

the
MOSAIC



2021



Wyatt Waters
Angles and Angels

The Mosaic is a medical humanities journal written by students, faculty, and staff at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Just as a mosaic is formed from a unique composition of glass, stone, or tile, so is our diverse community of patients, students, staff, and professionals at UMMC.

Many components are required to create one unified form, and while they are all different in appearance or function, they serve a single greater purpose. This journal is comprised of written and illustrated art from students, residents, faculty, staff, and patients.

Sponsoring Organization

Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society, UMMC Chapter

Co-Sponsoring Organizations

Gold Humanism Society

Healthy Nurse Healthy Nation

The Center for Bioethics and Humanities

The Office of Patient Experience

The Office of Student Affairs

The Office of Well-Being

Table of Contents

Photography.....	1
Katelyn Rose Fairley.....	1
J. Mark Reed.....	2-7
Wilson Benton.....	8-9
Dax G. Bushway.....	10
Illustrative Artwork.....	11
Katherine Adele Thiel.....	11
Collin Bryant Peterson.....	12-13
Parminder J. S.Vig.....	14-15
Katelyn Rose Fairley.....	16-17
Anna H. Owings.....	18-19
Lakshmi N. Kurnutala.....	20-21
Mary Clay Bailey.....	22
Carrie Leigh Ball.....	23
Amanda Diane Blackwell.....	24
Bobby L. May, Jr.....	25
Sculptures.....	26
Kimberly Paige Porter.....	26-27
Graphic Design.....	28
Niki K. Patel.....	28
Somjade J. Songcharoen.....	28
Monessa Wadford.....	28
Shiv K. Patel.....	28
Marc E. Walker.....	28
Poetry.....	29
Kathleen Glover.....	29
Carlie Justice Reeves.....	30-31
James Mellow.....	32-34
Katelyn Rose Fairley.....	35
Short Stories.....	36
Danielle M. George.....	36-37
Babatunde Adeyemi.....	38-39
Essays.....	40
Katelyn Rose Fairley.....	40-43

Photography



Katelyn Rose Fairley
University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy, P3 Student
PharmD Candidate, 2022
At the Lakehouse



J. Mark Reed, MD, FAAP, FACS
 Professor, Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery
 Chief, Division of Pediatric Otolaryngology
Surgical Symmetry



J. Mark Reed, MD, FAAP, FACS
 Professor, Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery
 Chief, Division of Pediatric Otolaryngology
Reflections of the State Fair



J. Mark Reed, MD, FAAP, FACS
 Professor, Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery
 Chief, Division of Pediatric Otolaryngology
Face of Despair



J. Mark Reed, MD, FAAP, FACS
 Professor, Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery
 Chief, Division of Pediatric Otolaryngology
Eyes of the Master



J. Mark Reed, MD, FAAP, FACS
 Professor, Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery
 Chief, Division of Pediatric Otolaryngology
Gone but Not Forgotten



J. Mark Reed, MD, FAAP, FACS
 Professor, Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery
 Chief, Division of Pediatric Otolaryngology
Can't Save Myself



Wilson Benton
UMMC School of Medicine, Class of 2023
Solace

“This roaring waterfall in northern Iceland was chaotic and deafening. However, by increasing my camera’s exposure time and positioning my brother within the view of the falls, I hoped to create an image that felt quiet, peaceful, and reflective. Looking at this image reminds me that all it takes to find comfort in the moments of life that seem most out of control is a simple change of perspective.”



Wilson Benton
UMMC School of Medicine, Class of 2023
Airborne

“I captured this shot of the iconic crashed US Navy C-117D in Sólheimasandur, Iceland. I took several pictures of my brother standing on the fuselage, but it did not amplify the emotion and stark contrast of the crashed plane in the black sand. I told him to jump, snapped the pic, and knew I had achieved what I’d set out for. I believe the movement and life my brother provides atop the skeleton of the plane perfectly demonstrates the beautiful dichotomy I’d hoped to display.”

Illustrative Artwork



Dax. G. Bushway
UMMC School of Medicine, Class of 2023
Pain Unknown

“This picture was taken on Kodak TX400 film in Jackson, Mississippi. The simple geometry of the buildings provides a surreal backdrop to a scene of alienation and solace. The subject in the left third of the picture appears to feel some deep emotion, while others pass him by. Such a scene represents a daily experience for each of us: we are both the man sitting and the people walking by.”



Katherine Adele Thiel
UMMC School of Medicine, Class of 2021
Untitled

“I have had a fascination with the human body, particularly its movement, for years and have enjoyed painting and drawing figure works. Even when we sit or stand still, our bodies are doing a tremendous amount of work, and I enjoy the challenge of capturing the movement and tension in a pose that separates us from the inanimate. I believe learning anatomy has enhanced my ability to see these qualities and has given me a new appreciation of the hidden work our bodies do for us daily.”

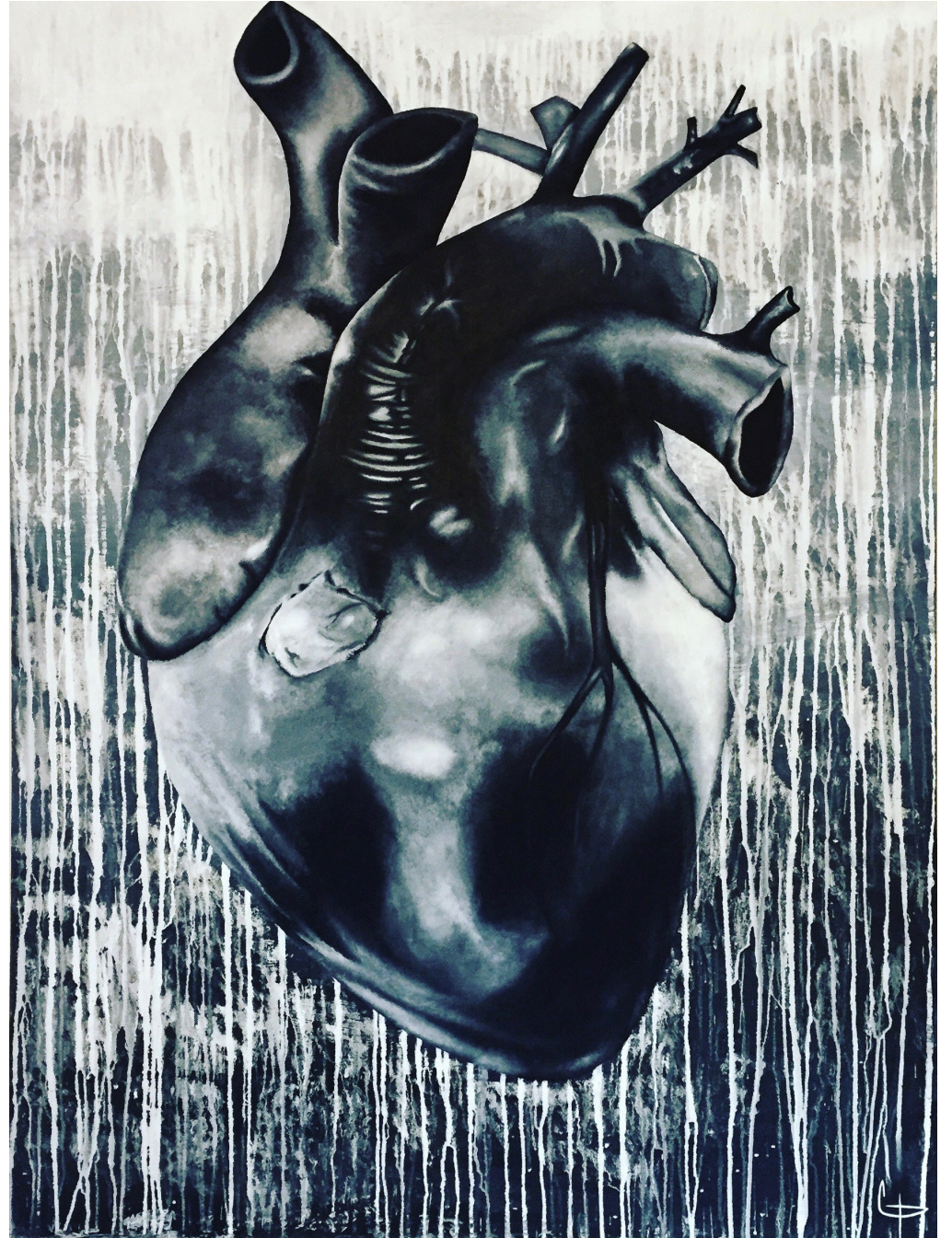


Collin Bryant Peterson
UMMC School of Dentistry, Class of 2021
Psalm 139

"I received this vision after listening to the song '139' by Kings Kaleidoscope. This piece portrays a lion looking through stained glass. The lion in the portrait represents God, being that a lion is the king of the jungle, as is God king of the universe. Our God is mighty and sovereign, full of compassion and love. The concept of the stained glass represents us, the people, because We Are The Church. This is referenced in Matthew 28:19-20. Psalm 139 expresses that no matter where we go, God is with us. He can see who we are on the inside as well as the outside, looking through our walls like stained glass."

Collin Bryant Peterson
UMMC School of Dentistry, Class of 2021
David's Plea

"In Psalm 51, David approaches and confesses his sin to God in full honesty and brokenness. David notices the dirt and stains on his soul from sin. He then asks the Lord to 'create in him a clean/pure heart.' For me this sparked an entire new outlook on how we coast through our time here on earth. We need to become more like David! We need to call out those underlying sins that we ignore, suppress, and justify, and release them to Christ. We are constantly pretending that the casual routine of sin we live in isn't a big deal. In Psalm 51, David cries out to God to cleanse his heart because he genuinely loves the Lord but he knows he isn't perfect. So David repents for what he has done and rejoices! Why does he rejoice? Because David understands how merciful and gracious God is. No matter his fault. He can seek repentance and turn away from that sin immediately. WE CAN DO THAT. But in order to do so, we must call out the sin that is binding us. Be real with yourself. Bring the dirt to the surface so Christ can wash you clean."





Dr. Parminder J. S. Vig
Professor, Department of Neurology
Field of Flowers

“When off on my couch I lie in vacant or in pensive mood, they flash upon the inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude.’ These words by Williams Wordsworth were the inspiration behind this acrylic painting which I call my ‘Field of Flowers’ and brings me great joy whenever I see new flowers bloom in my garden.”



Dr. Parminder J. S. Vig
Professor, Department of Neurology
Sunset over Chapel Hill Lake in Flora

“This acrylic painting is inspired by a photograph that I took on a lazy evening at our Chapel Hill Lake in Flora. When the fish are not biting, I try to ‘catch’ the beautiful sunsets with my camera and later on paint them on a canvas: Each one is a unique masterpiece by Mother Nature!”



Katelyn Rose Fairley
 UMMC School of Pharmacy, P3 Student
 PharmD Candidate, 2022
Jacksonville

“Paint is my favorite medium to work with; I like to blend colors and create textures.”



Katelyn Rose Fairley
 UMMC School of Pharmacy, P3 Student
 PharmD Candidate, 2022
Re-growth



Anna H. Owings
Internal Medicine Resident, PGY III
Annabelle

“The bull pictured in this painting was inspired by a pet cow, Annabelle, that we had when I was growing up on a farm south of Nashville, Tennessee.”

Anna H. Owings
Internal Medicine Resident, PGY III
First Light

“This painting was inspired by a transition time in my life. It is an abstract representation of new beginnings, positivity and the beauty found in our chaotic life in this world.”





Lakshmi N. Kurnutala, MD, M.Sc.
Associate Professor and Director of Neuroanesthesiology
Floating Island

Lakshmi N. Kurnutala, MD, M.Sc.
Associate Professor and Director of
Neuroanesthesiology
The Dancing Feet

“In March 2020, a UMMC infectious disease physician called me to self-isolate away from family and the hospital for two weeks because the patient I provided anesthesia care for the day before tested positive for COVID and I am in the high-risk exposure category. I stayed in a room upstairs in my house for the first two days and was bored of writing research papers, watching TV, and doing exercise. I decided to put a brush on the canvas with acrylic paints bought by my wife for my daughter. I felt wonderful and happy with my artwork and realized it as a stress reliever too. I express my feelings and myself through my paintings. So far, I have painted almost 45 paintings in the last seven months. My inspiration for paintings has always been women (my mother, wife, and daughter) and nature. I worked as an editor for a wall magazine named “Pulse” in my medical school. During the period of 1998-2003, I wrote editorials, poetry, and paintings for the magazine. Because of increased competition in medical education, I had to leave those hobbies aside and concentrate on the medical field. I am glad to have taken advantage of this era of COVID time to revisit my hobby of painting and enjoying it every day.”





Mary Clay Bailey
UMMC School of Medicine, Class of 2021
The Morning Strut

“One of the greatest reprieves from medical school: taking time to transform a blank canvas into whatever you want. A handsome rooster in his stately stride, for example!”

Carrie Leigh Ball
School of Health-Related Professions
Doctor of Physical Therapy, 3rd Year
Untitled

“This painting was inspired by the beauty that we are privileged to witness when a tree produces fruit. From seed to tree, the lemon tree at first appears similar to other trees. However, when it produces fruit, it transforms into something beautiful. I think it’s amazing to witness the beauty that can come from something that is seemingly average. This painting reminded me of the joy we can experience from watching the growth of the world around us and in each other.”





Amanda Diane Blackwell
UMMC School of Medicine, Class of 2023
In the Name of...

“My undergraduate degree from the University of Mississippi is in studio art, and this was one of the many challenging pieces I was tasked with creating in one of my upper-level painting courses. At first glance, the style and process with which I painted this piece carries a lot of weight and puts off a serious and intense tone. The bona fide weight and irony of this piece comes from the fact that the subject of this painting is actually a 99-cent toy I bought from Goodwill. You know, the ones with the neon orange caps. And what’s dripping? Honey. This was all just the process of the project. This was the largest and most time-consuming piece I had ever painted up to that point in my art career. In all honesty, I really didn’t have what it appears to be now in mind whatsoever. I didn’t know how it was going to turn out in the beginning, and I certainly wasn’t trying to make any sort of statement. I love revealing secrets behind the artwork. It’s easy to make assumptions upon initial encounter, but things are not always as they seem. People are not always as they seem. You’ll never know someone’s entire story, and it is of the utmost importance to approach and treat them as such.”



Bobby L. May, Jr.
UMMC School of Medicine, Class of 2021
The Art of Surgery

“The blood, the paint. The scalpel, the brush. The body, the canvas. The surgeon, the artist.”

Sculptures

Kimberly Paige Porter
UMMC School of Pharmacy, Class of 2021
The Heart of Pharmacy

“The inspiration behind ‘The Heart of Pharmacy’ stems from the passion I have for my chosen career. This piece is an abstract ceramics sculpture of a pill with anatomical heart components. This represents my heart. I did not choose a job; I chose my passion. The work of a pharmacist is special. Sometimes, that work goes unnoticed; however, we do not do it for recognition or gratitude. We do it because we desire to care for our patients, our community, our friends, our family. We want to ensure that people are receiving quality care and getting the most out of this life. When I was trying to decide what I wanted to do for a career, I didn't choose pharmacy; pharmacy chose me.”



Kimberly Paige Porter
UMMC School of Pharmacy, Class of 2021
Overflowing

“The inspiration behind ‘Overflowing’ stems from the nature of a pharmacist. This piece is an abstract ceramics sculpture of a mortar and pestle with a medication bottle pouring out pills. This piece embodies how I pour my heart and soul into my passion for pharmacy. The workload of a pharmacist can be demanding and overwhelming at times; however, taking care of your community is fulfilling.”

Graphic Design

Niki K. Patel
UMMC School of Medicine, Class of 2022
Somjade J. Songcharoen, MD
Hand Fellow, UMMC Division of Plastic Surgery
Monessa Wadford, RN
Hand Program Nurse, UMMC Division of Plastic Surgery
Shiv K. Patel
Student, Mississippi College
Marc E. Walker, MD, MBA
Assistant Professor of Plastic Surgery and Orthopaedic Surgery,
UMMC Division of Plastic Surgery
Mississippi Hands Helping Mississippi Hands

“Here at UMMC, we are a community built on the working hands of heroes— physicians, nurses, teachers, students, scientists, researchers and community leaders. Together, we work hand-in-hand to help Mississippians, young and old, overcome the obstacles they may encounter throughout their lives. This was the inspiration for our artwork—a collage of both pediatric and adult hands treated at UMMC alongside the hands of the providers treating them. It is together with our hands that we reach out to solve the challenges of our times. We are thankful for the opportunity to serve our patients with Mississippi Hands Helping Mississippi Hands!”



Poetry

Tiny
Kathleen Glover, MD
Preventive Medicine Resident, PGY3
MCSI Candidate (June 2021)

Our colony is disturbed,
The grist split
By the tiniest of beings.
Our smiles are masked,
Critical meetings scuttled
By the tiniest of beings.
We fix our heart’s walls,
Shore each other up
With the tiniest of things.
The elbow bumps,
The yielding of space,
Our care for each other.
The tiniest of things.

Churchgoers
Carlie Justice Reeves
Master’s of Biomedical Sciences program

“My poem ‘Churchgoers’ was inspired by my desire to capture what a typical Sunday morning is like from a child’s point of view.”

Mama yanks my hair
and pinches my legs
to get us to church on time.

As I walk down,
my stomach growls,
and I wonder if we’ll get Mexican
for lunch today.

I scratch holes through my
itchy stockings
as I slump in my seat nearly
asleep as damnation reverberates
through my bobbing head.

“Wake up!” screams the pain
from my pulled ear
as I raise myself up out of
daddy’s lap.

“The next song is Amazing Grace.”
Again. It’s their favorite, I know it
Word
for
Word.

It’s time to walk down the aisle
“If you feel so led,”
assures mama.

On the car ride home,
I scratch the hole through my
stockings,
and mama asks me,
“What did you learn at church
today?”

A Heart Immune
Carlie Justice Reeves
Master’s of Biomedical Sciences program

“My Shakespearean sonnet was inspired by a sonnet from Shakespeare (as well as a relationship that is now a thing of the past).”

When I ponder on how I so loved thee,
like a fiend for opium’s delusions,
I realize thy trap, disguised as a dream,
was the cause of my logic’s confusion.
I trusted thee with my heart to hold,
But thou pierced it with thy snake fangs;
turning my heart into a void-filled cold,
I longed escape from thy stifling chain.
When thy venom seeped into every vein,
paralysis plagued all my heart’s desires,
but temporary only was the pain
before I discovered a purer fire.
Healed of tainted love, I was made anew,
And brought back to life with a heart immune.

Black.
James Mellow (J.M.)
University of Mississippi Medical Center

The black experience is one of complexity, suffering, love, beauty, failures, and triumphs.
Blackness is what society first sees before I am a woman, wife, mother, daughter, aunt, sister, cousin, student, friend.
Blackness is also rooted in my self-identity.
I wanted to show how different people can view their own blackness and/or the blackness in others.
For centuries in American history, blackness has been used against people of color. 2020 is not a new type of traumatic experience. It is an unveiling of what has always been there.
I also wanted to demonstrate how black love and black strength birthed and raised black people.
I love and gladly embrace my blackness. I choose to use my blackness as a tool for good, to empower myself and others, and to create positive change.
I share my black experience with others with the hope that I can make a difference and keep the fire lit in those that are already doing the work.

Describe yourself in one word.
Any word?
Sure, any word. As long as you say why.
Black.
You see black.
To be black.
Cannot escape that.
Bullets. Accusations. Insults. Isolation.
Black bodies outlined in the streets.
Black bodies murdered in congregations.
No permission to have a mental health crisis.
On TV, the only black storyline is black violence.
Black men. Black boys. Black hands. Put them up.
Black backs. Full of slugs. Black is guilty. So they lock black up.
But that is what it is. When you see black. To be black.

We see black.
To be black.
Birthed from black love.
Unbreakable. Infallible.
Protected by grandmother’s black prayers.
Black bodies nourished with black food.
Grace spoken with black hands entwined around Sunday dinner.
The sun caresses black skin.
With shea butter, that black skin glows.
It shines and sparkles like my black girl magic.
As I accomplish my black woman goals.
My ancestors’ wildest dreams.
Beyoncé said, “Motherland drip on me.”
But that is what it is. When we see black. To be black.

Black is beauty.
Black is pain.
Black is love.
Black is trauma.
Black is strength.
Black is grace.
Black is resilience.
Black is intelligence.
Black is excellence.

Stop killing us.
Stop abusing us.
Stop gaslighting us.
Stop incarcerating us.
Black Lives Matter.
I was held by black hands.
I am held by black hands.
So when you ask for one word to describe me.
Know that no other one word captures me so completely.
Black. Because Black is me. Black is what you see. Black is her. Black is him. Black is us. Black is them.
Black is my chaos. Black is my tranquility. In a society that insists that All Lives Matter. My black is my everything.

Black Hair & Things

James Mellow (J.M.)
University of Mississippi Medical Center

*“Natural black hairstyles have been a topic of debate in the workplace and in society at large.
Like our beautiful locs that are here to stay, black women have decided that we are doing this our own way.
No one can define our hair but us. And we have decided that we are not changing.
—Sincerely, an unbothered black woman. J.M.”*

My black hair coils and resists harsh touches.
My black hair is feisty when unsolicited hands and opinions approach it.
My black hair loves protective styles.
Satin bonnets at nighttime, my black hair says she is not going out.
She lies down patiently in cornrows. She says beauty cannot be rushed.
She stands up for what she wants and complies with no comb or brush.
I told her that I love the way she marches to the beat of her own drum.
She said that it takes a queen to recognize another one.

Twin Headlights

Katelyn Rose Fairley
UMMC School of Pharmacy, P3 Student
PharmD Candidate, 2022

You know, I had never really thought about it that way before.

Back then, places with low ceilings made it hard to breathe.
Parking lots riddled with potholes,
Urban tide pools,
Glistening like rainbows under the haze of orange streetlights.
We had both feigned interest in the movie that night but our heads were restless,
The thoughts of nameless strangers, stale cigarette smoke and neon lights
Eventually drawing us from the darkened theater, down the carpeted stairs,
Out into the shockingly cool night and into a run,
Crossing one street and then another, gasping breathlessly,
As a pair of twin headlights crawled inside of my eyes only a moment too late,
My body lurching helplessly toward them
Before your arm shot out and across my chest, sneakers skidding on wet concrete,
Oncoming car whipping damp curls back roughly,
The light against your face shifting from yellow to black to red in the following silence.
The driver shouted something incoherent at us but did not stop.

You let your arm fall.
We laughed about it for the rest of the night.

Did you know before I did?

Short Stories

The Woman Who Fell in Love During COVID

Danielle M. George

Audiologist Assistant, Department of Otolaryngology

“I was inspired to write this short love story by believing that we all need love. I am a strong believer that love can fix anything and it has the strength to heal any broken thing. I was afraid to share this story because I found some of it to be true to things that I have gone through and I wasn’t really sure I was ready to share my story. Here I am with a great group of friends who all encouraged me to just do it. Even my love couldn’t understand what I was afraid of. So I am using this story to help others whatever way it can. I imagine art being in the eye of the beholder so it may not read the same to me as it would someone else, but at least they would get a good laugh out of it.”

Going through COVID has been rough for everyone, including those that are treating patients, families of those people, people who have been affected and lost their lives, the elderly, children and the list goes on. Which also means for almost a year we have not had much light. As I take the time away from a world so chaotic, I want to tell you a story of a woman who fell in love. She started her days praying and ended her nights crying. She never understood her emotions and never noticed a problem. This woman, whose name does not matter, wanted something different. She had been hurt before and her idea of love had been betrayed. At that moment if you came to her to tell her that love would solve all her problems, she wouldn’t have believed you. It wouldn’t have made sense and she would curse you. What she did not know is it would have been true. I have to tell her story because she isn’t strong enough to say it for herself. She feels that it would be bragging but in my reality it is worshipping and hope for those who search and do not know what they are looking for.

One may find love to be complicated and find there are two types of love. One that still leaves you empty at night and crying during the day praying no one saw you. This kind of love can also overshadow your vision causing you to be blind to the person that has been placed before you to destroy you. You don’t feel the destruction happening to your body and don’t realize you find yourself holding on for those few, rare moments that it feels good. The pain follows you years following that break up but then the light shines you in a direction to a new kind of love. One that you’ve only heard about. One that is rare in this world but last for a lifetime. This love was built from pain of failed love covered up to be lust and not wanting to ever be broken again. You search for ways to avoid this from happening, you spending hours and days reading, studying and doing research because you know you do not want to feel old pain again. From that you find something so amazing! You find someone so wonderful and when you look up in the mirror, it’s you! You find a love that loves you first. That love does not mean you are selfish, it means that you are so in love with who you are that it shows through your smile. Your love becomes so contagious that you find yourself helping others along the way! That’s the kind of love each person needs because with love like that it isn’t just for you. It’s to share with those around you who are learning to love themselves too. It took one person to go through hard times, to save a million more. It sounds a lot like med school. I’ve never been, but that analogy did sound pretty good.

As we get back to this woman, who has now found herself and is deeply in love with who she is, she meets a man. His eyes told his story, his hands revealed his pain and his past broke him. She saw no hope in him but still she tried. They dated and failed. They dated again and failed. This was going nowhere and she found herself reverting back to time. She feared the thought of wasting time because to her that was time lost. One thing we never get back is time and words that are said. She found herself struggling, falling, crying and lost. Then she remembered who she was and who she had grown to be. She took time away from him to rebuild herself. That’s when everything began to make sense. It came to her that she may have been the cause of their failed love story by running away. Because she’s healed, she could see herself (with flaws) and make changes to get different results. Changes were made and results were different! They are here today, smiling and unfolding themselves into each other. She finds things in him and he finds things in her. They find that they have a lot in common and a lot of things are different. What stands the same is their faith in God, their plans for the future and hope to change the world. What I love so much about this story is this woman can be you. With every up and every down there is purpose. The purpose is to help the next man find his way! Because in a perfect world, we all can benefit from a friend. We all can fall in love.

The Cheetah

Babatunde Adeyemi
Emergency Medicine Resident, PGY2

“In terms of what inspired me, I always enjoyed the fables we were told while growing up. ‘Why the wolf howls at the moon,’ ‘How the tiger got its stripes,’ ‘The lion and the mouse.’ I loved Aesop’s Fables and drew inspiration from them. Cheetahs have always been my favorite animal, and I find them amazing the way they are build for one specific agenda: speed. So I decided to combine the two and give reason for why ‘the cheetah’ was built the way it was.”

Way back when, in the midlands of Africa, animals of every kind competed in just about every event known today. The Gorillas wrestled, the rhinos bucked heads, and the birds aimed to hit little targets on the ground. Africa was very competitive back then. With these competitions came winners and losers. When an animal lost, though, they accepted their defeat gracefully. When an animal won, they bowed to their competitor, as a sign of respect. There was a mutual agreement between all the animals of the land.

One day, Tiger laid in the grass, bored from the day, while chewing on some hay. Now, Tiger was a pretty decent competitor, but not much of a runner. As he lay in the grass, he started getting anxious and began to crave a challenge. Just then, Snail appeared in the near distance. Now, Snail wasn’t as small or as slow as you may think, at least back then he wasn’t. Tiger exclaimed, “Finally, a race!” and challenged Snail to a race. Snail had never been challenged to a race before, and stood idle by the starting line, while Tiger stretched and jumped. “ON YOUR MARK. GET SET. GOOO!” The race was on!

Tiger started with the lead, but all of a sudden Snail began to creep up on him. Snail started getting faster, and faster, until he took the lead! Snail ended up winning the race! His first race! Snail started jumping in excitement, bragging non-stop about his victory. Tiger was accepting of his loss, and continued to chew. Soon Snail raced everyone, from Bear to Hawk, Coyote to Hyena. Snail beat all, and boasted about it non-stop. Not once did Snail bow to his losers, and instead sang of his victories, with no other animals’ feelings in mind.

One day, Snail challenged Fox to a race. Fox, not minding a loss here and there, heard about Snail’s speed, and accepted the challenge anyway. And like many others before him, he lost. Fox wasn’t sad about his loss, but was expecting a bow in return. Instead he was called a list of names that in the end, stood for failure. Fox was no snitch, but this made him very angry, and he wanted to do something about this self-celebrating snail.

Fox traveled to a distant land, across many deserts, and found the old Wizard. He told the Wizard about Snail’s disrespect, and told him something must be done. The old Wizard pondered back and forth, and finally came up with an idea. The Wizard then thought, “Let’s create our own animal. One that will be built for speed. One built to beat Snail.”

The animal had a flexible tail to help change direction, claws that never retract so it could have more grip on the dry African ground, and a small, aerodynamic head. It had a flexible spine to help run, large lungs for air, and the most adrenaline the Wizard could think of. An animal made for the simple purpose of speed.

The Wizard named it Cheetah. So the Wizard turned towards Fox and told him to challenge Snail using Cheetah. Fox accepted.

Back in the fields of Africa, Snail continued to brag about his amazing speed. In walked Fox, with his new friend Cheetah and the Wizard. Fox challenged Snail to a race against Cheetah. “If you win, all the animals will bow before your great speed. If you lose, your speed will be taken away from you.” Without even knowing who he was racing, Snail exclaimed, “I am the fastest in the land! Bring on anyone you have, I cannot be beaten!” At this point, every other animal saw the trickery behind Fox, since Cheetah had never been seen before. But Snail was so caught up in his boasting that he didn’t notice. The race was on!

Snail raced as hard as he could! Faster and faster gaining more and more speed! As fast as the eye could see, only to come in second to Cheetah. “What! WHAT! WHAT JUST HAPPENED?!” screamed Snail as he huffed and puffed! “You lost,” smirked Fox. The old Wizard waved his heavy hand with no hesitation, and POOF! Snail was as slow as the clouds in the sky. “NO! NO! THIS CAN’T BE! YOU! YOU CHEATED!” bellowed Snail as he still tried to figure out the situation. “No, no, no, Snail, Cheetah,” said Cheetah as she bowed to Snail.

“WHY YOU...” Snail was cut off as he was turned into the size of a pebble. “You talk big, Snail. Let’s see if you still can while the size of my toe?” Snail screamed and shouted, but no animal could hear him. The animals laughed and giggled, especially Hyena, as they welcomed their new friend Cheetah.

At the end of this long day, the Wizard walked away saying, “Bragging will get you nowhere.” And Snail, finding a leaf to hide under, with a long slimy list of wins behind him, dragged himself slowly away, almost getting nowhere.

The End.

Essays

The Conch Shell

Katelyn Rose Fairley
UMMC School of Pharmacy, P3 Student
PharmD Candidate, 2022

It had rained here nearly every night since late September, an unrelenting wash of gray and bluish-green splattering across dark streets that still smelled of motor oil and summertime despite the icy coolness that seeped through the front passenger-side window of your 1968 Chevy pickup truck.

The window never fully closed, not anymore, not after the deer had hit it that night on the highway, all wild-eyed and heart pounding in its throat, spilling out of its mouth in a cloud of hot breath.

That was the first time I had ever seen a deer.

“Maybe you should find a new profession,” you said, a smile in your voice but not in your eyes, as you informed me that this sort of thing happened all the time out in these parts and cursed me for not helping you drag it to the side of the road so that the other motorists on this lonely stretch of road would not meet the same fate as us.

Two biologists killing a deer from behind the wheel of a diesel-fueled truck, traveling home from a controlled forest-burn in the deepest part of the redwoods that you had lit and I had watched burn out, which was why we were driving home so late tonight, as you kept reminding me, I could have stifled it out earlier but I always had a hard time deciding when the moment was just right.

“Turn that light off, Mara, it’s hard to see the road-”
But doesn’t the orange-yellow glow makes the ring on my finger sparkle?

It was just destruction all around.

Earlier that morning, I had pressed a worn, blue thermos to my cracked lips as the rusted blue forestry service truck rocked back and forth over the knotted roots near the forest’s edge. I watched as you fiddled with the radio the same way you did every morning, cursing, jabbing at buttons and twisting knobs, getting only static in response. The inside of the cab smelled like dirt and leaves and sweat. Old newspaper clippings, pencilled roadmaps, rusted handsaws and dirty socks scattered across the floor and erupted across the dashboard; leftovers from all of the other biology students who had expressed an interest in forestry during that first, fateful year of the program and had since made the two-hour trek out and into the deepest part of the forest some Saturday morning years and years before.

I had met you that first year, as well.

I looked away from your hand, still poised on the knob, twisting, just like always.

The truck hit something hard then, shifting the contents of the cabin, including my coffee, Back and forth roughly, something white suddenly poking out from behind a stack of old roadmaps,

A conch shell,

The outside weathered to a flaking whiteness with age, the inside striped and smooth in cool shades of black and white.

“You like that?” you asked, just as the broken sound of Hank William’s Six More Miles began to poke through the radio static.

My head nodded up and down vigorously, turning the shell over in my hands, head going cold and not because of the broken window as you cracked a grin, snaking a hand across my thigh.
“Picked that right off the beach down in Florida last summer during work-study.”

Florida.

“If you like it so much, you can have it.”

It felt wrong for me to say that I missed her, exactly, because when it came down to it, I had never even known her name. She was just the girl in the black and white striped bathing suit, eighteen years old, a grade above me in school, running barefoot down the beach in my mind, gulls crying out, white sand flying up in her wake.

Here and now, the soil is dark and gritty, crunching, rough, like coffee grounds beneath my boots as I hop out of the truck and step off the shoulder toward the forest, the difference in sensation physically jarring, sending shockwaves up both my knees. Ancient branches twisted and spun up up toward the slate gray sky that colored the morning, the last tendrils of fog concealed behind the undergrowth like children trying hard to not be caught eavesdropping.

You hop out of the truck behind me, sleeves half-rolled up to the elbows and yellow work gloves tucked into your back pocket. Something fell off of the seat beside you, smashing against the one strip of pavement for miles.

“Sorry, Mara.”

“Don’t worry about it, John.”

“I know you really liked that conch shell.”

I didn’t ask how the shell had moved from my side of the truck to yours or why your phone, also balanced precariously on the edge of the seat, had not leapt down to the pavement as well. Instead, I shouldered my backpack and flag markers and stepped out into the dense undergrowth.

The sun was just starting to peek through the leaves above, the scent of wet earth filling my lungs as I bent down to dig my first tin-metal flag into the soil at the base of a large oak tree but my cheeks were still cold. Is it possible that the sun is just colder here? Maybe farther away? I should know the answer to that question. Just like I should know that I chose to be here, to come away from all that I had known, that I was tired of the sticky, Florida heat and the way that that crisp, white sand had gotten into everything and never washed out of my floral bedsheets.

What I didn’t know
Was if it was okay to say that I had changed my mind.
About everything.
About it all.

I planted my hands against the trunk of the tree, the red-painted “x” on its rough bark still fresh, almost the exact same shade of the tiny rubies set around the central stone of the ring that you had gotten me last August because it was our last year, you had said, we had always worked well together, we’d make a great pair, two biologists. He had said he was in love. And I had thought, well, sure, but that’s not all there is, right?

My head made contact with the trunk, eyes closing.

This couldn’t be all there is.

Why is the question always: if a tree falls down in the forest when no one is around to hear it, will it make a noise?
Why is it never: if a tree falls down in the forest when no one is around, will it still be felt?

Years ago, cracked summer asphalt blistered the soles of my feet as I hopped from patch to patch of dandelion weed down to the old boardwalk that ran behind my grandmother’s house. I had thought that I had loved the ocean back then, but the girl in the striped swimsuit had always loved it more, swimming out far beyond the white crest of the waves, bobbing, black and white stripes flashing against the dark surf like a strange fish. I hadn’t known how to swim back then, so I spent most of those summers wandering along the shore alone where the sharp sand reeds made contact with the rolling dunes, mother’s sunglasses perched on the edge of my freckled nose, red, plastic, shaped the the eyes of a cat, not expensive but made to look that way, always wishing that the girl would call out, to me:

“Mara, come down! The water’s fine!”

And I would have.

I would have come down,
White, sand-coated arms thrown around narrow shoulders,
The tiny shards of glass and broken shell sparking like amber in the setting sun,
Rubbing roughly against sunburnt skin,
Hip to hip,
The wetness of her swimsuit seeping against my sundress
But neither one of us moving.
The largest naval orange I have ever seen held before my eyes,
Half-peeled, an offering,
The pale, sticky juice running down the girl’s wrist,
A smaller rivulet,
Flowing to join the larger blue river that lay just below her skin,
Stained pink like mine but from the frigid sea before us,
Not from the sunlight,
Not from this,
My hand touching hers, peeling the rind away and popping a single wedge into my mouth,
Heavy, cold, sweet.
Smiling
Like it was nothing at all.

This. This was it.

