

Editors' Introduction

Kupari is Michigan Tech's student literary magazine, dedicated to unearthing and amplifying the creative voices of our community. We provide a platform for students to experiment with language, art, and ideas, and an outlet to share these experiments with a wider audience.

We envision *Kupari* as a vital creative outlet on campus to foster student innovation in art and storytelling. By creating a place to compile the endeavors of our student community, we aim to amplify their voices and inspire further creativity throughout Michigan Tech.

When Ink & Ore was founded in the fall 2025 semester, the idea for a new literary magazine was already in the works. We have spent the last academic year fleshing out the concept, setting up processes, and then putting them to the test during the creation of this issue. With what we have set up, we can ensure that *Kupari* can be produced smoothly well into the future.

Kupari, Spring 2026

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Collapse of the North Atlantic Cod

Wren Schmalz

17th of May, 1903

Dearest Juliana,

I fear I have once again witnessed something I cannot put entirely into words, and I write to you in hopes that you have some recollection of our last trip on our father's fishing boat. It was the fall of 1863 or '64, the year before he sold the old cabin and moved us to Toronto. Always the rugged outdoorsman, wasn't he? He still tells me of his most successful autumn, when he shot that bull moose he kept stuffed on the wall until we had to move him into the hospital after his occasional bouts of sickness turned permanent. He misses his time outside, and the sport of the hunt, though he would never go back out onto the water. You can see it in his eyes, Julie. He won't talk to me about the autumns we spent on the Atlantic. I sat with him in his room one day, playing cards, and when I asked him about the Atlantic cod, storm clouds moved over his pale blue eyes. He said he didn't recall anything particularly interesting. Then, he asked me to put on a new pot of coffee, as if we were still at home.

You were still very young during the 60s, though you may have some memory of our father during his time as a fisherman. We were living just outside that small village on the North Atlantic Coast of Quebec, just the three of us, and father would spend every summer hand-weaving fishing nets on the shore and coaxing the sails of his newly repaired sailboat against the trade winds. I was about seven years of age, so you must have been five. We were just old enough to sit with him on the boat when he went out in the evenings. He baited his hooks with some of the largest worms I had ever seen. I recoiled from them at first, as they continued to squirm and writhe even after being stabbed clean through. I couldn't help imagining how it would feel to have a hook pushed through my abdomen. If I thought about it too much, it would make me sick to my stomach, and I would yearn to ask father to sail back to shore early. Still, I took the fishing lines when they were handed to me, and I lowered them over the side of the boat. I watched them fall until they sunk far into deep blue shadows.

The day I write to you about was a cold day in early November. Slate-gray clouds rolled in overhead, and I shivered as salty mist splashed up from against the side of the boat and stuck to my skin in tiny droplets. The weather looked like rain, though our father insisted on going out anyway. He hadn't been having much luck over the past few weeks, and we were starting to notice as all we had eaten for the past five days was stale bread and salty venison jerky. "One good catch and we'll be back on our

feet,” I heard him say once when he was visiting with our neighbor, an old man whose name I don’t remember.

Without warning, a tug on one of the fishing lines rocked the boat sharply to the port side. I had been standing on the deck and tumbled hard, slamming my shoulder into the wall. Hot tears welled in my eyes, and I clutched my hurting arm close to my body. I had never wanted to go home so badly in my life, but I saw the way our father’s face lit up as he grabbed the line, so I stayed quiet.

He shouted to me for the fishing net. I nodded and fetched it from underneath your seat. You were bundled tightly in an old quilt I insisted on bringing. Thoughts of cold-induced sickness and hook-inflicted injury often swam through my mind back then. It was okay if it happened to me, I thought, as the oldest. You were so small, and you had started shivering as soon as the boat hit the water that day. Despite this, you held out a hand and helped me bundle the net into a more manageable size. Then, you stared wide-eyed at our father as he pulled in the fish.

The thing he brought into the boat was impossibly large, though it didn’t seem so at first. He held the body of the creature steady and I pulled the hook from its lip. “An Atlantic cod,” he called it. He placed it on the deck and turned around to re-set the hook. The cod twisted its body into a C-shape, then flopped onto its other side. I watched it struggle with a slight morbid curiosity. Did it feel pain? The way it gasped for air made it look like a crying baby, an infant just born from the sea.

Soon, I began to notice that the cod didn't fit on the deck anymore. Its tail pushed against the bench seat you sat on, and its head reached far past the main mast. The sails were folded against the post to keep from tearing in the wind. I reached towards the cod in an attempt to reposition it, but as I touched the scales behind its gills, I felt something soft and tender. I moved my hand quickly, and glassy yellow eyes stared back at me. They pulsed and moved in rhythm with the cod's attempted breathing. Something cold and hard dropped in my stomach at the sight of it. I couldn't name it then, and I fail to find the words now for how I felt. Fear? Or was it madness?

I called out to father, but he didn't answer. He was transfixed on something else, something far in the distance. There, against the horizon line, was a huge commercial fishing boat, the kind that towered over the small buildings in our fishing village. I didn't understand what he was looking for; the ship had been there for the past hour, rocking in rhythm with the waves and dragging its mile-long trawl nets against the sea floor. As I stared longer, though, I realized the boat was completely still, and below it—below us too—was a meandering shadow. A gaping maw opened underneath the commercial ship. The bow tipped below the stern, and within moments, it was gone.

The cod in our boat looked nothing like a fish anymore. I shut my eyes tight, trying to will it away, but I could still hear it rasping and struggling against the deck. I peeked out from behind my eyelids for only a moment and,

mustering all the strength and bravery I had left in me, hoisted the thing up and over the starboard side. It slipped out of my hands and hit the water with a crack.

When we returned to the shore, I remember father rushed us inside. I heard our neighbor speak with him later that night, when he thought the two of us were asleep. "It's best not to disturb her any longer," I heard the old man tell him. "Go, before she claims you too."

I thought that was the end of it, after we moved away. I pushed the experience to the back of my mind, but these details still linger. I can't make sense of it, Julie.

I thought I had finally forgotten about it. I'm near age fifty and so many other details have been lost to the fog of memory. Half a century of life, can you believe it? But there was something else that struck me with that same direness I felt in our childhood. It washed up on the shore last month, not far from the home I share with my husband and the children.

I thought it a whale at first. I spotted it while I was sitting on the old dock repairing my husband's torn fishing net. The wooden support beams were covered in barnacles that looked like old popped cysts, and as I moved my gaze from the end of the dock up the shore, tracing the white foam on the waves, I saw that salt-stained hulk of a creature.

I crept over to it carefully, leaving the net abandoned. As I got closer, the details came into focus. I shivered. So many eyes, it had, and all of them searched frantically. I didn't know what for, but still, I searched with

it. As I gazed out across the water, white-capped waves that stretched on infinitely, a realization took hold and pushed at the forefront of my mind like the pearl inside a clam.

The creature lying twitching in the sand was a child. A lonely child, separated from its mother. In its eyes was not malice, but fear. Abandonment. I thought then of the thing before me as some sort of infant god, something I should not understand nor even witness. Still, there was a piece of myself inside it that I recognized, that small grieving child I was so many years ago. I sat down in the sand next to it, and we mourned together for a long while.

You probably don't remember our mother. I hardly do myself. I remember she was kind, and though we still had our father to take care of us after her passing, bless his soul, she left a hole in our lives that nothing could fill. It was irreversible, and with time we would forget the sound of her voice and the look of her face, but we can never forget *her*, can we?

Do you think we take too much from the world? These creatures from the ocean, is their mother dying too?

My husband found me there after dark, and he insisted on bringing me to the psychiatrist in town as soon as possible. He claimed there was nothing there but the carcass of a small sun-rotten cod! He fears I'm experiencing a bout of hysteria, maybe delusion, but I can't deny the evidence of my senses!

Juliana, please write back as soon as you receive this. If there's any insight you have as to what I've seen, if it means anything to you, please tell me. I need you to tell

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me everything so I can start to make sense of it. Though, even if you don't remember, or you haven't seen what I have, I would still like to hear from you.

Yours always,
Mary

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Anita Popelka

There's a Storm Out There!

Zachary Wiechec

A distant crack of thunder reverberates harshly through the air, gently shaking the house as a man stares solemnly through a rain-battered window. He has one hand held on the chilly glass pane. The layer of condensation on the window slowly wipes away as he slides his palm along the surface. He fails to make out anything recognizable; he can't even see the birdhouse he has hanging just to the right! Nothing at all is visible through the unusually thick haze that entirely shrouds the outside world.

"Yeah. It's the worst I've ever seen it, Caleb, you can't see a damn thing out there. It's like I'm in the middle of a snowstorm! It's just weird because, y'know," he shakily yells into his phone's receiver, "I honestly don't even know what causes this..." He sighs, tapping his fingers on the glass. "I know, I know. I'll call you if I need anything," he quickly blurts out, cutting off the person on the other side, "see you." He unsteadily places the phone back in its holder with a soft clunk.

He breathes out. Despite the thunderstorm hammering away outside, an eerie atmosphere of quiet seems to permeate every inch of the house this evening. The false silence is grating to the man, who can focus only on how the house seems unusually devoid of something

that it would usually be overflowing with. Some feeling, some emotion, but what exactly?

The wind whips against the side of the house, creating ethereal noises like swaths of spirits invading from beyond. "Yeah, yeah. Speak your mind, storm," the man vaguely gestures at the air. He closes his eyes and rests his forehead on his fist. The last time he felt an atmosphere quite this dreary and tense was during the first few days of his trip to Finland a couple years back. Dark, formless skies, and absolutely nowhere else to go in the vast wilderness he worked so hard to get himself in. *At least it wasn't all bad.*

Just...do what I did then, yeah? He concludes as he slowly makes his way over to the brick fireplace in the corner of the dim living room, his footsteps muffled by the thick carpet. He strikes a match, throws it in, and watches as the flames slowly crackle to life to sing their soothing song. The warm glow brings life to the desolate room, flooding the space with the little bit of warmth that it has to give. It's enough. At that moment, as he sits down on the carpet right in front of the fireplace, his legs half on the hardwood floor, he's brought right back to that day.

His gaze falls over to the right, peering at the wall containing the board that serves as a constant reminder of that trip. "Finland!!!" is written in red sharpie at the top. Beneath the title, mountains of instant photos cover every inch of the small board. He chuckles at how many photos are just large expanses of water. *They weren't kidding about how many lakes that place has.* He hopes that he can

fill up all of the empty space on the wall soon enough; it may have been his first trip abroad, but it will not be the last.

The sounds of the fireplace and the rain outside complement each other in the most peculiar way. With all of the lights shut off, the warm light that the fireplace emits reigns supreme, pushing away and toppling the dreariness to its knees. Maybe, just maybe, sitting here, everything will be alright for the man tonight.

A tune comes to him, and he finds himself tapping against the floor to a song that's stuck in his head. He even starts humming along to it! With a smile, he glances over at the record player to his left, and drags himself across the floor over to it. He drags several crates out from underneath the table, and starts thumbing through all of the vinyl records within for something that catches his eye.

He does this for quite a while, not quite content with anything that he's seeing. Hundreds of covers—clad in hundreds of colors—fly by quickly, all letting their voices be heard, if but for just a short moment. A sense of growing discontent grows in the man as more and more time marches on without a selection. He's heard all of these countless times in the past.

He eventually settles on a quite peculiar one, as it has an entirely black cover. "Oh yeah...I forgot they actually did that," he mutters under his breath with a slight chuckle. A sticky note is attached to the corner that reads "Return this to me when you're done with it, -L", which he grimaces at. He delicately takes the record out of its sleeve and puts

it on the turntable. A second after he drops the needle on the grooved surface, a droning, abrasive distorted piano melody awakens, emanating all throughout the room. He nods, and gets up to look back out the window as the discordant notes start to shift into a soft piano melody.

The thick haze shrouding the outside world still lays unbroken, and the rolling hills the man knows so well are still just out of view. There's just something...not quite right about what he's seeing. It's something so unusual that he can't put it into a coherent thought. But that doesn't matter, because right now? All of the sounds and sensations are coming together into one cohesive harmony. The fireplace crackles, the rain patterns, and a soothing violin all work together to create something comforting.

The music crescendos, and then it all snaps down in one fell swoop.

An incredibly loud boom of thunder is heard from just outside the house! This wouldn't usually be too worrying, aside from the momentarily jolt in the movement of the turntable, except for the inclusion of an unbearable rush of agony that shoots through the man's forehead. He grunts in pain, running his hands through the top of his hair as a transcendent piano continues to echo throughout the room.

The pain soon subsides, leaving him momentarily broken on his knees. He quickly shoots himself back up to his feet, the adrenaline still coursing through his veins. It leaves a slight lingering in his head. One of anger. At what?

Who's to say? Maybe it was the lightning, or maybe the storm as a whole? Perhaps it's the music that's playing? Or maybe perhaps it's the room itself? His head is spinning, thoughts and sensations melding together for no earthly reason.

But he breathes in, and breathes out. In, then out, no other thoughts but the air flowing through your body. Then, he starts to feel okay again, attempting to ground himself further by meandering slowly into other rooms. He feels the carpet fibers under his feet, and the slightly humid smell of the air. He focuses on the objects that decorate the house—the little notes he's left for himself in his office, the remains of a fractured bowling ball from that one incredibly botched bowling trip that lay in his music room, and the cobwebs that litter the corners he was too lazy to clean—and they fully fling him back into himself, if but for a moment.

"Music room..." he mutters to himself as he gets more of his sense back. A smirk appears on his face as he realizes the exceedingly obvious way to pass the time. He makes his way into the small room; it's exceedingly claustrophobic, a small t-shaped area that's barely enough to fit a small shelf, a falling-apart drum kit, and a low-quality acoustic guitar. It's always been a nice little escape, though. He'll never take it for granted, especially not now. He stops for a moment, remembering that there's already music coming from down the hall. He snaps his fingers and turns back around to turn off the record player in the other room.

Back in the living room, he lifts up the needle and stops the turntable. The sudden absence of music is...grating. Even with the fireplace going, he finds himself getting mad at the constant, unyielding sound of rain from outside. He waves it off as an inherently irrational thought, and heads back to the music room, where he lays the guitar over his lap while sitting down on a small wooden stool.

The man hadn't been playing the guitar for very long. In fact, all of the music equipment in this room had been passed down to him from his more musically-inclined friends. But he has fun messing around with it, and he supposes that's all that really matters in the end. He relaxes his body, and starts playing the first song he ever learned, which his friends poked fun at for whatever earthly reason: Wonderwall. That doesn't make it any less rewarding for him, though.

He starts playing the opening chord, and he finds that he can't quite focus. The pattering of the rain on the roof above the room is louder, fiercer, and more violent. Not by much, but just enough to irritate him. With each pluck of the strings, the storm seems to mock him more and more. A short gust of wind here, a thunderbolt in the distance there, and he's lost all ability to pay attention to what he's doing. Slowly, but surely, the grating headache starts to rise up once more.

"Why?" he shouts out as he loudly drops the guitar on the ground in pained frustration. He scowls violently at the curtain behind him, "Can you just shut up for ONE SECOND!" he bellows. He gasps as he realizes the sheer

force by which guitar slammed down on the ground. He stares at the ground for a moment, both angry, frustrated, and in no state of mind to care all at the same time.

Another flash of light outside, then a burst of thunder, and he snaps. He plunges his fist forward, about to collide with the guitar—

And then all goes quiet.

It's not just an ordinary silence. It's a cold, all-encompassing, oppressing sort of silence. The type of silence that forbids all other sensation but one's own heartbeat. He's taken completely by surprise, frozen in place one inch from decimating that very object he holds close to heart. He attempts to speak out, but no sound leaves his mouth. And for that moment, he feels some sort of primal fear.

Panic rising, he starts hyperventilating. No amount of deep breaths will do, no, this is something else. The whole world has fallen out from under him, and he just wants to know what the rain wants from him. He tries to ask, but the rain does not hear it, nor does he. Nor does the rain wish to answer, at least, not in any substantial way. It continues to speak its ancient song, however silently.

The sensations must cease, the sight of the house is too much. To him, it feels as if everything else is amplified. The echoes of the storm are all around him, and a cold sweat continues to rush over him. In the middle of the hallway, he looks around. The fireplace still flickers on, but it does not ease him one bit. His eyes settle on the door

to the basement, cracked and worn out, right underneath where the attic ladder would come down.

He quickly throws open the door, despite the hushed protests of the aged hinges, and the dimly lit basement comes into view. A small light to the left of the staircase is on, illuminating a small corner filled with scattered cardboard boxes. Other than that, the basement is a barren darkness. Blank, grey walls, and equally bland pillars hold the ceiling up. It's exactly the environment that he needs right now. He revels in the cold and dry feeling that bombards him with every step down.

He reaches the bottom, and a dull footstep echoes as his foot contacts the ground. With that, one quiet ends, and a new one begins. To him, this one is greatly preferable. He continues forward, and the footsteps continue to ring out. The rain outside is now only a dull memory of what it once was, it's now reduced to a faint cry in the distance.

The man finds himself laughing as he slowly makes his way over to the other end of the small basement. Perhaps now, things will be alright? He closes his eyes and keeps going, little step by little step. Is he attempting to smash right into the wall? Who's to say at this point. When he finally reaches the other end, he sees something wildly unexpected upon opening his eyes.

On the wall directly in front of him, subsuming all else, there's drawn lines made of a white, lightly glowing substance. *Chalk?* He reaches his finger up to try and wipe some of it off, but it doesn't budge. He takes a step back

and examines the whole diagram. It's almost like a blueprint of sorts? There's a fancy, roman-looking pedestal that holds a small chamber upon the top, and in that chamber is an orb in the middle held together by four sharp, protruding arms from the corners.

"Oh," he blankly states, completely speechless. Above the blueprint, a small window lies that allows little fragments of light into the dim basement. A gust of wind relentlessly blows forth and directs a flurry of rain drops directly at the window. Every single drop of rain that contacts the window brings the rising anxiety he buried back up to the surface. He recoils, shaking his head.

He locks eyes with the top left of the drawing. There's a tiny, hand-written title in cursive that reads: "STMMKR". As he reads the word, something profound clicks in his mind in an instant. Like magic, every bit of the oppressive cold and darkness leaves him, and life floods back into his veins. He no longer fears the rain against the window, and he sees how silly he was for ever being scared in the first place. He sees everything. There's just one thing he can't quite wrap his head around.

He stumbles his way over to the stairwell, calmly climbing up it. He makes his way out of the basement, and meanders over towards the front door. He looks down at his hand as he turns the handle, as if having to be entirely sure that he knows what he's doing, and then makes his way through the door.

The sight ahead is a large observation window, surrounded by a gray metal frame. Outside is a vast, red

landscape, where the sky is full of endless stars. He can't believe his eyes. He blinks, and as if taunting him, the sight switches right back to a stormy landscape. That cold sweat creeps back, but only for a moment this time. The anxiety quickly subsides, and the red landscape returns. The sun glares relentlessly against his face, even through the heavily tinted window. He welcomes it gladly.

Looking out in the distance, it all clicks. All of the brain fog lifts, and he looks to his right. The man punches in a code on a keypad next to a metal door. He takes one last look back at the landscape with a certain fondness, like it's something that he's been looking for his whole life. As he enters the next room—which is roughly the size of a closet, containing only a chair, a desk, and various electronic supplies on it—he laughs again. This time, it's a genuine, hysterical laughter at the absurdity of the whole situation.

He pushes a button on the desk, and the subtle beep of a radio transmission commencing rings out through the cramped space. He speaks into a small microphone bolted onto the desk in a jovial tone transcending any fear and anxiety he held prior.

"That didn't quite work how we intended it to, yeah? Over."

Kupari, Spring 2026



Lorelei George

Kupari, Spring 2026

Cold Morning Stasis

Gideon Kwilinski

It happened one morning a cold glass was laid on the river
Its shocking impassiveness, in turn, imposing a freeze on
the valley

A strange static as time stood frozen
and all was held in strict silence

The trees could hear the absence and became as statues

The wind, terrified by the stillness would not enter her
run between the slopes

The river feigned obedience, as rivers are like to do, but
hidden in its depths retained its flow

And the only movement from that winter gripped valley,
like ants racing along a well beaten track,
was the one thing that would wait for no magic or
moment

The transient lives of man.

Kupari, Spring 2026



Cal Gilbertson

And Quoth the Raven

Zoe Whetham

----- Elenore set her bangs in the mirror, ensuring her black curved bob framed her cheeks and covered her right eye to hide the mess she made of her eyeliner that morning. Content with her appearance and the black nail polish upon her fingers, she smiled at her reflection and skipped out of the bathroom.

She straightened her black wool cardigan so its deep V-neck framed her purple shirt, highlighting her cute raven pendant. Satisfied with how it rested, she made her way to the stairs and began to pull on her lace-up boots over her fishnet tights.

“And where do you think you’re going this late, missy?”

Elenore looked up from her shoelaces to her mother and quickly tightened the bow in her hands. She stood up a little taller than before, her platforms boosting her height and confidence.

“Oh mom, eat my shorts!” She sashayed her hips while she spoke, with her hands sat upon her purple and black striped shorts. “What does it matter if I get back upon a midnight dreary, you needn’t stay awake and grow weary.”

“You’re only thirteen!” Her mother exclaimed. “No daughter of mine is going out looking like a hooker at this hour. Now go to your room, and don’t leave until I tell you.”

“But how is that fair? Do you even care?” Elenore challenged.

“Of course I care! Last Friday you had me worried sick, and you never answered your phone,” huffed her mother. “Now upstairs, or would you rather the paddle instead?”

Elenore bit her tongue back in defeat as she covered her backside with her hands and looked away in embarrassment. Without another peep, she began her slow ascent up the stairs, slipped into her room, and shut the door with a light click. It appears she wouldn't be joining the others tonight.

She moved to her desk and pulled out a drawer where a purple notebook covered in black bats sat. Opening it she was greeted by sacred runes depicting rituals, summonings, and recipes for cauldrons. She heaved a sigh as her head sank onto her palm and knocked loose her bangs. Effortlessly, she blew them back into place.

Her eyes wandered down to the pendant clipped to her shirt. With this turn of events, there was no point in wearing it. She slipped her hand down to it.

And then there came a tapping, a tapping upon the glass of her window. Elenore sank lower at her desk.

“‘Tis the wind and nothing more...”

But then there came a rapping, a rapping upon her window louder than before. Too curious to ignore it, Elenore turned her sight to the glass. She squinted into the darkness to make out a slightly darker shape. Seeking

satisfaction to bring the cat back from the grave, she rose from her chair and threw open the window.

A rapid fluttering came from the startled raven perched upon her windowsill, the bird trying to prevent itself from falling backwards out of fright.

“It’s some raven wanting entry at my window as if a door,” Elenore’s eyes sparkled with wonder. “Have you flown in from the days of yore?”

The raven tried its hardest to flap its one wing, but no matter the effort it put into the action, the wing barely moved.

“Oh my, you’re hurt quite badly, but venturing down the stairs would incur my mother’s wrath.” Elenore hung a finger on her lip as she glanced around her room. “I’m sorry, I thought I had bandages, but it appears I don’t have any. And I can’t even draw you a bath.”

“*Grunk! Squawk!*” The raven hopped side to side and flapped its good wing.

“What is it? What has you in a twist?” Elenore leaned closer as the bird stepped back and waved for her to follow. “Oh no, but I shouldn’t. Or more-so, right now I couldn’t.”

Her fingers curled around the lip of her window and the cool night breeze grazed her knuckles. The sky above them was filled with stars and the moon shone like the sun, but as she thought back to her mother, she turned her head away.

The raven hopped closer and grabbed hold of her sleeve in its beak. It pulled and tugged like a puppy, trying

to coax her into the night. Her eyes widened as she met its determined gaze. Elenore furrowed her eyebrows and nodded, and immediately the raven understood.

Elenore quickly shoved pillows under her blankets and flipped off the lights before pulling herself up onto the window's ledge and stepping through. She scooped the raven into her palms and placed it onto her shoulder, then brought her thumb and index finger to her lips.

Fweeeeeeeet!

Her whistle filled the night air, as golden stars flickered from her fingertips and trailed into the night. A confident grin shaped her lips and she held out her right hand. There was a rustling through the trees, then out popped a magic broomstick that flew directly into her hand.

“Now then, raven, from the days of yore, what do you want me to explore?” Elenore asked. “Ravens only grab witches if there's a quest. I can't make promises, but I'll do my best.”

Elenore placed her broomstick between her legs and the raven hopped down from her shoulder to sit upon it.

“*Squaaaaawk!*” It raised its wings into the air as it glowed gold.

Steadily, its feathers turned to wood and it became one with her broomstick, like a figurehead on a ship. The golden glow from its body spread to the broomstick, launching it up into the air.

“Woah!” Elenore tightened her grip and lowered her head as they accelerated.

Once up along the clouds and the sky, she lifted up her head and let out an excited hoot, pumping a fist up into the air.

“I feel so free!” She exclaimed, “It’s as if you saved me.”

The boredom of her room definitely would have killed her. By no means was that ‘being dramatic’ as her mother would say.

As they soared through the sky, Elenore looked down to see the fire pit and dancing of her usual coven. However, instead of stopping there as she was accustomed, they flew further into the woods before descending down into the forest near a stone path.

Once on the ground, the raven separated from Elenore’s broomstick and returned to her shoulder. Meanwhile, her broom took off to go back to its stable at the coven. In the distance, she heard voices. They were quiet. Then they grew louder.

Upon spotting flashlights, she and the raven ducked under the bushes and watched a group of five men come out of the darkness.

“Keep your eyes open, men,” shouted the interloper in the front, hoisting his flashlight up into the air. “There may be witches about, protecting this sacred land.”

Immediately the interlopers broke into laughter.

“As if!” Exclaimed one stood behind him. “We wiped them out years ago. Finding Old Edward’s shrine should be easy-peasy.”

When they disappeared down the path, Elenore stood up.

“Who is this Edward they speak of?” She blew orange smoke from her lips. “Here, no need to be shy like a dove.”

The smoke formed into a hand and pried open the raven’s beak before filling its lungs.

“The greatest warlock of all time, *grunk!*” The raven coughed into its wing. “Edgar Allen Poe, of course. Rumor had it his shrine contains his most powerful spell, but only a powerful witch or warlock can access it.”

“Then why did you pick me?” Elenore looked away and hunched her shoulders. “Compared to my friends, I’m just a flea...”

“I sense potential in your soul,” replied the raven. “I believe you can open the lock and prevent these buffoons from tainting our land.”

“Very well then, friend, let us take down these men.”

Elenore crawled through the woods to catch up with the treasure hunters. She rubbed her hands together and golden liquid began to pool in her palms.

“Toil be doubled, visionary trouble.” She threw the ball of goo at the interlopers and it exploded into a dark cloud.

“Who just put out my light?” asked the leader.

“Your light? Who just put out my light?” asked another, feeling around blindly with his free hand.

“Hey, guys,” Another moved his hand back and forth in front of his face. “Can you see anything?”

Elenore giggled to herself and continued through the woods until she was out of range of her own spell. Once in the clear she hopped onto the path and followed it as fast as she could. *Click clomp click clomp!*

It wasn't long before she arrived at a building mimicking that of a stage. The stage itself was rather pathetic, being no bigger than a few feet wide and deep, draped in green curtains that ran in a semi-circle.

“This is it,” said the raven. “Quick, let's hurry inside before those guys catch up.”

“Is it really alright? I'm afraid this isn't my fight.”

“If you were not right, would this be your quest, Elenore?” quoth the raven.

“No, it would not. Can't wait for my spell to rot.”

Elenore stepped up onto the stage and cast the curtains aside.

“Who goes there?”

Elenore jumped back in fright and yelped as a red-eyed, stone orangutan head came to life.

“Who dares disturb my master's slumber?” He demanded, steam pouring out of his nostrils.

“Your forgiveness I implore,” Elenore bowed then pointed to her pendant. “For I am one from the coven of the days of yore.”

“A witch thou claimst? And thou dost solicit entrance?” The orangutan lifted a heavy eyebrow.

Elenore’s eyes flickered down to the double door below the orangutan.

“Yes!” The raven chimed in. “We must gain entry at once!”

“Only ye worthy of my master’s trust will have permission to intrude upon his eternal slumber,” the orangutan’s voice echoed around the stage. “Therefore, thou must prove thyself worthy before entering his tomb.”

“I may not be the strongest witch in the land,” Elenore stepped forward, a hand on her chest. “But I’ll show you my entire hand.”

“Heavens, no! For why doth every soul think worth relies on strength?” The orangutan rolled his eyes. “I’ve got some riddles for thee instead.”

“Okay, I’ll take your test. I promise I’ll give it my best.”

“Riddle one: Once upon a time, there was a prince of an unnamed country in an unnamed land who naively laughed in the face of death. What was his name?”

“Oh, aha! That’s an easy answer for this lass, for it was Prince Prospero who drank illness from his glass.”

“Good, good. Oh, that bloot was a fool to toil with my master.” The orangutan smiled fondly at the memory. “Riddle two: What is the best sherry to toast to revenge?”

“A cask of Amontillado!” Elenore grinned. “Truly a shame for Fortunato.”

“Ah yes, what a shame.” The orangutan stifled a laugh. “Inquiry three: What is all that we see?”

Elenore rubbed her chin a moment. “Ah, yes, it’s a dream within a dream. That is all we seem to see.”

“How admirable, I’m impressed. Now, I have one final riddle,” the orangutan smirked. “And quoth the raven?”

“Nevermore!” Elenore and the raven shouted at once.

With a hearty chuckle, the ground began to shake as the orangutan opened the door beneath him. “Oh, that one is splendid with a raven amongst us. Excellent.”

Elenore and the raven crept down the dusty stairs, tiny stones breaking off of the cracking steps as Elenore stepped upon them. As they tiptoed into the darkness, torches burst to life to guide their journey. Despite the flames, the air grew colder as the stairs crawled on and began to spiral. Down and down and down they went. Finally, they reached the bottom to be greeted by a tall doorway with a large golden bell hanging from it.

Slowly Elenore passed through the doorway. *Bong! Bong!* The bell’s call echoed around the stone brick chamber and shook Elenore to her core. Once the sound subsided and her body ceased trembling, she noticed the door that she had passed through was gone.

She noticed the walls were lined with cubbies filled with personal items from the warlock: old spell books, scrolls, potions, a blue eyeball in a jar, a small pendulum akin to a Newton’s cradle, a painting of a woman hung over

the next cubby, and a bottle of old sherry. Lastly, standing out from the rest on a pedestal before the warlock's vertical casket of green, was a sparkling, red party mask from the olden days. Its edges were sharp, and on its right side it had a charming display of red feathers to add extra pizzazz.

"*Grunk*, that's what you need to grab," the raven pointed at the mask. "That is what they're after."

Elenore approached the pedestal and noticed an iridescent bubble surrounding it, likely to protect it from thieves. Her eyes wandered down to the plaque attached upon the front side of the pedestal.

"Only those who are kin can escape in the end," she read.

There was a slot for a hand. She nervously gulped before squatting down and placing her hand upon it. It erupted in bright white light and made her hand tingle. Unable to look, Elenore closed her eyes and turned away. When the light had dimmed, and she realized her hand was still attached, she cracked open her eyes to take a look. Green sand now clung to her skin.

Slowly, she pulled back her hand and the sand rolled off of her and took the shape of letters on the plaque. It read, "Elenore Clemm, descendent of Edgar Allen Poe."

"This can't be!" Elenore shouted. "How could such a legend be related to a worm like me?"

She fell down to her knees as she looked up at the words. Letting her gaze wander farther, she realized the bubble around the mask had popped.

“That’s why you were chosen,” said the raven. “I was informed you were somehow connected, but I figured you already knew.”

Elenore shook her head.

“Never once have I met my father, and my mother hates witches, so talking to her would be a bother.” Elenore hugged herself and looked down at the ground. “This is hard to swallow...”

The raven nuzzled her cheek. “It’s okay, fate is fate, but you don’t have to accept it overnight. Think on it and let it settle, *grunk!* Right now, let’s focus on getting us and the mask out of here.”

“You’re right, this is no time for sorrow,” Elenore smiled and lifted her head. “I can worry about it tomorrow.”

She stood up from the ground and took the mask into her hands. Beneath it there was a message engraved on the pedestal: “For whomever retrieves this, you have been chosen to wield the Masque of the Red Death.” Elenore timidly turned the mask around in her hands to admire every angle.

“I think you have to put it on to use it,” The raven said.

Bong! The room began to tremble as the door they came through reappeared.

“Master can tell us more back at the coven, *grunk!*”

Elenore nodded and they began back up the stairs.

“Forsooth, what madness is this?!” Shouted the orangutan from the top of the stairs.

“*Grunk!* Sounds like there’s trouble.” The raven looked to Elenore.

She nodded and let go of the railing of the spiraled stairs. Quickly she ran up the steps, going around and around, and eventually hit the spot where they climbed straight up. With a shove of her shoulder, she burst through the orangutan’s doors to see the green curtains ablaze.

“Oh, so you let an itty-bitty girl in, but you won’t let us gentlemen enter?” asked the leader of the interlopers while playing with the lighter in his hand.

As the burnt curtains fell to smolder, Elenore could see his smirking face as he casually held out his arms.

“What a shame there’s no rain to come down.”

Elenore walked across the stage and stood akimbo before them as the fire roared around her.

“What has brought you to our sacred land, you fiends?” Elenore’s voice boomed over the crackling of the flames. “Judging by your clothes, you’ve got plenty of money for the mouths you feed.”

“Now, now, let’s not get hostile.” The interloper patted the air with his palms in an act of innocence. “Why don’t you be a doll and come down from there, it’s rather dangerous to be so close to fire. My gentlemen can help you down if you’re scared.”

“Eat my shorts!” Elenore shouted. “You better prepare your life supports.”

She lifted the mask high into the air as it dazzled in the moonlight. Immediately she brought it down and tied it around her face. Looking through the mask, she could see the organs of every man outlined in red.

“What the hell are you wearing?” The interlopers laughed. “Are we playing dress up now?”

Elenore reached out towards the leader’s heart and scooped up the outline in her hand. The heart materialized as red smoke in her palm, and she squeezed it.

The leader coughed and clasped at his chest. He tried hammering it as he fell to his knees. As his body began to tremble, Elenore released the heart and it vanished. She turned her sights to the other men before her.

Each interloper took a step back.

Quickly, she reached for one of their sets of lungs, and it materialized as the heart did, but required both of her hands. She gave them a quick tug and the man gasped for breath and stumbled backwards. Elenore proceeded to dig into the bottom of his lungs with her claws as the man began to wheeze.

“She’s a witch!” Yelled one of the untouched interlopers. “And she’s got The Red Death!”

“Retreat!”

She released the interloper’s lungs and he collapsed. Meanwhile, the other three thieves scurried to gather their fallen comrades before fleeing down the path and out of sight. Elenore lowered the mask from her face and turned towards the orangutan and his flaming stage.

"I am beholdened to you, witch," he told her. "I sense they will not grace us with their presence for a time."

Elenore smiled and waved a hand in the air. There was a small roar of thunder, then it began to rain over the curtains, putting out the remaining flames.

"Will you be alright?" asked the raven.

"Oh, ho! Thou art fretting over me?" The Orangutan raised an eyebrow. "Prithee, fret not, I am crafted of stone. A little fire shall leave no scratch upon me, unlike thee."

"Ah..." The raven rubbed its head with its wing. "Right."

"Thank you for everything, friend." Elenore bowed again. "I hope with time, any wounds will mend."

"'Tis a pleasure. Now, travel home safely."

Elenore put her fingers to her lips. *Fweeeeeeeet!*

Her broom arrived and she hopped on with the raven on her shoulder.

"Until we meet again!" Elenore waved to the orangutan.

"Fare thee well," he grinned as the little witch took off into the air. "The mask is in worthy hands."

High up in the sky, Elenore finally took a moment to breathe. She looked down at the mask sitting upon her lap.

"So, what will you do now?" inquired the raven.

"Dig more into my family's past," Elenore looked up to the moon. "I think it'll be a blast."

"It's a shame we have to part after this, since I'll be sent back to the nest," sighed the raven.

“Well, even if you could, breaking the rules would be no good.” Elenore looked at him. “Because magic will only last, until night has gone and passed.”

They soon arrived at her home, and Elenore stepped off of her broom and onto the roof. Her broom flew around her in a playful farewell then back into the stars to head back home, leaving her and the raven behind. Elenore held out her hands to the bird and it hopped down into her palms. It proceeded to shake its feathers, releasing the orange smoke that allowed it to speak. With a sad smile, Elenore closed her eyes and leaned down to kiss its head.

A rainbow bow appeared on the raven’s injured wing. “*Grunt! Grunt!*”

“Safe travels, my friend,” she cooed. “May we meet someday again.”

She gave it a light toss up and it spread its feathers. With a flap of its wings, the raven took off into the sky and soared up into the night. Elenore watched it, mask in one hand and pendant in the other.

For a moment, she too felt like she had the wings of a bird.

Kupari, Spring 2026



Cal Gilbertson



Kupari, Spring 2026

Ducks and Sun

Baden Webster

-----The pair of plumpy bundles lie

Together under warming rays.

A light wind fluffs their downy plumes

And gives the day its winter feel.

The ice and the apocalypse

Departed—only blossoming

And breezy notes of chill remain

To tell the tales of frozen woes.

The puffy parcels stir and shake

Their sleepy season from its place,

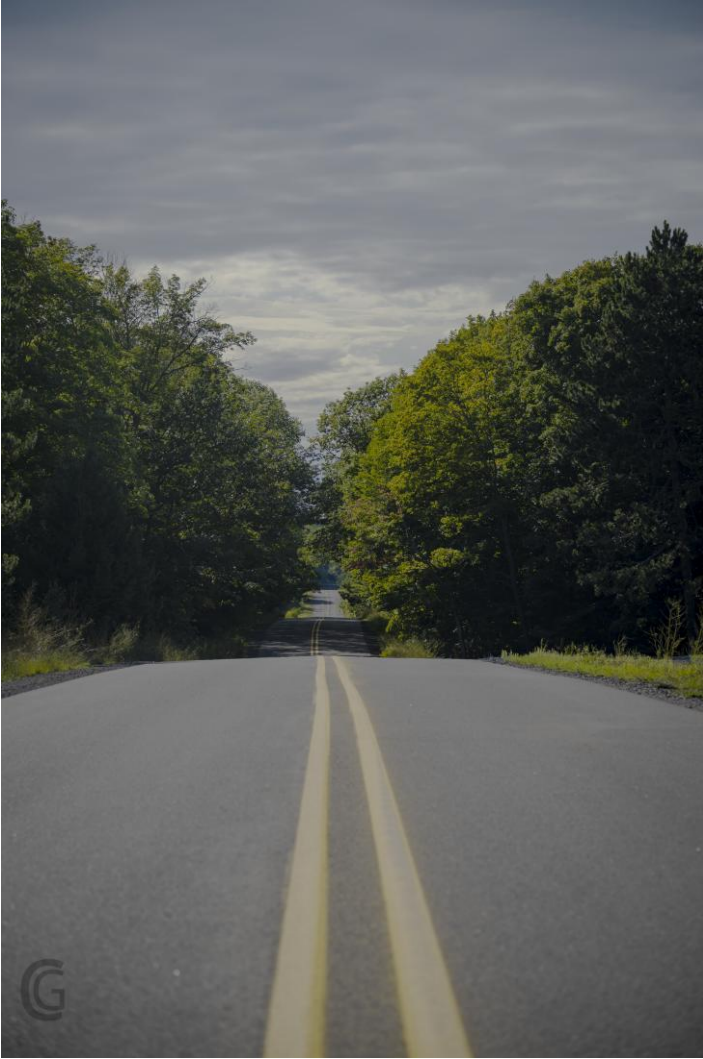
Disturbed by humans' rhyming strides:

Young lovers' steps on a boardwalk.

The couples momentarily

Become companions sharing sun.

Kupari, Spring 2026



Cal Gilbertson

The Pit

John Umbriac

The smell of damp earth graced us for our long drive into the center of the pit. It was just me and the other volunteer that day. The chirping of birds had faded many hours ago, leaving only the sound of wheels crunching on dirt. Our vehicle was the Offroad Open V34.6.25, the most popular of various land vehicle projects. Open-source development for the car started 13 years ago, and had almost 17,000 contributions from 3,658 unique contributors. It had the look of a dune buggy grown from a vine. Rampant topology optimization turned every wheel, support, handle, and surface into a tangle of support branches, like two sticks had been glued together and then quickly pulled apart. The form served the function as our vehicle glided smoothly over the exposed regolith at a non-trivial incline.

"So, why did you join the Extraction Concerns org?"

It was a boring question, but I could think of nothing better. There had only been sparse conversation between us during the flight in and refabrication of our craft into the Offroad Open. I'd venture they were as stunned by the landscape as I was. It seemed the world was two colors. The brown plane of the excavated ground receded infinitely in all directions to a perfectly flat horizon, as if leveled by sandpaper. From that line, pure blue rose up to encompass a half-circle above and around

us, a complete lack of clouds only reinforcing the dichotomy.

"I just finished a stint with one of the resource refinement committees and was looking for my next thing," my companion said with a shrug. A boring response for a boring question. We should have been more adept conversationalists, both being members of the Real Human Connection org, which advocated being physically present with others when collaborating. They scanned the horizon, squinting. "You know, I've looked at the satellite images for this place, but they really don't convey the scale..."

I nodded in agreement. "Nobody really considers where our spools come from. Why would we? What matters is that we get them, and then get more when they run out." My fingers tapped the armrest in thought. "This is the cost of it all."

That comment seemed to draw my companion from their stupor. When they spoke it was drawn-out, as if to put more effort into their word choice. "Paying this cost buys us a post-scarcity utopia. It has to be worth it." I paused to consider before replying. "I don't think utopias exist. Once we reach a higher standard of living, that just becomes the new normal." They shook their head. "I'd argue that 'utopia' gets its meaning through comparison. Compared to the past, even just 20 years ago, everything's better. I mean, anyone can get anything they want by queuing their fab."

"Sure, you might be happier than the average person in Thailand," I countered, "but your life is not free

of strife." The choice of Thailand was pointed. Six years ago the Thai National Assembly passed a law banning the use of personal fabrication devices in an effort to save the nation's failing industrial sector. A fab could print a duplicate of itself in under three hours. The time between the first fab's completion and their numbers rivaling the human population of earth, replacing the need for centralized manufacturing, had exceeded all expectations. "I think there's an assumption that solving societal problems solves personal ones."

"Hmm. Fair," they said placatively, turning away to look out the passenger side.

A hint of orange appeared on the horizon, reminding me of the hour. My watch showed an acceptable time for dinner, if not a bit early. I swiped on the circular display, prompting the device to show contextual options for actions I might want to take. I watched the bubbled suggestions drift slowly around the watchface. The one I needed was directly in the center: queue food. With most meal choices "unavailable" due to lack of internet access, I settled for an old favorite. Pressing "print" instantly sprang the scaled-down fab in the back seat to life. The print heads whirled around the forming sphere, almost invisible in their speed as a timer counted down: 11...10...9...8. Five spools slowly unwound to feed the frenzy. The meal's 283 grams were mostly comprised of structural soy proteins, with added vitamins and flavoring agents. 3...2...1. A slow curl of steam rose from the completed dish. It was a modern version of arancini, the main changes being

greater structural integrity and no-mess handling. As I bit into my meal, my partner printed theirs, some fruity protein slurry. We ate in silence, watching the hues of sunset consume the sky.

Not long after we finished our meals, the car gave a pleasant chime, slowing to a gradual stop. The fab, dutifully following the pre-programmed travel instructions, printed three small clear vials alongside stoppers and a scoop. This only took four seconds. My companion grabbed the pillar behind the passenger seat and swung around, unimpeded by the lack of doors, and plucked the objects from the print bed. As they turned to hop off the vehicle and take the samples, the fab, verifying that the print area was once again clear, started printing the soil analyzer. Being a specialty piece of scientific equipment, its printable design was a relatively niche project. Having only a handful of contributors meant that the design prioritized functionality and accuracy over reducing printing time with an optimized tool path. Including a few short waiting periods for proper heating and cooling of materials, the print took around six minutes. With the samples collected, my companion walked back to the car and threw the scoop into a chute at the top of the fab. A muted grinding noise accompanied the recycler processing the material for reuse. They then placed a vial into the slot in the soil analyzer. The machine indicated the scan was complete and my partner flung the vial into the recycling chute, replacing it with the next one. Each vial eventually flew a graceful

trajectory into the recycler, followed by the analyzer itself, and the drive continued.

As the sun dipped below the horizon the wind picked up, blowing dust onto the center console. I solved this problem with the contextual button to seal off the rear wall of the buggy. There was a synchronized "flumph" as molded airbags inflated from the rear structural pillars forming a solid barrier over the tangle of structural supports. A drop of water on the back of my right hand prompted my passenger to apply the same shield to the roof of the vehicle. They motioned to seal the sides as well, but I moved to stop them. I figured we could enjoy the panoramic fading glow of dusk.

A warning light flashed on the center console. I read the error out loud: "Warning: mismatch between expected and measured velocity." My partner grumbled something incomprehensible. We had been getting various warnings throughout the trip, but they were easy enough to ignore. The terrain was no doubt dangerous, but our vehicle was designed exactly for this purpose.

The warning disappeared, replaced by a bigger, redder, scarier one. It wasn't the new warning that scared me though, it was the line under it. "Action: Applying brakes." That couldn't be right—there was no jolt from the stop. I poked my head out the side of the buggy, and panic sliced through the tip of my spine. The wheels were not turning. We were stationary, but the ground wasn't. It was a landslide.

Any action I could take seemed like the wrong one. We had no control. A light pierced the night ahead of us, rapidly growing in luminance as it approached.

The milliseconds between recognizing the approaching object and collision were excruciating. Impact was inevitable. As the vehicle rotated upon its guiding currents, the rock barreled down on the driver side door, except there was no door. The impact hit low, momentum forcing the buggy to roll over the rock. A sharp protrusion made my agony physical, slicing through my seatbelt and leaving a wicked gash across my stomach. With the strap released, the tensioner flung the slackened fabric away from me while I was flung from the vehicle into the dark abyss.

Pain, and then silence.

It hurt to breathe, it hurt to think. I opened my eyes to a sharp slap in the face. My partner was kneeling over me, soaked, bleeding, and covered in dirt. Their mouth was moving, but their words were overpowered by the sound of my own heartbeat. A small white box in their hand displayed a message: "Preliminary scan complete. Diagnosis: chest fracture. Recommended action: fabricate breathing assis—" and the world fell away.

Jason knelt helplessly over their new friend, who according to the Compact Medical Scanner, had slipped back into a coma, their brain starved of oxygen. It was all going to be okay though. In 40 seconds the fab would finish printing the breathing assistance device, and they would make it out of this hellscape.

38...37...36...The scanner beeped a new message. "Condition update: Unstable. Recommended action: Seek medical assistance." Jason cursed under their breath. 26...25...24. The scanner beeped more frantically, only heightening the claustrophobia of inaction. They stared at the fabricator, watching the blur of the print heads form an object seemingly from the air itself. 19...18...17...16...

All they could do was sit and stare.

And wait.

The scanner stopped beeping, giving a final update. "Condition update: Deceased. No recommended action." Jason sat unmoving, feeling as lifeless as the body in front of them.

The fab had been too slow. This device, the culmination of human ingenuity, obsessively refined by open source collaboration of the best minds of their generation, hadn't been fast enough. To Jason, at that moment, the fab didn't seem like a modern miracle but instead a clunky unfinished toy. If the contributors had put in a bit more effort to optimize the fab's tool path or material deposition speed everything would have worked out. They could have all worked a bit harder. But would that have saved this person's life? Would it still fail others?

Would it ever be enough?

Kupari, Spring 2026



Nathan Klemstein



Ties, Trauma, and Turning Things Around

Brendan Moore

CW: child abuse

I climb the weathered, wooden stairs to my apartment, robotically making more coffee to offset school and class. The air fryer reheats depressing leftover frozen pizza for a lunch that disappears in a hungry blur, but the coffee's nursed slowly in a futile attempt to curb my caffeine addiction. I half-run up the stairs, just slow enough to avoid spilling it. The coffee sits on my computer desk next to the edibles used to avoid—or more likely forget—waking up from remembered nightmares. I unbar the closet—carefully moving the hammock I sleep in to avoid disturbing the gifted mattress awkwardly leaning against the opposite wall. Unzipping the unearthed garment-bag reveals the moths either could not or did not eat through the bag. A light blue dress shirt, suit pants, and a black tie pile onto an arm, and I grab the all-important coffee on my way out.

In the bathroom, the tie haphazardly flies onto the shower rod, as fraying denim appears in the mirror. After fastening the final buttons, I pull out my phone for the annual tradition of looking up how to tie a tie, setting the phone next to trimmings from my typically unkempt beard.

The knot is way too low the first time, about halfway down my chest. The tie is left loose to adjust on the second try, and I know it's right when the knot tightens uncomfortably snug around my throat.

While heading downhill to the bus stop, I prepare public-safe explanations about my situation for the phantoms in my head. My resume denotes five years at Tech and claims I'll graduate this semester, but COVID and my mom's arrest meant leaving college early in two different semesters, and I just got back from my unexpected gap year. Although no employer-friendly or personally palatable explanations come to mind, I know that Spring 2024 is my sixth full semester at Tech. The bus heads back to campus, towards Career Fair.

I remember being held down, gasping for air. I am a child, ten years old, unable to fight back against my bigger, taller, stronger father. Insurmountable pressure pushes my throat in, demanding full attention, shoving everything else aside. The red curtains, the tail end of sunset in the window, and anything out of reach fades into some distracting mural. I can't slip out from the hand crushing my throat.

I get off near the library. The hill separating Career Fair from the rest of campus feels larger than usual, but time collapses in on itself during the climb.

I am a ten-year-old kid trying to break free from a man twice my size, a man I barely knew when the courts decided he would raise me. My ten-year-old

arm reaches out for something heavy or sharp, but I only find a black couch pillow. I urgently try to elbow his arm and kick his knee, but he has more than enough martial arts training to ignore a flailing child's attempt to fight. I'm unable to stop the world from matching the black couch.

I get to Career Fair where a vague mass of students fills the entrance. There's a long line that I instinctively get in. The surroundings already feel like a stifled mesh of heat.

Later that night, I am talking to the cops in the house; the cops who are just suddenly here in the same way the fight's suddenly over. One of them is in the kitchen talking to my father, and the other is in the living room talking to me next to the grave couch. Where I am gets lost, buried under everything else. The cop blends with all the other cops who respond to already countless calls. He's just another cop in a bullet-proof vest. He asks about the fight and who started it, expecting answers from me: the kid focusing on pushing words out of a bruised throat.

I write my name on the blank tag. It sticks to the dress shirt despite the heat.

I'm the same ten-year-old kid now in the back of the police cruiser. The officer tells me to look in the rearview mirror. There must be a camera he is pointing to, so I blink away the blur that crept into my eyes again, finding the little circle giving away the lens. He asks me to repeat what I told him while

looking into the camera. I tell him, again, about the past few months, about the fights, about the abuse and the neglect, and, again, about tonight, about my father choking me.

The Career Fair room is even worse. It's full of chatter, an overwhelming assault of noise. There are too many people to track.

After the interview in the cruiser, I am in the driveway with the cop from the cruiser when the other cop comes out of the house with my father. Cruiser cop tells me to get in the truck, and I do. When left alone in the truck, tears slip past the emotional wall, reddening the face of an ashamed ten-year-old kid. I had been told all my life that men don't cry, so the tears became another sign of my current inability to fight back. The cruiser cop's voice rises, almost audible through the truck door as he gestures to me in the window, a memory that would slowly ingrain itself as the closest anyone ever came to doing anything. But what mattered that night is I am a child left fully alone to process the abuse, the fear, the anger, the neglect, and almost dying.

I find the first company. There is no line, so the short woman quickly starts talking to me. She says they are only actually looking for programmers, her voice barely outside the cacophony. I know I have no interest, but I need to be able to pay the bills.

In the dead of night, I'm awake while even my dog

sleeps. Since the cops left, the usual nighttime footsteps failed to occur. It's far from the first time I've kept watch and even further from the last time I'd need to, but even the quietest nights aren't so dead.

At the booth for the second company, the large man says their new branch is in need of marketers. I hand over a resume and my contact info, receiving something in the shape of a business card which ends up somewhere.

There's yet another fight while I am ten years old, another to count among the dozens. I didn't do some chore he demanded, and my father picks me up and throws me into my black bedroom wall, painted for the high school football team's colors. I fall onto the bed, but lean into the mattress, using the slight bounce to get on my feet faster. I've learned I need to learn to fight better or it all ends.

Amidst a sea of remembered nightmares, I get in line for the third company. The line crawls along, and people blur into an ever-shifting distraction that threatens to surround me. The heat feels infinite, filling the room with the intense calm that everywhere else is as stifling.

I remember fight after fight as the remainder of fifth grade blurs together, learning the flashing sirens are some sort of indication another week passed. It gets easier to keep watch at night and harder to pay attention in class. Homework becomes meaningless, and I strategically quit the various sports teams. The food my mom drops off

from food banks and food stamps is no longer enough, so I learn to steal food from the school cafeteria. Purple marks appear and cover my biceps, shoulders, and thighs. Within a year of almost dying, three hours of sleep means a restful night to the perpetually injured 220lb fighting mass I've become.

I am half-way. Even the sought-out sensation of breath gets buried under the amalgamation of light, noise, and people that itself is buried under the grim abyss of the worst moments of my life. All air feels lifelessly, stiflingly hot with nothing to latch to, no anchor.

I remember being ten years old, gasping for air, futilely fighting, and the world slipping away. I remember hearing a cop yell before walking away, gasping for air, seeing darkness, and overwhelming pressure crushing my throat. I remember gasping for air, crying alone in the truck, gasping for air, blue and red flashing lights illuminating the cul-de-sac, gasping for air, being unable to breath, gasping for air.

I forget about breathing and start to listen to the group behind me talk about something I can't make out. With monumental focus, their voices slowly separate, and I eventually discern they're talking about the internships they hope to get. My window of focus carefully expands to include breathing, and I'm able to feel the motions and try to steady it.

A few years later, CPS showed up in the middle of

the night to investigate. I hear the unknown car slowly drive down the cul-de-sac; hear it pull slowly into the driveway of my father's house. The unidentified agents bang on the front door, and I wake up my father in the hopes that whatever bad happens will happen to him first.

I get to the recruiter, some person standing on the verge of the amalgamation of people. They take a resume, and we talk a little. The company only sent engineers. The recruiter asks why I want to work there, but "to get paid" is not the answer they want. I say something in line with what they want to hear, but we both know it's a script.

My injured fourteen-year-old-self rides with the CPS agents to be examined at the hospital. Someone else pointed out my legs are entirely bruised, my right ring finger was missing a chunk of fingernail, and other injuries a mirror would not reflect. I only notice an annoying sting when attempting to use that hand.

A new, familiar exhaustion filled me, seeping through my entire body and every thought. Every movement feels sluggish, every sense feels overworked, and every memory has worn away my resolve. I head for the door, fully ready to go home and just sit.

Pride swelled as the CPS agent told me she had never seen a kid fight like that, validating my sense of fierce security. At fourteen, I was proven capable of not just escaping my father pinning me, but standing up while lifting him. Adrenaline gave me

strength, and adrenaline joined with experience taught me to empty myself, enabling my untrained form to give as good as I got. There had been far fewer fights since growing and learning this, but I stayed ready and capable. The hospital machines beeped as she again complimented my prowess.

I spot a company on the way out. There's some faint recognition, loosely related to the list of companies looking for humanities majors. I talk to the recruiter and hand them a resume. They have to pass the information on.

CPS took me from the hospital to live with my grandparents for a week while my father, stepmother, and blood-sibling went to her family reunion. After a week of quiet recovery and peaceful reading, it was back to the house I spent four years surviving. I'm fourteen, sitting across from a social worker who spent the past month lecturing about the importance of doing chores. I'm sick of being told to obey a self-servingly violent man and tired of the disappointment at a week's rest after four years of survival; I feel foolish for expecting change. After a month of weekly family meetings, I tell the social worker everything's fine and there are no issues; I undercut the "preponderance of evidence" substantiating my father as an abuser. I've already survived four years and outgrown most of my physical disadvantages, what would another four years be? Fights are simpler, and far more familiar, than false hope.

I immediately take off the tie once outside. The light starts harsh, glaring off puddles of melted snow. The sun offers a gentler, welcoming warmth. My body knows where to go. I drink water near the bus stop, and it's just cold enough to use my typical trick of letting it sit in my mouth to help me ground myself. Music sits in one ear, some lively Celtic song that perpetually sounds one room away. I try to counterbalance the memories on repeat, leaning on my sisters as usual.

I show up at Sydney's door in the middle of the night. After being kicked out by my mom over a fight about my high school graduation open house, I walked across my street-lit town first to my friend Parker's house, vaguely aware walking seven miles along forested backroads at night is not a great idea. Once woken, Parker drives me to Syd's, and we had to find her house in the dark.

While I watch for the bus, I have to remind myself Parker gave me his phone to get a hold of Syd as he got ready to drive. I remind myself Syd took me in, asked if I wanted to talk, and gave me a blanket and a spot to sleep. I remind myself her grandparents drove me to work the next day, with the trees and fields of the backroads blurring together on the way. Even when my mom calmed, Syd helped me make plans in case it happened again.

I get back to my apartment and grab a glass. Cold outlines my fingers while tossing in some ice cubes. The shake in my hands has become visible from across the room, but I try to focus on other things. An ice cube marks

the bounds of my hand while a glass fills with water. In my room, I move an organizer to use as a nightstand and climb into the hammock. The music shuts off as I focus on the rhythmic fan.

After a couple hours I get up to make sure there are no homework assignments due on this arduous day. I take an edible, resigning myself to an early night. Habit again coaxes me into dealing with college concerns tomorrow. Without space or reason to envision a future, it's a skill I never learned.

Almost two years later, I'm hosting Fucked-Up Family Dinner. There are just two seats taken tonight, but phantoms help fill the room. We've avoided dinner being just us without the third, but I needed to step up once she alluded to her aversion. Tonight the phantom of my own father has been staring at me since she walked in, so hosting and asking about school takes more of me. She helps guide the conversation past checking on her, and I'm content—or maybe proud—to notice she's spotted the phantoms too. We swap stories for a while and end up laughing for a bit, but we skip the more typical support group conversations because tonight's already required the work of healing. On her way out, she says a weighty "thank you Brendan." I spend the next four hours writing and processing, honing the understanding I wish to share because the last hour constantly reminded me to do better.

Growing up in a violent, dangerous home taught me to look for threats, and be ready to violently engage the

dangers the world *will* offer. During the worst year of the abuse, schoolyard fights became training grounds for my father's house, and countless walls emerged to keep the violent world out. The endless threats demanded nothing less.

The walls and the fights worked; being fearsome, or at least readily violent, kept the world at bay. This seemed necessary, but a distant world is limited to an exotic curiosity. My walls entombed an empty fortress, leaving me to spiral like Odin, with only my fears for company. Years after the danger passed, every distancing action served to prevent a theoretical threat. While my successful disconnection kept some vague sense of security, growth became impossible. My survivable answers never saw a single alternative. Disconnection could only ever let me waste away, as I was a child stuck in survival mode while the outside world passed me by.

People can only make the best decision they can from the options they can see. I vaguely remember being told to be the bigger man as a child, being told to take the high road with my abusive father. However, these idealistic moral arguments will always fall flat when staring death in the face, and I felt my only meaningful option was to fight after being left alone in every conceivable way the night he choked me out. In my childhood experience, waiting for help was a slow suicide, whether it was help from cruiser cop who scolded my father one week amidst a year of persistent, rampant abuse or the neighbors who angrily yelled, "shut up" when I screamed for help. Fifteen years

later, I am still counterbalancing my lived experience of help as an empty ideal; I'm still learning to accept willing help from people who genuinely care.

Genuine care, inherently intertwined with human connection, demands finding better options. I've choked down ashen food innumerable times to avoid Syd saying "Brendan" in a defeated way, the one that sounds like she wants to tell me off while briefly seeing how deep the scars run. Aubrie sends TikToks after weeklong silences, and she repeatedly asks about when I'm moving back downstate. Her family happily makes room for me in their crowded house. Justyn, one of my best friends, and his family regularly give me their bunkhouse as a crash-pad. These mundane actions still starkly contrast the world I grew up in.

Their simple, caring actions provided important insight for Fucked-Up Family Dinner, an informal support group I created alongside two college friends who survived their own tragic circumstances. We chose to create a restorative group, intending to give ourselves our own version of everything fate denied us. During dinner, we happily update each other about everyday life, talk about our goals or dreaded exams to come, and joke around together. Only after family dinner do we talk about our struggles adapting to normal life, so our lives and goals can remind us what we are working for. Quite simply, we created our own little fucked-up family.

As part of this, we look out for each other between sessions. The older girl calls me to help talk through the

rough days, and she's started pushing me open up if she suspects I'm toughing it out. When a decayed tooth pinched a nerve, she left class to pick me up and stayed by my side through an ER trip. While she had an awful bout of the flu, I figured out who to rope into driving me for a soup run before finding out her roommates had her covered.

During this time, progress snuck up on me. Just like Syd and Aubrie, my fucked-up family members help blunt the survivor's edge to better fit a peaceful environment. The starkest point of personal progress comes in the form of instinctively all-but-adopting the youngest Fucked-Up Family Dinner member as "my kid." Without a single conscious thought, I always make sure she's eating, have stepped directly in front of her to hide her from a man fifteen years older who regularly hits on her, and have offered to walk three miles to shovel her snowbank of a driveway. She's liberatingly described these caring, protective actions as *dadlike*. For most of my life the specter of my own violent father has haunted me as a bad omen, but if she giddily describes my instinctive actions, then maybe I outgrew his mistakes—maybe I would be a better father than him.

All of this growth, this positive change, came from small steps towards something better, spurred on by the connection with my sisters and friends. They acted as the light at the end of the tunnel, encouraging me to look for the better options. Trauma violently disrupts life, but connection and care create growth, and growth signifies

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life. I've made plenty of short-sighted mistakes, but I want to do better for my found-family.

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Cal Gilbertson

Kupari, Spring 2026

Embers in Darkness

Quinn Winkler

There was one night when,
we drove through the woods
to a location
famed for its stars.

We arrived,
threaded the car between so many others
and walked into the clearing.

And the Sky Unfolded before us.

Across the infinite ebony canvas,
someone had spilled the Cosmos.

Thousands of Eyes stared back at me,
from the canvas above
where they lay, Waiting.

Little pinpricks of Light
like matches tossed from the heavens
blazed across the expanse,

small lights
aglow for mere Moments in Eternity

faded away.

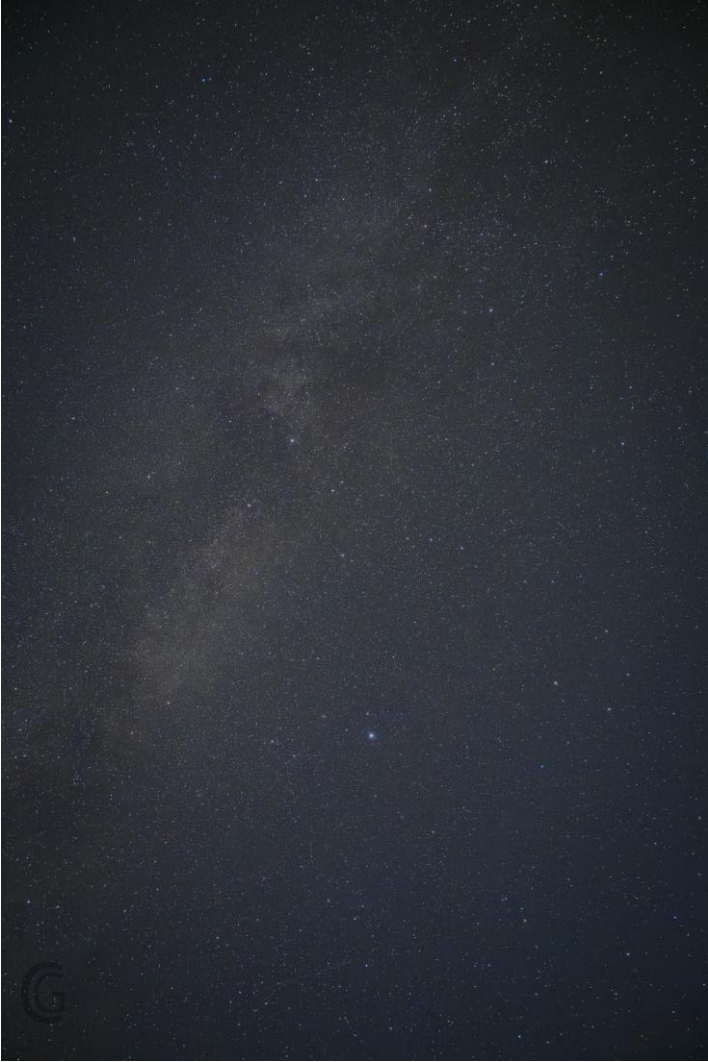
The Universe held the Stars dearly in its grasp,
afraid to let them Go.

Yet They Burned
On And On,

yet they burned outdtpalcze
over and over,

as we watched,
helplessly in awe.

Kupari, Spring 2026



Cal Gilbertson

Enterprise Biographies

Jamie Perlman is the president of Ink & Ore Enterprise at Michigan Tech, Paw Prints team lead, and a part of the original Paw Prints team. She is a fourth-year Scientific and Technical Communication major at Michigan Tech from Ann Arbor, Michigan. She loves history, F1, automotive design and engineering, music, *Magic: The Gathering*, the Pleiades star cluster, and working on Paw Prints: The Michigan Tech Journal of First-Year Writing.

Devin Palczewski is the vice president of Ink & Ore Enterprise and Kupari team lead. He is a third-year English Major with minors in Communication and Writing from Macomb, Michigan and enjoys playing games, participating in the pep band, reading, and being outside in his free time.

Charles Driscoll is a first-year Scientific and Technical Communication major at Michigan Tech. They are involved with the Huskies Pep Band, WMTU, and are a new member of Ink and Ore Enterprise. He's from Chicago, Illinois and loves to read, write, and consume music however he can.

Rowan Kerns is a fourth-year Scientific and Technical Communication major at Michigan Tech. They were a part of the initial editorial leadership team for Paw Prints, and now work with Paw Prints for the Ink and Ore Enterprise.

They are from Ann Arbor, Michigan and love drawing, playing guitar, and spending lots of time outside.

Max Meyer is a fourth-year Scientific and Technical Communication major with minors in Computer Science and Writing from River Forest, Illinois. In his free time, he makes games, writes stories, goes on adventures, and gets lost down rabbit holes.

Brendan Moore is a fifth-year Scientific and Technical Communication major with minors in Psychology and Philosophy. He is from Lowell, Michigan, and he loves bonfires with friends and night drives. He has had no involvement with the creation of *Kupari* aside from his contribution.

Bella Wicker is a third-year Cybersecurity major from St. Johns, Michigan. She currently works as the editorial assistant for *The Lode* and likes sewing and Minecraft.

Faculty Advisors' Biographies

Holly Hassel has been a professor in the Department of Humanities and director of the first-year writing program at Michigan Tech since 2023. She has previously taught at North Dakota State University and the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County. Her areas of expertise are writing studies, writing program administration, and writing assessment. As Director of First-Year Writing, she teaches writing students and mentors writing instructors as they integrate *Paw Prints* into the curriculum.

Prof. M. Bartley Seigel is the author of *In the Bone-Cracking Cold* (Wayne State University Press, 2025) and *This Is What They Say* (Typecast Publishing, 2013). A former Poet Laureate of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow, his poems have appeared in literary journals such as Poetry Magazine, Michigan Quarterly Review, About Place, and Split Rock Review, among many others. He is Writing Center Director and Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Michigan Technological University.

Contributor Biographies

Lorelei George is a Scientific and Technical Communications student at Michigan Technological University from the small town of Pewamo, Michigan. Her photography mainly focuses on nature and the outdoors, inspired by her adventurous personality and love of travel. Instagram: @lorelei_george

Cal Gilbertson is a third-year Computer Network and System Administration student at Michigan Tech who spends his time taking photos, working on computers, and spending time outdoors in the Keweenaw. Originally from Wisconsin, his photography focuses on capturing striking long-exposure outdoor scenes and the northern lights. You can find more of his work at calgilbertson.com.

Nathan Klemstein is a photographer and videographer interested in many different subjects. He has been refining his film photography techniques and appreciates how film forces his work to be more intentional. While studying Civil Engineering, photography serves as his creative outlet.

Gideon Kwilinski is a first-year Wildlife Ecology and Conservation student at Michigan Tech. They've enjoyed reading and memorizing poems for a few years and recently started trying to write some of their own. Some

of their favorite poets are Mary Oliver, James Wright, and Robert Frost.

Brendan Moore grew up in Lowell, Michigan. After graduating from the Scientific and Technical Communication program with Psychology and Philosophy minors, he will be attending Grand Valley State University to attain a Master's in Social Work. He enjoys spending time with his friends whether it be hikes, bonfires, or playing games.

Anita Popelka is an undergraduate student at MTU pursuing a degree in Mechanical Engineering. She has been painting for about 7 years as of 2026, and her preferred mediums are watercolor and graphite. She also dabbles in acrylics, charcoal, and even some embroidery as well!

Wren Schmalz is an Environmental Science and Fish Biology student who loves writing about the natural world, speculative ecology, and all things strange and unusual.

John Umbriac is a senior studying Computer Science at Michigan Technological University. Inspired by the short stories of Ted Chiang, he took a break from computer programming to instead write something for humans to read. In his free time he enjoys programming, reading, and rock climbing.

Baden Webster grew up in Zhongdian, Yunnan, China. He was homeschooled by his mother, who instilled in him a love of words, poetry, and creativity.

Zachary Wiechec writes abstract stories that tend to combine suspense, mystery, and vivid descriptions, attempting to capture the essence of some of the more difficult aspects of living.

Zoe Whetham has always had a soft spot for fantasy and psychological horror stories, be they games, movies, or literature, and loves exploring themes of self-discovery and mental health. It's their dream to create stories like those that inspired them, and hopefully make others fall in love with fantasy and horror too.

Quinn Winkler is a third-year chemistry major. They enjoy creative writing, art, and DnD.

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Thank you so much for reading the first issue of Kupari! We put a lot of work into making our first issue a reality, and we can't wait to see where we go from here. We'd like to give an additional special thanks to all our contributors, fellow Ink & Ore enterprise members, advisors, and everyone in the Humanities department who helped spread the word about submissions. We hope you enjoyed it.

- Kupari Editorial Team,
Devin Palczewski, Max Meyer, Charles Driscoll



Lorelei George