink



SWIMMING

Josh White/Tyler/Collage

FAIR RIDES

“You loved the rides at the fair. I remember how excited you were to ride them. You just had to know what each one did.” Her smile is bittersweet as she looks back at me, but in her eyes I can see a desperation, a search for something.

All I can do is nod, really, because I can’t remember this, and I can’t give her what she wants. Besides, the discomfort from him still lingers, and I can’t find a way to express everything I feel to make her finally understand. So, I stay quiet in the backseat, and I try to not worry about the empty driver’s seat (but I do).

“Have you been on any rides recently?” she asks, and I shrug. There’s a sadness between us, years of lost time; I’ve moved on, accepted that I can never regain what I’ve lost. She hasn’t.

When I don’t respond, she presses again. A vague memory comes to mind, but nothing specific. “Maybe, with Dylan.” It’s all I can give, and she seems disappointed before she shrugs it away.

“Well, why don’t I take you and your boyfriend to an amusement park? Or just you and I.” She smiles as she offers a trip, but I hesitate. Amusement parks are crowded, too many people, and I balk at the thought. I can’t tell her no, though. Not directly. The disappointment on her face is too much.

“Not during summer. Too busy.” I give a half-smile, busy looking at the world beyond. Sadness creeps in, though—have I lost more than I thought? I wonder, for a few moments, about a childhood I never had a chance to experience.

“Hot, too,” she comments. I nod, but I’m too focused on the figure approaching the car to pay attention. He gets in, slips into the driver’s seat, and starts the car. It roars to life with a stutter. The air conditioning pumps out a lukewarm breeze in the warmth of late spring.

“Looks like a storm is rolling in,” my mother says, peering back at me. Some emotion shines in her face, in the pull of her eyebrows and the tilt of her lips, but I stare steadily out the window and pretend I don’t notice it. The man who has no place sitting in the driver’s seat fiddles with the broken air conditioning and I watch the first, fat drops of rain splash against the glass while the world slides past.

Alicia Mullings/Lindale



IF THE WORLD WERE GLASS

Jane Camp/Longview/Photography

CURVE OF REFLECTION

A candle flickers in the center of the table, and a bright light shines from the counter. In the rooms beyond, small flames flicker. It is dark and silent, and in the absence of power, the house falls still.

In the shadows, the dark wood table stands large in its space; scratches and smudges shine from the small candle placed upon it. The shelf, built into a corner of the kitchen, houses reflective dishware (a soothing green, placed upon metal stands, intended to be shown but never used). Crickets chirp outside, desperate to be heard.

Light reflects off the white tiles, shot through with light greys, and a newly-whitened grout stands tall to the test of time. The refrigerator is silent, the stove cold; the sound of cars from the highway just a parking lot away drifts through the night air, uninhibited by the hum of electricity.

As the flames burn, the scent of candles begins to dance. It smells like smoke and wax, not spring breezes and linen. Cigarette smoke hangs heavy in the air, like an aftertaste. The air grows stagnant, heavy and choking in the dark silence, and there is only the smell of smoke, the chirping of crickets, and the rumbling of cars.

Even the taste of smoke lingers in the air, and it almost burns the throat with every breath. The stillness weighs heavy in the back of the mouth; it tastes like silence, a round, oppressive feeling on the taste buds. It almost makes the throat ache against the weight of it all.

As the flame flickers, it throws shadows against the ceiling and into the steep tunnel of the skylight. No moonlight shines through; the sky hides behind thick, wispy clouds. A tiny, orange deflection wavers in the curve of the tinted plastic, and a kitchen is shown, minuscule and warped as all reflections are.

The house is still, and dark, and quiet. Crickets chirp outside; cars race down the highway. Air stagnates and smoke spreads, and in the absence of power, everything seems warped, a mere reflection of the reality of life. Like a flame in the curve of a skylight.

Alicia Mullings/Lindale

LOVE

Love one night
opened its door for the first time
i
t
offered excitement
followed by a party
space where the magic happened
Love Is Death
sensation,
significantly slows down
calling on
abstract piece
will keep you staring at the sun.
T
haze The longer the more you feel, your breath constrict
toxic
feeling of dread
I'm an undertaker.
Love
Is Death

Alejandra Benitez/Jacksonville



BUG

Helen Woods/Quitman/Photography Nikon D60

TO LIVE OR DIE

I moved through the morning rituals, slowly waking loved ones, making tea, collecting ingredients from the garden and storeroom for breakfast, and dressing for the day. Today was a much-anticipated trip to purchase several luxuries in the next town. Hugs, kisses, and waves, and then they were off. That morning was so happy.

As the town Healer, I had stayed behind to check on a patient. I noticed as I walked that there were tense whispers following me today. A few people even ducked back into their homes to avoid talking to me. This was odd. I was used to having some whispered words about my practices, but it didn't prevent greetings in town. I wondered what was different about today. I slowly continued my walk home with a sense of foreboding. I arrived home agitated and worried. I made myself some tea and sat in the sunshine trying to calm my nerves. Tea wasn't as helpful as having my partner in the house to comfort me and tell me I was overreacting. They would be home in two days. I could make it two days.

I spent the next day working around the cottage. At dusk, I lit a candle and sat with my favorite book. I was lost in the beautiful world inside those pages until I heard a rough knock on the cottage door. I looked up sharply. The only time anyone came to my home this late was for an emergency, so I steeled my nerves, set aside my book, and walked to the door.

I gasped when I saw the scene beyond my door. Most of the village was in my yard, many carrying lamps and torches. The clearing looked rough, sharp, and dangerous in the harsh light of the torchlight. Before me was the town Elder. He was a big man, but gentle. I'd never seen his face look so distraught. A stranger stepped out of the crowd, raised his torch high, and, before he uttered a word, I knew. He was a Hunter. A man who made it his life's work to hunt down people that were deemed a threat: the occasional escaped prisoner, but more often now it was quiet people they accused of evil intent. They screamed "Witch!" and left a swath of death and horror in their wake.

I asked the Elder for a moment and he nodded quickly before anyone else could speak. I saw anxious movement in the crowd. I closed the door quickly and sagged against it for a moment. I knew what was coming. I knew that I could not put up any struggle or the stranger would take out his wrath on anyone close to me. After a few sobbing breaths, I walked to the desk and pulled out a page to write my last words to my loved ones. I hoped they would be allowed to read them and that they would have a home to come back to.

I followed the Elder and the Hunter toward the shoreline. I felt a chill but couldn't tell how much was from the night wind and how much was the chill of what I faced sinking deep into my bones. The Hunter would likely perform his own test tonight; a test designed to strike fear into anyone who witnessed it, and a test that most often ended in death. I squeezed my eyes shut, dreading what was to come. When we reached the shore, the townspeople stood and shifted uncomfortably. Not many could look me in the eye. I realized the Elder and the Hunter were talking and I was jerked to awareness as they called me forward.

"You are accused of witchcraft," the Hunter said acidly. "Do you admit your villainy?"

"I am a healer, and I have done nothing to harm anyone," I said firmly.

"Then you deny the charges," he raised his voice. "She denies the charges and will be tested by water."

"Now wait," the Elder interrupted, "She should be allowed a trial. We can wait until Judge Green comes."

"No!" boomed the Hunter's voice. "She will stand this test now. If she passes, she is innocent, and no further harm will come to her or her family." He looked at me with his eyes reflecting the fire of the torches around him and said, "You do understand the test, correct?"

"I understand," I said.

The Elder sagged in defeat. The Hunter directed me to take off my boots and step into a waiting boat. I stepped in, feeling the rough wood tug against the weave of my thick wool socks. I sat down and closed my eyes, listening to the gentle waves. The boat moved and then I was instructed to sit on its edge. My body was heavy and sluggish as I moved, trying to balance my weight. I slipped my feet into the cool water. I looked toward the place I had called home for so long, seeing the faces of many I had called friends. The silvery glow of the full moon made it all seem like an unearthly dream. I squeezed my eyes shut, my mind racing. I was a good swimmer, and I didn't think anyone would put up much of a fight if I tried to escape. If I fought, then I was clearly a witch. If I didn't fight, I would die. Perhaps they would let my family live. The moment came. There was a signal I didn't see, and I was pushed into the water. I gasped as I went over. The water was cold, and my clothes clung to me, weighing me down.

I made my choice. I willed my family to feel my love. Then I looked up at the moon. I smiled as I saw a flock of birds, dark against the moon as they flew through the night, and at the iridescent dragon flying in their midst. I kept the moon in my sights as I slowly stopped fighting and sank beneath the water. My body was heavy and stiff, the water colder every second.

Then I was soaring, as light as a feather. I saw my body beneath me, dark in the water. I saw the faces of the village; the face of the stranger. They knew I was gone. I locked my sights on the moon and went to meet the dragon.

I wasn't afraid of whatever was next. I knew it was the fear of others that had caused my death, but I have never let fear decide for me. I didn't then, and I don't now.

Rebekah Miller/Longview



FREE

Wizan Sebulburo/Tyler/Photography, Canon EOS Rebel T3

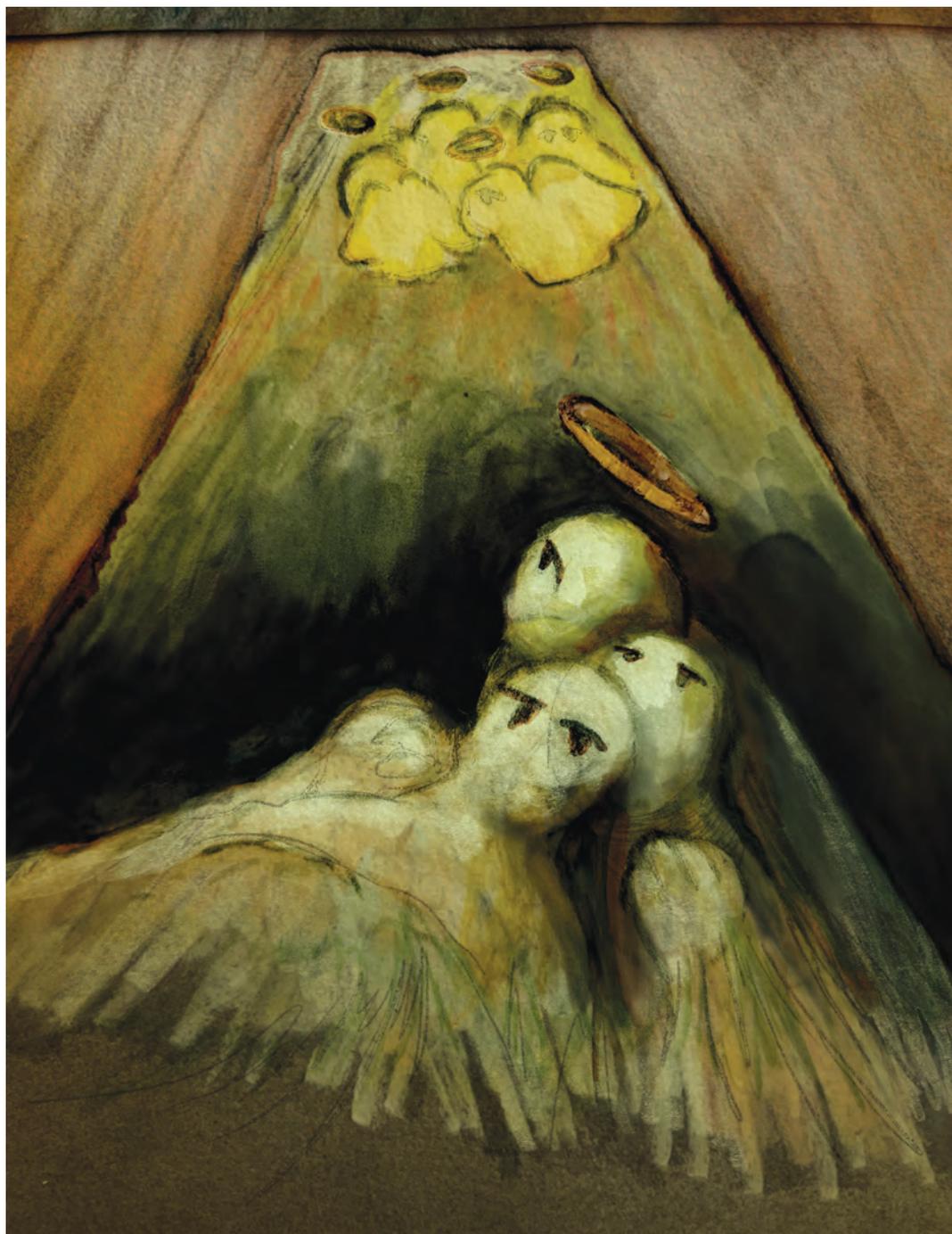
NOVEMBER MOONLIGHT (GRIMSHAW)

And as I walked against the stone,
damp and chilled to the rocky bone,
I wrapped myself in linens sheer
to stave off claws of hidden fear.

For I quivered at its shrouded gaze now,
mumbling to myself with sweat on my brow.
My core, it quaked, my soul would not be still.
Yet, I walked towards terror with present will.

Until the hooves hit the stone just behind—
And I turned, damn myself, my eyes aligned
with the abyssal mare galloping close,
the cloaked rider resembling my ghost.

Jordan Booth/Rusk



I WANT TO BE LIKE THEM

Arturo Alvarado/Tyler/Gouache, digitally altered on Photoshop

THE STORY OF A REVOLUTION

The peasants are revolting
They refuse to work the fields
Watch the crops all soiling
Watch the country lose its yield
Who is to blame
Surely not the famed

You egg them
You bleed them
You beg them
You need them

Peasants fuel the impossible
While they paint the King in chrome
The knights are in the hospital
As the nobles take their homes
Who do we shame
Surely not the famed

They pay you
They feed you
They bathe you
They need you

The peasants are rejoicing
Now the crown caved in
In the new world they're enjoying
The knights protect them
With the land reclaimed
The world engulfs in flames

They axed them
They shook them
They taxed them
They nuked them

Jeffrey Ptak/Lindale



THE RELICT

Jarren Gipson/Tyler/Ink

MIND SLIP

Over the cobblestone road,
click-clack, click-clack,
he leaves his world behind.

In the artificial light, a gruesome sight is left.
He rides down the road in fright.
He did not know how it happened;
his hands were covered in it before he knew.

I must have been possessed, he tells himself.
He wasn't.
He just let his mind slip is all.
He let the brewing emotions and thoughts escape.

So, he rides
away from the mansion, covered in red.

Cheyenne Adkins/Tyler



UNTITLED

Josh White/Tyler/Acrylic on Canvas



SHINY DROPLETS

Wizan Sebulburo/Tyler/Photography, Canon EOS Rebel T3

REMEMBER THE RAIN

Sent from the sky
coming down through the crisp, cool air,
it falls down on the grass.
It pours over rocks and down the sidewalk.
It comes down gently and lands on my lashes.
I blink and it is gone.
It collects in big drops on my jacket.
It seeps through the little holes in my clothes,
and suddenly I feel the cool water touch my skin.
I stomp through the puddles and love the feeling of wet socks and wet hair.
I am freezing.
I am uncomfortable.
I am capturing every detail of this moment.
Because, one day, when all of my days are gone,
I will wish that I had danced in the rain more.
One day, I will want to remember what it feels like to feel the rain.
One day, I will look back and want to remember what it feels like to be alive.
One day, I will want to remember the rain.

Kate Smith / Jacksonville

SYMBOLISM

Full-service imagery courtesy of Sigmund Freud,
the man who weaponized fathers and graven images.
What do you see in this spilt ink?
“Nothing” is always the worst answer,
better get inventive with the visuals.
The clouds are shaped like my mother,
her eyes the vault of stars,
cumulus copies of her profile.
Open the wings of the Mind Palace
and look through the gauze of sleeping delusion,
perhaps a glimpse of truth,
or more illusion, or illustration, or allusion.
From metaphor to Manger,
It’s how religions look in their early years.
I mean what I say and speak it in echoes,
calling to the underside of the stones.
“Turn me,” they respond in sedimentary whispers.
If you dream of swimming, they say you fear flight.
If you write of mirrors, they say you mean yourself,
even if the tale is about an ogre.
Especially if it’s about an ogre.
We all feel like the outline of monsters,
The cracks in the pavement like the lines of my palm,
speaking of life and regret and nothing at all.
If symbols are the shorthand of seeing,
then once in a blue moon a cigar is actually a periscope.

Kristin Hoover/Alto



SIMPLE PLEASURES

Kristina Crawford/Forney/Photography

FROSTBITE

Like a delicate flower
you thrived on sunlight.
Your lips, soft and sweet,
like a petal,
were a sight too beautiful
for my selfish eyes
to bear.

But my poisonous touch
was a temptation.
Even you,
as pure and gentle as you were,
could not resist.

And your beauty
turned black and rotten
with decay.
My ice-cold lips
touched your sweet roots,
and like the flower you were,
you shriveled and died from the cold.

Melissa Lopez/Van



UNTITLED

Josh White/Tyler/Acrylic on Canvas



SCOUT

Lauren Mullins/Tyler/Mixed Media Drawing

TO TELL A PHOENIX

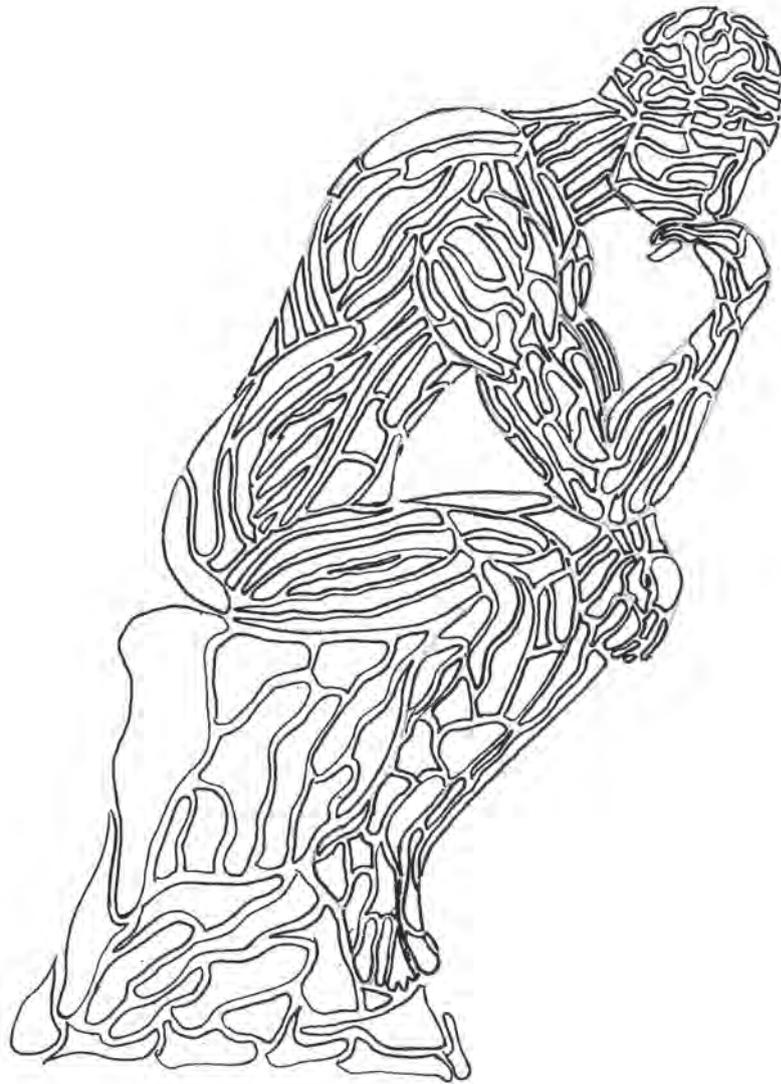
A phoenix is a creation of hope.
Something to brighten the eyes of children;
a glimpse of a better future for all.
But to tell a phoenix how to rise is unethical.

Once, a woman showed me her phoenix;
the background of her tragic tale.
Each burn told a memory.
Every ash told her truth.
She said, "Once, a man told me how to heal,"
and her truth became the ashes;
her memory became the burn.
Someone's past is sacred ground.
That man telling her how to heal
only made her phoenix rise back down.

A man showed me the ashes of his past;
the ground where his phoenix arose.
He said, "The materfamilias was the one who set the flame."
He showed me burns from each ember.
The mark of blue combustion.
His own mother held him down
while his father was nowhere to be found.

A phoenix does not rise unless the past is broken,
unless each part of a man is bruised,
unless every right of a woman is taken.
Hope cannot come from hope.
To tell a phoenix how to rise is unethical.
But to show a phoenix where you rose
is merely to show a glimpse of hope.

Alexis Holford/Tyler



THE THINKER

Hernan Lara/Lindale/Pen & Pencil

THE MAGIC OF NEURONS

Infinite connections
spark every second.
A thought, a memory, an action, a movement...
a complete mystery.
One that will never be fully understood.
It is something magic,
but it can become your enemy.
It can take control of your life;
You need to be strong;
You are in charge.

Alejandra Benitez/Jacksonville



WORDS OF LIFE

Aaron Crow / Canton / Adobe Photoshop

JOURNEY

A leaf will always fall,
but, what will happen to it?
The wind will take it where it pleases,
the leaf at the whim of nature's call.

What does it see?
Who does it meet?
Where does it go?
It shall see wonders most will never notice.

It shall meet people and animals who find it's a piece of beauty.
It will go places many will not think twice about.
A leaf will see many things in its lifetime;
wonders we don't pay attention to.

Be like the leaf and enjoy the journey.

James Zablosky/Canton

FRONT DESK

On December 28th, 2020, at around 4 in the morning, a man came to my work, leveled a gun at me, and fired relentlessly. There are only a few images of that first second—the flash, the pavement, the shattering glass. One bullet shattered the large window pane of the lobby next to me, while I shouldered through the double doors of the worst hotel in hell. Crouched behind the front desk, I clutched my revolver, clinched my teeth, closed my eyes, and said the only honest prayer of my life. The gunman was still outside, and I was terrified that in less than a minute there would be only six shots to save myself and damn someone else.

Now, in the mirror, I avert my eyes while my reflection stares straight ahead. In Bergman's film *Winter Light*, a man with a horrible fear of an irrational death comes to Pastor Tomas for guidance. The pastor, though, is consumed by doubt, and unable to properly comfort the man, offering only empty platitudes. In classic Bergman style, one of the most powerful scenes comes from a close up shot of the pastor's face, where he averts his eyes for only a split second. But that split second was enough to send the man in front of him to his death. The man gives a courteous smile, and promises that he will be back next Sunday, before leaving and summarily ending his own life.

My failure to meet my own gaze has sent me down nearly nine months of crippling doubt. In that time, I've washed down more painkillers and benzos than most will in their entire life. With my bare knees to the cold cement floor of my bedroom, I pray and pray. My clasped hands shift from supplication, to my ears, and I press as hard as I can to block out the silence. "Guds tystnad,"—God's silence—I hear the pastor say, as he stares out the canted window of his barren office.

Near the end of the film, the pastor's sexton, who suffers greatly from a pre-existing condition, asks the pastor if he wouldn't mind discussing the Gospels. "[They have] given me pause," he says, after sitting next to the downcast pastor, "wouldn't you say the focus on his suffering is all wrong?" The sexton goes on to say that he has suffered more physical pain than Christ himself. He notes that Christ's physical pain lasted merely four hours, while his own has been a lifetime of suffering. But Christ was "tormented far worse on another level," the sexton has realized. All of his disciples had abandoned him, and had not even understood the meaning of his teachings over nearly three years—"He was left all alone."

Among the shattered glass and horrible silence, broken only by my sharp breathing, with a revolver that I believed was my only chance at salvation, I felt abandoned. “To be abandoned when you need someone to rely on,” the sexton notes, “that must be excruciatingly painful.” The sheer terror that I experienced, the abandonment, the realization that I was alone with all that could happen—can you blame me for my sudden faith? Can you look me in the eyes and tell me that I am ridiculous? I’ve gone my entire life without belief—much of it even in vehement opposition—but God confronted me with the cold grace of a .45.

And to say that I was shaken into belief, afraid of damnation if I did not suddenly repent, would be cynical and misguided. I have never considered hell. The crude, ecstatic exhortations of someone like Flannery O’Connor do not phase me, but the words of Melville do. In his novel *Pierre*, Melville writes that “Silence is the only voice of God” (204). Let me stick out my neck to you, so that in your cold, ironic detachment you can punish my sincerity when I say that these words made me crumple and cry. The most powerful artists—Bergman, Bresson, Melville, even Wittgenstein—have helped to reconcile the most terrifying moment of my life with the silence of God. If “all profound things...are preceded by and attended by Silence,” (Melville 204) then it should be said that not only terror, but also the intensely quiet experience of writing, are profound and redemptive, securing not only your spiritual salvation, but your earthly one as well. Take my final remarks not as O’Connor’s, who wished to violently shake her audience into belief, but as a reminder from someone who has come close to death several times over.

Remember that you will be swept up in the turmoil, and that your life will end before you have the final word. Dedicate yourself to expression, before the “lone and level sands stretch far away” (Shelley 401); reach out to Shelley as you reach out to God. Through the most powerful art, come to understand that silence is essential to faith and is the voice of God. And if the shooter should ever return, remember me as someone who had one last look into the camera, before being gone forever—and never say that Caleb didn’t love the world.

Caleb Sheffield/Tyler

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CHESS

Lauren Mullins/Tyler/Prismacolor Color Pencil

IF LIFE WERE A POEM

It would be a free verse.
Much to my dissatisfaction.

I wish life were neat and orderly,
with rules in place and a gentle structure.
It would have rhymes that fit in properly,
and a sturdy architecture.

Even a haiku
would at least put some balance
in everyday life.

But instead, it's a free verse.
Random events happen that don't make any
sense.
There is no rhyme scheme in real life.
No grandiose masterwork of one moment,
pairing up perfectly with another moment.
Life is just a series of experimentations,
not unlike free verse,
where days can go on and on and on and
on until you realize you've

somehow made it to the next one without
even registering it.
We get caught up in doing the same things over and over again
that we don't even comprehend the fact that
we get caught up in doing the same things over and over again.

*And when something new enters our lives,
it doesn't come in a pleasant format.
It usually either sneaks up underneath us when we least expect it,
or boldly comes forth with no warning.*

As scary as it can be to live in a world with free verse,
I've learned a secret that helps me traverse.
Just like every poet has the ability to make their own rules,
So, too, do you and I have the power to shape life with our own tools.

Joseph Hamm/Whitehouse

THE BELL TOWER ARTS JOURNAL 2022 DEDICATION

Dr. Linda Gary founded The Bell Tower Arts Journal in 2006. The journal is a collaboration among the English, Art, and Visual Communications Departments. The Bell Tower Arts Journal is entirely student generated. Students design the cover and layout each year, and only student works are considered for publication. Students are even part of the selection process. The number of submissions varies from year-to-year, but there have been as many as 70 literary submissions and probably as many, if not more, visual submissions (art, photography, graphic art). The journal exists to highlight the literary and artistic works of TJC students. It has also won numerous awards at the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association Conference under Dr. Gary's tutelage. This is a testament to the stellar quality of the journal. No doubt, TJC is better for having The Bell Tower Arts Journal.



Dr. Linda Gary is a veteran HCFA professor. She came to TJC in 2005 as an English Professor and served as the Humanities & Philosophy department Chair from 2012-2021. She also served as the Dean for HCFA from 2016 to 2020. She founded the Festival of the Arts, a month-long celebration of the arts here on campus. Her passion for the arts and investment into the students of TJC is insurmountable.

Our institution therefore honors Dr. Linda Gary for creating the artistic vessel that is The Bell Tower Arts Journal. With sincere gratitude, we thank you for the legacy you have left us. The students, faculty, and administration wish you continued blessings and happiness, and wish for you to know that you will be remembered.

Therefore, on behalf of everyone who believes in The Bell Tower Arts Journal, the 2022 edition is dedicated to Dr. Gary as a symbol of our appreciation.

Many thanks,

Regan Minkel, Editor of The Bell Tower Arts Journal & English Professor