



# THE PAW

Tualatin

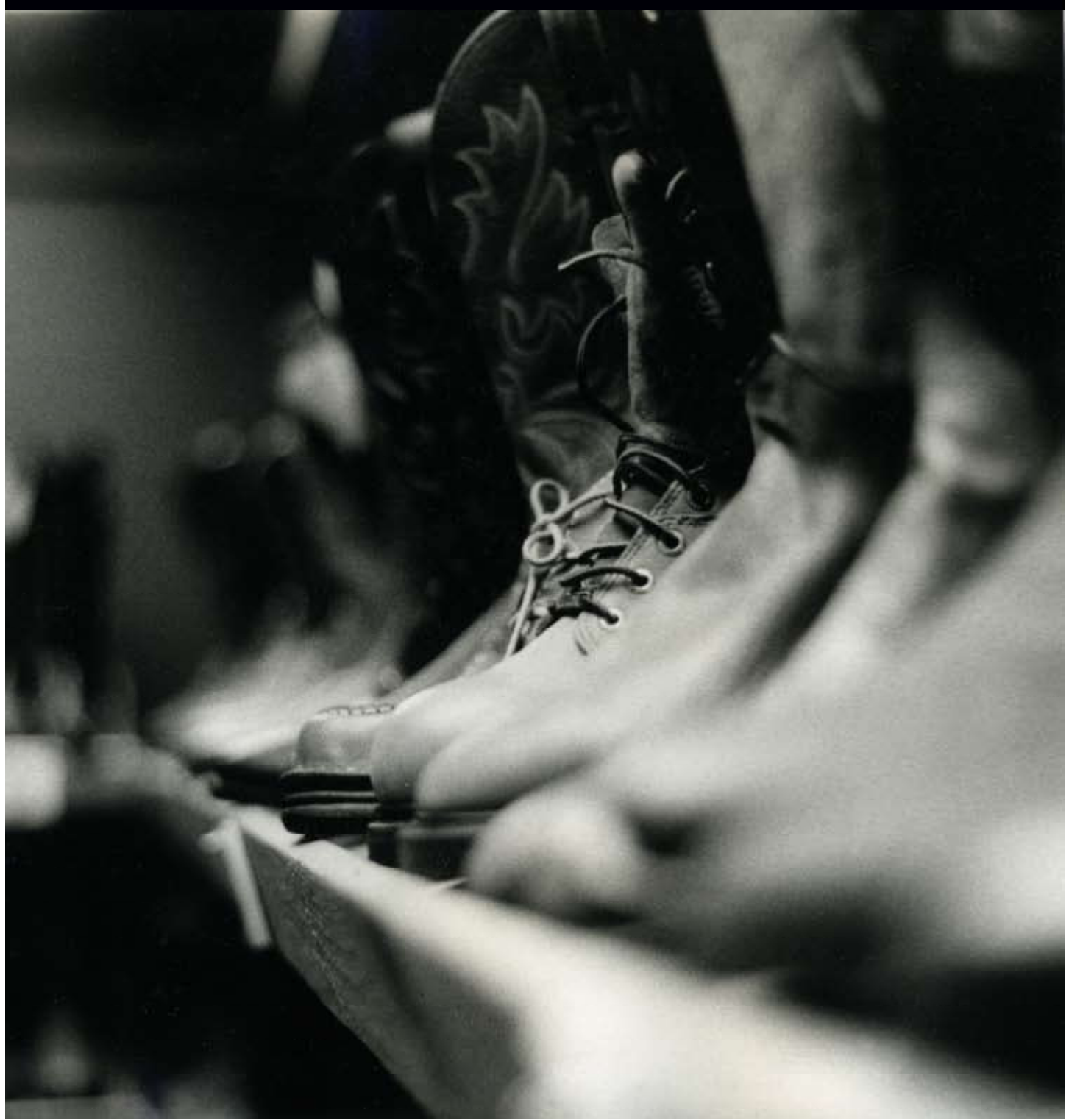
High's

Electronic

Publication for

Art and

Writing



# Letter from the Staff

Dear Readers,

Well, it's the end of the year! This has been a great first year for THE PAW; we released not one but THREE issues brimming with student writing and artwork, and were received by the students of Tualatin High with vastly greater enthusiasm than I, as cofounder, ever anticipated.

I can honestly say that this has been an exciting year; it was certainly filled with a great deal of sweat and blood on the part of the staff of THE PAW. Since it was our first year operating, there was at first some difficulty getting the magazine on its feet, but, thanks to the diligence and devotion of our staff members, we were able to pull through. Great job, guys. A big thank you as well to teacher Shem Malone for lending us the Journalism room after school, and to Mrs. Payne for being our devoted supervisor.

And, of course, we also owe our gratitude to all of the writers and artists who submitted their work to the magazine. If it were not for your interest and support, THE PAW would not exist. You have no idea how heartening it was to see our inbox overflowing with submissions for every issue; you kept us going! If possible, we hope that next year will yield even more interest. So please, keep us in mind over the summer, and make sure to keep drawing and writing!

Sincerely,

Emma  
Cofounder of THE PAW

## THE PAW STAFF

Susan Payne- Advisor

Melissa Aust

Margaret Campbell

Emma DeFontes

Gillian Downey

Marianna Saucier

David Shumway

Patreece Suen

Cover Art: "Boots" by Haley Fisher

# Brainwaves

Laura Houlberg

sustained by norepinephrine  
confront him non-fictitiously  
my story on a spin, you see  
i need reliability  
to swim up from an empty void  
slave of pavlov, scared of freud  
the beating swiftly escalates  
while slips allude a quick escape  
from harmony?  
a warm embrace  
so comforting  
yet so cliché  
"im the reason why" i say  
you act like the authority  
on matters  
what does?  
not so deep  
i thought we had agreed to keep  
it bound  
and i look around

and see so many auras i could match with  
voices i could laugh with  
places i could run to  
with people that would jump to  
the challenge  
of searching  
for more than just a quick fix  
are you understanding this?  
keep me up and put me down  
breaking as i hear the sound  
metaphors included in  
the way that  
i murder  
this stream of insecurity  
a dream so existentially  
impartial

although you'll never know  
i'd rather haunt these halls alone.



Alexandra Taylor

# Raging Beauty

JJ Sayers



You cry today      You are the seas  
And rage tomorrow      The mighty oceans  
Your spirits are dark      Whole lands fear your enmity  
And your heart is troubled      Men respect your power  
Your fury, it flows      You are worshipped by some  
In waves of anger      And hated by others  
Up and down      But what men think  
Rise and fall      Is unimportant  
To and fro      When the morning sun  
With grief giving way      Strikes your stunning features  
To hatred so black      Be still, open waters  
It drives men off their feet      Be calm  
And drowns them in sorrow      All is well



Alexandra Taylor



## The Music

*JJ Sayers*

You lived your life in music  
You gave to it your soul  
You wrote a song of life  
Meant for rock and roll

An artist with your pen  
The lyrics you did write  
They kept your heart alive  
Made you feel alright

Consuming all you were  
But keeping you alive  
Notes, they did explode  
Inspiration, it arrives

For many years you wrote  
It took in all your time  
Filled with your insanity  
Engrossed inside your rhyme

Now in your later days  
The words, they flee your mind  
Your pen no longer moves  
This stillness so unkind

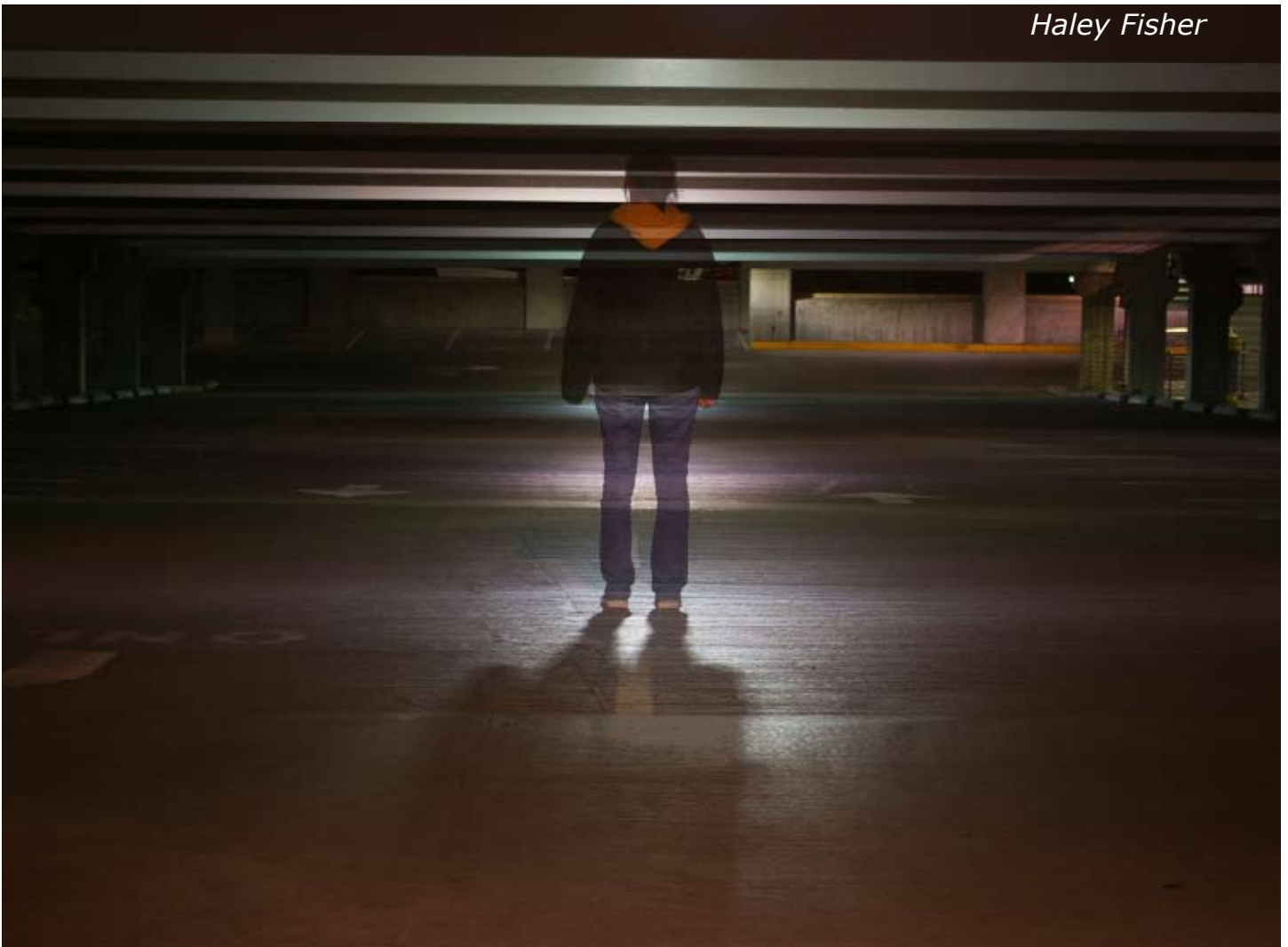
Since you no longer write  
There's no reason to be here  
You burn the song you wrote  
And now you disappear

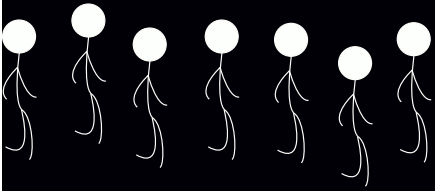
## *The Nameless*

*JJ Sayers*

Nameless, faceless people fading by me  
Little willed men all abiding  
Looked down and saw my feet moving towards  
Something unseen, unredeemed, always forward  
Don't know what I was looking for, just something more  
Guess I was searching for some distant shore  
Stopped walking then, decided to be free  
As nameless faceless people faded by me  
Stood for a moment and turned around  
Lifted my head to the sky, waited for a sound  
And the most blaring sonance that came upon me was silence  
Revealed to me something that can't be explained by any science  
Noticed an old friend coming near, cleared my cobwebbed throat and uttered "hey"  
My friend floated spechlessly onward, his eyes filmed over with grey  
I saw then all the rest were still walking, all the shes and hes  
And the nameless, faceless people kept fading on by me

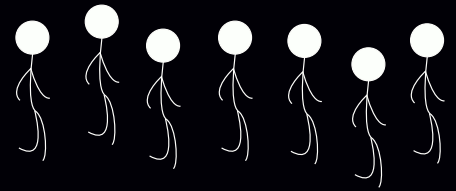
*Haley Fisher*





# REBELS

*JJ Sayers*



We are only rebels of forgotten times  
 Our stories are different  
 Our anguish the same  
 So many thoughts  
 A manifold of feelings  
 That lead in various directions  
 And merge into a solitary path  
 We walked this path, we rebels  
 Different increments of duration, perhaps  
 But we all traveled it for a time  
 And during our passage, some bore the picket sign  
 Some sang, some spoke, some lead, some followed  
 Still others wielded the fist  
 Some did it all  
 Through our words, our music, our acts  
 We say the said the same thing in many ways  
 No  
 No to so many things, but the voice we meeled with  
 most mightily  
 The voice that told us the lies  
 That we could be nothing, that we are simple pawns  
 In a chess game that will inevitably end  
 But the voice of guile we stand against  
 Has another voice, a sweet voice  
 This voice has told us that we could become anything  
 That the sky is the limit, that the chess game will end  
 with us victorious  
 Be damed, you silver tongue, you deceiver, you  
 breaker of dreams  
 We believed you, in our naivety  
 And in this erratum we climbed to the sky, believeing  
 we were invincible  
 That we could not be touched if we made our pres-  
 ence strong  
 But we were shot down from our unstable ladder of  
 stupidity  
 And we fell miles to our destruction

The short minutes of vertigo seemed endless  
 And in this maddening eternity we suffered  
 We wallowed in our misery  
 Burning in our humiliation  
 But we shall rise again  
 We will conquer our anger and swallow our pride  
 And find our way back to the path  
 And as we pick our way towards peace  
 We smile, speaking words of strength  
 Yes  
 To our shared strength  
 Our fellowship  
 Our love

*Alexandra Taylor*

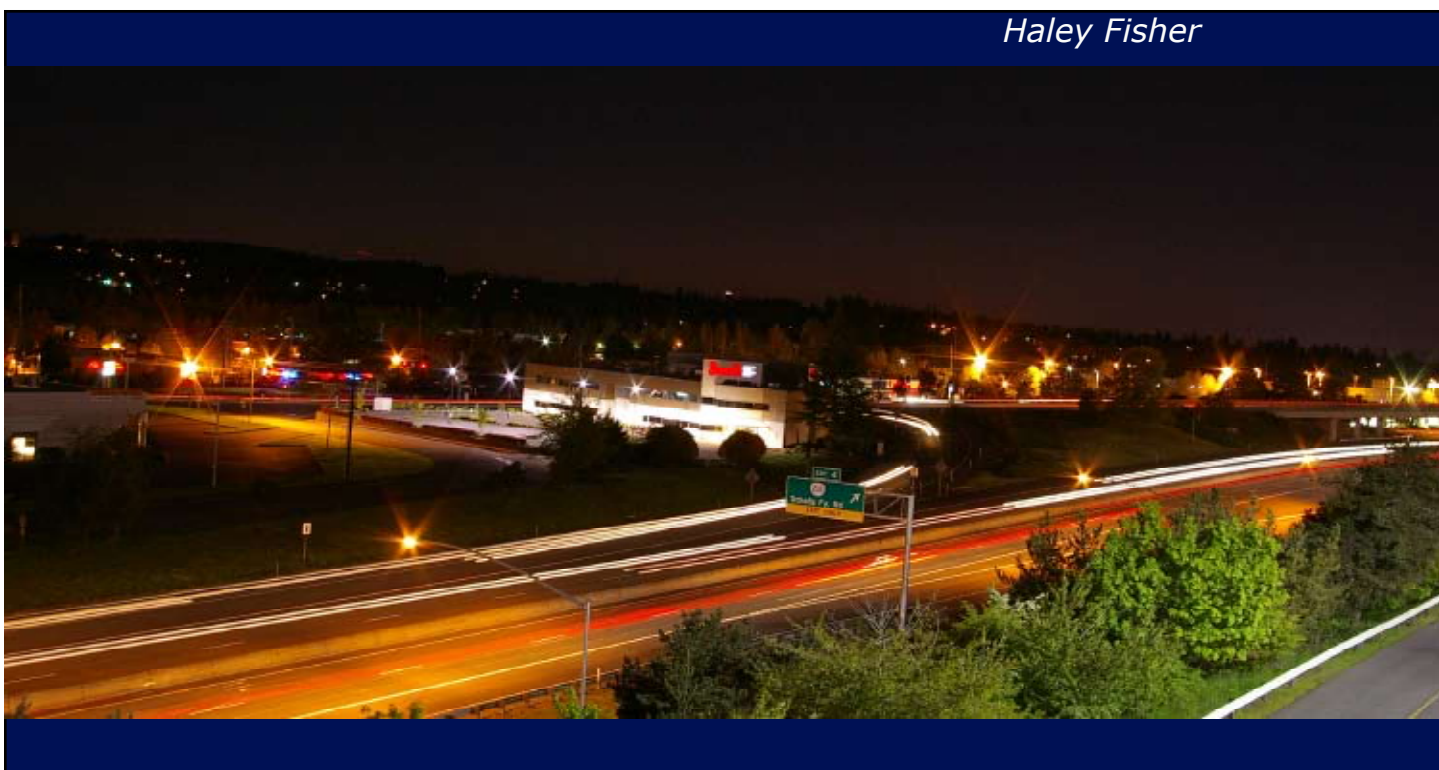


## **Boredom**

how sad it is  
that we can't find  
any way  
to spend our time  
so we sit and drink  
old red wine  
thinking of  
times sublime  
and we try to put  
into rhyme  
all the things  
we lose to time

*JJ Sayers*

*Haley Fisher*



*JJ Sayers*

You've done to me  
A frightful crime  
Which I can't describe  
In a thousand lines  
But revenge I'll take  
Over grueling time  
I'll exact from you  
A sinister fine  
You'll pay with joys  
All you're free time  
I'll take from you  
Life's finest wine:

Your work, your love  
On your dreams I'll dine  
And spit out terrors in the night  
There's no running this time  
You can't escape  
I'm not a tumor found benign  
I'm here to suck your life bone dry  
Such a crime

## **Revenge**

I can't forgive  
Instead of time  
I'll make you live  
Until they find  
You've finally left  
This world behind





## *Untitled*

I see you here  
But where am I?  
I always hear  
Your collective sighs  
When you know  
About my lies  
I cannot help it  
But I'll say goodbye  
Just for you  
I'll go get high  
And dream of things  
That man defies  
And I'll drift far  
In cloudless skies

*JJ Sayers*

*JJ Sayers*

## Cell

Alone in cold  
Cold single cell  
There is a certain  
Ghastly hell  
No angels come  
With ringing bells  
I'm lost alone  
Whisper farewell

*A poem about A Long  
Way Gone: Memoirs  
of a Boy Soldier by  
Ishmael Beah*

*Nick Gellos*

My heart distraught as I walk  
among the dead,  
filled with confusion and my life  
that I dread,  
Here in this country of hate,  
I walk alone with no mate,  
I do not keep track of time, for my  
soul is lost and my life is spinning  
out of control,  
The government is corrupt and  
our country is flawed,  
I feel no emotion because  
I've seen it all, everyone is gone  
and I am beginning to fall,  
It's already too late to help the  
people, they're all gone....  
A Long Way Gone.

*Accumulation*

*Margaret Campbell*

I am an accumulation  
hair neatly combed  
a product of a million  
deaths  
tears  
pains  
sorrows  
I am an accumulation  
clothes neatly pressed  
mind neatly folded  
a product of a million  
births  
laughs  
joys  
revelations  
don't tell me I am special  
don't tell me I am unique  
don't speak for others  
if you are truly sincere  
it still means little  
I am only these things to you  
and who are you?  
and where have you been?  
what have you seen?  
to anyone I could be everything  
but to everyone I am nothing  
a fat American drain on the  
planet  
don't judge me  
special or anything  
be with me  
watch me, listen to me  
watch me laugh until I cry  
then listen to me cry until I  
puke  
and then try  
just try  
to say you love me

*Fitting in*

*Jake McGrady*

I want new clothes  
I want this, I want that  
I want to fit in  
What is fitting in?  
Blending in, losing yourself  
Putting on a mask that hides you  
When you fit in you are  
lost not found  
Be yourself  
You are you  
I will be me, only myself  
This is who I truly am  
I will never try to fit in

## Mama I've Got a Secret

Kelsey Ostrander

Mama, I've got a secret  
But I'm not sure if I'm ready to tell  
When I whisper it in your ear  
Please don't say I'm going to hell

Please treat me like your daughter  
I need to know that you accept  
Don't make me think that the truth  
Is a secret I should've kept

Maybe you'll still love me...  
I'm just letting my hopes get too  
high  
But I'm not sure how long I can  
keep this up  
There is hurt with every lie

Maybe if I tell you  
You'll join me in silence this year  
This secret is so hard to let out  
It's your hate that I fear

Will you still love me?  
Or will things between us change?  
I know that once I tell you  
Your views about me will be rear-  
ranged

Before I share my secret  
I wanna know what you'll do or say  
So let me ask you this question:  
Mama, will you still love me if I'm  
gay?



Alexandra Taylor

## AFFLICTION

Alexa English

I came here to talk, I hope you understand  
Everything has been changing  
Because life isn't planned  
Things between us are just too different  
You've changed so much  
And you won't even listen  
I came here to talk  
To straighten things out  
And now that you're here, I just want you to walk  
Is it going to be worth it?  
To say I still need you  
When you say it's my fault  
That it was you who was lied to  
And as I explain  
How sorry I am

That I brought you to tell you  
Our friendship is a sham  
The look in your eyes betrays your emotion  
Don't try to guilt me into  
Drowning in your ocean  
We never controlled a word that we said  
The syllables fled from our mouth  
To become free from our head  
I don't want to hurt you  
I've done it enough  
But this time I have to,  
I'm calling your bluff  
Don't say I didn't try  
Don't say you did it all  
We tried hard enough  
Yet our hardest caused us to fall

# Into the Woods

*C.L. Cummings*

I remember Grandma's woods  
that lay behind her creaky door:  
ancient trees reached where they stood  
their great arms brushing the sky.

I remember Grandma's woods  
where it was always day  
I played amongst the trees' roots  
and rested in their shade.

I remember Grandma's woods

with a road of velvet moss  
remnants of fallen trees built bridges;  
in the place I didn't mind being lost.

I remember Grandma's woods  
back when I was still young  
remembering them is all I can do;  
now they're dead and gone--  
only a memory lingering on



*Alexandra Taylor*

Alexandra Taylor



## **MTL**

*Anonymous*

Time never stops  
But lives still end  
Some are taken  
Others robbed of chances  
Away to the home of Angels  
When god comes to carry us home

Love to the fullest  
Laugh always  
And live like you were dying  
Shoot for the moon  
Even if you fall short  
You'll land amongst the stars

In loving memory of  
Michael Lockwood

## **BROTHER**

*Jack Furlong*

I know you were a blessing,  
I know you help a lot,  
But lately I've been stressing  
I have been so distraught,  
I've read the stories of you,

And I've seen the tree planted for you,  
Now I have these tags around my neck,  
In honor of the life you lived,  
I know you won't be coming back,  
But I wish the knowledge you could give...



Alexandra Taylor

She wrote about  
me  
Me of all people  
I am the one she  
chose  
The person to be  
her hero  
I don't think she  
truly knows  
Knows the effect  
those few small  
words  
Pasted across her  
Myspace  
Truly have

## My Sister

Anonymous

I don't think she  
knows  
What it means to  
be looked to in  
times of need  
What it means to  
not only be  
needed  
But wanted  
I don't think she  
knows how much  
it means  
To be the one she  
chose



Alexandra Taylor

*Among What Is Thought*

Morgan L. Vickers

Eyes locked in thought

Hands are cold

Hearts are beating slow

Fading discernment, feeling lifeless

This notion is deep and creeps

This world will never be what we expected

We never thought of what could become,

Our ruined ambience

Buried with guilt, aware of our faults

Ápá pæDYÓDÓ ØæY áDUÓæ pæáá' souls

What can be done to rescue the conspicuous?

Signs are sought, but are not given

Mentally drained, we cannot comprehend much longer

Time like an hour glass, it's only ØBÓÓpYÓÓ

Grains of sand beating against the glass,

Grain by grain a life is removed from this earth

Heaven is crowding

· ÓUæ pæÓæ' pæØÖ

With no where to go, we suffer our own consequences

±ØPÓÓY'á' pæØÖ

Blood isn't pumping

Your body begins to fail

Eyes dilating, throat drying

Among your lenses, life glares between blinks

Your throat, as if clogged, inhales no oxygen

There's no bright light to be seen, almost unconscious you ask your self,

How could this be end?

Where is my rescuer?

But that's what everyone wants, a rescuer

But where was our rescuer for the end of life?

Rescuers weren't dispersed to save our planet when we needed them the most

So how could we expect to have a rescuer now?

Are we that deserving?

Do we not think of our selves as self-ish?

Do we only think that what's given to us we don't have to work for, or be grateful for?

You ask yourself, why is this the end?

Why is this, the end?

It didn't have to be

We were all capable of preventing this, but we didn't acknowledge it as what would obviously be our worst fear

The sun don't shine no more

The sky doesn't show no more

The grass isn't green

The grass is dirt

The dirt is dry

The dirt is cracked

What happened to our beautiful world?

It is no longer beautiful

It only resembles a hell on earth

Is it fair to say we were responsible?

Everything dead and absent

Now the earth is cold

Now the earth breaths slow

Now the earth is locked in isolation

# Bandwagoning

*JJ Sayers*



High off my emotion  
Feeling be my drug  
Don't make me go slow motion  
I'd sooner have them pull the plug

Don't think a single instance  
I'll wait for any reason  
Can't you see me in the distance?  
Slowing down would be a treason

Can't seem to quench this need  
To be where everything goes down  
To be socially guaranteed  
I'll be rewarded common ground

I won't let myself be left out  
I've been there many times before  
I'd suffer torture, sickness, drought  
To avoid being booted out the door

With disgrace I'm well acquainted  
I've felt shame a time or two  
Everything I was is tainted  
To gain the "friends" that I pursue

So none of this is real  
Does it matter in the end?  
I may die lonely and without reason  
But at least for a time I could pretend

I refuse to be introspective  
Won't let helpful thoughts stick around  
The world doesn't give a damn about perspective  
It's concerned only with renown

I now recognize my poison  
Yet there's not a thing to do  
But rot in my corrosion  
And think of happy memories few



## *The Blackcoats of Maelmaris* A Regime of Wolves, (continued) By David Shumway

*(Continued from Issue Two)*

“I...I see now! You’re a Blackcoat! Well you...haven’t got your pack...of Maelmarian dogs to help you now...you’re...all alone!” Van Daum writhed on the ground against the man’s grip. He squirmed partly free of the man’s grasp and yelled at the Cadre again. “What are you waiting for? I’m not afraid of blood on my face, fools! You know what I did to the Minister Aëlvice! Our Maelmarian friend certainly does...OPEN FIRE!!!”

It was only upon giving this order that Van Daum realized the Cadre’s guns weren’t pointed at the man in green. They were pointed at him.



“What is this...?”

“Surprised my old friend?” This came from Leovych, who casually made his way to the center of the room. He was holding a wicked looking scythe in his left hand, which was handed to the man in green and effectively used to pin Van Daum to the ground in place of his assailant’s very-able hand.

“Leovych you traitor! What was the price? Thirty silver alcrysals?” Van Daum bellowed with infernal rage.

“Oh...I’m afraid you must forgive Leovych Trostia.” Leovych laughed smugly. “He may have been the most loyal person you ever knew.”

“May have been?! Who are you, and what have you done to him?!”

The man who seemed to be Leovych laughed again, somewhat demonically this time. “Wiechold Van Daum, after chasing you across Aether for seven years, I would have laughed at the idea of such a cunning viper like yourself being caught in a silly trap such as this.”

Van Daum gritted his teeth. “You have not trapped me yet!” he wriggled furiously. “I will never submit to you Maelmarian dogs!”

“Ha ha ha! That’s what you never seemed to understand, Van Daum. Your hated ‘regime of dogs’ has a few

wolves prowling around in it!” He reached up and put one hand firmly on his head, and ripped off his long gray wig to reveal fiery crimson hair. Van Daum saw for the first time the man’s cruel, piercing green eyes, with the greed and ambition that burned behind them.

“Do you recognize me now? The man who is restraining you so well is Xeris Malgrathea. You may know him from the Larterian Wars...do you read the newspapers?”

“Of course I read the newspapers!” Van Daum bellowed with venom. “I know what General Malgrathea did to my homeland Galidra during the wars! I know of those savage, merciless gas attacks and your ‘total’ war that devastated our countryside!”

Xeris glanced nonchalantly at the man with the fiery hair and pressed his scythe blade harder on Van Daum. The man laughed again, but this time it was with a calm smugness. “What your newspapers didn’t tell you...is that it wasn’t Xeris who came up with the ideas to do that, nor do they tell you that Xeris in fact did very little tactical strategizing at all on the eastern front...”

He was interrupted by Xeris rolling his eyes noticeably. “Quit it!” The man with the fiery hair yelled. “Let me have my little bit of...ugh, where was I?”

“You were about to tell me who was truly responsible for the absolute destruction of my homeland, and it sounded as if you were about to brag about it... you sick vormache...”

“Shut your foul Cooperatist mouth!” The man kicked Van Daum hard in the mouth with his steel-toed leather boot. Van Daum’s jaw gave a sickening crack and blood spewed everywhere. “You’re right...it was me. I was responsible for all those dead, all those wounded, all those scarred miles of country side!”



He leaned menacingly over Van Daum, took off his disguise, and donned the scarlet tipped jet black coat and polished iron shoulder pads of a Maelmarian commander handed to him by one of the false cadre men. He had a cruel wide-sword on his back, under the old rifle.

“I was responsible, I, Lein Sevolver, a name that strikes fear into the hearts of scum like you!” He grinned evilly and drew his broadsword at the poor man’s throat.

Even with a broken jaw, Van Daum was still able to remain defiant. “Oh...really? I had never...heard of you...only...of Malgrathea...”

“Agh!!!!” Sevolver shrieked with madness. He brought his sword around to plunge it into Van Daum’s chest when Xeris intervened and blocked the sword’s trajectory with his scythe. In a lightning motion, Xeris’s scythe doubled back and slammed into Sevolver with its broadside, knocking him across the room.

“I will permit some abuse of the prisoner, Lein, but this one is more important than your ego.” Xeris said very calmly. “Wiechold Van Daum, you are under arrest for treasonous acts against the crown, contemplated murder of a government minister, and for committing and conspiring to commit terrorist acts, and for the unlaw-

for this prisoner in Ulsemrothis. That will be all. Guards, take the prisoner to cell block A.”

“No! I have a score to settle with him! I want smell his flesh burn!!!” Sevolver reached for Van Daum, but was restrained by Xeris. “Agh! Let me have him!”

“That’s extremely disturbing, commander.”

“It’s fatigue, Crew Chief. He just needs some rest.” Xeris said quietly.

The Crew Chief raised an eyebrow. “Hmm...well if Sevolver is on your head, then we should be fine, general. See to it that he doesn’t destroy anything. We all remember that Officer’s Ball last year.”

While this was happening a small cabin boy walked by them carrying a bucket of tools. He stopped and stared at Van Daum’s wretched form. There was an odd sort of connection between the two, as the boy looked on with pity and wonder. Van Daum stared at the boy and quickly slipped his heavy book of writings out of his overcoat using only his elbows. The book fell to the ground and the boy picked it up and cradled it in his hands. The Red Storm Guards didn’t notice; they were talking amongst themselves about the wild things they had seen Sevolver do before.

Taking full advantage of this, Van Daum whispered to the boy, “Read this, and see that...the world gets...to read it also...” Van Daum used everything he had and endured immeasurable pain from his shattered jaw to deliver this final, most important message. The boy nodded and raced off toward things unknowable, but every step he took was hope for Van Daum.



*I do not know how to triumph against Tumulteon’s power; I doubt any one man or group of men could even figure it out. It will take an uprising of the masses to unseat him, something I had always talked about but suppose I could never grasp until now. One day, someone else will realize this too. One day the entire world will realize it hopefully. I can only hope that they remember who came before and what they stood for, and use that memory of their long suffering to destroy their oppressors! I hope my ideals and my struggle will set this Great Revenge in motion. In some way, I will be the end of you Tumulteon! And you Maelmarian dogs! And all the servants of the ruling class!*

Sevolver and Xeris left the Crew Chief to his job, and left to wherever they were supposed to be next. The Crew Chief motioned to the Red Storm guards, who promptly dragged Van Daum off to his destiny.

*I find comfort in facing my horrible, prolonged doom by knowing that the world will not have heard the last of Wiechold Van Daum! One day I...we will have our revenge! The revolution of the people against their oppressors will go on...forever!*



Sevolver settled into a huge cushy armchair in the Imperial suite of the Ziratos. He exhaled happily and put his feet up, where a mirthless servant began to massage them.

“What do you think of this Xeris?” he said with a grand flourish. “Such luxury! This suite is huge! Like, ten times the size of my house!” He delightedly grabbed a huge slice of sweet ham from the table and began to devour it.

They were in a massive room filled with all of the delights and comforts of life. On the walls were gigantic portraits of Tumulteon, his palaces, his gardens, his favorite places in the empire; all framed by shimmering marble columns. The ceiling was a huge dome of crystal that beheld a radiant view of the stars from the chamber. At one end of the room was a sprawling heated bath pool, with luscious tropical plants soaking in the hot mist from the baths. On another side of the room were many window-paned doors that led to a giant movie theater and planetarium. On still another side of the room, was a huge hall filled with exercise equipment. And on the far end of the room, an indoor garden complete with a towering waterfall and full-sized pine trees served as an all too poignant memory of the mountains of Eclipsor, for that is what the garden was based on.

In the direct center of the room there was a comfortable living room around a blazing fire, where Sevolver and Xeris were now sitting. Behind them, was a wide ballroom staircase that led to Tumulteon’s private sleeping quarters, and the biggest, comfiest bed ever made in Aether. This place was forbidden to them, but it wasn’t tempting, for they would soon be home in Ulsemrothis, and there wasn’t any need for sleeping. Sevolver almost regretted their short trip, because he didn’t have time to exploit the splendor around him.

“It was nice of Tumulteon to let us use his suite.” Xeris replied.

“Ah, I’m sure it’s because he’s so grateful we captured Van Daum.”

Xeris raised his fists to his face and held them there in thought. “I must confess, I cannot stop thinking about Van Daum...it is very strange.”

Sevolver abruptly stopped gnawing his succulent slice of ham and sat up. “Ya know what,” he said vacantly. “I can’t stop thinking about him either. I don’t understand Wiechold Van Daum...he threw his life away chasing a stupid dream! Everything he ever did was for that one cause. It just unnerves me a little.”

“What unnerves you?” Xeris asked.

“I don’t know, that sort of consuming passion, I guess. I don’t see how a person could do that their whole lives. What was it about his ideals that made him believe in them so fervently?”

Xeris laughed quietly to himself. “I’ve never heard you use such big words.”

“Yeah well, we’re talking philosophy, sort of.”

“Hmm...that’s exactly it. Philosophy. That’s what drove Van Daum mad, made him assassinate a minister, made him throw bombs into Tumulteon’s garden, made him return to Ulsemroth and risk being caught. Something had to have been driving him, right? After all, Van Daum in his right mind would have seen right through our ruse,” Xeris took another sip of his sparkling cider. “After all, you nearly blew our cover so many times.”

“Me?! And this is coming from the guy who walks behind him like some inhuman robot, barely stopping to breathe? Van Daum had to have noticed that!”

“He did, though; I saw his unease many times. There were quite a few instances where something very

troubling or out of place happened, and Van Daum simply shook it off and kept going. The question is why.” Xeris paused. “Do you remember when he first showed you that book?”

Sevolver thought for a bit. “Yeah, he uh...I said something about his ‘fiery spirit’, suddenly he goes into that fervor and talks about, ‘the soul of the party’ and whatnot.”

“There you go.”

“What?” exclaimed Sevolver.

“Van Daum was in a frenzy of zealous belief over his newly devised thesis, and that explains a lot of things.”

“For example?”

“Lein, belief has often been called a blessing but it is also a curse at times. And other times when it really seems to be a curse, it is actually a blessing. Just as your body is nourished by the ham you’ve been gorging yourself on, the soul needs nourishment as well. But eventually, if you eat enough of that meat you’ll become fat and sluggish...especially if you carry on the way you are doing right now.”

A pause as Sevolver glanced down at his stomach. “What do my eating habits have to do with any of this? And anyway, I’m not fat!”

“Of course not, because you would become ashamed of yourself like you are now, and stop eating. It is possible to do this because food is less appetizing and more tangible than ideas. Do you understand?”

“Umm, no...”

Xeris sighed. “The way you were gorging your body with ham, the soul can gorge itself as well.”

“On ham?” Sevolver asked skeptically.

“No, on ideas. That’s the key. Ideas aren’t like ham, but they’re just as bad when abused, and it’s easier to abuse them because one craves an idea more, but does not necessarily know the weight of it.”

“Ah ha! Now I understand! Van Daum’s normally keen instinct was fat and sluggish because he gorged himself on ideas! He became sick on ideas!” Sevolver thought puzzlingly. “Are ideas contagious?”

“More so than any virus in Aether.”

“Wait, does that mean I’ll catch them and end up crazy like Van Daum?!”

Xeris laughed. “You’re far too obstinate to fall victim to some of Van Daum’s ideas about revenge and liberation.”

He became serious. “But there are many others who will feed heavily on such ideas, and a few will even gorge themselves to the same level of Van Daum. It is very dangerous, Lein. You know better than most about the empty purposelessness that seems to grip every peasant in Ulsemroth. You have surely seen their soulless eyes.

Different ideas catch fire at different rates. Some are very, very contagious, much quicker to spread than others. And these are usually very negative. Ideas like Revenge, and Hatred, and Power and Jealousy...the people of Ulsemroth are tinder for the fire.”

Xeris closed his eyes and sat silently for several minutes, before finally saying very simply, “I did not hate Van Daum for his mannerisms or his identity, or even his theories. However, I did despise that shriveled man and all the things he did for one reason: he had the wrong ideas. Had Van Daum taken all his revolutionary actions for the right reasons, I may have joined him. But he did it for hate, fear, and loathing. Van Daum’s motive was always revenge for the Larterian Wars. Many people latched onto that idea to get revenge for their own reasons, whatever grievance they seem to have. It’s an army of very angry people.”

“You’ve got that right.” Sevolver said.

Xeris poured more cider, and some for Sevolver as well.

“Listen carefully Sevolver, for this is an idea you can safely latch onto. Call it a purpose, if you will. The people of Ulsemroth are deprived and hungry for ideas. And there are maniacs like Wiechold Van Daum thoughtlessly spreading terrible ideas around. As I said, the people are tinder for the fire. Our purpose is to keep that fire from spreading by eliminating its sources. As it so happens,” Xeris continued, “Maelmaris as a whole was created for a similar purpose, but one that is selfishly twisted, and that I am not fond of. Maelmaris targets not only bad ideas but good ones too; essentially all ideas that are unsatisfactory to Lord Tumulteon. Unfortunately, this lockdown on the migration of ideas is almost as unhealthy as the spread of the bad ones...”

“Heavy stuff...” Sevolver muttered sheepishly.

Xeris handed one of the glasses now brim-full with lovely sparkling cider to Sevolver and kept another for himself. “Our work is cut out for us, Lein.”

They toasted and downed their cider like old friends. Sevolver said casually, “I guess it’s a good thing Van Daum’s ideas and that stupid book died with him...”

Xeris raised his glass to his lips and wore a troubled expression on his face. “Yes, it’s very fortunate...” He stopped to drink. “I greatly enjoyed working with you, Sevolver. As much as I love my desk job presiding over the police of Ulsemrothis-”

“Ah yes, you’re Commissioner now aren’t you?” Sevolver asked enviously.

“...Yes, but I think it’s time for a change.” He turned to Sevolver and looked him in the eyes. “Lein, what you think of renewing our old partnership? If we are to tackle this great challenge, I would like to do it with you. What do you say? I could ask Minister Burton for a transfer when we get back...”he trailed off.

Sevolver was taken aback. “You? Me? You’d give up your cushy position to travel around the empire with me and stop the spread of bad ideas or whatever? I’d...be honored, I guess. But I’d have to leave Ulsemrothis for long periods of time, right?”

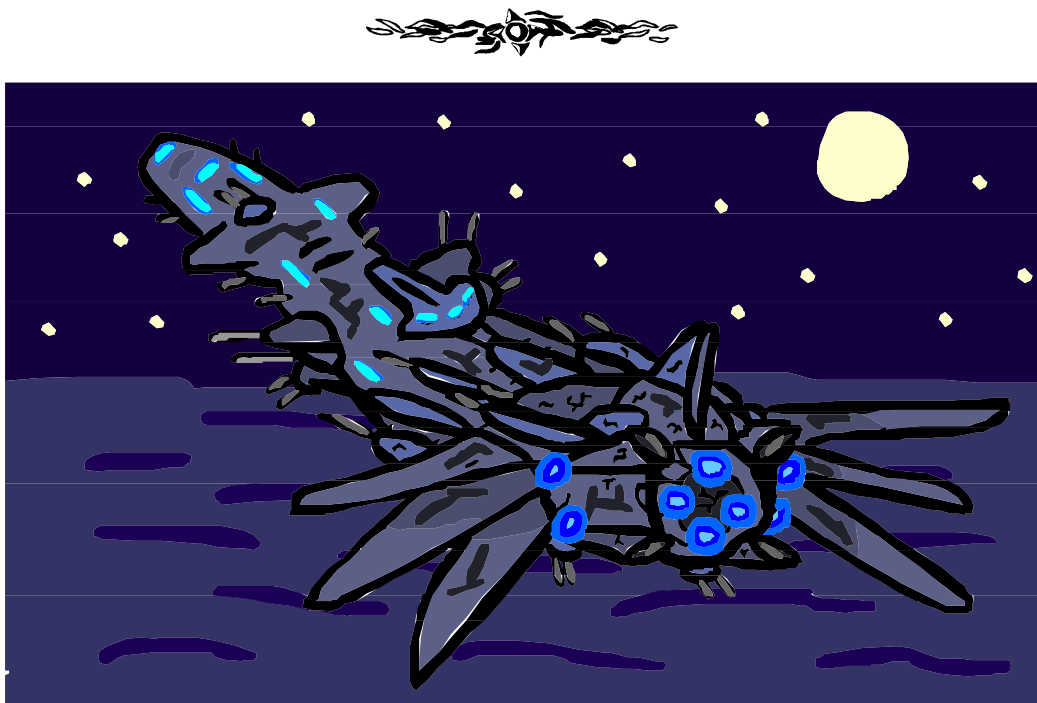
“Come, the empire needs two men like us; to handle not just the revolutionaries and extremists, but their philosophers as well. Remember, it will be a tough, lonely job.”

Sevolver drank the last of his cider and deeply considered the proposal. Finally, he put his glass down and shook Xeris's hand. "Welcome back, old buddy," he grinned. "I thought that high rank had rotted all the decency out of you. Let's take out those vormaches like Van Daum wherever they appear!"

Xeris smiled. "I am glad, Lein. We'll fulfill our grand purpose together. I wouldn't have it any other way."

At this, Sevolver pounded his fist in the air, tossed his glass at the wall, and dozed off to sleep in the big arm chair.

Xeris laughed silently, leaned back, and looked up at the stars shining bright through the dome, contemplating their infinite mystery.



## *Glossary of Terms You May Encounter:*

- Alcrysals**      Currency; Van Daum is making a biblical reference about treachery.
- Black Coats**      A slang term for members of the organization "Maelmaris".
- Maelmaris**      Secret police of Ulsemroth, under the direct command of Prime Minister Burton. Maelmaris is utilized for many purposes, from censorship agents to military officers to special operations corps to Lord Tumulteon's personal cabin boys.
- Larterian Wars**      Massive worldwide war in Galidra and the Ereban esert; Ulsemrothic atrocities.
- Vormache**      A slang curse term, akin to "bastard". It is derived from the name of an extraordinarily ugly swamp creature.



*Christine Cummings*