



The Four Elements

The Inkwell

Undergraduate Literary Magazine

THE INKWELL

Spring 2016, Issue 1: "The Four Elements"

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Christopher Buza '16

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Marc Lee '17

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Jessica Romeo '17
Bridget Belfiore '18

**MARKETING &
SOCIAL MEDIA DIRECTOR**
Marina Lindland '18

TREASURER
John McGovern '17

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

During spring semester, we sometimes get so overwhelmed by work, scheduling, and exams, that we can barely find time to sit down and enjoy the return of the warm weather. So, for this issue, we decided to get back in touch with the world around us and challenge readers to write about the four elements; earth, water, air, and fire. We were thrilled at the outcome, and we hope you will be, too.
Enjoy!

~THE INKWELL STAFF~

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EARTH

Beyond Earth -- John McGovern '17

Cosmic Birth -- Justine Ferrara '18

Path of Life -- Gabriella Minos '19

AIR

Wings -- Brownyn Kelly '19

Ode to Carcass -- Vincenzo Frosolone '17

Driving from Nanuet -- Bridget Belfiore '18

Advice for Taking Flight -- Celia Wilson '19

Gasp -- Marina Lindland '18

A Cup of Tea -- Emily Bishop '16

WATER

The Water Olympics -- Brownyn Kelly '19

Drowning -- Michelle Hernandez '19

Why the Seaweed is Always Greener: A Rant -- Alyssa Vigorito '19

How to Drown a Sailor -- Sabina Dirienzo '19

The Phoenix and the Koi -- Mary Kate Marren '17

FIRE

Dying Embers -- Meaghan Conlon '16

A Strike and a Match -- Katie Barrera '18

The Wastebasket Story -- Sabina Dirienzo '19

Flare -- Jessica Romeo '17

Earth

Beyond Earth

by John McGovern

If there were no Earth
None as far as your eyes could see
Nothing below your feet
Nothing hanging over your head
You would be free

If there were no clouds above you
No mud and dirt between your toes
No wind blinding and stinging you
No rain hitting and freezing your face
You would have no limits

But what I see now is Earth
I do feel the dirt between my toes
I do feel the wind stinging my eyes
I do feel the rain making me cold
I am imprisoned by this Earth

I wish the best for you
Beyond the sky and clouds
With no Earth to hold you down
But I will stay here among the dirt, the wind, the rain
I belong here but you deserve the stars.

Path of Life

by Gabriella Minos

“Tell me, do you know the path of life? Can you show me?” She whispered to the wind. I have always known. Ever since the beginning of time, I have always known. It responded as it blew across her hair. Trust in me and I will carry you to places never before seen by human eyes. I will show you worlds that have yet to be discovered. But be cautioned, for I am merely a force of nature and cannot control how far you will go or where you will end up. That is my path.

Unsure of the ways of the wind and where she they would go, she continued on in her search. She walked all the way to the ocean. “Tell me, do you know the path of life? Can you show me?” She shouted over the crashing waves. The oceans quieted, Of course we know the way, ever since the beginning of time we have known. We can take you to places of solitude and beauty. Places never before seen by your kind. But beware, for we are a force of nature and cannot give you certainty in your destination. There are many of us and we know our paths well.

Once again the unreliability of the journey deterred her, so she continued on. Eventually she found herself at the mouth of a volcano. “Tell me, do you know the path of life? Can you show me?” The path of life is known to me and my kind. Since the beginning of time, it has been known. The molten bubbled and hissed its response. Come with me and I can show you power beyond your understanding. I can show you things never before felt by yours. But be forewarned, I am merely a force of nature and cannot ensure your safety.

Disappointed by this response she made her way back down. Head hung low and hopes almost gone, she traveled home. Weeks went by and she had hardly moved. From her place under the tree she wept, “What is my path? The winds and the oceans and fires know theirs. Why can I not find mine? Why?”

She felt the tree she leaned against begin to sway. My child, the tree groaned ever so quietly, you know your path. You have been journeying it all along. “How could that be true? I have no set course like the others. I know not my destination. I wouldn't even know how to get there.” Oh but weren't you listening, child. No one truly knows their destination. The path each journeys is ever changing and always a mystery. The winds, the oceans, and the fires know they have a path, they know that wherever they end up will bring them happiness. They do not know how exactly how they will get there, however. Each told you they can show you wondrous things but they could not tell their end. Life is uncertain, even that of a tree. Trust in life and you will be taken to beautiful places and see wonderful things. The earth is the road you will walk along, the winds will guide you, the oceans will pull you,

and the fires push you. Each of us a force of nature, created to help you find your way through the days and nights. My child you, yourself, are a force of nature if only you allow yourself to be. Cry not, for your path is already underway and you have done a marvelous job thus far traveling along it. Do not be afraid of uncertainty, do not be afraid of the unknown. If you lose your way and forget where it was you were headed, think back. Remember where you have been and you will remember where you are going.

There is only one thing certain in this life of yours — it is your life to live. If you allow it, all of us will help you along your way through day and night, all you must do is remember where your feet land and you will remember us.

Air

Wings

by Bronwyn Kelly

My shoulder blades are just bone.
They're alien to my body, only loaned,
since it lost its extension long, long ago.
My damp eye in the sliver of mirror starred back at me from the wall.
How could he possibly have that much gaul?
I traced my back with the pad of my finger
and realize my hand has started to linger
over the scar that has maimed my skin.
The only physical reminder of my sin.
I stare at myself through that grimy reflection,
and need a form of divine intervention.
Disgusting, dirty and wrong.
I can't stare at myself for that long.
Without my wings how could I ever be
the woman I always wanted to see.
My hair lost its glow when he left my side;
he took more than just my dignity, my pride.
I can still feel the razor blade of his knife on my back.
I lost the only thing I thought I could never lack.
I climb the creaking stairs that led to the roof.
He said he wanted concrete proof
of our love that we shared.
He took his "evidence" that I cared.
The roof is the closest to the clouds I'll be.
We'll see if our love becomes an infinity.
My toes curl over the edge
and I almost look down at the thorny hedge.
I fly, I soar in the air above.
I fall, I plummet without any love.
The world is as black as the heart in his chest.
My weary soul can finally now rest.

Ode to Carcass

by Vincenzo Frosolone

A violet sky is asphyxiated and beautiful
Under stress it gives me air to constantly give
Leaving none for myself to keep
My form is a testament to arrogance
All the air is yours for drifting
Blood in my body is wholesome yet captive
Yours flows free and remains
It showed me the leak in my tire
Sacrificing its alignment for your sake
That which carried me in the night to beat out the day
Learned the way of the carcass
At home air denies you recognition

Driving from Nanuet

by Bridget Belfiore

“The answer is blowin’ in the wind.”

Andria’s red Kia Soul speeds
Quickly on the Tappan Zee, gliding through the air
Past the Range Rovers and Acuras traveling from
Hectic homes and stressful jobs;
All bound by universal desire of destination.

A blonde boy sticks his blue candy-colored tongue out the window, and
We laugh and wave like we know him;
His hair shakes against the wind, who feels
Lonely and strong,
Hoping someone will notice her presence.

“The answer is blowin’ in the wind.”

My cousin and I lower the rain-stained window,
The wind’s wistful body sweeps throughout the car,
Hectic homes,
Stressful jobs,
Destinations;
She continues blowing leaves from streets,
Cleaning dust from eyes,
Teasing hair of balding men.

We open the window and blast Bob Dylan with
Large smiles and frosty faces as we let the wind
Greet us and listen to our song.

With disheveled hair and
Open windows,
We question the world;
Existentialist enquiries on a winter afternoon.
Bob Dylan serenades us,
“The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind.”

Advice for Taking Flight

by Celia Wilson

Remember your wings
watch as others fly away,
keep up now, they shout

if your wings lay
forgotten, don't wander away,
Come home with daylight

If daylight ends quick,
pray moonlight reflects your flight
Listen to your heart.

If your heartbeat stops,
hopefully you will gain wings,
the pen writes your tale

Pen to paper saves
those who are wandering,
that is what they claim

Pen opens up minds
words give flight on a paper
to all without wings

Believe your freedom
that pen to paper gives you,
brave thoughts give you wings.

You can keep up now,
recall your wings and take flight,
Don't shun what they say.

Gasp

by Marina Lindland

Reach up
and claw out the eyes of heaven
They are watching you die
and do nothing about it

My lungs shrivel in my chest
and my throat burns
aching for the sweet relief
of cool, fresh air

With shaking hands I pray
for the end
My head is swimming
No
Drowning in my frantic thoughts

Breathe
I can't
I gasp
I clutch my chest
to still my racing heart

Before the blackness
at the corners of my vision
take over my consciousness
Heaven intervenes

When did I end up on the floor?
My hands won't stop shaking
Feeling in my body returns
and I shiver
at the coolness of the air around me

Breathe
You're alive
You're here
You'll be okay
Breathe

A Cup of Tea

by Emily Bishop

It's the morning of April 26th and light filters in through the sheer curtains in front of the bay window. Rectangles of light stretch across the floor and reach towards the unmade bed in the far corner of the room. The electric kettle switches on and the sound of boiling water fills the small apartment. She shakes the last of the tea into the pot and pours the water over it. As she carries the pot and two chipped mugs back into bed he rolls over and takes the cup she offers with a soft smile.

She tilts the teapot over his cup and steam curls around the current of honey-colored liquid. Their noses are filled with rosemary and ginger as they lean back against the headboard and watch the curtains sway in the breeze from the open window above the sink.

For a moment there's no other sound in the room but the rustle of sheets and the dripping bathroom sink. Then he takes a sip of tea and slurps, just a little. She closes her eyes and commits the small noise to memory. They stay like that for a long time, side by side sitting up in bed; hands curled around the warm mugs; taking long, slow sips until the teapot is empty and the leaves are drying in the teabag. She asks if he'd like another and he nods. As she climbs out of bed he reaches out and his fingers brush her retreating back.

She refills the kettle and after setting it to boil she opens the door of the fridge, scanning the mostly empty shelves more out of habit than actual hunger.

"Do you want anything else? There's some takeout." She opens the origami box and sniffs it. "Still good, I think."

He laughs and shakes his head, "Just tea."

As she waits for the water she leans against the counter and gazes out of the small window at the brick buildings opposite and the sliver of pavement visible a few blocks away. There's no one in sight but some trash is being blown about by the wind. The sky is almost entirely blocked by buildings taller than her own, but she catches a glimpse of puffy, white clouds against the blue. She isn't sure what she expected but she's surprised to see it's a nice day outside.

The kettle whistles and startles her.

When she brings the second pot of tea back to bed he opens his arms and she falls into them, resting her head against his chest.

"Should we open the curtains?" she asks.

"I'd rather not know when it's coming. What do you think?"

She pauses, studying the hair on his arm before she answers, "I guess I kinda do. Call it morbid curiosity but I think I'd like to see the end of the world." She sits up and pours herself a half cup of tea. The scent of ginger grows stronger again. "I mean, don't you sort of want to know if all those movies got it right? This is a once in a lifetime opportunity," she says with a grin.

He chuckles at that. "An opportunity that's going to wipe out the human race. Are

you sad at all?"

She isn't, not anymore at least. It had been six months since the government had announced the efforts to redirect the meteor had failed and that it would collide with Earth on April 26th. She remembered the mass panic, the skirmishes with riot police and armored tanks in the streets, the power failures that lasted for days at a time. The world had gone to shit for a little while until everyone had realized it wasn't worth it. Why bother killing your enemies when they would be crushed by a massive fiery rock in a few months anyway? And you, crushed right along with them.

It was called (7438) ANUBIS after the Egyptian god of death and it was believed to have originated from an asteroid belt near the center of the galaxy. Honestly, she had grown weary of the constant profiles and projections based around the hunk of rock and ice hurtling toward them through space. She had gone through the grief and the anger and she had come out on the other side feeling empty but for curiosity.

She could remember the exact moment when she learned of her impending death; she had been at the grocery store, in the produce aisle, pondering the price of onions. Someone had looked up from the screen of their phone and screamed. As the news spread, people had put down their baskets and run out of the store but she didn't have anyone to run to, so she'd abandoned the onions and went to find the candy three aisles over. She cleaned out the stock of Almond Joys and then grabbed a few bottles of wine on her way out the door. The cashier guy had run home with everyone else.

She'd walked numbly through the streets, past crowds smashing windows and cars set alight.

On that day, she had gone back to her apartment and turned on the electric kettle. She had opened the tin of tea and breathed in the scent of rosemary and ginger. When the water boiled she'd poured it over the dry leaves and carried the pot and a mug to the chair in front of the bay window with a view of the river. She'd sat with the steaming cup in her hands and stared out the window until it had grown cold and the light had faded.

After that she hadn't left her apartment much, only for food every Tuesday morning when government trucks rolled through the streets distributing the bare necessities. She would sit in her chair in front of the window and drink or read or sometimes just stare at the sky, waiting for a fiery orb to appear on the horizon and wipe her off the face of the Earth.

It took her a long time to decide how she felt about the doom of mankind. Once the news sunk in, she admitted to herself she felt a little relieved. If she was being honest, her life had been stuck in a rut for a long time; both parents dead, a stale career, no boyfriend to speak of. A meteor hurtling towards Earth didn't seem like the worst thing in the world. But one day she drank two bottles of wine and opened an unread copy of National Geographic. She lost it at the article about African elephants in Botswana learning to coexist with local tribes and smashed a glass against the wall. She cut her hand on the broken shards and cried over the bathroom sink for a long time at the unfair demise of the poor, innocent African elephants.

She wandered listlessly through her apartment for a few days after that, every little thought or sight liable to trigger the waterworks again. It was then that she began to dread the arrival of (7438) ANUBIS.

But then, at some point in February she had stopped feeling sorry for herself and had grown angry instead. She was wasting what little time she had left in that stupid apartment, so she had begun to take walks. At first she was afraid to go further than the end of her block, somehow terrified that the meteor would hit while she was away from home – like that would somehow make a difference. Then one day, for no particular reason, she walked to the river, and on the next day she crossed the bridge and wound her way through the park on the opposite shore.

She began to walk every day, wandering through streets that had never, even after all these years living in this city, felt familiar to her. She allowed her anger and her loneliness and her confusion to guide her feet through the brick and concrete that would melt away in just a few short weeks. She tried to picture it – the end of the world – but all she could come up with were scenes from movies or that footage they always used to show on the History Channel of nuclear explosions.

The city wasn't empty then, far from it, and now, as she sits in her apartment sipping tea with him, she thinks of the faces that she passed everyday as she walked. They had saved her from her loneliness. People just like her, whose mundane lives had been interrupted by the news of their own scheduled demise, sending them spinning into an existential crisis six months long.

With each face she came to recognize, a little more of her anger and fear ebbed away until she was left with only her curiosity.

He had been one of those faces. Like her, he had taken to wandering the streets alone and lost in his own thoughts.

There was no pivotal moment that stood out in her mind of when they had ceased to be passing ships and instead had begun to define each other's dwindling worlds. But she liked his hands – rough and capable – and he liked her laugh – punctuating her words – and so they'd gravitated toward each other with nothing left to lose.

It was strange, to fall in love with no possibility of a future, so they had spent most of their time telling stories and when those ran out they sat side by side and sipped tea from her chipped mugs, watching the sky.

This morning, though, he says he would rather not know when the end is coming. She pulls the bottle of cheap vodka from under the bed and pours the last of it into their mugs.

The sun is bright enough to see vague shapes through the curtains but she ignores them and studies the place where his ear meets his jaw instead. She threw away her clocks a long time ago but she senses the morning grow old as if the blood in her veins has begun to tick.

The tea is gone and the scents of rosemary and ginger retreat to the blurred edges of the room but now she watches dust curling in the breeze from the window like the steam from the tea.

There is nothing left to do but wait.

She shifts so she can see his face more easily and the sheets rustle again. "Do you

think our lives will flash before our eyes? Or we'll see a white light at the end of a tunnel?"

He smiles. These are questions they've asked each other before. "Maybe. Or a man will pop out of that closet" – he nods – "and say that it's all been a big joke. 'Terribly sorry, but you're on Candid Camera.'"

She wrinkles her nose, "That would be awful."

"What? That the world isn't ending or that someone would do that to us?"

"That the world's not ending." She shakes her head. "That's the worst thing that could happen, I think."

He doesn't say anything for a minute, his fingers tracing invisible circles on her wrist. Finally he asks, "why?"

"Because I'm ready. All of this soul searching and all of this pain and then imagine if it missed, just hurtled right on past. I don't think I could survive that."

"I don't think anyone could," he admits. "I think we'd go and blow ourselves up just to finish the job. Nobody's got anything left in them, you know. Honestly, it's sort of a relief that it's finally today."

She sighs, "It's just the waiting I hate." She puts her head back against his chest and pulls him closer. "I wish we had more tea."

Water

The Water Olympics

by Bronwyn Kelly

“Mommmmm! Mom!” I whined in my high-pitched five year old voice, which must have been so endearing to the poor elderly couple with hearing aids next to me. I was standing in the shallow end of the pool, where my bright pink painted chipped toenails could just almost touch the bottom. I had my goggles fastened into place, held down by my long and unruly blonde hair that was plaited into two French braids by my ears. I was a gymnast in the circus, an entertainer for the ages. I decided I had to show off. My big toothy grin and wide eyes were plagued with mischief and pride, as I poked my mom lightly in her side for what seemed like the billionth time in a minute. “Mom, just watch this once, okay?” So she finally gave me her undivided attention and said, “Go ahead Bron, you got me this time. I’ll watch.”

So I held my nose, as all Olympic swimmers do, and catapulted my body forward to do my world-famous flip underwater. The water would... no I’m sorry, could... never betray me. Not now, not ever. I feel the water rush around my body. But sadly as I flip, my legs get stuck in the air like I’m doing a handstand and I do the worst thing possible... I panic. I see my entire five-year-old life flash before my eyes with such vivid details that my brain hurts. I finally flip myself around, after what I’m sure are hours upon hours of drowning silently in the pool. I twist my body so my legs come crashing down and I’m finally able to choke out a breath of air that scalds my lungs. I rip my goggles off and my hair aches from all the chlorine and knots in it from too much time in the pool. I look around me, and Jimmy Buffett’s “Margaritaville” fill my eardrums once again as I become more aware of my surroundings. I turn wild-eyed to my mother who turns back from sipping her tropical fruity drink to ask, “What happened?”

Drowning

by Michelle Hernandez

I'm on the bench in Central Park, holding a gift you gave me.
The lake reflected the dismal clouds above, a mood much like my feelings.
Today was supposed to be celebrated but now I'm here alone, reminiscing on what was.

Tears run down my cheek, and I let loose of the necklace for second as I try to dry my eyes.

It slips and somehow ends up in the lake.

It's like it was an impulse to go in and get it- what you gave me.

Before I know it I'm in the lake and my feet can't reach the ground.

My feet can't reach the ground! They can't! I'm trying to extend my legs to find a base but I can't!

I can't breathe here, I try to find sight again but I can't.

The water- it's brown, there's twigs here.

I try to scream but the dirty water fills in my mouth.

I'm mute, again. Mute like the way you made me feel when you wanted to right.

Mute when I had to bite my tongue when I felt like you hurt me way too hard, I have proof, you left bruises, remember?

But my fault, I was scared to yell mercy.

I've lost the air to breath, just like I lost what I thought was the love of my life.

Without both I don't know what to do.

Right now my thoughts are getting dainty and daintier as I'm reaching the base of this lake.

I'm drowning and I can't find the words for help.

But why you ask? Why am I drowning? Because, I'm trying to save something that you gave me...

but I should have let go of that idea of you a long time ago because look at where you got me.

Why the Seaweed is Always Greener in Someone Else's Lake: A Rant

by Alyssa Vigorito

Why is the seaweed always greener in someone else's lake, you asked? Well fuck you, that's why. I am so tired of people asking me why the sky is blue or why we can't see four-dimensions or why my wife left me. And I have no answers for any of those questions.

If I knew why the seaweed is always greener in someone else's lake, then by all means, I would tell people why. Heck, if I knew why, I'd ask the government for a million-dollar grant and instead of wasting it away on teaching a dog how to play piano, I'd use that money to buy a fucking pack of loose-leaf paper and a Dora the Explora themed pen, and I'd write the fucking explanation down. And then I'd send it off to the hungry Mongols that work at Buzzfeed so they can report on something useful for a change instead of another article titled 'Do You Know All the Lyrics to Mr. Brightside?'

Now you're asking me what would I do with the leftover money. I'd probably buy a lake and spend the rest of my life individually painting pieces of seaweed the color of neon green. I'd make it my lifestyle. I'd have kids and make it their lifestyle. We'd start up a family business. Why did my wife leave me? My lake would have the greenest seaweed in all of the world and people would come ask me why the seaweed is greener in my lake over theirs. And I'd say, fuck you, that's why.

How to Drown a Sailor

By Sabina Dirienzo

It is a truth universally acknowledged that sailors are easiest to drown if they're drunk. Though alcohol does not necessarily make a sailor easier to steer, it does make it infinitely easier to shove him off a boat. This truth is held by witches, bartenders, captains who are irritated by very specific sailors, and anyone who has ever worked on a cruise ship. Witches will likely find it most useful, as drunkenness also makes it easier to get a sailor to overlook the fact that one is reading Latin out of a very old book and periodically cackling to oneself.

Should the spell in question forbid the sacrifice from being drunk, a hungover sailor is also easy to drown. Simply trap him in some sort of container (boxes, barrels, a large suitcase, a small suitcase if he's short) wait however many hours one considers appropriate – the internet is excellent for these things! – and then shove the container into the water and off of the boat, preferably weighed down. If one is not on a boat, harbors and rivers are also acceptable. Unless they're the Charles River or otherwise full of mercury. Then you may produce a mutant.

Drunken sailors are also highly useful for karaoke, if you're not in a murdering mood. So. You know. Versatile options.

Phoenix and the Koi

By Mary Kate Marren

If a koi fell in love with a phoenix and the phoenix fell in love with the koi, where would they build their nest? The phoenix is the embodiment of fire, if he went into the ocean his fire and his life would be extinguished. The Koi, daughter of the tides would drown in the skies or be burned to ashes.

But love will always find a way.

They would build their nest between the raindrops and the storm clouds, within a feral tempest of cold white fire and warming tears a tempest where the heavens and seas truly meet. A typhoon of earthly forces and divine emotions collide, ascend and cascade together. They make their nest between the lightning flashes and warm rain. Out of this chaotic place, love is found.

Fire

Dying Embers

by Meaghan Conlon

On a cool summer night, when I feel numb inside, I want nothing more to be warm. My toes are dug into the sand as I hug my knees closer to my body, scooting my way closer to the fire that Pat has set up. The grains of sand stick to the back of my thighs as I allow myself to become mesmerized by the dancing flames. Entranced, I force myself to just breathe; my breath syncing up with the sparks released. Smoke clouds the figures of Chrissy, Kelly, and Sally; laughing and drinking and shaking their asses to the faint sound of music.

Henry throws himself down next to me, beer in hand, talking about the baseball game from earlier. Generally, I would love to talk about how the Mets are beating all expectations of their way to the World Series, but tonight I just want the flames to consume me--to put me out of my misery. I make sure to nod and comment in the right place, until Joe comes along, singing "Come on Eileen" and starts to dance around the fire. He extends a hand to Henry, who grabs it and joins him; getting up and accidentally kicking sand in my face, like someone putting out a bonfire.

My anger is no longer hot, like a fire that ignites and burns brightly, but rather it has cooled like embers left behind to extinguish. I have exhausted myself, used all the oxygen that fueled me and now all that remains is a faintly smoking pile of sticks. I don't even look at the girls as they walk past me on their way to get more beer.

I am the only one sitting in the sand, the only one enraptured by the fire. I wanted to be out in the open, where I feel like I can breathe, but not like this. There are people - "friends" all around me, but I feel so alone. The smoke, when the wind blows the wrong way, is suffocating, just like those stray thoughts I'm trying so desperately to keep at bay.

I am like the dying embers, fading in spirit and strength, as the night prolongs. I wish I could just forget everything that happened, allow my feelings to float away like smoke in the night sky. But I know that everything, the sadness, deadness, and anxiousness, will all stay with me; just the ashes and soot remain after a fire.

A Strike and a Match

By Katie Barrera

They say she's the girl that set the house on fire, but in a small town like that any little bit of news could get fanned into an uproar with how fast gossip travels. And it wasn't like much else happened that summer, at least not much anyone else can remember. But I remember...

I remember her hair, red as embers, and how it hung limp like wet rags in the Virginia heat.

People always focused on her hair when they saw her. Being born to two raven-haired parents, one could understand why, but I always noticed her eyes first. They were brown but not muddy the way some folks' are. They looked as if someone had spooned honey over all the gaps, and they shone brighter than diamonds when she smiled.

We were sopping in sweat that summer, but we were together, closer than we'd ever been. It was the end of junior year and it felt like the world was about to end and begin all at once. We'd seek out our escape along the backroads finding our way to the creek. Every day we could manage, we'd pack up our beaten book bags, lighter than they ever were during the school year, with towels, cheap shades, and the pair of bikinis we'd bought the day Roger Evans had given us a lift to the closest group of stores our town had. A sight too sad to warrant the term "mall."

Bare feet and rusty bicycles took us to the creek where we cherished our freedom. Mossy rocks and cool water, we shrieked when crawfish touched our toes. We'd splash water back and forth trying to relieve ourselves from the heat, only for the sun to burn brighter, adding more freckles to her and a shade or two to me. We basked in daylight until the sun sunk too low; then we reveled in the dusk. We'd wait for fireflies or sometimes the stars, anything to keep from going back.

We'd talk. We'd talk about school and friends who never visit and ones we wish wouldn't. We talk about teachers, and family, but forget to talk about her dad. We talk about classes and remember to talk about how excited she was to take art next year. As the summer waned, we'd talk about what we wanted to do, where we wanted to go, and who we wanted to go with. We talked a lot about endings: the end of the summer, of high school, of college, of life. There was no sadness, in our talks she always aspired for the end. It seemed to me that she was a person who was born wanting to retire, and I suppose if she wanted that; I wanted that too. Of all the endings we talked about, she never acted as if our nights together ended. Night after night they all blurred together as one. No memory ever really stood out in my mind until the night she kissed me.

We were waiting for stars, not fireflies, and the moon was just a sliver. My hand reached up to point out Orion's belt and hers reached out to meet mine. They intertwined.

Our hands tumbled from the sky. I looked to her, brown eyes shone beneath a

mass of red. She leaned forward, bringing our faces closer together curls licked up my neck like flames. That night I was engulfed.

We walked back, holding hands in the cooling air and hanging on to one another 'til we reached the doorstep, where she placed a peck on my cheek.

That night was the night when things began and ended all at once.

We didn't notice the porchlight.

I hardly ever speak ill of people, so I never speak about her father, but he was there, so I'll say this.

He can holler louder than any person I've ever known, and he has rough hands that he wields with vicious abandon.

I don't remember much of what happened but I remember him swinging. If I hadn't pushed her he wouldn't have hit the mantle, if he hadn't hit the mantle he might not have crashed into the fireplace.

It's amazing how fast embers turn to flames and waxed wood goes up in smoke. Booze on the mantle is never a good idea either.

It's also amazing what you can do when you're scared as hell. There were only two survivors of the house fire that night, because I took her hand and ran. She was dead weight, her body in shock and her mind never quite catching up to what she was babbling out. Babbling turned to gasping breaths as smoke filled our lungs and we found the grass of her front lawn to be the furthest we could reach.

Firetrucks never get there fast enough when you need them to and ambulances come too quickly, only to drive too slow.

I figure that the night eventually turned into day, but that's what happens, whether or not you're holding your breath.

People said we were lucky

People said we were gonna be fine.

People talk a lot about things they know too little about.

She stayed at my house for the rest of the summer; we never kissed again.

The new school year was filled with whispers. Not even the mask of her fiery hair could shield her. No, I took that position, taking her hand in mine and grasping it tight from the first day until the last.

She's the girl that burned the house down the whispers said, but they always got it wrong.

She was a flame, that mass of hair proved it. She set many things on fire that summer, but she never burned the house down.

I did.

Flare

by Jessica Romeo

He's got her,
and he's looking at her like she's this fierce brilliant thing,
and he knows that he's going to keep holding her
even though it burns him,
even though it feels like his skin is going to blister and sizzle and
be stripped away

he doesn't even care about the pain because he's just so happy,
so happy that he knows his complete and utter happiness will kill him
before she can
so he's always touching her even though it burns and burns and burns
his skin
and kissing her even though it sets his lips on fire
yes he presses his cool lips to her scalding hot forehead
and it burns so bad that pieces
of his skin stay stuck to her face when he pulls away

he just keeps smiling and blinking into her brightness
she's in his arms,
settled between his legs

he has his chin on her head and it's like leaning into flames
and his hands are wrapped around her middle so tight that he's break-
ing his fingers
and she can't breath because his arms just wanna pull her into him
to pull her inside of him

she turns and smiles and he's nearly blinded
yes his eyeballs are burned with an impression of her teeth and nose and
freckles and hair and eyebrows and lids and lashes and lips

he strokes her skin and flames dart from his fingertips,
and she's glowing oh yes she glows red then orange then white oh
god it hurts it hurts

this fire inside of her that leaks from her mouth and ears and nostrils
and spills onto his bare chest as she kisses it once, softly, once

then she starts to pull away,
and her fingers are like knives as they twist from his
and her body starts to harden, that molten red fluidity starts to dull and
turn black
and those eyes that once blinded him are eclipsed and suddenly it's safe
to look into them

she walks toward the door, slow and clumsy, her joints cracking when
she moves
no don't please no
he grabs her

but she crumbles in his hands
she turns to dust in his hands
she's nothing but a pile of ash

and he knows he know he knows that he can't look into the sun again no
he can't it's too bright

the ash runs through his fingers
and blows away in the wind.

COVER ART
Jessica Romeo '17