A Note from the Advisor...

Oh, to be in print again! The luxury of holding *Ex Umbra* in our hands. To carry the small weight as we curl into our spots of refuge, to trace our favorite lines as to impress them on our bodies as well as our minds.

This talented editorial staff worked diligently to bring this issue to fruition. And we are so happy to offer it up to you.

Dr. Tricia Leaf  
Faculty Advisor  
April 2024
From the Editor-In-Chief...

As my position as Editor-in-Chief comes to a close, I am filled with gratitude for the insightful journey this year has been.

I have cherished every moment of taking on the responsibilities that come with leading a literary magazine, and it has been a privilege to witness the incredible talent and bravery of our contributors.

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Dr. Tricia Leaf for her guidance and support throughout this journey. Your wisdom and encouragement have been invaluable.

To all the writers and artists who submitted their work, thank you for sharing your creativity and vulnerability with us. Your contributions have enriched our pages and inspired us all.

Here’s to the power of storytelling and the endless possibilities that the literary world offers.

Best,
Nya McCray
Editor-In-Chief
April 2024
Ex Umbra #51: Express Yourself

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NON-FICTION

“Writing – the act of one person giving a piece of their soul to another.”
– J. Spredemann
Isaiah, my boy, as you begin your journey into adulthood, I feel compelled to impart some truly priceless wisdom that will serve as your compass through life's intricately woven path. Life is a remarkable voyage, brimming with endless possibilities for self discovery, personal development, and exploration. Embrace every opportunity that graces your path, my boy, for even amidst challenges and unexpected turns, these experiences will shape you, propelling you on your path of growth and metamorphosis.

Respect is an essential cornerstone when it comes to maneuvering through life's intricate maze. Regardless of someone's background or situation, it is crucial to approach every person with consistent kindness and respect. As the trailblazer for academic pursuits in our family, it is your responsibility to embody the essence of respect, showcasing this admirable quality in your deeds, language, and engagements with others. Always bear in mind that genuine strength doesn't stem from asserting authority, but rather from uplifting and empowering those who surround you.

Education, my boy, acts as the magical key that opens the door to the marvelous path leading towards your future aspirations. Endeavor to reach the utmost level of brilliance in your academic pursuits and relentlessly chase after your dreams with an unwavering resolve. Always bear in mind that the quest for knowledge knows no boundaries set within the classroom walls. Embrace every chance that comes your way to acquire wisdom and broaden your perspectives, for the entire world serves as your esteemed academy, revealing profound insights in the most unforeseen realms. Seek out mentors who ignite the fire of inspiration within you, engage yourself in profound intellectual discussions, and continually nurture the thirst that rages within you for knowledge.

Building a strong connection with God is vital. As we've discussed before, make Him a central part of your life, and you'll witness how everything else falls into place effortlessly. During uncertain times, God's love and guidance will grant you the strength, comfort, and clarity you need. Equally important is taking care of your physical and
mental well being. Make self care a priority, as it enables you to face life's obstacles with resilience and poise. Being punctual, keeping things tidy, and seeking guidance when uncertainties arise are key practices to remember. Always bear in mind that you're never alone on your journey.

Surround yourself with real, authentic friends who you can genuinely trust and who hold the same values as you do. It's important to be kind hearted and compassionate, while staying away from harmful behaviors that hinder your personal growth. Embrace the amazing experiences that come with youth, celebrate your individuality, and make wise choices that align with your values and dreams. Keep in mind that every decision you make carries responsibility, so take ownership of your actions and learn from the outcomes they bring. Your friends will be there for you, supporting and accompanying you through life's ups and downs.

Remember, my boy, that I am always here to support you. As your “Pop Pop”, I am your strong pillar of guidance and unwavering assistance as you navigate through the unpredictable waves of life. With the knowledge and advice that has been passed down to you, I am sure that your journey will be filled with happiness, satisfaction, and personal development. Stay dedicated to your dreams, hold onto your values, and continue to push forward with unwavering determination. By doing so, you will unquestionably thrive in all your pursuits, leaving a lasting impression on those around you.

I hope the light of knowledge, love, and faith guides you along your path. Embrace the journey of life with an open heart and a curious mind, my boy. I feel a great sense of pride in you, my boy, and I am eager to witness the remarkable person you will become. Remember, life is like an unfolding tale, and you hold the pen to write your own chapters. Embrace challenges as opportunities for personal development, and don't shy away from stepping outside your comfort zone. The world is vast and filled with countless wonders, patiently waiting for you to explore and leave your mark. Trust in yourself, have faith in your abilities, and always strive for excellence.
“There here,” my mother yelled from downstairs. Nervous, me and my sister rush downstairs along with my other siblings to greet our new step mother and her children. A tall, dark skinned woman was hugging my short mother as they greeted each other. I stared at my three new siblings entering into the living room, two girls and one boy. Both of the girls had locs and the boy was pretty tall, all dark skinned, and they looked just as shy and nervous as me. My brother, who was playing the game, seemed to ignore the commotion of everyone introducing themselves as I joined him. My father and mother had us move out to North Carolina because of opportunities and also because of her...my stepmother.

A polygamy family, very natural in my parents eyes but very unusual to me. I looked at the woman in the corner of my eye talking to my older sister now, and suddenly, anger had arisen in me, this was going to be my NEW mother. No one is allowed to tell me what to do but other than my actual parents, I had thought. How is my mother even okay with this? Why are they doing this to our family? A lot of questions ringing in my head with confusion, anger, and anxiety. This was our third chosen sister's wife.

Back in California, our first sister wife was very strict and abusive towards her son as she was a veteran. She would spank him constantly for dumb reasons in my opinion, at one point she even spanked me! But I do have to admit, she was my only favorite as we got along great, taking me out to eat, talking about the most funny things, making jokes, just very fun, she even saved my brother from drowning. Overtime, my family slowly stopped seeing her as I guess my mother and father probably just thought she wasn’t the one. Another was an old friend of my father, she had a son as well and we knew him since we were young children. So we thought it would work as it was simply just catching up and becoming a family together...wrong, I HATED her!
She was so paranoid, strict, just simply unnecessary, like one time I had just opened the fridge door and she told me I couldn't leave the fridge door open and made a big deal about it, she doesn't allow us to watch cartoons like *Amazing World of Gumball* and *Spongebob* since supposedly she finds it inappropriate for children, and she wouldn't allow me to play outside without a jacket when it was only chilly outside thinking I was gonna catch a cold but she allowed my brother to go outside without a jacket. And I get it, I love wrestling with my brother and she allows her son to defend himself if anyone touches him, but I will mind my business and out of nowhere he'd hit me super hard and I'll tell her but she'll ignore me and say, “well stop playing with him.” But I guess me and my brother were the only ones feeling this way as everyone loved her.

She was my parents favorite thus far, but she couldn’t keep the relationship going as it was too weird for her and we were planning on moving at the time. So here we are now stuck with hopefully not another crazy sister wife. It was finally my turn to greet her and putting on my best smile I shook her hand and announced my name. Even though I was not happy seeing her, I was at least happy to meet Jordan, Sierra and Jaylyn, my new step siblings. They just stayed in the back corner of the living room and said nothing but to each other or played on their electronics.

It was the afternoon by the time I decided to say something to them. I walked over to Jordan and Jaylyn as they seemed closer to each other as Sierra kept to herself on her tablet. I asked Jordan—since he’s a boy—if he wanted to play video games with me and my brother, trying to get my brother who’s trapped in playing *Left 4 Dead* to socialize since he’s the only eldest boy whereas my other brother who at the time was too busy playing dolls with my younger sister. In a couple of minutes, the room was filled with laughter and personality except for one…Sierra. As a shy introvert, I can relate distancing myself to new people as Sierra was laying on the floor playing on her tablet.

This remained like this for a week as Jordan and Jaylyn had already gotten comfortable with us and were sleeping over the house. Sometimes we can do silly things together like make personal jokes, fart, wrestle, and share clothes comfortably. Their mother, I would rarely see as if she’d leave her children with us as if it was a daycare. Me, Jordan, and
Jayln were in the living room. I was on my phone sitting on the couch whilst they both lay on the floor drawing anime characters.

“Hey can you teach me how to draw,” I asked.

Jordan continued drawing without giving me a glimpse and nodded, “sure.”

In excitement, since at the time I was writing a script for my novel, I needed to learn how to draw, so I decided to have Jordan teach me since I see him draw all the time with Jayln. We all laughed and were having a good time, but I always notice Sierra is somewhere else other than where everyone was. Two weeks later, it was a stormy night and everyone was upstairs in the girls room laughing about random things until we got bored and wanted to play something fun.

Me, Kailah my older sister, Savana my younger sister, Yashia my younger brother, and Shyne my other brother all agreed to play hide and seek in the dark mixed with capture the flag. We all split into teams along with Jordan and Jayln. We played several rounds chasing each other and capturing the other team’s flag.

“That’s not fair,” Yashia would yell from inside the closet as he was discovered by my team filled with Jayln, Savana, and Kailah.

We all began laughing at him until I noticed no one was protecting our flag in the girls room. A shadow flashed before my eyes as I made out the figure to be Shyne as he zoomed past everyone with our flag. He was almost down the stairs, but luckily, Savana grabbed him by the ankle and I tackled him to the floor for our flag.

“Let go,” we both giggled, struggling for dominance for who’d ever win the game. There weren’t many rules to the game so everyone at this point turned the game into whoever won pinning the other down, so everybody started wrestling.
As I tried my hardest to pull the white cloth from my brother's hands, I suddenly felt multiple hefty bodies on top of me. I was getting jumped from the boys team filled with Jordan and Yashia.

I was suffocating as I struggled to get out from the bottom and began to hit all of them to get to the flag. I finally managed to push the boys off of me and tried to regain myself as I was feeling betrayed by my team. I turned to look over at them as Jayln was laughing at me and Kailah just stopped playing all together. The only one that came to my aid was Savana; as skinny as she was trying to go after Shyne but mainly Yashia.

The game was short lived as my mom yelled, “Yall better not be making a mess up there! Stop playing before someone gets hurt!”

I guess she was fed up with the constant banging that she was hearing upstairs as she was cooking dinner, and even more so since my dad was going to be home soon.

“Why didn’t you guys help me,” I complained.

Jayln continued laughing her butt off as the only thing occupying her mind was hearing Savana and Yashia argue in the background.

“I tried my best,” Savana shouted from behind as she heard my complaint.

Kailah yawned, “I didn’t even wanna play anymore. I’m tired.”

“Whatsoever,” I mumbled as I stomped downstairs to calm my adrenaline by watching tv and listening to the rain from outside. I plopped on the couch scrolling through the channels and a grumble in my stomach was heard as I could smell the delicious chicken my mother was cooking. Since at the time we were vegetarian, this is the first time we get to eat meat again in a while.
I glanced over and noticed Sierra laying on the floor in the corner—under the bar on her tablet giggling at something. Curious of getting to know her, I sit beside her with a big smile plastered on my face.

“Whatcha watching?”

“Just a funny video,” she giggles.

“Come and play with us upstairs,” I say, trying to pressure her.

“I just wanna go on my tablet.”

I grabbed her by the arm and began to pull it trying to get her to sit up, “Come on, please Sierra!”

Looking extremely unsatisfied, she finally lets in, “Fine.”

In excitement, I yell as I run upstairs, “SIERRA’S PLAYING! COME ON LET’S PLAY!” I announced our new player one last time and convinced everyone to play one last round. It wasn’t as fun as the first rounds but enough to at least make Sierra laugh which made me happy.

During that night we asked my mom if everyone including her if we could walk around the neighborhood even though a storm was happening. Surprisingly she agreed and as a group we walked around the whole neighborhood screaming, jumping, and running around. We were at the final block that leads towards my house until suddenly, a loud BOOM was heard that blasted everyone's eardrums! Everyone screamed as we ran inside. We all laughed in the living room rethinking the moment how scared we were. That was actually a very memorable moment that I loved because that was when everyone was getting along...until we weren't.
"A writer gets to live yet another life every time he or she creates a new story."

— Pawan Mishra, On Writing Wonderfully: The Craft of Creative Fiction Writing
DOE-EYED
Ava Sadikifu

A deer snuck out from the underbrush, beautiful and hesitant and all-seeing with round, glossy black eyes like polished obsidian.

“Look.” murmured Nathan, as if we all hadn’t already caught sight of the scraggly thing. Nathan’s hair clung limp with drying sweat to his forehead, the fringe hanging in his eyes, but Reggie would’ve choked him ‘til the lights in his eyes went out if he, or me, for that matter, dared to move even a hair.

So we waited. Five minutes at the most, in a standoff with an animal that was just as silent and still as we. It knew we were there; it was just a matter of who would be quicker to the draw, quicker to act out in the game of life.

The untimely crunch of branches under the poor thing’s feet was akin to the blow of a shotgun, the sick snap of Thomas Belluvue Jr.’s nose beneath my hand in the ninth grade when his tongue got too slick and my fist slipped.

(It was June, taste-the-smoke-in-the-air June, yellowed grass and wade in the creek June, and I had just figured out that getting punched in the face hurt like fresh hell, courtesy of my older brother.)

Belluvue’s blood stained my knuckles maroon for an entire whole day and a half, and the force from the blow had bruised my hand as much as it did his face.

I hadn’t wanted to punch him, at least not at first. But I had known I wanted to make him hurt, wanted to hurt him real bad, just as much as the singular, sinful word he’d laughed out had twisted a knife deep in my belly with a searing, primal pain.

Hitting him came easy after that, like how a rabid dog bites and foams at the mouth or how the sun rises over the hills every morning. Clockwork.
Before I could even take another breath, the deer clamored off into the inky tangle of trees in a panicked rush, a run for its life on gangly stick legs.

“Damnit.”

Reggie grunted and then rose from his crouch in the mud, the knees of his jeans so wet with the stuff that leaves clung to them. His mouth curled into a sneer and so he swore again, to himself this time, sticking his pistol in his waistband as if he was some sort of outlaw. Stray beams of light caught the gunmetal and scattered like angel beams.

My brother insisted on us going out here every day, looking for some poor thing to kill, take back, skin, and clean. I supposed it was because he had something to prove to somebody—our pa, most likely, but also himself. Either way, truth was, Reggie wasn’t any good with a gun. And no amount of waiting or cursing in vain would change that.

“Bad luck, bad, bad luck, man. We can always try later tomorrow. Later, even.” I offered, looking lamely at Nathan to back me up. Nathan pulled on his cap, his knees in a similar state to both mine and my brother’s, tears in the worn denim.

“Evan’s right, Reg. We ought to go and come back later. No reason to be out here now if we ain’t gone bring nothing back.”

Reggie shook his head. “Nah. Not feeling it no more, man. Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow.” I nodded and began the trek back to the truck, my tanned face warm and sticky with humidity and salt. Sweat gathered at my nape and curled my hair. My skin burned pleasantly and drowsiness washed over me, the sun a warm cup of milk that weighed on my eyelids.
Carolina blue skies, picturesque and a solid dark blue, opened up over the expanse of heat-yellowed trees with dying branches and even more dead leaves.

The truck, faded red with a grill full of crusty mud, sputtered as it started and then coughed when Reggie climbed into the driver’s seat and revved the engine.

It was mutually understood that Nathan would ride shotgun back to the ranch and I would be in the back, resting my head on the back window (of which Reggie did not use to drive in the slightest) and gathering my bearings. But I didn’t mind. I could stand to be free from Reggie’s endless prodding and poking fun, his stupid big mouth as reckless as his driving.

We pulled out of the field, wheels churning mud, and out onto the worn gray asphalt.

The radio squeaked as Reggie turned the knob and stuttered out crooning blues the entire ride home.
Lost Memories
Ariana Oden-Clark

Despite the flowing and overflowing mixture of tourists and home folks sweeping through downtown on a regular, every day in Phoenix seems the same for Mallory. Pricked by knowing she is different, she feels lonely and alone ... drowning, seemingly unrecognized amidst the sea of millions that swarm the various attractions. Like choosing to hard reset her phone, Mallory wishes the mental swipe was in her control. Everyone else can do it ... choose to remember or choose to forget ... and they can do it within seconds, something Mallory can only dream about.

Feeling outcasted, she is blocked by memory loss in a world where memory is key.

Mallory, a quiet student, enjoys her Poetry class for the peace and comfort it brings her, along with the private freedom of expression offered to her by Mrs. White, her Poetry teacher.

"Okay, Mallory," says Mrs. White. "You're up next."

Mrs. White asked her to share a poem about herself with her peers. Mallory shakes her head in fear of her thoughts actually being heard as she begins to look through dozens of poems that only the teacher was privileged to see. Mrs. White knows.

"When you're ready, Mallory, we're listening, and this is a safe space," said Mrs. White, flashing a reassuring smile in Mallory's direction.

Mallory clears her throat and says,
"Imagine living in a forgettable world.
You'd think every day is an adventure, But not for me."
Those highlights that brighten most of your days ...

Like going to see a movie, laughing with friends, Vacations you take with your significant other, Long strolls, and sightseeing...
Yet for me, just like that, such memories become mysteries ...
Vanishing from my mind in the blink of an eye...
That warm, fuzzy feeling you get in your stomach as each destination leads to another adventure... is fun!
Until you forget where you are going...
I hope a picture or video can capture the moments for you to remember later.

Well, welcome to the mind of a girl who has almost forgotten. Mallory... a nicer name for "Unfortunate" in everyone's eyes, But they couldn't handle a day with my mind Trying to maneuver through memories that might not even be mine or real. The thumping sounds Thump ... thump ... thump! Getting louder! Overtaking my thoughts ... trying to remember! Where's that happy place again? The clock shifts ... shifts to the next interval.

Open your eyes and decide: Can you live a day in my shoes? Trapped in a dysfunctional mind Leaving lingering time to lose yourself. Where nothing lasts past ...

A mind full of insecurities always leaves something to question. I look in the mirror ... hoping that today will be different from yesterday?... Will you remember today?...
The silence fights with the raging voice of my insecure conscience...
Trying to be positive.
Remembering what day today is... is the first thing on my bucket list.
And it goes on and on and on.
I start to ball my hand into a fist from continuously having to start over... to connect the dots... to remember.
Thump ... thump ... thump!
So now this is what's left of me, the unfortunate girl who had now forgotten her name.
Who am I?"

Mallory wipes a tear away as she finishes and walks to her seat, barely hearing the applause that followed her.

"Mallory, it was amazing how you captured your feelings and were able to share them with all of us. It was very good and took courage," said Mrs. White., Allowing students to speak their opinions. The students immediately followed behind Mrs. White, complimenting Mallory.

"I think that was a good poem, Mallory. You should submit your poem to the school spring poem contest," said Jacob, snapping his fingers and smiling at Mallory.

"You should share your poems more often in class. I would love to hear another one... One day," said Amber, looking up from her writing.

"That concludes class. I hope everyone has their poems based on the prompt for class tomorrow. Thank you again, Mallory, for sharing your beautiful poem," said Mrs. White, dismissing the class.

The class begins to leave, saying bye to Mallory and Mrs. White.
"Jacob is right. You should submit your poem. It is very good, and you are not the only one who may feel like this. You deserve to be heard. Think about it," said Mrs. White, encouraging Mallory to submit a piece.

"Thank you, Mrs. White. Your call on me allowed me to step out of my comfort zone, and it was uncomfortable, but it felt good. I might submit a poem, but I don't know yet," said Mallory, walking to the door.

"Okay, I'll see you tomorrow," said Mrs. White, returning to her desk.

"See you tomorrow," said Mallory.

When Mallory got home, she thought about whether or not to enter her poem into the contest. She read the poem to her dog Trix. Trix lies there listening. She decides the worst that could happen is that she doesn't win. But the best that could happen is that she does win, and people understand. With the latter in mind, Mallory submits her poem to the contest.

She remembered.
Product of the World
Ciarra Spleen

The Beautiful Bright City gleamed with stardust and misted the air with hopes and dreams. The hovering towers hung beneath the clouds as they stood like trees in a forest, whispering to one another. The whispers carried from below the towers as a swarm of people buzzed throughout tightly knit crowds. But from the buzzing crowds the whispers did not come. They were sad whispers, the kind that would be accompanied with a weep of defeat and sorrow. The whispers could not be heard by those in the swarm as their attention was rendered with beautiful lies that had been regurgitated and labeled to them as important. Only a few would stop and look around wondering if the sad whispers were real or not or even worth acknowledging, if so. But, just like a bad memory the whisper that had been heard was soon pushed to the back of one's mind and forgotten about.

There was a man who lived in this city who knew all about being forgotten. The city was his home he was simply just existing in it; becoming a part of the darkness that lurked around in the shadows casted by those in the buzzing swarms; shadows that still lingered even after the swarm had dissipated. Looking out from the darkness of his home he observed many things. He saw how 3 piece suits and pantyhose turned into baggy sweat suits and fishnets, how firm loyal handshakes turned to shady ominous dap ups, and how bright blush pink cheeks turned to dried up runny mascara covered cheeks. While observing the bustling crowds he would sometimes whisper sweet
nothings to those who passed by hoping to one day be heard, or maybe even seen. Making him reflect on the times he still had a voice, and could tell others his name.

He was a friendly man, but to him life was not friendly at all. He was a hopeless child, a detached human being, and a lost lover all in the same lifetime. He knew if he’d let time write his story for him he would be non-existent just like time itself. His relationship with time had never been the best, as he felt she moved too fast for him. He always tried keeping up with her, but always ended up losing his footing and tripping his own self up in the end. Colliding with the sweltering hot pavement leaving him with nothing but scratches and bruises, that never quite healed. Once he finally had gained the confidence to brush himself off and stand on his own feet again, she was long gone. She shattered his heart, his hopes, and his dreams.

He would spend his time wandering around the city searching for the hope that once existed inside of him. Swept over by an overwhelming feeling of emptiness, yearning for peace of mind that would ease the demons from his past that followed closely behind him. Once darkness fell he would take refuge in the darkest corners of the city protecting himself from the unknown dangers of the world. Restlessness greeted him often, but his sense of loneliness would be comforted by the rodents and bugs that accompanied him at night while he slept.
POETRY

“Those that don’t got it, can’t show it. Those that got it, can’t hide it.”
-Zora Neale Hurston
A Message from your Lover
Ashanti Douglas

Cause what you feel is what you attract
The people who don’t give a flack about what your going through
The ones that dismiss you
Making you accessible
To pain
To sorrow
To depression
Because you gave them permission
To do so

Why are you always trying to hide
Barricading your emotions behind a disguise
Do you not see the beauty in your tears
The glory that comes from within your fears
The ones that make you preserver

When will you say enough is enough
When will you learn to stop eating Agony until you're eventually stuffed
When will you grow hungry for confidence
Why must you you always wait until there’s nothing left on the table but crumbs because he decided to eat all of it

Like my darling wake up
Stop fantasizing
Opens your eyes
Discovery that the beauty of you doesn’t just lye in between your thighs
But within your mind
That truly defines you are woman!
The good thing that is unfortunately confined to stand
behind a man
Who commands everything from you
Placing you as a trophy on his pedestal
Until you become nothing but a visual

Aiding and abetting his image
The partner covering up his damage
Because he has yet to heal himself
But belittles and steals your joy something of a common theft

The thief in the night
who serves one purpose as the monster who seeks to dim your light
Because just like a little kid he is unable to face his own darkness.
Running to mom and dad so they can act as his blanket

I apologize if I wasn’t as sheltered as you
I apologize that daddy wasn’t at my beck and call
I apologize that moms mental illness made her incapable
I apologize that I have enough courage to walk away
Instead of remaining complacent to a love that commands me to stay

I apologize that I’m sorry is not in my vocabulary
Because the streets raised me better to become something more than just another
body in your personal cemetery
I apologize that to death do us part meant nothing to you
I apologize that the seed I planted inside of you never got to bloom
I apologize that just like a flower you watched me wilt
whilst you killed us with no guilt

But most of I apologize that your not the man I dreamt you to be
Because they said what you feel is what you attract
Isn’t it crazy how a deer in headlights will throw you off your path
I was nothing more than the prey that kept you company
So sadly this is where we must part
sincerely Yours truly, the one that got away

Broken Mirrors
Samantha Parker-Ramirez

Blissfully content with ignorance, her fingers ran through the plaything’s straight, vibrant blonde hair. Her’s was too thick and wild to run fingers through, her curly mane tangled and alive like thickets of vines. She prayed she could run her fingers through her hair one day, and imagined it’d feel like silk. She begged and begged til she got her wish, full of excitement when the day came.

The vines screamed as the iron tamed them, weakening under torture. Rushing to the mirror to admire her new do, long dark velvet flowed down her neck and back.

Again and again it went on, til the velvet was rug and the vines shriveled to nothing. Picked and plucked and pulled, it refused to move. Mirrors shattered as she glanced at them, her mane now a damaged mess.

Her crown was gone, she had nothing left.

Like peeling back a ripe plantain, the broken glass glided with ease.
All her hopes and dreams soaked the ground beneath.
I was raised by “yes ma’am, no ma’am”  
Samantha Parker-Ramirez

I was raised by yes ma’am, no ma’am  
Make you stand up straight  
“Don’t talk to me that way”,  
sayin “yes ma’am, no ma’am” in response  
Can’t say what you really want.  
Grown folk are talking, go on an play  
Do somethin to get out the way  
I was raised by yes ma’am, no ma’am  
Actin up won’t do no good  
Set em’ straight while they still in childhood  
Make you look someone in the eye  
“Dry up those tears, now don’t you cry”.  
I was raised by yes ma’am, no ma’am.

Black Women  
Logan J. Tilton

Black woman, who is she?  
Black women with curls kinks, and beauty in which they call unique  
Black women who’ve been through so many things

Melanin so powerful she made it to college  
My H B C U embraces the black in me  
But here I’m struggling to see  
Who is she?

Beyond those things that meet the eye  
Who is this black women under her beautifully melanated disguise or those traumas she carries in her brown eyes Who can she be?
If she embraced her obstacles and became a black woman who learned to fly
She struggles battling this internal fight
Be great she says in the mirror as she lets down her locs Releasing attachment to everything she’s not

She is her muse
The creator of her thoughts
She’s powerful in her peace
Black women are art
The beauty of a phenomenal woman, yes indeed

As I Lay
Lydia Sallis

As I lay, amongst my fallen sisters and brothers.
    Daughters and sons.
    Mothers and Fathers, and so on.

I look up to see darkness, not light as some say,
Instead I look into a barrel.
The smoke arising from the chamber
As if to say
“Don’t get comfortable.”

The city grew silent with the chills of day and night
Bodies in the streets and no tombstones to be seen

A rusty badge and loose garments hang off of the man.
A shimmer of light shines off of the bullet.
I read my name and over 1,000s of others carved into the brass.
“It doesn't matter who it hits, as long as I get one. That's one off the list” The man chuckles while tightening his grip.

All these years, all of our deaths are thrown over ignorant shoulders like salt. As if to say “Keep back, don’t bring evil towards me”

My fist has been clenched since growing up. Others die with their fists in the air as if to say. “Stand up, and look up. That’s all you need to worry about.”

Our rivers run full with the blood of innocent. As it runs into the systems and it dries like ink on paper. But with no one to tell our story, our blood runs dry.

I hear a snap, one you only hear if you're black. Normally we run or duck and await for the pop to follow. Waiting for the moment a wife becomes a widow. Or to watch someone scrape our skin off the cement like plaque.

They say you can hear for a few minutes after you get hit. Before you bleed out, and your lungs quit.

My mothers voice and my fathers silence. Was a result of this unspoken violence.

To say we are anatomically alike would be misspoken, our brains are different. Yours is still working. Look down at the concrete while you walk. Here I am, sorry. I can't talk.
Be You
Juliuana Battle

I’m for determination, and goals, and free-range thoughts
to be able to create our destiny.
For memories, and pictures, and quality time, and laughter,
having the joy to live in the moment.
For compassion, and self-care, and empathy, may you have
time to mend your broken heart.
Curiosity, self-motivation, "the truth",
and the ability to have fun: I’m for all of these.
For mistakes, and corrections, and also wrong-doings, and right-doings
because nobody is perfect but practice might help.
I’m for trends, and "Fried Chicken Wednesday", and social media
but only for the love of Tiktok.
For silence and "breaks" but wake me for the reality check.
Ignorance, and liars, and drama, and animosity: the trash.
Imagination, and introversion,
and positivity, and encouragement: in my bag.
For my old lifestyle and not the "new normal", for a clean bill of health
if it doesn’t require masks, and I’m for corona just not the virus.
Speak your mind and leave the cruelty to the side. I’m for your own opinions,
and your own beliefs,
and your own perspectives but only of your own life.
Cancel Culture
Kobie Phillips

A swipe
A scroll
A tweet
A comment so dull
A fleeting thought
Posted as a symbol
Of an opinion so amble
An unsought disagreement
Spread like wildfire
Comments
On a post meant for freedom of speech
If the one defends the victim
The defender becomes
the secondary target
Jobs lost over
A group of offended people
Who felt offended
Not because of primary information
Because of the influence of the group around
Too many holes in the evidence
To be found sound
A false accusation
Ever so convincing when everyone around you
Has the same opinions
Opinions backed by
False information
False information
False information
Prominent in the world of
Swipe
Tweet
Scroll
Little do we know
But presume
Fortune of the follower
Happy to be the opposite of the target
Frowns turn into smiles
Click
Another follower
For sanding up for something that was never wrong
Too many times false evidence has gone wrong
The truth
Like a cacophony
Never wanting to be heard
Like a voice of true justice never to be found
The unknown is not bound to the knower
Of what is true
The lies are not pure
As the truth pure of gold
As pure of the love between cold stone lovers
As pure as the confessions to a priest
No one needs lies
That seeps underneath
Into the soils
Of the tree that bears the fruits
The fruits
Of what is true
Untainted from a biased view
Don't let the lies poison the truth that should be ever so
apparent
In one sound decision
Of who's wrong and who's right
With all that said
Wrote down
And read
Laced with a spitfire of soulful words
I think it is proven
cancel culture
Isn't so nice
And that is the price

Death
Sean Kornegay

I still haven't forgiven myself for abusing
Your trust. I loved you in stealth, hiding
My feelings, fearing you'd see me open,
And take advantage of my emotions.

I was too busy holding on to past pain,
Drowning in the raindrops on my mind's panes,
To see that my dream had been realized;
I cared for nightmares when salvation stood there

In plain sight. You cared, but I stared backward,
Stoned by the flashbacks I hoped to lock away.
I lost tomorrow because I lived
In yesterday. Too many times, I have paid

For the mistakes I made. I dressed that bed,
But I've already laid and woken up again;
Still, the groundhog is there every morning.
I seek new accommodations. My heart

Is in mourning; sorrow falls from the sky.
As I lament our loss, again, I repent. No cross.
Insanity looms; I loathe these memories.
Buried eternal at Love's Cemetery.

The rose I wear falls on dead eyes. Locked away
In the space between smiles and cries are the
Feelings we once exchanged. I can't let go,
Even though we're no more, and I know

From former failures, we can't resurrect.
When I'm alone, in the prone, I recollect;
Reflect on a woman worthy of my respect.
We lived a love like no other, but no more. Death.

2009
Ex Umbra #51

You
Manuela Bello

I drink, I eat, I sleep, I pray
Yet, this gaping hole in my heart
won’t go away...
Obstinate is this sensation
plaguing my elation
I must remain serene...
Before you make me flare up again...you...
You who made me happy
You who made me sad
You who made me laugh
And you who made me mad
And you...who left...that gaping hole in my heart
If only I could detach this wretched piece of me
That loves and hungers, onto one and thing
That always wants to see the best of thee
And that always, wants to care for you all
And that somehow always, ends up, lying lifeless, in my hands
Bloodied and torn
My poor heart I mourn
over and over again...
Lava Girl
De’Zaria Lucas

Shark boy and lava girl used to be one of my favorite Disney channel original movies

I don’t know if it was my crippling obsession with Taylor Lautner or my new found love of super hero’s at the time.

But I adored lava girl, because everything she touched disintegrated.

She ruined things without even trying.

I was young, so I didn’t know I was actually identifying....myself

I’m a ruiner, a disaster...a train wreck

I try to fix and control things and bend them on my terms

But as I bend and try to shape things, I end up breaking them

In a way I’m Lava Girl, heart in the right place

Have saved many, but is still seen as the villain in my own story

I’m Lava Girl, because fires excite me

They don’t scare me away, I’m not scared to get burned or scared to disintegrate

I couldn’t be Shark Boy, because he wanted to follow his father’s legacy...that’s not me

I couldn’t be the Ice Queen, because even though I have stone cold tendencies...I don’t have the beauty and the innocence in between

But I have the fury, the motive and the self-made beautiful pain like lava girl  When I enter a room, my presence matters to people but not in the way it does for the Ice Queen

But still I’m my beautiful me

So the fires I may cause, and all the left over debris is my beautiful beginning

My disastrous journey of what’s to come  I can’t love quietly, I have to be loud and passionate

I can find my Shark Boy in a place so evident , in a way he’s already ruined before I could even touch em
I’m not saying you have to be damaged, to be with me
But to be able to manage, the beauty in me
You got to understand...the severity
The force that comes with me, because being with Lava girl that means the things you love might break
Because as Lava Girl...things around me disintegrate
As lava girl the thing you love, is gonna break
As she is I
The fires I may cause, may hurt you too
So as Lava Girl, all I’m asking of you is to take my caution signs into consideration
And hold me carefully and understand that I don’t mean...any pain that I may have caused you in between
Because like Lava Girl, we can see the brighter side of things and light things up like the sun while we are still in a dark place
In a way, my light still shines and there’s mountains for me to climb...volcanos waiting to erupt and as lava girl we haven’t ran out of time
XOXO, Lava Girl
So, Respectfully
Christina Tate

As a young woman, we are told at a young age that our bodies like is a temple
But I don’t treat my body like one
Nor do the men who were interested in me before
Time and time again, I put myself into these situations where my body is just an object for young men
I agreed to the terms & conditions that the man has made for me
I tell him that I’m here when you need a one night stand
Or when you need a break from reality
But why?
My mom says I should treat my body as if I’m a goddess
I should be modest and polite
But how can I contain the craving to be loved
To be valued properly when some of the men aren’t looking for a relationship
They look for more of a situation-ship
They look for a girl that’s “easy”
A girl who can be manipulated by false emotions
A girl who can devote their time & energy into a man that knows that she is way out of her league
Emotionally, physically, and mentally
A girl who knows that she could do better for herself without him
A girl who knows she can be successful without him
I gave my body to a man that wasn’t worth any of my time
I oversexualize myself until he got what he wanted
Genuine question: Do you have feelings for me?
What was the answer you ask...
“I don’t have feelings for nobody”
I went from a somebody to a nobody to this man in a matter of seconds

So respectfully, I should do better
I can’t be stuck on a man who doesn’t care about me
A man who isn’t willing to love me the right way
The man who I secretly “loved” so much that I would be at his beckoning call
It’s sad, I know
Disappointing even

**So respectfully, I should not waste my time**
I shouldn’t waste time on a man who only values a girl’s body rather than emotions
A guy who has sex with anything with legs
A person that just wants a bit of fun & not looking for anything serious
A guy who is willing to say I love you to your face
Knowing that it is just meaningless to him but means everything to you
So you stay
And you wait... and wait.. and wait...
Until you are no longer needed
Until he can finally say goodbye
Until the conversations become one-sided
Until the relationship turns into a simple hi & hello interaction
Because you gave the satisfaction that this man needed
So you feel defeated that you wasted your time
**So respectfully, focus on yourself**
And realize that you can’t reverse what has happened
You can’t reverse time my love
I know it hurts
It breaks your heart to see that man has never loved you
What should I do now?
You pick up those pieces of your broken heart and mend it back together
It’s his loss, not yours
He was not capable of seeing what a beautiful person you are
not capable of being around a woman who knows how to improve their confidence after being shot down
A woman who willing to work on herself to heal the hurt that he caused
I know you want to spin back
Beg him to take you back
Beg him to treat you like a human being instead of being someone who is unprofitable
You can convince yourself that you can fix him
“I can fix the way he acted towards me”
“I can fix how he may treat a woman like nothing but toys in the future” Im sorry to break it to you sweetheart, but

**You can’t fix a man who isn’t willing to fix himself first**

That man isn’t worth fixing and you know that
Leave that man alone and let him do what he needs to do
Move in silence
Stand on business
Don’t tell him about your latest achievements & accomplishments
Don’t try to make him jealous
That man does not care about you like I do
Sooner or later, he will understand that you were the best thing he ever had
Or he may not
That’s for him to decide
And he tries to spin the block
Laugh at this moment and never look back