

Serendipity

TALES

FROM

THE

SEA

By Comsewogue High School's Literary Magazine Club

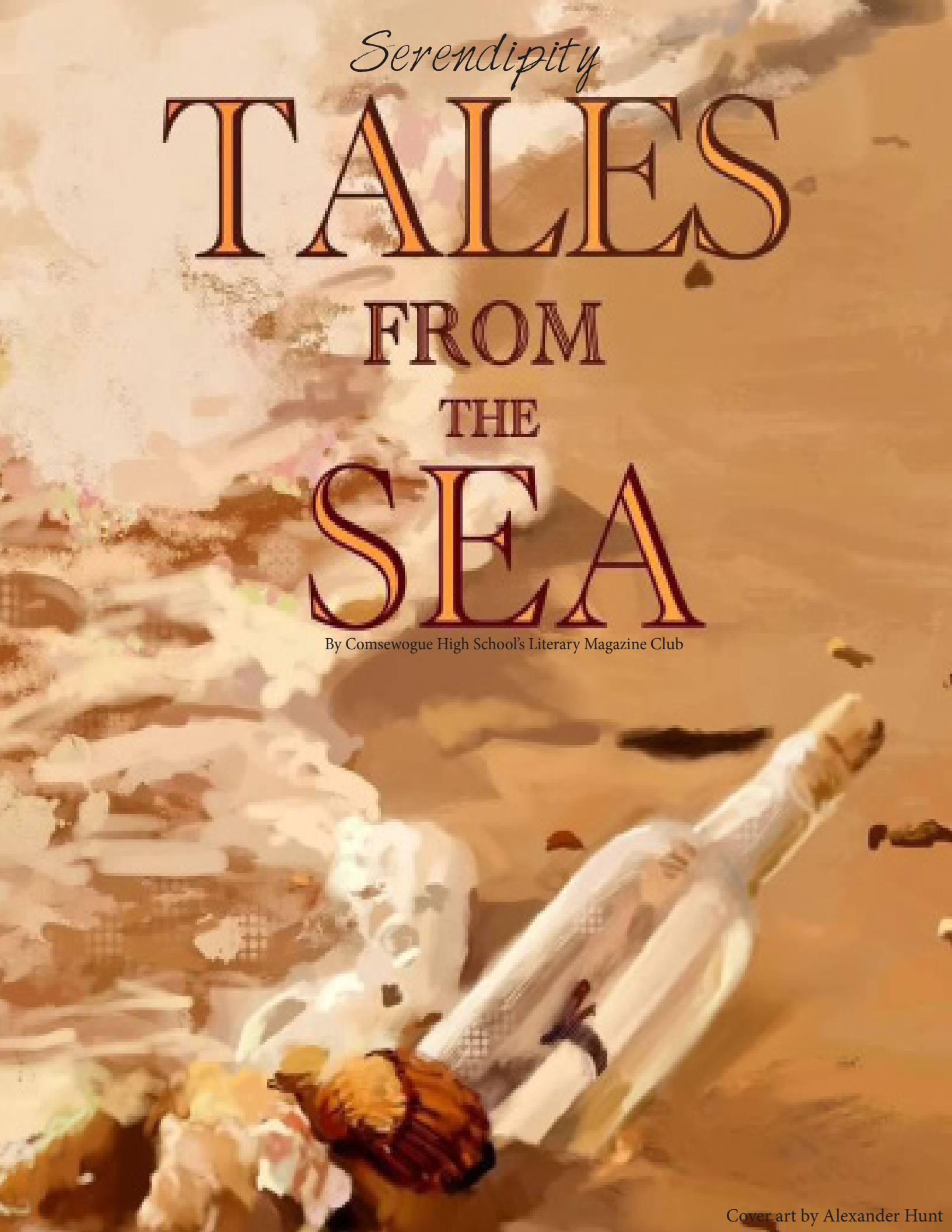


Table of Contents

Poetry and Prose:

The Duality of Man.....	05
How She Created the Ocean.....	07
Cerulean.....	09
A Sailor's Wife.....	11
A Man in an Ocean.....	12
The Artist Only My Eyes Could See.....	13
Black Sea.....	14
Home to the Sea.....	16
An Unlikely Feminist.....	17
Vanora.....	18
Valencia.....	19
And She Pulls Me.....	24
Dark Heart of a Siren.....	26
The Hermit.....	27
Floating in a Sea of Grief.....	28
Lost in the Bliss.....	29
Mindomachy.....	30
The Fear of the Beloved Sea.....	32
The First Siren.....	34
Dear Sea.....	36
The Pier.....	37
Snow on the Beach.....	42
Drifting out to the Sea.....	46
A Love for Fishing.....	47
A Kiss From the Sea.....	49

Book and Movie Reviews:

Priory of the Orange Tree Book Review.....53
80 For Brady: Better Without Brady.....54
The Best Movie of 2022.....55
The Kite Runner Review.....56
Don't Self Publish.....57

Poetry & Prose



By Nicholas Mattheus

Travis

The Duality of Man

By Mahreen Anwar

The wooden boat — or what is left of it — rocks gently on the deep blue water. The cyclone has completely torn away the sail and the helm, leaving the two men absolutely no way to steer to safety. The winds have blown them away from the Indian Ocean, completely off course. They have no idea where on the map they could be.

The sky darkens as sunset commences. The oranges and purples that paint the horizons slowly appear.

The two men sit at each end of the boat, staring at each other. They have sat like this for days, in complete and utter silence. Both think about their pasts. Both know they will die. However, the two have very different methods of dealing with this inevitable circumstance.

If I counted correctly, today is the eighth day we are stranded on this ship. We have run out of water, food, and morale. The boy's eyes have been piercing into my chest ever since I threw Abdi's body overboard.

I know it was hard for him to watch his mate get tossed into the abyss, but keeping a severed corpse on board would only kill us faster. His skin acts more as a veil than as flesh. It is basically translucent, and the contour of his bones protrude from underneath.

I reach up to scratch my beard, and I see him flinch a little, as if scared I am going to attack him. When my hand returns to my side, I trace my fingers along the engravings carved into the hilt of my belawa. The intricate geometric design allows me to escape from the unfortunate situation for a moment..

The deep blue ocean, as boundless and petrifying as it is, perfectly reflects the gorgeous sunset. Oranges and purples paint the sky, so radiant that tears start to form in the wells of my eyes. God has blessed my last moments in life with a beautiful sight.

I curse myself for having wasted my life focusing on the material aspect of everything. I joined this ship, this band of thieving pirates, because there was the slight chance that we would find gold, jewels, treasure, and so much more. Wealth and power, that was all I wanted. For so many years, my eyes were blind to everything but my ultimate goal of prosperity. My life was controlled by greed and nothing else. Any emotion that contradicted my avariciousness was eradicated.

But now, I have lost those acquisitive tendencies. I am forced to watch the birds majestically drift through the air, and forced to feel the sea wake me up from my sleep with its salty mist, and forced to watch the sun rise and set every single day without fail.

And though I am devastated at the fact that I have wasted the entirety of my days chasing my tail, I am elated that in my final hours I have experienced more life than I have ever in my sixty eight years on this planet. I am overjoyed at the fact that I have finally come to recognize what real beauty is, and that no matter how harrowing humanity and nature may be, one thing will always prevail: Beauty.

I close my eyes and absorb the last bit of sunlight I may ever get. I remove my fingers from the hilts of my daggers and lean towards the left side of the boat, reaching down. The warm water glides over my hand as I wave it back and forth. I feel at peace. I feel content. I feel two hands grasping my side and throwing me into the water; it swallows me. A hand pushes my head down as I flail, desperately trying to come back up, but water quickly fills my lungs.

Suddenly, I feel a sharp pain in my chest. I look down and see blood spewing out of me, mixing with the water. My weak body is unable to fight back, so I stop trying to. I feel light headed.

But I am not upset. I know it is my time. At least now, I think, I will become part of nature, and live on in its beauty.

I stare at the old man, making sure not to falter, as I have no idea what he is planning. He reaches up to scratch his beard, and I flinch. I curse at myself for being such a coward, and pray that he didn't see me.

For the past few days, all he has been doing is playing with that damn belawa. He's probably creating a list of reasons in his head on why he should kill me (The top of his list is food. The rest is probably a bunch of nonsense). He's insane and I'm sure of it. He sings to himself and nods his head to a non-existent beat. We haven't eaten in eight days, haven't drank in two, and by my estimates, have only one day left to live. Why is he in such a chipper mood?

The fool threw Abdi's corpse off the boat. His body could have bought us more time, our lives maybe. But I didn't stop him. And I regret that. I regret a lot.

I regret that I did not hold onto my sword tight when our boat was ripped apart. I regret that the old man survived along with me, only because I held onto his body for my own dear life. I regret that I allow myself to feel threatened by a senile man, just because he possesses a sword.

The sunset leaves an unearthly glow on his skin, as if he were being chosen by God. I watch as he starts to cry. Finally, a sign of anguish — until the corner of his lips curl into a smile. The mad man smiles. He is content. Serene. Tears pour down. His eyebrows furrow. He lifts his fingers from the hilt of the belawa and leans to his side, submerging his hand into the warm water.

Now. This is my opportunity. I get up and almost fall over. I haven't used my legs for more than a week. Do I even have the strength to follow through? I do have the element of surprise on my side. But, I am just as weak as him.

I push all my inevitable doubt away, and shove him, throwing his unsuspecting body off the side of the boat, his ivory sword clattering onto the floor. I use the entirety of my strength to push him down and as he struggles, I quickly pick up the belawa and drive it into his chest. He stops and looks down in disbelief. Crimson liquid spews out of his body, tainting the surrounding area. He looks up at me, clearly losing consciousness, and he smiles. The codger shuts his eyes and smiles. Once again, he looks placid despite everything going on.

I regret a lot of things; becoming a pirate, being a coward, saving someone's life. But I will not regret killing a deranged old man before he can kill me. I have won the sick and twisted mind game he has played on me. I came out on top. I will die a winner. And I have a now pink-tinted ivory belawa to prove it.



How She created the ocean

By Sophia Arredondo

She grew up in the
Shadows
of her beloved
Sister


treated as the
Sun
during a lunar eclipse

hidden from the world

full of life, love, light
no one could
See
Her through their judgment

she would never live up to her Sister
receive the praise
be known
be noticed

instead it was failure
disappointment and
neglection



alone she Sat
the warmth of the Sand beneath her
wondering why
they treated her like
nothing

her tears flooded the beach
created an ocean So wide
a pain too Strong
that could be felt miles away

encompassed by the water
she looked up at the Sky
the Starsandmoon beamed back

then came the tides

waves crashed down
on the
Shore

and her
Spirits
with it

gone forevermore



yet what remains
is her creation
an endless glistening Sea
Singing a melodic Symphony
to those
just like
She

Cerulean

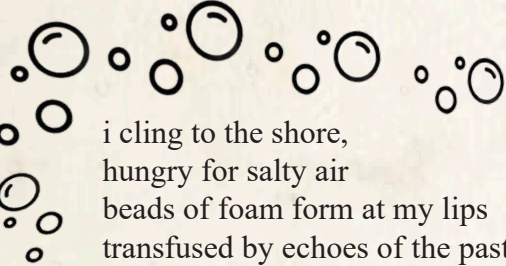
By Jake Epstein

deep cerulean waves
licking the shore
foaming at its maw
delicately lapping up the salty air
sapphire tides enchant me
beneath the surface lay clandestine stories
cold, tantalizing eyes draw me in
frigid, fluid fingers curl around me
a whirlpool of desire beguiles my senses
and my head

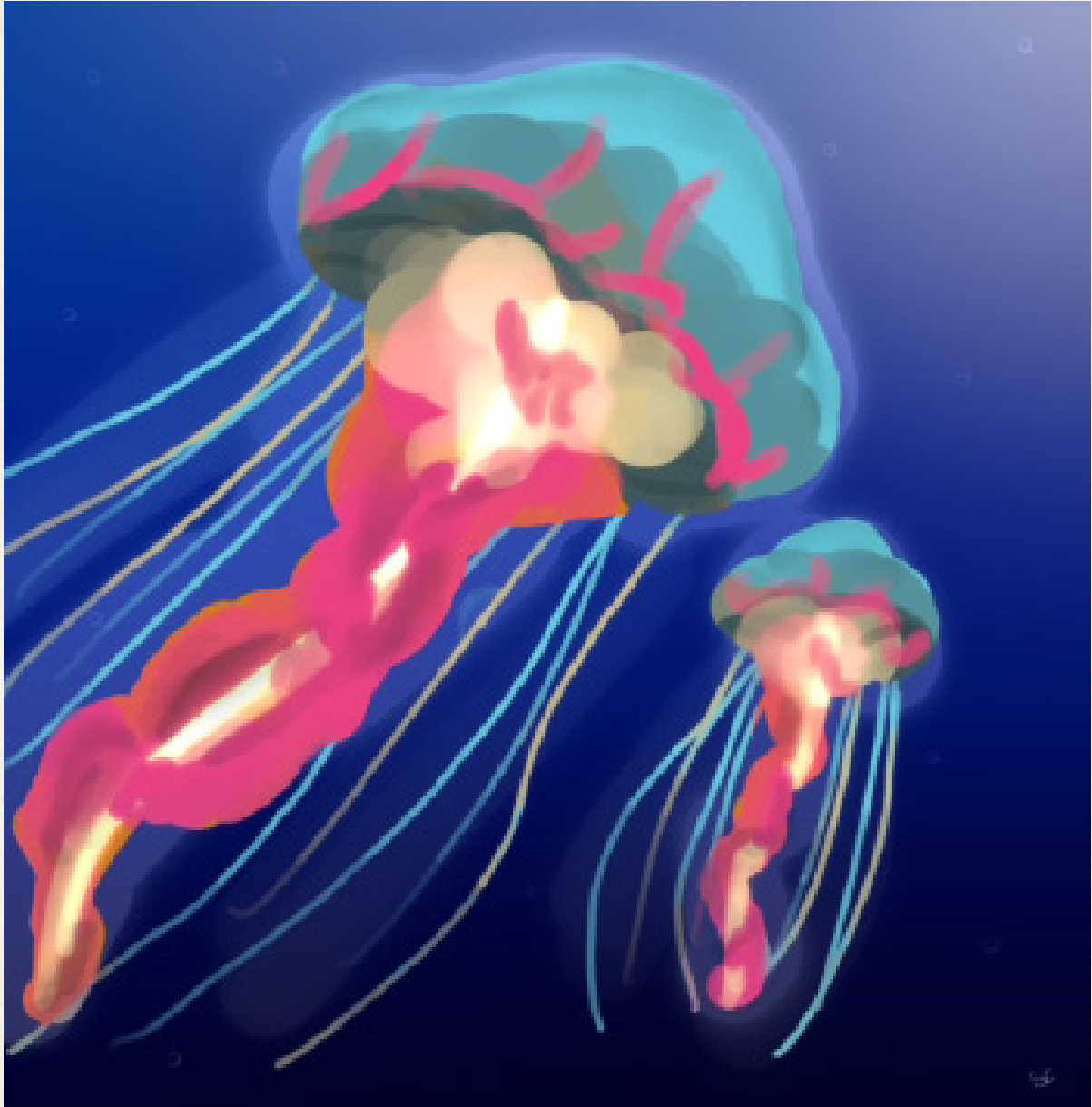
goes

under

bubbles climb above me as i descend
an azurean melancholia envelops me
obscuring my being—



i cling to the shore,
hungry for salty air
beads of foam form at my lips
transfused by echoes of the past
and
i am cerulean



By Sydney Cutler

A Sailor's Wife

By Grace Jos

He starts to swirl in her royal eyes as she resists with spite
It seems cumbersome, unnatural for her
Her curves suppress them from moving forward
And I almost hope she wins

I claim fair winds and following seas
As I wish for his return while I secretly pine
"Way hay and up she rises early in the morning!"
Pulling the lines off into the mist as he drifts

They sing in all their glory as the gray dawn prevails
as I bathe in a melancholic dew
I hope, and I pray, and I beg
That the departure does not transpire— though it always does

She seems enraged by his presumption
His power and ability to force a bow in some unnatural manner
How can she be tamed?
How can a reigning woman, so compelling, so consuming—
Be conquered by such small, insignificant men

They dream of gutting her
Yet speak as if they were betrothed
To steal the mystic mystery within
Is what they believe they will one day hold

I watch as she accepts defeat
She is no match for their abrasive sails
I hear her cry out in as she rises to the sky,
and splashes into the abyss, and her beauty starts to unveil

Home is a sailor,
Home is from the sea
But once again,
He always ceases to be

In the foam of blue skin
I wave once again
And watch his figure become lost
I cry in unison with her
She splashes in agony, as I wail in grief
And we become, in truth— one like we were

A Man in an Ocean

By Zoe Marks

Every morning he goes out to the sea. He wears a towel around his shoulders and the swim trunks his brother got him for Christmas, and that's all, even if it's twelve degrees outside. He holds his breath and dives into the water. Sometimes he thinks about staying underneath. He's always clambering up the beach by seven forty-five.

He eats scrambled eggs with ketchup, lightly salted, lightly peppered, and a piece of toast, always buttered—never jammed, he doesn't like jam—and he drinks a glass of orange juice. He likes to take his time.

Sometimes he goes back to the beach and watches the water; always pushing and pulling, attacking and then retreating. He used to swim competitively. He's a terrific swimmer.

He lives alone, in that gray house up on the hill. You can see it, but sometimes when it's foggy you can't. He buys the fun-sized candy bars for Halloween and he's Santa Claus for Christmas, the Easter bunny for Easter. He could've been an Olympic gold-medalist, you know. And then he cramped in the pool and almost drowned.

The water is always pushing and pulling, attacking and then retreating. It's one of the things he loves about it; it's consistent. It's playful. It's dangerous, and that's what's really exhilarating.

He goes back out at night, when it's really dark and the only light comes from the lighthouse and sometimes the moon. Sometimes he thinks about staying underneath. But he's always clambering up the beach by one o'clock.

-

He got a dog. A cute Border Collie. She sits on the beach while he swims and sometimes she whines, sometimes she barks, when he's in there for too long. He goes for long walks with her up and down the sand, even if it's windy. And it's almost always windy, down the hill by the water. Look, you can see his house. Can you see him?

Some people joke that he's a merman in disguise. He's always in the water, so why wouldn't he be one? You know, he used to be an Olympic swimmer... He's always the only person in the water. It's too cold here to swim, even in the summer. And yet every day, like clockwork, he's swimming. Did you know...

-

The water is always pushing and pulling. Always taking, never giving; that's what some people say. Some people, he thinks, are stupid. The water has only ever given to him. Of course he knows what people say; it's a small town, and if you go to the corner diner you can get all the rumors for free. Everyone knows everyone else's business. It's something he needs to get away from. He just wants to swim.

Of course he knows what people say, and it wasn't a cramp, and it wasn't a pool. It wasn't much of anything, really. Just the water, pushing and pulling.

-

He's moving, did you know?

-

That family in his old house, they don't swim, not a single one. Isn't that a shame?

-

He swims more often. There's an indoor pool in his apartment building, and the ocean is an hour drive. Sometimes he doesn't even swim when he takes the trip; just watches the waves, creeping up onto the sand and then disappearing.

The Artist Only My Eyes Could See

By Blaize Carpino

After everything you and I have shared,
the emotions we've exchanged,
push and pull
with the rhythm
of the sea's tides
a living, breathing
heartbeat
where the deepest thoughts are kept locked away.
You are wading deeper into the sea
but creating more distance from the
beach,
drifting away from me.

I reach out a desperate hand
to salvage what we had,
even if only a remnant.
One day already destined to be forgotten
the hollow shell
when he leaves the misery of the beach
will eventually fade into nothing.
He splashed life into the shell,
masterpieces of color and life
the artist only my eyes could see.

Everything he does
reflects
on his work of art,
he attempted to turn the sand of the shore to gravel:
perfection in his eyes.
But it was simply not possible
for one man to form the earth
the foundation of his prototype
of which had been formed over years and years
could not be altered at this point.
It was too late
for me to become
his perfect image
his picture,
his work of art.

To the artist only my eyes can see,
you should've known this wouldn't happen,
and you can't change the past.

Black Sea

By Samantha Rodriguez

The sea had slowly begun turning darker as the old captain of the ship pedaled the crew towards the fog. It was a heavy, all-encompassing fog, one which clouded the mind as much as it did the vision.

The captain's mind felt heavy like he'd just woken from a deep sleep, and it took all his energy to focus his eyes on the black sea beyond them. It would give him clarity, serenity, and peace; the sea was rumored to do so, for it reflected the desires of each man back to him, and gave him purpose.

Many had traveled to the sea in the past and come back to become famous artists, soldiers, and kings, all masters of their craft. Just as many had died trying to get there, or gone mad from the fog which surrounded the place.

The captain wasn't about to let that happen to him. He glanced overboard every few seconds, ignored the lurching of his stomach when the ship lurched, ignored the pained cries of his crew, and focused solely on the black, getting closer and closer.

Once the sea around them was a stark black color, the captain ran to the topmost area of the ship, determined to steal a glimpse of his future, of who he was destined to be, who he could become if he tried hard enough.

When he looked down, though, he was greeted by nothing but black. The sea stared back at him with its cold eyes, daring him to take a closer look. The fog had grown heavier, and he determined this to be the cause of his problems.

"I'll simply climb out of the ship," the captain mused. Using the wale as a ledge to prop himself up, he grabbed a hold of the edge of the ship, climbing down.

The sea stared back at him. Still black.

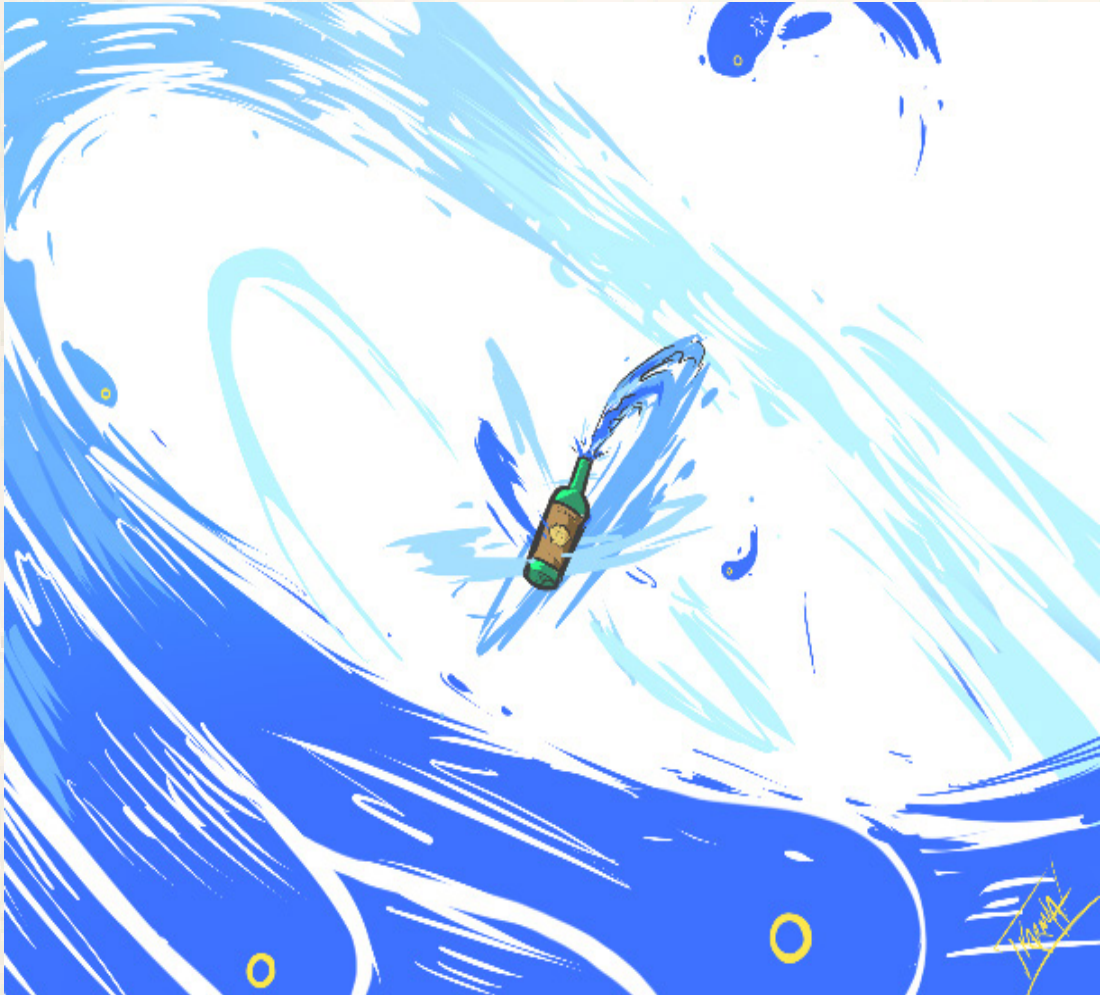
"Perhaps if I touch the water, the sea will show me then."

And so the captain climbed down further until his toes touched the cold sea. But still, when he looked down, all he saw was black.

He climbed down further, resolving that others had swam in the water to see their future selves. But once submerged in water, shivering to his core, unable to think of anything besides the black sea, he still could not see his future.

And so he thought, *perhaps I am in the wrong place. I shall swim further until I encounter my future.* But once he swam downward, the man realized he could still not see his future, and resolved to stay in the sea until it granted his wishes; though of course, the man had never planned to enter the black sea, which was nothing if not brutal to mortal men, with its carnivorous underwater beasts and its freezing temperatures, and of course, a man cannot hold his breath for long.

Still, the man waited for an eternity, staring back at nothing but black.



By Nicholas Mattheus

Home to the Sea

By Macy Carter

The sea was miraculous. Teeming with life, but even the open water refracted rainbows, a million shades of shining blue. Light streamed through, bouncing off specks. What were those specks? The water there was all together, I liked being all together.

I left the sea, up and up and up to the sky, fractured into billions of tiny droplets. I miss being the sea. Now I watch birds and bugs, and the wind moves me along, and it's remarkable, but never the same. The birds are not fish. The bugs are not snails. The wind is not the current. I am in pieces.

I was part of a miracle, a tremendous body of power and movement. I was a member of the seventy percent of Earth's surface. It has been so long since I've felt the surface. Smooth pebbles, rolling along the seafloor, slimy plants, mountains, and valleys that I once surrounded, touched, and moved.

In the sea, everything moved. From the scuttling hermit crab to the massive blue whale, every bit of the ocean pushed it along, sending out spinning bubbles. It was never quiet. In fact, it sounded like a symphony. Every being in the ocean was an instrument, even the light of the sunset sang when it hit the water.

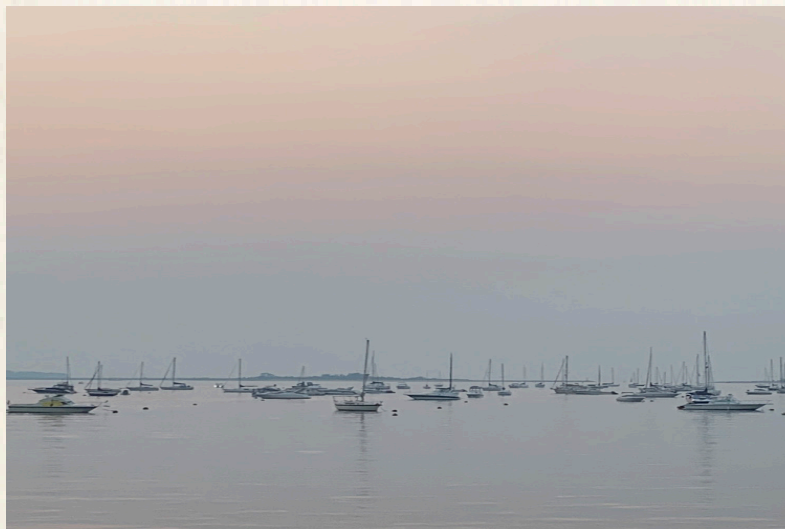
Now the only sound I hear is the torturous, taunting call of the waves collapsing upon each other. If only I could collapse into the sea. Yes, the air has its beauty. The moon, stars, and various other celestial objects I had never seen before now grace the sky, shining and shimmering. Fireflies occasionally blink through, as well, reminding me of those specks in the water.

All I do is stare at the sea. How tormenting it is to yearn for a life you once had, that you now can only view from afar. My heart is weighted with longing, growing heavier and heavier by the minute. I feel the sorrow swell and expand tenfold.

The sky turns dark and gray, and before I know it, I am slipping away from the sky. I glide through the air and tumble down in pieces, down and down and down I fall, back to the sea! Back to my home!

The sea greets me ardently, enveloping me in a familiar jubilation. An abundance of bubbles swirl around as the rain rocks the water, spraying waves across the surface. I sink further down, rejoining the sisterhood that is the sea. I behold submerged mountains and caves, schools of fish with dazzling scales swimming past, and specks aplenty before me.

I enjoy a great deal of time in the sea, but I soon feel myself begin to rise. As I leave up and up and up, I am no longer fearful. I am merely a tourist visiting the sky. I know my vacation will end and I will at last return home, home to the sea.



By Lydia McGuigan

An Unlikely Feminist

By Madison Maida

When you hear the word “pirate” what do you think? Pirates of the Caribbean? A huge man with a long beard? A man with a hook for a hand? None of these describe objectively one of the most influential and powerful pirates to ever exist, Zheng Yi Sao. Although her life is extremely controversial due to her rise of power, her influence is undeniable.

While you might assume Zheng Yi Sao was born thousands of years ago, she was actually born in 1775; making popular figures such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and many more famous people all older than her.

As you would expect China during this time period, like the rest of the world, had severe gender inequality. From not being able to vote, to the cultural significance of marriage and a woman’s role simply being to marry and serve a man. Zheng Yi began her rise of power as a prostitute, with many of her clients being pirates themselves. Not only did she make money from her occupation but by also selling secrets from her clients. By far her most important client was someone also by the name of Zheng Yi. He was not only her key when rising to power but also her husband. Zheng Yi was an extremely powerful leader and pirate, controlling over 60,000 men. As a couple they were unstoppable.

This all came crashing down when Zheng Yi passed away in 1807, leaving Zheng Yi Sao to fight for control. This was especially difficult as a woman. Through her intelligence, creativity, and charm she won the respect of the two power chieftains. Allowing her to remain in power. With her pirate empire she was able to create laws, a passport system, and finally have major control over China’s salt trade. She created laws to preserve order in her pirate empire. She allowed people to trade salt and other materials on her territory, yet they required a passport. Just like modern day they had tax collectors to ensure people were paying their taxes. Her empire was feared with the Chinese government of the time only controlling not even ten percent of their salt ships. She had almost complete control over the salt trade in China. She was feared across continents. Even when the Chinese government hired the British and Portuguese to help destroy her empire. They were unsuccessful.

The only thing that could lead to the end of her unstoppable empire was a major sum of money from the Chinese Government. In her last years she went back to her hometown Guangdong to raise her son. She lived there until her death in 1844. She is undeniably one of the most powerful pirates in history. She is a great example of the power of women despite the oppressive times.

Vanora

By Jordana Schweitzer

The sea was her home. It was a vast expanse of emptiness, a blank sheet of paper ready to be defamed. The water, once crystalline, had adopted a greenish hue that only added to its pitifulness. The waves, formerly wide and cresting, now folded in on themselves as if sighing. Did she prefer the water before it had succumbed to humanity's frivolous nature? She did not care one way or the other. Perhaps, from a birds-eye perspective, she should have. Maybe she would have, in a brighter time.

She heaved a sigh tinged with wistfulness. Although the woman was home, her mind had never been farther. She wished she could plunge into the murky depths ebbing and flowing against her toes. Perhaps she should blame it on a mythical creature of old? A Siren had lured her here, not the incessant voices in her head! Perhaps she could become a crab instead, they weren't suitable morsels for maidens of seaweed and rugged rocks. She wanted to cocoon into her shell as she sank further... and further... until her murky apparition was extinguished from time forever. The scrutinizing glare of the sun would be the only witness to her demise.

The sea wouldn't care, she thought. She could float on its surface for hours and let the water suck her dry. She could hit the waves with all the force her 34-year-old wiry frame could muster, and it still wouldn't make a dent.

Or she could stand here. And wait. Forever.

What was forever anyway? She found herself wondering, *Is it even definable? Or is it like the sea? Immeasurable amounts of vastness that is seen in the eyes of a human being as space between lands to colonize.*

She laughed at this line of reasoning. It was craven, hoarse, and guttural all at once. Although... she tilted her head, flopping a mat of dirty-blond hair to the side. The sea was indifferent to her tumult. Meaning it was constant; forever, for as far as she was concerned. Therefore, she could come to the conclusion that it was an anchor, her habitat, an alcove of safety for many years.

Her side flared, and she inhaled sharply through her nose. It had been relegated to a dull throb all day, but it had made an appearance in full force.

Without warning, she allowed herself to fall backward onto the glossy, white sand of the beach. She paid little attention to where she landed. As long as she was belly up and staring at the sky, she couldn't be more content. One thing remained clear in her tortured consciousness. The gentle push and pull of the tides, moving at an inchworm pace up her body. For now, they were still lapping at the base of her toes, but it would change soon enough.

Her eternity. She was prepared to rest in the sea forever.

Another laugh, more forced this time. How could one so attuned with the sea, the most expansive force on the planet, be so close-minded?

Maybe submerging herself in her own self-doubt would give her a semblance of mind. Playing the devil's advocate was always a heartbeat away for her. It was in her nature to test the waters, simply because she wanted to piss the world off. Perhaps the world was finally getting its reprisal.

A smile— that would've made Valencia's heartbreak, burn, and melt all at once— slithered its way onto her face, pockmarked with dimples and book-ended by thin red lips.

She was whisked back to that day all at once, the mere thought of her name bringing every memory back. Every. Emaciated. Moment. She would never get back.

She bit her lip in anguish. She knew that it wouldn't change anything, to linger. Valencia had always stated it didn't suit her anyway. Her name meant the sea, yet she could only stare out at the coast and wonder. *Why?*

Valencia

By Jordana Schweitzer

Valencia had always harbored grandiose plans for the future. It was in her nature to want more out of life than what was given to her. When she was 19 she was inducted into the National Hall of Fame for discovering a new way to grow crops that took up 36% less space. The rest of the world had scoffed when she had first proposed the idea that landed her on the covers of the Scientific Metropolitan newspaper. It would still take a plethora of resources to mass produce her product, after all. Now she was the one scoffing because she had pulled it off and secured a patent for her work at just 18.

What was so compelling about her argument that seasoned businessmen would lend an ear to her preaching? As driven as she was, Valencia was not the brainiest nor brawniest. She wasn't the most charismatic either. She planned ahead by being patient and listening before brashly making a decision. Her candidness was something that had caught the businessmen off guard. They had initially mistaken her for an egotistical and headstrong teenager, but they had fallen into a false sense of security. Better that way. Valencia thought to herself semi-satisfactorily. She was not in this business for fame. Not even for the money. She was the type who would sell all of her belongings to continue her research. She would become a monk if she had to, just for the world of botanical sciences.

In fact, she did become a monk of sorts. Although her patent was secured, Valencia's work was far from finished. She scoured the world for a place to cultivate her new idea and settled on the Middle East. What better place to try than the first civilization's starting point? Favored by the three secular religions? There's not much that surpasses it. She mused.

She settled on the sandy coasts of Jordan to begin her experimentation. It wasn't just the land that drew her, it was the fabled Dead Sea that permeated through the West Bank. It was said to harbor multiple times more salt than an average body of water. If she could use the mechanics of concentration gradients with distilled water, she may be able to concoct the perfect salve to nurture crops of the future. She was so caught up in her train of thought she didn't notice when the dingy had come ashore. The crooked tooth boat-er flashed her a grin and, unnerved, she hurriedly quit the small vessel. Now she was left to her own devices. Straggling along those coasts, she began to feel the creeping spider of doubt crawling into her veins. It unnerved her. What if this was a mistake, and she wouldn't find what she was looking for? No! I can't think like that! Valencia thought.

Where was she again? Her olive-toned hands clumsily searched for her map in her pack, but in doing so felt a sort of lightness. Realization dawned on her in a flash. *That damned boater stole my goods!* She thought incredulously. It was unlike her to flare up in anger, but too many things had already gone wrong that day, and this was the straw that broke the camel's back. When she thought of that old codger parsing through her brand new equipment she had just purchased with grant money, the rage bubbled over.

Hours later, her anger yielded to despair when all that was around her was the wastelands of an abandoned coast. The sun was disappearing over the horizon and the harsh reality of her situation began to settle in on her. After all of her tribulations, was she really destined to die here? Unremembered save for a magazine cover and a thorn in some rich ambitious guys' sides? That's when she saw it. An outlined figure obscured in what she thought was some sort of hazy hallucination. It sprung up on her like a rude awakening. A couple of hundred paces later, Valencia was able to confirm that this person was, in fact, very real. Something like a mix of awe and mirth blossomed in her stomach. The person's—a woman's—lithe body was hardened from constant work by the relentless ocean, her hands were calloused even from a distance. Later she would find that their touch wasn't uncomfortable despite the look. Her tanned, peachy skin was so in sync with the Jordanian landscape Valencia could see how it had taken ample time to make her out. The woman caught sight of her, and a ginger smirk eased its way onto her crudely drawn lips. She dropped what she was working on, it seemed to be some sort of basket she was weaving. "What the hell happened to you?" She spoke in a rapid Arabian lilt that Valencia found hard to discern. The woman's eyes were pierc-

ing her. The initial relief Valencia had felt at sighting another human being was momentarily stanchd. Her words came hesitantly in response, and she spoke with less confidence than she would have liked, but communication was key if she was to find bed and food for the night. When Valencia told the full extent of her journey, she left out the part about being a renowned scientist. She figured it would cause her more harm than good. The woman raised a bushy eyebrow inquisitively. For a second Valencia was terrified the woman had seen through the gaping in her story: why she had decided on such a remote part of the country to travel to. Then, to Valencia's utmost relief, she threw her head back and laughed. It was hearty and full of pride.

"I never expected someone to fall victim to the likes of Hassam, that bumbling fool has never worked honestly a day in his life. Pleased to make your acquaintance, I'm Vanora." Her smirk gave way to an easy smile, wide and bright. "Our village is not five thousand paces south, I suspect you will need adequate rest from your strenuous journey." She nodded to Valencia's clothes, which were shrunken from the unrelenting heat of the sunset.

Once again dumbstruck from relief, and happy tears pecking at the corners of her eyes, it was all Valencia could do to emphatically nod her head like the good little sycophant she was. "You truly believe me? I have no proof other than the clothes on my back and the words on my tongue!" Valencia exclaimed. Vanora snorted. "Oh please, the more desperate they are the easier it is to pick apart their deepest desires. There's no malice in you, only desperation. Now come, we arrive by dusk."

Despite it all, Valencia reddened at the other woman's frankness. In her little time abroad, she had been diminished to an irresolute husk of her former self. Nonetheless, she fell in lockstep with Vanora and tried to memorize this location in case she needed it for reference later.

But she needn't have feared the desert for getting lost in. There was Vanora's windswept hair and the slight indentations of her dimples instead. Valencia gave a valiant effort not to let her eyes drift too far down, but resistance was futile. Inwardly sighing at her pervertedness, she forced her mind to her work studies, reflecting on her gratitude to be here, a semi-uncharted part of the world, for the sole purpose of scientific advancement. Vanora's confident stride amid the arid climate was so wide and unrelenting that Valencia had to jog lightly to keep up.

Thus the hands of time pushed the two women together. Via telegraph Valencia was able to prove her identification through voice and, miraculously, she was issued a passport.

And thus, her work began in earnest. Research that should've theoretically taken a couple of weeks stretched into months. However, using both her charisma and the convenient droughts that had been gracing Jordan as of late she was able to placate the businessmen. The honest truth? Valencia wasn't working as hard as she could've. And Vanora knew it. She was still extremely oblivious as to why, which just served to aggravate Valencia further.

Having been raised from smokestacks and towering construction sites, talking to Vanora was like examining a new plant species under a microscope. She was extraordinarily quick-witted, which wasn't that surprising considering the country she had to grow up in. Valencia learned of Vanora's family, whom she respected deeply. Unable to go to secondary school and pursue her dream of pottery, she settled on basket weaving instead. It was a humble profession. However, it quieted her dawdling parents and she wouldn't be betrothed as quickly to an egotistical husband.

Tragically, or so it seemed to Valencia, Vanora's quick wits were underappreciated. The first time Vanora had entered the town she came to learn as Potash, she donned a hijab and passed a spare to Valencia. "Would be best to wear this." She spoke begrudgingly as if she herself didn't quite believe it was right. It was only when they were out on the coast that her hair and true attitude could shine fiercely. And Valencia couldn't help but feel a throb of guilt for her. Smart as she was, Vanora was only a woman. A stunning, knowledgeable woman. But in the sight of her peers, she was only as much as those male monarchs would allow her to be. Her jagged, satirical humor must've stemmed from this knowledge. Suddenly Valencia was overcome with the urge to tell Vanora everything. She wanted to desperately prove to her not only that she was not only well recognized back home but respected for it. Wildness started to overcome her thoughts.

During her stay in that small one-bedroom hovel, she yearned for Vanora to come with her. Come

Britain, to the spiraling straits of London. Valencia wanted to urge her, all of her persuasion aside. She really was like a wave, one that smoothed out all of her complexities, honest to her true self. Too honest. Valencia didn't know if the woman had the stomach. To leave it all behind. Her family, her home, and her country? It was a big ask. But Valencia would be damned if she wouldn't try.

Then one morning, Vanora approached her while she was concocting her 33% salt and 66% percent distilled water solution.

Valencia observed an anomaly in her body language today. She had a rigid way of carrying herself, but right now it was unnaturally rigid. She sat herself down on the laboratory floor in a most unladylike way. Vanora smirked, thinking how it would make Vanora's patriarchs balk.

"No one cares what I think or feel. And why would they? I don't have anything worth acknowledging anyways." She shrugged it off as if it was a mosquito that had landed on her arm, and not some life-altering concession she made with herself. The crease in Vanora's brow didn't fit her. Valencia wanted to smooth it out somehow. She pulled in her aquamarine eyes, and it was like reeling in a fish on a hook. Valencia seized the opportunity and opened her mouth to speak.

"But don't you see? You harbor something most people live and die before they experience. How can you be so blind? You're ho- I mean hopelessly determined to accomplish your goals!" That candid smile again. She must know what it did to Valencia at this point. "Very smooth... although the word choice was a bit contradictory," Vanora added with a superfluous wink.

Meanwhile, Valencia was turning redder by the second. Somehow the cool, calculated, and composed woman was unraveled at mere the sight of Vanora. Thankfully the woman had turned around to pack her basket weaving equipment, for she was starting to feel things that would definitely screw with her trial results.

"You know what they call this place?" Vanora asked her one day. Her attitude towards day-to-day life had been more lax as of late. She was more methodical than usual working on her baskets, and the finished products were breathtakingly gorgeous.

Valencia brushed the hair out of Vanora's eyes.

"What?" Valencia asked. Vanora sighed and wrapped an arm around her waist. "Al Bahr al mayyit. The sea of salt. I never understood it. There was no life here, I saw no beauty in it. But then I saw you. Now I know why my people have named it so." Valencia once again tried to speak but this time she was hushed by another voice, and it spoke louder and truer than she ever could with words.

She could not fathom how many times they embraced on those white sandy beaches. She wanted to play somewhat hard to get, but that was impossible. She felt her envelopes and limits being pushed forward to their pivotal conclusion. Their innumerable hushed secrets and whispers, that bond she made... Valencia allowed herself to fall into that false sense of security. She could simply stay in Jordan... people would forget about her so easily, and now it seemed more welcome than ever to continue her experiments in peace.

Unfortunately, love had dulled her. She was not as rigid or attentive as she once was to her work. Her dreams of tackling the world's hunger problems had made way for much smaller goals indeed. Why must love be so illogical? Was it truly okay to indulge when people were starving for scraps? When Vanora was against her, however, all capitulations went out the window. It was just them, the beach, and the sea.

It was their honeymoon. They were enamored with each other.

They were in a carriage. It was rolling to a villa in the Golan Heights, and they stole a glance at the driver, thwapping away with his whip in stride. Valencia remembered the dingy boat from all that time ago and laughed like an infant. A spurt of giggles projected from her mouth and felt like the pleasant morning breeze to Vanora, who was finally allowing herself to relax, the tenseness easing out of her shoulders for the first time in years. They simply basked in each other's presence, so private in their carriage yet so public. The bustling middle eastern town was mere feet from them. Vanora was deaf to it all. Valencia smelled like the sea, and her skin was grainy from the years spent in the desert climate. She had closed her eyes and nestled into that smell, the smell she hadn't ever thought would be hers. Valencia's attitude, her smile, her almond

brown hair... she wanted to breathe it all in and never exhale. They understood each other like they were siblings but loved like a fire, passionate and quick to burn. Stern, inflexible countenances broke into brisk, hearty laughter at the drop of a hat.

How could it be wrong when it felt so right? How could this pure, unbridled passion lead to such a travesty? Sometimes she wondered if life would've been better if she had denied it. If she had just held onto herself a bit longer, and not curled in on herself like the foamy waves of the shore. She could've settled down with a respectable husband, had a family, kept the family that had estranged her when she had foolishly announced a wedding— but no, of course not.

The carriage never made it to its destination.

Instead, it was lying on its side, one wheel still circumventing on its axis. At first, all she heard was ringing, and then a wave of white-hot fear hazed its way into her heart.

“Valencia!” she screamed, no more than a heaving wide-eyed mass on the ground. People were staring in shock, there was blood. And more screaming at that, “Get an ambulance! God save her!” She screamed in anguish. She was so overwrought with adrenaline that she didn't even notice when help arrived or the extent of her own injuries before she collapsed from blood loss. Vanora knew in her heart what had happened, and instead of malice or hatred towards their assailant, all she felt was apathy. Apathy was the scariest of all. For she was trapped without her anchor of fire. Of adoration. Of affection. Of love.

This was the first day she had decided to return to her true home. The place where she had met Valencia. And the first day she cried since her lover's death. The hot wet tears seized her at once, and she imagined herself drowning in them.

The sea takes what it wants.



By Pranjali Dangi

Breathe

By Annemarie Kosak

Breathe

A right belonging to every man
Yet how can I breathe with salt in my nose
It coats my skin like the breeze once did
But there is no breeze in the ocean

Breathe

My hands are bound behind my back
Crumbs from the bread I'd taken still lingers on my fingerprints
Take bread, steal a life
They are of equal value after all

Breathe

All is fair when you're starving
All is fair until it no longer benefits you
Where is the fairness in the world when I am sinking
What fairness will be spared for those I know

Breathe

Who will tend to my child
When I am the only one who cares for him?
Who will take him on afternoon walks?
Who will show him the sea his father lies in?

Breathe

To be with wife or to be with child
Is it selfish to want the embrace of my wife
Or must I fight to embrace my child
I look up

Breathe

A light shines above me
Is it the sun or could it be my love
Has she come to save me from the weight that fills my lungs
I close my eyes

Breathe

lift me up
Either out of the sea or into the sky
What a waste
To create something with the sole purpose to die

Breathe

At least to serve a purpose
Serve me on a silver platter
Fill the stomachs I emptied
Flavor my skin with the salt of the sea

Breathe

Deeper
Deeper
Deeper
Still, I cannot

Breathe

I can no longer stand it
The light has grown too bright
If my wife beckons, I shall answer
I inhale

And She Pulls Me

By Joseph Finn

I arrive at the water
And I try to cleanse my mind
And I try to cease my pain
And she pulls me

I gaze at the water
And I try to forget this
And I try to continue
And she pulls me

And she seems to not realize
The effect she has on me
But I see her every night
When I fall asleep

And she seems to go on living
Her life like she intended
But I can't now live without her
My existence upended

Still, she pulls me

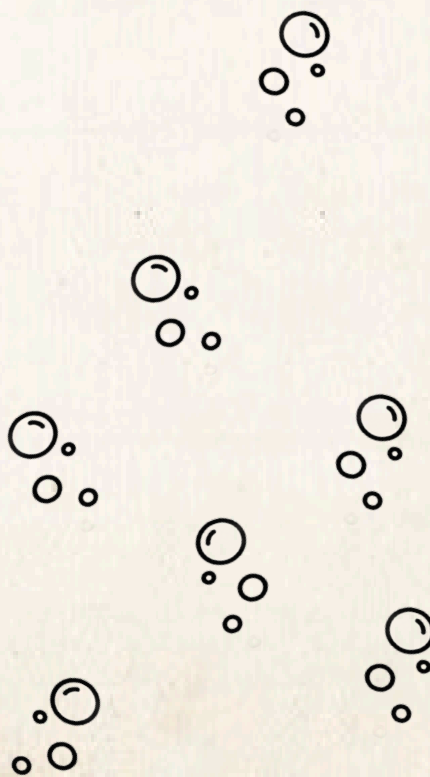
I pause in the water
I try to relax
And I try to move on
And she pulls me

I go under the water
And I try to live
And I try to continue
And she pulls me

And she seems to only exist
To give my life more pain
But I can't foresee a future
With my consciousness regained

And she seems to have her feelings
As I seem to have mine
But something about her isn't human
She seems to be divine

Thus, she pulls me



Dark Heart of a Siren

By Ebube Maduekwe

The bubbling and boiling spurts that came from the coral scratched my tail as I curved and shifted through the musky sea waters. My braids, that were intertwined with metal rings and sea shells, wringed around my body as I twirled and pranced through the sea. The sea was as blue as the fish catchers who tried to capture me but failed tremendously. Fishes of every color and shape guided themselves into specific lines and marched through the sea like soldiers. They marched into war everyday, the war of a predator. Everyday the food chain circulates the sea like a busy ship about to sail.

I hear the whispers, they say I am a tale of the sea. They say I am a figment of the imagination, but how could that be true? How could I be fake when I wake everyday and quest the sea. Every now and then I hold on to the bottom of ships and boats to remind the beings without tails that I exist. Some of the beings without tails release nasty and deafening sounds from their mouths that startle me and hurt my ears.

Today another being without a tail startled me and it was so bad that I crashed down into a glistening rock. The rock attacked my back and left me in a sprawled out position for what felt like an eternity. When I finally woke up and got myself back into swimming, I realized there was a "house" in the sea. At least that's what the being without a tail call it.

The structure was big and dull in color. The door entranced me and so I opened it. Inside the house there were pink balloons and cloth dolls. As I passed by many hallways I saw trinkets and toys, the house was very reassuring and kind. The last hallway I passed had five doors, each door had a toy painted on it.

The first door had a balloon, the second had a teddy bear, the third had a toy ship, the fourth and the fifth had pink ribbons with a lollipop. I opened the second door with the teddy bear and saw a room filled with toys and baby dresses. The fourth door was just like the second but instead had more junk and plastic in the room. The rooms no longer intrigued me and I soon realized the house was quite boring and nothing special. The back door of the house was painted baby blue and chipped at the corners. It was the only thing that was blue. When I went to open the door, the door fought back and stood in place. Another push to the door and still nothing. I slammed the door once more and ripped my hand back after black gunk oozed from the handle to my hand.

The door opened. Right in front of the door was the head of a mermaid. Past the door wasn't just the sea, it was a different section of the sea. There were heads, arms, tails and more gruesomely disturbing things. Hot and expired smells flowed into my nostrils, I gagged and coughed as I swam. The stench was so bad my nose bled from my nails digging into the sides of it to try and mask the smell. A strong crack shuddered the waters, I ducked down. A warm, fleshy and infected body crashed into my torso. I let out the strongest and most ear rattling scream that a siren could.

Body by body, the further I swam, the more bodies swam with me. Some bodies were fresh with wounds and wine colored stains, others were turning green and missing eyes. Behind me was a half bitten fish. The fish had chunks taken out in the shape of big circles. I physically couldn't keep going but I feared the worse if I didn't.

Another body whipped across my face, leaving a smear of watered down blood and chunks of skin on my face. Body. Body. Hand. A hand grabbed my tail, another grabbed my shoulder and another grabbed my mouth. My skin stretched and ripped at the hands mutilating me. The cracks on my face were poisoned with painful substances. They pulled me back and held on to me. Black gunk slipped into the crevice of my mouth. I battled in a war to stay alive. My body glitched and pains spread throughout my limbs. A boat went over the sea. Another boat went over the sea, unknown to the torture I was going through. I deserved a better death than this, and not because of my hubris. It was because the stretching and deep wounds stung and sizzled. I sizzled and burned. I managed one more look at the house. There was no house.

There was only me in the sea. I killed everyone in a fit of rage when I woke up from the fall. My screams terrified the creatures and the beings without tails. My siren scream erased every soul and thing in

the world. The bodies that swam with me were those of the ones I killed. The bodies that grabbed me were the bodies I robbed of life. The mental obstacle my own brain went through to bargain the idea that I ruined a world. It made it seem like I was in danger. My own brain betrayed me with the vivid scene of a traumatic experience. I saw and felt everything like it was real. My long stygian hair warped and spiraled around me as I descended over the sea and scanned the empty world. I wasn't in danger, I was the danger. But, they all deserved it anyway. How could I be balled down to just a tale of the sea? I'm not the danger. They were. They were. I mean how could I be in the wrong? I just wanted peace for the sea. They are now just a tale of the sea. They do not exist. They're a figment of the imagination.

The Hermit

By Cassandra Paciella

In my solitude,
I rest under the sand.
I lay undisturbed,
Beneath the grainy strand.

No worries or wants,
But to grow and expand.
Search for a new shell,
That I may then brand.

And for my new shell,
I shall search all the lands.
And hope my new shell,
Will find my crabby hands.



By Lydia McGuigan

Floating in a Sea of Grief

By Jillian Bollbach

As the days went on and the world kept spinning
I looked for your comfort as the touch of you was thinning

The loss of you still on my mind
And more and more people seem to be blind

I walked to the shore to see if you'd be there
I looked into the blank ocean to be left in despair

You always said you'd be with me
But I'm starting to disagree

You said even if I couldn't see you
You would be there when the wind blew

When the waves crashed on the shore
That was you making a roar

As the sea sat still
And life without you felt as if it could kill

I walked away
But the ocean called to me to stay

It was exactly eleven eleven
And It felt as though it were you from heaven

Like you'd be there

Even when no one else would care

Lost In the Bliss

By Madelyn Serxner

Blue, deep, bottomless sea.

Blue, deep, unfaltering miles of ocean.

How appalling, yet how beautiful she is as she shines her beautiful aura.

Terrifying she is, as I lose my mind in her neverending bliss.

I tend to get lost in her relentless waves of destruction.

Each one, imprisoning me, guiding me and pulling me far...far...away.

I make up only one speck of the millions of miles which fill her.

Yet, how significant I am to her health and to how she continues to thrive.

It's puzzling to think that I am so significant to her well being, as I am only the size of a pea.

I watch as mermaids swim past me gliding through her beautiful blue.

Each one, swiftly swimming past, smiles painted onto their porcelain faces.

The light complimented the shimmer which covers them. The gold glistened upon them as they twist and
turn.

How I envy them, for they are so significant, so impactful.

I may be significant, though most of the time I feel otherwise.

I may make a difference in other people's lives but I feel as though I'm too small to *truly* make a difference.

Mindomachy

By Panika Garg

The seas rage

Waves raking their claws through the sky

Ripping through the clouds

Tearing through all defenses

The gods throwing anger from the heavens

Tears churning the sea

Swords gashing through the darkest depths

Drums playing the music of war

An eternal struggle

An undying stalemate

Death piles on the beaches

A red haze covers the eye

The land a witness

To the atrocities committed

The civilians killed

The families ripped apart

The land tried to be a mediator

A long time ago

If it had succeeded

There would be a war no more

We look on

To centuries of struggle

To the hordes of death

And know that there is nothing we can do

Resigned to the sea and the air

We look on

Hopeless

Despairing

We look on

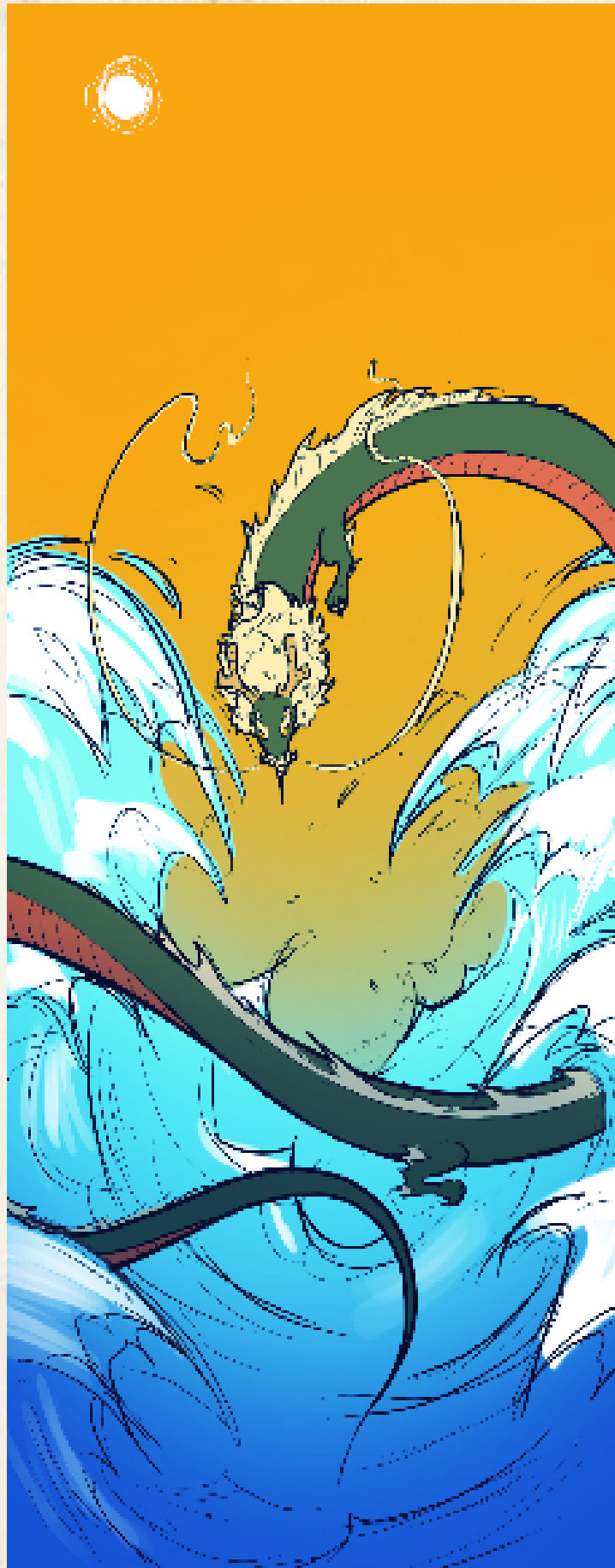
And watch as the world tears apart

Until there is no more

The Fear of The Beloved Sea

By Adastra Cuiffo

She sees the blue waves
as she sits
and stares for days
Nowhere to go and nowhere to hide causing pain in her bright blue eyes
She feels she will never get a happy ending to her journey
Her constant worry
The days feel long as she just drags along
Wondering how others could ever manage to stay so strong
Each tale of the sea reminds her of the days of the week
Monday full of storms and sadness
But Friday bringing big things
As all she could see were the dead fish fangs
All she could do was wait
Until she reached her fate
The day would come eventually
How could such a such a big ocean ever possibly become
Full
She knows she will take a hit but there's no reason for her to throw a big fit
The Sea will soon be gone
Her once enjoyed home has forever been destroyed
People may come
Go to her place full of woe
But they leave before the day is done
Why wouldn't they stay to see us all decay
They can't avoid it for long
Or the tales of the sea
Will reach a dark end



By Nicholas Mattheus

The First Siren

By Maddie Dobias

Even on an early morning, the streets were already filled with rushed people and voices. Over the surrounding noise, the young newsboys could still be heard, calling out to the early risers walking the street. A nickel was all it cost to hear the biggest headlines.

The woman was drawn in by the shouts of a particularly scruffy boy, the bold print on the paper he was holding calling to her. It read words that had been more frequent those days- *Ship Taken Down From Enemy Fire*. They sent a chill through the air. A headline like that meant only one thing: more men were dead, and more families would mourn. The woman couldn't fathom these headlines. It was easy to imagine her husband being on one of those decimated ships, as he was a member of the fighting force, and had been stationed on a boat for quite some time now.

The fleeting sense of panic always overtook the woman, although the chances of it being her husband's boat were slim, considering how many ships were out there. She liked to keep that in mind. It calmed her nerves and settled her senses. She handed the shiny coin to the boy, and he gave her a toothy grin, as if he had no idea what was on the page he passed to her. The woman admired that about children— the brief innocence of their unawareness.

She felt the warm paper in her hands, rough but smooth, the ink flowing from word to word. She glanced at the large picture first, of a large boat with wood floating around it, after it had been struck. Then she saw the thing she dreaded most— the bold white words on one of the planks. Harbor Force 2. She knew that name. How did she know that name? It took her a moment as adrenaline flooded her senses.

One noise was then heard above the rest on that street. The distraught cries of a now mourning wife, and the sobs of longing for what was no longer there. If you listened closely, you could hear a paper hitting the cobblestone, and the confused gasp of a young boy. The woman felt her heart rip out of her chest, and the voice being taken from her throat and replaced with unintelligible wails, drawing attention to her running down the street. All the way back to her apartment was where she went, as mourning turned to rage over her now lost husband. Why his ship? Why draft him in this war? Why him? He was kind, sweet, and fair, and always gave her his attention; he didn't deserve this.

These were what the woman pondered for weeks, as her apartment became desolate and quiet, except for the muffled crying that could only be heard from the apartment next door. The sadness overtook her, engulfing her soul and reminding her day in and day out of her pain. After about a month, the cries went quiet, and the woman's soul and body made their way to the ocean, to join her husband once again.

The Harbor Force 3 made its way to the sea about a month after the accident. After being stranded who knows where for an anxiety-inducing amount of time, the sailors, especially one particular man, were happy to be back out on the ocean, with the possibility of seeing their families filling their hearts. The man couldn't wait to see his wife- all his attention would be hers when he got home. He would make up for lost time. He had let go of so much when he was drafted, but he would always hold onto his wife.

As the boat rocked onto the shore, he heard a voice. Enchanting and soothing, it drew him in. It was warm and familiar in a sense— the man couldn't quite put his finger on it. As he glanced out into the blue water, he came face to face with what was calling him. On a rock not too far out from where his boat was, a shadowy yet bright figure of his wife passed by. He couldn't believe it. As she continued to sing, he felt drawn to her. He thought of how much he missed her, and how long it had been since he had seen her. Her sweet singing voice drew him in and calmed him down. He felt himself growing closer to the edge of the ship, longing to be reunited with her. As the urge became too much, he felt the air under his feet, and soon, the cold water met his body.

The man and women were reunited that day. Now living as spirits in the ocean, they could spend their days

The man never forgot the haunting song his wife sang to draw him in. She continued to sing it from time to time, and as other sailors heard her enchanting call, more spirits would join them in the ocean.



By Alexander Hunt

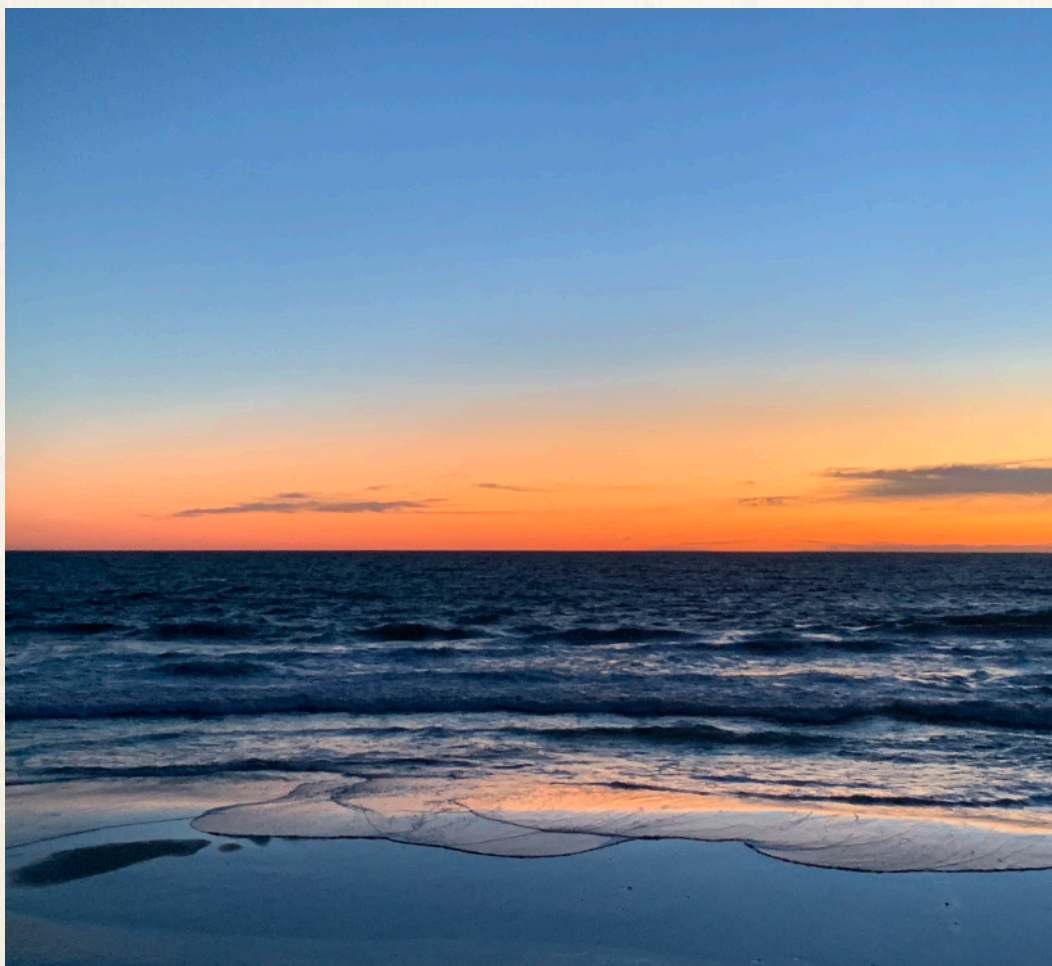
Dear Sea

By Ava Kalberer

Dear Sea,

Thank you for the days spent in your presence, those precious hours I spent rolling around in your ever-changing tides. Thank you for the memories of my love and me playing and splashing in your waves. Thank you for the stories you have inspired, stories of mermaids, selkies and great pirates, stories of love, peace and adventure. Thank you for inspiring the stories that inspire me. Thank you for the summers spent in your great embrace. You don't apologize for your depth or your wild, untamable waves, so neither will I. Thank you for showing me that beautiful things do not have to be small or pleasant or accommodating. Your greatness inspires me.

Sincerely,
Your faithful devotee



By Lydia McGuigan

The Pier

By Lydia McGuigan

A cool breeze whistled by Ralph as he pushed his uncle's wheelchair. Stale leaves of browns, reds, and yellows carried by the wind brushed against his skin. The flimsy wheelchair crushed the leaves beneath them causing an invasive crunching noise to fill the pair's ears.

The frail middle-aged man in the chair shivered, despite the red plaid blanket wrapped around his shoulders and the wool coat that Ralph had made him wear before they left the house. Ralph's steps were slow. He let his uncle take in the sight of the November foliage. The trees were nowhere near as full as they were in October. They were already halfway bare and clinging for dear life to their last set of leaves.

"It's so goddamn cold out. Why is it so goddamn cold out?" The man in the wheelchair complained. His voice strained as the words spilled from his lips.

"Cause it's goddamn November," Ralph replied, mimicking his uncle's brash dialect.

Al, his uncle, was a short boney man of fifty-five. He had gray hair covering his head in light strands and wrinkly skin littered with moles. Al looked more like an eighty-year-old grandfather rather than the uncle of a young man. His hands were skeleton thin and his legs matched too, although he always covered his legs with a pair of baggy pajama pants.

Uncle Al didn't always look like this of course, his hair wasn't always gray and thin, his hands weren't always wrinkly and boney, and his legs used to be able to walk a full block without giving out. The man had his wild youth that every middle-aged man talked about endlessly because they just can't seem to let go of their glory days. Al Westfield was a football star. He was the MVP all throughout his childhood up until college. Al Westfield was smart. He was an honors student with outstanding grades his whole academic career. Al Westfield was a family man. His kids and wife loved him. Every guy wanted to be like Al Westfield. Al Westfield was the guy that made mothers go "See now why can't you be more like Al?" to their sons.

Now, Al Westfield is a sick old man in a wheelchair who needs his nephew to assist him with every small daily task. Al Westfield couldn't get out of bed in the morning without needing his nephew to carry him out. Al Westfield couldn't stomach his favorite dishes anymore without them being mashed into a paste. Al Westfield couldn't throw a football as he used to without pulling a muscle.

Ralph could hear the sound of waves crashing in the distance. They were reaching their desired destination. The crisp breeze from earlier became a hefty wind as they neared the pier. His uncle shivered violently.

"Here Uncle Al," Ralph placed his chestnut brown leather bag on the road. He fiddled with the buttons before opening it and pulling out an extra blanket stuffed in there. "I brought you an extra blanket."

He rested it on top of the old plaid one his uncle was wrapped in. That old thing was too thin to keep the fragile man warm on a day like this, but his uncle insisted that he didn't need the thicker one. Ralph still packed it just in case.

The pier was almost completely empty besides a boy playing fetch with his brown labrador retriever on the rocky sand below the dock. Ralph parked his uncle's wheelchair at the end of the creaky dock. The wooden structure was covered in moss and damp from last night's rain. He stood behind the chair, his hands grasping the handles on the back to make sure it stays in place.

His uncle gazed silently at the body of water in front of them. It was a deep blue highlighted by the limited amount of sunlight peeking out from behind the gray clouds. The waves were slightly stronger than usual due to the wind. Ralph closed his eyes and let himself become lost in all the familiar sounds of the pier. He heard the staggered inhale and exhale from his uncle's nostrils. There were a few seagulls scouring the area for the garbage to treat as a five-course meal. The young boy on the sand squealed with excitement as his dog caught the cheap plastic frisbee he threw. The fresh waves kissed the shoreline and then retreated back into the vast sea.

His uncle let out a wet cough, interrupting the peaceful silence. Ralph could practically hear the man's lungs fighting for a gasp of air. There was a harsh gurgle in the back of his throat as he fought to take in oxygen. Ralph rested a hand on his uncle's back, rubbing circles into it with his palm. Al's eyelids drooped slightly and he relaxed his shoulders.

"Do you wanna go home, Uncle Al?" He offered. The man shook his head before answering feebly.

"No, no. I wanna stay right here Ralphie. Don't take me home yet. We've only been here for a few goddamn minutes."

"Alright, alright." He surrendered with a sigh. His uncle's bloodshot eyes were fixed on the water. They were weighed down by heavy purple bags caused by countless nights of waking up in a coughing fit or a struggle to breathe.

"Ain't that a sight?" Al commented.

"It'd be a hell of a lot better if it wasn't forty degrees out."

"It really is beautiful. I don't think I've ever seen anything more beautiful. I think I could die right here if I wanted to."

"Can you at least wait until we get home?" Ralph morbidly quipped. His uncle smiled faintly from the joke and Ralph kind of did too. It was probably the first time the man cracked one since he was diagnosed.

"Y'know I used to take you here all the time when you were a kid, Ralphie. You loved it." He recalled fondly.

"It didn't matter what season or even the weather. There could've been a category five hurricane and you'd still beg me to take you."

Ralph gave him a small grin. His best childhood memories were made while he was at the beach with his uncle. He can vividly recollect the feeling of Al's calloused hand holding his while the two walked along the shoreline. The cool waves would crash against the shore and Ralph, being a young boy at the time, would bellow with laughter and hold onto his uncle tighter.

"Did your sister ever get that birthday card I sent her? The one with the money?" Al inquired.

"She did, and she said thank you."

"How come she never visits me?"

"She doesn't wanna get you sick Uncle Al." They both knew it was a lousy excuse.

"How can I possibly get sicker than I already am?" Ralph shrugged.

"You're the only one who visits me Ralphie. No one ever visits me. Not even own goddamn kids. My own kids, Ralphie." Al huffed in melancholic frustration. "Like jeez, I know they all have their own families now but it wouldn't hurt them to visit their dad from time to time. I'm on my deathbed for God's sake Ralphie. I'm on my deathbed and my own kids won't even come say goodbye."

"I'm sure they'll stop by eventually." Ralph didn't even know why he attempted to rationalize their careless neglect. He knew they wouldn't bother to stop by and Al knew that too. The excuse was more for comforting him than it was for his uncle. Ralph has tried. He's tried to contact all his cousins, and siblings, and aunts, and uncles, and all that crap. Even his uncle's friends from high school. But every time it'd be the same sorry lies blurted out: "Oh I'd love to, but I've just been so busy lately." And they'd be busy every single day for the next year.

The worst part about it is that they'd all show up to Al's funeral with tears in their cold eyes and bouquets stuffed with white lilies and yellow roses in hand. Then, they'd all one by one firmly shake the hand of Al's oldest son, Richard, give him a pat on the back and a "Sorry for your loss." And Ralph would be standing to the side because to everyone else, he was just the nephew.

Ralph never liked Richard all that much. His cousin was almost a decade older than him so the two never really had anything in common. He reminded him of Al in his prime. There was a definite resemblance in looks but Richard never had that confident glimmer in eye like Al did when he was younger. Instead, he was stuck up and snobbish but not in the charismatic way Al was. The man was arrogant in his youth, there wasn't a single doubt about it, but he still went out of his way to treat others with respect.

Richard was never like that and Ralph was sure that he'd never be like that. After all, if Richard was a caring person, he would've visited his dying father more than twice a year.

"No they won't." His uncle muttered.

"C'mon don't say that Uncle Al."

"I know they won't Ralphie and so do you."

Ralph sighed. He gently rubbed his thumb back and forth on the leathery foam padding of the wheelchair handle. His skin was dry and cracked from the cold and a few dead flakes fell off from the light movement.

"I tried," He began. "I tried to call them and text them and all of that stuff. I even confronted them face-to-face. I tried everything Uncle Al and no one came and I'm sorry."

"Oh stop it with your pity party. It's not your fault." Al retorted as he gently squatted Ralph on the side of the head. His tone was calm despite his nephew's nervous ramblings. "Nothing you or I can do about it anymore."

Ralph took a seat at the edge of the dock next to Al's wheelchair, letting his legs dangle over the water. He rested one hand on the side of the chair for security and the other on the rough beat-up wood of the structure. It was splintery and wet. His jeans began to dampen as he sat. He adjusted his position, causing the wood to let out an unpleasant screech. Al seemed to be deep in thought. His brows were furrowed in focus and that sickly purplish vein was bulging out his forehead.

"I care about you Uncle Al. I really do," The young man voiced with concern. "And I know that no one's gonna come visit you and all that but it's just nice to think about y'know. I don't even know how you haven't lost your mind yet."

"Who's to say I haven't?" His uncle chuckled, his lungs convulsing in the process. There was a small grin on his thin, dry, cracked lips.

"I'm serious Uncle Al." Al tapped his pale bony fingers on the arm of his chair. His gaze stayed on the vast empty sea in front of them.

"Well, as much as I'd for all my kids and family to visit me, I know it's not gonna happen." He sighed.

The man had trouble coming to terms with it. It only took years of facing the answering machine and sorry excuses to realize that no one was going to be there for him. No one was going to bring him to his weekly check ups, only Ralph would. No one was going to help him get out of bed every morning, only Ralph would. No one was going to be next to him holding his hand on his deathbed, only Ralph would. If he died right now, his family would still ignore the calls and the letters. Only Ralph would be there next to his wheelchair and his bedside and his casket.

"I'm still here." Ralph shrugged. Al removed a shaky hand from the padded arm of the chair and rested it on Ralph's shoulder. He gave a small pat like an owner would do to an obedient dog.

"I know you are Ralphie." His uncle replied.

A crisp gust of wind whisked by them. Ralph's hair blew sideways and covered his forehead. He scrunched his nose from the uncomfortable sensation. The extra blanket that protected his uncle was swept off his shoulders by the puff of air. Ralph bent over the splintery rail and swiftly grabbed it before it was able to fly off the pier. He gently laid it back onto his frail uncle.

"Here Uncle Al," He spoke while patting down the soft material, making sure it can stay in place.

"Hold on tightly to it. You don't want it to blow away for good."

"Thank you, Ralphie." His uncle said with a smile. Ralph felt the man give him another pat on the shoulder.

"Welcome." He replied as he began to stand up. He hissed slightly as a wood chip poked his palm when he pulled himself up.

"You alright, Ralphie?" Al queried. His voice was laced with concern.

"I'm alright. Just a small splinter." His uncle took his hand and inspected his palm. His eyebrows furrowed when he took sight of the tiny wound.

"I'm okay, Uncle Al. Really, I'm fine. I'll pull it out when we get home." Ralph explained.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure." The younger man placed his hands on the handles located on the back of the wheelchair.

"C'mon, Uncle Al. Let's go home. It's too cold to stay out here long." Ralph suggested.

"Alright." The wheelchair-bound man agreed.

Ralph wheeled the chair around towards the entrance of the pier. The wood planks of the dock creaked as the chair passed over them.

"I love you, Ralphie."

"Love you too, Uncle Al."



Tyrrhenian Sea by Ava Kalberer

Snow On The Beach

By Sarah Seale

“Are we falling like snow at the beach? Weird but it was beautiful”

The moon was shining bright in the night sky. It was a cold, windy night. Fitting since it was the middle of winter, and the only thing that could be heard was the sound of the waves crashing on the shore. Being at the beach in the middle of December was an odd feeling; it felt like being at school on a Saturday. There was nothing illegal or wrong about it, but it felt as if it was. On a hot summer day, a crowded beach filled with old couples sitting in the sand and screaming children splashing in the water was natural and normal. On a cold winter night, a desolate beach was to be expected, and being the only person on said beach was just depressing.

On this day, a boy, no older than twenty, was the lone soul at the beach. It wasn't uncommon for this boy to be sitting in the sand, masked by the dark of night. The reason was unknown. It could be that he found the repeating crash of the waves on the shore calming, or possibly it was the best place for him to think; it was anyone's guess, truly.

He had been there for a while, maybe an hour or two. He had no intention of leaving anytime soon. He had nowhere to be and he liked sitting in the sand. There was something different about that night though. The air felt different and the sounds and smells felt more electric. Something was bound to happen, whether it would be for better or for worse was an entirely different story.

Located far beneath the surface of the water, a girl with a long, fishlike tail, was dreaming of the boy she had seen sitting on the beach in the middle of the night. She knew he visited the beach often and had a tendency to swim to the surface in order to catch a glimpse of him. She enjoyed seeing him sitting there, lost in thought, and wished she was able to join him. Of course, if she truly wanted to she could, but the thought of having to explain what she was to this beautiful boy was a concept she just could not handle. She chose to observe from afar and dreamt that one day, maybe, she would have the confidence to visit him. With a change in the tides, and a slight boost of confidence, the half girl half fish finally decided to visit the boy. He was at the beach again that night and it just felt right. She had to make sure she wasn't seen by him until she was ready, so she swam up until she was just below the surface, then swam down the beach so she was out of his eyeline. She transformed her sparkling tail into a pair of long legs and walked her way up the beach. She took a deep breath and prepared herself for what was to come. She was ready, she just hoped he was too.

A bright light reflected off the water, shocking the boy from his thoughts. He played it off as a reflection of the moon, but he couldn't help but feel like it was something else. As he was about to get up to leave, he heard the sound of footsteps nearing him. His heartbeat started to pick up and he started to panic a bit. Not once had he seen someone else at the beach during his visits and he most definitely was not expecting anyone that night. He turned his head to see what the source of the footsteps was and what he saw left his eyes wide and his jaw dropped.

Walking on the beach was a beautiful girl, with long auburn hair and gorgeously tanned skin. She was ethereal; almost like she was made of magic. She took a seat next to him and simply smiled, a stunning smile at that. She didn't say a word so he figured he should be the one to speak up.

“Do you believe in mermaids?” he asked. His question took her by shock. Now of course she wasn't a mermaid, but she was close enough that, under his broad umbrella term, she would probably be considered one.

“Even if they don't exist, I think it's fun to believe they do.” she replied. She looked away from the water to find him already looking at her.

“So what are you doing all alone at the beach in the middle of the night?”

“I like it here, it’s peaceful, you know? Like nothing in the world can possibly be wrong when you’re sitting here watching the water.”

“Very poetic.” the girl said with a slight smirk. She liked this, talking to him. From afar, he was pretty, but that was about all she knew. Up close, she was able to get to know him, and she really liked what she was getting to know. He was funny but sweet and she was really glad she decided to finally face her fears and leave the safety net that was the sea.

“So what is a pretty girl like you doing here at the beach under the same moon as I?” he questioned her back.

She blushed a bright red. She had never been complimented like that before, especially not by a boy as cute as him. A smile started to creep onto her face as she replied.

“Well, I happened to notice a very cute boy sitting here all alone and decided to see if he had anything interesting to say.”

The boy laughed at her answer. She was funny, and the blush that adorned her cheeks made her even more adorable. He really liked this girl, more than anyone before. He felt like a little boy who couldn’t express his feelings to his crush in elementary school. He felt so helpless with these overwhelming feelings. His thoughts started to run wild when she spoke out, putting his thoughts on hold.

“I like you, you know? More than I think I’ve liked anyone ever before.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah”

“I feel the same way. There’s something about you that’s so... captivating.”

And so it went. Every night, illuminated by the shining stars above, they would meet and just talk. They got to know each other and the more they learned, the more they liked. Their relationship evolved from friends, to more. As the winter drew on, they had reached the point where they were more girlfriend/boyfriend than best friends. There were no real labels put on their relationship. Mostly because they didn’t think they needed labels to define what they felt for each other, but also because she was afraid to commit herself fully to him when she couldn’t even tell him her secret; the secret that could end the best thing that has ever happened to her.

The girl knew the winter months were soon to end, and she knew that because the summer was coming, the beach would become a madhouse packed with people, and with that, it would be harder to meet up. Things between her and the boy were getting more serious, and she knew it was now or never. She had to tell him the truth about herself, even if that meant she would lose him forever.

It was especially cold that night. The boy was sitting in his usual spot in the sand, waiting for the pretty girl he had met so many moons ago to show herself like she usually did. He heard footsteps approach him and he looked up to see the girl he had grown to love, but he noticed she looked a bit apprehensive. He flashed her one of his signature smiles as she sat down and prepared himself for another wonderful night of falling further in love. They sat there in silence for a moment, just staring off into the water, when suddenly the girl spoke up.

“There’s something I need to tell you and I’m really nervous that you’re going to be upset with me and I don’t want you to be upset with me because I love you and you have been the best thing that has ever happened to me and I don’t know what I would do without you but know you’re going to be mad so I’m going to say it and I’m not going to wait for an answer because I can’t stand to have you be mad at me.” she blurted out.

“Whoa, whoa slo-” he started before she cut him off.

“No, no I can’t! I have to tell you. I live in the sea and my legs turn into a tail at will and you’ve been dating a half girl, half fish. And I know I’m so lame for not telling you but I was scared and I’m still scared but I did it and I’m going to go now.” she rambled. She was so ashamed of her secret that she didn’t even want to know what he was thinking. Without even looking at him, she got up and went to run away,

back to the sea which she called home. As she turned to leave, he grabbed her wrist and turned her around so she was facing him.

“Not so fast.” he said with a smirk. “You really think you’re going to leave me just like that? You think this silly little secret is going to upset me? Well, you thought wrong. Sit back down.”

She was taken aback. He wasn’t disappointed in her for keeping a secret and he wasn’t disgusted by the thought of what she was? Everything she had thought was wrong, and she couldn’t have been happier.

“You’re really not mad at me?” she asked nervously.

“It’s a little hard to be upset when I’ve known your little secret since the first day I met you.” he responded smartly.

“Y-you knew? This whole time? How?” she spluttered. She spent all this time trying to keep her secret and stressing that he was going to leave because of it all for him to know the whole time. She couldn’t believe it.

“Yeah, little ripples in the water and a reflection of your tail right before you make yourself known to me each night kind of gave it away.” he said as if it was the most simple explanation in the world.

“Oh.” she said.

“Oh.” he replied.

She sat back down and rested her head on his shoulder. She couldn’t believe that he knew what she was hiding this whole time, and even more surprisingly, that he didn’t even care.

“Hey look, it’s snowing.” the boy pointed out with a smile. It was the first snow of the season and it was even more special since he got to experience it with the girl he loved.

“That is it.” she said quietly. She was a bit tired after all of the stress of the day and she was very content with falling asleep exactly where she was.

“It’s kinda like us, you know? It’s a bit odd, but it’s really beautiful.” he said as if he was just speaking his thoughts out. She smiled. He summed up their relationship perfectly, a bit strange but in the end, a really beautiful occurrence.



By Lydia McGuigan

Drifting out to Sea

By Joseph Tobasko

Drifting out to sea
Perhaps I am drifting out to sea

Like a whirlpool that grips your hand and forces you away
I find that my mind, in its cold embrace, is much the same
A day of calm ebbs and flows,
of little wavelets laying sand against sand
Could so easily—so unsuspectingly—precede the brut playing of the maritime band

Drifting out to sea
Perhaps I am drifting out to sea

And I do ask myself,
why am I subjected to such torrent?
Why do the lilies I have carefully placed
wash away in the spur of the moment?
I do ask myself all this and more, so much that I drown in doubt
Doubt
thin as air or
thick as water;
I fear my body may never find out

Drifting out to sea
Perhaps I am drifting out to sea

Love is all you need, they say
But what if there is no ground
Wherein to plant the seed...

A Love For Fishing

By Jenna Levine

The bright orange sky was a nice juxtaposition to the dark blue ocean. The line between the sky and the water was clear to see; little things like that are what made everything feel even better. The air was cool and smelled of fish and salt. As the boat rocked back and forth, the sailor gently closed his eyes, finally getting some shut-eye after his long day of fishing.

He was secluded from all other forms of human life. But that didn't bother him much. To be honest, it didn't really bother him at all. Every once in a while, he'd feel the sudden urge to talk to someone, but that didn't happen often. Bringing his boat back to the dock was enough human interaction for a year, with its mindless "hello" and "how are you doing?"

Other than that, his life was pretty uneventful. But the simplicity of it was what made him love it so much. The ocean was a vast, unexplored place that constantly enticed him; that was enough. One day things changed, however. Like most good things, his peace and quiet came to an end. He had docked his boat like he usually did when one of the dock workers came up to him.

"Your wife came by." The words surprised the sailor.

"Oh no," he said, though he didn't mean to say it out loud.

"She's asking you to come back home, George." It had been so long since someone called him by his name that he almost didn't recognize it. He didn't even know how the dockworker knew his name, but clearly, he did.

"Is that all she said?" he asked. The dockworker shook his head.

"She said the kids miss you. She said this is a formative time in their lives and they need a father." George rolled his eyes. *This woman*, he thought to himself. She couldn't seem to get over the fact that the big-happy-family lifestyle was not what he had in mind for his ideal life. He wanted to be on his boat, alone, secluded from the world. That's what he truly enjoyed.

"Alright," George said to the dockworker. "I'll handle it." Despite his promise, he had no real intention of handling it. From now on he'd have to make sure to avoid this particular dockworker, and keep an eye out for his wife, and possibly even his kids.

He let out a sigh and continued on his way, grabbing some bait, extra food, and supplies for himself and he went on his merry way.

The rest of the day was spent fishing, his true passion in life. He sat and tried to clear his mind; however, there was something running through his brain that would not allow him to relax.

Why now? It had been four years since he had left his family to pursue fishing. He didn't belong in the white picket fence neighborhood with the crusty white dog and the stay-at-home mother who took care of the children— that just wasn't George.

The ocean had called him; it always had. It wouldn't have been fair to himself, or his wife and children, to ignore it. It wouldn't have been fair for him to be unhappy for the rest of his life. His unhappiness would have translated into his wife's unhappiness, which would have translated into his children's unhappiness. Unhappiness all around; it wouldn't have been fair to anyone. So, the only solution had been for him to leave. And that's exactly what he'd done.

Now he was left to think about his decision, think about why or what his kids would need him for. He was stuck thinking about what life would have been like had he never left. It was all too much; it was distracting him from his fishing because he just missed a bite.

"God damn it!" he cursed out loud, frustrated with how complicated his simple life suddenly seemed. Things weren't supposed to happen like this; he was supposed to have left them and never heard from Kelly and the kids again.

This never would have happened if it wasn't for my parents, he thought to himself. He never would have met his wife, Kelly, if his parents had never introduced them to each other; he wouldn't be in this situa-

tion in the first place.

It's all wrong. His mind flooded with annoyance, anger, and vexation. He was supposed to be joyous, he was fishing for Christ's sake! Fishing was supposed to make everything feel perfect. Yet, it didn't. What was wrong with him?! Why did he leave in the first place? *I'm an awful person*, he thought to himself. What kind of person leaves their own children?

No, he thought. He did the right thing. He'd convinced himself of that ages ago, so why now was he having doubts? . Everything was wrong now. He got up aggressively and reeled his rod in and went inside the boat to lay down for a bit. He ended up falling asleep.

He woke up in a cold sweat, confused and worried that he'd forgotten to tie his boat to the mooring. It was still light outside; he glanced out one of the windows to check the mooring, but he couldn't see if the boat was tied up. He got out of the boat to make sure, and as he walked out his stomach dropped to his feet.

"George," Kelly said.

"Lord, Jesus have mercy!" He said under his breath.

"George, it's time that you come home," Kelly said.

"Am I still dreaming?" George asked.

"No George, this is real."

"Oh, God!" He exclaimed.

"George, come home please. It's been four years, honey. It's time."

"No, no, this can't be happening." George was in disbelief. There was no way this was actually happening to him. His wife should not be there. He was supposed to be secluded from all human life.

"George, this is real. And I'm telling you that you have to come home," Kelly said with annoyance in her voice.

"I can't. Kelly, living with you isn't the kind of life I want," George said bluntly. Kelly looked at her feet, tears streaming down her face.

"Your children need you, George,"

"I can't," George said regretfully. He turned around and walked back on his boat. He made sure not to look back to see his wife sobbing while she left.

Once inside the boat, George realized what he had to do to permanently be away from Kelly, Nathan, Leslie, and Jerard, to finally be free to live his life, far from the stress and anxiety of a white-picket-fence-life. He started packing. He gathered everything he could think of and as the sun was setting he started out to the sea, no destination in mind. Just the wide, open, unexplored sea all to himself. That was enough for him.

A Kiss From the Sea

By Jenna Levine

A small boat sat on top of the water, rocking back and forth with the ebb and flow of the tide. Ben sat in the boat, tired from fishing all day. He hadn't caught anything or gotten a glimpse of a single fish, but he was not one to give up. Plus, it was nice, sitting in the boat, not having a care in the world; just looking out into the distant ocean and feeling the breeze flowing through his hair. It felt peaceful. Picture-perfect. Ben sat there for a while, not getting a single pull on his fishing line, but that didn't bother him. He was content right where he was. The sea air filled his nostrils, and the gentle rocking of the boat was putting him to sleep.

Just as he was dozing off, he felt something from deep below swimming towards his boat. Ben raised his eyebrows, curious as to what it could possibly be. He thought it was a fish since it was swimming towards his line. When he got a glimpse of the fish's tail, it was larger than he expected—usually, the fish in that particular area were smaller. He thought nothing of it and just assumed he'd gotten lucky with a large catch. Finally, all the waiting had paid off.

Just as he was thinking of all the praise he would get for such a large catch, the once calm ocean sway turned vicious. The boat started rocking back and forth violently. The flow of the water was so vicious, in fact, that Ben thought he might fall right out of his boat.

The fish got closer to the surface, and what Ben saw was not at all what he'd expected. He got sight of more of its body and the interesting part was it wasn't fish at all—at least not completely. The creature came even closer and reached its hand out to the edge of the boat, a scaly, slimy, human-like hand that slapped itself onto the side of the vessel, splashing some water on Ben in the process. He leaned over to get a better look at the creature and saw a human head of blonde hair.

"A m-mermaid," Ben stuttered, disconcerted as to what he'd just discovered. He'd heard stories of these creatures before, but he never thought they were actually real. The mermaid's hair curled and danced in the water as she backed away from the boat, taking her hand off the side as she descended back into the depths of the water.

As she descended, Ben heard a song. A sweet, calm song. The same calm feeling that came when he looked out to the ocean while fishing. It was a steady, slow, humming melody, not sad but instead relaxing. He'd never heard something so enticing; it was like the water was calling him to jump in.

Ben sat there for a while, listening to the tune. After a bit, he realized it was coming from the creature itself. And before he knew it, he got the sudden urge to jump into the water and swim alongside the creature, but that was his irrational side talking. Why would he just jump into the water—the song got louder, far more prominent.

The same dark shadow rose once more from the water. It got closer and he realized it was the creature once again. Her song was much more distinguished. She moved closer, putting her scaly hands on the side of the boat, one at a time, each time splashing some water onto the man.

Both hands were on the boat when she started to pull herself out of the water, all whilst still singing her song. Ben was beguiled, stuck in an inescapable trance. She got closer and he allowed himself to approach the creature.

They were face to face with one another. She lifted one of her hands and put it on Ben's face. She pulled herself closer to Ben, stopping her song just as he perked up his lips stealing a kiss from the creature. She smiled as she pulled away. And before he knew it, she was gone.

"Come back," he cried, desperate for her to give him just one more kiss. Ben had never experienced anything like it. He still felt her lips on his and felt her warm breath on his face. She had left so quickly he hadn't even gotten a name from her. They hadn't spoken a single word to one another, he'd just sat and listened to her song. While all this was going through his mind, he vowed to himself that he would come back the next day.

And that he did.

The next morning, he woke up early, excited to see the creature once again. He got ready quickly and went straight to his small boat. He paddled out to the same exact spot as the previous day, and he set up his fishing line and cast it out. Then he waited.

He sat for a while before anything happened; it was another slow day and not even the regular fish were biting. Soon, however, things started to change. His boat began to rock back and forth, like the day before, and he heard the same sweet, calm song. He sat up, excited to see the creature again.

The first thing he noticed was her beautiful blonde hair. It moved in the water like sea grass, graceful and with a mind of its own. She swam over to the fishing line and tugged on the string wading in the ocean. She looked confused, even a bit melancholy. She shook her head and stopped singing.

Ben snapped out of it; he'd gotten quickly lost in the song, and when she stopped he couldn't help but feel disappointed.

"Fishing is bad, you know," she spoke in a pleasant voice. It was just as beautiful as her song. "It hurts the fish."

"I didn't mean to cause any harm," Ben said in return.

"But you are," she retorted.

"Y-yes," Ben responded, not knowing what exactly to say in response.

"I'm Alana," she said. Ben thought it was awfully fitting that she had such a pretty name to match her voice and looks. "You come here often," she stopped.

"Yeah, I do. The water calms me," he said in response.

"The ocean calms me too; I love everything about it." Alana smiled and looked at the fishing line.

"I can pull it in if it bothers you that much. I haven't caught anything," Ben said, trying to make Alana feel better about his fishing.

"Yes, please," she said kindly. Ben reeled in the fishing line. Alana smiled at him, looking deep into his eyes.

The two continued to talk, for a while. They talked until the sun started setting. It glistened on top of the water, making the water turn yellow instead of blue. Ben realized he had to go, and Alana reached her hand up to his face and pulled him in for another kiss. He smiled, ecstatic that she'd kissed him again.

The next few days they created a trend of talking to one another for a long while. They talked about everything and anything they could think of. And each day they ended with a kiss.

One day started off differently; Alana began with a kiss, and when they pulled away from each other she posed a question.

"Would you like to see my home?" She asked. Ben thought the question was weird; how would he stay underwater long enough to see anything? How would he swim all the way down there? All these questions filled his mind; he had no idea how it would be possible.

"Sure," he responded anyway. Ben started to take off his shoes for the long swim. He trusted Alana and he believed she wouldn't let him down. He took his socks and shirt off.

Alana put out her scaly hand and Ben took it. He jumped in the water and Alana helped him stay afloat.

"I can help you breathe underwater," She said, "Just stay close," she added. Ben nodded and he took a deep breath just as Alana swam under.

They swam deep under the water. Ben strained to keep his eyes open as the water stung. Everything was a blur; he could just barely make out Alana's green fishtail.

They were under the water for just seconds when Ben's lungs started to burn. He was running out of breath and would soon drown if Alana didn't help him.

He tried to catch up to her, but she was too far ahead. Then, the same sweet, calm song played in his head. Alana was singing, but why? He kept swimming, trying his best to catch up with her. But there was no point. He turned around, to try to make it back to the surface. But he had nothing to boost himself up against.

Ben panicked. He was running out of air quickly. He was pumping with adrenaline and his heart was

racing. He could hear the frantic beating of his heart in his ears, alongside Alana's beautiful song.

He was growing tired. He knew he wasn't going to make it back to the surface. So, he gave up. His lungs were exhausted. He allowed himself to drift down and in the corner of his eye, he saw Alana's wispy blonde hair floating in the water. She approached him, putting her hands on his face, and gently laid a kiss on his lips.

He closed his eyes and allowed the water to fill his lungs.

Reviews

By Nicholas Mattheus



Priory of the Orange Tree Book Review

By Jordana Schweitzer

This book absolutely blew me away. I was not expecting it to be this good at all. Let's get straight into it. Do you enjoy constant, thrilling action that keeps you pinned to the edge of your seat? Looking for an epic standalone fantasy romance book? Do you desire to become immersed in a world filled with magic, dragons, and hair raising medieval warfare? Well then you're in business because Samantha Shannon's *Priory of the Orange Tree* checks all of these boxes!

The story focuses on the main characters Ead Duryan, Tané Miduchi, Arteloth 'Loth' Beck, and Doctor Niclays Roos. Each hails from a different part of the world, giving them a unique perspective and varying obstacles they must overcome. The main conflict is external, stemming from the bone chilling "Nameless One" who is stirring from its thousand-year-old slumber. But that is like a final boss, if you will. The main premise of the story is a lot more down to earth than one would think, merely blown to fantastical proportions due to the surreal mechanics of magic and dragons.

What I enjoyed most was Shannon's ability to juggle expository elements of the story by simply thrusting the reader into the world, briefly going over names that fly right over our heads initially, and touching back on these elements without ever breaking the constant action that takes place. I think this actually works in her favor later on because it causes a lot of plot points to be set into place without the reader expressly noticing. It makes me wonder how many more of those little seeds she planted but simply chose not to go anywhere with them. I also like how you don't have to reread any part of the book to fully grasp the story. Maybe just to glance at the map in the initial two pages, if that. And I haven't even touched upon the individual character arcs, some of which take place when the characters aren't even narrators. In fact, one of the biggest developments came from a character who seemed entirely poised to be a flat, one-sided wall.

Another thing I think Shannon knocked out of the park was her ability to capture struggle. I found myself becoming more attuned to the characters' strifes than I was to my own, which was freakish. I wish I could go into more detail without spoiling this wondrous book, but the internal conflict on even the minor characters are so believable and realistic you'd think the author went through all of these things personally. And even with horrific scenes and motifs being explored in this book, Shannon is able to round out the book with light humor and good natured rom-com-esque teasing. If only I could multitask like that I'd be valedictorian by now!

The ambiguity of the book was a little frustrating, but I realized why it had to be that way after digesting the ending. When I say ambiguity, I don't mean something as drastic as a cliffhanger, but rather subtle ends where you can see where the characters would be going from there but there's no sure conclusion to their story. I'd like to be optimistic and go out on a whim by saying that perhaps a sequel could be made from the work, but Shannon is releasing a prequel later this year, which serves to quash my minute hopes for a solid conclusion.

As for grammatical level and complexity, I did find myself checking Google dozens of times for definitions. However, if you are an avid reader grasping the terminology through basic context clues should be no problem here. Complexity, like stated before, is woven into the story and therefore slightly underwhelming at first glance. However, I'd advise setting aside some time for self reflection after the novel, as the voluminous amount of pages will come back and haunt you otherwise.

Overall this book will more likely than not have a major personal impact on you. Not once did I ever feel forced to continue reading, only felt exasperated that the next capsizing plot twist was not upon me yet. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how one can pick apart a good book from an unforgettable one. Bravo, Samantha Shannon, you sure threw us a goldmine of a plot, well-written characters, and fiery romance into one epic fantasy. I seriously recommend this book! Go read *Priory of the Orange Tree*!

80 For Brady: Better Without Brady

By Samantha Rodriguez

80 For Brady follows a group of women over eighty as they go on a journey to the 2017 Super Bowl. The main cast consists of superb actors, and besides the parts with Tom Brady, it was a very enjoyable, funny, and emotional film.

The story starts off with our main characters watching a football game together, doing their usual pregame ritual. After the game, they hear an announcement on their favorite radio show declaring that they are giving away four tickets to the Superbowl to whoever has the best story. The women end up winning the tickets and embark on a journey to the Superbowl, where they get into all kinds of silly shenanigans.

One thing I found especially enjoyable were the main characters in the film; Loula was a strong, independent, and emotional character with an intriguing backstory, who we learn throughout the film, is hiding something from her friends. The rest of the women also had their own interesting issues and were skilled in different ways, providing for a well-rounded cast of characters. The main four characters worked really well together, and their chemistry on screen made it so that you never questioned whether or not they had actually been friends for over twenty years. Besides the main characters, the side characters were amusing, and almost every actor in the film did an incredible job.

I say “almost” every actor because one thing that was lacking within this otherwise great movie was Tom Brady’s performance. All of his lines sound like generic stock image quotes that come up when you Google “inspirational quotes” and he delivers them in a robotic, stilted voice like he’s talking to a news reporter rather than to the characters in the movie. Funnily enough, though, the movie centers around these women’s love for football and Tom Brady, I think it would have been significantly better if Brady had not been in the movie at all.

Another thing that bothered me about this movie was how they painted Tom Brady. Parts of the movie felt like a propaganda film; whenever Tom Brady popped up on screen, he would say some meaningless platitude to one of the women, who was usually struggling in some way or another, and she’d look up at him and become stronger like he was Jesus or some other divine figure. I found it strange, and after discovering that Tom Brady produced this film, it feels especially self-important and egotistical.

Overall, *80 For Brady* is a fun movie with a great cast of characters, filled with tons of emotional and silly moments, though all this is weighed down by the film’s inclusion of its title character, Tom Brady himself.



The Best Movie of 2022

By Jenna Levine

Puss in Boots: The Last Wish is the best movie I've seen in a long time. From the animation style to the character development, the movie is the most well thought out piece of cinema I have ever seen.

I'm not going to lie, I didn't see the first Puss in Boots movie, but it didn't matter in the end because its story doesn't really continue into the sequel. The only thing I felt slightly lost with was the relationship between Puss and Kitty Softpaws; however, I feel as though nothing can be as incredible as their connection was in *The Last Wish*. I won't be seeing the first movie, as I don't want to be disappointed since the second was pure *purrfection*.

The movie starts out with Puss in Boots losing his last life. Now the overly confident character has become a big scaredy cat, especially after he sees the Big Bad Wolf—the main villain of the movie. Puss is forced to retire from his carefree and heroic life; and he moves into the house of a crazy cat lady who has hundreds of feline friends named Mama Luna.

In Mama Luna's home for cats, Puss meets Perro, a homeless dog who in the end he teams up with—I'm not one to spoil a movie, so I'll keep this short and sweet. Basically, Puss figures out that there is a map that leads to a wishing star that grants one person a single wish. Of course, Puss wants to wish for more lives and so the adventure begins. Along the way, he comes across other characters, including Goldilocks and the three bears and Jack Horner.

In conclusion, *Puss In Boots: The Last Wish* is a masterpiece of animation. The art style is to die for and it's not some crappy 3D animated nonsense; instead this actually looked hand drawn, which, personally, I enjoyed very much. It's definitely something I'd love to see more of. *Puss In Boots: The Last Wish* is a story involving everything from friendship, to love, to hate, to adventure, to comedy. It is a well rounded movie that people of all ages can enjoy.



A Book Review on The Kite Runner, by Khaled Hosseini

By Jenna Levine

The Kite Runner is a novel that takes place in Afghanistan. The book follows the life of Amir, a character who experiences a lot of difficult changes throughout his life.

Amir takes us through the story of his life, starting at the age of eleven. He introduces us to his father, and his best friend Hassan, to name just a couple of characters we meet through the book. Amir and Hassan grew up together, but Amir belongs to the upper caste, whereas Hassan belongs to the Hazara, a lower caste. Even though they're from different backgrounds, the two still manage to be great friends. Both enjoy reading, learning, and of course flying kites.

While much of this seems comfortable and carefree, it doesn't stay that way for long. Russians attack Kabul, and Amir and his father escape to America, leaving Hassan, and everything they've ever known, behind.

While in America, Amir is haunted by things that happened in his childhood, back in Kabul. Later in life, he ends up refacing these haunting memories.

This book is a gripping and emotional story of betrayal and redemption. It touches on many difficult subjects while still managing to be relatable as Amir has trouble fitting in after his experiences in Afghanistan. In addition to this, and normal childhood problems, he has to find a way to please his father.

Altogether, this is a compelling story that one can find relatable in many different ways. It's a story about friendship, loss, family, and life and it makes you think about your own life and how your actions can really affect others. Anyone can get something out of this book, and you *will* want to cry while reading it.



Don't Self Publish

By Jenna Levine

I had the unfortunate experience of reading a self-published book. I honestly don't see a problem with self-publishing; however, it all depends on the kind of writer you are. Plenty of highly popular writers have self-published before, so I'm by no means opposed to it. The only time I have a problem with it is when you're a teenager trying to be something you're not.

Universe: Discovery, a novel written by Kyle N. Kolber, is a science fiction book about finding new worlds and places within the ever-expanding universe. The main character, Pete, is a scientist on a ship about to explore space for the first time in his life. The main goal of this mission is to find the most habitable planets in the universe for, I assume, when Earth is all out of natural resources or no longer meets the requirements to be lived on.

Now that I have the normal plot summary out of the way, I can get to the good part. Why do I hate this book? Well, there are a number of reasons:

#1. The paragraphing is awful. Throughout the entire book, there are a number of times where there are places where a new paragraph should be, however, there is no indentation or anything suggesting a new paragraph. This makes the book feel even longer, as if I'm reading a page-long paragraph. There is awful formatting after and around the dialogue. It is not properly spaced and makes the book seem longer than it actually is.

#2. Unnecessary cursing. I'm not entirely sure who this book is marketed towards because of the number of times there is cursing throughout the book. Mr. Kyle N. Kolber seems to have a large arsenal of curse words in this book; it makes me think that it's targeted toward an older teenage audience. However, it feels far too easy to read. In addition to this, he tries to censor one particular curse word that I'm obviously not allowed to say in this. It feels out of place when other curses aren't censored; it's confusing and weird, to say the least, and it feels like he's a child learning how to curse for the first time.

#3. The dialogue. One major takeaway from my reading this book is that Kolber doesn't know how to write dialogue. A lot of it is unnatural and awkward, and doesn't feel necessary. Throughout my time reading this book, I felt like there was too much speaking, possibly to make up for lack of description. I could be just nitpicking, but this is my opinion after all.

#4. Terrible romance plot. The romance in this book is absolutely terrible. Pete, the main character, claims to be in love with one of his coworkers. A majority of the romance arc feels like it's just a time filler to add more pages to the novel. With that being said, the romance is completely unnatural. You could blame it on Pete's self-proclaimed awkwardness; however, no amount of awkwardness in a person could make their relationship with their significant other this uncomfortable and unnatural.

In all honesty, Kolber could have just made this a series of short stories. It would have been better than making six different books. Yes, he plans on making six other books using the same characters and storyline.

#5. It needs real editing. This entire book feels like it was never edited. There are extra spaces, awkward lines, lines that sound wrong, bad formatting, and so much more. You can't edit a book by yourself. It's just not possible. You need at least one other person to read it so that you can make sure there are the proper edits being made, to make sure the book is as close to perfect as you can get it.

#6. I felt no connection to the characters. Throughout the book, there are a number of bad things that happen to the characters, but each time something awful happens I can't sympathize with them. I just don't care. They could all die and I wouldn't feel anything. In every book, authors need to create this reader-to-character connection, but this book just doesn't have it.

So, would I recommend this book? The short answer is no. This book is horrible and there are so many other things I didn't mention in my review that need to be changed. If you want an easy, quick read, then I guess you can read this book, however, I wouldn't recommend doing so.



Contributions



Editors in Chief:

Jenna Levine
Lydia McGuigan

Writers/Artists:

Mahreen Anwar
Sophia Arredondo
Jillian Bollbach
Blaize Carpino
Macy Carter
Adastra Cuiffo
Sydney Cutler
Pranjali Dangi
Madeline Dobias
Jake Epstein
Joseph Finn
Panika Garg
Alexander Hunt
Grace Jos
Ava Kalberer
Annemarie Kosak
Jenna Levine
Ebubechukwu Maduekwe
Madison Maida
Zoe Marks
Nicholas Mattheus
Lydia McGuigan
Cassandra Paciella
Jordana Schweitzer
Sarah Seale
Madelyn Serxner
Joseph Tabasko Jr.

Editors:

Madeline Dobias
Cassandra Paciella
Samantha Rodriguez

Advisor:

Maura Montgomery