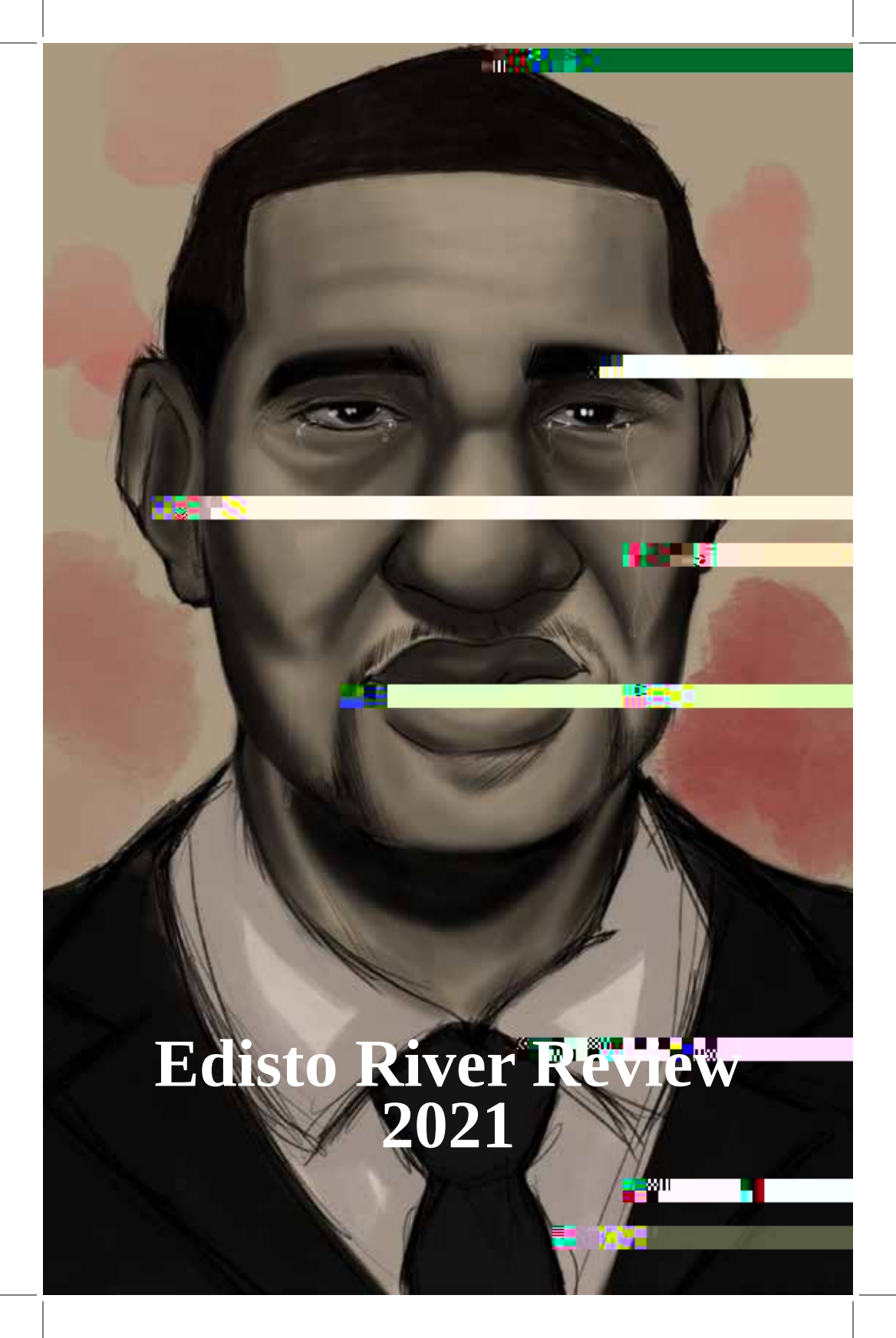




Edisto River Review 2021

EDISTO RIVER REVIEW
2021

Clafin University
Orangeburg, South Carolina
Volume VII

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Edisto River Review is a publication of the Department of English

Williamson Printing

White. His drawings adorn both the front and back covers. Also in art, the second- and third-place cover art submissions. We hope

speakers, I would like to give a round of applause to our students

Review. Please give these student artists a huge round of applause.

I begin my conclusion with thanking Drs. Sharon Gile and Charity

thanks to Dr. Dennis Bormann for his work as associate prose edi-

Bailey, Glover, Quinonez, Keith, and Rahman. It was a pleasure working with Tiana Wilder and Terrecia McPherson, the student interns who were responsible for tracking, organizing, copy editing,

assembly work. Thank you, Ms. Jennifer Clark and Ms. Carolyn

Carlson and particularly Muhammad Hossain's formatting work have been critical for bringing our last two issues to publication.

2021 Department of English Creative Writing

Awards

Clafin University

Art

First Place:

Second Place:

Third Place:

Fiction

First Place:

Second Place: Terrecia McPherson, Cecil's Story

Third Place:

Honorable Mention:

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Tiana Wilder

Extra, Extra!

dark green color, and the carpet was dark blue. A layer of dust

seen better days. Even the chair that Kim found herself sitting in was worn and started to make her back ache. Kim wrapped her

fall upon the principal before her.

His infamous affairs were a testament to that. Yet as she looked the man over, taking in his bloated body and sagging face, she wondered how anyone could have ever even considered sleeping with him before.

ior. There have been several instances of backtalk, coming into

Kim nodded. She had been getting more and more phone calls recently. But she and her husband had talked to the girls and made

change in behavior to teenage hormones and nothing more.



away behind the school. She was kissing a boy that Kim had never even seen nor heard her daughter talk about, but Kim could tell that he looked like trouble from the photo. The fact that her

-
-

eyes traveled further down on the page and she gasped as she read the name of the person who wrote it.

-

mistake. Gwen would never write something like that! Especially

Yes, the girls had their spats from time to time, but she knew that Gwen would never do something so malicious to her own sister. Kim tried to think back to earlier this morning, when Gwen and

-

dolyn enlisted one of the students in the Coding Club to hack into the website and post the article without the advisor of newspaper knowing. We discovered the article around lunchtime, but by then, a number of students had already seen it. The newspaper advisor is

Kim rubbed her temples, trying to come to terms with what
gry, disappointed, but most of all, upset with herself. What did she

-



After signing a few papers and gathering all of Gwen's lobby. Kim decided to sign both of the girls out for the day. She was sure that they were both tired of hearing all of the gossip and that some rest would do them well. As she did so, Mrs. Parrish, the front desk assistant, attempted to start a conversation with her.





Both girls turned bright red. Kim assumed Britney's was

-
tween them. Even on the drive home, Kim could feel it weighing down on her neck, trying to push her down into her seat. She knew that she had to remedy this situation as fast as possible. Gwen and Britney had been close ever since they were born. They considered each other their best friend, despite their differences. Gwen supported Britney throughout her vegan phase and Britney supported Gwen throughout her goth phase. They would often tell each

talking, for them not to be friends, was a strange, gray area that Kim didn't feel comfortable stepping into.

When they arrived home, Britney and Gwen went to straight



Kim sat at Britney's vanity, careful not to mess up the neat



Britney nodded. Kim consoled her daughter for a few moments more before going down the hall and knocking on Gwen's

Gwen's room was a clash of her many different interests. Posters littered the walls, almost hiding the fact that the walls were painted purple, and none of them looked like they belonged in the same room. There was a Wicked poster signed by a community college student above her bed, a handful of rock band



into the school's website and write an article calling your sister a

number of friendships and romantic relationships that she had

She knew that very well. It happened with her best friend in high

life. But Kim had to admit, she didn't think that Gwen and Britney would ever grow apart, mainly because they had been together for so long.

she scored super high on the PSATs. And now she's talking about college, and she's trying to get a job at the daycare, and she has a

are never going to stop being sisters. Sure, you may grow apart a

hug before leaving her room. As she went into the kitchen, her thoughts drifted back to what Gwen had asked. Drifting apart happened so often that she rarely thought about it now. Then, almost unconsciously, her thoughts started to creep over to her husband. She thought about his behavior, the way their conversations grew shorter and shorter. Kim then shook her head, shooing the thoughts away.

Kim decided to go ahead and prep dinner. That way, she could just pop everything in the oven once dinnertime came around. She settled on cooking a simple casserole that she knew both of the girls would love, as well as some broccoli and fresh dinner rolls. As she worked in the kitchen, she heard the sound of the garage door opening and closing. That sound was soon fol-



She noticed Erik jumped a bit before attempting to recover.

Rick was telling me about his poker group and wanted me to join

Erik then made a comment about having to grade papers

ing towards her husband. Why had he gotten so nervous about the watch? And why didn't he tell her about it before?

could say about schoolwork and the new episodes of The Amazing

ments about how well his lecture went or any of his frustrations

dinners, Kim sent them upstairs, leaving her and Erik alone with the girls.

showing only mild concern.



nothing. I'm changing the passwords, and you can get them after

worse, I still think you should apologize to her too. You knew she



First Place Poetry Winner

Tiana S. Wilder

Double Dutch, Double Dutch

Double Dutch
Double Dutch
Don't you dare touch
My hair, Xavier
I just got it pressed
My Momma had stressed
Not to let it get messed up
by little boys like you

So, go on, get gone
And let us play
You see this the championship
and I got the crown in clutch

And leave us here to
Double Dutch
Double Dutch

And it is here that I rise up
out of my body

The nitty gritty looks so pretty
in the memories

How could something so bad happen
beneath the summertime trees?



Double Dutch
Double Dutch
I can only hear
The skip of the rope
on the hot street,
my breath and my feet

DJ is keeping score
and he is the one that hears it
The police sirens
The screaming
The Crying

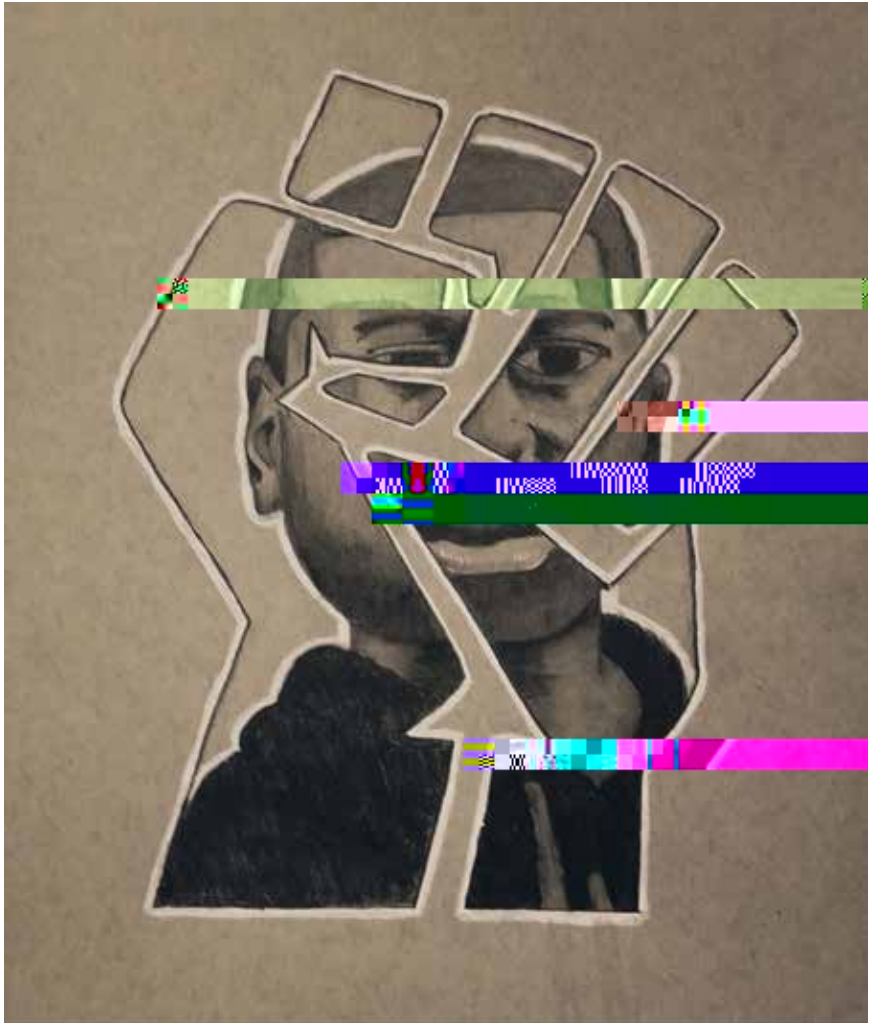
And you know us,
Too nosy for our own good
And even though it is that type of neighborhood
We slink towards it
Creep against the brick
Double Dutch
Double Dutch
All forgotten, just a blip

We stand off in corner
And we see him, Chiron
Skin slick with sweat
And his eye are wet
He's got his hands
in the air
And his girlfriend is crying
And he is steady denying



I ring up her groceries
and want to tear out her hair
and rip off each acrylic 'til
she's begging and pleading
I want to stomp her ass





Malachi D. Wright,



First Place Nonfiction Winner

Faith A. Lomax

The Love of a Father

my body tucked into the corner closest to the window, I had sworn myself to seclusion only to speak when spoken to. The aroma of



on the 3rd because my mother was returning to work. As we were retrieving our luggage from the trunk, my phone rung. It was him.

left hand tightly gripping my light-weighted suitcase while my right hand almost crumbled my phone into pieces. Did he not know how much heartache his last stunt had caused? I rushed him off the

option. As soon as the phone went click, my mother turned to me

that look only a mother can give with her bug eyes staring directly

body GMC as she reversed and drove off into the distance. She didn't know that was the last time she was going to see her only child.

~

demons had overthrown my savior, Jesus Christ, and devoured my soul. This room is so dark and cold even though it was the middle

were prescribed to my mother and the others were PM pain kill-

in the safari search engine of my black iPhone 4. A recording of the BET awards traveled faintly from the living room followed by the smacking of lips. Tavia and Kari were enjoying the short time

they had left together before their early departure. My birthday was

was God. I started foaming at the mouth and throwing up mushy,
in my bones. I still reeked of depression yet, every breath tasted of



Second Place Fiction

Terrecia McPherson

Cecil's Story

The rumor mill congregates downstairs. Cecil – although not yet fully awake – can hear the agitated whispers stealthily climbing the stairs.

like the Reverend. He wasn't really a reverend, just that his voice wanes and booms just like one and everything he says seems to bear the weight of God on it. But no man of God carries as much

working men such as Cecil's father the Reverend forms his own congregation with mama, Miss Matty from two houses down the road, and Miss Jackie the seamstress.

The Reverend, a raving mad drunkard with no money or family, re-

Peeping round the bend that leads the staircase into the kitchen, Cecil watches the Reverend put a piece of paper in the middle of the table. The women gather around to look. Cecil wants to know what is on the paper to cause their eyes to open so wide. Miss Matty swings little Jeremy from one bony hip to the other and straightens herself up.

The women murmur under their breath not sure what the Reverend is really asking of them.

-

year to go work somewhere in New York. While hiding in this very

spot just last month, Cecil overheard the rumor mill read a part of

never hope for. I wish one day you will join me for it is not as your imagination makes it to seem. Would I not be a fool to settle for

A wretched town indeed. That is if what the Reverend is claiming

kerosene and march ourselves to the cross for all it is worth going

Suddenly a vivid image appears in the back of Cecil's mind. He

wrapped parcel held no interest to Cecil all the week before Christmas day when mama told him what was in it and that it was his.

Brownie Kodak Hawkeye written on the front. There was a shiny metal trimming outlining the lens. In no time Cecil had set about

old.

father whenever she mentions them. But she never talks ill about

say how the Reverend could never truly keep his thoughts inside his head. Nobody trusts him with any information but they aren't opposed to listening to what he has to say about everpTside



Cecil walks to the kitchen, camera around his neck, and yawns as though he is still tired.

to take some for your father when you are done eating and hurry

piece of paper the Reverend never retrieved from the table. Not too far from here, he thinks.

The congregation grows weary. Not sure what to do with the Reverend's information they decide it best to do nothing.

to just bunker down at nightfall with your children and husbands while the enemy like a roaring lion walketh around seeking whom

bald head starts perspiring like the pastor at church on Sundays and

from her seat at the kitchen table and starts to adjust her frock.

let everyone know to stay safe at home tonight then there is noth-

And he didn't dare ask for there was only one rule whenever the

round and tell the others. That should be something helpful don't

ished. He hisses his teeth, puts his hat on, and leaves with the women and baby in tow.

~



the boy.

Cecil offers him the plate of food and follows his pout to rest it on the ground by the row of plants he is digging. Crouching there on hands and knees in the dirt he looks like a raised mound of South

brown trousers makes it even more so for Cecil had seen these colors in the dirt when him and Johnny dig it up in the summer times.

Cecil doesn't mind helping his father especially since he knows the man thinks of him as weak.

that camera 'bout your neck boy? This is no place for taking pictures with him.

I will show him tonight that I am not weak. I am as strong and brave as they come. I am going to that rally to take a picture! Cecil thinks to himself.

Despite his opinion, Cecil's father never pushes it too far and so the camera always stays. Yet it is not Cecil's intention to stir his father's wrath so after handing him the bucket he asks permission and wanders off to see Johnny, the Roberts' boy, Cecil's best friend. A stone's throw away Cecil sees John Sr., the boy's father,

the men.

as he speaks.

Cecil whispers the whole story for fear that someone else might overhear. He anticipates the small smile that will play over Johnny's mischievous face anytime soon. It never comes. Instead,



Yet instead of going to Edisto River – which is sure to be too cold for his wispy body anyways – he turns down Glover Street. Turning onto one of the dark side roads Cecil follows his memory to



become sweaty and he loses his grip on the camera.

Nicholas starts in the direction of Cecil.

Cecil drops to his stomach. In his haste the camera hit against the ground and slams into his small chest. It knocks the wind out of him.

Then Cecil hears it. Right in front of him.

Reverend's drunken slur pierces the air.

A loud commotion starts among the men. Cecil gathers his wits and looks up just enough to see the Reverend being dragged to the burning cross.

could do anything the ground moves from beneath him.

No, he is moving up.

between the two as the man bundles Cecil under his arms and runs away from the sheeted bodies.

At home, the fury of God rains over the boy. Somewhere between playing hide and seek with the man's belt and begging for mercy from mama, Cecil found out the story.

An hour prior his father had returned for dinner and heard the rumor of the Klan rally from mama. Immediately he had set out to

house he realized the missing camera and put two and two together.

too late but better late than never Cecil reminds himself.

Second Place Nonfiction

Jaliah I. Robinson

Through My Eyes: America's Pandemic

versa. This year was different. I don't know when my summer began. It is as if after spring break the concept of time ceased to distinguish the days apart from each other. Even Easter went suddenly only a memory.

ties, had sleepovers, went on trips, and so on. They lived as if there was not an indiscernible killer on the loose. They used conspiracy theories when confronted with their carefree living. They were

more cautiously. They stayed in the comfort of their own homes, to avoid any interaction as much as they could. They shopped online to reduce the risk. Their actions depict living a temporary, moderate life. My truth, there was no adventure. There was boredom and the underlying feeling of redundancy from doing the same thing day in and day out. Home improvements and crafts are what occupied my time. Painting walls and rearranging furniture, even just adding decorations. I might as well be an interior designer at this point. I thought the days would play on a loop in my mind, that not one moment would stand out to me. I could not have been more wrong.

had to stay in the house. They wrote signs about needing haircuts and talked about how it is their right to live how they want. Then came uproar about a taken life. Another black corpse to add to

People took to the streets, ranted on social media, whether behind

-

in a civil war. If the sky could be painted a color it would bleed red. Red for bloodshed. Red for hate. Red for love. Red for the uncompromising, blind ignorance that was interwoven into the

pouring in the middle. A tale as old as time with details skewed ever so often. The pandemic, the broadcaster of this unjust system. All media had their eyes on this situation. The world was watching as week-by-week people were fed up with the despicable treatment of black people.

As with every movement there were people who used the time to cause trouble and there were people who criticized. Some demand-

-



Einstein

Willful ignorance. A warm blanket that wraps them snug in their

a few holes piercing through. The truth was too much to take.

It was as if to say racism is in the eye of the beholder. White privi-

This notion was not accepted for the mere fact that people did not

-
credit what was happening. What was worse was that there was a divide within the black community as well. Some believed that the outroar was more damaging to the black image than it was good. They did not support the cause orchestrated by their own people. It is said that ignorance is bliss but at what point does it become a menace to society? It is easier to think a certain way when one is

dressed the streets, doubt slowly crept into the air and willful ignorance was a shield of armor. Bubbles were burst and lines were crossed. There was so much trauma and pain in America. So much blood shed and so much hate. America bared its ugliness, there was no more hiding. This is our new normal.



Second Place Poetry

Ariel A. Meriwether

Tell Me

Cypher the fragments and give me sentences then take that and
piece together your thoughts

Words in the air travel to my soul.

Engulfed in my bed and trapped in my pillowcases.

Swarms of power and waves of control wrap themselves tightly
into threaded sheets.

Tell me power. How do you do it?

Enlighten me control. Where does it end

Shards of body stiffen the air. Heat entangles the mind.

Give me some type of hope.

Tie me down and stop my ears so I can hear.

Shut my mouth and focus me to speak

Allow thoughts to control my spirit.

Give my unbearable soul a source of belief and tell me

I'm begging you

Stress to me

Make me believe that the thoughts of my spirit will survive

Encourage my hope

Because I'm not sure how much more I have, if any, left.



Third Place Nonfiction

JaMariya A. Mason-Price

Truth Hurts

It's two in the morning and I suddenly jolt awake. Tears come pouring out of me attempting to cleanse my broken soul. It's the -
ing myself. The pitch-black room tries to keep me company, but



Alicia D. Parson,



Third Place Poetry

Alicia D. Parson

Insert Name Here

We march again, tear-stained cheeks steady glistening

But, is anyone even listening?

A different face but the story's always the same

The pain is the always there

Ripped anew with every hashtag

Insert Name Here?

You're telling me it's not just us,

I'm telling you there's no justice

Please! Whoever is listening, you have nothing to fear

Must I really insert another name here?

My sign is old, and my marker is drying

Along with my hope, my faith in you is dying.

What did you ever have to fear?

It's faces that look like mine that should be afraid



Just to feel seen, and just to be heard,
And just to feel like you've felt our word.



Third Place Fiction

Gervaris T. Wearing

Blood Drips to the Floor



presence, I'm certain, so he can pull off pulling out the hefty belt, the earthy colored one with the oval clasp that hasn't been around his abdomen since we said I do. He yanks off the belt and goes upstairs for him to go to bed.

know in less than two minutes he will go back to the Treshawn I married. As I open my phone to look at the camera to see my damage, he peeks his head down the steps and asks to come upstairs to

on my white shirt.

I hesitantly maneuver to the kitchen to clean the tile and head to bed. I know I'll come to our bed with him and his manhood waiting for me, so he can apologize and promise that he would never

tell me that we are together forever, and it will get better between us, but this time, I am not willing to hear his empty promises. And

as tears roll down my cheek.

The most profound wound from Tre last night, the card-sized one

touching does no damage anymore, even now, surrounding our willow on the trimmer, taking a few knocks. As I look at my face

elongate as he comes closer to see the damage he created. His jaw tightens as he looks at the damage he made to my light skin. Tre sighs heavily as he stands behind me to hug me and watch me apply Dermablend to mask the bruise. He abruptly leaves to go to the carport to self-pity as usual. I sigh as I can still see the damage still laying there boldly. I know it will take more than Dermablend to



point when I leave the bathroom with a full face of makeup, sharp blares cause me to notice smoke spilling from the carport window. Also, on the off chance that we were living in suburbia — neighbors inside earshot — the trills would've shocked them, as well.

My drive is to run, and I submit to the adrenaline, acknowledging halfway there that moving into fourth would've gotten me to him faster. I arrive at the rear of the carport, on the off chance that you'd hit a design where an awkward sets up a one end to the other

ens whether Tre's gotten away out front. Better to check there prior to taking any risks, at that point move up the carport entryway to clear the smoke.

Another scramble. I petition God for him to be anyplace but inside, more.

In any case, when I turn the corner, just the charger is in the carport. I'm still alone.

spilling out the top crease and leaking around the sides, making my eyes water. I snatch the handle and hurl, to save my adoration. Damn! The bastard kept it bolted! A speedy look about, at that

up. Rush around, salvage my adoration.

I rush to the secondary passage and reach for the handle, at that sively hot. I shake my head — I need to save my love, regardless.

Shoulders tight, I tap the metal. Just warm. Enormous spat, muscles unwind. More smoke than heat, up until this point. I open up the entryway and get impacted by an irate cloud, an observer

Time for my dive. I hold a full breath and walk in, blinded, arms



that I attempted. I drop to the ground, prepared to slither in reverse; yet nature's left a couple of clear crawls of air, similar to the educators guaranteed. But I can't see Tre from the solid, simply the bottoms of certain sawhorses and his air blower. I rotate on all fours, running winded, monitoring the entryway, I think, while I'm checking. Most of the way around, lungs consuming, a shine from outside, not far by any means. I attempt a breath. Hack! Hack! I creep. More smoky breaths, really hacking, even some frenzy.

It accepts twice the length I'd speculated, however it was a couple of feet, and I breakdown on the grass. I can't return for my adoration — we shouldn't both kick the bucket.

I hear an alarm, the commander's alarm. At the point when he

-

back, when I was breathing in smoke from a slick cloth and breathing out profound into that oppressive mouth, stage one of concealing that I'd killed him by siphoning the cutter's fumes under a covering I'd laid over his head. My love consistently moved his drinking sprees to his workshop when spring showed up, and I was

fastening iron into the overstuffed wastebasket.



Arielle J. Wiggins

Carmel Newyork

from those days in the summer.

wear the sunscreen

Every time we came inside for a water break, they yelled at us for

dew.

I still remember the swing set that was missing chains for the swing and bolts from the slide that eventually gave you a black eye.

That was before you got a full-time job being someone you weren't, became taller than me and went through puberty.

That was when life was simpler before distance and our lives kept us apart,



Faithe A. Stallings

The Draining

It sucks the life out of me
That every day, I wake up and I am a natural enemy
When I wash my face and the color does not change
I wish I could put a mask on to erase the deeper pain
But still, even with the weight on my shoulders
I rise for a better opportunity
A chance to escape the struggle
If I act a certain way, maybe they would see my rebuttals

The shade of my skin is like the other side
Right? No, wrong.

And it sucks the life out of me.



Honorable Mention

Kristopher A. Dunbar

Black is the Color (Of My True Love's Mind)

Island. Black bodies were scattered across the sands sunbathing, castle building, and simply playing. There was a homely presence about the surrounding island. A history rich with blacks who were transform the island through generations.

back as if the sun did not have permission to invade her eyes. The sea-salt ocean breeze would push against black-brown twisted locks. Collecting sand between her toes and smiling at the sensations. Most importantly, the color of my true love's mind is black.

ourselves as planetary bodies in alignment with each other. Trav-
essence of our beings.

I could watch the ocean caressing the land forever. Watching the
a slight breeze touched my face.

out of the two of us, I did not speak much paraphrase what she
back. I believed that we the both of us took in enough trauma for



-
ter movement to bring justice to those served with injustice. The

There were some many times that I had to turn off the television for Danielle, because it was getting too much. I remember her and I witnessing our city of New York going up in protest. I recall Dan-

small percentage of what those before us faced. Then I don't know

It got to the point where I had to remove our television from our bedroom. A temporary solution to stop the news cycle of pain that they were building in our minds. Agony that was the news founda-

with murder. I remember going into a primal yell of how I yearned

apartment.

Never before has my heart jumped to the base of my skull. I thought for a moment that I was going to be like another victim of

dark blue with a silver badge, and my hands nervously on the steering wheel. My eyes starring ahead of me hoping to see a future far from this present.



unless I accidentally cut myself shaving my face. I cannot even fathom how the others felt when they could not escape with their

Snapped back into reality as Danielle closed her book in my face

collective black bodies having fun in the sun. The laughter from the children and dialect from the adults.

I began to smile as I feel a chance that a possible change may come. A small teardrop comes from my eye to my cheek. I look



Brooke S. Jacobs

Think Outside the Box

M

iMposter

They ask me to choose

Male

It hurts to consider

In which I shall sit

Kill my ego, bury its song

Crack and bend it to a shape

Silence the cries, let it ache.





Jireh S. Funnie, Strength



Kristopher A. Dunbar

Flowers in the Attic

You can't go back to yesterday cause the petals won't stop bloom-

With your blood running down fertilizing what you planted.

You can't take back the seeds.

Just have to hope it grows and the petals go somewhere in the wind.

So far, I left my petals in the attic to wither and collect dust to



Nia-Semone C. McIntyre

Silence

Silence!

The complete absence of sound to cause or become silent; prohibit or prevent from speaking.

Silenced.

of Mississippi

was silenced, beaten to the point beyond recognition because he offended a white woman in a grocery store when he whistled.

Silenced.

was

Silenced.

one white person was killed or injured.

Silenced.

their Bible study at Mother

Emanuel Church, were

Silenced, as he shot rounds from a semi-automatic into their bodies in order to provoke a race war.

Silenced.

Silenced.



Silenced

as he was shot in the thigh and left to bleed out in the streets of

Silenced

made a sound.

Silence no more.

This silence we feed into the lie and webs we weave, we will no longer submissively take it

we choose to leave.

our history books.

Is a sharp hook in the mouth of a bass

not aware of his inevitable fate to be cooked.

These tragic tales that leave you shook.

Isn't one that many choose to look for, but as I said many times before we will no longer be Silenced.

We are the kings of the jungle; we will speak our truths and Roar!

Silence..... no more.



Alicia D. Parson

Heart Ache

It still hurts. There's still an ache there whenever he tells me about someone else. Whenever I imagine it. Them. Her. Whoever she may be, how she must look. How she's not me. It hurts. But it doesn't hurt every time. Sometimes I'm okay. It's almost like I've been pretending, no— faking it so long that I actually manifested

him. I can truly be his friend. But then something happens that reshapes my reality once again. It may be one of our mutual friends mentioning how they thought we'd always end up together, and suddenly I snap right back into the time where I thought the very same. Then that ache blossoms in my chest again, pressing gently

myself. After this last time I realized I can't just be his friend. The



Noah. D. Thomas

What is Blackness?

ers say that it is simply a culture or lifestyle. Truthfully, all of these
blackness is multifaceted.

own blackness. Stripped of their original culture, African slaves
were regarded as subhuman and primitive. They were degraded,
conditioned to believe that they were inferior. They were admon-

blackness was mocked; black people were portrayed as foolish and
stereotypes and caricatures. Even today, black people have very
little control over how they are represented and perceived.

not been obliterated; it has only evolved. There remains a lack of

to assimilate into white society. Many of us have to adopt a second
position has even affected the way we interact with other black

types that white people have impressed upon us. Internal issues
like gang violence, self-hate, broken homes, and colorism cause
great strain within the black community. Because anti-blackness is



embedded in the fabric of this nation, it is virtually impossible for black people to avoid challenges.

Importantly, blackness is diverse. Commonly, black people are regarded as a monolith, when in all actuality, the opposite is true. Black people come in a multitude of shades, and the black community is comprised of multiple ethnicities and cultures. Black people are diverse in lifestyle, religion, socioeconomic status, and political

-

is harmful, as it pushes a false narrative while placing black people

nerdy. Black people do not have to perpetuate stereotypes in order to embrace their blackness. Black people have just as much right to be different as everyone else.

Despite adversity, blackness is something that is worthy of celebra-

tenacity and unfeigned strength. In the face of marginalization, black people have still managed to produce and progress. We continuously set trends, and countless innovations have resulted from black thought. There have been numerous black philosophers, writers, scientists, artists, and academics to break ground in their

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ized some of the greatest social and political movements known to man.

rich. There are times when we mourn, and there are times when we rejoice. There are times when we reel, and there are times when we rest. When we embrace our blackness, we are not simply embracing our race or culture, but we are embracing a profound testimony of strength and faith. We are embracing wisdom born of adversity and tenacity born of struggle. When we embrace our blackness, we





Wesley V. Hickson,



Kristopher A. Dunbar

The Downward Relapse

It was the middle of senior year that I fell into a grey area once more. A blurred perspective of loathing everyone and everything around me. I didn't care if the grass was greener on the other side or that the grass was giving off a brighter pigmentation. I just knew that I was going under the same mutation in my higher mind. Yet I was comfortable with this symbiotic cancerous growth that was feeding off me at small intervals of time. Ripping my skin back and having Elliot Smith on constant airplay. By the way, a wonderful, underrated artist during his time. My dear Melancholia felt more like a lover who would come by and take me at a moment's notice. Singing harsh monotone harmonies scraping her tongue to clash with her teeth, letting me know how worthless I am to her. Yet she held me when no one else did as I sunk into my despair, with her hands burrowing into my back, grabbing at my heart to

my relapse since her and I had waltz to this similar tune of self-anguish, self-hatred, and bitterness towards everyone who was better off than me. Yet this time it wasn't waltz; her and I were dancing above seventy beats per measure. The measures contained no rest, but a constant repeat of the downward spiral.



Gervaris T. Wearing

I'm Tired

I am tired of the same thing every day.

Every day, as if my life is a total cycle.

I'm Tired.

It's too much pressure for a young man like myself.

Nothing but negativity and derogatory comments coming towards me.

I'm Tired.

When will all of this stop?

When will I have the energy to care or try again?

I'm Tired.

I hope one day all of this will change.

And I will no longer be tired of the same thing every day.

Take the time out of your day to encourage someone.

Because there are many people who are just like me.

And We are getting tired and more tired each and every day.



Jaliah I. Robinson

Series of Unfortunate Events

January blindsided us like a deer in headlights

May oozed red like a gunshot wound on an innocent jogger

June suffocated us like a knee was glued to our necks

August ripped through hearts like the San Andreas fault line

September virtually shattered all hope that things would get better



Arielle J. Wiggins

The Fire That Never Stopped Burning

I elbow Tyler in the side, he winces. Honestly, I shouldn't be

believe it was along the lines of 'dang it, I just bought those new sneakers, now they are ruined'. Sometimes I can't believe we are related, let alone twins; he can be so insensitive. All around me,

turkey on Thanksgiving, and he burns it. As I stand in the charred

ories of when I was younger; back then, it seemed like our second home, even if it was a few hours away. The house is unrecognizable; there were no pictures of my mom when she was my age, family reunions, and my favorite, the one of my cousin holding me

I blinked my eyes, hoping that this was all a dream this couldn't be

As my eyes peel open, I see my mother crouched on the ground, eyes wide and hands covering her mouth in disbelief. My mom has never been one to hide her emotions, and frankly, it's a pret-

know she is in shock and is uncertain for whatever reason; tragedy seems to be following this family recently. How could something so catastrophic happen to us, not my immediate family but grandma and grandpa too. They offered us to stay with them after our old house had been burnt down and while our new one was being

complained. I know we were inconveniencing them with our crazy schedules and contributing to the utility bills' increase; it was a little concerning; they never said anything considering they are easily irritated and tend to speak their minds. What is the likelihood that



Why would God allow something like this to happen? I mutter a prayer under my breath; even though he allowed this to happen, I know the only way we will get out of it is with God.



Terrecia McPherson

Black Is....

The color of my skin,

The color of my eyes,

The color of my hair,

Not the color of your lies.

Black Is....

The color of the earth's crust

Within which diamonds lie,

The color of freedom,

And the color of pride.

Don't try to brainwash me, for you are blind!



Brooke S. Jacobs

Adoration from Nowhere

Who knows your beauty, if not I?
Though you care not to hear it
I adore the very sight of you
When I know you cannot feel it.

Who knows your beauty, if not I?
I've seen it almost daily
Even though you cannot stay.
I wait 'til you come to see me.

Who knows your beauty, if not I?
The years that you spend sitting

Who knows your beauty, if not I?
The wrinkles setting deeper.
It suits you well, even now,
When you are growing weaker.

Who knew your beauty, if not I?
The room my only company.
You've gone and left me all alone.
I pray you rest easy.



Faith Lomax

The African American Succession

Rhythm with the rhymes

Devils in disguise

With that red look in his eyes

Trying to hold on



So you lock me up in chains and shackles
Cause you say you gotta tame me
But when we think about it
You're the only one that's yelling
Acting like an infected mutt

Tryna justify my actions
Because of your unspeakable attractions
See you can't blame my people

You used our talents

We were your limelights
Your meal ticket was our birthrights
We paved the way
So you could have your fancy rides

But I refuse to let you take advantage of me

Not master Becky, John, or Pete
I hold the legacy of my ancestors
My people didn't face defeat
They were just under oppression
But our time is now

This is the Great African American Succession



Nia-Semone C. McIntyre

Breaking Chains

Breaking chains gutted and deveined, chained and oppressed,

Their thirst for freedom.

Rounded up like cattle and forced to assimilate, regenerate, and
incinerate into the ideologies of democracy.

Breaking chains

stripped of their names

they suffered in pain

and were never the same.

No credit or fame

for the land that was built on the backs of the many.

They provided plenty but never got any. It's over now

the time is up

the things they endured

helped lift them up.

That left battle scars.

So will never forget,

they come from a culture where they're fortunate because no mat-
ter how bad things may get no

chain, brands, lynchings, or whips

Will ever hold them down.

It is their nature to rise from the ground and reclaim their voice



Wesley V. Hickson,



Quiana L. Wilson

The Embrace

-

time I was bullied for the family's business. We were at this school for smart kids and it had new paint over the wall, so new you could already tired of the jokes.

-

wanted to be friends with the dark-skinned girl with pink lips and green eyes, if you look close enough you will see this red hair of mine too, but it just looks dark brown luckily.

truck, I'm always the last on her carpool route so I am able to get

friends, it obviously was easy for her in school, especially since she is so beautiful. She has these slanted green eyes and normal looking brown lips and even her hair makes sense, dark brown and curly. Her hair goes well with her peanut butter brown skin and her

don't blame them, how did I end up being the darkest female in our me through the rear-view mirror.

father and your rich dark brown skin came from my mother; you bones are high like the tribe my father came from, your hair is just

come from family members, I thought they cooked me up in one of



their rituals.

starting to crack again and the paint on the wood is chipping. You would think since the building is so small, they would keep it up better.

how she always knows everything; she says I will develop this too one day. My mom has the family green eyes with brown tint, complimenting her brown skin and black hair. She is only a little taller

being tall, that doesn't seem to matter.

frustration set across her face. She knows why they are calling me a witch; my birthday is in a month and the family will start me in

gives birth to girls if we didn't seem weird enough already. I am dreading this year because I do not want to turn into a witch.

you are not a witch you just come from a very blessed and pow-



with me over my bed not being made yet on a Saturday morning, during spring break, I chuckle to myself. Sometimes I forget I am still a child and things like that matter to mama too.

Aunt Cint and her 3 girls come over for breakfast and for the usual

since Jade and I started learning the root work, spirit has taken keen to me. I don't know why but it just comes easier for me. Mama said it's because I have the strongest connection to her parent's since I look just like them. Nevertheless, it makes my cousins resent me because, aunt Cint pushes them to be more like me. I will be honest I was not liking this root work thing, the only bene-

never let one of her girls walk around with purple hair. Mama says we shouldn't ignore what spirit feels, and spirit wanted me to color my hair with whatever color I was seeing that week. Who am I to complain?

~

-

I am considered the strongest on today and I can feel it. I have changed my hair color back to its natural reddish brown to fully embrace today and I am glad I did. Today is the day I fully become

embrace my family's work but I did not understand it yet. All those kids who used to pick at me now come to the shop for services from me. They say I'm the best in the state, did you understand what I just said? They said I am the best in all of California, and

dark skin witch with pink lips, green eyes, and red-brown hair. She is blessed and powerful. She is me.



Nia-Semone C. McIntyre

Rise Up

Rise.

I said RISE!

Rise up from the ashes that they burnt you into.

Rise up out of the oppression that wasn't meant for you.

Rise up off the ground your body aching from the pain.

You see, this country was built on your back with no disdain

So rise up or your life they will claim.

Striking down lashes blood dripping to your feet.

nent sleep.

Rise like Jesus of Nazareth on the third day, Rise like the sun in the sky at the break of dawn peeking out of the blanket of night that covers it. Rise up like Assata Shakur hand up yet the bullet still stuck in her core.

I can take no more

Do lions howl and wolves roar?

No more, rise up.

Still, she shall rise.



Rise up from the ashes that they burnt you into. Rise up out of the oppression that wasn't meant for you.

chains that hold you down.

That mute your voice from making a sound.

With words so profound.

Rise out of diversity like a rose out of concrete because that stone that crushes bones is no match for your roots.

Roots that have been sold, burned, and hanged.

Roots that continue to grow and remain the same. Roots that are nurtured and gave rise to mankind. Rise from your roots

And blossom.

Rise from the pain

And thrive.

Rise from the bones of your ancestors they chained,

maimed, and claimed. Wake up and Rise up. Rise up and Wise up. Wise up because time's up.



Terrecia McPherson

Make Up

We made up our minds
To make up our bodies
Because we hated our bodily make up.
But before you add lashes and powder to eyes that haven't yet
wake up
Think,

What else could I be doing to sharpen my vision
and help not only my eyes, but body and mind to wake up?
Is adding contour and blush
Just hiding my fears and insecurities in a rush?
I agree,
It may not be.

But instead, maybe
You're falling
out of grace with this world
and falling
right back in love with your face.
But don't haste
Think

Instead about making a mud paste
And plastering your face.
Aligning yourself
with traditions of our forgotten race.



It strengthens your contour
And rejuvenates your blush

and use the makeup that inevitably we all must.



Jaliah I. Robinson

Living

Night falls

Days bloom

There's a break in the system

A lot happens in a day

So much pain

So much hate

Sun rises in the east

Sets in the west

Sunrise to sunset

The rise and fall of my chest

We take a breath

Suffocating

Blink our eyes

Tears fall

Move our jaws

Spewing hate

And smack our lips

Tasting bitter

We second guess



Judge and overthink
Misunderstand
With haste we sink

This is living

This is life

This is living



Tasha Y. Skinner

Situationship

Simply wondering if you're okay,



Jaliah I. Robinson

Society

Who am I?

Who do you want me to be?

Certain way I need to walk

How I need to talk

Things I need to change

I can't be the same

You say this is what I need to do

In order to succeed

I am who you want me to be.

Told to watch my tone.

My voice is not my own.

Change the way I dress.

Culture there is no such thing.

Assimilation we tend to cling.

My roots are my home.

Yet my identity is still unknown.



-

had been several times were Naomi promised to pick up Zoey or go to one of her school plays, but never showed. It often frustrated Jesse to no end, but thankfully, April was more than willing to help out when she could.

-

ly checked Zoey's bag to make sure she had her reading book and toast and microwave bacon, before sitting down at the table. April joined them a few minutes later, her now slightly cold coffee in tow.

April made a face but said nothing, and the rest of breakfast was about what was happening in her cartoon.

from, so April and Zoey made their way to the elementary school just a few blocks down from Jesse's apartment. He watched them from the window for a moment, Zoey clinging onto April's arm as they walked. After making sure that they were gone, Jesse rushed back into the bedroom.



for almost three months now. Inside was the ring he hoped to give

sure he was that she would say yes, Jesse hid it away right after he bought it. He never felt like there was a right time, a right place, or a right way to propose to April. Not only had they been friends since they met in a Dungeons and Dragons group in community college, but she was one of his most supportive friends during his breakup with Naomi. April helped him through every crazy twist and turn, from the custody battle to the incident where Naomi somehow got into the apartment and ruined all of his clothes. It felt surprisingly natural when she started spending the night. Soon after, she started dropping Zoey off at daycare in the morning and



their breakup certainly didn't help the situation.

into the apartment. She looked around and Jesse watched as her

Jesse frowned and looked around the apartment. April's additions, while noticeable, certainly weren't overt. Yes, he had a few more plants than he was used to and yes, he now had throw pillows of all things, but he felt like the changes made the apartment feel homier.

knew that she was in the wrong. The two lapsed into silence for a

Jesse followed her gaze and realized his mistake. If it truly had



and a pear-shaped diamond. The ring certainly wasn't anything to



and turned to storm off.

At that same moment, April walked in. The two women almost ran into each other before stopping and staring at one another. As they stood in front of each other, Jesse realized how different the two women truly were. Naomi was tall, blonde and lithe. She was the

-
tisement in a magazine, body bent in a foreign yet alluring way. April, on the other hand, was short, curvy, and a bit plain looking.

and dramatic behavior, and April was known for remaining calm



As April got dressed and put on her make-up, Jesse placed the ring back into his hiding spot in the drawer. He cleaned the kitchen and straightened up Zoey's room, putting away all her toys. By the time he started folding the load of laundry he had left in the dryer, April

off to work.

As soon as Jesse was sure that April was well on her way to work, he sprang into action. He called his mother and arranged for Zoey to be dropped off at her place. His mother, of course, was ecstatic, and it took Jesse almost a whole hour to get her off the phone. He then ran to the grocery store and picked up all the ingredients necessary for his signature chicken rigatoni. He stopped by the

tealight candles to go on the table. When Jesse arrived home, he started setting everything up, placing the fragrant roses and lilies in a clear vase. He began prepping dinner, chopping up the chives,

he got done, Jesse had wished he had eaten a snack before trying to cook.

who promised Zoey that they would have a girl's night full of Bar-

old into complying, and she happily went with her grandmother. Before pulling off, Jesse's mother tried to give him a few words of advice, telling him to time it just right, and if April came home angry, just scrap the whole thing and save the proposal for another day.

cy champagne, and returned to his apartment. As he drove up to his

with all of the books thrown off the shelf and a number of photos missing from their spots on the wall. The throw pillows had been ripped open and the television had been smashed.



