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TCL Expressions *Spring 2024*

TECHNICAL COLLEGE OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

FRONT

Ambriance Lamar, *Cybersecurity Student*

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Expressions Returns

Welcome to *Expressions 2024*, the third edition of TCL's literary journal, that includes poems, essays, short stories, photographs, paintings, and other works of art from TCL students, staff, and faculty.

Thanks so much to all of those who shared their talents and creativity! Thanks, also, to Leigh Copeland and her Marketing Team, Mark Rand and Mindy Lucas, for first promoting and then putting together and copy editing this publication!

Though we have fewer submissions for this edition, the quality of the works is not less, so relax, put aside whatever it is you're working on and enjoy the creative reflections and contemplations of life from members of the college community!

Dan Herrin & Russell Keevy
Editors



Helen Keevy,
Daughter of Russell Keevy, English Instructor

Carolina Reaper:
A Poem of Fire and Stomach Aches
Katie Ross, Dual Enrollment Student

Wrinkles red,
Like gnarled bark of blood,
Scorpion tail-
Stings my eyes like vinegar.
I inhale.
Feels like breathing an inferno.
Feeling dread,
I hold it up, my stomach gurgles.
Take a nibble.
A trace of sweet but mostly HEAT HEAT HEAT!
Keeps getting worse,
My tongue's been skinned and rubbed with salt!
Through ringing ears,
I faintly hear a pant and cough.
I gulp and sputter.
Sears my throat going down.
With indigestion,
I lie down on the ground.
The burning taste
Doesn't leave for another half an hour!

Dragons on My Mind

Katie Ross, *Dual Enrollment Student*

If a dragon is a thought,
Then which to my mind was first brought?
Which dragon settled in this den?
How long 'til it was seized again
By other scales or mother's brood,
Thrown out, no light, no air, no food?
Now other dragons hold rule there.
Which was the first to find this lair?
Which dragons did first make a nest,
Outside my hair, with my own breath?
And soon new dens completely claimed,
Through steel and flame and claw and fang,
Were settled by those sent by me!
Some other dragons forced to flee,
into deadly obscurity.
Outside the head they cannot feed.
Which dragons did first make a nest,
Outside my hair, with my own breath?
How many dragons have there been?
How many claimed these nests within?
They conquer heads, and in their quests
They roar and feast and build their nests
In other hosts, in other heads.
Just how far have my dragons spread?

How many dragons were replaced
By their own hatched posterity?
The weaker dragons starve and waste,
While stronger have prosperity.
For now new offspring rule my den,
But will they be thrown out again?
How many dragons, once the queens,
Now waste away, unheard, unseen?
How many scales are really mine?
Should I've let foreign dragons dine,
Upon my ponders and daydreams,
So mine or not they interbreed?
All drink my thoughts with endless thirst,
So I don't know which was the first.
Since breeding dragon genes combine,
Can I call any dragons mine?
Even the first was born elsewhere.
Which dragon first did find this lair?
To seek originality
Is nothing but futility,
Or maybe creativity
Is really ingenuity.
So think of dragons! Let them breed!
Make nests for eggs that breeding brought,
And see if these small hatchlings lead
To strong new dragons that you sought.
If a dragon is a thought.

Fail Better

Reese Walrad, *Dual Enrollment Student*

Since the day my second grade teacher, Mrs. Whitfield slipped one more sheet of perfectly written notes into a thick manila folder of every test I completed that year and slid it towards me, my education has felt like one big scrabble game in which someone keeps kicking the board. I'd just finished yet another reading assessment. The whole time I was stumbling over words and hoping the bold black dot that signaled I could stop would appear, only for her to inquisitively ask me to continue to the next one. She said a word that at the time I didn't understand anything about other than that it meant something was wrong with me; dyslexia. I didn't dare ask her to repeat it for fear it was another test. *Would she have me spell it? How would I? I'd only just heard it, that'd be unfair!* I could try spelling it out like she'd taught me, but I could only get to 'D'. Mrs. Whitfield continued as I scrambled around the letters in my head, hoping they'd land like loaded dice. She told me it was a learning disability she had been researching, that she understood why I was having such a hard time. It wasn't my fault, my brain would skip over lines and exchange letters and it would continue to do so my whole life.

One week later I was pouting in the backseat of my mom's car as she explained that after school for three days of every week I would go to a place where they would teach me a different way to read. *I could read perfectly fine* I thought, *so what if I missed a few letters? It only took a few minutes for me to figure out what the word was meant to be!* All I wanted all day was to go back home and now I was forced into what was practically two more hours of school. My stomach dropped as we walked through the door and suddenly I was rolling my lettered dice again, trying to recall every word I was taught. Maybe if I showed my new instructor that I could read perfectly fine she would tell my mom that this was all a big mistake, there was nothing wrong with me, I wasn't stupid. A simple twenty minute pretest confirmed everything my second grade teacher thought and it was decided that I had to relearn how to read entirely, starting with the alphabet. There it was, another piece of proof to add to the folder of idiocy that now defined me, the one that made my teachers look upon me like a starving dog they were morally obligated to feed. I began to feel the need to prove myself, I couldn't make a single

mistake lest I be considered stupid and I couldn't ask for help because that would confirm that I was. I poured my whole being into every piece of work I did and if it wasn't good enough I shut down, after failure it was no longer worth trying. After any mistake I made my eyes would sting, my face would redden, and my blood would boil, which only made it harder to read the words that squirmed and mocked me on their pages. My instructor would tell me to breathe and try again with the methods she taught me and I did so as to not inconvenience her or prolong the amount of time I had to be there.

By my Freshman year the lessons were long over and I had just about given up on school. It didn't matter that I was a more skilled reader by then, the damage had been done. If something didn't come easy to me immediately I ignored it until something else came along that I could do. This reflected in my grades, low Bs to high Cs, and led to my first 504 plan meeting. At first my stomach twisted when I was called down to the meeting, although I had given up on school I was still conscious of disappointing my parents and I knew the meeting was about my grades. What I didn't know was that while the meeting was going to address my grades, it was also for talking about and finding solutions to my difficulties in class. It allowed me to express my need for assistance in a non-judgemental space and start to repair my relationship with my education. I was given accommodations such as a one day extension for writing and reading assignments, preferential seating, time and a half on tests, and guaranteed access to notes.

I don't exactly remember when I heard Samuel Beckett's famous quote "Try Again. Fail Again. Fail Better.", but I remember the day a show I was watching reminded me of it. It made me think back to my three years of reading lessons and how far I'd come. I recalled how I kicked myself when I stumbled over a word before quickly correcting myself and how in school if my grade fell my self-worth fell with it, despite any mistakes my teachers allowed me to correct. I had gone from having to relearn the alphabet to reading close to a college level, though I am still a slow reader. I no longer allow myself to stay silent and fall behind, I've learned to advocate for my educational needs and for the last one and a half years I have been enrolled in advanced placement and honors level classes. Over time as I thought about these parts of my life I realized how experiences I viewed as failures had ultimately helped me learn to "fail better" when I eventually decided to try again.

Fantasies Can be Fatal.

Natalia Inda, *Nursing Student*

I often ask myself if it is justifiable to grieve something that was never even there. Something that was never tangible, alive, and real. Something that was in actuality a complex delusion to which I had entirely convinced myself upon the topic that it was indeed, living, breathing, and standing right before me in my own reality. With such profound dreams, poetic thoughts, and new levels of awareness that seemed to heighten day by day for months on end. All I wanted was to share my newfound hopes, dreams, and thoughts in all its grandeur that came along with them. A phrase I would say often to my friends and family was, “And then I couldn’t stop realizing.” To some of them, that statement was considered a warning for what was to follow. A conversation to smile and nod along with when you are entirely lost on the topic being presented. The few that would speak out to me for better and worse, occasionally gave me the warning that my fantasies can be fatal.

Growing up I had struggled with both my mental and physical health. Some of my earliest memories I can recall of feeling very out of touch and out of place with the world around me, were from the time I was three years old. Around that age I had dreamt then convinced myself that I could fly, and I had tried to do it multiple times. Fortunately, I never ended up with any broken bones or any injury for that matter. As I got older that feeling never really changed. I would have and still do, describe myself as the song with the most upbeat, eclectic, and euphoric instrumentals. Coupled with the most reflective, poetic, and melancholic lyrics. Essentially, a walking contradiction. My emotions held a power that would lift me up to the heavens or drag me down to hell. I would often find myself stuck being pulled from both ends at once. I would also find myself experiencing intense dreams, spiritual awakenings, and occasionally losing significant portions of certain memories.

All of the specialists that I had seen during that time had diagnosed me with depression and anxiety. However, every single one of them

had mentioned, “it’s likely that you’re bipolar, but due to your age we cannot diagnose you as such”. Therefore, I was not treated for bipolar disorder properly like I should have been. For seven years I was on and off different antidepressants that always made my condition worse. The weird part is I was never the one to initially notice how negatively I reacted with that class of medication. It just seemed to me the longer I was on them, the more years that would go by, the more I felt I began to lose my mind. More so my concept of what is real and what is not.

Now I wouldn’t say it’s foolish to want to live in your dream world. I personally believe it is where you can find hope. When you can create your own stories, make your own magic, and visualize yourself reaching your highest potential. The problem that I faced wasn’t living in my fantasy land. It was the intensity of it that became the best and bane of my existence as I grew older. I wasn’t just believing in a dream, I was entirely convinced and sold in the sense that it was real and life outside of my delusions was not. I would also try to convince everyone close to me of the same things for better and worse. It wasn’t until much later I was informed by my close friends that half the time they had no clue what I was talking about.

I would convince myself of my sanity and that I made sense when I spoke. I would convince myself that I was doing well, and I was healthy. I would convince myself that every man I met would be the one. I would convince myself that I was entirely invincible to anything or anyone around me that could put me in harm’s way. I would convince myself that I could fight God or become him. All things beyond any realm of possibility and in some, I neglected entirely to think of the possible repercussions for my health and wellbeing.

When the highs would stop and I would feel the ball drop, all my dreams, the things I spoke so passionately about, the feelings of love I held for another, and everything I had convinced myself of as being my reality would just disappear. I would come out with no recollection of the events that took place while I was gone. Or I would cry myself to sleep violently for months, grieving all the fantasies I created and convinced myself were true. The most bizarre part is on all those dark nights where I wished to suffer the same fate of my dreams, I

would wake up with the sun with no recollection of what consumed me in the darkness just hours before. They were all delusions so strong that the only thing that would break me out was quite literally crashing out of a manic episode all the way back down to earth. I would only stay on the ground for a week where I existed completely devoid of emotion, but with a larger amount of mental clarity. Not fed by delusions. Before again spending many more months traveling through hell and back, carrying my bag of delusions along with me.

It wasn't until the time I was 20 years old that I was properly and professionally diagnosed with bipolar I disorder and medicated for it. It was a very hard pill to swallow considering it was one of the things I kept in the back of my mind, but I refused to accept it as my reality. It was also a big leap from appearing under the illusion of depression and anxiety. To the reality of bipolar I disorder with paranoid delusions. It was never a dream of mine to carry a title so feared, too heavy for the world to carry, and too complex to ever be fully understood by myself and others. It's a bit of an uncomfortable fact that I must take a few pills every day for the rest of my life in order to appear normal to the outside world. To keep my mind from wandering too far north or south. Also, to be told that I am doing the "right" or "good thing" by doing so. I never know how to take that statement. If it's out of love and concern for me or the fear that others might feel because of how the media portrays people with bipolar disorder.

On the flip side I still love the fact that I am a walking contradiction. My thoughts are so deep and complex they come to me in the form of poetry. I'm naturally creative and a dreamer at heart. In any situation I somehow am always able to find the beauty behind the madness. I look at life and unfortunate circumstances simply as being a beautiful tragedy, or it is something that is tragically beautiful. I am an agent of both war and peace simultaneously. I enjoy life more being a wild card, there's always something happening to keep me on my toes. Whether I'm stuck in mania or have crashed into the void, I'm now a lot more conscious overall of my reality vs my delusions. What is real and what is not. And I have learned and repeatedly proven that fantasies can be fatal.

Harper
Leslie Harper Worthington,
*Director of Institutional
Effectiveness*

Celtic Harps populate
My Appalachian Heritage
Many Musicians
Comprise my Clan
All taking up Strings
Of Diverse Design
Not Heavenly Harps
As much as
Mountain Mandolins

The Gap Year

Kiley Caffrey, *Culinary Arts Technology Student*

I couldn't picture myself attending college for quite a while. I went through the application process, checked out different schools, and even connected with a few representatives of their institutions. It fell short, and I honestly found no interest in the subject. My mother warned me that if school was not in the books, I would have to work throughout the summer into next year. I got ahead of this and managed to secure my first job at the infamous retail store, Gap Inc. Though, this was not an intended pun of my situation. Shortly after the beginning of my employment, I was invited to a trip to Puerto Rico by a close friend only days after graduating high school. I jumped at the opportunity, seeing as how I had never left South Carolina any farther than the distance to South Dakota, and the adventure was fun! Sure, 12 solid hours of food poisoning began with the 3 a.m. flight to the island, along with quite the sunburn throughout my stay going with it, but I was entranced by the beauty around me and the people bustling through the streets of San Juan. The trip ended only a week later, and I was right back to work at Gap.

Retail certainly showed how judgmental and egotistical people can be with one another. Customers, management, it simply didn't matter who after a while. I was highly successful, even having the highest sale of credit cards in the entire building. Being scheduled more hours than I ever agreed on certainly boosted my performance and allowed for all the time in the world to help customers. However, nothing lasts forever. I discovered a new place to test my skills and really grow as an employee and having a more private location comforted me. I happily took in the training and bonded well with my new colleagues. Unfortunately, managing two separate jobs at once eventually took its toll, and I had to

make my very first career driven decision. I left Gap joyous as could be and settled into my new home away from home.

Private businesses are not always reliable. Like Gap, I worked at my new place for many months. I saw the holidays, excited as more Christmas trees left the property to grateful families. I saw the lovebirds stroll through the door on Valentine's Day, envious as I was only a few months into processing the end of a long-term relationship. I even made it through the upbeat holiday of Mardi-Gras, jokingly handing out colorful plastic bead necklaces to the servers and kitchen staff. All that time spent was worthwhile to me, but issues had begun.

I was faced with the challenges of petty feuds between employees and customers, punished when I was wrongly convicted for someone else's mistakes and mistreatment. I had to keep my mouth shut as I was scolded as if I were a child again, only to leave me with a vision like rain falling against a windowpane. My personal motivation grew thin, and the world was simply preparing me for the worst.

Good Friday. I was enjoying the somewhat cloudy day and headed to the grocery store to find a dessert fit for Easter Sunday. Driving in my Volkswagen Beetle, I was about to turn when suddenly, I'm in my first-ever car accident. My entire headlight is on the ground, as well as a significantly smaller piece, leaving my front bumper with two empty spaces. I carefully leave the driver's seat to collect the puzzle pieces of my beetle, and quickly become reseated as I drive over to a grassy area to assess further damages. The other driver, hauling around her brushguarded Jeep Wrangler, was an unlikely suspect. Initially, I found solace in the fact the driver was a police officer. Someone the public can rely on in times of need. That was foolish of me to assume.

Had it not been for the state trooper, I would have blindly taken the advice of the officer who did not want to take responsibility for their actions against a civilian. Lying to an insurance company is not usually at the forefront of

a person's mind, but something appeared to have changed that day. Thankfully, their insurance company was unable to argue against an official report saying I was not responsible, and my mother found relief in that moment. A week later, with my taped-in headlight, I was fired from my employment at the time, left to pick up the pieces within myself.

It took around a month or so for someone to examine my car and figure out where the damage lay. This was not satisfactory, given how almost nothing was properly accounted for. Further investigation revealed my radiator had been bent, and my beetle was declared a total loss, as well as a personal heartbreak.

I felt as if the world was at war with me. I was charging, wanting to fight, but struck by the weaponry of fate and random chance. Devastation was masked with determination to discover new employment opportunities, as well as a new vehicle, not caring if it had been used like my ruined beetle. Not many employers reached out to me from my numerous applications, and Facebook marketplace was not the greatest dealership either. My parents were seemingly impressed by my behavior, and I found myself unable to convey the true emotion I felt from my recent losses. The words "We're very proud of you" circled around me like carousel horses at the local carnival, taunting me with feelings of failure and utter shame. My parents, however, remained oblivious to my internal struggles of wanting to succeed, not fall apart in front of them.

Time moved by days becoming weeks, and I was exploring Bluffton while borrowing my mother's car, when opportunity rang over the phone. I had finally grasped an interview, and once the call ended, I shouted with utter delight! I brewed in the joy and hopeful waves that crashed over me, and anxiously waited to tell my parents what had occurred. The interview had gone well, and the place was beautiful, but being rejected from the decision was certainly a kick to the stomach. It was difficult being told I simply did not have enough knowledge for a position I applied for, but no later than a week did 3 new possibilities arrive.

Overnight, I was the dream candidate. I was offered the role from the trilogy of managers I interviewed with, deciding to take on the challenge of handling and scheduling 3 different jobs for myself. I was finally earning income again, and quickly building all kinds of relationships with others. Adding on to my resume and growing my list of skills began to fuel me with motivation and curiosity again. I had finally found what I wanted and where I needed to be.

College had no longer seemed to be so daunting anymore. I recognized I had been able to overcome challenges in the past year alone that most tend to experience much later than the rightful age of 19. Making the decision to leave a job despite the close bonds I formed with select coworkers, facing my first car accident and losing my car, being fired for the first time, all leaving me with nothing but the remnants of my bank account and the fruitless effort of dating apps. I simply had nothing left to fear anymore. Using the newfound confidence encouraged the process of re-applying to college, discovering the promise of an education catered to the culinary arts.

Life after graduation appeared to be something to look forward to. I had read countless stories of alumni recalling their “final summers”, and noting how warm and inviting the experience could be. I certainly didn’t plan on the different scenarios that came to reality, but I had learned the best way to deal with my problems was to simply accept them for what they had been and get through it. Similar to the popular phrase “Take a bull by the horns, and a man by his word”, I had to take it all on the chin and bear being told “Your car was totaled”, and “You are no longer needed, good luck to you” all while struggling to decide if further education was worth my time. I’m grateful for my gap year. It showed me what the “real world” looks like and brings to the table, and it forced me to bring something myself. It forced me to hold on and listen, and I refused to let go.

Life Sucks Sometimes

Ciara McMahon, *Nursing Student*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said, “into each life some rain must fall.” This aphorism means that life can really suck sometimes for everyone. Personally, my life has been full of rain. I have severe bipolar disorder, which makes it extremely hard to be a functional member of society. I’ve had many episodes of both depression and mania, but the most severe manic episode I ever had happened when I turned twenty-six years old. My recollection of this episode is blurry in some areas, but I’m going to do my best to describe the rainiest season of my life.

I turned twenty-six when I was in Lake George, New York with my family. I was hiking every day of my vacation and enjoying the breathtaking views of the Adirondacks. I remember feeling extremely creative while spending time alone in nature, and I kept writing poems about my feelings. I had a pretty serious problem with alcohol all throughout my twenties, but on my twenty-sixth birthday I felt that God was calling me to be sober, so I quit drinking abruptly. I also didn’t pack enough of my bipolar medication on the trip, so I didn’t take my pills for a few days and started to feel elevated without the numbing effect of drugs. When I got home from New York, I decided I didn’t need the pills at all. I stopped needing sleep and one morning I had an epiphany while meditating at the beach. I was meditating in the sand and all these dogs came up to me. Dogs represent unconditional love, and in that moment at the beach I felt unconditionally loved by God. I felt like I had a calling from God to be like Jesus or the Buddha. I felt enlightened.

I normally would take my younger sister to high school in the morning because she has epilepsy and doesn’t drive. But

that morning, I told her she didn't need to go to school because I was enlightened, and I felt she could learn more from life than she could from sitting at a desk all day. I also decided I was going to quit all my jobs and have complete faith in God because I was sick of working in real estate and teaching yoga. I took my sister to my therapist's house, my dad's office, and the diner I used to work at to tell people of my new calling to be like Jesus and not have a job. They all had different reactions, but my old boss at the diner told me that I needed money to live, and my response was to throw my purse in the trash and storm out of his restaurant. I thought money was the root of all evil. I drove to my grandma's old people home to tell her about my new calling. I thought she would be excited because she's super Catholic, but she was just afraid. She called my parents, and they came to the old people home.

I don't remember much of what happened when my parents came to the old people home, but I eventually ended up in the ER in the middle of the night. I was barefoot, without my glasses, and was injected with some tranquilizers to calm me down. I started to really think I was Jesus and that I was being crucified on the stretcher. One of the doctors told me to meditate, so I got in my lotus position and started meditating with the mindset of healing those who needed to be healed. I especially thought of my little sister because I wanted to heal her epilepsy. While meditating, I had a massive grand mal seizure, and woke up strapped to the hospital bed with a bunch of IVs in my arm.

I wasn't afraid that I had the seizure, but I didn't feel safe in the hospital. So, I escaped the restraints and ran out of the hospital as fast as I could. I used to run track in college, so I got far before the cops showed up. I remember it was raining, I was barefoot, and I couldn't see because I didn't have my

glasses on. But I felt free to be away from the restraints of the hospital. When the cops surrounded me, I refused to go with them back to the hospital. I told them to leave their bad energy and I might have yelled “fuck the police” at them. I guess I’d have to check their body cams to confirm if I did that. The police tackled me to the ground, handcuffed me, ankle cuffed me, and brought me back to the bed that I escaped from. They handcuffed me and ankle cuffed me to the bed.

I was screaming like a crazy person because I thought the police and the doctors were evil and trying to kill me like the Romans did to Jesus. They injected me with some medication I was allergic to, and I had a reaction where my face got frozen to the right and I couldn’t breathe. I spent at least a week in Hilton Head hospital, barefoot and blind. My bloodwork was abnormal, and I told the doctor it was because it’s the blood of Christ. Because I had run away from the hospital and was saying I was Jesus, I got sent to the mental hospital in Beaufort. I rode to the hospital in a cop car. I was in handcuffs again, which are kind of painful. I asked the police officer if he liked donuts, and he said he did not.

If the ER was hell, the mental hospital was more like purgatory. I hadn’t eaten for about seven or eight days or been given a shower in the regular hospital, but the mental hospital at least let me take a shower and gave me food. The problem was that I just wanted to be free in the nature that God created, but I was stuck inside of a stale building surrounded by white walls and given an absurd number of pills to calm me down. I had bruises all over my arms and ankles from being handcuffed and injected with so much medication.

One good thing about the mental hospital was the other patients. I felt like they were my people. A lot of them were

severely depressed, and I felt like I could help them see that society was the cause of their depression. I taught them yoga and encouraged them to not give a fuck about rules. In my psychosis, I believed that rules were causing a lot of unnecessary suffering in society. I kept doing cartwheels in the narrow halls of the mental hospital, and the nurses kept having to inject me with benzodiazepines because I had too much energy for them to handle. I lost about thirty pounds in the hospital because I didn't eat very much and would walk miles up and down the hall each day. I felt like a caged animal that needed to be free.

I eventually got released from the mental hospital because I told the doctor I knew I wasn't Jesus, and that I was just a bipolar human. However, I lied to the staff so they would let me be free in nature. I still thought I was the Messiah for many months after leaving the loony bin. I would walk around barefoot and pick up trash off the side of the road because I wanted to save the earth. I also wrote a book of poetry that I dropped off at the police station and hospital so they could be aware that they treated me like shit.

Eventually, I came back to reality and realized I wasn't Jesus, and that I'm just an insane person. That made me really upset when I realized I wasn't Jesus. If I could give anyone advice that feels like they might be enlightened, then I would say don't tell anyone about it. Society treats mentally ill people like the scum of the earth. My body was truly destroyed from being abused by the police and doctors, and I still haven't fully recovered from the trauma. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was right when he said, "into each life some rain must fall."

The Princess Penelope

Katie Ross, *Dual Enrollment Student*

Penelope, sweet fluffy bun,
You rest serene, enjoying sun.
I love you, Puppy~ oh so much!
The reason that my love is such,
Is lo! you love me so much more.
When you sleep sound and give small snore,
I'll come to you and hug your face;
You'll sigh as if at perfect peace.
With claws just right and eyes so bright,
I'll always love you day and night.
I hope we always get along.
Your woof is like an angel's song.
With silver snout and fluffy tail,
To princess Penelope, all hail!
Stop!
Let's be real.
Penny, you shed everywhere~
All my clothes are full of hair.

You avoid me when I want a hug,
But stay by me when I have food.
You lazy, lazy hound! You slug!
No other dog sleeps as much as you!
You do not fetch; you do not play.
Snoozing takes up your whole day!
As soon as the first thunder booms,
You head to each of the bathrooms,
And, after knocking trashcans on their sides,
Someone tries to catch you, and you hide
In a closet or under the bed
And on all my stuff you drool and shed.
And your bark is no angel's verse.
Could your chords be any worse?
There's nothing like a beagle's bay—
Part scream, part yowl from your airway.
With your grey muzzle and tail that whacks my face,
Here's my dog in all her grace.
That being said, while your flaws abound,
I wouldn't trade my beagle with any other hound.

Visit

S. Frances Tiger, *Computer Technology Student*

In the dark I'd wandered for days, weeks, months... No, it was years if I'm being honest. It had always been there, the darkness, threatening to shroud my eyes. Once it took hold as I gazed aloft, I thought I would never see the sun again. Every day was impossible to see, to function normally.

Tooth and nail, as they say. A test of strength, though not one that could be won by the size of my muscles. Yet climbing was my only choice, for if I didn't climb—dig my fingers into the dirt—I would fall. Fall backward into a sea of self-loathing, a dream—no—a nightmare from which I would not wake.

It tries on occasion to seep back into my skies, but I've learned from my time in the dark. No matter how hard it tries, I am always able to find the sun again. Sometimes though, instead of blue, the horizon seems enraged, a menacing hue of red. I find it more difficult to find blue than I do the sun, but nevertheless I persist.

I know that the golden hour is always waiting, always welcoming. If only for a visit. The sun will be warm, the flowers fragrant. The fruit will be sweet, and the music of the natural world will embrace me. If only for a visit. If only for a time, though as fleeting as it may be, my heart will be full, and the sky will smile down upon me.

And when the time comes, when it is meant to be, I will walk among the eternal. My spirit will dance and swim amid the stars, my vibrations will carry on them a song of a soul once lived. And I will be at peace.

For Your Eyes Only
Dr. Frederick Cooper,
Dean of Arts & Sciences

Twinkle, twinkle little star
My heart is wherever you are.
The chill of winter gives way
To the rebirth of spring.
The Easter wind warms
My heart and soul.
The fragrance of the season's
New Flowers invokes memories
Of your enticing aroma.
All of the memories in the world
Cannot take the place of
You being here.
I can imagine the love I feel
Every time you lovingly stroke
My tender skin.
I sense the texture of your lipstick
Every time our lips embrace.
Your smile accentuates the beauty
Maintained inside and out.
My life's journey seemed lost
Until the day I found you.
Now I sing Glory to God
In the Highest.
For I give Him thanks
For my newly discovered treasure.
As I lay my head to sleep
I know tomorrow will be better
As long as I have you.

Uncharted Waters

Evelyn Prokes, *Career Development Student*

I watched the powerlines pass by, swooping with the motion of the car. It had been two hours and the boredom was palpable. My stepsister scrolled through Instagram with discontent little huffs and my half brother shifted in his seat nonstop. Thankfully, I started spotting the familiar landmarks, the hole in the wall ice cream shop and the RV park broke up the monotonous cornfields, tell tale signs that the lake was close. During the long car ride my attention kept drifting from my book (some Jane Austin retelling) to the upcoming homecoming dance. It would be my first high school dance.

This train of thought continued even once we were on the pontoon. Instead of powerlines, I watched the sparkling water and pictured myself in my dress, a cotton candy like confection of pink tulle and rhinestones. I thought about how I should style my hair and which lipstick to wear. I pictured my best friend and seeing her in her dress. She had kept it a surprise from me, so I cycled through options, silver to match her eyes or the pale pink of her lips or maybe blue to complement her golden hair. In my imagination she'd see me and be breathless, maybe tell me I was the prettiest thing she'd ever seen.

It hadn't yet occurred to me that these thoughts weren't exactly straight. Over the past year I had had fleeting moments of clarity, but I dismissed each and every one. I thought love was like the romance novels I read, the girl falls for a boy, and they live happily ever after. Sure, I knew gay people existed but only in the abstract, which made me freak out all the more when my little imagined homecoming ended in a slow dance and a kiss.

I couldn't get the image out of my head, a Taylor Swift music video, drop everything, end of a romance novel, kiss. I could see it crystal clear. It terrified me. I tried desperately to return to my book, picture some dashing hero to save me from these thoughts. But I knew in that moment, I could never be the same. The lake was calm that day, the breeze gentle, and it all felt like a direct attack by nature to make my inner turmoil all the more apparent.

It would be two months before I breathed a word of my discovery to another soul. Two months I spent trying to undo this revelation. I went on a date with a boy I knew liked me and tried to make myself feel something. And when the night ended, and nothing had changed, I mourned for the girl I thought I would be. For a girl obsessed with romance novels and hallmark movies, it was a death sentence. I had no fairy tales to see myself in now, no role models or books to read.

It took time but, I know now my queerness was far from the death sentence I thought it was. I read the poems of Sappho and Virginia Woolf's novels and am awed that not only have there always been people like me, but I get to know their names and their stories. It is beautiful. I have found books and movies that portray love like mine, and I rejoice in it. I live in a time where I will not be forced to marry a man or hide my love. That is what I hold on to when I become discouraged by the rampant homophobia I see everywhere from my own town to our government. When I think back on that day on the lake, the emotion most prevalent was fear. I was so afraid of being different and what that would mean that I couldn't see how wonderful it was to finally understand myself. I hope for a world someday where that fear is nonexistent.



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