

SPRING 2025 | ISSUE 1



# ***THE RUBY GOOSE***

Sigma Tau Delta's Creative Writing Zine





“My voice goes after what my  
eyes cannot reach, / With the  
twirl of my tongue I encompass  
worlds and volumes of worlds,”  
- Walt Whitman, “Song of  
Myself”

## Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

I chose to start this zine as another way for writers on campus to showcase their work. There is a certain fear about putting work out there, especially early on in an artist's journey, so I hope this serves as a low-risk way for voices to be heard.

In this zine, you will find stories and worlds of all kinds. The authors invite you to peek through their windows into a world crafted by them. By weaving these stories together and opening your mind to new experiences, I hope you see the kaleidoscope that our writers have crafted.

This is the first ever issue of The Ruby Goose, and I thank you and hope you enjoy being one of the first readers. As you join us on this journey through the looking glass, I hope you appreciate these different perspectives and perhaps find inspiration for your own work as well.

## Chase Cariens

Editor-in-Chief of The Ruby Goose



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# THE RUBY GOOSE

Sigma Tau Delta's Creative Writing Zine

## Meet the Staff



Chase Cariens is an English major with a concentration in secondary education. He enjoys writing, reading, and video games. He also loves creating new opportunities for writers on campus.

Brandi Spann is an English literature graduate student. She works at the student newspaper, The Alestle, and has a passion for writing, storytelling, and words. She'd like to thank her co-editors and the authors of these pieces for making this come to life!



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Natalie Jacobs is a senior majoring in English and minoring in creative writing, and the vice president of Sigma Tau Delta. She is also a novelist and spends her spare time playing Mario games and recommending obscure 80s music. She has never been seen in a room with a Koopaling.



Kevin Cox is pursuing his Master's in the Teaching of Writing here at SIUE. He has had a passion for Creative Writing since his first course as an undergraduate student, and has loved watching the Creative Writing community on campus grow.

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# “Scrambled Eggs”

By Esther Dutey

Behind the walls of a little brown house,  
Beyond the door of a periwinkle room,  
Beneath the covers of a twin-sized bed,  
I opened my eyes to glittering daylight  
and scurried to the kitchen.

I wanted scrambled eggs, no—  
I wanted to *make* scrambled eggs.  
My father, forever awake,  
got the pan from the high cupboard,  
turned the stove to medium heat,  
and placed me on the counter.

I wanted to add the eggs.  
He let me.  
A crack, a splash—the dog came running.  
I wanted to try again.  
He let me.

I wanted to hold the spoon.  
He let me.  
I stirred the white, spun the yellow;  
I spilled some over the edge.  
He let me.

Minutes passed like water droplets,  
slow and idle—a sodden towel  
drip-drying in the sun.  
I took up the time like a sponge in water.  
I cluttered the morning.  
He let me.

I think of my father when I think of time.  
Time gone and time spent.  
The way it overflowed his pockets  
and how he never came up short  
when I needed to borrow a bit of it.



# “Weep for the Worms”

By Chase Cariens

Digging through mud, picking out pink, I weep for the worms.  
Dirt cakes under my fingernails. I scrunch my face as I see them writhe and wiggle,  
a slimy flesh begging to be let go.  
All I could do was spread them farther,  
piercing through their skin with the hook like my dad instructed.  
As I cast my rod into the park lake, we sunk deeper down, drowning each other in silence.

On days when the Sun is fully covered and the rain comes pelting down, I weep for the worms.  
I hold my breath as I dodge them like landmines.  
It is sidewalk warfare, the darkening pinks of bodies, blackened from the  
dirt homogenizing with exposed wounds.  
The rain drops down like bombs, shaking the soil and forcing the worms to wiggle away from their  
homes.  
I wonder if they cry out, or if anyone would listen, or maybe I’m overthinking it.  
Their brains aren’t very big, after all.  
They can’t say anything.

Who would understand the comfort of soil packed tightly around them, or the struggle against dirty  
fingers,  
or the squirming that comes from being touched, while also being fully exposed?  
Who would understand the final wriggle, as the man pierces skin,  
opening you in a way you would never choose for yourself?  
Who would understand the back-and-forth motion, or the war inside you as the rain hits exposed,  
dirty flesh?  
Who would understand silent screams and careful footsteps,  
and who would weep for them?

On the uphill playground, my friends and I raced toward the worms.  
Hollow metallic beams that ran underground and rose up from the  
dirt five feet away to make another worm-like shape.  
There were only eight, so they were coveted for the comfortable seating on their humps.  
Their mouths were speakers; we yelled and spat and made noises like  
“ptthhhhhht” and “waaooooooooow.”  
Each one was different but used the same.  
We made a worm-themed rap one year, and the teacher recorded us.  
I was beatboxing on the hump of my short, yellow worm.

“We are worms” we sang, “we are worms.”

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# “Beautiful Butterfly”

By Natalie Jacobs

Sadness and loneliness tumbled through the depths of Noah’s mind. He never fit in with the rest of the world, nor did he want to. It didn’t feel right. But now, the only person who was there for him, who let him express himself, was gone. Not just his sister, but his mentor, his best friend. He didn’t even get to say goodbye to her.

Even his parents wouldn’t accept him. He hated talking about them because they hated him. He was scared that he would have to go back to the people who were supposed to love him but treated him like he barely existed.

It was going to be Noah against the world. A world he believed wanted nothing to do with him. And for what? His liking for nature? His desire to have the animal friends he had heard about in the stories his sister read to him when he was younger?

But alas, he had to fit in. He had to be normal. Constantly vying for the attention of other boys his age. The same boys who would treat him like a laughingstock. They told him to grow up, they told him to stop being such a baby, they told him he was weird.

His sister understood him. She knew he wasn’t a monster. But now she was gone. There was no bringing her back. If he had known that he would only get thirteen years with her, he would have done so much differently. He would never have let the little bouquet of wildflowers she had given him wilt.

Noah was lost. There was nowhere left for him to run when times got tough. There was no one who understood him.

He needed to get away. He needed to go to his special place.

Noah looked up into the night sky and begged for his sister back. He offered his soul. But the sky was unyielding. It was cold to him. She was gone. He was alone. A terrified, lonely boy left out to dry in a universe that wanted nothing to do with him.

He sighed as he sat down on the grass. This field was his special place. He needed to be at home in nature.

Nature was his only friend left. There was no need to pretend here. There were no humans to laugh at him. The buttercups and dandelions would never treat him so badly.

He looked around at the flowers that surrounded him. If he had his way, there would be a wonderland full of roses, tulips, and lilies blooming around him. He sprawled himself out, letting the grass tickle the back of his neck. It was comforting to let himself rest.

He stared off into the stars. He didn’t know what each one meant to him on their own. He couldn’t know, as much as he would have loved to. The entire night sky could look at him and be happy to have his presence. All he knew is that somewhere up there, his sister was smiling down on him.

His back was starting to become damp from the dew on the grass, but Noah welcomed the sensation. The grass was simply providing its protective coat to a young boy in need. As his muscles started to relax, it was like he was melting right into the grass.

But something still wasn’t right. He wasn’t melting – he was sinking. There was a weight attached to his heart that he couldn’t shake no matter what he did. The weight of his loss was just too much. Worse, a thought started to form in his head. The thought of anyone finding out where he was or what he was doing would be humiliating and ruin his already fractured relationship with the people around him. This had to stay between him and the field.



The thoughts were starting to become too real. They were closing in on him. He swore he could see the world becoming smaller and smaller around him. No more was it a blanket of warmth and love, it was a constrictive serpent trying to strangle him.

He closed his eyes, rolled onto his side, and put his knees to his chest and his hands on his knees. Everything went silent and the world slowed down to a stop.

In that moment, Noah finally felt something he had been deprived of – peace. As the dew absorbed into his skin, it felt like his entire body was melting into the ground; becoming one with the nature he loved so much. Time was completely irrelevant in this newfound state of bliss. Finally, his senses weren't working against him – the crickets chirping in his ears, the breeze flowing over his skin, the scent of wildflowers in his nose. The weight of the world was falling off his back more and more with each passing second.

As the weight disappeared, the line between reality and fantasy started to blur. Noah could feel a pair of wings on his back; to his surprise, he could control them with ease. He had no idea whether he had entered a dreamscape or not, nor did he care. He was brimming with joy at the sense of freedom that he had been blessed with. When he opened his eyes, he was greeted by a new world full of colors and scents.

With a flap of his wings, he lifted off the ground. Finally, he was free of the burdens that had come with him. His true happiness came from simply flitting his wings and soaring through the air, taking it all in during this new euphoric state. No longer did it matter what anyone else thought of him – even if there were anyone around, his new form was too beautiful, and he was well aware of it.

As he came to rest on the ground next to a small puddle, he was shown the truth of what had happened. Looking back at him was not a human, but a butterfly. Words ran through his mind as he spread his large black and orange wings. Strength. Pride. Courage.

Never before had any of these concepts been so real to him. But there he was, looking at the reflection of a monarch butterfly, desperately hoping it was all real. This reality that he had entered was majestic and free. It satisfied a deeply rooted craving that he had never been able to truly satisfy. He had found his true form, and he was going to hold on to it for as long as he could.

However, as the night came to a close, Noah landed back in the same spot where he had shed his human form. He closed his eyes again, finding himself back to normal when he opened them. As disappointing as it was that he had to return to his human life, he returned with a renewed sense of adventure and joy. He thought once again about his sister, who had always loved butterflies. Somewhere, wherever she was, she was feeling the same pride that Noah had just felt.

Over the coming days, the memory of his time as a butterfly lived in the forefront of his mind. His changed demeanor was evident to everyone around him. But he was too shy to talk about why. It just reinforced his eccentricity. Even if he knew it wasn't his fault that the human world didn't understand him, it still felt like his problem for being a weirdo. He didn't want to care what other people thought of him. But he did. He tried not to care. But he did.

And then it slipped out.

Noah's giddy mood was gone. It was anxiety now. Why did he say anything? What was he thinking? What would other people think? Was it even real? Why was he talking about it like it was? He turned into a butterfly. That had to have been a dream. What kind of idiot did he have to be to think that anyone would ever take him seriously when he had just said that he got to turn into a butterfly?

Before the thoughts and questions and fear started to boil over, he rushed away from the outside world. Noah couldn't get to his favorite field fast enough. It was calling for him. Telling him to come home. To come home and get some rest.

The stars were bright, the dew underfoot was warm, and the flowers were in full bloom.

Noah stared into the night sky once again. Everything was coming back to him — the joy of seeing his reflection be something that he loved instead of resented, the connection he had with his sister, the way the human world could no longer mistreat him. He thought about what he was, then imagined what he wanted to be.

He looked around. No one was there to hear him. Only him and nature. He looked down at his human form for what would hopefully be the last time. He looked back up at the sky and saw his sister giving him a wink as if to give her permission for what he was about to do.

With all the conviction he could muster, he yelled.

"I want to be a butterfly!"

For the first time since he had lost his sister, he was confident in himself.

And then, silence. Darkness.

Time was frozen once again.

As he opened his eyes, all the sensations started to come back to him. He could feel the weight fall off his back as his wings sprawled out. This time, though, he wouldn't be turning back. The human world had rejected him and he had found a new existence much better suited for him. With a majestic flutter, Noah took off into the night sky.

Noah's sister had always loved butterflies. He remembered the time she became fascinated while they were visiting an atrium when they were younger. The smile on her face when a big, blue butterfly landed on her finger was priceless. She said she wished she could stay there and live with the butterflies.

As Noah flew around his new home, he knew that somewhere out there, another butterfly was waiting for him. A big, blue one just like the one that landed on his sister's finger that day.

They would be reunited soon enough, and they would be more beautiful than ever before.

# “Why did you want a son instead of a daughter?”

By Grant Lockhart

Dear Mom,  
I am typing this out while sitting in a coffee shop seeing patrons go in and out with their coffee and I see just a glimpse of how beautifully diverse humankind is in the way that every person expresses themselves differently. I ponder on people conforming and defying gender norms and it caused me to desire to ask you this important question. Why did you appeal to God and ask Him to fill your womb with a son instead of a daughter?

To an extent, I get it. Our patriarchal society still treats women cruelly sometimes and you just wanted to spare your child from that pain. A pain that you recognize all too well. You raised me right by showing me how To be an upstanding man who respects and protects women so that there could be less pain caused by male cruelty in the world.

However, the part that I don't get is when you said that you wanted a son because you thought you were too “tomboyish” to raise a daughter.

You didn't think that you could show them how to do stereotypically feminine activities.

I just don't understand why you and most of your generation weren't able to see the complexities of gender.

If you had a daughter, they could have been like you or they could have been more feminine or they could have been a mixture of femininity and masculinity.

I mean, I think that every person has a mixture of the two, even if they don't realize it. I see this in you when you nurtured me in your arms like the amazing mother you are and you also taught me how to throw and catch a baseball.

These qualities only have gender associated with them because society has socially constructed certain roles to be tied with certain genders.

I think these roles are too heavily forced upon us, especially when I look

back at a time where these roles played out in both a humorous and disgusting way when I was catcalled at a gas station late at night by a man who only saw the back of my head and thought I was a woman.

Men sure could be disgusting sometimes. This man was so shallow that he tried to make a move after only seeing a part of me. I left the gas station and laughed it off because I didn't see him as much of a threat, but I do find it horrific that women go through that everyday, and I understand why you wanted to spare me from that.

Mom, I know I have been rather aggressive in pushing this point in my letter, but I love and adore you. You have always been an amazing Mom. I just wanted you to see things through my eyes and I wanted you to know that there is beauty in femininity in every way that it's expressed and that your femininity is beautiful in every way that you express it.

# “The Woman Who Tried to Become God”

By Grant Lockhart

Eve was the only woman who tried to become God.  
Her ambition was unique and can't be compared.  
Many women have aspired to high positions of power,  
but Eve was the only one who risked her life to attempt to  
become the most powerful being in the entire universe.

Eve was the only woman who tried to become God.  
She drew her inspiration from Lilith, Adam's first wife.  
Lilith knew that she was Adam's equal because she  
was his literal other half.  
They were one person that God split  
into two people of two genders.

The woman who tried to become God had more ambitious goals  
than Lilith, who just sought to be coequal with Adam  
and just wanted her turn to be on top of him while he lay below.  
Lilith was cast into the depths of hell for this, and Eve was willing  
to risk a similar fate. However, Eve wanted more than equality with man.  
She wanted the knowledge and power that would make her coequal with her own  
Creator.

Eve was the only woman who tried to become God.  
She was made out of Adam's rib because God wanted her  
to submit to Adam, unlike Lilith who knew that she was Adam's equal.  
God didn't know that Adam was going to be the one to submit to Eve  
by eating the forbidden fruit in order to please her.  
Adam's motivation was simple, he wanted to please Eve  
because he didn't want to lose her like he lost Lilith.  
Eve's motivation was to become something greater than herself.

Eve was the only woman who tried to become God.  
Her and Adam were cast out of Eden for this, but it was worth it  
to make a point that she wasn't going to let anything  
hold her back from attempting to push humanity forward  
by taking the steps that she thought could make her omnipotent.

The woman who tried to become God can be seen  
in every woman who tries to break the glass ceiling  
by running for president of the United States,  
or a woman who runs for the highest office in any country,  
or even just by being the first woman to accomplish  
something in her field.

Lilith's determination to have equality with Adam  
and Eve's determination to have equality with God  
can be seen in every woman  
who seeks to overturn  
every patriarchal system.

The woman who tried to become God should be an inspiration to  
every woman who aspires to be in great positions of authority  
because her and Lilith's stories show that if there is a risk no matter what you  
do, then the best option is to strive to be the greatest that ever was  
and become your own God by not allowing anyone to have power over you.

## **"A City Smothered"**

**By Lindsey Jacobs**

The acrid aroma of smoke is the first sign.  
The snow covered city is burning.  
White winter ground burnt black  
Only now can I remember the ember of my youth.  
The way fire fought but water reigned.  
Red flame flamenco dances  
Next year at this time I hope to dance too.  
Dantes' match striking a chord.  
That which lights a soul ablaze  
What smoke signal do you send?  
Combustion consumes as all creation crumbles.  
Smother  
Bury the burnt remains of a city surrounded by smoke.  
Ash falls like snow, ground white once more.

# “The Lockhart Women”

By Grant Lockhart

It is more than a surname, it tells a story.  
A story of two women with the last name Lockhart.

Their stories reflect each other like a mirror.  
One married into it and one was born into the name Lockhart.

One is my mother, who is the first in her family to get  
a bachelor's degree. A degree without the name Lockhart.

After college, she sought out adventure by working in Yellowstone  
and after a few years she found her future husband with the last name Lockhart.

She got married and moved back to Illinois, where she worked for a few years before fulfilling  
her lifelong dream of becoming a mother to two sons born into the family of Lockhart.

The other woman is the first Canadian woman to get  
a bachelor's degree. A woman named Grace Lockhart.

An inspiring woman that I'm not related to, but I connect with  
because we share all three initials and the last name, Lockhart.

She was a preacher's wife and homemaker, but she used her writing for activism because she  
wanted women to speak their minds instead of locking up their opinions in their hearts.

They both took on more “stereotypical” roles for women as stay-at-home  
mothers and were able to raise the next generation of Lockharts’.

A difficult and noble role that is underrated.  
A role that fits well for a Lockhart.

They are making legacies and have left legacies  
that have brought great pride to the name Lockhart.

They are both great women with incredible accomplishments.  
I hope to achieve something equally as great as them in my name, Grant Lockhart.



# “The Jeep Wrangler”

By Chase Cariens

The first vehicle that truly felt mine was a black Jeep Wrangler.

Softness didn't exist in my Jeep.

Hard wheel, hard seats, hard doors.

I had to crank the windows down and flip the lights on myself.

When I tried on makeup filters on TikTok, they found their way to my drafts.

Bright red lipstick versus a turkey necklace.

Automatic didn't exist in my Jeep.

I would push the manual lock down with my keys still inside,  
and have to call my dad to bring the spare. Eventually he would just put a spare under my hood.

On the way to college, I drove through unpaved roads.

It was too late to hear the men at work yelling by the time I saw  
black tar flinging up on both sides.

I told my dad that they didn't put any signs on the road,  
but at the end of the day, I wasn't looking close enough.

When something went wrong, it was simply user error.

I didn't exist in my Jeep.

It felt like a doomsday bunker I never prepped.

The tire cover was an image of an American flag made from bullets.

The gas cap was made to resemble an IED.

One day, after my shift at Starbucks, I found a rainbow flower with a smiley face on the ground.

It was a Croc charm, but it jiggled perfectly into my air vent.

I turned the key in the ignition to feel the rattle and bounce, ready for the battles ahead.

# “FLORENCE THE MACHINE”

By Ryan Whaley

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## AUTHOR’S NOTE

I’ve made the discovery of a lifetime - a great discovery but not a grand discovery, like curing cancer or ending world hunger, not to get your hopes up. But a discovery nonetheless, that I have the honor of sharing with you. Space-time is a cosmic, fickle beast; I have no credibility in this subject and have only taken the simplest classes to fulfill the credit-hour requirement for receiving my degree. If you have the time, take a moment out of your very busy (or boring) life to suspend disbelief.

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## ORIGIN

The day was Wednesday, February 12th, 2025. It had snowed the night before, and the thinnest inch of ice had formed on the roads. I woke up late, as I usually do, at 6 a.m., and made it to work just in time. My day consisted of:

1. KidZone before-care
2. Coffee & Homework
3. Nonfiction Writing class
4. A sprint up 3 flights of stairs
5. Shakespeare class
6. Ramen and Water
7. Opening Night Performance (Blood at the Root - Dominique Morisseau)

All things considered, the performance went well, and I left to eat dinner with some cast members and friends. In my circle of friends, we struggled to talk about anything other than our problems with teachers we didn’t like, or assignments we didn’t do, avoiding any conversation about ourselves, or our problems, what we’re not but could be doing, what we want to do, our ticks or icks or how we make love. No, we didn’t talk about any of that and ran out of things to say. When it was finally time to leave, we fell into the trap of a midwestern goodbye, as I inched out the door, making faces at my friend so she would get the hint.

I gave her a ride home and started the drive to my own. It was 11:25 p.m.; I had roughly 15 minutes until I was home. My car, which I have named Florence, The Machine, after *Florence + The Machine*, a singer I highly recommend, was driving, as she always did, *a little rough*. She is a 2007 Ford Fusion, passed across four generations of owners, I being her first feminine man in my family of powerful women. She suffered several health conditions over the years. Just to name a few:

- 1) Dented tire frame on Driver’s Side (a pot-hole)
- 2) Re-aligned tires (also my fault)
- 3) A broken radio (my dad fixed this)
- 4) Lagging AC and Heat
- 5) Rust by the tires
- 6) Hail dents on the hood (an act of God)
- 7) Replaced brakes (which I’d likely worn down in 2 months).

Despite all of this, she still ran and got me from Point A to Point B.

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ANOMALY

I drove 15 minutes, or 14 minutes, with Florence, on roads we've met thousands of times before. Her heat was finally kicking in, the flakes of ice on the windshield melting and leaping off. Cars were passing beneath the concrete bridge, and the ugly church was coming into view on the left, with its footlights casting a god-fearing off-white gaze on its face. The field to the right that belonged to a farmer I'd never met was present, silent. As I rolled forward at 35 or 40 miles per hour, the thinnest layer of black ice had passed unseen beneath the rotation of the tires. "*So Caught Up*" by The Teskey Brothers started to play on my phone, which sat in my door cubby (Feel free to listen while reading for a heightened experience).

At 11:38 p.m., I turned my wheel to the right, to correct the smallest tilt to the left (I was in the middle of the bridge), and noticed the rear wheels started to skid behind me, losing traction. To counter the spin, I turned the wheel back left, which spun the car out. The Teskey Brothers started to slow and warble, a melody of thunder. I realized I had an infinite amount of time until the crash hit. If I wanted, I could stay in this moment, with my thoughts, until I was ready, until it was time.

I took a chance. Winter crawled inside the car, frost expanding over the world, over my skin, plunging me into the hadal zone of the coldest depths, into hypothermia that numbed spacetime; Florence spun a haunting pirouette. Here, in a dimension I've accessed countless times before but always forgot (a universal experience, I'm sure), I took a spin at my own thoughts.

*Well, this sucks. We just fixed her brakes. I was only going 30, maybe 35, okay, maybe I was going 40, which is my fault, but why did the ice, or the world I guess, choose to spin out my tires? I might die. In case I die I should settle any beef I have in my heart so I don't haunt our cemetery like the Poltergeist movie, and get my happy ass on to the afterlife, if there is one. There isn't much beef to settle, now that I think about it, I think everybody I associate with has something redeeming about them that makes them worth loving. Everyone's an asshole though. Thank God I tried to be bigger person and don't care about the stupid things everyone wants to adhere to, like the way we're told to act or supposed to wear or choose to be competitive instead of appreciating, finding success in others just as rewarding as personal growth. Worst case scenario, if I die then I had a good shot, I tried to be a good person, who tried to do good things, but was selfish when I had to. I learned to admit when I was wrong and to avoid those who can't learn that. I learned the more I spoke the more I had to say, and that was strangely beautiful. I learned to listen to myself before I listened to everyone else, and that took me far. I analyzed myself and others to try and make sense of the human experience and didn't get far, which I'm okay with. It's kind of an impossible feat, so I'm glad I tried. I tried to be kind when I could. I made myself uncomfortable, disgusted even, and learned what it meant to be a better person because of it. Everyone should learn how to be ugly, on stage and in real life, that's where real truth lies, in the freedom of our hidden ugliness, with no regard for how we look and who everyone wants us to be. Free to make decisions and face the consequences without fear. I lived that life. If I crash, I hope that people will be sad, or that the world will come together over how tragic my death was, that everyone will get their shit together, and fix our economy, stop hunger, cancer, wars, petty shit, and racist shit and homophobic shit and selfish shit and maybe even stop car crashes and learn how to come back in time and stop the crash from happening. I won't crash, I have faith in her.*

It was time to come up for air. My muscles started to writhe in my skin, warming up, as a miserable shout crawled its way up my throat, grasping for the surface. Hypothermia melted away, and the instincts of three

generations shot through my body, like alcohol down my throat.

"If ya want yer sinuses to clear right up, just take one a them shots a whiskey. Oh, yer old enough, I won't tell yer folks."

I opened my eyes, as the moment of infinity shattered.

The car spun twice before the left driver's side nose of Florence smashed into the guardrail. There was no whiplash. The back wheels did not follow, halting.

I crashed at 11:38 p.m. The car was facing the other way, where I had come from, stuck in silence. The Teskey Brothers kept on singing.

*Every time I try to shake it*

I opened the jammed door and crawled out of the tight space between my door and the rail. I shut it and looked around.

*I can't*

The wind whipped up, carrying musty leaves and oaken musk. I could hear the ghosts wailing on the interstate, droning with the mating bullfrogs deep in the graveyard. The refuge I could take (the church, the barn beyond the field, the house with the broken metal fence, the woods, the graveyard, and the drain pipe) were drawing me in. Six gravitational pulls centered me, my head drowning in the moonlight. I had a faulty phone plan. I couldn't call or receive texts. I could only send out a text to my dad, and my friends, and hope someone would come.

*It's impossible to do*

I wasn't hurt. Maybe if I was hurt, it would make the moment more believable. Florence's right eye was gouged out - the hood had popped open, the whole front grill was smashed and exposed, wires and rubber sticking out like veins and tissue. The headlight hadn't gone out; it was glowing brighter than ever.

*Even if I try to break it*

I didn't know if she was totaled, I'd never crashed a car before. She was still running, and the airbags didn't go off. She made it far.

*No, I can't*

She was still running. Her heart was still beating. I could try to drive her home. We could drive off the face of the earth. We could leave, make for the woods beyond the field. Tomorrow could wait for a while longer.

*A broken memory of you.*

God (or Emmanuel, Zeus, whatever you believe in) peeks their head out the window of the church. I can't see them because I don't believe, and well, seeing is believing. They see a son in crisis, wondering if the event they've curated will spark any weight of faith. Peering deeper, they decide to view Ryan's life from past to present, all at once (known as the 4th dimension, where all time relative to space can be perceived on top of each other; yes, they can do that). Emmanuel smiles, turns off the lights to the church, and crawls back under whatever nook or cranny the fucker hides in whenever the world goes to shit.

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THE WAKE

My nana had an open casket. As we took turns gathering the courage to meet the stranger with eyes forced shut, I noticed she was masked with some sort of false life. The skin was too tight, livor mortis peeking through the caked concealer. We wrote letters, secret 'we love you's', dropped into the casket. We were given Bible verses to speak, but my siblings and I knew better than to make this moment about anyone other than her. We erased

any mention of the Lord from the text, letting Dorothy exist in the white space. I doubt she would be very proud of us, as a woman of faith.

Dementia is a degradative disease, a hunger caused by a variety of medical conditions, usually taking hold in old age. My nana lived till 97, who birthed my mother and only my mother, (the hidden Australian lovechild would reach out to my mother, his half-sister, once he was in his 50s, his jawline and balding hair evidence of his familial connection). She moved from her suburban home in Pennsylvania to the closer nursing home when I was 14. She had fallen on her stairs. For 4 years, she did our laundry, cleaned our home, and cooked dinner when my parents couldn't make it home in time. She wanted to stay busy. As time went on, watching movies on her box TV, going through her cupboards of old food, sleeping on her couch that smelled like moth balls, she started to lose her memory. She became irritated, angry, lost. And that terrified me.

2 years after the funeral, we visited her grave in the military mass cemetery far up the hills of Upstate New York, up the gravel winding pathways in our rental van covered in scrapes and dents. Her gravestone sat among the others, a tooth in a maw that swallowed martyrs for a future that has long since changed its name. By someone's decision, her inscription was on the back of her husband's stone (I didn't know that was possible). She, with very few others, got to gaze over the valley. My siblings and parents gathered 3 lavender flowers and 3 pinecones (we weren't allowed to tamper with the gravesite) and laid them on the stone. I never said anything to her at the funeral. I bent down to her grave and whispered something as quiet as the birds in the trees and bees in the field, an apology that only the bones would know.

I wrote a poem after I left the graveyard (since revised):

R 972

I wish I said something to you  
If I only had something to say  
Staring at marble and yarrow  
When it strung its iron dew  
Did the spider know of your memory  
Twinkling in the corner of my eye  
You would have enjoyed the view  
Comedy comes in threes  
Silent laughter holds so much power  
Is it okay to find the humor  
In three pinecones and three flowers  
A penny placed at the gate  
Could it buy your empty thoughts  
Of Deansboro and your only daughter  
Of pumpkin pies and flower pots  
When you forgot my name  
It must've been so cold  
I should've hugged you  
Heaven's warm I'm told  
Letting go too early  
Is a mistake I'll never make

Wherever you are is a better place  
Knowing that you're awake

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#### AUTOPSY

I am recording 7 days post-mortem, at 1:39 pm, where I intend to perform an autopsy of the subject, who sits in my garage chamber. For all future purposes, the subject will be referred to as Florence. Florence is prone, her anterior epidermis removed and laid aside, exposing her subcutaneous tissue. The epidermal layer has suffered major abrasions and injury, best described as a 3-inch concave dent and fraying skin on the orbital fracture, resulting in stage 3 bruising. While the impact site sustained the most injury, a perimortem tear was formed along Florence's anterior. This resulted in a medial depressed fracture in the crown, fortunately avoiding any comminuted pathway. Despite the destruction along the socket, the globus oculi has remained undamaged; it still reflects light via the Hirschberg test. Furthermore, after examining the cardiovascular structure in the postmortem, I've found a most incredible and horrifying discovery. It would appear that the muscles and ligaments that hold the organs together still respond to external stimuli, simulating the same functions the whole system may have had in life. Essentially, Florence's heart still beats. Her engine still runs. I must continue further study, to properly grasp this anomaly.

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#### EULOGY

Florence was strong. She represented 4 generations of women (counting me), a matriarch of an iron will and inspiring passion. Life threw its worst at her, but nothing could tear away her pride. She stood her ground and stood for a better world. At a terribly young age, Florence suffered severe health conditions: sunburnt skin; her bones were sturdy, but her skin flaked and blistered over her joints, a rare condition. When she turned sixteen, she was caught in a storm of bumps on her skin, that no ointment or surgery would fix. Her marigold eyes started to gloss over, and the muscles in her feet started to tighten and wear; you could hear the squeak where she went. She was patient and gentle, sharing an aged wisdom that her trusted few could hear through the whispers she spoke. She was modest and fierce. She stood for the simple things. She stood for radio over Bluetooth, rolling with the punches, and turning the miles into minutes. We could all learn a thing or two from her. Here on this day, we lay her soul to rest. But, if there's one thing I know about Florence, it's that she would wish to see us take this moment and rejoice, look for the golden opportunity, to grab it by the horns, and make of life what we wish. Because Florence was a damn machine. Florence got shit done.

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#### THE HARVEST

Three weeks after the crash, my dad and I finally found some time to fix Florence. We were going to pick up parts from a junkyard an hour away and spend the rest of the weekend in the garage. I had brought homework and readings to keep me busy on the trip.

We never stopped talking the whole drive up, my homework was untouched. I shared my thoughts on my siblings, the places I wanted to go, the philosophy I had on life, and the music that raised me.

"Hey, I want you to know I've been weed-free for 3 months."

"Who?"

"Me, I haven't smoked since January. Except for some cheat days, but those don't count."

My dad did a double take, and I saw his eyes flicker as he tried to concentrate on the road. He held his hand



out for a fist bump.

“That’s awesome man, thank you for doing that.”

We talked about underage drinking and mistakes. My dad never liked talking about mistakes he’s made. I told him about a 4th of July party where I drank so much that I knocked over three of my friend’s deck lamps and puked in their trailer toilet; I was told explicitly not to do so before the party started; the unit didn’t have plumbing. I told him I was still planning on smoking, but from time to time, and I would let him know, at least while I was living at home.

We arrived at Goodfellow Motors, Inc., where Rick and Rob sold us our parts (estimated to be ~\$400) for \$200. Rick kept on throwing stuff in.

“Oh, you’re paying in cash, \$185.”

My dad laughed and handed him \$200, “Take the \$200, buy yourself dinner.” We loaded all the parts into the back of the van, talking the whole way home.

It took 2 days to fix Florence. We turned on space heaters, played music from my phone, and worked from eight in the morning. We had donuts on the first day and French toast on the second. In the past, whenever my dad tried to teach me about cars, from as young as he could, I actively resisted learning the information. This time around, I had to learn.

We had a family friend, who lives in farmland before the bridge, come over to check out the car. My dad was hoping he could help. He told us about the farmland to the right of the guardrail.

“It was sold. The guy who owned the land, David Mueller, was closed on, and it was sold to a guy named Damon. We met and talked; apparently, he’s building an equestrian stable, an obstacle course with a bridge, some hurdles, and maybe a lake. He told me he used to train orcas at SeaWorld. He said it all started with horses.” He took a second to chuckle. “Apparently he only has 6 weeks to build the thing, so he has Mexicans *crawling* all over the place.”

I stopped smiling, staying silent until he left, which was 5 minutes later. My dad turned to me, nervous “I thought he was gonna help”. I looked as the man got in his car. I’d known him since I was a kid. His two daughters grew up with my siblings and I, basically our younger sisters, although practically estranged since high-school started.

“Crawling?”

When Florence’s engine started, she had all her parts in place. Her fluids needed to be checked, but soon she could be taken back on the roads. Even though she had a makeover, the junkyard parts had suffered some damage:

1. The hood had hail dents (surprise) and some scratches we could buff out
2. The driver’s side fender had lost some paint, Dad smoothed it out and spray-painted it red.
3. The bumper had some cracks that we epoxy-ed from the inside.
4. The radiator fan was slow to start.
5. The ignition might stutter, so you would need to wait, turning the key as the pressure in the engine built.
6. The doors were still broken. The little flap of cloth behind the rear window was loose, it would flap in the wind. The plastic piece that funneled air by the windshield had popped off.
7. Apparently the glass cover for the driver’s side brake light was gone. I had never noticed that. After we gave

her a test drive my dad realized he could stick his hand inside.

She was going to need some time to recover.

But Florence was alive.

Resurrected.

She looked unfamiliar, but she was there. With more to teach me.

I haven't been this happy in months.

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## CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, you have learned:

- 1) Spacetime might not be that relevant but it makes for a good hook
- 2) Women are powerful
- 3) Ice forms easier on bridges
- 4) Funerals should honor life
- 5) The dead can breathe
- 6) Cars can have eulogies
- 7) Mistakes are chances

So, with all of this hard-earned knowledge, find the pockets of time and milk them for all their worth. Let the dream breed a hunger in your belly, so when your next bloody rampage or garden trapeze erupts, it's guided by the Self. Become the immovable object and the unstoppable force. We are broken, THEN given a chance. Take it.

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## EPILOGUE

When I got home, my mom asked me if I was high.

I told her no.

And I wasn't.

That made me furious.

As if I needed drugs to make mistakes.

Or cuts on my skin to prove a point.

People are forgotten.

Fears take control.

Horror lives in the human soul.

Every day.

Was it out of love?

Could they see the fear in my eyes

To forget about their own?

They didn't have to say anything.

And I wanted to take it all.

Determined to shatter my Self

My face against the guardrail.

Turning me into a broken memory.

# “A Body is Water”

By Lindsey Jacobs

Every body is an ocean.  
Mine an estuary,  
where salt and fresh water meet.  
My heart a tide pool,  
I can always find you there.  
Listening to the waves,  
crash and break,  
freedom in their foamy flow.  
Can you feel the current?  
The rip tides grip,  
pulling us under.  
Saltwaters sweet sting,  
Oceans' kiss.  
Algae covered emotions ebb,  
revealing the expanse between us.  
My buoyed hope,  
kept under loch and key.  
What is a baby other than a small stream formed from a bigger body.  
Birth a briny baptism.

# “Ode to My Moon”

By Chase Cariens

You say I burn as bright as the Sun,  
but you shift tides.  
Perfect balance for my all-encompassing heat,  
you are the one.

Faithfully you orbit that Earth.  
You have been scorched before,  
but you twist around it still  
because you know well it's worth.

You love as much as I do.  
How can I not burn brighter for that?  
Though we part ways, I rest your remnants around my neck.  
Letting you fall against my chest; your voice seems to cut right through.

My cool celestial, I'll watch over your orbit eternally.  
I'll let the light of my love shine so I can catch a glimpse of you again.  
When I see your fullness, I swear we will eclipse it all.  
Until I consume Mercury, Venus, and the Earth that bruised you, I will love you infernally.

# “Eclipse”

By Lindsey Jacobs

On a day that would make ancient civilization shiver  
We make sandwiches and sit in lawn chairs  
You explain physics to me while we sunbathe  
Though the subtleties of science are lost on me the significance is not.  
Glasses force a focus only the sun can demand  
A celestial body.  
With halo of golden glow  
All around us dusk.  
Four minutes which remind us how small we really are.



