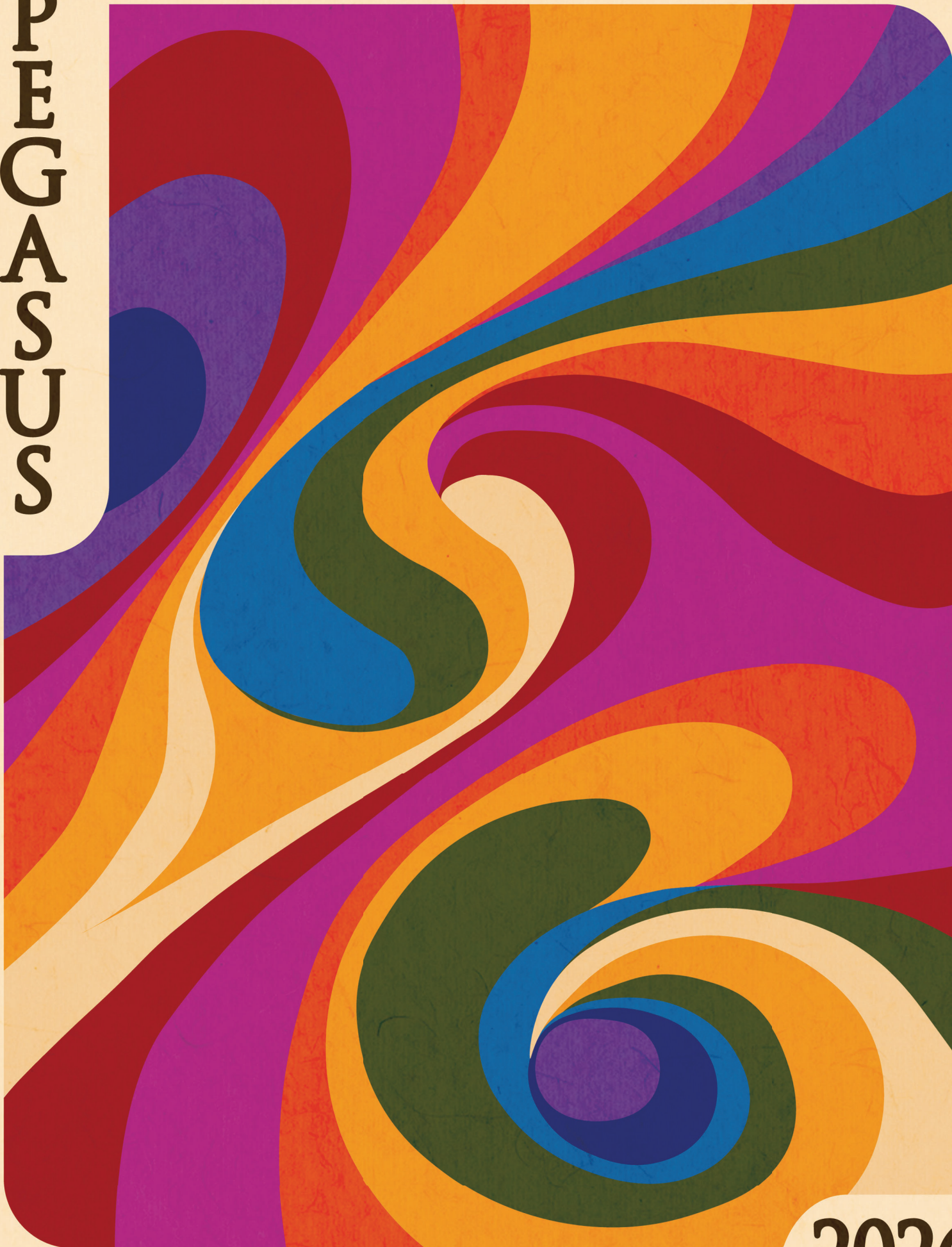
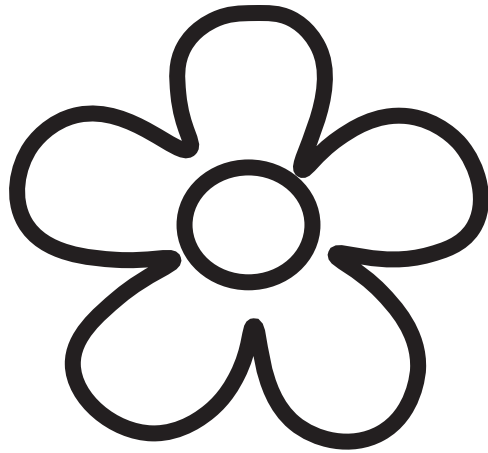


PEGASUS



2026



PEGASUS LITERARY MAGAZINE 2026

Pegasus is published annually by The Phantom Student Press
and the Office of Campus Engagement at Delaware County
Community College, Media, PA.

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor-In-Chief

Brigid Amoroso

Associate Editors

Macady Amparan

Dominic DiIorio

Luis Herrera-Herrera

Lydia Kirkpatrick

Viviana Pruett-Saratan

Emiliano Villagomez-Lopez

Emer C. Walsh

Cover Art & Graphic Design

Lydia Kirkpatrick

Faculty Advisor

Paul Pat, Professor of English and Creative Writing

Special Thanks

Allyson Gleason, Director Of Campus Engagement

The Edith Garlow Endowment

DCCC Educational Foundation

EDITOR'S NOTE

At the end of the Spring 2025 semester, Professor Paul Pat approached a group of students, including myself, to work for the student newspaper, *The Communitarian*. The DCCC newspaper had been dormant for a few years when he decided to take on the role of faculty advisor. Serving as the advisor for both *Pegasus Literary Magazine* and *The Communitarian*, Professor Pat combined the two to create The Phantom Student Press (PSP).

I had never been part of a newspaper or literary magazine before this year. When Professor Pat originally offered me the position, I was unsure whether I would accept; it was my first year of college, and I didn't know if college was the right path for me. However, PSP gave me a sense of connection to Delaware County Community College that I hadn't previously felt. I finally found purpose and direction.

This wouldn't have been possible without my fellow editors. Our team has grown so much this year, and I couldn't think of a more wonderful group of people to bring this project to life with. For those of you graduating this spring, I can't wait to see all that you have yet to accomplish. For those of us continuing our academic careers at DCCC, I'm excited to see what the future holds for us at The Phantom Student Press.

I would especially like to thank Professor Pat for bringing our editors, writers, photographers, and graphic designers together. His guidance and support have enabled us to contribute our best work. To be among the students chosen to revive the school's newspaper and be part of the inaugural PSP staff has been a great honor. I would also like to express my appreciation to Lydia Kirkpatrick, our PSP graphic designer and managing editor for *The Communitarian*. I have never seen another student so driven and dedicated to her work. This publication would not have been possible without the immense work they both contributed over this year.

Our PSP staff is also indebted to the generosity of DCCC's Educational Foundation, through which the Edith Carlow Poetry contests can award students thousands of dollars in prize money. These opportunities have reinvigorated student interest in the literary arts and poetry on campus.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the students who submitted their stories, poems, and artwork to *Pegasus Literary Magazine*. We couldn't have produced this magazine without you. It was an honor to read and showcase all of your pieces. I encourage you to keep putting yourselves out there—you never know what possibilities it will bring.

"Creativity takes courage" – Henri Matisse

Brigid Amoroso

Editor, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Editor's Note</i> - Brigid Amoroso	... 3
<i>Space Station Dystopia</i> - E'llana Morales-Howard	... 6
<i>If I Were A Book</i> - Paraskevi Nakos	... 7
<i>The Tyrant's Bark</i> - Cole Wood	... 8
<i>Hands Still Open</i> - Cameron Stewart	... 9
<i>Blue Eyed Black Girl</i> - Mia Moss	... 10
<i>A Gift From a Friend</i> - Diyor Hakberdiyev	... 11
<i>Giving</i> - Lillian Barnes	... 12
<i>Black and Beautiful</i> - Iffat Pugh	... 14
<i>Dark Skin Girls</i> - Nana Boakye	... 15
<i>Diespora</i> - Shayan Siddiqui	... 16
<i>Awaken, Borincano</i> - Maribel Veguilla	... 17
<i>Giving Myself Grace</i> - Lauren Clark	... 18
<i>Song of a Foolish Gardener</i> - Kit Stewart	... 19
<i>How Our World Cycles</i> - Milo Taylor	... 20
<i>Fetching</i> - Genny Evans	... 21
<i>An Afternoon Nap and a Toothpick</i> - Dan Ngoc Vo	... 22
<i>I Think It's Romantic</i> - Amaya Howard	... 24
<i>Two Roots One Heart</i> - Maria Garcia	... 25

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Identity</i> - Jeannot Palimen	... 26
<i>La Joie de Vivre</i> - Kimora Tomoney	... 28
<i>The Want</i> - Simran Jeet Kaur Basra	... 29
<i>Where I Lay My Heart</i> - Salimah Rahim	... 30
<i>Sunshine</i> - Bailey McCarron	... 31
<i>The Key She Wore</i> - Aya Ayselina	... 32
<i>Yusuf</i> - Peter Duchak	... 34
<i>Love, Honestly</i> - Dylan Walsh	... 36

SPACE STATION DYSTOPIA

E'LLANA MORALES-HOWARD



©_KAMIKIKOSA_

IF I WERE A BOOK

PARASKEVI NAKOS

If I were a book, I'd crave to be opened
for the wisdom unspoken, but there.
People are too distracted to care,
but if I were a book, I'd be eager and able to share.

The substance of my being is just like the rest,
but the book that I am is unique, I protest.

I can feel a sense of justice, the words are just there
yet people pass by me; to me, that's unfair.
I do not hoard words, just the ones deemed important
and even so, I still crave to be opened.

The ones that do read me, I'll always care for.
They know where I come from and whom I implore,
but it's not all that often I bear food for thought.

In my era, the words are not easily taught
and my right to exist is easily fought.
The more creative I get, the more people who fear
that the discussions I have opened are too real to be near.

I'm just a book. How do I get banned?
If I were a book, I would never understand.

THE TYRANT'S BARK

COLE WOOD

They say:

“When tyranny becomes law, rebellion becomes duty,”

Though where does one draw such a line?

When neighbors turn up dead?

When the concrete-gray cometh blood red?

To the slaughtering of said Swine?

Or merely the preservation of “divine”?

Jaws of tyranny, both bared and drawn.

Shalt be the consumer.

If not—the fawn.

To answer the line's dilemma:

Sung in sirens and shallow graves.

The blood of the people, the proletariat's song.

Yet, the few cannot quench the militia's rage.

When the tyrant's blade concedes to no scrutiny.

When the tyrant's hate destroys the people's tapestry

To the fear felt folk,

Or the people's suffering be not bespoke.

HANDS STILL OPEN

CAMERON STEWART

There was a girl named Giving —
She always gave too much.
Yet, Giving didn't know that she had a gentle touch.
Her gift was a light that shone so bright;
She didn't know that, with it dimmed,
she would feel more alive.

The gifts she gave didn't have to be covered in gold,
Just that steady hand she always held out
When someone was losing hold.
Giving was a gift, but she didn't see it that way.
She only cared about what others would say.

So, Giving carried on.
“Friends” invited her to hike at dawn —
She hauled their packs up mountainsides,
Her face paled, mouth dry,
Though smiling with breath withdrawn.

None cared to notice she was withering away from the loss of air.
The altitude made her dizzy,
But they didn't care.
They took her water as she smiled;
Her heart was thumping as they went on for miles.
She was starved and dying while they were thriving.

As she fell to the ground.
They all turned around,
Frantic as they were, they couldn't hear a sound.
They were all alone with no one to help...
For the first time they understood how she felt.

She felt hopeless, like she didn't belong.
So she gave more of herself than she could,
If only someone listened to her song,
Maybe then she would have made it up that mountain.
Her notes were beautiful, like a fountain.

Though the lyrics spat out the uneasiness she felt,
If only they had listened to her silently belt,
Maybe they would have understood the trembling
Truth.

But now it's too late to change the past,
Because giving was dead, and it happened fast.

BLUE EYED BLACK GIRL

MIA MOSS

In my prayers, I asked God for some shiny blue eyes.
Can't you just picture it?
The innocent streams of blue waltzing down from the sky,
swirling through the parted clouds in all their whiteness
and the color could seep into the cracks of my skin.

Then my brown face would be special rather than a burden.
They would not beat me into the dirt and call it a fair fight.
They would not crumple me and toss me in the shadows.
Or violate me on the train in broad daylight.

And if I had those shiny blue eyes, could I see through the rippling in the water?
Could I settle the lagoon that separates me from my reflection?
With all this storming, I'm starting to forget what color I am.

And maybe if I had some shiny blue eyes, when I speak up,
when I take that blue out of my face,
when I shine light on whom they're hiding in the shadows,
no one would write me off as... whatever names they call us nowadays.
It's nothing new
Oh this again? Another one dead? All those people do is complain.
You have your vote, and you have your rights, what more could you want?

Well, I want to repeat the words of Martin Luther King Jr. Yes I'm talking about him again. I know we talk
about him every year, but he had more than one dream, so let's listen to all of them. The ones that we've heard
ad nauseam and the ones buried or forgotten. There's a reason you've heard them so many times.
Guess what, I have a dream. You have one, you know you do.

When they dragged us across the world, half of our dreams drowned in the ocean.
A third of our dreams were burned up, bought out, brushed off, beaten or raped.
The rest of us, traded our dreams for an orange jumpsuit and a toothbrush.
And we're gonna need longer than the shortest month of the year to get through them all.

And sir, I am so sorry to yell. Ma'am I am so sorry, I know you don't like the loud ones. I'm one of the good
ones, I promise. I know I don't have those pretty eyes, but one day I assure you God will answer my prayers.
Yes God, the same one. He'll send me those innocent streams of blue.

Oh don't be shy. You don't have to say it. I know you'd love them too.

A GIFT FROM A FRIEND

DIYOR HAKBERDIYEV

There is a crow perched outside my balcony
It sees everything that the world has to show
With its echoing caw and feathers of ebony
I leave nuts and berries as a gift for the crow

Days have gone, one by one, where I would leave treats
And the crow retreats, but I could not blame the creature
For I too would be wary of a stranger with sweets
For all we know, experience is an unforgiving teacher

The crow and I are more alike than I thought, I've found
Both they and I enjoy our own solitude with food
Perched and observing the world; by time we are bound
Their presence to me is a gift, even if they find my presence rude

Where the crow was perched proud and content outside yesterday
I saw an acorn today, and knew right away that it was something that they gave away

GIVING

LILLIAN BARNES

I give.
That's the verb I was born carrying like a cracked-
open promise,
palms out, fingers trembling,
offering pieces of myself like loose change
to anybody who looks like they might fall apart
if someone doesn't hold them together.

I give
until my hands are empty,
until my voice is stretched thin like a wire pulled too
tight,
until the echo of my own name sounds unfamiliar in
my mouth.

People say giving is noble.
But nobody warns you
that you can pour and pour and pour
and not notice the slow leak forming in your own
chest.

A drip.
A hollowing.
A quiet disappearance
you don't recognize until you stand up one day
and your knees buckle under the weight
of everything you swore you could carry.

Nobody teaches you
that "selfless" is just another word for empty
if you're not careful.

Nobody warns you
that being everything for everyone
means being nothing for yourself.

See
there's a version of me that lives in the mirrors
of other people.
She's dependable. She's strong. She's always
there.
She holds everyone's storms,
cups lightning in her hands,
pretends it doesn't burn.

But there's another version.
The one I only meet at midnight
when the house is finally quiet
and the world stops tugging on me long
enough
for the truth to crawl out of my throat.

She whispers:
How can you be a lighthouse
when you keep giving away the fire?

How can a body glow
when every bit of warmth gets handed off,
folded into someone else's healing,
tucked into someone else's need?

I give like the sun—
even when I'm dying a little at the edges.
Even when it costs me whole days of myself
I will never get back.

But tonight—
tonight

LILLIAN BARNES

I'm tired of being a sacrifice
disguised as a blessing.

I'm tired of bleeding quietly
so the world can stay comfortable.

Giving shouldn't mean disappearing.
Love shouldn't mean depletion.

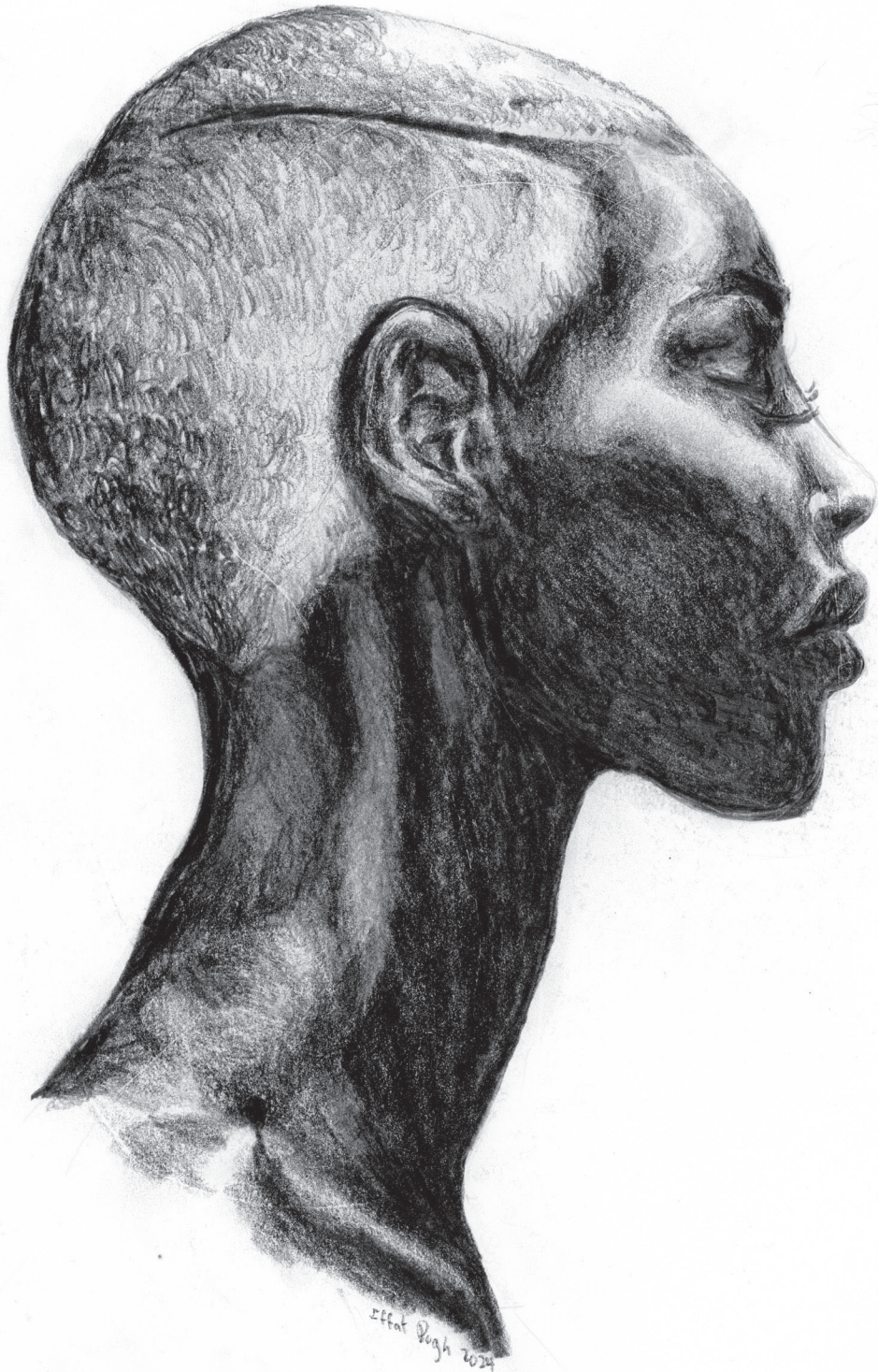
And I—
I shouldn't have to break
to prove I was here.

And when the voice of reason I keep
choking on finally breaks free, it
screams
give—
but not everything.
Not the parts that keep me standing.
Not the last flicker of light I need to make it through
my own storms.

Because I'm learning—slow, stubborn—
that the most generous thing I can offer this world
is a self that still exists
when the giving is done.

BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL

IFFAT PUGH



DARK SKINNED GIRLS

NANA BOAKYE

I used to hate the color of my skin.

The way it shined in the dark like the endlessness of the universe.

The way it was different from those around me.

“Why are you so dark?” The question I dreaded the most.

But as the summer rolled around, the darker those with lighter skin became.

So how come having tanned skin looked good on them, but never on me?

I used to hate my hair type.

Growing up with 4c hair, it became the norm to pay more for everyday braids.

My hair type was too difficult, something that not only applied to my hair but me as well.

I thought that maybe I could begin to love my natural hair by styling it,

but every style turned sour due to the ridicule.

“Why is your hair so oily?”

“Is that even your real hair?” they’d say to me.

However, I would scroll and scroll looking at every beautiful person

on my screen with 3a and 3c hair types.

Nothing but admiration for their hair texture.

How come having curly hair was beautiful and exotic on them...but messy on me?

The saying: everyone’s first bully was their mother applied to me in a sort of different way.

Rather than my first bully being my mother,

My first bully was none other than...myself.

I used to hate myself.

But that is no longer me.

As a dark skinned girl, growing up in the suburbs was the closest thing to hell

one could experience on earth.

Until I remembered I am more than just dark skinned.

For if my skin is like that of the universe,

then I am like stars that cause it to shine.

DIESPORA

SHAYAN SIDDIQUI

she had left behind every version of herself that ever felt loved,
only to be a guest in every room she walks in.

she memorized the language of the land down to the smallest details,
and yet the world still moves past her as if she were a ghost.

a thousand eyes watch for her flaws, her voice, her skin, her accent, her body but none will meet hers
when she cries.

she plays her role the best she can, she powders the face her mother called sacred, softens the voice
her father had cherished, burned the garments her aunt had sown all for faceless strangers who never
learned to see her.

she smiles even during the days she is met with adversity from those she aspires to befriend. she giggles
and mistakes mockery for warmth because cruelty sounds gentle when you wish to belong.
she scrapes the dust off of her glasses every time a stranger brushes past her and neglects her fall
because somehow wiping the dust is less painful than the bruise of being unseen.

her father says she is a vibrant painting full of ecstasy, her mother says her soul could reach the
bleakest depths and still provide light. so she clings onto the hope that the world will see what they said
was always there.

whispers echo around her wherever she goes, eyes glossy towards her but race past when she notices
them. she eventually gets so used to the role, she realizes the mouths that welcomed her are the same
ones that wound her.

she laughs a second too early and the room stiffens, a silent meeting called without her, they look at
her as if she had malfunctioned, as if her happiness was a sin. so she swallows it and mistakes silence as
sincerity.

her name gets mispronounced so much she has forgotten how to say it,
her presence is greeted by subtle looks of disappointment and inferiority,
her soul has become stained and she forgets who she is.
maybe this is what the american dream was all about.

AWAKEN, BORINCANO

MARIBEL VEGUILLA

Awaken, Borincano
And look within yourself.
So many years have passed
And you have a lot to tell.

Awaken, Borincano
Do not give up on your dreams.
The place you come from
Saw your labor and your effort.

One day you were invaded,
Your people stripped away.
They arrived in this nation
And started again.

The joy that sets you apart
And your desire to work
Testify that a Borincano
Does not change, even in a different world.

Awaken Borincano
Raise your voice again.
Someone is telling you
That you are not welcome here.

You give your people
To fight for this nation.
Their blood was shed
Without any validation.

You are from the Island of the Lamb
From precious Borikén.
You are strong, valuable and worthy
To be here without any worry.

One day your music will be heard
In their beloved game.
Bad Bunny will sing Salsa
In the name of Boriquen!

GIVING MYSELF GRACE

LAUREN CLARK

I give myself the grace
My past self never knew—
Like old angel wings that I
grew, cut off; left in a box.
The new ones root deeper
Inside my vessel, where
I crochet links of lace
Around the chambers
Of my heart, forgetting
What anyone else thinks,
Reminding myself it's
Okay to be imperfect—
But I better keep trying
To be kind, since not
Much else is worth it.
I give myself full breaths
Of life because I'm afraid
Of dying, and I'd be lying
If I said it's always easy
To keep trying in a world
That gives little back.
Now, the slack is reaching
Thin, but nothing scares me
More than failing to learn
From my own teaching.
I give myself hugs in the
Middle of the night; no
More monsters hiding
Under my bed—just credit
Card bills, time clocks,
Culture shocks. Even so,
The Earth too holds herself
Close through the night;
She wears bedclothes.
I can see the imprints
Of her hands wrapping
Around me—serenity.

SONG OF A FOOLISH GARDENER

KIT STEWART

I plant a bed full of roses
for a boy who won't notice
the petals will be withering
just hoping that he's listening.

With a can of gasoline upon your shoulder...
will I still think of you when I'm older?
I'm the fire, you're the match
light me up when you laugh.
It's difficult to let you go when you keep coming back.

It's a strange kind of love
'cause it won't ever be enough
though I always say it will surely fade,
every other midnight it leaves me wide awake.

But maybe I just like you to cover up the ache
even though a romance is something I can't take
even though this 'love' is an unrequited daze
I see with both my eyes, you're something I cannot fake.

...in the end, of course
it will all go to ash.
all I can do is pray
that my roots withstand the blaze.

HOW OUR WORLD CYCLES

MILO TAYLOR

In the night sky, brushed in thick coated paint
was a watercolor blend, appearing gray.
Where blunders are left on its canvas,
and white spots reborn, covered with decay.

To my naked eye, I couldn't fathom its beauty.
Until it smiles so slightly, running through oil stains,
a subtle shine of marble, flaunting its crevice,
and how the clouds stand before it, with blush on each remains.

Once a ripple, it enlarged my waves with laughter,
crashing, blasting, then settling below its nocturnal.
A form where our spirits grasp on to each palm,
two cold hands, melting until it reaches eternal.

As yin and yang, we died by the sunrise.
My vision blurred, helplessly submerged.
Words have no meaning, beneath all my salt,
percolating inside the air that created my surge.

The painter brushes the word dark again,
and the moon's coat wraps my sorrows,
as we dance through its hollow sheets.
With a smile wide enough that last all tomorrows,

it fell deep into the sun with such grace,
and yet my water beams from the heaven above
To stand by flowing, while hugging myself,
glazing at the canvas that created my love.

FETCHING

GENNY EVANS



AN AFTERNOON NAP AND A TOOTHPICK

DAN NGOC VO

From a distant memory a big, hazy room resurfaced. A layer of fog draped over everything inside. In the corner stood a small cabinet against the wall. Across from it laid a huge deep brown, wooden bed under an open window.

My six-year-old self was lying on the bed, squeezing my eyes shut and waiting for sleep to visit, but many things were keeping her away. That faint yet poignant smell in the air. I couldn't tell what it was though, and it bothered me. The hot and humid weather made my skin clammy. The rigid bed felt uncomfortable. I turned my body to the other side, facing the window, to find a better position. Then, the powerful sunlight hit my face. Before I flipped myself back, a breeze passed through the opened window, gently caressed my face with the cool, refreshing air from the river running beside the house. I could hear the family next door talking about something.

Thump-thump.

The sound of plastic honeycomb slippers on the hard concrete floor echoed in the foggy room. I squeezed my eyes shut and stayed as still as possible, thus tensing up my entire body. Then, I heard a soft chuckle.

“If you can't sleep, get up and find a toothpick for me, won't ya?”

A mission to get out of afternoon nap!

I got up from the bed and sprinted toward the cabinet, then reached the small toothpick box at the top and took one out.

I turned around, and there stood my grandfather. For some reason, the fog around him was not as dense. It looked like my grandfather was standing in the cloud. He wore an off-white shirt and beige khaki pants, his usual attire. He strolled toward me with his hands behind his back. Wherever he walked, the fog dissipated, as if he was parting the cloud to come over to me.

The smell in the room intensified. It was durian.

“Is the durian stuck in your teeth, grandpa?” I asked him.

“Yeah.”

DAN NGOC VO

“Can I pick them out for you?” I enthusiastically requested. He let out a soft smile, and slowly crouched down in front of me.

The moment his lips spread apart showing the teeth behind them, all of the fog disappeared. I could clearly see my grandfather now. I saw his high forehead with thin, grey and white hair brushed back, clear eyes looking into mine, the wrinkles around his eyes and mouth, the grin on his face, and his teeth. They were sparse and kind of yellow, with a few of them turning slightly brown at the edges. There was one big cluster of durian stuck at the upper right section of the teeth, and a few smaller chunks spreading at the other part of his mouth.

I pursed my lip, took a deep breath, steadied my trembling hand, and guided the firmly gripped toothpick toward the biggest piece at the upper right corner with the speed of a snail. I could see my grandfather’s lip slightly shook, and a light snicker came out. How mean!

Slowly, slowly. I didn’t want to prick his gum and make him bleed with the toothpick. Steady, steady. And finally, the tip of the toothpick reached the durian.

“What are you thinking letting her pick your tooth? SU (my nickname at home), give the toothpick to your grandpa and take your nap.”

My grandmother scolded us from the living room. Startled, I shrunk back. My grandfather took the toothpick from my hand, smiled at me while patting my head. The soft, warm touch that had mostly faded from my memory calmed me down from grandma’s scare. He shook his head toward the bed, signaled me to do as she said. I pursed my lips again, unhappily climbed back to the hard bed and closed my eyes.

Then I heard a small creaking of the bed, and the rustling sound of clothes from behind. I felt that warmth gently rubbing my head, then my back. It slowly scratched the back in steady, rhythmic motion, easing my younger self into the afternoon nap. And everything faded into the dark once again. The gentle touch of a dear grandfather faded into the cold fog, only left behind the warmth and a small regret in my memory.

I really wished I had picked his teeth for him that day.

I THINK IT'S ROMANTIC

AMAYA HOWARD

I think it's romantic

The way you say my name

Like you were the only one meant to say it

Like everything in my universe can be yours too.

I think it's lovely the way you look at me

Like I'm the Earth that orbits your sun.

Your eyes burn brighter and brighter until you burst into a brilliant solar flare full of warmth, passion, and love for me.

I think it's wonderful how you can make my day brighter with words

Earnest and sweet everything I imagined love would be.

A sacred flame that only you and I can be burned by

I think it's romantic

TWO ROOTS ONE HEART

MARIA GARCIA

Not from here, not from there,
not from anywhere.
Tacos, burgers, everything nice.
Not from here, not from there,
two cultures, one heart.
Agua de horchata,
strawberry refresher, oh so good.
Not from here, not from there.
Christmas, Reyes Magos,
traditions.
Soccer, football,
sports.
Not from here, not from there,
two roots, one heart.
Can't stay, only passing through with a hello and a goodbye.
My life is here, yet I'm made to feel like I don't belong.
Proud Mexican-American.

IDENTITY

JEANNOT PALIMEN

Identity

Friend, lover, dreamer, believer, future husband, seeker,
College student, artist, companion,
Preacher, poet, Christian,
Writer, former complainer, foodie, savory-loving, son, brother,
Grandson, never-hater, manifestor, cousin,
Nephew, uncle, money-grabbing,
Cartoon-flicking, sport-rooting,
Film-buffing, glasses-wearing, virgin,
Sincere best friend, goalkeeper, goal taker, muse,
With love of nature and inspiration,
You know what can define me?
The me, the newly improved but hardheaded yet free,
Programmed lie detector, secret holder, eye catcher, vibe checker,
The personality and energy, glow of a birthstone ring,
Covering the pressure to give pleasure,
22 years young, hopefully praying on my,
22nd rotation around the sun,
Never boring, always fun, cold blooded, never numb,
The not so fully realized,
Not privileged as society televises,
Illustrates, suffocates,
More privileged than some, husky, healthy, handsome, sexy,
African American, quirky, brainy, zany, wordy,
Brutally honest, bit-of-a-jerky, hardwired-as-a-NASCAR swerving,
Musically inclined, sarcastic, comedic, conceited,
Fake friend remover, drama settler,
One-to-zero, boxing champion undefeated,
Historically, scientifically, half mathematically proportioned human being,
Born fragile, grown unbreakable, mind freeing,
Recovering people pleaser, anxiety and depression beater,
Never smoked tobacco, never drunk liquor,
Never whipped-by-a-parent,

JEANNOT PALIMEN

Still, I chase for more paradise,
Than every athlete who was neglected,
Occasional psychoactive dabbler, diving deep into mysticism,
Meditation, levitation, middle finger to alienation,
Learning what it means to be a healer,
Two legs, one brain, new year, new pain,
New gain, new mile, new quarter, new game,
The swimmer of my own pond, the streamer,
The intergalactic one, the dreamer,
The hate ripper, the schemer,
The God worshipping, the positive ruler, the believer,
The bar shot, the kidney stone, the caffeine, the sweetener,
The “not this, not that” beyond definition,
The work in progress,
The “I” in me,
The “Me” in you,
The “You” of the inner mind who grants joy for infinity,
And too young to have found his
Identity

LA JOIE DE VIVRE

KIMORA TOMONEY

To not embrace anything,
is what foolish people do

Neither receiving nor giving,
is what we shall not.

Lay in my hands,
the way your heart does

A gift from within,
the way my love is.

And I will treasure it,
the way my soul does

And I shall admire it,
the way I do you.

We duet,

As we do take upon a star's
perfect wish,

To complete a chemically curated dance

Amidst a sea full of people who cannot stand
To move their feet.

THE WANT

SIMRAN JEET KAUR BASRA

I do not want to lie with your body;
neither do I want to sugarcoat things,
sweet as sugarcane.
I just want to feel you when the days are foggy,
and the mist presses gently at the windowpane.

My hands do not trace the map of your
back, neck, or chest.
Instead, they learn to rest
in this chaotic mess.

Oh honey, I know you need to be heard, too—
now listen to me.
Walk slowly towards the mirror,
look at us, I told you, I am always here.

I am not reaching for touch,
only for the warmth of your hush.
Even when you brush your teeth,
I crave you in the ordinary, everywhere.

Tell me—do we trust each other enough
to share secrets weighing on silent lines,
when I am not seeking your lips to kiss mine,
and to call it a rainy day
instead of sunshine?

I am not expecting us
to just tangle bodies in bed,
I long for your heartbeat to skip with fear
when my tears fall,
and my cheeks flush red.

You once made me feel alive—
not for how well I performed,
not for the battles yet to be won,
but for staying, for giving,
when the world offered nothing.

In that quiet, I understood:
love does not reach for skin.
It's a choice. It stays,
and stays with us, every day.

WHERE I LAY MY HEART

SALIMAH RAHIM

Love is not fireworks
It is the lamp left on
When the night forgets your name.

It is the quiet chair
waiting in the corner of a long day,
the way your breath slows
just by standing near something that knows you.

Love is the warmth without asking,
a blanket folded into a voice
a hand that does not pull
only holds.

It is a kitchen light at midnight,
the smell of something sweet
even when you are tired,
a heartbeat that says:
“you may rest here.”

Sometimes love is a person.
Sometimes it is a memory,
a song, a dream, a quiet hope.
But always
it is something that reminds you
you are safe to exist.

And in its presence,
even your broken pieces
learn how to breathe again.

Because love does not rescue
it stays
it does not fix
it feels.

And in that feeling,
we become
whole.

SUNSHINE

BAILEY McCARRON

Drums crash and guitars strum
Flow in and out like the ocean waves
The tide sucks me into the icy waters
All I can feel is numb.

Drums crash and guitars strum
The chatter of people swarms around me
So why do I feel so alone
The darkness in a sea of light is what I have become.

The rhythm of the music continues to sway
But suddenly all of the noise fades away.
My sunshine, the brightest light of all, runs to me
She is all I need to see.

Loneliness dissipates as her happiness
bounces into the icy sea, warming it up once again.
Does she know that her sunshine is my only friend?

THE KEY SHE WORE

AYA Ayselina

Part I: The Key She Wore

She wore no diamonds,
only silence and the weight of waiting,
a key around her neck,
cold against skin that once knew warmth.

He left not like men leave,
but like shadows at dusk,
slowly, then all at once,
fading from the door she never shut.

Time did not heal her,
only taught her to carry the ache,
like a song only she remembered,
humming beneath her ribs
in lives where he did not return.

She danced in other arms,
smiled in sepia photos,
and played the part of one who moved on.
But the door,
that old door,
remained locked,
softly glowing with the warmth of once.

He watched from afar,
a ghost behind glass,
following her quiet hope
that one day she'd turn,
that her heart might still beat
in rhythm with his name.

He believed she forgot.
He did not see how she still reached for him
in dreams painted black and white,
where he always turned back,

and she never stopped waiting.
The key was never hers.
It had always been his,
hanging by a thread of gold, aching
for the hand
brave enough, kind enough
to use it.

And now,
a sliver of light,
a crack in time,
a heartbeat's pause in the script.
If he dares,
not with apology but with presence,
not as a boy who fled,
but as a man who returns,
she will meet him there,
at the door.

Because some love
is written not in years,
but in echoes.
And hers
has been calling his name
for lifetimes.

AYA Ayselina

Part II: The Door That Remembered

Years turned like soft pages,
and the ache became a language
she no longer needed to speak aloud.
The moon forgot his name,
the stars dimmed where he once stood,
and still, she dreamed of him
as if time itself had promised to bring him home.

He came not as thunder,
but as rain,

quiet, relentless,
seeping through the cracks of her guarded heart.

He carried no excuses,
only the silence of a man
who had met his own reflection
and found regret staring back.

He had been to the edge of forgetting
and turned away.

He had seen her shadow in other eyes,
but none held the same light.

He spoke, not of the past,
but of what he had learned from losing it,
how love untended still grows roots,
how distance does not kill truth,
only hides it until the soul is brave enough to
return.

Her eyes met his,
and the key,
the one that had waited so long,
trembled against her chest
as if it, too, remembered the sound of his voice.

He reached out,
not for forgiveness,
but for understanding,
his touch asking,

“May I come home?”

And she,
who had built her strength
from the ruins of what they once were,
did not answer with words.
She simply took his hand,
and the door opened, not with noise, but
with the soft sigh
of two hearts remembering their rhythm.

In that quiet,
there was no more waiting,
no more lifetimes spent apart,
only the breath between them,
the sacred moment
where loss became return,
and love, once broken,
became whole again.

YUSUF

PETER DUCHAK

“SSG Duchak! As-salamu alaykum.” Yusuf was smiling ear to ear.

“Wa-Alaikum-Salaam,” I replied, returning his smile.

We embraced and kissed each other’s cheeks in the traditional Arabic greeting. He brought me into his CHU (compartmentalized housing unit), and we sat down for chai tea. You could never conduct business of any sort in Iraq without tea. It just wasn’t done. I watched as he pulled out the old electric kettle, the kind that was literally just a metal bar that sat in the water that heated it up, then dumped a handful of black tea leaves into it. A few minutes later, the water was boiling and he poured each of us a cup as we sat cross-legged on the floor.

“I have the letter you asked for. You’ve earned it.”

He giddily clapped his hands. Yusuf had been asking me since day one of me taking over as the interpreter manager for our unit for a recommendation letter for citizenship.

“SSG Duchak, for this, I will arrange for my sister to be your wife.” We both laughed at the joke.

Yusuf had been the best interpreter in our unit, despite being barely eighteen. He was enthusiastic, friendly, and competent. He never turned down a mission, and never complained. His work ethic had even caught the eye of the Battalion Commander, who requested him whenever he left the wire. I had been the interpreter manager for nearly fourteen months now, just one of the many duties I performed in Iraq. This carried with it many responsibilities. Those responsibilities included making sure the interpreters’ day to day needs were taken care of. I needed to ensure that their housing, food, and pay was all provided by the base. Because of this, you become rather close to them. Other than the platoons they would leave the wire with, I was the person they spent the most time with. I knew their names. I knew their families. I knew what they hoped to achieve and their goals in life.

Yusuf was very clear about what he wanted. To become a US citizen. Then, to attend university. Once there, he wanted to major in computer science and meet an American woman. One, specifically, who was very busty. He used more specific language, but I’ll leave that to your imagination.

It was a day like any other. I was manning the S2 station at the Battalion Command Center. Lt. Hartline and I were idly chatting about upcoming operations while we waited to hear that the Commander was RP-ing back to base. We got the radio call in, but it wasn’t to announce a RP time. It was to tell the command center they were under fire and to request a MEDEVAC. They had conducted a key leader engagement (KLE) with one of the local heads of a tribe in our area of operations. Due to infrastructure layout, they’d had to park the convoy approximately 300 meters away from the engagement site. As they were walking back to their vehicles after the meeting, the vehicular borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) went off.

After about an hour, when things had settled, the situation resolved, and the convoy had started it’s RP (return point) I got the news no one ever wants to hear.

PETER DUCHAK

“SSG Duchak, we need you in the morgue to identify a body.”

At first I was confused. All the platoon leaders had given accountability of their soldiers. No one had died. Hell, we got off easy, no injuries. Reportedly, the VBIED had killed some local civilians, but I didn't understand why I'd have to identify them. Then it hit me. Yusuf. He had been assigned as the Commanders interpreter for that mission. I wracked my brain, trying to remember if he had been accounted for, but nothing came to mind. Trembling, I walked over to the morgue. We had been on this base for months now, and I'd never realized how close it actually was to our command center. The mortuary affairs NCO and his soldier let me in and led me back to cold storage, where several body bags sat on a table. He moved to the closest one and unzipped it.

My first reaction was, once again, confusion. This wasn't a person. It was a disassembled mannequin sitting in a brown, disgusting mixture. Just two legs, two arms and a head not connected to anything, and a thick brown slurry. But then I looked, really looked, at the head. The face of someone I had sat with dozens if not hundreds of times, drank tea with, shared meals with. It was Yusuf. I steeled myself, because I wasn't done. We had to be sure, and to do that I needed to take his biometrics. I lifted his right hand for fingerprints, and had to hold open his eye to scan it. It was hard to wrap my head around how intact the head was, considering that there was just...no torso.

As I was packing up the biometrics gear, the mortuary affairs specialist, the assistant, made a joke. I don't remember the specifics. I think something partially racist, something to do with him being Iraqi. Looking back with hindsight, it was probably a common occurrence. Something they did to break the tension of having to deal with corpses every day. But at the time, I didn't care. I snapped.

“Listen here you, motherfucker!” I yelled, getting up in his face. “Yusuf is twice the soldier you'll ever be!” I don't remember being that angry about many things in my life. The Mortuary Affairs NCO ended up pulling me back before I did something we'd all have regretted. Later, that soldier was made to come to me and apologize. It was a hollow gesture.

Months later, after returning home from Iraq, I was visiting my parents while on leave. My mom had made a beef stew for dinner, something that previously I'd loved to eat.

She poured a large bowl and set it in front of me. Immediately I vomited all over the table. The stew looked exactly like what had been inside that body bag. The memories all came rushing back. I cried for maybe ten minutes, alone in my childhood bedroom before I was able to compose myself. When my parents asked about it, I made up some lame excuse. Anything other than facing what the truth was. For months after the incident, I never thought much of it. In 2006, we were only just beginning to understand what the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder had on soldiers. What the impact of being in a war that lasted two decades did to the soldiers who served one, two, or in my case seven, combat deployments in them.

Yusuf hadn't been the first body I'd seen, but he'd been the first I'd been close to. After the fifth or sixth friend, I stopped trying to keep count. I let them, friend and foe alike, become just numbers on a spreadsheet. Years later, in in-patient care, I finally was forced to confront my trauma. I spoke with the therapists. My therapists called it survivor's guilt. Logically, I know there was nothing I could have done to prevent what had happened that day. But it still stings. I don't know what happened to his body. I have no idea what became of his family.

LOVE, HONESTLY

DYLAN WALSH

Love isn't the dramatic kind you see in movies.
It's not always grand gestures
or words said at exactly the right time.
Most days, it's quieter than that.
It's choosing patience
when you're tired and annoyed.
It's remembering how someone takes their coffee
or noticing when their smile doesn't quite reach their eyes.
It's staying,
even when leaving would be simpler.
Love exists in late-night conversations
that wander nowhere important,
in shared silences that don't feel empty.
It's laughing at the same joke twice
and still finding it funny.
It doesn't fix everything.
It doesn't erase flaws or mistakes.
But it tries.
And it keeps trying.
Love is effort without keeping score,
care without conditions,
and the decision—made quietly, every day—
to choose the same person
Again.

PEGASUS LITERARY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED BY THE PHANTOM STUDENT PRESS