

Hog Creek Hardin



A Breath of Fall

Autumn 2023

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at The Ohio State University Lima

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A Note From the Editors

There is no better place to start than reiterating what we are often reminded of: Hog Creek Hardin is nothing without the voices from our community that are courageous enough to sacrifice comfort in the name of vulnerability. We are writers. We know the feeling of this risk, and we admire those who take it.

We thank our contributors and The Ohio State University at Lima's English department. Having the opportunity to build this forum for local voices has been an incredibly rewarding endeavor, and we look forward to publishing Hog Creek Hardin's very first print edition in May.

We are honored to showcase the essential voices of Ohio poets and writers of all ages, though a specific mention of Allen County is necessary. ArtSpace/Lima allowed a venue for our Poetry in the Alley, an event entirely heartwarming despite the budding cold. The high schools of Allen County contributed a great handful of ambitious submissions, many of which are contained within this edition. Lima is our home, and it has served us well.

Hog Creek Hardin stands on the shoulders of Ohio's writers. We know who and what we are. Thank you to our contributors, community, and university for engaging in our mission and making all of this possible.



Timothy Cheeseman, Advisor

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4 seasons and you.

spring. the beginning of flowers. leaves back on the trees. you gave me a new look. i was no longer bare & empty. i was a flower blossoming in this new season. it was the start of something good.

summer. smiles & sunshine. hot summer days where everything is good & green & the days never end. laughs at midnight last until 5 in the morning & we mindlessly lose track of what day it is. the days all seem to run into each other but that was okay because we were living our best lives in the bright sunshine.

fall. warm & cozy. as our relationship falls apart, the leaves began to fall off the trees. we seemed so far away from that springtime & the sunshine & the beginning of new life. it began to get chillier & as the flowers wilted away, so did you.

winter. it was freezing. it was cold & lonely & i often compared myself to the bare & lonely tree outside my window. it no longer had the leaves. i caught myself crying as often as it snowed. the long snowfalls began to pile up on the branches & it became too heavy to bear. so the limbs broke.

what once was a tree w/ long limbs that stretched up to the blue sky covered in green leaves was now a tree w/ broken branches & so close to the cold ground.

you were the heavy snowfall that made me break.

i knew spring was going to come again. i know the tree would have long limbs covered in bright green leaves that touched the blue sky.

sometimes, the snow just takes forever to melt.

Alexis Bechtel



Alexis Bechtel is a senior cosmetology student at Apollo Career Center. She spends her time working hard in the gym and at both of her jobs. In her free time, you might find Alexis outside with a good book.

Sky Islands

There was once a Healer's apprentice who lived on an island. She had lived on the island her whole life, together with her family and community. For years, they had lived low to the sea, their island barely floating above the waves. Below, dark waters charged and crashed against each other, like spartans at war. But, as long as their island remained above, the waves remained below, misting in frustration at the island, just out of reach.

One day, the sea suddenly became quiet. The water barely stirred, and, despite the bright sun, it seemed darker than ever before. Whispers spread throughout the island. Even the youngest children felt uneasy. All eyes were on the water. It was planning something.

The sea stayed like that for weeks, waiting. The Apprentice distracted herself with her work, mending scratches, ailments, and pains of many kinds. Life went on.

But in town, fear spread like wildfire. The Elders, when the children weren't around, would whisper of an ocean goddess, with the fury of a volcano, that coveted the land, desperately trying to steal it from the sky. "It upsets her," they said, "to have land so close, yet out of reach." Some said that the ocean laid on the back of a great bird, the mists, its breath, and the waves and wind, caused by the ruffling of its fine feathers as it flew through the sky. Still another group insisted that the water was not an entity, but home to snake-like monsters, who wanted nothing more than to claim the beautiful island for their own. Whatever the reason, if something fell over the edge, it never came back.

It was early in the morning when they felt the first sign, a change in the wind currents. Then, the waters rapidly receded, leaving the jagged stones in the shallowest parts of the water uncovered. It was an uneasy time on the island, and after the fourth hour of waiting in the empty clinic, the Healer and her Apprentice left for home. They could see the families in the windows huddled together. The Healer had no family, but sat uneasily on her chair, her old bones feeling the change in the air, as the Apprentice ground herbs for the clinic. The whole island was holding its breath, waiting.

They did not wait long, for the sky quickly darkened, and the strange winds became a hurricane. The Apprentice ran outside, just in time to see a wall of darkness expand to block out the sun. Strange figures moved throughout the wave, but there was barely time to notice before it broke over the island, white froth covering her in an instant.

She lost all sense of direction as it threw her head over heels, again and again. There was nothing she could do, except close her eyes. The pure force of the wave seemed to reach down her throat and steal her precious oxygen, exerting a vise-like grip on her lungs. She hacked and coughed, but there was nothing left, nothing but saltwater. Her brain felt like it was lagging behind, full to the brim with salt and bubbles. Moments seemed to stretch into hours, and then into days, as the current threw her to and fro. It was a miracle that she wasn't crushed or impaled.

Sky Islands cont.

Time passes in strange ways. As if from another's eyes, she was unconsciously aware of the water level dropping, of land beneath her, of waves lapping at her boots. She thought she had opened her eyes for a moment, perhaps seeing a scaled beast, but remembering it was like catching a cloud in her hands.

The first thing the Apprentice could truly pick out was the sound of crying. She heard it from far away, like a sound from a dream. Then it became louder, closer. As it sharpened, so did the rest of her senses. All at once, she felt the water in her lungs, and reflexively hacked until they were somewhat emptier. She took a moment to rest, then sat up, and looked around. She felt like she had been scrubbed with sand, inside and out. There were various bruises and scratches, but worst of all was her headache. It took her a few minutes to untangle her limbs, then a few more to stand.

The Apprentice looked frightful, her hair tangled beyond fixing, and her face red and splotchy from the salt. The land surrounding her, however, was even worse. The ground had the consistency of a marshmallow, and some of the buildings had been flattened. She had been lucky enough that it had dropped her on the beach, instead of leaving her in the rubble or dragging her out to sea. There was very little left of the island she knew. Parts of the woods where she had spent her childhood had been decimated, and the well organized plantations had been totaled. The Apprentice shivered as her eyes crossed tooth marks left on one of the standing trees.

She knew now what had happened. The ocean had pulled back, gathering all of its strength, until it could form a wave tall enough to steal the island from the sky, and it had succeeded. Where there had once been sharp rocky ledges, there was now sand, and the quiet lapping of ripples on the shore. No longer did the island float in the air. It had become a part of the water. This was very, very bad. The Apprentice knew what would happen to an island so close to the waves. For now, however, the ocean seemed to have worn itself out, playfully lapping at her toes, like a tame cat. She stepped away, until she was out of its reach.

Nothing looked the same. It took her half an hour to find the Healer's home, or what was left of it. One glance, and she knew that she was no longer the apprentice, but the healer. Still, she had to check. Solemnly, she shoved a loose board away and scanned the room. It was empty. Just like her.

She counted to three, then turned, moving on, leaving the rough frame of a chair to sit alone in the room. There were people to help, and as the new Healer, it was her responsibility. Quietly, she found the nearest cries, set down her medical bag, and got to work.

On day one, the survivors met at the center of the ruins to count themselves, then count again, as they realized just how many had been lost.

On days two, three, and four, they organized, and anyone who could walk searched the island for survivors. They found none.

On day 5, they gave up, and the sole remaining elder held a service for the lost.

Sky Islands cont.

On day 6, they began to rebuild their homes. Halfway through, it began to storm, and they hid under the surviving trees. But the woods were no longer safe. The nature spirits which had once lived peacefully alongside them had turned hateful and bitter. It was a massacre.

On day 7, they stopped counting.

It went on like that for a long time, search, build, hide. The Healer was swamped with work, fighting to keep the survivors alive. Sometimes it saved them, sometimes it didn't. When those who had been injured either lived or passed, she joined the scavengers, trying to find something that would help rebuild what was left of their island. It was dangerous work. The woods were off-limits, as was the beach. That didn't leave many places to look. Still, she went out every day to check the places that she had searched the day before, and the day before that with the rest of the village. What else could they do?

One day, she was lingering closer to the woods than was strictly safe, longing to walk its familiar paths, when something caught her eye. It was the Healer's sea stone mortar that she had been using to grind up herbs when the wave hit. She had dropped it sometime during the flood, and here it was, so close, just a few meters into the tree line. Just seeing it felt like life, and green, and floating islands in the sky. It was vibrant, colorful, so unlike the dreary days of rain and clouds that she had become accustomed to. It was a relic of the sun, from back when she was made of sun too, unlike the gray, colorless person she felt she had become. She wanted it. But she was a prudent, careful girl, and she knew better than to enter into the spirits territory. She counted to three, then walked away, moving on.

It became a habit of hers, walking past that same spot, stopping for a minute or two. It felt good to have something to do each day, even if it was just to watch the sun glint off the mortar's smooth surface. It was her way of mourning the people she had lost, and the life she had once known. Every day, she ended her visit the same way, counting,

One,

Two,

Three,

Turning,

Stopping. She shivered as adrenaline and surprise washed over her. Somebody had followed her to her secret spot. The somebody was tall, hooded and, to her surprise, not from the village. The Healer clutched the small knife she carried in her bag. She had always known that one day she would get too close, that the spirits would find her, and now here she was, danger on one side and the woods on the other. Maybe she could scare it off-

The spirit spoke, waving. The Healer relaxed a little, but not much, as she realized that they were still a fair distance off. The stranger took a few steps forward, and she could see that they had a shadow, a surefire sign that they were not a spirit. But then who were they, and more importantly, where did they come from?

Sky Islands cont.

“Who-” The Healer’s question was cut off as the stranger lunged forward, their brilliant red cloak flying out behind them. Covering more distance than any human should be able to, they shoved her to the side. The stranger’s cloak flared out, impossibly, and then down, propelling them into the air.

The Healer’s eyes widened as she watched them go up, flying. The red blur was not a cloak, but a pair of brilliant crimson wings, shining like twin piles of rubies. She watched them as they turned with the grace of a hawk, and urgently pointed toward the point that they had flown up from.

The Healer’s turned her attention back to the ground, just in time to dodge the foggy tendrils of a lace-like spirit, silently floating in the breeze. It looked something like a jellyfish made out of doilies. She dodged again as it reached for her, and looked up trying to find a streak of red standing out against the blue of the sky. Nothing.

The spirit howled and charged at her, faster than ever. She rolled to the side, and planted her feet, running in the direction of the beach. She kept her lead for a long while, but just as the grass turned to sand, she could feel one of its tendrils brush the back of her arm, ever so delicately, leaving a long, red welt where it had touched her. She screamed, pain fueling her as she sped toward the water and the towering waves, each almost a dozen meters tall.

Just as one was about to crash over her head, she felt something grab her injured arm, and roughly pull her up, through the wave. She screamed, looking down, just in time to see it crash over the jellyfish spirit, and wash it away. Above, all she could see was a blur of red wings, struggling to stay aloft.

As soon as they were out of the range of the waves, they quickly began to lose altitude until they crashed into the beach, sending a geyser of sand into the sky. The stranger rolled with the landing, letting go of the Healer who, never having landed before, fell flat on her back. She would have rested for a moment, but the sand on her back and the stranger by her side had her nervous, and she pushed herself up into a sitting position. Further down the shore, the stranger was shaking the water off of her wings. She screamed at the wave, brandishing a closed fist, then shook her head and turned to the Healer. The stranger said something, but the meaning was lost to her.

“What?”

She repeated, enunciating the gibberish syllables.

They stared at each other. After about a minute, the stranger said something else, spread her wings, and flew off toward the forest. The Healer ran after her, curious. She hadn’t been curious in a very long time, and was powerless to stop herself.

Sky Islands cont.

By the time she caught up, there was no sign of the stranger. All that was left was a single red feather, and a strange floating object, tied to the top of a tree, something like the jellyfish spirit, but glowing like a lantern. The Healer bent to retrieve the feather, and was surprised to see it lay on top of something. It was her teacher's mortar, the one that she had visited. The Healer looked into the woods, where it had once laid. There sat another feather, glimmering like a smile.

She continued visiting her spot every day. Something had taken the other red feather, but she still knew exactly where the mortar had laid. She hoped and waited, searching the skies for the telltale red. She never saw any sign of the girl, but there were more balloons every day.

Meanwhile, the waves grew and the beach shrunk, and the days grew darker and colder. It would only be a matter of months before the villagers would be forced into the woods. Then, there would be nothing that could be done. The island would become a lifeless rock, among so many others.

One day, she lingered longer than usual at her spot. Maybe she could sense somebody hiding, or perhaps she couldn't bear to leave again. Whatever the reason, she stayed for a long time, almost until dark. From out of the treetops came a rustle, followed by a winged person. He did not have the red wings of the girl, but great blue wings, much rounder than her slim, quick ones. He was followed by a half dozen more, in all colors, shapes, and sizes. Then came the girl with the red wings. As the Healer watched, they began to tie something around the highest boughs, which then inflated to become more balloons. The girl with red wings glanced over to the Healer's special spot, perhaps remembering their meeting. Her eyes lit up. She handed more of the balloons to the blue winged boy, and swooped down to join her on the ground.

"Your back!" The Healer was elated. It was amazing, the effect that the winged people had on the somber island. Each of them seemed so vibrant, so alive, that the dull trees and grass seemed to turn a shade of emerald green when they were near. Even the balloons seemed to emanate color, turning the sky more blue, and the sun a little brighter.

"What are those for?" she pointed.

The girl with red wings said something she couldn't understand, then two words the Healer could understand: "Help you."

The Healer looked up. The balloons were colorful, but besides looking pretty, she could see no use for them.

"How?"

The winged girl waved for her to follow, then headed toward the beach. The Healer took a deep breath, and cautiously followed, aware that she had no wings with which to escape the hungry shoreline. They stopped where the sand met the grass. There, the Healer could see the waves. They were huge, terrifying, like great horses, stampeding up the beach, then crashing back into the water. But, something was different. The beach seemed a little bigger, the shoreline a little further back. Was the water receding?

Sky Islands cont.

The girl turned around at the sand and pointed back to the balloons. The Healer understood now. The waves weren't retreating. The island was rising! Their balloons were pulling it out of the sea!

That night, the Healer called a meeting. Standing beside her, were two representatives of the bird-people, the first one, with crimson wings, and another with silver wings. She explained what she had seen, and what the Winged, as she called them, were doing, and a great cheer resounded.

When they had quieted, she explained what would need to be done to help. Firstly, balloons would be distributed for the villagers to place throughout the island. Guards would be placed near the beach to track the water's progress. Sheds would also be built for the Winged, so they would no longer need to shelter in the woods. They would do this together, hand in hand, working to save their island.

Days later, the water had retreated again, preparing for its next attack. It could sense the change, could smell it in the air. It smelled like hope.

Their work reached a frantic pace as the sky began to darken. The Winged tied balloon after balloon, as the islanders prepared to meet the wave. The Healer stood among them, spear in hand. The tip had been carved from the mortar, once a stone from the sea itself.

Together, they faced the maelstrom ready to fight for their island. With a ravenous fury, the wave crashed over the island, plowing down the ramshackle town, dragging the villagers in its current. Expecting this, they had each tied themselves to a tree, and while they were all knocked over, none of them were washed away. The Healer held her breath, hands clenched over the spear, waiting for the currents to smooth out enough that she could right herself.

Moments stretched back into hours, and then she was the Healer's Apprentice again, terrified, almost dropping her spear. Everything slowed, then stopped, as the first of the ocean creatures came into sight. She watched as the water froze, preserving the imprints of the villagers, rubble, and monsters. She wasn't sure that it would ever unfreeze, until it did, and she was pulled forward, forward, forward, until she was again the Healer, and time again flowed.

Propelled by the current, the winding snake-like things moved like arrows, eyes shining, claws ready. The villagers, led by their Healer, met them with ferocity to match, driving them back with the force of a hurricane. Above, the winged flew among the dry treetops, finishing their work as fast as they could.

Many fell on both sides, as the current again worked itself into a froth, forcing the villagers to their knees. The monsters disappeared with it, as did much of the island. On the ocean floor, the remaining villagers held firm, unable to do anything but cling tight to their trees, their determination a palpable force on its own.

Sky Islands cont.

Then, the last of the wave passed, and it was gone. Slowly, they began to stand, their legs wobbly, one after another. As each one stood, behind them unfurled a beautiful pair of wings, each different, and entirely their own. The last to stand was the Healer, who had wings the color of sea stones, of the mortar that had washed away.

Just barely visible among the clouds, the crimson Winged smiled, remembering the joy of her own victory, not long ago, before swooping down to join the others. She couldn't wait to teach the Healer how to bundle clouds into balloons, how to ride the wind currents, how to be free. There were so many islands to raise, in a wide, wide sky. But, with the new Winged by her side, it seemed just a little smaller.

That night, Sky was full of island, joy and wings. It would finally get to meet the beautiful Winged that it had so carefully raised on its island. Below, sister Sea was frothing with anger, clawing up at the flying people like a cat chasing fireflies, but it was too late. They had found their wings, and returned to Sky. Sea would never hurt them again. There were other islands, of course, and Sea was always vengeful, but as long as the Winged flew through Sky's currents, there was hope. That would be enough.

Lucy Bensinger



Lucy Bensinger is a student from Allen County who hopes to become a writer. In her free time, she likes to draw, read, and stay active.

British Invasion

My ancestors tell of “ghost people”,
Flesh of moon. Eyes of sea.
They arrived.
I cry as a child in want of mother,
Again and again and again,
Aching desperation,
For a good cup of chai.

Shivani Bhatt



My name is Shivani, and I am a former student of OSU Lima. Along with loving to write all things relating to India, sci-fi, and fantasy, I also love hiking, science, and spending time with friends and family.

Cherry Red

I was 12 when I wore red lipstick for the first time,
the cherry color making my skin look pale.
Walking into the world as a child,
leaving that store as a woman.

I was followed home that night,
my keys tucked between my knuckles,
the same way my mother taught me at 9.
My lipstick matching the cuts on my fingers.

The older boys whistled when I walked by,
calling me sweetheart and pretty.
I figured it was some kind of love,
But could a man really ever love a girl?

After red lipstick,
followed tight tank tops,
the tall high heels,
for the beginning of my adulthood started at only 13.

Men called me pretty,
took me home after dates,
kissing me messily in their trucks,
before whisking me off to my home before curfew.

I was brought to huge parties,
played with men older than my brothers.
I was tossed around like a bottle of beer,
But I was only half the cost.

For I was Lolita.
With my bright red lips,
and my cherry sucker from the gas station.
The older men sucking on my skin like a wolf does to a lamb.

Cherry Red cont.

For red lips now stain soft subtle features,
Adolescence sinking into the warm flesh of childhood.
Tainting my skin as I now reach the age,
of the men who once took my own innocence.

Brynna Chaney



Fox Child

I was born dirty
I was cleaned with burning fire,
clothed with stolen cloths.
Born on naive hope and stolen innocence,
of a broken lamb pretending she's grown.

For I was a fox in a puppy litter.
I was raised to bite,
with teeth I've never had.
Pelt covered with bite marks,
praising stolen youth and childlike adulthood.

I was raised inside sheep skin,
manipulation seeping from my veins.
I was born to kill,
born to sink my claws into all I touch.
I was born a monster.

I was a monster before I became a mother.
You gifting me a litter,
despite the dull shine of claws.
My teeth too sharp to pick up.
My body too ugly to be motherly.

I was no good mother.
My claws nicked their frail bodies.
My body was too young to feed their bellies.
My life was too scattered to properly raise.
And my fear was too prominent to protect.

For I was too scared of taking another bite.
I was fearful of the man you were raised behind,
a man with teeth duller than ours.
Too fearsome of scars littering my earth,
to protect the solar system I was supposed to hold.

Fox Child cont.

For I was your mother,
your guardian,
the wall between you and the world.
But I failed,
your puppy scent lingering in my daydreams.

Brynna Chaney



Brynna Chaney is a senior at Apollo Career Center currently aiming to get her Child Development Associate. She currently lives in Wapakoneta, Ohio with her two aggressive cats and her freakishly long axolotl. In her free time, she enjoys writing poetry about things that her therapist has gotten tired of hearing and hanging out with the local moms of her community.

Oil

“...there’s oil on the shop floor...”

Concrete’s glistening under harsh yellow industrial lighting.
Relentless, we crawl across the sacred shop floor.
We tirelessly tread the footsteps of gods.
Living off scraps in their shadows.
They hold the power over your head.
Swaying above you, keys to a toddler.
You feel tall enough to grasp them, but you’re just a kid.
You don’t wear their colors. You fly a different flag.

And so, you crawl.
Soiled with oil; blood, grease; sadness.

Like a giant she towers
Relishing in starving ego,
The oil is under her skin,
In veins like pipes of polished steel.
Atop her scrap metal throne
She sits, overlooking her failures,
All scattered on the killing floor,
Working to live, not living to work.
At her feet and dying on the concrete.
The film around our blood,
Separates the oil from the individual.

There is blood on the factory floor.

Ethan Dunlap



Hands like the Fish

My hands are like the fish:
Ensnared in a trap, hooked by the lip,
Flapping, sputtering, panicking,
Fueled by fear of death;
The atmosphere above me.
It is only a reflex, not a reflection,
These movements.

If I could take my own life
At dock's edge upon water
And aim it right at her,
Like looking down the barrel
Of an old rusty flintlock,
Waterlogged and powder-jammed,
Pull the trigger, deep end bound,
Then we would be one.

She is a bird of prey.
Atop the pond water she hunts
For my hands; her meal.
I see her sunlit silhouette,
So hypnotic her ebb and flow,
All from my cage, beneath feathers,
Under ripples above the surface.
The tension is too great.
I can't even break the skin.

Ethan Dunlap



My name is Ethan Dunlap. I am a writing tutor and full-time student at OSU Lima, and I plan to pursue a career in editing after graduation. I like to think of myself as a poet and aspiring writer, and someday I hope to be a published author.

Loves Greatest Regret

If I were to list
All the things I regret
It would stretch farther
Than the mightiest river
Most are small things
The wrong word said
At the worst moment
Time that could've been enjoyed
Instead of being wasted
Of all these things, though
The one I most regret
Is how I ended things with You.

All the years We'd had
The wonderful time We shared
The plans We made
For Our future together
Cast away in a text
Because I was convinced
Loneliness was the only way
I'd learn to be a better person
Maybe that was true
I grew into a woman
And made a real life
But I wish I would've done it with You.

And I wonder what could've been
Even though We're together again
You started a family without Me
And how I would've loved
To be there when it began
Instead of coming in late
Like I always do
To have helped You with Your Son
When You needed it most
To have built Our lives together
Instead of forcing them to fit
After all this time away from You.

Evelyn Evergreen

An Unaffordable Accident

Payton King's death was blissfully quick, despite the brutality of it. They had been crossing the street when a car ran them over. The oversized SUV killed them on impact before rushing over their corpse. The driver couldn't see them over the hood, and the AI that was steering the car didn't recognize their hunched frame as an obstacle until it was too late to react. Not that it would've been able to stop on such short notice anyways. The hover jets that scorched Payton's body as the car floated over them didn't have nearly enough breaking power to have preserved their life. It had been a good life though, better than most at least. Not many refugees had managed to get corporate positions, and fewer still had risen to even the moderate heights that Payton had risen to within their company before retiring. They left their kids with their own business, a family-owned diner like the one Payton's grandparents had talked so highly of. Payton wouldn't have chosen to die in that moment, of course, but they left this world without any unfinished business.

At least that's what should've happened. Payton woke up not to pearly gates, sulfurous hellfire, or even an eternal void of nonexistence. Instead, they woke up to the blinding lights and rhythmic, digital beeps of a hospital room. Their body felt strange to them. Their joints no longer ached, their skin was no longer loose, all the signs of age that Payton had grown used to had vanished between the seemingly simultaneous moments of now and when their stroll across the street had been cut short. More than that, they were extremely aware of several mechanical bits in their body. Some of them, like the needles of the IVs and the vital monitors, could be expected for someone waking up in a hospital. The cybernetic contraption wrapped around Payton's spinal cord, protruding from their back, and connected to the medical equipment through cables and tubes alike, was much less expected.

A cheerful, masculine voice drew Payton away from their self-evaluation and forced them to focus instead on the other people in the room with them. "Ah, Mrs. King, you're awake," the voice greeted them. Payton found the person addressing them, a man in a tailored suit, tidy hair and beard, a sly smile, and eyes too bright to be entirely organic. "So glad to have you with us properly."

"It's Mx. King," Payton corrected, "I'm not a woman, nor a man."

"Of course, my mistake," the man apologized without seeming to mean it.

"What's going on?" Payton asked, "I was crossing the street, and now I'm in a hospital? And what's this thing in my back? I wasn't supposed to get any chrome as part of my medical care, I've made that extremely clear. And who are you, where am I?"

The man in the suit kept the same sly smile as he replied, "I am Dalton Scott, a representative of Competitive Solutions, your former and hopefully future employer. As far your other queries, I think Dr. Flores will be able to answer those better than myself."

Payton's attention turned to a woman in a white coat with black hair tightly drawn into a bun who spoke in a clerical manner. "I'm afraid you were hit by a car Mx. King. You were proclaimed dead on the scene by paramedics, but your insurance through Competitive Solutions gave you access to this facility. Our contract with the company required us to do everything in our power to save your life, even going against your wishes to remain wholly organic." Dr. Flores shifted from a pragmatic recitation of events to a more empathetic tone, "I am, for the record, incredibly sorry for what we've done to you. Only you can decide if a second chance at life is worth compromising yourself in this way, but that's a decision we shouldn't have made for you."

An Unaffordable Accident cont.

Payton's heart raced as they were thrust into a flashback of the past. Suddenly they were watching the bodies of soldiers standing back up after having their chests blown out, crying out as their friends had their free will stripped by a virus they got while using their implanted computers on unprotected networks. All the horrors they'd lived through during the the war that killed America, the horrors that they'd thought they'd been safe from after they'd made it to Gem City and the war had ended, all came rushing back in a nauseating wave. Before Payton could be fully overwhelmed, however, the medical equipment they were attached to filled them with a cocktail of chemicals that blocked their trauma response. They found themselves scratching at their unnaturally youthful skin as they came back to themselves. It looked almost exactly as it did when they'd been a refugee on the run. The tightness of it was constricting somehow, though that may have been the medically suppressed panic attack.

"You Rebooted me?!"

"Not in the slightest," Dalton replied, though the guilt in Dr. Flores's eyes answered Payton's accusation more honestly than Dalton's words, "That term refers to people who have properly died and been reanimated⁷. The miracles of modern medical technology, however, do allow for recovery from much more grievous wounds than in days past. The paramedics were much too hasty in their declaration of death."

Payton didn't respond. They were having trouble digesting the situation. They had simply been on a stroll around the neighborhood, and now they'd died and been resurrected against their will. They didn't have very long to consider their predicament before Dalton continued with more bad news delivered through that unwavering smile.

"There is the matter of payment, however."

"Payment? I have insurance, isn't that what got me in this situation? Shouldn't this be covered?"

"I'm afraid not. Your insurance covers your stay here, but the treatment required to regenerate your body wasn't included, per your omission of cybernetic coverage."

"Then why the hell did you do this to me?!"

"Our contract," Dr. Flores answered sheepishly, "Requires us to do everything in our power to save the lives of our patients. Even if it goes against their wishes, and even if they don't have coverage for it. Saving lives comes first, they say."

Dr. Flores handed Payton an itemized bill, and they took it with a steadier grip than they'd had in decades. The procedure and cybernetics that had brought them back to life were unimaginably expensive. All the money in their savings would barely make a dent. Even if they came out of retirement, they'd never be able to pay it off within even the most generous payment plans time frame. They'd have to sell their business, the thing Payton had spent their life building to give their kids autonomy from the corporation they'd had to sell their life to, and even that might not be enough.

Dalton leaped on Payton's apparent desperation like a predator going after wounded prey, "There is another option if you lack the funds to cover the treatment. I'm prepared to offer you a new position within Competitive Solutions, one with a more comprehensive insurance plan."

"You brought me back from the dead to bring me out of retirement? Aren't there easier ways of going about this?"

"For this position, someone in your particular circumstance, that being someone prematurely declared dead and not yet reinstated as living, is required, and so unfortunately there isn't."

An Unaffordable Accident cont.

"So, what is this position?" Payton spat, trying to think of any other option.

"As you know," Dalton began, clearly having rehearsed this speech many times, "We at Competitive Solutions are a labor broker. We provide laborers for nearly every field. Recently we've begun fulfilling paramilitary contracts, and it's the specialized work in this field we'd like to hire you for. You'd be performing counter insurgency, espionage, and other clandestine operations. The position does require some substantial cybernetic modification, to allow you to perform at expected levels, as well as taking on some compliance software to ensure both that contracts are completed to satisfaction and that confidential information is kept under wraps. Furthermore, you'd have to refrain from contact with those that know you, for the same reasons."

Payton wasn't sure how to respond at first. This whole dreadful situation made more sense now though. Payton had lived an unremarkable life, and now they were legally dead, the perfect candidate for a secret agent. Their former employer had jumped at this opportunity and resurrected them to fulfill this incredibly specific niche. They didn't want to take the job, to be further modified beyond what they considered human, and least of all to be put under the control of whatever algorithms Competitive Solutions used to ensure compliance. They wanted to do anything else. To spit in Dalton's face, walk out and return to their old life. That wasn't an option though. If they didn't take this position, the life they had built for themselves and their family would come crumbling down. They thought of their kids, losing the life Payton had promised them, being forced into the corporate world Payton had suffered through, or worse, into the poverty Payton had so narrowly escaped.

"You're despicable," Payton finally said, defeated, "But fine. I'll take the job. Not like I have much of a choice."

Dalton's expression changed for the first time, his smile widening, "Wonderful, we're so happy to have you back on the team. I'll get the paperwork."

Evelyn Evergreen



Evelyn (It/She) is a first year Creative Writing student. It believes the best fiction stories have something to say about the world around us. She plans on getting a MLIS and becoming a public librarian to provide for her community. It's ideal life would be in a city surrounded by mountains that it could camp in every weekend.

a poem by someone who is not a poet but wants to be

I wanted to write a poem but I failed.
I don't know how to write poetry;
every time I try I feel like I am only jamming
sentences into lines where they don't fit.
I feel like I am ripping apart—
mutilating—
dismembering—
a sentence, a good sentence, a sentence that does not deserve my butchering hands squeezed
around its throat.
I feel like I am shredding words between my teeth like overcooked steak.
I don't know how to write poetry
but I also don't know how to fail.
I am a writer, I have always been a writer,
and the idea of writing something bad scares me
but the idea of not writing at all scares me more. So I sit here
with my broken sentences
band-aids fisted in my palms
and I hope that this fear gives way to creation.

J. Fox



J. Fox is a first year student at the University of Cincinnati, studying English and Classics. She has been writing her entire life and hopes to never stop seeing the beauty within words.

Infinity House

I've been complaining about how lonely I am nowadays,
but I've been lonelier.
Back when the sky was an endless sea of black
that surrounded the spooky cornfields by your house.
It reminded me of the summer days spent locked in
the house that glows in my nightmares
He was the warden that crept downstairs,
listening for creaking footsteps,
guarding the front door like a feral dog.
Hate festered in the walls like rats scratching,
buried underneath the creaky floorboards lies
the innocent girl I used to be
forgotten, so deep in the back of my mind,
I don't remember being her.
Nothing you could do would break me like those days did.

Deja Jones



Deja is a graduate from the Ohio State University and received her Bachelors of Fine Arts in December of 2022. She is currently enrolled in the MFA program at Ashland University and is an editor for the Black Fork Review. She spread creativity in her community by establishing the Poetry and Prose club at OSU Lima, interning as an editor for Asterism Literary Journal, and spending four years as an English tutor. Deja received publications in Mosaic Magazine, Asterism Literary Journal, Hog Creek Hardin Literary Journal, and won 3rd place in the Letter Review Prize for Poetry.

Shopping with Grandma

On the list of items that she would accrue,
we would go through the isles for an hour or two.
It was always a pain, for me to stand there and wait.
But she's family, isn't that enough for me to delegate?

We move right along, with me as her scout.
From back to the front, that was her usual route.
It had to be perfect, or she would pout;
Or tear apart the shelves, until the right product came out.

First came the eggs, 10 large, to be specific.
2% milk, small jug, thank you, terrific.
Distilled water, not regular, and don't forget the butter.
Some strawberry yogurt, and while you're at it, grab another.

Up and down, in a line, back to back, the cart moves.
Various things, and random things, she would peruse.
"Now we're going through the next isle to get me some spinach.
I hope you're taking notes, cause we're not yet finished."

Next going through shelves for mayonnaise,
All while she was ranting, spouting hate on the gays.
I say, "Really gran? Is this really the time and place?"
She gave me a look, as if I were too a disgrace.

Then came the various peppery spices.
And also the alcohol, for the family gathering's vices.
Next, the candy isle, for sugar sweets to consume.
Her statements from before, still left me a gloom.

Then came time to leave, how I yearned for that escape.
All those things that she said, left my mouth agape.
But I held my tongue, and still I wonder why,
She needed all these things, and her comments so dry.

Shopping with Grandma cont.

We pile her items in the trunk with a thunk!
She said, “same time next week,” and my heart sunk.
While I still love her, and as we drove back to her den;
I thought to myself, “I think with her, I won’t go shopping again.”

Alec Keller



Alec Keller is a student at The Ohio State University, Lima Campus. They are currently on their senior year to obtain their B.A. in Theatre. In their free time, Alec is an avid creative writer, a staunch advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community, and a tabletop roleplaying enthusiast.

the illusion of sensing

5.

You feel it

a punch to your gut, hollowing.
it trickles to your thighs,
tickles. a deprivation.
you don't understand it,
but you know it wants to spill.
it almost hurts. worse.
it makes you love him
more.

4.

You see it

bodies, longing.
elongated, because distance
lets the words grow fonder
behind blue light.
blue bubbles,
two for every white.
a healthy obsession,
endearment beyond understanding.
does it hurt
if it's not hurting
anyone in the end?
though you'd take the words away
if it meant he could love you
more.

the illusion of sensing cont.

3.

You hear it

laughing,
genuinely. a release. finally
getting to act like yourself
around someone
so beyond your
self-
construed needs.
maybe the denial means
you do need him
more.

2.

You taste it

though nothing's in your mouth,
only a notion
of what it should do.
a blanket, balm, like every star
in the sky at once. yet
you think twice before
you go in again
because you'd let him
leave before
you loved him
more.

the illusion of sensing cont.

1.

You smell it

sweat, dripping.
sticking, desperately. why?
are you getting nervous, baby?
drop the act. he's not calling you that.
remember the script. lick it away.
as long as you're alive, wet or dry,
he's never loving you
more.

0.

Julia Lombardo



Julia Lombardo recently graduated from Ohio State University with an English degree and a Creative Writing minor. She has had five poems published in Mosaic Magazine and one in Short Vine. She enjoys reading YA fiction, going to concerts, volunteering around her city, and spending time with her friends.

June

beneath the bridge, June rattles his pole,
lets the worm writhe beneath still currents
in hopes of a bite, a decent cat some twenty pounds
with a stubborn jaw and taste for steel,

a monster like the ones they pull out
brush covered dugouts of the Scioto,
mudcats all fight til they peak out the river
and ain't more than a couple croaks

futile and hookmouthed like newborns
who flail unknowing between two worlds,
slick muddied and ugly in the light of day
somehow shining like something special

cats that follow June back home, split open
and fried til the taste of mud only lingers long enough
for March to say that their baby's gonna come out
spittin river water and drift wood

Garret Miller



Garret Miller is a native of Northwest Ohio and currently attends The Ohio State University with plans to pursue graduate school. He maintains a severe interest in poetry and acts as Editor-in-Chief of Hog Creek Hardin, the literary journal of Ohio State Lima.

Beneath My Feeble Seams

I lay in a field of Queen Anne's lace.
Its faded, white bud's bloom
the memories that were
clipped away from seasons past.

Thistles and thorns stab
my waistline, attempting to
take the required measurements
for the clothing I'm controlled to wear.

The sharp, verdant grass
trims the follicles of hair
imperative for the desired
image of perfection the plant infests in my mind.

The invasive, biennial lace wraps around
my vulnerable figure and entangles
the once faithful frame into a ditch
that peacefully rests along the edge
of a deserted byway that no man has traveled.

There is nothing I can do to unravel the seeds that are sown,
the seeds that pin my feeble body down into the dirt.
Her floral exterior poisons my mortal uniform.
No key in this world can save me from such a peril as this.
I begin to realize this is no field of Queen Anne's lace.
The acres I debilitate on consist of hemlock.

Nicole Pohlman



Configuration

Obscene images of what I've done
roam within the realm of my conscious.
Cruel sincerities tempt sentient thoughts,
while compassionate uncertainties
await to experience the veracious fruition
of life beyond the borders.

Salacious visions begin to develop
and depict conjugal ideals that the
voices threaten I must engage with.
These erotic illustrations are too vivid,
the cones of my retinas will never be able
to erase the past experiences I embraced.

Deceitful genuineness conquers the unconscious
Sympathetic rhetoric fails to be effective.
I flash a momentary smile that quickly falters
into the physiological representation
of the emotions I suppress from society,
the sensations I experience in isolation.

Nicole Pohlman



Nicole Pohlman is an aspiring English major with a minor in Professional Writing from OSU Lima. In 2023, Pohlman published a children's book on Amazon titled *The Little Fly Who Couldn't Fly* and plans to publish *Mabel the Moth* in 2024. She will graduate in the fall of 2025.

Nature Guide

In Costa Rica our tall
deep voiced nature guide told us that these
ants crossing the wide walking path
are all on a mission to scale the trees
so they might cut the freshest leaves
from the tallest greenest canopy
closest to the sky
and the sun
to bring home for the sustenance
of their queen and of their clan.
Clan, kin, family? Tribe? Elephants
move in memory but for ants
I cannot say.

An ant
who gets cut off from the dense
brown wriggling patch of their fellows
will often spin in aimless
circles lost and
alone
(for the very first time)
until they die.

Sitting from a high up place
I watch the spill of them filling up
the streets in their copiousness
something unimaginable
really
when I unfocus my eyes
they are ants moving together
in unending swarms
perhaps on a mission
or maybe not.

Nature Guide cont.

They might be searching
for the greenest freshest leaves
closest to the sun
and the sky
or they might be walking
into the comfort of anonymity
that bead of sacred and surprising silence within
the crush of buzzing sound. Perhaps
it's in our genetic code to fear
the cut off the damned
fate to spin aimless
and alone in ceaseless circles
until we die. Perhaps
it's why we swarm the streets
and the universities with ourselves
all bunched together
all tethered to the same tracks
of forward motion
(to where?)
the deep voice haunts
this high up perch
I am again in the hot
wet teeming-with-aliveness
jungle.

Daisy Roberts



My Favorite Foods

My brother smokes cigarettes
through the thin meshed windows of his
bedroom, where,
adjacently, I breathe in the musty dust
of melancholy boredom that
seeps through his sorry summer.

I remember how
I used to admire cigarette bodies,
those wane and wiry ballet dancers
breathing smoke for air
bellies taut and trim and never hungry,
full of satiating smoke,
while my soft and suppler
body was fueled by

peanut butter and jellies,
bags of baby carrots
pita and hummus, falafel and
kombucha through a licorice straw,
scrambled eggs and cream cheese,
bagels, blueberry pancakes, tortilla chips,
Greek yogurt, guacamole, broccoli,
and almond butter slathered banana all in a day's work.

Daisy Roberts



Mourning

That movie fucked me up
about the reverend and his suicide
jacket and his red barbed
wire flesh dripping
dripping all over the woman
whose tongue he savored at
the end
almost like love
can save us but I don't
think so. Love
a letter opener coaxing
you to the surface
of yourself to be finally
seen. Mania!
is the reality of things
it seems. Rubix cube
that will never not ever ever
ever be solved but instead churns
in nauseating disaster
green blue red green blue death
I have to hold my mouth
shut to keep the fever from
spilling. Like
what was paul schrader
even trying to say?

*Hello, shooting your brains
out with a shotgun
in the woods on the red
trail is i suppose the best
solution to coping with
the crippling disaster of
climate change.*

Mourning cont.

Climate change.
oh how to wrap myself
around it? I think
the leaves are turning red
not for fade of chlorophyll
but suffocation. Death
hovers close in this conversation
aha!
is that why instead
we discuss sports with leather
balls and virtual fantasies
like death
isn't already in mourning
for the murder we're conducting
right here right now
right here right now
right here right now

Daisy Roberts



Daisy Roberts is an avid nature wanderer and word lover studying English and Spanish at The Ohio State University. A Westerville native, Daisy is committed to finding ways to collaborate with language to express what she feels are the urgent truths of our time- climate catastrophe, attuning to the unbearable tenderness of being human for this brief time, the majesties of the natural world and the human capacity for sweeping intimacy- ultimately connecting with readers across wide disciplines and circumstances to unite in the shared land of language.

Symphony of the Night

Have you ever looked in the mirror and wondered if perception is far from truth?
Perhaps you've drawn out a picture in your mind of the people that seem too well off to choose,
Perhaps you struck at a million dollars but still feel like nothing is perfect for you.
Perhaps you studied a thousand hours but feel there's simply no choices to choose,
A thousand voices create a symphony of noises and yet you can only hear few,
From the sounds of suffering to the sounds of wisdom,
Their nonsense runs dark and it looms,
The voices of cheering, of laughing, of jeering, embedded inside of these tunes,
The noises of scraping, of killing, of raping, are always a part of them too,
A million chances, fallen romances, betrayal that reaps at the seems,
A story of lies, of unfinished fights, of people who hurt underneath.
The story of life is a trick full of smite made to knock a man down to his knees,
It builds you with praise and it worships your name till you fail to stack up to its needs,
You'll battle, you'll struggle, you'll fall and you'll buckle till you're back at the end of the cliff,
Then once you mess up it'll kill you for fun and then claim it was just cause you tripped.
The world that's so beautiful, that's odd but yet typical, that's swarmed with the souls of its life
In the morning it sparkles, it's warm but it's not loathed, it's loved until day turns to night
Till the sorrow grows rampant, the kids aren't frantic, and the quiet consumes all the air
The symphony of night is the tune made from spite that the day carefully hid away,
It doesn't cover up, nor address what's above, for the night remains constant and tame,
The symphony of night is the truth that we hide from the judgment of rays of the day.

Rocky Stallone



Trust

Trust,

a barrier between hope and love.

A word so solemnly spoken that its five letters slip off the tongue like dew on morning leaves.

Trust,

a word spoken so much you'd believe it'd be used correctly, but, clearly, belief is wrong.

Trust,

a seemingly safe hand, but when you grab it with your own it seems to lose its strength and let you fall

Trust,

the last thing you give before your world turns dark and cold and the hours turn to seconds as you lose those whom you love

Trust,

For, it only has 5 letters and 1 syllable, but it changes for every person...

cause obviously if everyone knew the meaning of trust it'd never be broken, right?

But even then you can't break a word with a million meanings, so instead, you'd break the person with only one.

Trust,

A word that loses its meaning when you give it away.

Rocky Stallone



Golden Flower

I somehow found my beauty, like a flower left behind.
A golden flower, childhood, something buried in my mind,
A tear within my petals leaving memories, figments, lies
A child, seems so innocent, may often ruin lives,
For the flower at her hands' disposal wasn't left alive
A past of broken friendships, broken families, blood and cries
A child who my heart hasn't forgiven in my mind
Still holds the one thing hidden in the cracks within my lies
It's beauty like a golden flower, priceless, nothing less
A beauty that I now don't want to hide, but to express

Rocky Stallone



Weight

There was a girl, who lied about her weight
She'd smile down the white tiled halls and skip throughout the day
She wore a mask, one that no one questioned or destined.
At night she'd have her sessions, though she never learned a thing
She'd leave smiling every time and hum the tune that kept her sane
She had no normal friends, just ones with faded skin
She'd talk to them from time to time, they smiled... from within
The girl was rather curious too, obsessed with the color red
She loved the way it dripped when the control was in her head
"Oh dear oh dear" she'd look aside with enemies around
She'd never get any peace and quiet as long as she was found
She often liked the silence, but they didn't grant her much
They'd cart her off and tie her hands as if she weren't hers to touch
She never really understood them, they never seemed to learn...
Suddenly she looked around and saw another girl
Her head was cast back to the ceiling, her eyes yet blank, adjourned
The weight had gotten to her
She'd been diagnosed
But she didn't think that'll ever happen, not to her, oh no

Rocky Stallone



I am a senior from Shawnee high school who found her expression in poetry. I've always had a dream of being able to spread my messages with the world, so I figured I'd take my first step with this submission. I hope the words I write bring out as much wonder to the audience as they do for me.

A Breath of Fall



Hog Creek Hardin is a literary journal housed at The Ohio State University Lima campus and is edited by undergraduates. Previously called Asterism and The Hog Creek Review, it has been in continuous circulation since 2007, publishing works by Ohio State Lima students and area high school students. We envision the journal's renewal publishing local, regional voices and reengaging local high schools. We are dedicated to encouraging and promoting regional work.

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