

MISCELLANEOUS VOICES 2024-2025



Beginning

Di Dante

The grass is green, the trees are blooming.
New beginnings are knocking on the door.
The gate to possibilities is alluring –
Ascending from the chrysalis, vibrant wings ride the wind,
The sun illuminates their colors.

A child comes to play.
New life is a short time away.

Don't sit and let your mind spin dizzily;
This life isn't easy.
Dance, sing, smile at strangers -- command the day,
and listen to miscellaneous voices along the way.

MISCELLANEOUS VOICES

2024-2025

Volume 32

Front Cover: Club members, Creative Writing students, and poet Joe Artz at Coffee Emporium Poetry Slam, March 2025, Iowa City IA. Back Cover: Club members at Open Mic at Night Cap, Jan. 2025, Burlington IA, & club meeting, April 2025.

This publication was formerly titled Chiaroscuro.

Southeastern Community College
West Burlington & Keokuk, Iowa

*With appreciation for their dedication
to SCC students and to building a creative community,
this issue is dedicated to*

*Tom Hayes, SCC English Professor,
who is the founding editor of this literary journal,
and*

*Charles Burm, SCC English Professor,
who edited this journal from 2022-2024.*

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Just One More Bite

Megan Butler

“Just one more bite,” I tell myself. “C’mon, you can do it.” I grip the fork, but my hand pauses. I press on and begin to twirl a few of the cold noodles in front of me. My throat begins to swell up, begging me not to let the food enter my mouth.

I close my eyes. I inhale. With my exhale, I feel determination filling my chest. I shove the wad of noodles in my mouth and chew. This bite is better than the last one. No gagging at least. I can finally check spaghetti off my ARFID list.

Anatomy of a Panic Attack

Cecilia Luengas Garcia

A&P II notes consume my every waking thought, and that is fine by me. I will take anything to deviate my thoughts from the recent and not so recent events unfolding in my personal life. Having to worry about the different regions of the respiratory tract is better than thinking about last night. Or the past few months. Or the past year.

I park. My cheeks are damp from a 35-minute ride full of *Soon You'll Get Better* by Taylor Swift. I didn't have time to cry last night, and I am slightly late for lab. Stupid human emotions.

I try to stop the tears that were still running down my face. It is useless. The song on the radio is about to turn ten years old. I remember when I was ten. When life was simple, I was poor, and my family was healthy. I remember when we were all together.

I am almost twenty. Chuy is almost twenty. I feel old, but I'm not. I feel grown, but I am not. He is not. We're just kids. The tears fall and fall, and my breathing picks up speed. He's dead. My godfather died yesterday. His youngest child is my age. He is...He was younger than my dad.

I cannot keep repeating the same things. I cannot think. I cannot breathe. I cannot.

I get out of the car and start walking towards the doors, somehow managing to suppress the sobs that threaten to choke me. My chest is tight, but it has been so since June.

The science building is quiet, and my thoughts are loud. My vision darkens and my feet stumble. This is not real. This is not my life. But it is.

I arrive in the lab and take out my heavy, tear-stained notes.

"Intrapleural pressure must never be higher than intrapulmonary, or the lungs may collapse."

My lungs are collapsing. I swear they are.

I run to the restroom, lock myself into a stall, and I let them cave in. I let the blinding lights above me fade and dim. I let myself choke and hyperventilate and fall to the questionable floor. My ribs stab my thoracic organs as I hold my breath in like I fear someone or something may seize it from me like it did with him. I hold on to that polluted air like I never held on to him. Like I never will.

I will need to watch the recorded lectures when I get home.

My godmother is a widow. My old childhood best friend is fatherless. My father has lost another friend.

I turned away from his gaze months ago with petty ideas, ironically condemning the hypocrite land I walked on. What an ingrate. I let weak resentment win again.

The floor is cold beneath me like the body of my godfather is now, about to be buried like these humiliating tears—reminders of my humanity. My hands are damp from sweat, and mascara stains my pathetic face. There are raw

marks on the side of my fingers and palms from my too-long nails involuntarily interring into them. My eyes are sore, and my stomach is yet to reposition itself correctly. It threatens to rebound into place, expulsing gastric acid and the yogurt I ate last night.

My professor knocks on the door, and I stay silent as her presence immediately terminates my exhausting self-pity session. I hear my name and nothing else. She may have asked if I was okay, so I will wait until my eyes are no longer swollen and my urge to scream is pushed back to the bottom of my throat, back to blocking the anxiety-induced vomit and other proof of internal chaos.

I'm glad my classmates have lives. I'm glad they are too busy to think about my temporary absence or the trembling hands dropping writing utensils two seats to their left. It is comforting to know they do not sense the intermittent electrical impulses causing my mentalis muscle to twitch and plaster an embarrassing half-pout on my face. Their eyes are locked on the diagram on the screen and on our professor's warnings of algebra questions on the exam, and mine are locked on the past. On the scent of outdoor games and cigarettes and his loud, colloquial voice.

My dad still doesn't know.

"Does anyone remember the normal value of atmospheric pressure?"

"760 mmHg."

My brain recalibrates, and words robotically leave my mouth as I visualize how I will sit at the dinner table, look my father in the eye, and speak of death, ribcage still collapsed, the rubble of bones, muscle, and organs failing to obstruct the entrance of the forbidden visitor stalking me since my sister called last night.

I dissect my redundant grief as my professor describes specialized cells and surfactant.

The Daycare Teacher

Heather Green

I can't lie and say it's easy to be a daycare teacher.
The temper tantrums, loud screams, and running around trying to
tend to everyone. Feed her, change him, put them to sleep.
Every day the same routine over on repeat.

I'm so tired and every time that alarm goes off I
want nothing more than to hit the snooze button and
snuggle back in the sheets, dream away, and catch up on all that sleep.

Besides all of that, it's worth it in the end, when I hear
their cute little giggles or get that big hug, when I become
one of their safe places. The cute ways they try to say
my name or when they colour me cute little pictures.

They may not be mine, but I love them all the same.
I would do anything for them. It's a hard job with its
many up's and down's, good and bad, but also one of the best
and most rewarding jobs I will ever have.

The World Stands Still

Sofia Ball

The world stands still, silent, bare,
time frozen in motionless air.
But overhead, the sky shifts free—
light to dusk, then dark to thee.
Clouds drift, storms break, colors fade,
night ignites in stars arrayed.
The earth stays still, unchanged, confined,
yet sky moves on, unbound by time.

Three Haiku

Keith Tillerman

In my apartment
Experiencing the world
Through a television screen

Laying on my bed
Watching the ceiling fan turn
No more third places

When I was a kid
It was easy to get lost
Playing at the park

Won't Write A Poem (In Response To Dr. Seuss)

Harlan Bernand

I won't write a poem for a bear.

I won't write a poem for a hare.

I won't write a poem for a chair.

I won't write a poem here.

I won't write a poem there.

I won't write a poem anywhere.

Hey! I wrote a poem here.

Maybe I can write a poem there.

Maybe I can write a poem anywhere.

White Noise

Sofia Ball

It hums between the cracks of thought,
a whisper spun from nothing.
not voice, not song, nor clear refrain,
just endless sound without a name.
It lingers where the silence waits,
soft static peeling from the walls.
A memory, a space, a time,
a shapeless tune with no design.
It's oceans churning, distant, vast,
a radio between worlds.
a hollow wind, a ceiling fan,
a rushing stream with no dry land.
It soothes, it drowns, it fills, it fades,
it bends around the light.
A constant pulse, a drone, a wave,
a sound to hear, a sound to crave.

Backpack

Maizzy Huebner

The backpack sitting in the corner of my room,
tired from years of travel.

Your name sweeps my mind like a broom,
leaving the air smelling of dust and gravel.

The longer we sit the more we unravel.

Bread and Baking

Alisyn Moody

In the beginning, the bread was made.
The bread was hot in the oven only to be smelled.
In the end, the bread was never eaten by the maker.
The sadness of no bread being eaten.
The work with no reward.

Years pass. The maker never knew the taste of the bread.

Now the bread is made again.
Only now the maker knows the taste:
Warm, comforting, happy.
The maker has found home.

Rusty World

Alicia Rodriguez

How did a Facebook post get stuck like a stripped screw?
Human hearts and keyboards unconsciously knew
That if they hit post, the damage they'd do,
When emotions are high and intelligence few.

They hit the post, it was fame or bust,
Their comments on fire like Los Angeles,
Was entitlement to your opinion worth the disgust?
How long before all your friends' distrust?

Is all the ire you endured truly unjust?
Only a matter of time before integrity turns to dust.
Hearts filled with sadness knowing that just
One quick ugly post on Facebook would rust.

Place To Be

Shainna Graham

Golden sands between my toes
This feeling is what my heart truly knows.
When the sun warms my skin, all worries will fade away.
A part of me will always stay.

Hearing the waves and the ocean songs.
Where each day feels forever long.
When I'm gone -- spread my ashes in the sea.
This is where I want to be.

The Tower

Kaden McGuire

Each day the builder imagines blocks,
Each one holding a purpose.
Every day the builder goes out.
Every day he finds one block.

Excited, he places them where they should be brought.
Excited his tower will form from those blocks.
When the tower was built, he felt safe and sound.
When he went out to reach the tower he heard a dreadful sound.

The tower collapsed, but what of the builder?
The builder collapsed under his tower.
Now people tell of the tale of a builder,
The builder who lays on the floor for no reason.

Nobody knows why he does.
No one truly cares if he does.

Eclipse

Riley Villont

Languid light
beaten black

An ache of time;
a sordid death

Rob the sun
and kiss the shadow:
worship delirious night

An Evening Stroll In December

Maizzy Huebner

Fur of a pale orange glow.
Ham, my sweet boy,
Sitting peacefully in the window.

Walking along streets covered in snow,
The tranquil silence fills me with joy.
Fur of a pale orange glow.

In the window sits a friendly calico,
Wishing she could join my convoy
Sitting peacefully, in the window.

Memories surface from five years ago,
My hand drops, fingers brush corduroy;
Fur of a pale orange glow

Between curtains drawn sits a photo,
Next to it lay the hat of a cowboy
Sitting peacefully in the window.

Returning home, I say “hello?”
Remembering the scene left behind, I play coy.
Fur of a pale orange glow
(still) sitting peacefully in the window.

My Pocket Watch

Kaden McGuire

In problem winds,
Time does fly.
My outlook dims
And hopes die.

Never could I triumph,
Passage of this concept.
I wish I could stand in defiance.
Lock on me is still kept.

I look down.
What is that,
A pocket watch?
Its hands silent,
I realize it's only a notion.

Time
Moves
As
Fast
As
I
Want.

It can move as slow as I think.
I am the clock.
Time is me.
I have broken the lock;
So don't let it transform thee.

Fairest One Of All

Marcus Giovanni Garcia

Mirror, mirror on the wall
Come to me from the farthest space, I call
Through wind and darkness I summon thee
Please show thy face to me

...

*Here I am your majesty
What wouldst thou like to see through me?*

...

Servant in the mirror, with your observant eyes
Show me a beauty more fair than I
Why was it me? Me, to whom this title should befall
This so-called "Fairest One of All"

...

*Alas, no other can match the lovely sight
That is the fair maiden Snow White
Thou hast no say in what many see
Nor sway adoration in any degree*

...

Snow White the Fair, Snow White the Cursed
Cursed with unwarranted attention 'til she bursts
With admirers wielding poisonous appetites
An apple that dreams of pie than a lewd bite
No one can wake this sleeping soul
After playing this subdued role

...

*O conflicted princess, thou art many things
A prize and lust is not all that thou brings
She who has brought a stir of the heart
The gift of a smile, she gingerly imparts
If any ever truly knew the legend of Snow White
They would be graced with heaven's light
The heat from the fire can be taken for granted
Within the lives of others, thy warmth is planted
Dost thou remember the dwarves on their own?
'Twas thy kindness that drove their axes to stone*

...

A flame that guides a moth has nothing to atone
Thy worth is more than being the fairest alone

Time

Brianna Bonilla

Time is stolen
Or maybe I gave it away
I still think back to that same day
I waited until tomorrow, but tomorrow never came
A message was received with a reply that I never sent.
My time wasn't even well spent!
When I realized the sender was gone
I swore that I would remember that feeling from now on

13 years
I hoped by now that I would have changed
Instead of constantly wondering if I'm too late
Tomorrow i'll visit
Tomorrow i'll call
Tomorrow i'll know if it was even worth it at all
Tomorrow i'll write
Tomorrow i'll sing
Tomorrow i'll know if they were passions or just temporary things

8 years
Today I visited
Today I saw
I don't even recognize my grandmother at all
She is all grey
Deep wrinkles cover her face
We talk and we cry
She didn't know why
Why I endured all of these years alone
I was just surprised that she didn't know
But how could she?
I never told her
I almost waited too long

2 years
I called, I returned some of the calls that I had been putting off
But my family doesn't know me anymore
They are better off
I don't have a place among them
They kept living while I was stuck in place
Time doesn't wait for anyone
Not even someone who kept their place
Alone

1 year
I'm writing
It's still not enough to make up for the time past
I'm feeling
It's still not enough to heal the past
It's a start though

6 months
Maybe i'll sing
Maybe i'll reach deep down and let out a deep ring
I used to love filling the room
Now I'd rather hide in the corner
Who wants to hear the voice of a loner

Now
So tomorrow I still say
Tomorrow I will remember the promises I made myself today
The days have past, my tomorrow come and gone
As I sit here and write I understand what's going on
I waited too long
But there still is time

Yet, I cant help but wonder who would I be
If my tomorrow was today and not yesterday, last month or last week.
You still have time
Take it from me
Tomorrow I WILL try again and tomorrow we will see
If I can make my today tomorrow finally.

Broken Hour

Riley Villont

Sat past willow trees
and daffodils, when
sunlight whispers
a golden fate
to yearning ears

a still body,
searching eyes,
trembling hands,
a need for more

A flipped hourglass
slipping like water
through shaking fingers

Falling, drowning,
in flooded sand

Waiting

Paranoia

Madison Timmerman

In the distance I can hear the soulful beatings of the Drums.
Their feet produce a forceful boom upon each step; a warning.
Between each leaf and limb is a whisper of misfortune and torment brought
upon by their tantalizing mourning.

Morning.

Good morning, Sun.

I rise to meet you, feet planted in the petals of my pink petunia.
All my blunders washed to the shoreline by a luminous leader..
Oh, my heart you have won.
The spirit of my soul captured by Helios; take me to Adonia.

Wailing; waning.

I rejoice in the comfort of a plum.

Cheeks lain upon that waxy exocarp it tells me a sordid secret.
Our words taste like bitter berries and rum.
There is a crackle, and I plunder towards an early casket.

The Earth unhinges its jaws below me, and it sounds like teeth shattering one by
one.

They have found me.

Seering spasticity chains me as a prisoner to await the beating Drum.
Magma locates the path to my dead, morose heart, so I capitulate and rest my
eyes.
My tears, still scorching.

Morning.

Good morning, Sun.

I rise to meet you, illuminated in the love of Lacrimosa.

A Woman's Scorn

Kadence Dieckow

Through shadowed halls of history's lore,
Their names resound but praised no more.
Once bold, defiant, fierce, and wise,
Now marked by whispers, cloaked in lies.
Joan with her visions, her flame-lit path,
Met by the sword of a church's wrath.
Not saint, but witch, they cried aloud,
As fire wrapped her in its shroud.
Cleopatra, queen of Nile's embrace,
Reduced to seductress, her cunning erased.
Not ruler, strategist, sharp and keen,
But the siren fell for a Roman dream.
Salem's daughters, in fear and pain,
Accused of pact with Satan's name.
For healing hands and knowing looks,
They burned the wise, they silenced books.
Boudica rose with a rebel's heart,
A mother wronged, who dared to start
A war for freedom, her baby's pride,
Yet history paints her savage, wild.
Medusa cursed with serpent hair,
Her beauty turned to a monstrous glare.
Not her fault, yet gods decreed,
She'd bear the weight of another's greed.
Lilith of Eden, first to rise,
Refused to bow, met demonized.
Her choice, her strength, her fiery will,
Cast her as darkness, haunting still.
What is it then that men must fear,
When women stand and persevere?
Their fire, their wisdom, their claim to speak,
Is branded wicked, bold, or weak.
But here they stand, through time's cruel gaze,
Their truths survive the scornful haze.
For every tale that paints them vile,
The brave among us sees their trial.

So, raise a glass, to those maligned,
Who dared to shatter, who redefined.
For in their villainy, falsely told,
Lies the power of women—unyielding, bold.

The Fragile Flower

Alicia Rodriguez

This fragile flower was born and raised from damp cold ground.
The ground was damp from tears that the flower shed
But once dry the flower felt grains of dirt scrape harshly against its stem.
Although the flower is suffering, it can still see
the beautiful sky with glistening sun.

Trying to grow the flower protected itself from pecking birds
Not realizing the self-inflicted harm.
The birds only wanted to help it grow
By passing on sweet pollen through a gentle touch to its rose petal.
Once trust was gained, the flower grew
into a beautiful, and courageous Red Rose.

I Will Always Be You

Analyssa Krieger

I used to know you.

In fact, I used to spend every day with you.

I knew everything about you, because I was you.

But you won't know me.

I still remember the way you felt, I still feel it sometimes

I remember the pain and constant fear that ran through your body

It was my body too.

But you've started coming to me less

Thoughts of you and him come mostly at night.

The abuse still hurts but

It helps to remember you sometimes

Because it was you that made me.

Phantom Sound

Kiera Wagler

RRRRRIIINGGGGG

I can see lips moving, see the tears falling,
but somehow, somehow,
I cannot hear what is being said.

“She’s gone.” They say

I feel my mouth open, feel my hands climb into my hair,
but somehow, somehow,
I cannot hear what is being said

“YOU’RE WRONG,” I yell

I hear myself now, a shell of myself.
The voice in my ears doesn’t sound right to me.
It’s somebody else, pretending to be.

Rush

Kiera Wagler

I hear the flood of water run against me, the scalding burn melting away the physical pain.

I close my eyes, surrender to the heat

Within darkness, I find salvation.

I plug my ears, plunging me into purgatory, nothing exists but me and the rush.

Wetness clings to my body, tears mixing with water flow

A beat. I wait.

My eyes then open in too-bright light. I can no longer hide.

Shutting off my spout, I venture from the box

Not ready to face the world, but waiting

For the Rush.

Journey of Hearts

Megan Butler

“Anything for me today, Harvey?” the young man asked hopefully, as he did most mornings on his walk to work.

“Well, let’s see here.” Harvey, a tall, lanky man, mumbled under his breath as he shuffled through a stack of letters, his fingers smudged with ink. “Ah! Arthur Allerton!” The graying postal worker handed Arthur the letter, which was crinkled at the edges, but still in sound condition.

Arthur’s hands rattled as he ripped open the envelope. He unfolded the letter as quickly as he could without damaging it. There was the handwriting that he adored so much, with the elegant loops and the defined capital letters.

Oh, Arthur. There is a sorrowful longing for your presence deep within me. I know it has only been a couple months that we have been apart, but it feels like I haven’t seen you in years. I do my best to keep busy, to keep my mind from wandering back to longing for you, but some days I can’t keep from daydreaming about you no matter how hard I try. It is easier than in the first days when we began to share interest in each other. I was so tickled at the idea that you could possibly like me back. How in the world could a man as wonderful as you love a girl like me? The thought was profound to me. You were so different from any other man I had met before. I could see your sweet spirit the first time I met you. I just knew you were the man God would give me, someone who would stop at nothing to provide for and protect me. Somehow God thought I was enough for you. I know better than to question Him, so I waited until you showed interest in me, never giving up that someday it would happen because of what I knew in my heart. I’m still not giving up, Arthur. And I know you won’t either. I long for the day when I get to see your face in front of me again.

The travel days feel long, but the good Lord has protected us. I am sending this letter from Scotts Bluff. Now we are preparing for two weeks of travel to Fort Laramie.

Yours in faith and love, Louanne

Arthur swiftly wiped a tear from his eye, he hoped before Harvey could see. He gently folded the note into the envelope which had protected these words of affection for nearly a thousand miles. The fact that this letter was written a few weeks ago didn’t ease Arthur’s anxiety. The stagecoaches couldn’t bring the news of Louanne’s wellbeing quick enough. Was she safe? Louanne had left with her father, her only living family member, on the well-traveled California Trail in hopes of better fortune in the west. Their final destination was somewhere near Sacramento.

There hadn’t been a choice for the two lovers. As Louanne was only 16 years old, she hardly had a say in where she went. Arthur was only 19 years old, old enough to hold a steady income, but still too young to provide for a family, not to mention that Louanne’s father didn’t have a certain fondness about the idea of the two getting married.

Sniffing, Arthur stored the letter in his back pocket.

"Thanks, Harvey. You have no idea how you've made my day," Arthur grinned as he stepped out of the post office into the dusty street. He looked back at the building and read the sign which had been so familiar to him his whole life: Savannah Post Office. The fresh sun was warm on Arthur's cheeks, as he turned back to face the street. He paused to avoid collision. A buggy passed by, kicking dust. Arthur took the next opening and made his way out of town. He had a bound in his step as he headed down an old country road, fields of wheat on either side, towards Fletcher's farm. The thought of milking cows almost seemed like a privilege to Arthur this morning.

"Mornin,' sir," Arthur called up to Mr. Fletcher, as he grasped the rake that was leaning against the weathered barn door.

"G'mornin,' lad!" the scruffy, middle-aged man hollered down from the hayloft, bits of hay fluttering to the ground. "Ya gonna miss this ol' farm?"

"Just a bit! I'm ready to get goin,' though. I've got a girl to go after, remember?"

"Oh, I remember. Couldn't forget if I tried. Ain't no other reason you'd be smiling while scoopin' the muck, now would there? Some days it's as if that'd be a hobby for ya. You're in love, lad! That be as plain as the sky is blue!

"Say, when is it you're leavin'?" Mr. Fletcher scooped up a pile of hay and flung it farther into the hayloft.

"Two days, so that would be... Wednesday. I'm catchin' a ride with the Hanson's. It's a sort of payment for helpin' out with the chores when Mr. Hanson was ill. I sure am glad to be travelin' with them, as they're like my family in a way. They remind me of my parents..."

Mr. Fletcher paused, and Arthur could see a solemn tone grow across his face. But then a gentle smile began to form, and he looked at Arthur, his eyes with a loving light. "Ya know kid, I sure will miss ya 'round here. You've been a blessin' to me, honest and fair. And I ain't never seen anyone who can chop wood like ya! Your lady sure is a lucky one."

"Thank you, sir. I've been mighty blessed to have been able to work for you these past few years.

"How many stalls need mucked today? All of 'em?"

Mr. Fletcher sniffed and hastily rubbed his eye, "Ehhh, yeah. Yeah, all of 'em. After that ya can take the rest of the day to prepare for your trip, how about that?"

"I'd appreciate that, Mr. Fletcher!" Arthur swung the rake up onto his shoulder and strutted into the cool of the barn, whistling a joyful tune. Just two more days and he would be just a little closer to Louanne.

To continue reading this story jump to page 49.

Enough

Kadence Dieckow

In a world of walls, I find my space,
Each day a struggle, a quiet race.
These limbs may falter, this heart may ache,
But in my spirit, a fire won't break.

I see the heights that others climb,
And wonder if I'll ever find my time.
Yet within me burns a steady flame,
A voice that whispers, "You're more than your name."

Trapped by shadows that loom so wide,
I reach for the stars, with dreams as my guide.
Though labels may bind, I break through the night,
For I am the strength in my own quiet fight.

I seek to be more than what's seen on the skin,
To rise from the depths, let the journey begin.
In each small victory, I carve out my worth,
For I am enough, just as I am, here on this earth.

So, I'll weave my story, stitch by stitch,
Embracing the challenge, embracing the glitch.
In every heartbeat, in every breath,
I'm learning to live, defying the depths.

Though I may feel trapped, I'll find my own way,
For I am not less; I'm more every day.
In a tapestry woven of dreams yet unspun,
I am enough, and my life has just begun.

The Last Piece

Kadence Dieckow

The doctor speaks, and the room tilts,
like a puzzle shifting, edges built.
For years, I thought it was just me
a fault line trembling endlessly.
But here it is, spelled out in code,
a misprint in the script I hold.
Not a ghost, not fate unkind,
just letters misplaced in my spine.
I hold still start questioning who I am
Am I the me from 5 minutes ago
Has everything that I've overcome meant anything
The song hums low in sterile light,
"I don't know why I am the way I am."
"The band boy genius" sings, the walls breathe deep,
I taste the weight; I drink it steep.
I feel like I have become frozen
Back to square one it feels like
But then I realized maybe
This is a good thing I know who I am
Who I will always be
Not just seizures, not just chance,
but something written in advance.
Like finding out the missing piece
was never lost, just out of reach.
And now I understand.
The picture clears, the lines align—
for the first time, this body is mine.

Her Beauty Of Imprisonment (First Lover To Beloved)

Claire Anderson

What we have is truly rare,
So much lust the heart burns with a bright flame.
Always growing, twisting, and turning like her luscious curly hair.
So picturesque you could put her in a shiny golden frame.

Her smile, more radiant than the suns beam
Floods my soul like a river,
Barriers too weak to withstand the joyous stream.
Losing or letting you leave; I would never consider.

Taking care of her wispy attitude is hardly my passion,
Though I appreciate when her feather like personality comes out.
Others state she is as beautiful as a cloud, but I believe her "beauty" is passing.
My ugly statements that float in the wind I make sure she never hears about

But alas she has superhuman hearing, now I'm running out of time
Never enough "quality " rhymes to keep her as just mine.

To Ferrari My Paramour (Beloved To Second Lover)

Claire Anderson

I've always loved a brand-new car,
Oh, the shiny, sleek, handsome black paint.
The car that promises to take you far,
Seems I have no restraint.

I'm always dismissing the lack of safety features;
Ignoring the life and reality behind the seatbelt.
The wheel drawing me in saying "I need her!"
Numerous miles that we've spent together have always been heartfelt.

Everything moves so fast on the highways;
I investigate bygone days through the rearview mirror
As we speed off from my old partners cage "I'm doing this my way!"
The airbags go off with a loud explosion I can't hear,

PAIN, a sharp ringing in my ear, my vision no longer blurry
I've made my decision to leave my past entrapper in a hurry!

Chess Is A Game Of War (Second Lover To First Lover)

Claire Anderson

I've always been a fan of complex board games,
Pure ecstasy from winning a game of chess.
But me and you don't wager for just fame,
Gamble for the fair girl in a white dress.

Pawns in a non-playable story,
We are kings and she is my pretty queen!
I know she'll choose me, I don't even worry.
So smart you could call me a flawless dean.

This strange nonconfrontational battle,
I'm winning this war with love bombs,
On my high horse without a saddle.
Got me guessing who is getting the bronze,

Wait I know, sticks and stones shatter your bones
Good luck being forever alone!

A Shield of Contempt

Cecilia Luengas Garcia

As a child, I thought it was normal for my father's steps to disperse the room, to intimidate our fingers into pressing the button to change the channel, to hide the glitter and lip gloss, to mute the colors and blend with the walls. I thought the weight of his boots was what anchored us and kept order. I had not seen the storms his stratospheric ego caused. The rain helped me grow, even if it left me soaked, out in the cold of my family's conditional bond. Humiliation was key. It was effective, so it never went unquestioned.

My parents have always loved me. I have never doubted it, but sometimes, it seemed like I had to solve the oh-so-noble riddle to access that love. The devaluation of *I love yous* rose as time passed, and I grew hungrier and prouder. Never greedy, for I stubbornly believed meager crumbs were an excess. I grew stingy with my own hugs and kisses and smiles. They were mine. I'd *earned* them. I didn't know love wasn't meant to be a currency.

A scraped knee could not be accompanied by damp cheeks, so I learned to laugh when the wind, water, or alcohol made the raw skin sting. When my bones vibrated at the collision of knee and concrete and pain depleted my oxygen reserve, no complaints could be made. Resilience could not coexist with bitching and moaning. We weren't weak; we must not appear so. Thus, I bit my tongue as I washed my wounds, and I hid under my blanket at night and hoped the heavy homemade pillow would muffle my sobs and the whispers of shame my dreams never failed to deliver.

The monster of unjustified tears and immature emotions chased me no matter what disguise I wore, and it spread and multiplied the more I repressed the purest of my regrets and joys, feeding its purpose as I grew hungry for reassurance and acknowledgment. I was always hoping. Waiting. Wishing. For a day when my parents wouldn't condemn teary eyes or roaring laughter. When my sister would learn compassion. When a stutter or a nine on my report card did not label me a failure.

The virtue of moderation had turned into a prison and my so-called dedication had become a burden. In a world of endless plates of beans and overstretched coins and bills, education was all I had. All we had. I could not be poor and stupid. I could not let emotions overcome reason, but reason had left my family long before because a college degree does not equal intelligence, and in our case, it could not defeat poverty either. *How wonderful!*

The whispers of shame became screams, and their alarmed tones would not let me rest. I was confounded every time someone congratulated my mother for her gifted child and she glared at me with frustration. Compliments weren't enough. My teacher's approval wasn't enough. I wasn't enough. The nines, always bolder than the tens, on the sheet in her hand struck me harder than her open palm. My teachers' compliments felt empty, the priest's warnings were seething, and my shame was dense. It made me clumsy, which increased its weight and gave birth to a cycle of self-pity.

The shame giant morphed into guilt as ideals solidified and more sermons entered my ears, and I still carry it. Up the stairs and into the kitchen, to appease my father's pride and my mother's heart. To atone for my lack of sanity and deviated desires. To keep myself grounded and avoid hope's inviting flight to a future of idleness and wasted potential.

“Are you okay?”

Megan Butler

“Are you okay?”

I don’t know how to answer that.

Yes.

Well, no.

Mostly?

Perhaps to you that word denotes something different.

Perhaps in my mind the conception is misconceived.

Denying myself the luxury of feelings being the cause,

Believing

I’m

strong

enough

to

hold

it

all

alone.

My mind is malnourished.

Emotions

so desperately

fumbling

that they

start

to

flatline

Peace can’t live in an environment where stress, too, thrives.

Peace also can’t live in an environment where stress, too, dies.

Cultivated soil is fertile for all.

I can’t say all this. Haven’t got the time.

So I’ll smile and reply, “I’m fine.”

Dichotomous

Madison Timmerman

Within the time it takes for a whisper to tickle the peach fuzz of my ear, I felt the impact of a B52 Bomber dropping from my chest and pounding the tile between curled toes.

It was a bouncing resonance with a circadian rhythm; it was cyclically sick...

It was....

Me.

Me, from a distance.

Only, one million paces too far and five-hundred collapsed lungs away.

But... there was something else.

A ferocious fire glided left over the tides, producing a powerful performance of ruby red reflections.

The ruby broiled my pale salmon skin until it found the apertures of my eyes.

How rapidly it united chemical crimson and gemstone...

The tips of my fingers begged for correspondence.

Pulchritudinous unification of another felt by the brush of fray, oh!

Vehemently, my eyes burst apart to the tune of the Red Sea.

Scorn!

Intentional enchantment disillusioned by a girl with golden locks and an uncanny smile!

In that moment, like a rubber band had snapped, my limp body plunged forward confidently.

Only, it was halted by the body of another.

And in that moment...

My body crumpled like sheet metal as my neurons blazed for miles with agony. She and I in alliance, until death do us part.

Two Become One

Marcus Giovanni Garcia

One line going on its own way
One line going down another
One gap left as they sail away

Two muddied paths that go astray
Two siblings losing a brother
Two mouths that don't know what to say

One mind whose heart will not obey
One piece that topples the other
One outburst from causing doomsday

Two roles that they've been forced to play
Two pains that they each must suffer
Two hands clasp together to pray

One crossroad joins in the highway
One lost road gets rediscovered
One white joins the black to be gray

As the river finds its own bay
When the winter turns to summer
The night ends to bring a new day
Two dyes conjoin to one color

The Forest

Brianna Bonilla

The forest calls
When it does I listen
Have you heard?
Have you seen the trees glisten?

The trees cast a great shadow below
The leaves crunch under my feet as I go –

Deeper into the forest

I wonder what its name is?
It doesn't matter, it doesn't speak a known language

The wind blows,
The trees sway
But I swear they're saying come this way

Deeper into the thicket I wander
It's starting to get darker

I don't mind though
because I can still hear the birds sing
Even if it's just a distant ring.

There's something else
it's getting louder
The wind is gone now, so is the birds' chatter...

What's up ahead?
I can barely see

Someone or something
is in the dark

Waiting for me.

Red-Eyed Storm

Riley Villont

The eye of the storm
consists of nothing;
an absence of chaos,
a dull sense of terror

Blissful people in the pupil
see nothing

Outside the storm,
sorrowful people are running
shouting “Be wary”
to the void
because the blissful people
don’t hear

Some with sorrow
dig-in rattled earth
for safety,
Moist dirt caking
their hands

Some with the sight
continue to run
out of fear

Stuck between chaos
and it’s sheltered nothingness,
the storm wages on;
collecting heedful people
who protest its path,
inching towards
those blinded by calm;

the storm pays no mind
to whom it destroys
It only knows
greed and growth

the red-eyed storm
stops for no one

Even to those in the iris,
deprived of foresight,
calmed by blindness
the storm will eventually come

Weathered people outside the storm
are taken, one by one,
until they fade into silence

and the ignorant people in the pupil
sulk in confusion
when their beloved storm
seems to turn on them

They don't care to see
that because of the storm,
the red-eyed storm they loved,
we were all already half-dead

I Love You To The Moon

Madison Timmerman

Agony is not an emotion; it is a shadow.
A shadow that never leaves.

It is felt in the way it gnaws at my flesh; deep beneath that endothelium, my heart is drying up.
All alone, bleeding out into a cage of bone and viscera.

My spirit is held captive by immense suffocation, and a dainty string permanently pulls at the wheezing walls of my heart.
Transcription is causation for my diaphragm becoming a fifty-pound weight, which slowly drags my frail body beneath the soil of the Earth.

With it falls my ribcage, which once held all the butterflies in the world for you.
It is heard through walls, and through the atmosphere; the crackling and final breaking of my bones...
Now in pieces lying on the cold floor.

However, there is a sublimity to the emptiness that now completes me.
No longer are these butterflies trapped that you have given me as a birth right...
They are so sophisticated in the way they fly away from me.

There is a peacefulness and serenity as I look toward them, now taking place for the great celestial sky; I hear song in flight.

I now know that what I am seeing is you and your everlasting light
Your everlasting beauty...
Compassion...
Love...

You live inside of me forever.
But now, from the brazen state of Alaska, all the way to where the lions roam in Africa...
You are seen, and felt, and hugged.

I love you to the smiling moon and beyond, and I know you love me all the way back.

Your ladybug, always.

Ghost of My Heart

Sherry Boggs

She fills my mind entirely
A constant presence looming over my life
She is there whether I am awake or lost in slumber
Her image always lingers
To call my feelings for her an obsession would feel like a profound understatement
It's a longing that constantly consumes me
Her blue eyes are striking, vivid, and piercing
They invade my thoughts, both in the light of the day and the shadows of the nights
I envision a future that should have been ours
Yet it remains just out of reach, tainted by the reality of her absence
The weight of her death is like a relentless shadow
Leaving me lovesick for the moments we can never share again
I am haunted by the absence of our shared fate yet in my heart
I find great delight in the belief that I am with her now, even in the silence of eternity

Editor's Note

This issue marks a transition for SCC's annual literary journal. Formerly titled *Chiaroscuro*, the journal now is called *Miscellaneous Voices* – abbreviated as *MISCC Voices*. The Di Dante members chose this as a play on the names of the two newsletters for the college, which are titled *MISCC* and *The Voice* and continue as separate publications..

The students who share their voices here are from:

- the Adult Education Literacy program;
- the creative writing classes at Keokuk, West Burlington, and online;
- the Di Dante club; and
- open calls made to SCC students.

This issue was edited with students in-person in classrooms and club meetings, and by text, Zoom, and email. For example, Mr. Martin Distelhorst, Adult Education Literacy Instructor, shared time from his English II class so his students could discuss their poems from the course with me, and several of the students chose to share their writing in this issue. This collaboration was great fun!

The Di Dante club members do group writings for fun; the students take turns writing a line on a theme to craft a poem. This is how the “Beginning” and “Ending” poems started. The club meets weekly to develop their creative writings. In Spring 2025, the members attended a poetry slam in Iowa City in which one member competed; the featured poet, Joe Artz, was a kind host for SCC students throughout the event and is pictured with them on the front cover photo. The club members also coordinated and performed at two open mic nights at the Night Cap in Burlington. I am always impressed and humbled by students' talents and care for each other as they build a creative community.

I hope this journal inspires you to attend an open mic, to record your own story, or to jot down a line or two of poetry. Don't worry about it being right— ***just write!***

Lori Muntz, Ph.D.
SCC English Instructor

Journey of Hearts

.....

Slowly, Arthur dipped his pen into the void of ink. A candle sat to his left, its presence flickering playfully across his page. A cool breeze flowed through the open window, and streams from the moon cast beams across the oak floorboards. Pen met paper, and emotions shaped into words.

My dear Louanne, I received your letter earnestly. I am glad you find comfort in belief that your God has kept you safe on your journey. I finished work at Mr. Fletcher's yesterday, and today I finished packing up. I bought a new pair of leather boots, since my previous pair prized healthy wear, and I also bought a new pocketknife, which should last for quite some time. The Hanson's and I are leaving with a few other families at the crack of dawn tomorrow. The wagon is loaded, so there won't be much preparation to do in the morning. I'm hoping we'll make good time. I don't want to be away from you any longer than I have to.

I'm sending this letter to Fort Bridger, as it seems to be the next major stop after Fort Laramie. I hope you find it when you arrive. I'll notify the rider and have him tell the postal worker to hold it for you. I love you, Louanne.

Sincerely, Arthur

Arthur carefully dressed the letter and laid it on his nightstand. He would drop it off to be mailed in the morning on the way to the Hanson's house. There was a good possibility, he thought, that this would be the last letter sent between the two, since neither of them would know where to address any future mail. He thought at least Louanne could rest, knowing that Arthur was on his way.

Chirping birds serenaded the one-room, log cabin as Arthur's eyes fluttered open. Rays from the morning light shown through the open window.

Arthur sat up in bed, his chestnut hair justifying his depth of sleep. He sentimentally gazed across the place he had called home for nearly two years, ever since he had to drop out of school because his parents had... And now he was leaving everything he had ever known. Savannah was the only place Arthur had called home before. His roots were here. His family had been here. But it felt like his “family” was on the California trail; it felt like his family was far away.

“Excuse me, sir. Do you happen to know if there are any letters for Louanne Thomas?” Louanne asked, a hopeful glint in her amber eyes. She had arrived in Fort Bridger with her father the night before and was anxious to hear any sort of word from home, particularly from a certain man.

“I can look in the back for you, ma’am.” The postal worker disappeared through a doorway, and Louanne could hear creaking as he shuffled across the floorboards. She rocked back and forth on her toes and the heels of her feet. She swished her skirt as she tried to calculate distances and time in her head. If she was right, there was a chance, but math had never been her strength in school.

Louanne heard the creaking returning to the front desk. She clasped her hands together and looked at the ceiling. The short man entered through the doorway; Louanne could see a small white envelope concealed between his pudgy fingers.

“Here you are, ma’am. This one’s been here for a bit. Been wondering when the owner would come to pick it up!” The man chuckled to himself as he handed the letter into Louanne’s small, gentle hands.

“Thank you very much, sir!” Louanne held the letter dearly to her chest, her heart pounding harder and harder as she headed back towards the camp, where they would be staying for a few days to rest and restock their supplies.

In the privacy of the wagon, which trophied its cover to provide shade from the scorching July sun, Louanne opened the envelope and shakily unfolded the letter, her sweaty hands sticking to the paper. She devoured every word that Arthur had written. Emotions flooded over her. She was relieved and full of joy that he was on his way, but she was also terrified. This type of traveling was not safe if the necessary precautions were not observed, and even when they were

observed, there were still many dangers. Just a few weeks ago, a wagon traveling with Louanne's family had nearly capsized in an unexpectedly swollen river. And Louanne's father, who had injured his leg about a week ago was keeping his eye on a minor infection that could potentially lead to fatality if professional medical attention couldn't be found. Louanne knew Arthur was a determined young man, but she also knew that some of these disasters were unavoidable. She couldn't bear it if something happened to him, especially when his reason for coming was for her. Louanne's mind kept racing, imagining all the different struggles that might be waiting to pounce on Arthur as he traveled. She wished she could do something to ensure Arthur's safety, yet the only thing she could do was whisper a prayer for their safety and strength. "God, please keep us safe. Please keep Arthur safe."

There was never as much relief to Arthur as when his wagon train spotted the next resting point. The first few days after the wagon train left, adrenaline kept Arthur alert and strong. Now, the days were long and sometimes it felt to Arthur like they were walking in slow motion, forever stuck in the burning heat. But when they reached a town, they were able to regain their strength for the next stretch of walking. It also helped to know that each town he stopped at, Louanne had been. She had seen the same buildings and walked the same roads. Arthur needed every bit of connection to Louanne he could get; the weight from traveling bore down on him, so much that he could barely muster the strength to open Louanne's letter, but he didn't need to. He had memorized every word of it in the first week of traveling.

When Arthur could make out a blur that was Fort Bridger, relief washed over him. This was the last place Louanne had received a letter from him. He needed to know if she had thought of checking the post office for word from him when her and her father were passing through.

"Hello, sir. Is there a letter for Louanne here? She should have been passing through about two months or so ago, and I was wondering if she knew to pick up the letter I sent her."

“I can check for you, sir. What was the name again?”

“Louanne Thomas.”

“You know what, I remember. Yes, she did stop by here to pick up a letter! But it couldn’t have been more than three weeks ago that she last stopped by. Polite, young lady, she is. She happened to leave a note behind. Said if a man about yea high,” he gestured a measurement above his stature-challenged body that was a few inches shorter than Arthur, “came in, to give him this.” The man reached under the desk and pulled out a slip of paper. The edges were jagged. It appeared to have been hastily ripped from another piece of paper.

Arthur, I hope this fragment reaches you. We have been slowed down more than we anticipated. Father’s leg is infected, and his mobilization and health are declining daily. We are leaving urgently, in hopes to find medical help in Salt Lake City.

Yours, Louanne

Arthur’s eyes widened; his stomach sank. Louanne had written this weeks ago. Was her father’s health still worsening? Arthur needed to get to Salt Lake City as soon as possible. But his traveling group had just arrived in town. They probably wouldn’t leave for at least a few days, but a few days was too long for Arthur to wait.

Mr. Hanson, kneeling beside one of the wagon wheels, yanked on the partially rusted wrench that he was using to ensure all the bolts were secure. “Sorry, son. We can’t leave without the rest of the wagons. It’s not safe. We’ll also make better travel time if we rest up a few days. It just wouldn’t be logical to leave tomorrow.”

“Mr. Hanson, please!” Arthur begged. “Louanne’s father could be in severe condition right now or worse. I need to get to Salt Lake City.”

“Arthur,” Mr. Hanson said sternly, tugging on another bolt. “It’s not wise. No matter what condition Louanne’s father is in, you’re probably not going to be able to do much. I suggest you get some rest. We’ll leave in a few days and be there within two weeks.”

“I can’t wait two weeks! I need to be there now!” Arthur’s eyes had fire in them. He clenched his fist. “I’ll go by myself if I have to.”

Mr. Hanson stood and faced Arthur. He wiped sweat from his upper lip onto his sleeve. “That’s unreasonable and unwise. You aren’t married to Louanne. She isn’t your responsibility, and neither is her father.”

Arthur’s mouth tightened and he started towards the general store. He didn’t have much money, but he would use it all if he had to. He could see Louanne’s eyes and her bright smile. And being the closest he had been to her in months was a relief, but he couldn’t fully rest until he knew she was safe.

The sunrise was breathtaking the next morning, painted with various hues of orange and pink. Clouds, tinged with glow, reflected the light on their bellies, giving the illusion that the sky was full and close. Arthur paused for just a moment to admire the morning before he slung a newly-purchased leather knapsack onto his back.

At the store yesterday, he had bumped into a young man a little older than himself who was a member of a wagon train that happened to be packing up to leave for Salt Lake City the next day. Arthur explained his predicament, and the man, who could sense Arthur’s desperation, asked him if he would like to join their train; in return, Arthur would help with the night watches. This was an opportunity Arthur couldn’t possibly turn down. It couldn’t have been more perfect in his mind. What were the chances?

Arthur’s mind had run through all the possibilities of situations that Louanne could be in. He tended to walk a distance from the wagons, as his mind was too distracted to be engaged in conversation. He didn’t know these people, but they were respectable enough to allow him space, which is what he needed. The constant sound of grasses swaying, the creaking of the wagons, and the distant murmur of chatter had a soothing effect on Arthur. It gave him freedom to be lost in navigating new emotions.

The traveling was smooth. The days’ weather was fair and didn’t hinder them in any way except for the unbearable heat during midday, which merely slowed the train down for a few hours until the sun began to sink. They

had made remarkable time in Arthur's opinion, despite his eagerness to reach the city, arriving on the night of the eighth day after departure. Arthur helped fetch water that night, exhausted from the journey, and extremely thankful for the coolness of the liquid, which revived his parched throat. He decided to start searching Salt Lake City for Louanne at first light in the morning.

Sleep had mostly escaped Arthur that night as he lay restless, anticipating the rising of the sun, which would signify that his search for his love could begin. His eyes were dry, and he shivered from the chill of the morning as he rose up to search for his knapsack. He headed away from the camp towards the city, which was awakening.

Children began to trickle from houses, and as Arthur wandered down a street, he waved at a little girl with bleach-blond hair who reminded him of Mr. Hanson's daughter. The city seemed to be a maze, with streets leading to more streets. The cinnamon-brick buildings crowded together, shoulder to shoulder, sheltering pedestrians from breezes. Dread snuck upon Arthur's hopefulness, as he realized the demanding task ahead of him. But he was so close. A woman with a rose bonnet, who was carrying a woven basket, caught Arthur's attention, and he approached her.

"Excuse me, ma'am," Arthur called out to the woman, his throat slightly groggy as he cleared it. "Is there a hospital here?"

The woman slowed her step and turned to Arthur, looking a bit surprised. "No, I'm afraid there isn't. Most folks around here go to Dr. Jones. He lives on West Temple Street down that way." She pointed to the left, and Arthur's eyes followed, gazing up at numerous two-story brick buildings that bordered the streets, each one boldly casting a shadow shaped by the rising sun. The woman gazed at Arthur with concern. "Is someone hurt?"

"I hope not," Arthur replied. He mustered a small smile. "Thank you for your help." He made a nice pace as he headed towards the direction the woman had pointed, each step one step closer to Louanne, he hoped.

Arthur skimmed West Temple Street, his eyes darting about, until he saw a small wooden sign dangling from the overhang on a house with painted wooden siding. The sign presented *Dr. Henry Jones, Physician*. Arthur's stomach leaped with hope and anxiety. He advanced towards the front door, which appeared clean and professional. He rapped on the door, and a man with a tidy beard and glasses introduced himself as Doc. Jones. From Arthur's questioning, and to Arthur's disappointment, he learned that Louanne's father hadn't come to him for help. Doc. Jones redirected Arthur to Reverend Samuel Whitaker's home. Reverend Whitaker was a pastor at a local church that provided help to those who needed medical care. Arthur kindly thanked the physician and started for the new location, which the doctor had pointed out to Arthur.

Dejection swallowed Arthur as he sat down against a building in a patch of shade, pulling his knapsack beside him. The bricks behind his back were rough, and his thin shirt snagged on the texture. Arthur sighed and ran his hand through his hair. Time after time he had confidently followed a trail that led to either another trail or a dead end. Time after time he had gone from certainty to disorientation. The buckle on Arthur's loyal leather bag jingled as he unclasped it; he was hungry from his morning trek and, luckily, he had enough mindfulness that morning to stuff some jerky in his bag that he had been given by a family from his new wagon train. The jerky was tough but savory with smokey hints, and it held his hunger back.

The sound of wagon wheels toned out other city noises, and Arthur considered what he should do next. The truth was that he had no idea where Louanne could be, and honestly, he wasn't completely sure that Louanne and her father were even still in Salt Lake City. Maybe her father had recovered, and they had moved on. The only thing he could do really was to ask locals if they had seen her, which wasn't the most reliable technique, but it was the only method Arthur had to work from.

Now that his stomach had been addressed, he was ready to keep searching. He decided he would see what direction he could get from inside of the building.

Ding-a-ling. A bell rang as Arthur opened the squeaky door. He closed it behind him, and he peered around the room. A counter stood across from the door and behind that was a wall of miniature brass doors, each with a small key-hole. This was a post office. Arthur sensed a connection, though he didn't quite understand the reason behind it. Perhaps because the last place he had true proof of Louanne's presence was at a post office.

An employee came from behind the wall of mailboxes, and he asked how he could assist Arthur. Arthur began explaining that he was looking for any clues of where Louanne or her father could be, emphasizing the fact that they were probably in a place where they could find help for Louanne's father.

Ding-a-ling. An elderly lady with her hair fastened in an orderly bun strode up to the counter beside Arthur. She smiled at him politely while the worker handed her a few envelopes of various sizes. She seemed resolute, a quality that Arthur hadn't related to for a while and one he was quite jealous of. The lady opened the squeaky door, revealing the sound of clopping hooves and hollering of city-folk, and she dissolved into the bustle of the street.

Arthur returned to the postal worker to finish his explanation, and the worker nodded empathetically when Arthur mentioned how he had traveled so far by himself, even switching wagon trains to arrive in Salt Lake City sooner.

Ding-a-ling. A small gasp and a symphony of fluttering papers sounded behind Arthur, mixing with his voice. Then came a gentle whisper, "Arthur?"

Arthur spun around. He knew that voice just as well as he knew the loopy handwriting that belonged to the same person. Her eyes, which were filled with tears of joy, were just as beautiful as Arthur had remembered them months ago. Arthur's throat swelled, and he breathed her name, full of disbelief and wonder. "Louanne."

"But why didn'tcha keep going to California, Papa? Why'd ya stay here in Salt Lake City?"

Arthur shifted a little boy, no older than seven years old, to his other knee. A fireplace crackled and projected shadows of the two onto the wall behind them. The child looked intently at his father.

“Well, Charles, Grandpapa didn’t want to travel to California after his leg amputation. And Mama and I found a home here in Salt Lake.” Arthur looked at the boy with a gentle gaze, a small smile playing on his face.

“Dinner’s ready!” Louanne called from the kitchen. “You two ought to come wash up.”

Charles scrambled down from his father’s knee. “Comin’ Mama!”

Arthur lingered for a moment, watching the flames as they danced lively. The warmth of the fire mirrored his heart. Then he leaned on his knees and stood, broad and tall, his family’s provider.

“Comin’ dear!” he hollered, striding into the kitchen where his family awaited him.

Ending

Di Dante

Leaves fall gracefully down . . .
Rest on the ground
Where life eventually ends –
Until it again comes around.

Bears prepare for the long sleep ahead
Looking for caves that make a nice bed.
I say, “Good Night” to the moon
and dream of foxes in dens.

Voices rejoice – voices sing:
Long live the king,
Long live his reign,
We rejoice in his grace,
The grace of my mother . . .
Disgrace of another,
And hope in the hands of our lovers.

Miscellaneous Voices is an academic literary journal that publishes creative writing of Southeastern Community College students and community.

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