



Spring Loaded (detail)
Barry Munson

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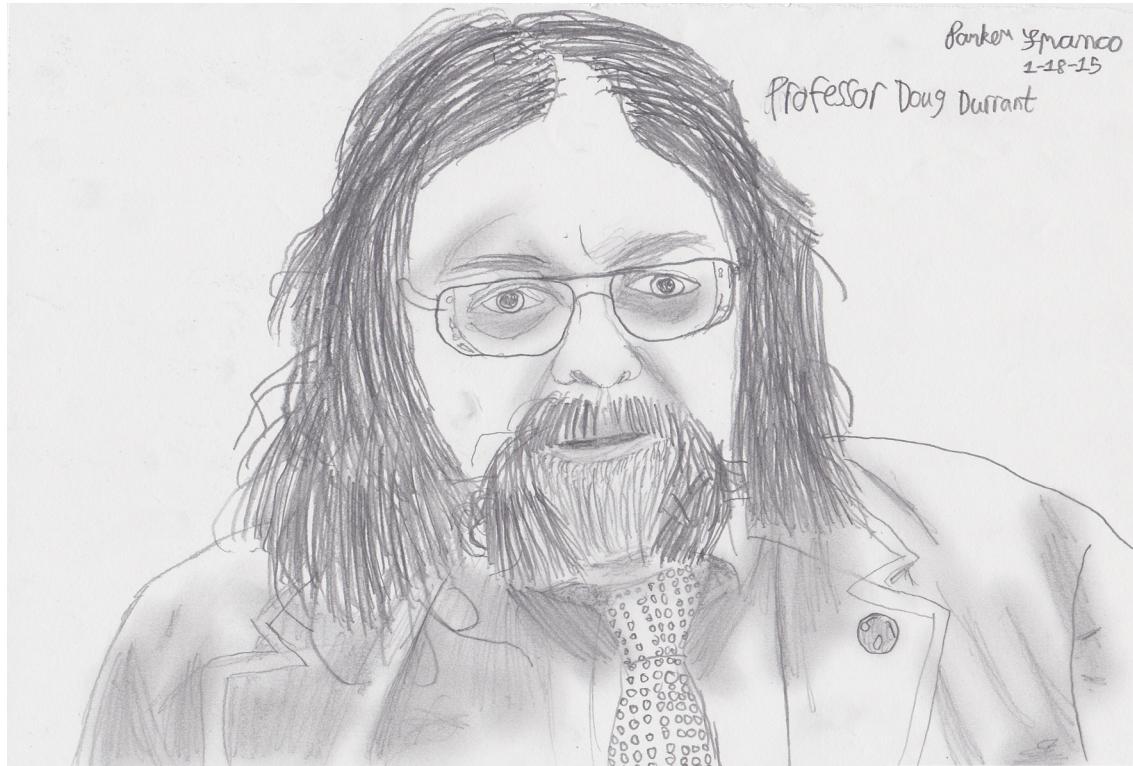
Opinions expressed in *Bravura* are those of the writers and artists, and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff of Palomar College.

In Memoriam

This year's *Bravura* is dedicated to Professor Doug Durrant and Cesar Robles.

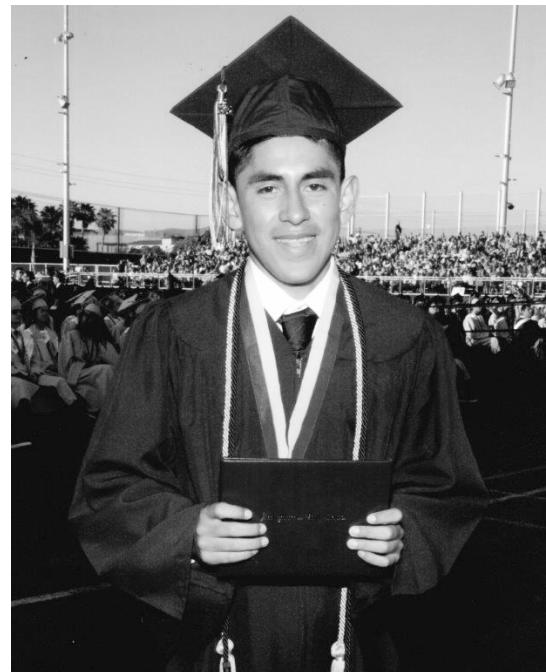
Doug was an art teacher at Palomar. His cowboy-hearted spirit will always be with us.

A student and fellow editor of this year's *Bravura*, Cesar, like Doug, loved art and what *Bravura* stands for.



Professor Doug Durrant

Parker Franco



Cesar Robles

Table of Contents

Fiction

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|---|
| Tea and Pizza Rolls <i>(Jack Mawhinney Fiction Prize)</i> | 13 | 108 | Trying <i>(Editor's Choice, Fiction)</i> Tessa Collins |
| The Digger <i>(Third Place, Fiction)</i> | 24 | | |
| The Cabby Barry Munson | 28 | | |
| Stay Yellow Lee Donovan | 36 | | |
| Marco's Run Brian Sutton | 44 | | |
| Mockingbirds <i>(Second Place, Fiction)</i> | 56 | | |
| Fan Fiction Tori Helton | 60 | | |
| The Exile's Lament Freddy Cleveland | 86 | | |
| Bambi Kehani Geronilla | 98 | | |
| A Beginning Half Joung Min Pak | 102 | | |
| A Slow Understanding of a Quick Realization Gabriella Pleasant | 106 | | |

Poetry

| | | | |
|---|----|----|---|
| French Nostalgia Amanda Stewart (<i>Third Place, Poetry</i>) | 10 | 42 | Flying With Tyrants Tasha Hall |
| Box Misti Vaughn | 11 | 43 | Pillow Talk (<i>Second Place, Poetry</i>) Sarah Broberg |
| Engagement Jonn'a Simmons | 11 | 50 | Muscular Dystrophy Daniel Bonds |
| A Dusty Book on a Shelf Chris Newton | 20 | 50 | These Legs of Mine Karen Truong |
| Look Sam Bedford | 20 | 51 | An Argument for the Hole in My Sock Bryan Angel |
| Scotland Calls Elizabeth Hoffman | 21 | 52 | Under Shadow of the Keel (<i>Editor's Choice, Poetry</i>) Vanessa Snedeker |
| In a Parking Lot, Outside Wal-Mart Christian Madrigal | 22 | 53 | Sardine Hannah Keene |
| hanging the wash ruth rice | 30 | 54 | Two Hands Hawkins Sellier |
| The First Rule of Revision Bryan Angel | 32 | 55 | Dance of the Night Julie Couch |
| Did I Tell You? Daphne Munson | 34 | 55 | Laughter's Cure Alyssa Coelho |
| Transcience Rickety Ram | 40 | 59 | A Black Mother Cries Adande Akobundu |
| | | 62 | Stall Hannah Keene |

Visual

| | | | |
|---|-----|----|--------------------------|
| Trash Day | 63 | 1 | Spring Loaded (detail) |
| Daphne Munson | | | Barry Munson |
| Playboy | 63 | 3 | Professor Doug Durrant |
| Misti Vaughn (<i>Angelo Carli Poetry Prize</i>) | | | Parker Franco |
| La Salle | 64 | 9 | Rapid Eye Movement |
| Misti Vaughn | | | Tim Topalov |
| Anatomy of My Suit | 85 | 10 | Evening In Paris |
| Bryan Angel | | | Aileen Candelario |
| Inspiration | 97 | 12 | Carousel |
| Sarah Broberg | | | Hank Harrington |
| Apathy | 103 | 19 | Vanity Fair |
| Sarah Broberg | | | Darby Norris |
| Bulb | 104 | 23 | Road to Snow |
| Stephen Rebernik | | | Daniel Kresge |
| And everyone kept driving by | 110 | 27 | Glamour Beneath Wrinkles |
| Briana Munoz | | | Darby Norris |
| Vision of Stars | 111 | 29 | Young at Heart |
| Stephen Rebernik | | | Darby Norris |
| Let the Road Take You | 113 | 31 | Remnant |
| Sammy Lizarraga | | | Lloyd Grant Thompson |
| Bomb Shelter | 114 | 35 | Fallen Autumn |
| Roxanne Reed | | | Barry Munson |

| | | | |
|---|----|----|--|
| Sub | 39 | 68 | Riveted Box |
| Bruce Woodward | | | Zeta Greene |
| Within | 42 | 69 | Alcatraz |
| Mitchell Hill | | | Emily Brown |
| Framing Joshua Tree | 49 | 69 | Sophie |
| Mitchell Hill | | | Omari McCord |
| Bound #1 | 57 | 70 | (Capsule) |
| Tracey Grassel | | | Nikki Callies |
| Mud Boy | 58 | 70 | Fly Me to the Moon |
| Barry Munson | | | Kacey Pogue |
| Two-Day Shipping | 65 | 71 | Salk |
| Katherine Hoang (<i>Second Place, Visual</i>) | | | Lloyd Grant Thompsom |
| McDonald's | 65 | 72 | How Thoughts Shape Us and Themselves |
| Katherine Hoang | | | Tim Topalov |
| Washed Away | 66 | 73 | dystopia |
| Sarah Broberg | | | Collin Vore |
| Unicorn | 67 | 74 | Untitled |
| Lauren Ballard | | | Saba Nourollahi |
| Color Skulls | 67 | 75 | NYC |
| Matthew Robinson | | | (<i>First Place, Visual</i>) Aileen Candelario |
| After the Rain | 68 | 76 | General Store Window Bodie, CA |
| Haruka Sato | | | Hank Harrington |

| | | | |
|--|-----|-----|---|
| Invite Your Monsters to Tea Krista Wright | 76 | 112 | Afflicted With Horn Vanessa Snedeker |
| Self Portrait in a Tidepool John Stone | 77 | 115 | At Balboa Park Veronika Kremennaya |
| Goat Love Emily Williamson (<i>Third Place, Visual</i>) | 78 | | |
| Jungle Nicky Rojo | 79 | | |
| Cain's Remains Barry Munson | 94 | 117 | The Ugly Truth Keely Dunne |
| Light Through the Trees Daniel Kresge | 95 | 118 | Mail Maya Delgado |
| Santa Barbara Hotel Morgan DeLuna | 96 | | |
| Dream Kevin Roca | 100 | 3 | In Memoriam |
| Les Lumieres Aileen Candelario | 105 | 120 | Contributors' Notes |
| Summer Vibes Darby Norris | 109 | | |
| To See the Stars Sam Borkton | 111 | | |

High School Awards

Rapid Eye Movement

Tim Topalov



French Nostalgia

Third Place, Poetry

Amanda Stewart

Paris isn't like the novels
But I felt the intensity of the sun
And the dampness of an unexpected rain
Velvet hotel curtains between my fingers
Cotton sheets beneath my face
Weaving through oceans of people
The apple red beret on my head
And the glitter of Versailles
My unbearable indecisiveness
The jade tinted Seine slapping at our feet
I saw the moon kiss the stars
They watched us and I watched you
The goodness of your heart
And the lead weight in mine
Fitzgerald won't pen us a sunset finale
Because our minds wandered
And the coffee in your cup was reminiscent of her eyes and not mine
The Arc de Triomphe couldn't save our burden
And I hope you're okay wherever you are
Because when people ask I will tell them:
Paris isn't like the novels



Evening In Paris
Aileen Candelario

Box

Misti Vaughn

He said the cat vomited in the litter box,
lifted his back from our red sheets and
shuffled that stubby footing to the toilet

and forced out a piss like Superman. from the bed
I can hear his grenades of piss splash the porcelain
and echo into a salty foam from the toilets

inner wall. standing there washing his hands he
looks like a damn roach, feelers pressed together
and observing himself in the mirror like its god

himself he's just got to see.

My hand in yours,
Kids scream and shout—
The crowd moves around us
As they shove faces with things deep fried
Or drowned in powdered sugar.

A Ferris wheel dominates the sky,
Gives us a different perspective—and
butterflies—
Orange, yellow, red and blue
Spin to life as the sun sinks lower.

You stop—and get down on one knee
I stop—confused—and look at you.
On your knee, you confess to me
Your love
Your feelings
You ask—I freeze.

*What if he leaves the toilet seat up?
What if he's a slob?
What if he leaves dishes in the sink?
He works so much,
Will he have time for me?
He's never taken care of a baby,
Will he help?
What if I'm not what he wants?
What if he finds someone prettier? Intelligent?
I'm sure he'll always be faithful,
Sure he gets tempted,
But I'm sure...almost.*

I inhale—and say—

Engagement

Jonn'a Simmons

Carousel

Hank Harrington



Tea and Pizza Rolls

Jack Mawhinney Fiction Prize

Jim Hudson

The old sofa Bruce and Marie sat on was lumpy and smelled vaguely of cat. Debra sat in the recliner opposite them with the space in between occupied by a coffee table holding a kettle of steeping tea.

"So how did you two meet?" she asked them.

"We met in college," Marie said smiling, looking at Bruce. He was looking across the room and not paying attention to her.

"How nice, I wanted to go to college but I couldn't afford to. I'm happy I was able to send my kids though," Debra said, nodding at the three framed photographs on the end table. "My oldest boy John went to West Point you know."

"No, I didn't," Marie said. "You must be so proud."

Bruce looked at the photograph of John. "West Point, huh?"

"Yes," Debra replied, smiling at the picture.

Bruce leaned in to examine it more closely. It was a photograph of a young man in a dress blue uniform. "Why is he wearing a Marine uniform?" he asked.

"Oh, he's on deployment."

"Yes, but you said he went to West Point," Bruce repeated.

"Oh yes, he got a full scholarship," she continued and then made a giggling sound that ended with a strange high-pitched whistle.

Bruce glanced over at Marie.

"Are you ready for some tea?" Debra asked.

"Yes, please," Marie said.

Debra poured tea into Marie's cup. Bruce shook his head.

"What I mean is, wouldn't he have gone to Annapolis? He's in the Marines, so he would have gone to the Naval Academy, not the

Army Academy, right?" he said.

"Bruce..." Marie began.

"John transferred after his first commission, he felt the Marines were more in line with his way of thinking about the world and his area of experience, you know."

"What?" Bruce said.

The oven timer went off in the kitchen.

"Pizza rolls are ready! I'll be right back, now don't y'all go away!" Debra reaching down to the right side of the recliner and pushed an unseen button. A grinding mechanical whirring noise started up and slowly the chair began to rise, pushing the obese woman to her feet with it.

"Can you hand me my cane dear?" she asked Marie.

"Sure," Marie said, finding the orthopedic cane next to the sofa and putting it into her hand. "Do you need some help with the food?"

"Oh no, you just relax, I'll be back in just a sec," she said and waddled slowly into the kitchen.

* * *

"You so fucking owe me for this," Bruce said looking at Marie.

"Be quiet," she said.

"She can't hear me," he said.

"How do you know? She's fat, not deaf."

"Yeah," Bruce said.

He again glanced around the living room of the small apartment. The furniture was old and out of style, with worn cushions and frayed, cat scratched fabric. In addition to the end table with the pictures on it there was an empty bookshelf next to a sliding glass door leading out onto a patio behind a worn out drapery. A hallway near the

bookshelf led down to the bathroom and a single bedroom. There was no TV in the living room, and no decorations or pictures on the walls. Bruce picked up the picture of the Marine.

"What was all that Annapolis business about?" Marie asked.

"Marines are in the Navy, so graduates of the Naval Academy go into the Marines," Bruce said, examining the picture closely.

"So?"

"So she said West Point. West Point is the Army Academy."

"Well, she said he transferred to the Marines."

"Uh-huh," he pointed at the marine's chest. "Look at this ribbon."

"Ribbon?"

"Yeah here, this one, this yellow and green one."

"What about it?"

"It's a Vietnam campaign ribbon."

"Again, so?" Marie asked.

"So unless her son is at least sixty-five years old he wasn't in Vietnam."

"Come on," she said.

"Marie, my father was in Vietnam and he has this same ribbon just like everyone else who went there during the war. How old do you think Debra is? Sixty? At the oldest?"

"I guess. What are you saying, that this isn't her son?"

"What else?"

"I don't know Bruce, I just work with the woman okay? She asked us over for tea and pizza rolls and I felt sorry for her so I accepted," she said. "I don't know anything about all of the rest of that. Can we just have a good time without you analyzing everything to death? Please?"

"So, what, we're just supposed to sit here and be made fools of? Is that what you think we should do?"

"No, Bruce, I think we should drink our tea and eat our pizza rolls and mind our own business, that's what I think we should do."

Bruce put down the marine's picture and picked up the one next to it. It was a black-and-white photo of a young woman in a mor-

tarboard and graduation gown holding what looked to be a rolled up diploma tied with a ribbon. She was smiling and looking directly into the camera.

"I've seen her before," he said.

"What do you mean? You know her?"

"No, I mean I've seen this photo before."

"Where?" Marie asked.

"Somewhere, I can't remember. Where did I see her before? There is definitely something weird going on here."

"Can you just give it a fucking rest and knock off that Sherlock Holmes shit, please? I just want to have a cup of tea and eat a stupid pizza roll without having a fight."

"Okay, okay, calm down I'm just making conversation," he said replacing the photo on the table. "Jesus Christ."

* * *

Debra returned from the kitchen empty handed and sat down heavily into her chair.

"The pizza rolls weren't quite done, let's give them a few more minutes," she said. "Would you like some more tea?"

"Yes, Thank you," Marie said.

Debra poured the tea into Marie's cup.

"So do you two have any little ones?" she asked.

"Children? No, we're thinking maybe we should wait until he gets out of grad school," Marie said looking at Bruce.

"She's thinking we should wait, I'm ready to have children," he said, continuing to stare at the pictures of Debra's children.

"There are other considerations, that's all," Marie said.

"So you've said," Bruce replied, turning to look at her.

Marie didn't respond.

A black and white cat jumped up on the table.

"Shoo Oreo! Shoo now!" Debra scolded and the cat jumped and ran down the hallway.

"That's Oreo. My daughter named her that because she looked just like an Oreo cookie to her."

"Is this her?" Bruce asked pointing to the young woman in the graduation picture. "Is that the girl?"

"Oh no, my youngest named the cat. That's my middle child Susan, she's a doctor you know."

"No, I didn't, is she really? Where'd she go to medical school?"

"Back east," Debra answered.

"I mean what was the name of the medical school she went to?" he said. "I'm interested. Do you remember the name?"

"Well, of course I remember the name," she said, but didn't continue.

"So this is her medical school graduation photo then?" he continued.

Marie glared at him.

"Yes it is," Debra said looking at Bruce and not at the photograph.

The oven timer in the kitchen went off again.

"Now the pizza rolls are ready!" Debra said and pushed the button to set the chair into motion again. Marie handed Debra her cane and she lumbered back into the kitchen.

* * *

"What the FUCK Bruce?" Marie said.

"I remember now," he said.

"What?"

"I remember where I saw this picture before. It came with the frame."

"What are you talking about?"

"When I was out last week getting a birthday card for my mom I stopped to look at the picture frames and this was one of those sample pictures the manufacturer puts in the frames."

"Oh bullshit," she said.

"Who takes a black-and-white graduation picture?" he said.

"Look at it, its fake."

"Bruce..."

"I'm sure of it."

He leaned over her and grabbed the picture off of the table, turning it over and examining the back.

"Keep a lookout," he said.

"What?"

Using his fingernail he began prying up the small metal flanges that held the cardboard backing in place.

"Stop it!" she hissed at him.

He ignored her and continued prying each flange in turn until the backing was free. Marie looked nervously toward the kitchen door. Placing his hand on the glass Bruce flipped the frame over so the picture and backing fell free. Sliding the photo from between the glass and backing the printed words which had been concealed by the edge of the frame could now be read beneath the girl's picture. They said: "Target 5x7 Solid Oak Frame".

"I knew it," he said. "She's a goddamn liar."

"Holy shit," Marie said.

"Listen, this woman is a nut," Bruce said

"But she seemed so normal," Marie said.

"Normal? She seems normal to you?"

"Well, at work she seemed normal. Sort of, anyway. Look I don't know, I'm not a shrink, okay? She's an old lady and maybe she's lonely and she has a fantasy life. Who's hurt by that?"

"Marie, we can't just ignore this, this women with her fake children and her Oreo cat and all."

Marie looked at Bruce.

"Her cat? You have a problem with her cat?" she said.

"I have a problem with a make-believe child naming a cat, yes I do," Bruce said. "And don't eat the pizza rolls".

"Don't eat the pizza rolls? Why not?"

"Use your head Marie. We don't know what she might have put in them, do we? We don't know what she's doing to them right now in the kitchen, as we speak."

"I don't know what to say to that Bruce," Marie said. "I truly don't."

"You don't have to say anything, just be on your guard."

"Oh my God," Marie said, picked up her empty teacup.

"What? What is it?"

"I drank her tea Bruce," she said with wide eyes. "I...I drank her tea," she repeated smiling now.

"Fine, whatever," he said looking away.

She rubbed his arm. "Listen, let's just humor her a bit and then we'll go home, okay? Just to be nice, she's not hurting anyone, all right?"

"I can't do that Marie," he said looking away from her. She stopped rubbing his arm.

"Come on Bruce she's just a bit odd, that's all. Just be nice and let's have a pleasant conversation and then we can go home, okay? Is that okay with you?"

"When am I not nice?" he asked.

"You know what I mean."

"No, I don't. How exactly am I not being nice by simply recognizing that this woman isn't normal? Answer me that."

"It doesn't matter."

"Yes it does, you're always making those sorts of statements and never explaining yourself, did you know that? You never explain what you mean," he said.

"What is it that you want me to explain to you Bruce? Because I think I'm being very clear about what I want and what I don't want."

"Okay, so what you want is for me to go along with this silly charade then, right?"

Marie said nothing.

* * *

The banging sound of an oven door closing came from the kitchen. Bruce hurriedly replaced the glass, picture and backing and pushed the metal flanges back into place before placing it back onto the table between the other two pictures. Debra came slowly back into the living room balancing a plate of pizza rolls which she placed on the coffee table.

"Help yourself," she said, handing each a paper napkin and motioning toward the rolls.

"Thanks," Bruce said, not taking any. Marie took three.

"You have a really nice place here," Bruce said to Debra. "Have you lived here long?"

"Oh, years and years"

"Did you raise your children here?" he asked.

"No, not John and Suzy, there were gone before my youngest and I moved in."

"So where's John deployed?" he asked.

Marie cleared her throat.

"Oh goodness, I'm not sure where he is now, he moves around so much," Debra replied.

"That must be very difficult for you," Marie said.

"It can be, but I know he's thinking about me," she said. "So why are you waiting to have children Marie?"

"We're still discussing it," she said. "You know, waiting for the right time."

"She's waiting for the right time, I'm not waiting for anything," Bruce said.

"And we discussed that Bruce."

"Well you talked to me about it anyway, I guess that could be called 'discussing' it," he said.

"I think it is Bruce," she said looked straight ahead.

"What do you think about that?" Bruce said to Debra while looking at Marie. "You're the only one here who's had children after all."

"Oh, oh I wouldn't know," Debra said.

"Come on Debra, as a mother and all. What's your opinion?" he said.

Debra paused and looked at Marie.

"Well, I don't want to be the cause of any trouble or anything, but I think everyone needs to be in agreement about the timing of these things. You two wouldn't want to rush into anything Bruce," she said finally.

"Okay, fair enough, you're the voice of authority here I guess," Bruce said.

"I agree," Marie said.

"You do?" he asked.

"Yes, she is the only one here with children, you're so right Bruce, you are absolutely right."

Bruce said nothing.

After a moment he reached over and picked up the graduation picture again. "So where does Suzy practice, Debra?"

"Practice?"

"Yeah, practice. Where does she practice medicine?"

"Oh she moves around a lot, a little of this a little of that," she said.

"A little of this and a little of that medicine?"

"Yes," Debra said.

"Okay," he said smiling at her. He set the graduation photo down and reached to pick up the third picture, and at almost the same time Debra reached for the photo herself; each of them managed to grab a corner with both holding opposite sides of the frame leaving it suspended between them over the pizza rolls. They looked awkwardly at each other until Debra finally released her grip and let Bruce take the picture. Marie didn't look at him, and her pursed lips cut a thin white line across her face.

The photo was of a cute blonde haired little girl, maybe ten or eleven years old, wearing a gingham dress, matching old-fashioned bonnet and standing in a wheat field. Her face was backlit and she was blowing on a dandelion, the seeds flying away into a golden afternoon sunlight. The scene was perfectly arranged.

"So this is your youngest," Bruce said. "The cookie girl. She's adorable."

"Please..." Debra said reaching out to Bruce, trying to retrieve the frame. He sat back into the couch and out of reach of her outstretched hand.

"Stunning in fact, like a child model. Is she a model Debra? I'll bet she could be a TV actress she's so beautiful. Maybe an actress?"

Bruce asked.

Marie leaned over to examine the picture with him.

"No, she was none of those things. Can I have my picture back please?" Debra said quietly.

"I'm just looking at it," he said. "Can't I just look at it? What did you say her name was?"

"I didn't."

"Ah," he said.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked.

"We know John and Suzy's names, and we just want to compete the trio. Right Marie?" Marie didn't acknowledge his question. "It's a lovely photo Debra," she said, reaching over and taking the picture from Bruce's hands. Marie started to put the picture back in its place on the table but stopped. She looked closer at it and inhaled sharply.

"I've seen her before," she said. "I know her name." She drew the picture closer to her and lightly touched the image with two fingers.

Bruce looked into her face but Marie was only staring at the picture.

"Abigail," Marie said. "Her name was Abigail."

"Yes," Debra said.

Marie stood up and carefully replaced the picture back in its place on the end table.

"I'm so sorry," Marie said. "I'm so sorry, I didn't realize until I really looked at the picture closely."

"Didn't realize what?" Bruce said.

"They had her school picture up on the bulletin board for weeks at the Starbucks I used to stop at on my way to work," Marie said to Debra. "Every morning I would see her face, and it haunted me."

"Her face? This girl's face?" Bruce said, his voice rising.

"It was before Bruce and I met. I want you to know I helped search when the Sheriff asked for volunteers. I looked for her."

Debra looked alarmed. "You weren't with the group that found her, were you?"

"Oh no, no I wasn't, our group was on the other side of the

park, searching near the highway.”

“Marie?” Bruce said louder and looking to her, but she ignored him.

“I’m glad. I feel so bad for those people who found her, it just tears me up that people had to see her like that,” Debra said.

“I wanted to help. I had to help.”

“Thank you, I couldn’t thank everyone at the time, there were so many people.”

“What are you talking about?” Bruce insisted.

“I don’t know how you could go through that experience as a mother,” Marie said. “I don’t know if I could bear it.”

“It was very difficult,” Debra said. “But I got through it.”

“But still...” Marie said.

“But still, even if I had known exactly what was going to happen to her, even then, I still would have had Abigail.” Debra added.

“Well, I wouldn’t have,” Marie said, “I know I wouldn’t.”

Debra didn’t say anything.

“Why didn’t you tell me all of this?” Bruce asked angrily.
“Why didn’t you say something to me?”

“What should I have said?” she asked. “It didn’t have anything to do with you.”

“I didn’t say it had anything to do with me, but you could have told me what happened to you.”

“Nothing happened to me Bruce,” she said. “But why didn’t you know this about me?”

“How in God’s name could I have known this happened before we even met?”

“That’s not what I mean.”

“So then explain what you mean. It’s time you tell me honestly the reasons you don’t want to have children,” he demanded.

“I’ve never been anything but honest with you Bruce,” she said.

* * *

“Thanks for having us over Debra,” Marie said, putting on her coat and wrapping it tightly around herself. She walked over to Debra and gave her a light kiss on the cheek and then went to the front door and opened it. Bruce still hadn’t moved. Framed in the doorway, Marie paused and turned to Bruce.

“Are you coming?” she asked. “Or are you staying here?”

Bruce got up and put on his own coat and walked to the open door. Without a word to Debra he closed the door behind them and they walked silently together down the stairs and to the carpark. Once inside the car Bruce put the keys in the ignition but didn’t start it.

“Okay, so how do we know that was actually Abigail’s mother?” he said suddenly, as if he’d answered a question.

Marie looked out the passenger side window, her face deliberately turned away so he wasn’t able to see her expression.

“I don’t know Bruce,” she said finally, “and I don’t care.”



Vanity Fair

Darby Norris

A Dusty Book on a Shelf

Chris Newton

My pages are torn at the ridges of themselves.
They reach, curling over as do fire singed waves
to cradle the shadows of my drifting words
as they crisp by an absent breeze at their edges.
A hollow decree echoes in their wake,
"Will we be noticed?"
A distant rust, unanswered, begins to wash over them.
They witness, as does the earth, the rhythm of time's
devouring decay
and, as dust, gather comfort in some undiscovered
corner.
A disclaimer of my heart's scattered pleas
(a mere binding of letters),
their pledges rest, awaiting.
Here my words will be, as long as the world allows,
once written, though ashen and smitten,
I rest not unlived, but avowed.

Look

Sam Bedford

SOP
I see barreled trucks transporting grey ooze,
Pouring it upon dirty ground,
POST
I see refineries molding molten alloys,
Shaping it into the pole that's needed,
TOP
I see sheets of metal under the chopping block,
As it waits for an octagonal trim,
POTS
I see vats of swirling components,
Making a liquid of alarming red, and another a frightening white,
SO, TO, PO
I see the machines that forge the bolts,
And other devices that put them in their places,
SPOT SOT
I see the language inscribed in that same frightening white.
I didn't see the other car.

Scotland Calls

Elizabeth Hoffman

It's AP Psych class and I am only half-listening to the teacher lecture about our fight or flight response and schizophrenia.

Her voice grows remote, drowned by the North Atlantic ocean as it rises to meet Scotland's coastline, with green grass blanketing the cliff top where the ruins of Slains Castle glow russet in the late afternoon sunlight

I wander its halls and imagine the footsteps of the Countess of Erroll who might have lived here, once three centuries back on the eve of the Jacobite Rebellion
And her niece, who might have walked the same path, though with different anxieties, and I wonder if she found the same solace on the edge of sheer drop cliffs, listening to the same restlessness of the sea with its waves crashing mercilessly, tirelessly against the rocks

I breathe deeply, feeling the cool wind caress my face, chase my hair behind my shoulders and I know I'm home.

I inhale just once more and swallow stale classroom air, hear the familiar voice bring me slowly back to the classroom just in time for the bell to bring the hour to a close, and so I walk reluctantly to Calculus, all the while, a part of me Pining for Scotland.

She was
not old enough
to have graduated
high school,
nor aware enough to
notice
how many eyes were on her,
sympathetic or
disdainful or
hungry,
as she struggled to push a cart full of
pull-ups
and cleaning supplies
in a cart with a broken wheel

through the warm and somniferous glow
of ill-maintained streetlights,

those obelisks of granite.

Don't call it
pity,

but
something
stirred my gut,
and burned my eyes,

as she trudged past me,
pushing a cartload of motherhood,
trailing a warm autumn breeze,
an aromatic telegram;

lilac and lavender,
a diffident bouquet,
accented by spritely vanilla,

withering before bleach-fumes
and mordant disinfectant.

In a Parking Lot, Outside Wal-Mart

Christian Madrigal

Road to Snow

Daniel Kresge





The Digger

Third Place, Fiction

Robert Bender

I find it is easy to forget how to think when I am covered head to toe in muck and sweat. I find it easy not to choose when a self proclaimed master of my destiny points the way to the path of least resistance. For a brief time I had forgotten. If not for a humble digger I would still be meandering on that path without a question in my mind. If not for a humble digger sparking the faintest embers of doubt I would still be devoid of independent thought and truly unaware of the anamorphous fear that gripped me.

The Digger had halted on the eastern perimeter of the American invaders encampment neighboring his village. He knew the Marines had rules and could not react to his actions without violent provocation; however this provided him with little comfort. The Digger felt nervous, and his body language showed it. He looked left and then right, his eyes resting for only a moment on my post only a hundred yards away. His tired, dust-scratched eyes met the two binocular lenses staring back at him and quickly looked left again. He turned, showing his back to me and dropped to his knees. The cracked and worn nubs of his fingers began to claw at the dry patch of earth just below him. His motions were slow at first, anticipating the worst. However, after a moment there was no rifle fire, no shouting, and no firing up of engines to come retrieve him. And so, with growing confidence, under the blistering desert sun The Digger continued to dig.

As I stood in a rickety looking tower made of sand bags and two-by-fours I lowered the binoculars from my eyes in-

credulous. The hell? Why would he dig here? The man's back was turned as if to hide what he was doing. I grabbed my M16 and placed my left eye behind the scope to get a better view. I intently watched the man dig, when suddenly there was a glint of metal in his right hand and what I thought was wire in his left.

A kitchen timer, a few stray wires, a battery, a poisonous cocktail of cleaning supplies, a single radio wave, and a couple dozen shards of metal are all it takes to obliterate a man. Every Marine knows that in Afghanistan the sight of wire equates to death. What I thought I saw the digger doing sent a wild panic coursing through me. However, I did have the presence of mind to consider the situation.

To me it didn't make sense. My entire battalion was given extensive pre-deployment training on the identification and spotting of improvised explosive devices. I should have asked myself why he wouldn't dig under the cover of darkness, or pick a more advantageous position. I should have considered that the man clearly didn't want to die, because why else would he hide his actions? I should have realized that maybe the Taliban was forcing him to do it. I assumed the reasons for the man's actions were irrelevant. I chose not to think and instead relied on assumptions. I believed the blunt truth was that this man was more than likely planting a weapon that could potentially take American lives. The characteristically American thoughts of paranoia and an all encompassing evil filled my head. And so, instead of thinking I chose honor, and what I thought glory might be. The word duty rang out in

my mind, with a hollow metallic clang, like two trash can lids being smashed together on the first dawn of boot camp. The moan of the twin lids containing truth yet drenched in sorrow. I realized what I needed to do and my stomach sank, my chest tightened and my breath ceased mid exhale. This man has to die.

At this point in my Marine Corps career I was what most other Marines call a boot. A boot is a term used for brand new Marines to the fleet. They have all the training and knowledge and more often than not they mean well. However, boots have zero real life experience, so when faced with even the most basic tasks they appear as idiotic and indecisive as a six year old who is told to build a computer from scratch.

During my first morning in Afghanistan I was flown to Forward Operating Base, or FOB Nolay aboard a CH-53E Marine Corps helicopter. On this occasion I forgot my ear protection and like the boot I was, I was paying for it. I can't say how long the flight was. With no light and a screaming headache all I could do was bury my face in my knees and grit my teeth. It wasn't until my world of discomfort tilted forty five degrees and slammed my already throbbing skull against the bulkhead that I became aware of the end of my journey. My stomach dropped as we descended and I could see minuscule glimmering specs on the ground from the rear hatch which was left open after takeoff. Our descent was jarring and faster than I expected. When we hit the ground dust enveloped everything. As I struggled to breathe I grabbed my gear and crawled out of the back of the helicopter. As I got clear of the rotors I stood upright, shouldering the heavy load of my pack. I had no idea what to expect, but I was ready for anything.

The rising sun revealed a maze of corroding mud walls holding up the last remnants of the warped beliefs of the Taliban. Before the Marines built FOB Nolay this scarred patch of desert was an opium farm owned by a Taliban Lieutenant. When the Marines finally showed up they claimed his mansion

for their own. Pock marking the decaying remains of what used to be a plantation built on greed and blood money were plastic tan dome-like cocoons encasing sweet precious cool air. The canvas of the cocoons crinkled audibly in the wind in defiance to the crumbling mud walls that imprisoned them.

It is evident to me now that the decaying landscape represented the Taliban's own shapeless leviathan. In many ways it is very different from America's, but then it is also manifested from the roots of fear. After decades of being trampled over by greater nations in pursuit of resources it is obvious why the Taliban hates and fears the first world.

At the center of this cacophony of clashing titans there sat a mud hut mansion towering above all the other single story buildings. Crafted from polished wood and crude masonry it sagged under the pressure of American military might. It held, refusing to crumble, anchoring everything around it to the ground. If not for the weathered sagging mansion built by opium surely the desert wind would whisk all of FOB Nolay away. Finally, around all of this were eight posts, always manned by at least one Marine to keep watch for any possible threats.

On my first morning at Nolay I was informed that I would be standing post for four hours. I collected my rifle and body armor and walked to the mansion made of mud and entered, unsure of what to expect. Inside, the walls of what used to be a living room were covered by television screens and desks holding computers. Marines tapped away at the key boards and gazed at the security camera shots passively, as if they had spent the last six months staring at the same image. I was greeted by a Captain with a strong jaw and a relatively clean uniform given the circumstances.

"You look lost. Are you here to check in for post?" He spoke with the deep bravado of a man in charge.

"Yessir. Good morning, it's my first day." He regarded me for a moment with calculating eyes.

"You came from Camp Leatherneck? Is it true they serve lobster every Sunday at the chow hall?"

"Yessir." I knew exactly where this conversation was going.

The Marine Corps has a saying, food is a crutch. To succumb to the basic needs of the average American is deemed a weakness. Marines take pride in their ability to thrive without basic luxuries. To admit to partaking in gourmet food while the rest of your brothers and sisters abstained was unacceptable. In this moment I felt inferior and that I needed to prove myself worthy of the Corps' high standards of excellence. This line of thought would drive many of us to make hard choices for better or worse in the name of tradition, acceptance and honor.

"Must be nice. Don't expect any of that crap here. We've been eating pork rib UGR's every day since, Christ, I don't know how long." He said with disdain, referring to the boiled meat pulp which was molded in the shape of a "rib" to appear more appetizing. He regarded a piece of paper for half a second. "You're standing post six today. It's about a ten minute walk to the south east corner of camp, you can't miss it. You will be standing post for four hours today. Do not abandon your post until properly relieved. If a higher rank comes around report the status of your post. Do not sit. Do not sleep. Do not do anything except watch. Welcome to Nolay." He turned his back to me as if to end the conversation.

I made the long walk to my post, thinking on how I had gotten to this point in my life and questioning what it meant to be in one of the most dangerous regions in the world. When I arrived at the tower made of lumber and sand I climbed the rickety ladder which lead to the elevated platform that gave a three hundred and sixty degree view of the empty desert. In the distance, far to the north a range of mountains jutted from the horizon, suggesting that Afghanistan was perhaps something more than desert. I relieved the other Marine, taking in my surroundings, the still boyish part of my mind wondering

what mysteries and danger lay beyond my field of vision. To my left was an M60, which is a machine gun normally used in four man firing teams to cause mayhem and control the movements of the enemy. In front of me was a Mark 19 which is a bigger machine gun that is normally mounted on the turret of a Humvee or a 7 Ton. I was told its purpose was to fire fifty caliber rounds into the engine block of any malicious looking vehicles, stopping them dead in their tracks. And of course slung over my shoulder was my M16. As a boot I had this romanticized idea of what an Afghan deployment should be. I truly believed that I was at war and all I wanted was to prove my worth. With an arsenal at my disposal I never felt more powerful in my life. Looking back, the idea of giving that amount of fire power to a kid who is still struggling to figure out how to think on his own again is ludicrous.

Two hours later the cross hairs of my scope were trained on the back of a man who was apparently digging. My heart was beating out of my chest. Sweat was spilling into my eyes, burning with uncertainty as I grappled with the morality of killing an unarmed man versus allowing my fellow Marines to walk into harm's way. In a defiant refusal to think I had succumbed to the primitive fear that drove early man to survive in a world much harsher than this. I had made the decision to take a man's life. The buttstock of my rifle tightened into my shoulder. My thumb flipped the safety with practiced ease and my forefinger brushed across the trigger guard, coming to rest on the trigger itself. The gentleman who was knelt before me was a little more than a hundred yards away. I had him dead to rights. All it would take was a slow exhale and a squeeze. My breath released as time slowed to a crawl. My finger tightened and suddenly like the snare drum of Thannitos echoing across the empty desert unhindered, my conscience was assaulted by the grandest of ideas. I have a radio. I should use it.

I tore my eye away from my scope for a moment and grabbed the radio that was sitting next to me the entire time.

"CP this is post six."

"Send it post six."

"I have a guy digging in front of my post. Do I shoot him?"

Silence for a long moment and then an audible hiss click from the radio. The response can only be described as the end of a bout of hysterical laughter, and the utterance of the word "boot" in the background.

"What? No post 6. Who is this? Never mind. Just log the location in your logbook and we'll send the dogs out later."

"Roger, out."

I lowered my weapon and sighed audibly. All the tension in my body went slack and I felt as if I was weightless. I almost killed a man. How could I be so dumb?

For the next two hours I contemplated America's insane lack of foresight when it came to trusting young men with no life experience to wield weapons of this power and magnitude.

Looking back, if I am truly honest with myself I wanted to kill that man. I wanted to take a human life so I could return home and say that I did my part to feed the beast. Deep down I wanted to prove that the evil of global terror does exist. However, in sparing a man's life I have learned that there is no evil in the Middle East. They too are gripped by the fear of a shrinking world and the looming shadow of increasing scarcity. They are not like us, they are us.

I would later be told by higher ranking Marines that if I had explained myself properly to my command the murder of the man would have been deemed acceptable. In some ways war used to be simple. A hundred men would line up in column after column of flesh and steel and charge at each other screaming. The last men standing knew they had achieved the greater goal. Be it land, resources or wealth, the survivors knew they were the victors. Today, catastrophes are allowed to occur, villains are invented, and we are regaled with tales of violent injustice to help us accept the militaristic control of

weaker nations. As we grow tired of the conflict in the Middle East new threats are imagined and our interest is renewed. The public opinion is kept in the realm of fear by the all powerful name of an ancient Egyptian god and delayed from swinging to disgust. In allowing a man to live I believe that I was able to keep my soul intact, and that in itself is a small victory. As for the victory we were all promised, that victory lies in the destruction of the ever hungry leviathan that drives men to violent madness. To win the war on terror we must seek the terror in our own hearts and know that it is imagined.



Glamour Beneath Wrinkles

Darby Norris

The Cabby

Barry Munson

"Look a' this guy. Look at im. Geeze. Driving a 500SL an' waving 'is hands around like an idiot. Whoze he talkin to? Just sitting there with one hand on the wheel and flap ping his jaws and waving his arm around like he's directing the London friggin philharmonic or somthin. Whadaya think he's talkin bout? I bet he's trying to explain to his wife why he had lipstick on his collar. He's got a girlfriend in Brooklyn and he's gettin sloppy. But her daaaaddy owns the mortgage to the house. He's screwed, he needs her more than she needs his sorry butt. Or why he neeeeeds that new big screen. Or a hundred reasons why his old ladys old lady cannot come from Minnesota to visit. Yea, that's probably it. What else? Or maybe, maybe, just maybe he's on the horn with with Delta trying to get a free upgrade from cattle car to cloud nine from La Guardia to Chicago. 'Cause I D e s e r v e it.' I hate that word. People don't D e s e r v e shit. They earn shit. And this friggin moron doesn't look like he's earned nothing, nada, nix, zilch. Look at that, fancy cut an his nails are shiny. The bastard's got a manicure. I dunno, ah, maybe it was just the light. Look at that, what the...? The front bumper is held on by friggin duck tape. Duck tape. Drivin a 500SL and the poor bastard can't even afford to get his car fixed."

"My brother-in-law's-wife's-cousin has a body shop in Queens. Vinny somethin. Does good work, fixed my sisters husbands Ford after getting sideswiped upstate by some drunk college kid joy riding a beemer. Squeezed his parents pretty hard. Said he would not turn it into his insurance if they paid cash. Guess the kid had a few of priors and they went for

it. Thirty five hundred he gets paid for that piece of shit and between just you and me, the car was already hit when he got it. It was worth maybe two grand. So, he drops half of it with his bookie and turns it into his insurance anyway hoping he's gonna get paid twice. He's a moron I tell ya. So he has Vinny fix the car, gets the family discount. Does a nice job, Vinny does, I swear on a stack, it looked brand new. Then he sells the car, said it never looked better and gets straight with his bookie. Now he's driving some piece of shit import roller skate with the back end all smashed in, can't even open the friggin trunk, hoping' he gets lucky and gets hit again."

"There he goes again, look at that, it's thirty outside and this guys working up a sweat waving his arm around. Looks like he is directing Beethoven's fifth or something. No, no, no, get this, he's talking to his tax guy who just told im that he owes Uncle Sam big this year. Poor bastard probably lost it all at Belmont. Some guy tells him he can write off his loozings so he thinks he's in fat city. Tax guy drops the bad news in his lap like a turd and he's been sweating ever since. He's trying to talk 'im out of it, like the IRS would give a shit about his sad story, they hear a million of 'em every day. Doesn't want to tell his old lady. Fraid daddy-in-law is gonna kick him out of his own house. No, yea, I got it, I got it, it's daddy's Benz and the bastard borrows it while daddy's out of town and wrecks it. Like, ah, Ferris Bueller's Day Out, right? You know that movie, don't ya? Never seen it? You gotta see it."

"Who? What? That, this picture right here. My oldest. Died in 911. He was a good kid, Georgie was. Twenty two.

Delivering office supplies and gets stuck in the north tower. Called his mom and his phone goes dead. She's still not over it, friggin shame, her only boy."

"There he goes, didja see that, follows the guy in front of 'im through the intersection without even touching the brakes. Like Mercedes drivers have different rules, no friggin respect. Hey, you know the difference between a porcupine and a Merc driver? No? On a porcupine, the prick is on the outside. Funny, huh?"

"Ok, we're here. I'll get the luggage. That's twenty three forty for the fare, father. Keep the change? You sure? I'll put it in the basket on Sunday. Have a nice day. And Father, watch out for yerself, people round here are fast talkers, they'll be in yer pocket and gone before you knows it."



Young at Heart

Darby Norris

hanging the wash

ruth rice

winters in the mojave
the sheets would freeze
the stiff ghosts of those
who had slept on them
till the sun rose up
the winter wind.
shaking ice
from their limbs,
they, spoke.
small child, sand licking
bared legs,
jumping to place the hem
safely, over the voices
that clotheslines, dispense.
everyone, will hear.

i pull the sheets
from the dryer,
bury my face in them,
and cannot find
the winter wind,
they are, just, clean.



Remnant

Lloyd Grant Thompson

The First Rule of Revision

Bryan Angel

(Where the X's and crossed out words are not to be read and merely be considered
an afterthought)

The first rule of revision is ~~exploit~~ undermine the eraser.
If the hero or heroine in your short story or poem begs a
Motive or more seriously, ~~drastically~~, a beating heart, put in
Motion the apocalyptic giver & taker of life sitting anxiously
At the end of your No.2 pencil.

~~Enchanted by the letters on a page and a rhythm beating
Through your fingers aren't to blame for the nonsensical
Mashing of plot & dialogue Yes, I was coming on to my
Own mind & imagination, I'm not sorry. Let me have one
More fight with these heroes and villains and I'll show you
A story that kills with words.~~

No noun or pronoun ~~the lust for exotic voices smeared in-~~
~~Dialogue—Or A dozen questions blooming into answers can~~
~~give back the Graveyard shift that was the first~~
Eight pages of
Your ~~autobiographical~~
semi-autobiographical Novella.

The missing grip on your pencil is now a new callus.

~~Your Saturday night at the roller derby is now hunched over
A dimly lit desk.~~ Two Aspirin, three shots of whiskey & a
Twice bitten under lip & your shaky love life is now the
Subject of your next poem while your mythical tale of bravery
Is still leaking through your old water stained ceiling.

But you'll stumble from your oversized mattress at daybreak
To praise ~~sift through~~ the night's unending tussle with paper &
Pencil. Your revised hero or heroine, ~~now guided by some unholy~~
~~titany~~ is now convincing you of an unrequited love that
Bleeds through the pages.

Every design on the page now a gift your eraser can thank you for as it settles
Into the glass mug on your desk where all your pencils sleep.
Until you realize the lover in your short story or poem has turned
Into Your long lost Uncle, ~~you never met~~ the one you
Wish you never met.

Did I tell you
I made the bed this morning,
Caressing the soft cotton sheets
Back into place.
I felt the imprint of your body
Still warm under my hand
Could see the indentation in your pillow,
Fine hairs that you left behind
And fought the urge to lay down
In the embrace of your heat,
Your scent.

I made the breakfast tea,
Watching the electric kettle heat its contents.
I saw small bubbles drift up from the coil,
Then larger ones bouncing more rapidly,
Turning into one roiling mass
To pour over bitter black leaves
In that tea pot you and I
Bought at Ikea all those years ago,
The day we decided to spend our lives together.

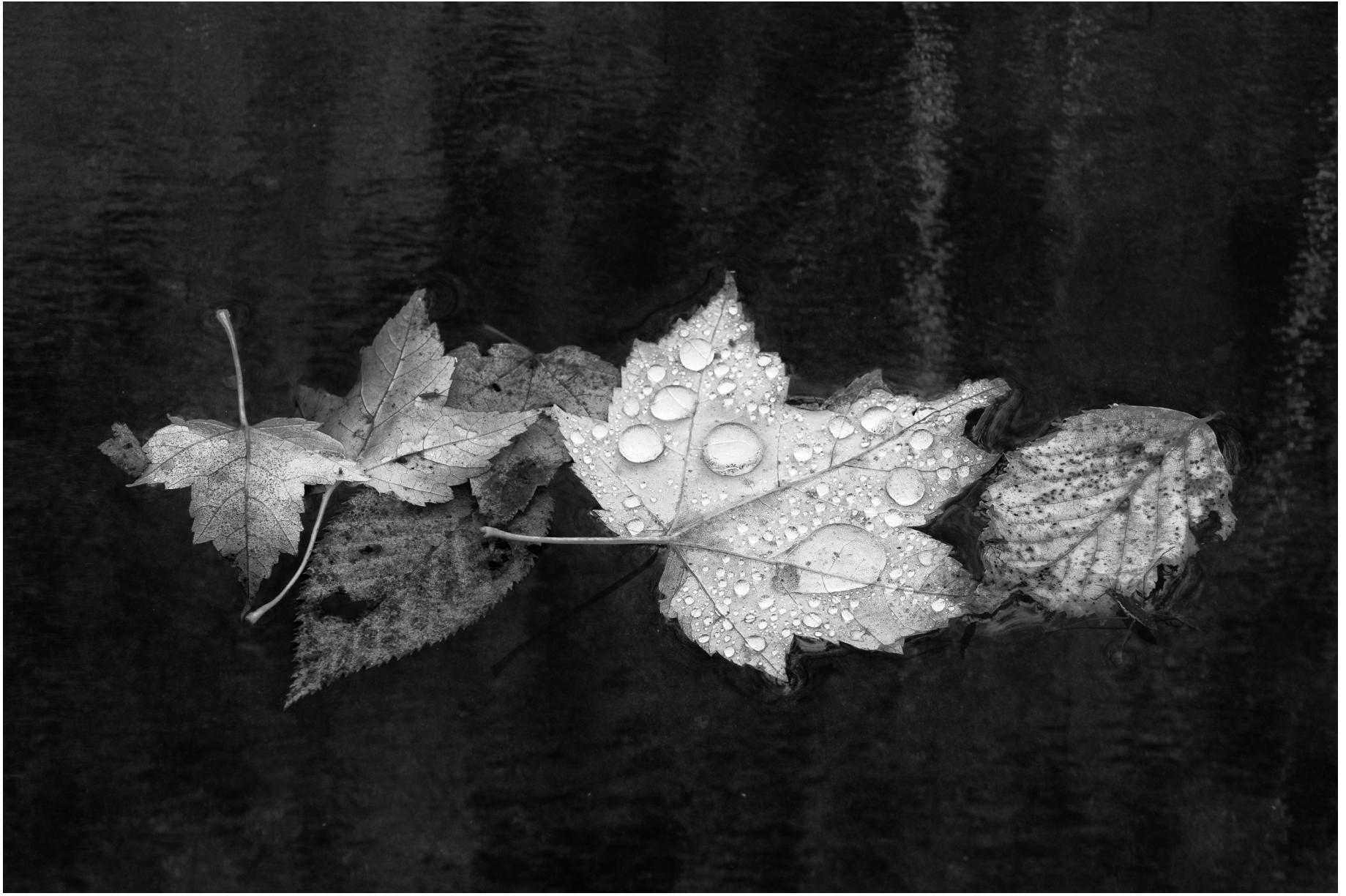
I stood on tiptoe
Reaching up to meet your lips with mine,
A hint of licorice on your breath,
From the fennel toothpaste I bought by mistake.
Pressing my body into yours,
Separated only by thin layers of cotton poly blend
“Let’s sleep till noon”
I almost whisper.

Did I tell you
I harbor a hope
That one day you will surprise me
And hear what I don’t say.
We will tumble onto that carefully made bed,
Laughing,
Tearing each other’s clothes off.
And after, we will sip our tea
Legs intertwined under the rumpled sheets
Wondering aloud
“Why didn’t we do this sooner?”

Did I tell you?

Did I Tell You?

Daphne Munson



Fallen Autumn

Barry Munson

Stay Yellow

Lee Donovan

There's just a few of us left. Non-techs. We 'void technology.

Cuz they use it to control us.

Won't be controlled. We're the last.

Won't submit to the Techs. Or use their lectrice-powered smart machines.

They would Integrate us. Put their machines in our heads. We resist and roll between the open spaces in the tunnels.

We can never stop; their machine-heads always find us. That's what you become when the Techs get you.

We only use simple machines that work on muscle power and gravity. Gravity's real but the Techs say only AI is real. Only lectricity is real. Only motors can move you and when they put machines in our heads we believe them. Believe only them.

Stiction's in front, leading, always leading. Without Stiction we'd be lost. Stuck in place and the Techs'd get us. He always says, "be calm," "stay yellow," "don't go red or the Techs'll get you." So I stay yellow cuz Stiction knows.

I'm behind him and behind me's Boose. Always behind me, Boose warns. When the Techs get close she whistles and we Grease the wheels. Techs can't catch us with Grease. They're too slow for Grease; cuz with Grease, speed's almost infinite.

We haven't seen the Techs in thirty spaces. We passed the Big White Arch in the last open space. Stiction says it used

to be a mon-you-mint or somethin like that. He's oldest. Been around so long he members the time before the Techs. Can't dream it.

A time with no Techs? We'd actually slow down in the open spaces, even stop.

But with the Techs always looking we can never stop, never slow. Only time we stop or slow is to get more Grease. For the wheels. To keep rolling.

Until we find Fish. Stiction says Fish can stop the Techs. Stop the machine-heads. Says Fish has blue-tech that'll kill the smart machines. I don't know what blue-tech is but I can't wait to get it. To stop the machine-heads.

Stiction whistles. Tunnel's ending. That means another open space, but still no sign a Techs. He slows, I slow and Boose after me. If Techs are gonna find us it'll be in the open. The machine-heads roam in the open. In the sand where our wheels can't roll. Means we carry our long-boards and run till the next tunnel. Grease can't help us out there.

At the end of the tunnel the light shines bright and the wind blows hot. I hate the open spaces. It's where the Techs rule, the machine-heads motor and the light burns.

"We go on my count," says Stiction. "Stay yellow, don't go red." He always says that. Says we should never forget it so he's gonna keep sayin' it. I don't mind. Boose always rolls her eyes.

While Stiction talks I tighten the trucks on our boards. If the trucks ain't tight we might spill when we get speed. Can't be spillin when the Techs find us.

"Boose, you stay behind Fixer, Fixer you stay behind me. Next tunnel's right over that dune. See?" Boose and I nod "yeah" as Stiction points. "Techs can't stop us if we stay yellow," Stiction says again.

"Stick, we know, let's just go it," says Boose. She's always pushing us to go. That's why Stiction always puts her last, cuz she pushes. "The longer we stay stopped the more the Techs is gonna find us. Let's go it."

Stiction gives her his whitest grin. "Boose, just stay yellow."

Stiction squats low at the tunnel mouth. This part of the tunnel's open like bare ribs of an old-dead monster. Spine buried, curved steel rising out of the sand. They built the tunnels after the Techs killed the earth. Connected every place to every other place. Air stayed cool in the tunnels away from the burning light. All airtight and smooth walls. Stiction said the Techs went to war on the tunnels. Cracked them open to get to the soft inside. And Integrated the world. Now the tunnels are only connected by the pipes that heal themselves.

Squinting into the harsh-light. Stiction waits and we wait. Wait to hear the whine of the machine heads motoring. Only sound is the hot wind whistlin' through steel ribs. Burning skin.

"On three now. One...two...three!"

On three we go. Boards in hand running through powdery sand. We come over the dune and there's the tunnel just like Stick said. We race and the dark tunnel mouth says, "hurry!" We get to it but no Techs, no machine-heads. Then drop our boards and roll. Inside, the air is cool on sweaty skin and smells like crete. Stick puts a hand on his helmet to seat it down and we roll faster. Gravity pulls us, no lectric motors. No smart machines. Just gravity.

Faster's always better and Boose whistles more speed. Stiction whistles back and we crouch low on our boards, hands behind backs and go faster. The crete-smelling air turns to

wind in our faces and the tunnel lights blur to a line.

I can hear Boose laugh. She loves speed. Loves it most. Stick yells his excitement into the crete-wind and I join with whoops and yelps.

Then a long whistle from Boose. The Techs.
Damn Techs.

They found us. Stick whistles back and we pull out Grease from our packs. Downhill can't get much faster till we get the Grease out. I spray Grease and the blurring tunnel lights go stream. The crete-wind bites my skin, makes me squeeze my eyes, put my visor down.

Another whistle from Boose. The Techs are still behind. That's not right! They can't compete with the Grease. They're too slow. Boose whistles again, then screams.

Damn Techs! Damn Techs! They got Boose! Tears in my eyes blur the streaming crete. Can't wipe them through my helmet and they itch their way down my face. Her empty board rolls next to me. I grab it, before it slows. It's mine now. Now that Techs got Boose. I fold it in half and slide it between my pack.

Don't need to look cuz I can feel 'em on my back. But I look. Still there. On their lectric bikes, faster than they ever been. Don't make sense. They never had speed before. Now they got so much and coming hard. Coming and red. Red as hell.

I whistle to Stick. He looks back, whistles back. More Grease. More Grease is more speed so we go it. We never rolled that fast before, even with Boose's board on me I'm rollin faster than ever.

Another whistle to Stick. He whistles back. Use Boose's board I guess.

Stay yellow. Stay yellow. The Techs can't stop us if we stay yellow. Don't go red. Don't go red. I hear Stick's voice in my head.

I pull out her board and my multi-tool and start

working. Rolling faster than I ever rolled. Thinking faster than I ever thought. What can I do with another board? We always keep spare boards for parts. We never lose parts. Might never find more. But Stick says use her board. If I don't we might never find Fish and his blue-tech.

One thing I know, Techs hate water. Fouls the lectrics. There's always pipes in these tunnels that take water somewhere. When we can stop we fill our teens from the pipes. I'm the one that taps in. I got the tools. So maybe I can tap in while we roll and get the Techs some water. The pipes got pressure, high pressure. They can kill a man if he don't know how to tap in proper. I been tappin' in my whole life. Tappin' in proper.

Looking back again there's five a them. And one has Boose on his bike. He's tryin to Integrate her. Turn her to a machine-head while we all roll. Boose would just a soon die than be a machine-head. So the Tech that's tryin' ain't doin' so well.

Stay yellow, Boose. They can't stop you if you stay yellow.

Gives me time. Time for tappin' in. Gonna use Boose's board as my tap. It just needs a point. That's simple. Makin' a point's all part a tappin' in. Her board with a point is my tap but if I don't hit on the first go I'll lose it, so I line it to my board just in case.

We steal magnetics from the Techs. It's part of their lectric motors. Stick says the more magnetics we steal the less Techs on bikes. But it's hard to carry too many magnetics. I got two right now. They're the strongest type and'll find the steel in those pipes. I'll just turn Boose's board into one giant magnetic. Should work.

Stick whistles. More Grease. I pause to spray more and we go faster still. The Techs are falling behind. But they still got Boose. We gotta get Boose.

Both magnetics on the board now and it jumps from

my hands into the pipes on the tunnel wall. The point strikes letting out a spray of water behind us, wall to wall. I whistle to Stick and we slow but don't stop.

Ready in case the Techs get through. They don't. The water fries them and they all crash.

Stick whistles to stop. Boose.

"Stay yellow," says Stick. We both run back with boards in hand to find Boose. On the way, I pull Boose's board off the pipe. The Techs are a mangled mess all twitches and staticky. Bits of lectricity running here and there.

Boose is in the middle of it all. Bloody, crying, not a machine-head.

"Boose? Can you roll?" Says Stick.

Through tears she says back, "Yeah. Damn Techs."

"Damn Techs," I says back.

"Damn Techs," Stick says.



Sub

Bruce Woodward

Transcience

Rickety Ram

I

What happens to me when I die?
Where do all those thoughts go?
I'm looking for thoughts to comfort my
aching heart and head,
but anytime someone tries to offer me solace,
I shrug and turn away,
and dismiss their counsel as some feel-good tranquilizer,
and belittle them
for daring to believe in God or hope and heaven
in the twenty-first century.

But here I am,
alone and naked,
beating my breast at how utterly senseless
all of this around me is:
we grow up, live a little, and then that's it,
we die.

But if,
and only if,
we're really lucky,
we grow old, and frail
and enter a stage of losing things:
our phones, our keys,
our family, friends, and loved ones,
all while our mental faculties start to slip away.

Pretty soon there won't even be a "me,"

the sight of the first tree I ever climbed,
the brilliant shade of blue
my Mom's dress was when she picked me up
from my first day of school,
(I cried all day),
or the way the edges of my first crush's lips
would start to curl up when she'd smile,
and how red I'd get and would look away
when I was so sure that that smile was meant for me.

Me and my friends would set the plates out and
try to capture as much as we could from the clouds,
eager to soak it all up.

First come some drops of my first steps as baby,
or some drops of that same first crush.
Then comes the time I skinned my knee,
or the first time that
Mom had to tell me
that sometimes our Dads don't come back.

college,
crushes,
moving away from home,
more crushes,
"in sickness and health,"
good books,
bad parties where you drank too much
(those you maybe don't remember so well, thank God),
birth of children,
death of children.

Some darker clouds looming from far off
portend other memories to come:
Rickety's gonna die, I'll die,
All those old waiters and feisty grandpas
in old, sentimental Christmas movies,
they're already dead.

what happens when our storehouses
for these innumerable gifts from the past begin to buckle?

collecting there
in the baptismal fonts and empty bottles
that are our heads.

II

Whatever happened to China? Or "We are the 99%"?
Or the water in Flint?

Everyone came here,
to America,
unmoored from their cultural traditions,
eager to assimilate
with everyone else.
They send us their dreams of a better life,
but all we send is soda, cigarettes, and processed food
to Mexico and Syria, so giants can maintain
obscene profit margins
as we in the west switch to organic coconut water and quinoa,
instead.
I don't think that there's a wall that can be built for that.

III

I can't draw pretty pictures
and I'm moody and prone
to fits of quitting and remorse.

I can't compare with
the smooth skin of the anime hero,
tasked with effortlessly
saving the world,
one computer-generated explosion
and irreverent quip at a time.

I can't even say that
I can't compare with some cute guy or girl
or with the sun or the lilies in the pond,
the way that Shakespeare could,
my words can only take these feelings
so far.

I have only these lines on the page,
And the song I sing when
I think about driving home to you.

And through it all,
I am happy.

Flying With Tyrants

Tasha Hall

I dreamt of black birds flying over me.
In this perfect V shaped formation,
I flew with them.
It was not just any day.
It was a day when flying meant you were a Phoenix.
My fortune reminded me of prosperity,
but why did I feel such sorrow?
It was then that I was truly naked,
so I let their wings beat a symphony
on my untainted skin.
We flew over black murky waters,
where I saw the faces of my enemies lurking.
Their repugnant stares covered me in ash,
as if I could not be more black,
I was desperate to awaken.
But, I couldn't.
I will never be free,
but I will forever be alive in dreams with black birds.
The messengers of God, I heard.

Within

Mitchell Hill



Pillow Talk

Second Place, Poetry

Sarah Broberg

My Dearest Pillow,

It's complicated.

I told you this was the most comfortable I have ever been with a pillow, and I was not lying. After weeks feeling like my neck was the track for a middle school roller derby team, I found you—so fluffy, so soft, as if your stuffing had fallen from an angel's wings. I swore you were the pillow of my restful dreams.

Unfortunately, I spoke too soon. At first you were like marshmallows in the s'mores of my life. But pillows change. Soft and fluffy gives way to flat and lumpy. The brisk, clean scent of department store stagnates to the musty aroma of dwindling time. What I once shed tears onto now only spills stuffing on my sheets. All signs lead to one hard truth—no matter how much I plump you up or flip you over, I can never replicate the bliss of our time together when we first met.

So, rather than prolong the pain—particularly in my shoulders and neck—it is time we went our separate ways. Perhaps my dog will love you for who you are, bacteria colonies and all.

My dearest pillow, for the final time, goodnight.

Marco's Run

Brian Sutton

It rained all day yesterday; same as the day before. Today there was no rain but the skies were still cloudy. The air was cool, but not cold, and very damp. Marco's clothes were wet but not all together from the rain. He had swum the river yesterday afternoon under the cloak of a heavy downpour. It was then he was glad for the rain. Now, he wished it would end. His spare clothes, which he carried on his back in a plastic bag that had torn open on the acacia thorns, were soaked now too. No sense in changing into them. This way, by leaving on his original jeans, shirt and not changing into what should have been dry clothes, he avoided having to discard wet clothes from the swim to serve as a beacon for the Border Patrol.

He was tired, cold, wet, and needed a rest. The chaparral brush along the north bank of the Rio Bravo afforded little in the way of shelter; not from the rain, or the gringo Border Patrol. He had been told by the coyote to head beyond the shore towards the sugar cane fields and muy pronto. There he could hide. Now was not the time to rest. Now was the time to find the sugar cane; so on he went away from the river.

The coyote Marco hired said January was a good month to cross; not too hot he said. The sugar cane would be tall, he said. Good for hiding.

Back home, last summer, Marco's cousin Julio had run afoul of Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel's former enforcer goons. Los Zetas had gambled on building their own smuggling operation

some time before, setting off a war between them and the more established Gulf Cartel. Julio, a low level smuggler for Los Zetas tried to switch sides to the Cartel. Having pissed off Los Zetas, Julio's bad judgment jeopardized the safety of Marco's entire extended family back in their village in Tamaulipas State. Marco knew he had to leave his village in Mexico because of his connections to his careless cousin, or die at the hands of el narcotraficantes.

The chaparral of deep South Texas was no place to wander around on foot. Mesquite, blackbrush, brazil trees and other thorny plants were there to rip the skin off anyone foolish enough to be a passerby. Ebony trees, yucca, sage and a variety of grasses provided a little cover, but not enough to evade the Border Patrol's infrared equipped choppers. Marco well knew this as he had been schooled by the coyote back in Mexico. Get out of the brush as fast as possible the coyote told him. Head for the sugar cane; but, which way? The skies were cloudy, no sun to guide him. Walk away from the river he was told; but it was easy to get disoriented. There were few roads, only dirt tracks, and javelina trails. No matter what, he was instructed keep walking away from the river. Eventually you will encounter a sugar cane field he was told. Marco tried to recall the coyote's words as he stumbled through the brush, ripping his clothes and flesh on the thorns.

What seemed like hours passed and as Marco was about to stop, as he felt he could go on no more, he came to a dirt road

which bordered what must have seemed the Promised Land. Sugar cane at last; tall, taller than he, green and dense, forming a jungle-like darkness within its sheltering canopy. Now Marco understood why the coyote told him to head for the cane. Here he could hide and rest, and perhaps even dry out a little.

But, beware, recalled Marco. When the gringo trucks come by blaring their warnings of the coming fires, run! Run fast and get out of the cane *muy pronto* or you will die! The gringo sugar cane farmers burn their fields prior to harvesting to remove the leaves, making for easier cutting by their combines. The fires spread quickly and are very hot. Death will come to any one caught in the inferno. All this he was told by the coyote. Before falling asleep Marco knew he had to keep one eye open and one ear cocked. He was not out of danger yet. He lay still on the ground nestled between the rows of cane, keeping the coyote's words of warning ever forward in his mind.

A light sleep fell over Marco. As he rested among cane stalks, he drifted off thinking of his family back home. His mama, papa, two sisters Elena and Marta, and one brother Angel filled his head with visions of happy times before the Cartel, before Los Zetas. Smells of his mama's cooking, the feel of the warm air in the maize fields, the voices of his loved ones provided succor. Marco's 18 year old brain had not yet matured into that of a man but he knew much for his age. Growing up fast on a Mexican farm was his education, he was about to be tutored in a lesson regarding human nature.

Marco awoke after about an hour, felt the pangs of hunger as the sun reached its zenith and reached into his plastic clothes bag for the tiny packet of tortillas he had squirreled away for the trip. He had banked on the zip lock bag keeping his lunch

dry but the tortillas were soggy none the less. Nothing could stay crisp in that humidity. Wet or not, the homemade corn tortillas from his mother's hearth tasted better than any he had ever eaten. Still hungry he was out of food and running out of time. The coyote had given Marco very detailed, explicit instructions on what to do after hiding the afternoon in the cane. At dusk, sneak out of the cane into the community. Be inconspicuous, walk in an unhurried manner so as not to attract attention and congregate as soon as possible with people. The larger the concentration of people, the safer he would be, the coyote told him. Head north, head to Renaldo's Taqueria. Wait for the red Tacoma pick up with the dented front fender. There will be your salvation and your transportation out of the Free Trade Zone and the gringo border checkpoints. Don't be late! The truck leaves with or without you at 7 PM! Marco knew these cane fields were large, 1000 hectares or more. There was no time to be lazy, it was time to move.

The coyote's warning was heeded. Marco could hear off in the distance a call in English and Spanish, "Attention, we commence burning in 30 minutes. This field is scheduled to be burned. Leave now." Marco knew this to be the truck he thought he heard earlier skirting the edge of the cane. On board was a pre-recorded announcement of the pending burn. Get out now or die. Why must everything be so urgent, Marco thought? So many ways a person could die. Death at the hands of the narco gangs, death at the hands of the gringo Border Patrol, death at the hands of the farmer's flames. Was there no peace? Marco sprang to his feet, looked in all directions and fled in what he thought was El Norte. Through the cane he ran. The coyote said run fast, the flames move faster than your feet. Do no get caught in a burning field; run, run as fast as you can! Marco ran, as quickly as his tired, achy feet would carry him. Run!

He could hear the flames, a roar like no other; sounds of a demon racing across the cane. The sound grew louder with each step Marco took. Through his nose Marco could smell the stench of burning sugar cane. He could hear the hiss of the water in the stalks turning to steam. Smoke began to fill the air. The fire must be getting closer. The coyote said the gringo farmers started the fires on the perimeter of the field. The heat would build causing the air to be sucked into the center, drawing all oxygen with it. If one did not die from the flames, one would surely suffocate. Run for the edge of the field Marco was told. If you must, dive through the flames to get out. Do not get caught in the middle of the field.

On Marco ran, running towards the glow of the flames. He knew he had to get through the fire to get out. The heat grew intense, the smoke thick. He ripped open his plastic bag of clothes, tied the replacement shirt he never wore around his head and darted towards the flames. This was it, he thought. Either I survive this or I don't.

Before leaping into the inferno, out of the corner of his eye Marco saw an out. Part of the field had already burned and was now only a smoldering remnant of the prior inferno. Changing course suddenly he darted to his right, ran about 50 meters and was in the clear. Smoke filled his lungs, his eyes and coated his clothes, but at least he was safe for now.

The next task was to figure out where to go next. With the cloudy skies filled with smoke Marco could not rely on the placement of the sun to determine direction. He could only rely on instinct. Moving away from the still burning field, across a dirt road he encountered his next obstacle, a short barbed wire fence. Seeing this as an extension of the thorns in the brush, he climbed over the sharp wire, tearing his clothes

and flesh still further, and entered a pasture. The second leg of his journey was now over. On to the third, he trudged hoping to find a landmark to aid in locating his rendezvous point with the red pickup truck.

He now shared what appeared to be a large pasture with a small herd of Brahma cattle; the kind with the large horns and protruding hump on their back. Carefully threading his way through so as not to spook the beasts, Marco continued, racing through the pasture knowing he was in the open and a moving target for the law. Off in the distance to his left he saw a water tower; to his right at about 2 o'clock a set of farm buildings. Beyond that, he spied some large commercial signs signaling commercial life. Deciding the signs would be a safe bet he steered towards them in the hope that once he reached what ever was there, he could blend in with the crowd, and perhaps ask directions to the convenience store he was to meet the driver of the red pickup. He needed to hurry as the day was getting away from him so he picked up his pace, placing one tired leg in front of the other.

Marco could hear the sound of his panting, intermingled with that of the mooing cattle, the light breeze rustling the grass and the far off roar of traffic that increased in volume with every step. He knew he was getting closer.

Another sound startled him. It was sharp, a crack like that of a whip. Like the switch his father used to handle the livestock back home, only deeper and rounder in pitch. He had heard this sound before while hunting with his elders back in the village. That sound was a gun. Another crack, this time it was closer. Marco began to get worried. Was it a hunter? The coyote warned Marco of the gringo vigilantes who shot trespassing wet backs. He picked up his pace keeping the distant tall

signs in view.

Yet another new noise could be heard, the whoop-whoop of a chopper. Crap! It's the border patrol. They're shooting at me. Run!

Swish was the whoosh of a bullet whistling past his right ear, followed by a second one. Marco hit the dirt and started to cry.

All of this trouble because of his cousin's bad judgment. Marco, as he lay prostrate on the ground expecting to be shot by the border patrol, said his prayers and wondered if his body would be found, or if it would even be identified. He had no papers on him. How would the gringos know who he was? How would his family know of his fate? Why didn't he just stay home and allow himself to be killed by the narcos? At least he would have received a decent burial in The Church, and not die on this lonely Texas pasture as food for the vultures.

As he spread flat on the cold ground, Marco heard no more shots fired. Without thinking he sprang up and ran some more. Better to be shot in the back running for the big sign. He had no chance on the ground. Gathering what adrenalin soaked strength he had left, Marco bolted towards the tall sign. He heard another gunshot, and then waited for the inevitable sting of the bullet. This Border Patrol agent must be a really bad shot: he missed again. Keep running, keep running! His goal was getting closer, close enough to see the words on the sign he could read but could not understand.

He reached another barbed wire fence and cleared it so fast he didn't feel the barbs as they dug into the flesh of his legs. Bleeding now, Marco cleared the ditch past the fence, splash-

ing through the knee deep water. Scrambling out, he reached the asphalt of a real paved road, the first he had seen since leaving Mexico. Loosing strength he crossed one lane, then another. Having reached the other side, panting and panicking he felt a hand on his shoulder and suddenly turned expecting certain death. He just knew it would be the Border Patrol and that his journey was over.

But it wasn't the border patrol.

This man had an assault rifle pointed right at Marco's face and screamed at him incomprehensibly. Through all the gibberish the man said two words Marco understood,

"Pinche mohado!"

Then he heard another shot, but this one didn't come from the gun of the man standing before him.

Marco stood still, confused and frozen like the statue of Benito Juarez in his village's plaza. Before him was the man who had been chasing and firing shots with intent to kill lying face down on the ground. Behind that man, about 20 meters away stood another, standing with his legs spread in that familiar policeman's stance he had seen back home, dressed in military green with official looking patches on his shoulders; a rifle on his shoulder and shouting in English at the man between them. At that instance, Marco saw his tracker heave forward from the chest out and fall face first on the ground, blood seeping out changing the green of the grass to red. Confused, Marco saw two men, one on the ground before him in cammo, dead; the other still standing in official uniform, alive. All that remained was another clean shot to his head and this would all be over.

"You ok?" the official looking man said in Spanish to Marco.

"Si."

"I've been chasing you since you left the cane earlier today. This guy on the ground has been also. He's a local rancher, hates Hispanics and has been known to be nothing but trouble around here. You're lucky I got here when I did."

"You mean he's not the Border Patrol?" ask Marco.

"No, I am. Are you ready to go home now?"

Marco was ready to go home.



Framing Joshua Tree

Mitchell Hill



Muscular Dystrophy

Daniel Bonds

It started like this:
My mother rushes me to the clinic.
Tests and more tests,
I am an experiment
EMG examining nerves,
A stinging, shocking sensation
Runs down my arm.
Biopsy of muscle tissue
Cut from my leg,
Strength and reflexes checked,
Pushing and prodding,
Testing my muscle capacity.
The doctor analyzes my gait,
Off balance and slouching
Up on tiptoes,
Heel-toe, heel-toe,
Attempting to walk a straight line.
The doctor tells me
My muscles will deteriorate
Gradually eaten away.
The pale yellow room closes in on me
My mother weeps.

These Legs of Mine

Karen Truong

These legs of mine are about to fail us
And I'm sorry

I can't stand much longer
These shoulders have bore enough
Your soles press on them
But I'll stay
Keeping you alive
Before you kick my head
Forcing me down
knees first
On the hard, cracked desert ground
Caused by this blistering dick-of-a-sun
That's when the noose becomes your friend
instead of me

The one you've always needed

The only thing
Left of you is this hole in my sock.
No smaller than a thimble you said the hole &
The sock had to go, that my foot was tired of this
Over washed garment which only helps produce more
Salt between my toes but to throw away the sock also
Meant to exile its beautiful brother.

Don't tell me I look like a peasant begging for shoes in
High heat, this hole rounded beneath my big toe is just
One less layer between our embrace.

You said a hole would only keep me crawling on
My hands & knees but this hole is where my foot steps
Out its sweaty cell. Witness the finest cotton unravel.
Each thread a loss so great I step on my own toes to
Stop myself in place.

But I will not abandon you sock, as she did me.
Will not give in to what your seams have already
Decided. Did you know you do much more than
Keep my heel from blistering?

And did Beethoven's sock come undone as he
Tapped his foot furiously while he wrote his
Letter to the Immortal Beloved?

But soon the whole of my foot will go through you
& you will die two deaths, die as the last faded cloth
Between lovers, die supporting my weight.

An Argument for the Hole in My Sock

Bryan Angel

Today I sent your lantern out to sea.
From a river bank at twilight
you went gently from my hands
into the currents of the Toro Nagashi,
a funerary ritual of the ancient Japanese.

Sailing in a paper lantern
with a candle for your name,
“to guide good passage to afterlife,”
someone on the shore explained,
seemed too simple an elegy
for the man who gave birth to me.

You lit up the world
like the fury of violins in finale
or in battle,
violent and serene and blazing
on an altar in the heart of night
consumed by sacred burning,
ardent dreaming,
and all our lessons
seemed to play out in the whispers
of the river and the fire.

You collapsed like a star on itself
with heavy gravity
and you flickered down
to the diminuendo of last embers,
diminishing,
finishing,
releasing to silence

until I saw you no more against darkness
but could feel you there inside it,
plunging like a diver in the eel skin sea,
sinking like a coin
into the low-sung deep,
where warriors and composers
and explorers and fathers,
lost loves
and everyone who knew
the light and sound of you
were tested in mad, remote fathoms
beneath the weighty

glory of blackest night—
your spirit somehow
still roaring bright
under shadow of the keel.

Under Shadow of the Keel

Editor's Choice, Poetry

Vanessa Snedeker

Sardine

Hannah Keene

I arrived in the place shy
but still with my arms through the air
and everything was mine
to say hello to and goodbye to

all things spiny become curved
like I had been rubbing against them for
years
and was finally here to fit
flesh
to the city
flesh

I took each turn mildly
until they began to take me as their own

the clouds move fast in this place
I said to my friends,
and no one said anything back
and the lines at the gas station are slow
but every bus is speared with silver poles
these are the cold parents
you grab onto when
you are trying to get home
and feeling nauseous

and we blink our scales at each other,
sparkling shining spitting angrily,
completely in love, on the bus.
finally I can say it: I want people close,
close and stinky, and packed in oil

and packed in golden oil, I found a
bristle in my foot
I took off my shoe on the bus
and I could only pet it more,
something in the city makes me stroke
these kinds of edges
like I'm very ill
but now I am also, very free
to find health
I am also

when I go home I find I'm no longer
tired
but I sleep anyways, a moving sleep.
and through this sleep I still breathe
and I might even talk gutturally like
some happily oiled thing.
I'll wake up and cough oil, it sounds like
a horn
filling the street

I stare into the sound
blinking into the scales of others,
wanting to be packed in the city again

I feel like the silver can should hug me
forever

but two weeks later I run out of cash,
I go home which is far behind this,
in the country, and I find myself
with a sorry, gay tongue hanging from
my face.
it looks like a pink and raw arm,
outstretched towards something oily
something that reeks as it heals,
and burns the whole time

I know I have a ticket to heaven still
even back home
I am also

I ask for sardines again,
in my suspended drawl
I am something led astray
a large mouth asking
and swallowing
its own spit over and over

Two Hands

Hawkins Sellier

A man is given one good set of hands, and a man disregards this.
Reaching out in every direction, as if his reach is that of the sky.
He tries to put his hand on the silhouettes of dreams that rise and fall

It is cruel the way that odds play out
Resulting in a man getting to touch,
To barely brush against his turbulent passions

A hurting person tries the most
Stretching beyond the veil of the life in front of them
To try to reel a dream up from the lake or cut it from the quarry

But endowed as he is, just one pair of hands
His grasp deceives him and his palms rest on less than his mind
Too often his callouses are moulded by tools that built the dreams of others

Bear fortune with grace my friend
Set your hands on what you see and build your dreams from there
The stairs to the sky were built from the stones of the earth

One good pair of hands
Keep them employed firmly by the sum of your desires
Then reach out, as if your reach was the sky

Dance of the Night

Julie Couch

Dancin' with the Devil
with your headphones on
Oh so sure of yourself
you swear, Nothing
will go wrong

Dancin' a jig
and singin' your song
Everyone staring at
your performance
Just playing along

Dancin' in the darkness
Your smile of delight
quickly turns to a frown
As the bright rising sun
brings the gift of a new day
Knowing your nighttime
fun is fading away

Tired and full of his fun
You lay your head down
Another dance done

Let me caress those sorrow-stitched barriers
You keep so very high,
Climb the ladder of your fears
With a joy you can't deny,
Trace those black and blue reminders
Ink-stamped pain from your past,
Dance upon those very horrors
With memories that will last.
Let me tickle every piece,
Every fracture, break, and crack
Till your heart will finally cease
To let you take it back.
I'll drown out every worry,
Tug the corners of your lips
While your vision becomes blurry
And you slowly lose your grip.
Now, darling, won't you dare
Forget every ache, every cry.
Let my melody fill the air
While the pain meets its demise.

Laughter's Cure

Alyssa Coelho

Mockingbirds

Second Place, Fiction

Briana Munoz

The birds were always around us. We would drive up to the loneliest hill of our tiresome town. We'd observe the tiny lights and cars, the size of ants driving past, busily. We'd stare at the occupied houses those fools called home.

We'd sit, being serenaded by the symphony of crickets, as the cold air chilled our bones. He would dramatically recite to me memorized lines of Baudelaire, Hemingway, Kerouac, of course some Edgar Allan Poe but always in a mocking sense. I'd laugh.

On top of the hood of my car, sitting on top of the hill- we felt on top of our own perfect world. We'd hear the birds chirp.

"Once people get into a relationship, everything changes. They feel the constraint of certain obligations." He was scared.

"Everything is constantly changing, regardless, silly. That's just... well, life." So was I.

In his bed or mine, we'd lay, bodies delicately placed diagonally on the mattress, pressed up against another like in an attempt to morph into one. Yet, nothing ever felt close enough. My messy hair dangling off of the bed like an old, rusty chandelier. Windows wide open, the sun creeping in through the cracks of the wooden blinds, we'd intertwine our legs for warmth. I'd carefully place my hand into the back pocket of his khaki pants. He'd lift up my shirt just enough to feel my skin and press his hands against my stomach. With his fingers he'd

pretend to engrave my skin with the stanzas of his favorite T.S. Eliot poems. He'd call me his half pint smidgen of a woman, his little lady, his daisy, he'd call me- his.

Nothing could interrupt the kingdom we had built. Nothing could disturb our utopia. Nothing except for those god damned beautiful little birds.

"What do you suppose they tell each other, darling?" He'd ask, staring at my hands which he held in his own.

I'd look up, curiously, at his electric green eyes that were always dimmed behind a pair of glasses.

"Out there. Those birds, what do you think they say to each other?"

"That she wants more." I'd hide under the blankets but I'd still remain close.

Some nights, I'd inevitably remind myself that I wasn't his and he was not truly mine. After half of a bottle of cheap tequila, that would really seem to bother me. The next morning, I'd end up in an unfamiliar bed- naked, cold. The sun breaking through the window and the trash trucks roaring would worsen the throbbing pain in my head. I'd spot a pair of shoes in the corner of the room, big, like his. I'd spot a Charles Bukowski book on the shelf and I'd remember that he couldn't stand Bukowski's drunk ass. In attempt to feel something, for someone else, I'd realize how no one could possibly, now,

measure up to him. But I was stubborn and could never bring myself to directly ask for that.

Other nights, he'd be the one to question things. He would say that what we were doing was completely and utterly foolish.

"Do me a favor?" He'd ask. "Don't talk to me ever again."

He'd go on rampages of ridiculously big words that were not in the vocabulary of most other guys his age, trying to justify that cutting me out of his life was for my sake. It was in some way, to me, actually sort of amusing.

"You bring me such happiness, you see, and I'm just not built for that or capable or deserving of being happy." He'd rant on. The first few times I'd try to convince him otherwise. The following times, I'd start to get offended. Eventually, I just accepted it as routine.

But somehow, we'd both end up, back at the place we found comfort in. Surrounded by fluttering feathers and hymns chirped on Sunday mornings, by those silly little fucking birds. As the sun would rise, we'd lay on a colorful tapestry. He'd hold a book in one hand and with the other he would comb his fingers through my hair. He'd begin,

"Let us go then, you and I,
When the Evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized..."

And everything would momentarily, be okay.



Bound #1

Tracey Grassel



Mud Boy
Barry Munson

A Black Mother Cries

Adande Akobundu

I am a black woman, a black wife, a black mother, a black grandmother

I am married to a wonderful, law-abiding black man

I am the mother of beautiful intelligent black daughters

I am the grandmother of an amazing black granddaughter

And I cry.

I experience something a white mother never has to experience

If I commit the minor offense of not realizing that the taillight on my car is broken, or my car breaks down, I must contemplate my options. Being a black woman is enough to question whether I can drive or live without being killed by police, or someone who has the soul of white supremacy. Who doesn't believe that my life is as important as the life of a white person?

Being the wife of a black man, there is always the nagging concern that when he leaves our home, whether to go to work, play tennis, or ride his bike - will he return? Or will he be taken by those who have the soul of white supremacy?

As the mother, and grandmother of black children, if they should ever be stopped by the police - if they have a flat tire, who will help them? Or worse, due to the many who have the souls of white supremacy - who will hurt them?

So you see - as a black woman, married to a black man, with black daughters and granddaughter

I experience something a white mother never has to experience - I, or my loved ones may die, just for being black, living among those who have the soul of white supremacy

Fan Fiction

Tori Helton

Perhaps sending him explicit pornographic stock photos just hours before our first date was a bad move.

I say this because it's been about two hours since we were supposed to meet and the only remotely romantic thing I've done is buy two corn dogs for myself. However, I refuse to completely claim any sort of wrongdoing of my charitable act.

Yes, charitable.

I mean, think about it. In a plan that was meant to merely stir him into the right mood for our date, I ended up giving him just what he needed to enjoy this afternoon in solitude. And isn't that how it works for guys in real life? You've got to continuously provide them little treats to keep them near you. Just like dogs.

This is precisely the reason I primarily stick to fictional men. Upkeep with the monotonous task of continuously pleasing boys in real life is like playing a game of darts with a blindfold in an empty room that plays nothing but dull elevator music and serves nothing but chicken broth. It in no way compares to the glistening reflection of the sunset off of [Insert Favorite Comic Hero Here]'s rippling pectorals as he brings you in to all encompassing hug, or the adorable character tropes that [Insert Beautiful Boy Band Member Here] falls into that serve to escalate the romantic fervor brewing between the two of you.

So, instead of the disappointment I should feel from being left to fend for myself beneath the mall's dimming effervescence, I feel a deep pity for my should-have-been date.

Fictional men can offer me so much more than whatever this real boy could. He simply cannot compete against the tide of rich heroes, chiseled hunks, irresistible troublemakers, and talented dreamers. Plus, there's a sort of intimacy with fictional men that I can adjust based upon my emotional needs. For example, if I am looking to change or enhance a particular emotional state, all I have to do is browse through my extensive repertoire of qualified men, select the one that is the most promising for the job, and modify the grey areas of their character to personalize them to my liking. How I need them, when I need them.

But more so than that is the power in it.

The mightiest of gods and the most repugnant of villains could become mine and perfect with a mere shift in their canonical stories. In just seconds, they become objects of my own universe. And the best part about it is I don't need to commit to just one man! This works out really well for me, especially because I don't just have one type.

No, I don't think reality could ever offer me something to pass all that up.

And yet as I sit here among the remaining trickles of people in the emptying dining court, I imagine my supposed date standing before me ragged, wind tussled, and out of breath. A small hopeful spark of a thought borne from futile wishes but... somehow not completely outside the realm of possibility. I imagine his eyes trembling with a desperate and unspoken apology, cheeks flushed with the rush to see me. Above all, I imagine a scenario in which I am desirable.

It's a scenario so unlike the reality of the filtering of straggling strangers and of the mall shutting off its lights one by one in random succession. It's also a scenario so unlike the ones I usually immerse myself in. What makes it so different is the sheer possibility of it. It's rare, tangible tone.

I will freely admit that as much as I retreat into impossible fantasies, I find myself hoping for a better reality. But at this point in my life, the freedom of imagination is much easier to carry than weighty hope. So I'll stick to what I'm comfortable with.

And as long as malls close their shops with chained gates, and as long as dining court chefs scrape the day's remaining food into the nearest garbage bins, and as long as window mannequins are being changed to accommodate the season's style, I will continue to imagine as a retort against what is lacking in the real world.

I think I know now
what my mom
has always known

I don't say it
but it's really there
when we look
at each other:
everything
from far away
looks beautiful
when you're burning,
and asking for a lot,
and not giving much
of what they want,
totally on fire and
yet not caring
about warming up
the place

the world is lit up already
and as for your head and my head?

a thousand wicks
and not a single one un lit
I smile at my mom
it's never totally triumphant
but when we laugh
it's the strongest way to
be under these circumstances

my mom took me to work
with her recently
to use the computer
and so many years after the first time
I still loved it
"let me finally see what she does"
is what I was always thinking
even this time

she has this plant
far up on top
of the cabinets
and im so convinced it's fake
but I ask her, twice, and she
tells me its real, twice
she keeps telling me
the name of it
which I can't remember right now
and even if its fake
my mother has named it
so its real anyways

and she named me

what a slight angel

giving life to areas

we're laughing and
making fun of her boss together
my mom talks about her Costco shirt
and after we use the computer printer
coffee maker
we pee together in the bathroom,
one stall apart
it sounds loud
and I really
love her
even if she did just have to
name me something
I understand this

isn't that the realest curse?
a name
or maybe the beginning of a curse,
yeah its just the beginning

something sings out in the empty bath-
room: piss

life is not as large
as we thought it was, mom
it is more large,
more upsetting

i'm not sure how to tell her:
I want to change my name

Stall

Hannah Keene

Trash Day

Daphne Munson

The sound of garbage trucks
Crawling
Early in the morning
Remind me of when
I was teenager

I'd snatch
The leavings from my room
Cigarette butts,
Sanitary napkins
Wrapped in kleenex,
Crumpled up pages of
Tearstained letters
Written to the boy
Of that week

And
Teetering
In 5 inch platform heels
Race the truck's
Progress down our street
To dump it all
Into heavy metal cans
Drag them
Across the gravel yard
To the curb
Of our pink and battleship grey house
My halter top
And wide bell bottomed hip huggers
Sticky with sweat

Playboy

Angelo Carli Poetry Prize

Misti Vaughn

There were these prized Playboy magazines
that were stashed in the closet. My sister and I
would steal them and hide behind the house-

crouched over, sweating like old men just to
take a peek at them and out of fear of being caught,
I'd get this urgency to take a piss and let it

run down my leg. I saw pink skin and flesh that
wrapped around their bodies with voluptuous pudge.
we'd compare our bony little bodies and poke out

our chests and laugh at the pictures.

La Salle

Misti Vaughn

My uncle's trailer resembled a rusty aluminum coke can, with jagged edges oxidized deep red,

the kind you step on barefoot, and bleed out onto the soil. When I'd step inside, a burning stink of hot piss and cigarillo ash would

drown me in the humid heat. He was here most of the time, coiled up like an intoxicated water moccasin. On one side laying

crosshatched in the light with his razor feminine hipbones protruding out. He'd smile when I walked in. Stretching his lips over the pus colored

grime in his teeth. Cheeks red with liquor, and a tongue numbed by the empty hurricane bottle on the floor. Slurred words poured out of him like a crazed

soothsayer versifying at all ends of the perimeter. Going on about how boys lie, and to never mix beer and liquor. We'd swat at the june bugs buzzing around

the light fixture that was hanging from an extension cord - lighting the room with tapioca yellow rays. He grabbed their vibrating bodies, shovel them into his

mouth - chew and claimed they were full of protein because he saw it on the discovery channel. And just to prove that I wasn't a pussy I'd eat some too.

Grabbing their buzzing bodies, shoveling them into his mouth and chewing, he claimed they were full of protein. My stomach would ache with laughter until tears fell and

I ate some, too. He was the only jesus I believed in that could wake up every morning after drinking himself to death.

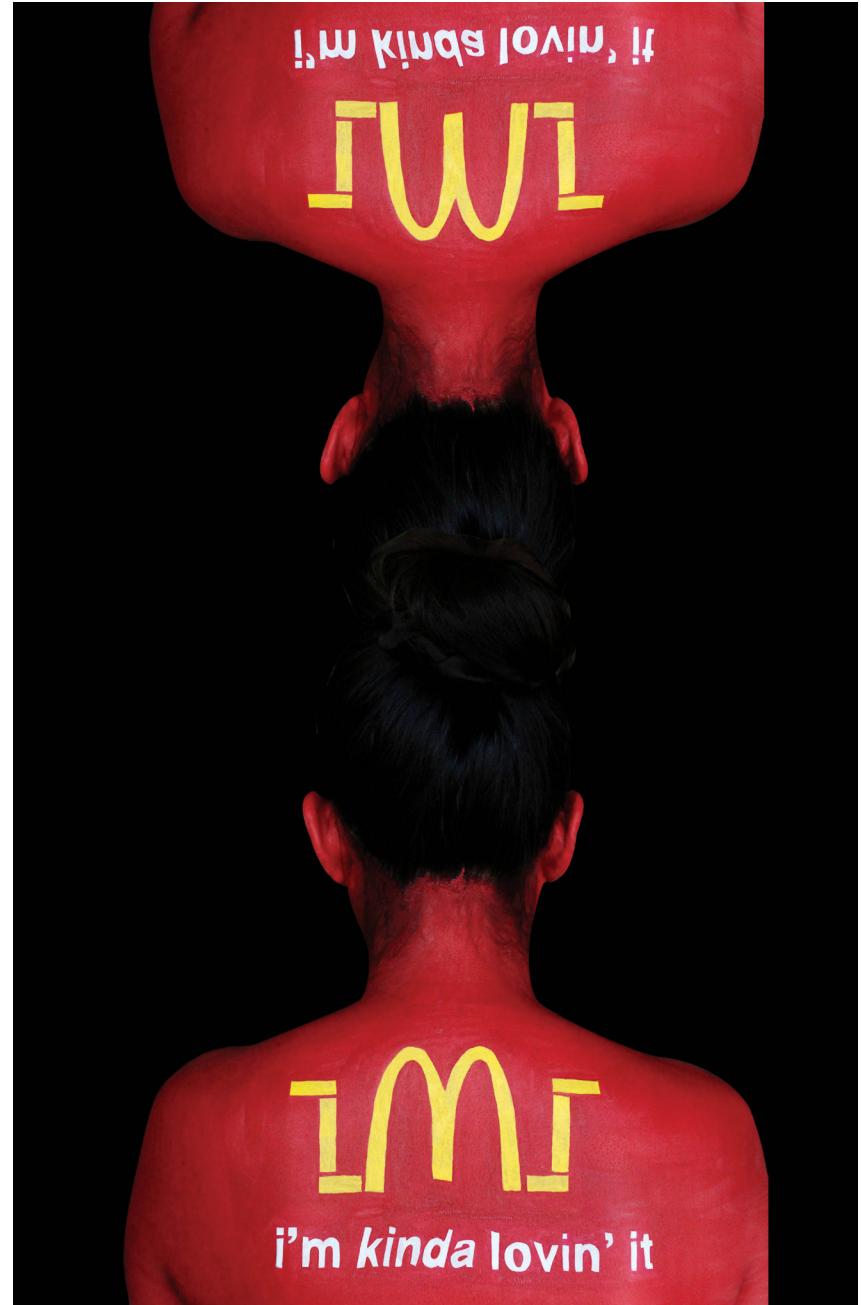
Two-Day Shipping

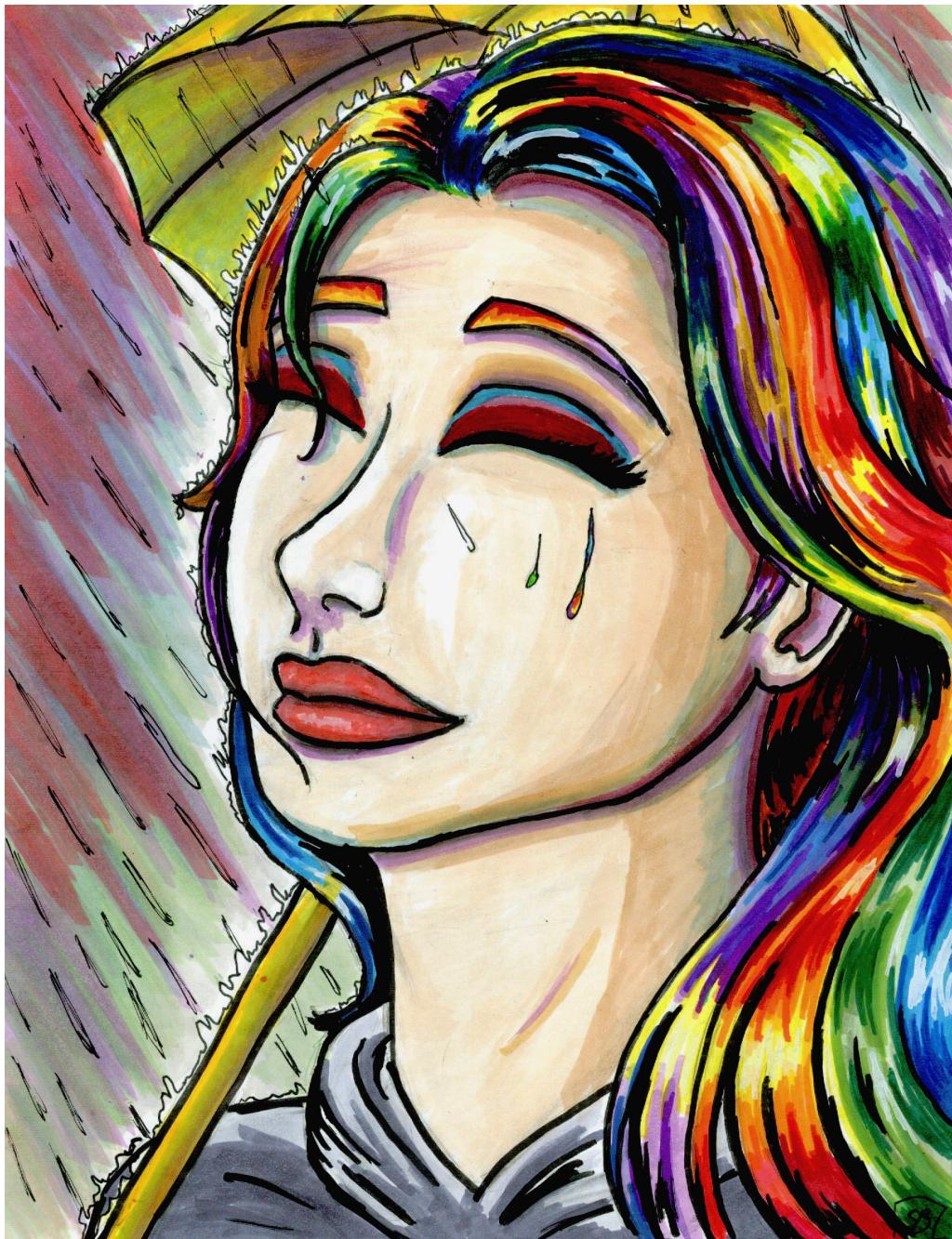
Second Place, Visual



McDonald's

Katherine Hoang





Washed Away

Sarah Broberg



Unicorn
Lauren Ballard

Color Skulls
Matthew Robinson





After the Rain

Haruka Sato

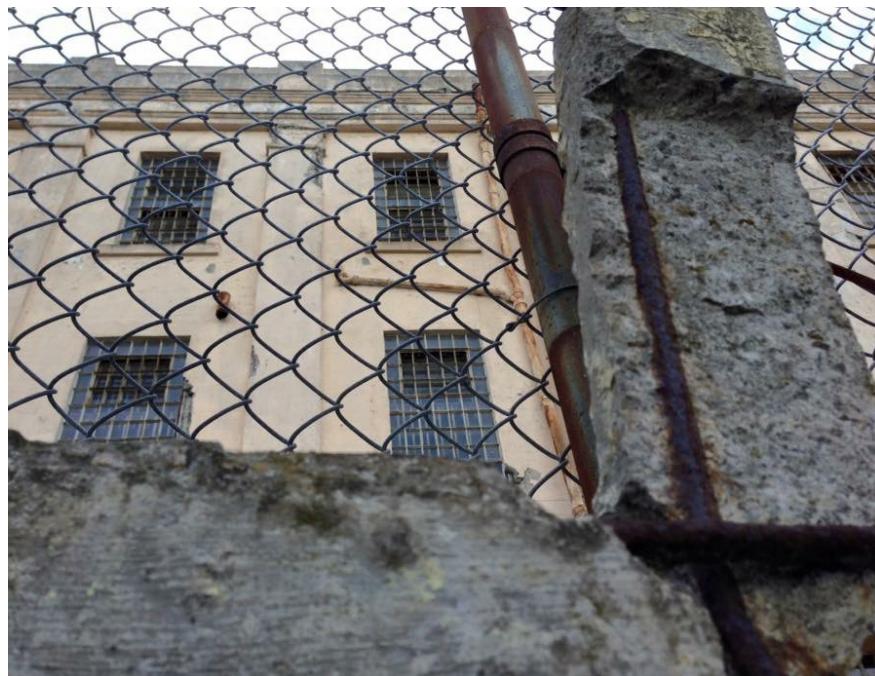
Riveted Box

Zeta Greene



Alcatraz

Emily Brown



Sophie

Omari McCord





(Capsule)
Nikki Callies

70

Fly Me to the Moon

Kacey Pogue





Salk Lloyd Grant Thompson



How Thoughts Shape Us and Themselves

Tim Topalov



dystopia

Collin Vore

Untitled

Saba Nourollahi





NYC

First Place, Visual
Aileen Candelario

Invite Your Monsters to Tea

Krista Wright



**General Store Window
Bodie, Ca**
Hank Harrington



Self Portrait in a Tidepool

John Stone

Goat Love

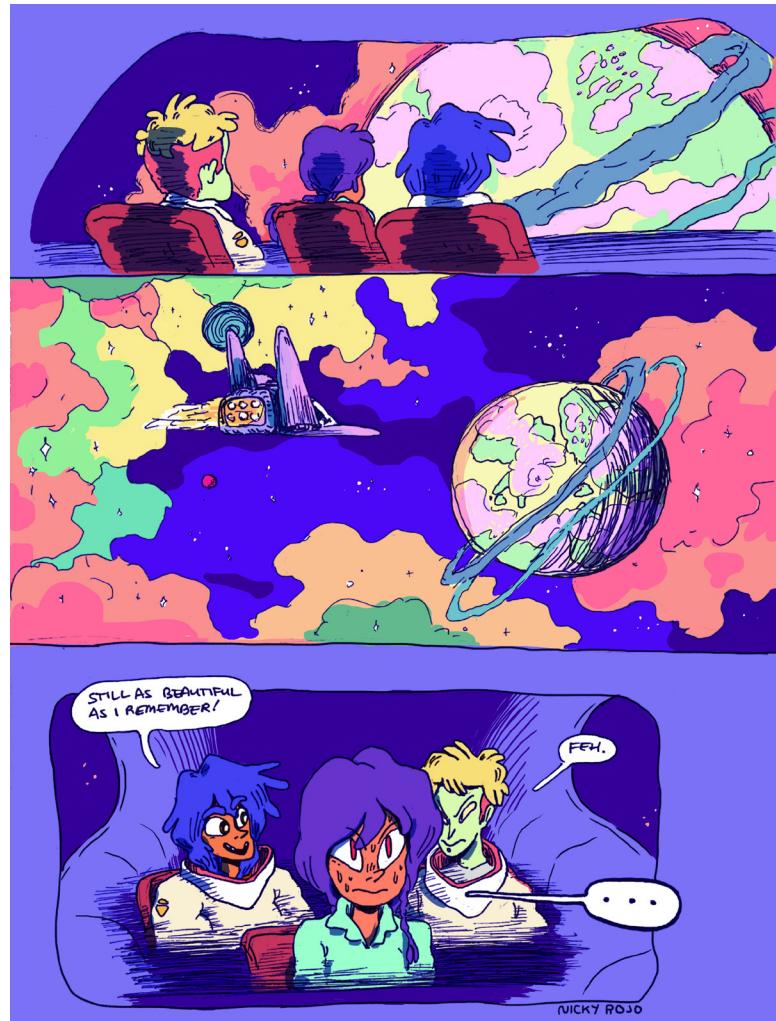
Third Place, Visual

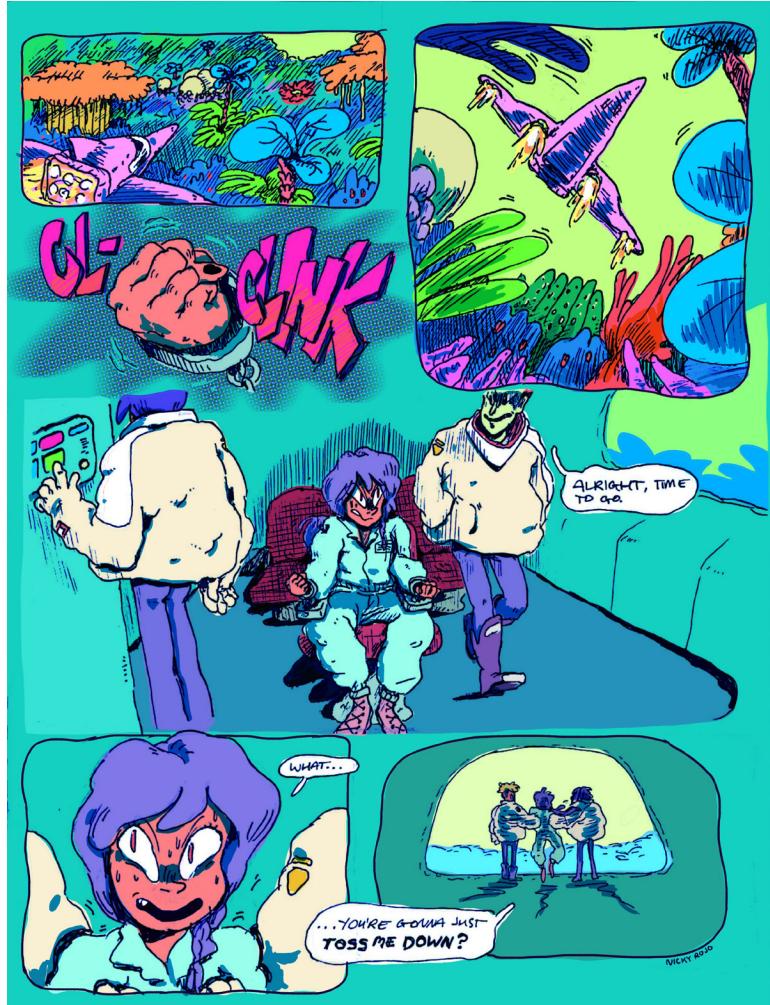
Emily Williamson

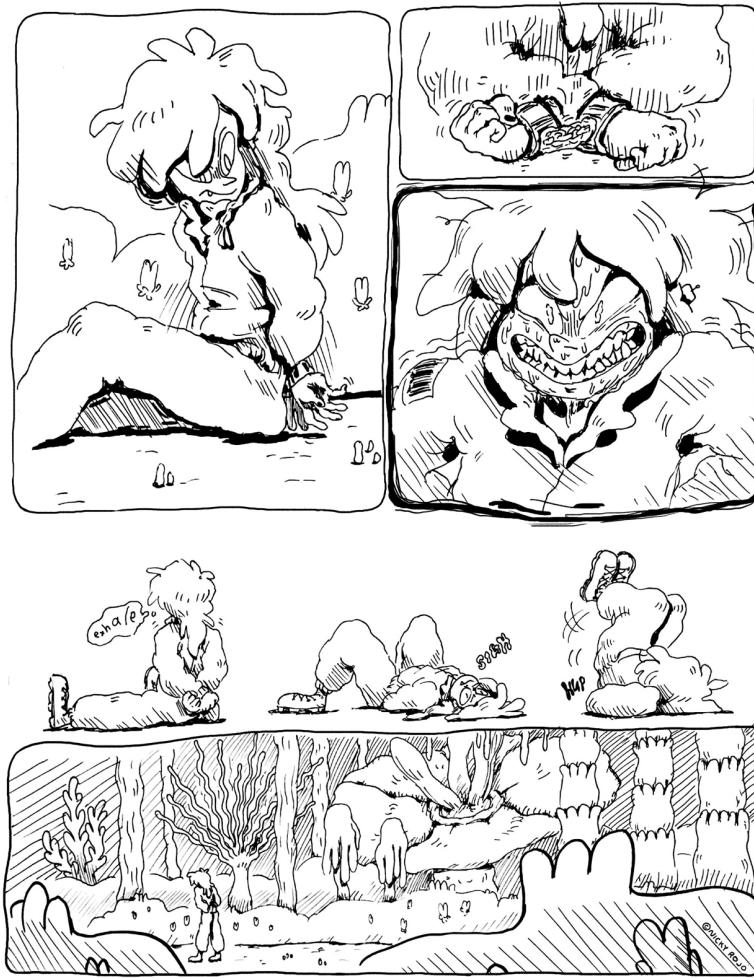


Jungle

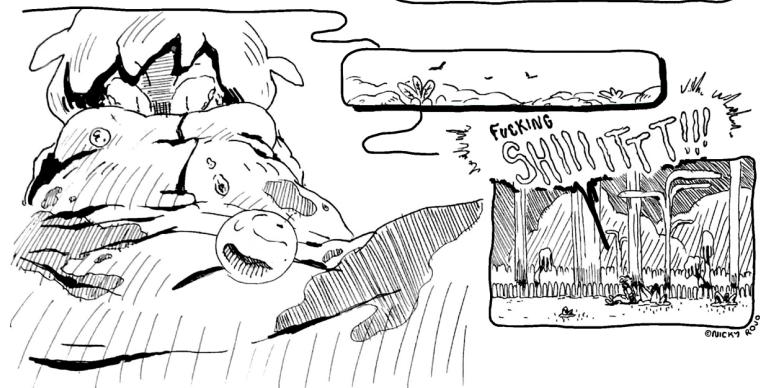
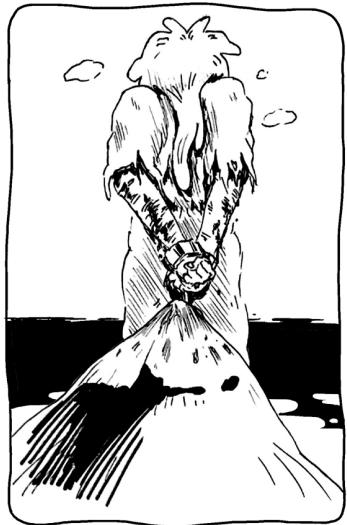
A Comic
by
Nicky Rojo

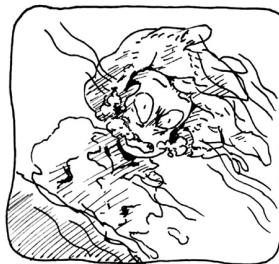
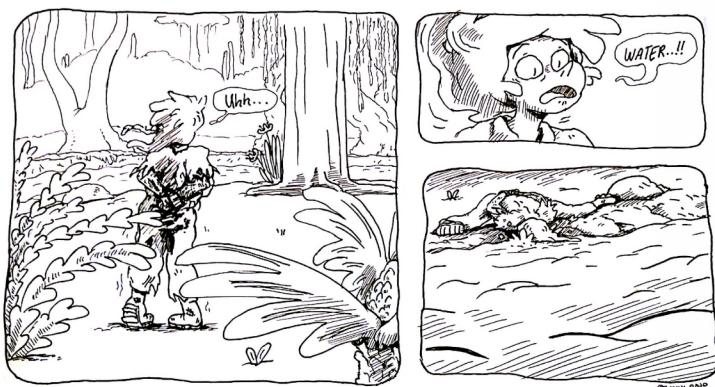












This is where the sheep's wool got spun off to,
To form the shell of my suit.

I can see this sheep now, his hooves dangling &
Snagging the pocket of the farmer who is shearing him.

If the sheep only knew how good he looked spread across
The lapels of my jacket, how his wool coat now lines both
My legs & hem at my ankles.

With five pockets, three on the outside & two sewn into the
Lining resting on my heart & spleen – let these be caves for
What my hands are tired of holding.

Someone tell the round plastic buttons hanging at my navel
That they're hardly being romantic when they slip into their
Holes, hugging the jacket closer to my body.

However, allow me to thank the poetic form that is the lone
Button of my trousers, the one holding my ass in place. If you
Were to ever lose the battle of my waist I'd laugh & cry at your
Surrender.

But at times when I am filling you on my way to the concert
Hall, I wish you were a suit of fifty years or maybe sixty.
Like the one Sinatra wore as he belted out "Luck Be a Lady"
Opening night Las Vegas, 1966.

As I stand in the mirror I fall in love with its cut, how the
Jacket agrees with each twist & pull of my hip. Now if I only
Knew what women thought as my jacket & broad shoulders
Follow each other's moves.

But instead I can't stop thinking of the sacrificial sheep,
The one who gave me this suit.

I picture his nude body shivering well into the third week of
December, his bald head ducking for cover from rain & me
Finding this sheep & gently draping my suit jacket
Over his hairless back as the sleeves hang at
His sides.

Anatomy of My Suit

Bryan Angel

The Exile's Lament

Freddy Cleveland

I.

"Your mother is looking for you," someone said.
But Z'ahak came home to find her mother gone.

She had threatened for months now, hinted for years, that she would one day take the road north to join H'tholdar's settlement. Z'ahak had not believed it would ever happen. This was their home.

She sat at the kitchen table in silence.

At the same table, during their first few months on Terrnivus, her mother had come home from the market with a basket full of fruit – one of each kind that she had been able to find. Back then, Z'ahak had only barely known the languages of Terrnivus, and she had struggled to name the fruits for her mother.

"This one, this one," her mother would say in their native tongue, pushing a fruit across the table. Amid laughter, Z'ahak sounded out the unfamiliar words.

"Apol," she said, and knew that it was close, but not quite correct. Her mouth could not form the words properly. But that was all years ago.

Gone.

Many of the Karakir had fled the city of Mearas.

Since H'tholdar's exodus, news had returned of the city he had founded in the north, a place where Karakir did not have to live beneath the tyranny of anyone.

And now her mother had gone, answered the call. Z'ahak always had the choice to follow. Always had the choice to run from Mearas like a rat fleeing a fire. Was that a choice?

The road north was the path of cowards.

My mother, Z'ahak thought. The coward.

Why should they be afraid of staying in Mearas? Just because they were unwelcome? The edicts of the city council tightened with every passing month. Karakir were allowed to the market only one day out of every ten, and even then the merchants had no obligation to sell to them. Any Karakir walking alone through the streets of Mearas ran the risk of a beating or being hauled off to the dungeons.

Even then, the city was home. It was where Z'ahak's first friendships had formed, where she had first learned what it was to be curious.

Why should I run?

Z'ahak felt her hand curl into a fist. Her mother was gone. What did that matter?

How long had it been since she was last home? A week?
More?

Z'ahak left and shut the door behind her.

She wouldn't leave without saying goodbye.

This was their home. The place they had built for themselves. It had taken them years, but they had built it.

She wouldn't leave.

II.

Z'ahak did her best to stand perfectly still.

Beside her, Jordi fidgeted.

Their treatises were being reviewed for inclusion in the Imperial library.

For years now, they had researched the Karakir together. Side by side, interviewing every Karakir that agreed to it.

They heard all the stories about the Voidplain, upon which the Karakir had been born. Z'ahak could barely remember the Voidplain, but the Elders who had lived there for most of their lives readily recalled its infinite reaches, and of the tribes that wandered it, never hoping to escape.

They told of the terrible wars they had waged.

And they heard of how L'dronok, the Guardian God, had appeared to them, and built for them a passage to Terrnivus. The tales as to how differed, for the stories of the Karakir were fluid things of shifting symbols, but all of the stories agreed that after aeons of wandering, their people had been delivered from the Voidplain onto the world of Terrnivus.

And after that, Z'ahak and Jordi pored over census data, tracing migration patterns, collecting stories large and small, constructing a history that had never been told before. They found old documents from learned men who had studied the bodies of the Karakir, that told of the great physical strength that could be roused, of the strange magic that coursed through their veins.

"Is all of this true?" Jordi used to ask.

Z'ahak shrugged, "I suppose so."

"Then show me."

And Z'ahak had entertained him by holding flowers in the palm of her hand and willing them to bloom with every slow breath she took.

"And what of the 'great strength'?"

But to that, Z'ahak shook her head. She was young, but she knew that the strength coiled beneath her skin was not to be treated lightly.

And Z'ahak and Jordi wrote the stories, curated all the disparate documents, spent long hours beside each other in the scriptorium, carefully copied the final text out of their notes. More than once, they had expressed the mutual hope that both works would be accepted to be read together. Z'ahak's treatise concerned history and religion, the stories her people had told

for as long as they could remember. Jordi's told of the Karakir's interactions with the native people of Terrnivus, and of their biology, as best could be described by the natural sciences.

Together, they thought, hoped, they had built a foundation for understanding. The Karakir had never been-...

"Acolytes Jordi and Z'ahak," the scholar at the center said. "You have each presented us with works to be included in the Imperial Library of Mearas. From Jordi, *The Karakir upon the Mortal Sphere*, and from Z'ahak, *The People of the Eternal Sand*."

Z'ahak felt herself nod slightly.

"That's right," Jordi said beside her. His voice shook.

"The work we have selected for inclusion in the Imperial Library of Mearas shows great ambition and dedication," the scholar said.

The work?

Z'ahak didn't even have a moment to process what was being said.

"Jordi, we found your work to be of greater quality, and are ready to include it upon a slight condition."

Z'ahak stood in silence, something deep and empty passing through her stomach. Jordi stepped forward.

"What's wrong with it?" he said.

"Nothing more than the title," the scholar said. "You have used two rather fanciful terms here. *Karakir* and the *mortal sphere* are both names of myth. It would be best if you-..."

Names of myth?

"Hold on a moment," Z'ahak stepped forward, the emptiness gone in a flash. In its place a fire. "Karakir is not-..."

"Acolyte Z'ahak," the scholar's voice cut her off. "We are addressing Acolyte Jordi."

"But *Karakir* is not a name from myth," Z'ahak said. "It is the name of my-..."

The scholar cut her off again, his voice so sharp

that it cowed her for a moment.

"Replace *Karakir* with *Elethnauri*, and *mortal sphere* with *Terrnivus*, and the board of scholars is prepared to include your work in the collection of..."

"*Elethnauri?*" Z'ahak stepped past Jordi, and made her voice as sharp as the scholars. "*Elethnauri* is not a name that single one of my people would call themselves."

The scholar's eyes met hers.

"It is the name used in the Library's records, in the Imperial Census, it is the name spoken in the prophecies of the Elder Days..."

"It's an insult," Z'ahak said.

"It is a noble name in the Blessed Tongue."

"It is an *insult*," Z'ahak spat. "*Eleth* meaning star. *Naur* for darkness, void, that which is not."

"Nobody is questioning your linguistic knowledge," one of the other scholars spoke.

"I am not a being of darkness," Z'ahak voice rose, and that fire within her seemed to sear just beneath her skin. She took another step forward "I am not a being that is not."

She felt a gentle hand in hers. Jordi.

"Z'ahak," he spoke softly. "Perhaps I can talk to them..."

"You do not speak for me," Z'ahak whirled on him and tore her hand from his. The dim room flashed with orange light, and Jordi recoiled. A spark drifted in the air where their hands had touched.

"It is clear the *Elethnauri* war-magic runs within you," the head scholar said, with a note of victory in his voice. "You know as well as I that warriors have no place-..."

"You know nothing," Z'ahak said, and crossed the rest of the distance to the scholars. One of them stood, but their leader kept his seat, his face a mask of calm. Before him sat the manuscripts that they had spent so many hours on.

"You think *this* is how my people make war?"

She reached out and pressed her palm against hers. In a flash, it crumbled into cinders, rising in a swirl of ash, glowing red and black. The lead scholar resisted for a moment before coughing and turning his head away, eyes watering.

The ashes settled, and the room was deathly silent.

"It's for the possibility of behavior like this that we were so reluctant to let *Elethnauri* into the Academy," the scholar said. "It's just as well you burned it. I have no interest in the stories of wandering barbarians."

Z'ahak summoned the foulest curse she knew and spat it at the scholar, the room, at Jordi, the Academy, at everything she could think of.

And it was gone.

Her work.

The Academy.

Jordi.

Gone.

And her mother had been so confused by that.

"Why did you burn it? Why did you not bring it home? They were our stories."

"I didn't write it for us. I wrote it for them. So they could see us."

"But why must they see us? Why give them our stories?"

"So that, some day, they will accept us."

And her mother was silent.

III.

And still later, more years, her mother had asked her.

"Where have you been, my child?"

How long had it been since then? Since Z'ahak looked into her mother's eyes and could not bring herself to lie?

Where have you been?

She had been at the Temple. She and the others who

were not afraid had gathered there to pray, to tell each other the old stories.

And T'soraq sat amidst them, with a smile that did not quite reach his eyes.

Some Homnar came for him, and there was no doubt in anyone's mind that he had done what they said he had done. T'soraq was an old Karakir. He had been a warrior when their people were still nomads, had killed a hundred Homnar before, and would kill a hundred more if given the chance. So when they came calling for him, when they came with their rusty swords, their ropes, their clubs, no Karakir in the Temple thought for a moment that he was innocent.

The Karakir's prayers were never ones of supplications. They praised the Guardian God, sometimes, thanked him and all the rest for their lives, for their place in the world. Their prayers were supposed to be loud communal, loud, full of song.

But on that night, they sat in silence, listening to the rise and fall of angry voices. The rattling of swords. Thumps on the heavy door of thrown rocks, the mob too afraid to approach the door. The incense scent and the smoke that carried it hung heavy in the air, but Z'ahak almost resented it.

I'll remember sitting here, she thought. Every time I come back. I'll remember sitting here, afraid.

And then T'soraq stood.

"I think it's time to see who is at the door."

He extended a hand and the air shone, glowed. His maul formed and solidified in a sudden swirl of light.

Years later, Z'ahak would think of it as something breaking.

She followed close behind T'soraq, out into the cobble-stone square that flickered with torchlight. Above everything, the moon watched silently, its clouds like the fingers of a child who wanted to cover her eyes but couldn't.

T'soraq's maul reflected nothing of the torchlight. The

Homnar seemed to pause as he strode towards them, as dozens of Karakir emerged behind him and spread out, in each of their hands a weapon.

What words they traded, Z'ahak could never remember. She only remembered standing there, feeling her bare legs shake as the night wind coiled beneath her tunic.

Where have you been, my child?

She had been with T'soraq, with the Karakir, with her people, spilling Homnar blood for the first time.

And where were you, mother? Cowering in your home? Avoiding the evening prayers because bad things happen to Karakir after dark?

She remembered rushing towards the torchlight, the rolling anger of her people all around her. Clubs and fists flailing, rising again and again. She remembered T'soraq swinging his maul, laughing, and Homnar crumpling before him.

She remembered leaping over a fallen Karakir, her spear raised, remembered as she drove it through a Homnar's ribs.

Who had it been? The fallen one?

She could remember knowing who it was. She remembered the anger, the tears she could not shed. And a sudden thirst for vengeance.

And all of it was lost to the frenzy of blood. The shifting of her weight as her spear struck, as Karakir all around her fell upon the Homnar. The Homnar on the ground, twisting and trying to rise, and the swords of the Karakir striking as swift as snakes, digging into flesh and withdrawing in clouds of arterial spray.

T'soraq's maul swinging like a pendulum, Homnar rushing towards him, searching for an opening, away from him in blind terror.

She remembered him laughing, and roaring at them, words, curses, promises of cruelty.

For years, for all the years the Karakir had lived on Terminvus, they had not made war, and for that, the Homnar

thought them weak.

War-magic, the scholars had said, and thought that they had seen it in the burning of a book. They knew nothing.

In truth, as T'soraq later said, it was mercy that had stayed their hands. If Karakir fought, fleshlings would die in droves. They would fall like wheat. Their blood spilling thicker than summer rains.

He had not said, *So will the Karakir.*

But Z'ahak remembered stepping over the body of someone she knew, but could not remember.

And in the end, the moon still watched, and the torches lay on the ground, burning, or guttering out in pools of blood, where they hissed and turned to ash and embers. The Homnar lay in piles, how many Z'ahak could not tell. Six Karakir had been slain, and they laid them out on the temple steps, their arms spread wide.

T'soraq made his way through it all, taking all of it in. His chest and hands and arms were slathered in blood, and the smile still did not reach his eyes.

And it was then that Z'ahak fell, shaking, kneeling in the damp until somebody helped her to her feet and offered a damp rag and a bucket of water already murky with blood. When she had wiped the gore from her eyes and hands, T'soraq was there.

He bent down to pick up her spear, and handed it to her. Smiling the whole time.

But something was broken.

Where have you been, my child?

Where were you, mother? And where have you gone?

IV.

And before any of that, they were still allowed to the market whenever they wanted.

Her mother held her hand tightly and pulled her

through the market crowds, glancing over her shoulder to check that she was still there. Z'ahak was small, small enough that all she could see of the market was skirts and robes and cloaks and legs. Through them, if she was lucky, she saw the stands full of fruits and vegetables that the Voidplain had never given them. She saw flashes of meats hanging to dry, could smell them, hear them sizzling over cooking fires, and all of it made her mouth water.

Her mother moved much too quickly for Z'ahak's liking. She wanted to stop, to ask her mother to buy that, and this, and that...

A flash of something behind the swirl of a cloak, red and bright, streaked with yellow.

This one? This one?

Apol.

And they laughed together.

She tugged at her mother's hand, but found herself suddenly free of her mother's grip.

Her mother looked back and beckoned her forward before pushing her way through the crowd.

Z'ahak looked helplessly after her, then back in the direction of the flash of color.

She slipped through the bustling legs of the crowd to find herself peering up at a fruit vendor, a heavyset Homnar speaking to someone else. Her mother was almost out of sight. Z'ahak snatched one of the apples up and ran after her mother.

If she was going to be dragged to the market, made to fight her way through the crowds of Homnar, then the least her mother could do was buy her an apple. They would go home, and they would share it, and....

Her ear exploded with a flash of fiery pain, and she felt herself falling. The apple slipped from her grip. She watched it as the ground rushed up to meet her, her eyes still watching it when a foot crushed it without breaking stride. She didn't have time to break her fall, and the cobblestones struck her cheek

with an angry smack.

"Little thief," a snarl above her, and a tug on her hair that turned into another wave of fire. She screamed and scrambled to her feet, her hands working against thick fingers. Her hair....

The hand came out of nowhere, and her ear erupted again, a ringing, and the sensation that something sharp was pushing into her skull. She could still feel herself screaming.

"No ka dos! No ka dos!" her mother rushing towards the vendor, her basket still gripped tightly. And her voice, then through her accent, "What are you doing?"

The vendor dropped her.

"Voidspawn," he turned on her and rose to his full height. "Tell your bitch that in this market, we pay for things."

Z'ahak could see in her mother's eyes that she did not know what had happened, that she did not understand the vendor's words.

"What?" her mother said, and the dull word made her sound stupid.

The vendor pushed her, and her mother fell. Z'ahak screamed again, but nobody seemed to notice. A ring had formed around them, and the vendor stood over mother, and nobody seemed to notice.

The basket was in his hand, all of its contents spilled over her mother's head. He swung it hard and her mother raised an arm to defend herself. Z'ahak wanted more than anything to cover her eyes, to look away, but she found that she could not.

The vendor swung the basket again and again, and Z'ahak kept screaming, until the wicker was broken and splintered.

Her mother's hair had fallen from its bun, and her arm and face were covered in scratches, and her cheeks shone with tears.

When it was over, the audience slowly dissolved, and

moved past her without even looking, until Z'ahak took her hand. And then her mother gathered her up in her arms.

Where have you gone?

Where have you gone?

V.

You wouldn't leave without saying goodbye.

She reached the Temple without being incident and wound her way through the wooden barricades that dotted the square. As she mounted the steps, she heard the sound of prayer-songs.

A guard lurked in the shadows beside the door, and roused suddenly as she approached.

"Z'ahak," he said. "Your mother..."

A wave of relief flooded her body, "Where is she?"

"She's just arrived. Making the pilgrimage in the morning, eh?"

"Pilgrimage," Z'ahak laughed, and the relief ebbed slightly, the same frustration that kept her away from home returning for a moment.

Where were you, mother? Cowering?

"Retreat then," the guard laughed.

Z'ahak smiled and slipped through the door.

There were more Karakir in the Temple then Z'ahak had seen in months, but as she searched among them for her mother's face, she realized that most of them were dressed to travel. Sacks of supplies and packs on wooden frames had been piled neatly along one side of the sanctuary.

The songs still echoed through the vaulted ceiling, and for a moment, Z'ahak felt herself smile. Not the acquiescent smile she had given the guard, or the grim smiles she had learned from T'soraq.

A certain peace, a joy.

Remembering something that had been lost, and here

was the faint hope of finding it again.

She felt someone touch her hand, and she turned. Her mother, smiling at her. Z'ahak was still not used to being taller. Without a word, her mother pulled her into an embrace, and Z'ahak found herself bending low to lay her head against her mother's shoulder.

"Mother," Z'ahak said, whispering into her mother's ear. The scent of her hair that was so familiar. "I'm so glad I..."

"I know," her mother said. "I would not leave without... Well."

Z'ahak pulled away, and they looked at each other. How long had it been? A week.

Maybe more.

But her mother looked older than Z'ahak remembered.

They stood there, amid the music, for a long moment, looking at each other. At last, the smoke from the torches made Z'ahak's eyes sting, and she blinked and looked away.

"You're finally going, then?" Z'ahak said.

Her mother shrugged and nodded.

"I never thought you would," Z'ahak said. "I thought-..."

Something thick filled her throat. She sighed heavily and crossed her arms to keep from crying. Her mother noticed, and reached out a hand to touch her arm.

"I thought this was our home," Z'ahak said.

"We are wanderers," her mother shrugged again. "Perhaps we are meant to wander. We wandered the Voidplain, we wandered Terrnivus... perhaps Mearas is just another camp along the way."

Z'ahak shook her head. She knew the stories. She had spent her whole life hearing them, and had studied them like no one else had.

"The stories say that we are not meant to be wanderers. We are meant to find a home."

"So why must it be *Mearas*?"

"Because we're *here*," Z'ahak said. "We are part of the city. We built a Temple. We built walls for ourselves. We've... we've done so much."

"And the city drives us out," her mother said. "Again and again, we are told that our kind is not welcome here. Our people are beaten in the streets. Our Temple has become a fortress. This is not a place to call home."

"It's *my* home," Z'ahak said, and shrugged her mother's hand away. "I've been here since I was a child. To call Mearas home... I've earned that right, haven't I?"

Z'ahak had not meant to ask a question, but now it hung in the air, and Z'ahak wished that she could take it back. Wished she could say, *I've earned that right. I've earned it. I've fought for it. I've bled for it.*

Haven't I?

"If anyone has, I suppose it's you," her mother sighed. "But you're young. You're not afraid."

"I am afraid," Z'ahak said. "I'm afraid every day. But I can't just run away."

"You're young," her mother said. "And so you won't run. You'll fight. I've made my peace with it. But I'm old, Z'ahak. Old and so tired of being afraid."

Z'ahak felt her mother's weariness in a sudden rush. A weight that seemed to land on her shoulders.

"I'm not tired yet," she said, half to convince herself. "I hope I never will be."

"I hope so too, child," her mother said.

And they did not speak of fear again.

They spoke of her mother's journey, and the perils she might face. They spoke of H'tholdar's settlement, and the peace her mother hoped to find. She said the word 'home' again.

They spoke of the times when they wandered the Voidplain and marveled at the stars, and of how Z'ahak would sit

nestled in her mother's lap, drawing parts of the stories in the sand.

They spoke of the lives that Mearas had given them. They spoke of the beach and the Endless Waters, dotted with sails of trading ships. They spoke of how the city looked in the rain, of the heat and laughter that filled the taverns then.

They spoke of the leak that they had never fixed, and of the meals they had shared, and the meals they hoped to share again one day.

They prayed with the rest of their people, lifting their voices in song, thanking the Guardian for all that they had been given.

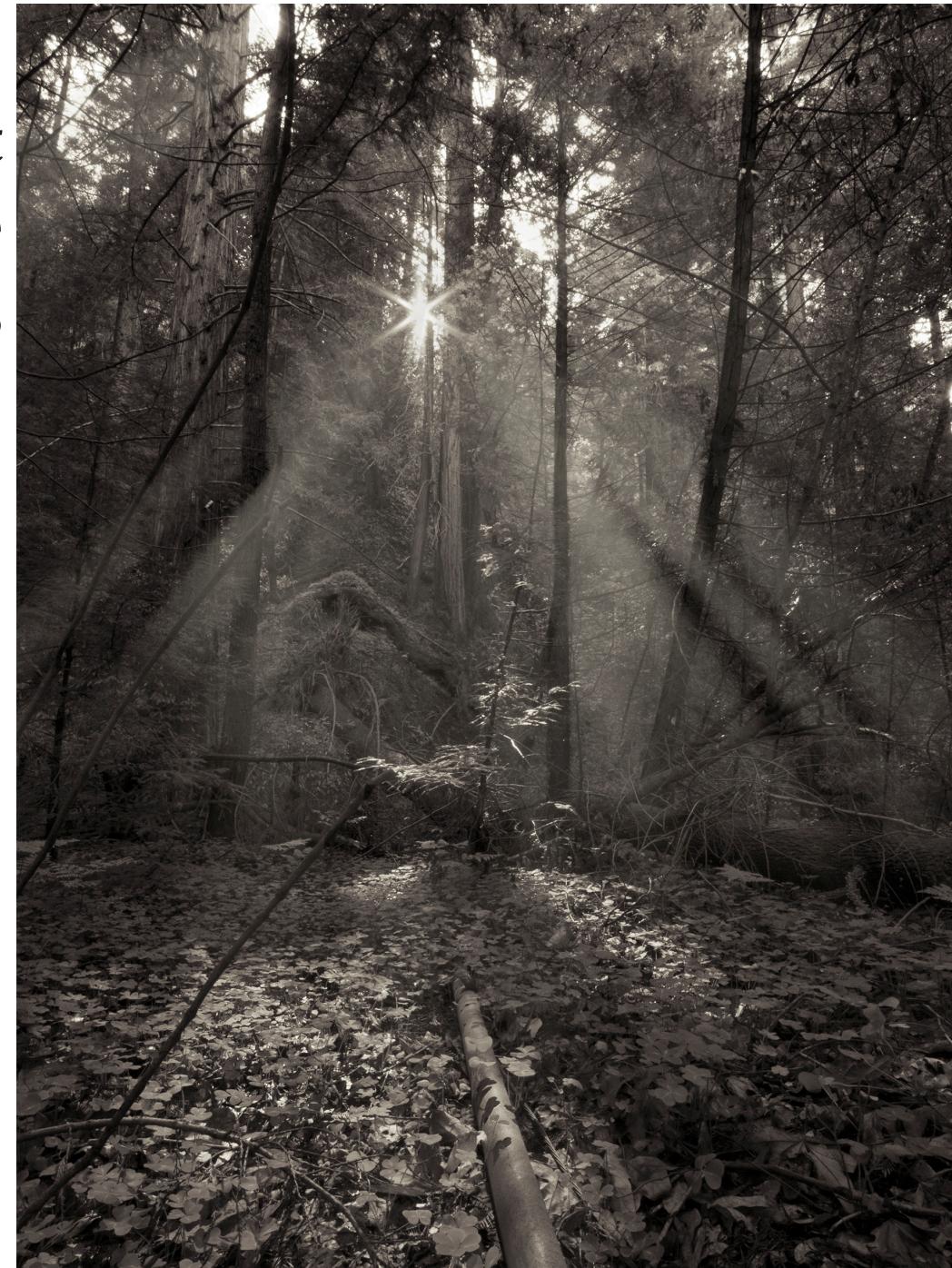
In the hour before dawn, the songs faded, and the pilgrims who were to undertake the journey north lifted their heavy packs onto their backs while the other Karakir loaded their supply wagons. And all around them, the sound of farewells while Z'ahak embraced her mother. She tried to whisper something into her ear but could find no words.





Light Through the Trees

Daniel Kresge



Cain's Remains

Barry Munson

Santa Barbara Hotel

Morgan DeLuna





Inspiration pulled me awake this morning,
The biggest pest I've had the pleasure of calling friend.
"Get up and look outside," it whispered.

I tried to brush it away, but it tickled my heart until my resistance crumbled.
I abandoned my cozy blankets for a realm of toe-numbing cold.

"All right, what am I seeing today?" I asked as I threw open the curtains.
Inspiration just laughed and said, "You tell me."

Inspiration

Sarah Broberg

Bambi

Kehani Geronilla

A sudden roar of laughter woke Penny up. She looked around the room trying to remember where she was this time. Paul's house, he always left the TV on. As always, it was on one of the family networks that played repeats of old cheesy sitcoms. It was the only laughter that filled this dreary room. Penny reached for the remote and shut off the only light there was.

Paul's familiar scented bed sheets reeked as though a skunk had been washed down with a cheap bar of soap. Penny felt the room spin as sounds of empty glass clanked loudly against one another.

She buttoned up her sheer black top, turning towards the window allowing the moonlight to expose the top of her breasts swollen from Paul's usual callous way with her. Tears strengthened Penny's cloudy vision. Careless of whatever else she dressed herself in. Penny closed the door behind her leaving Paul undisturbed.

Penny drove the entire way home with her lights off. The scattered and flickering streetlights were barely enough to guide her home. She always had faint hope of someone, anyone, who would want to attempt to help her. Perhaps flash their lights at her or make any kind of gesture to help her out of the dark. Instead whatever drivers were out at that time of night avoided her. They kept their distance, like Paul, like all of the men in her life.

As Penny made her last turn before arriving home, bright blue and cherry colored lights wildly swirled behind her. The dark, tunnel like street she drove on was quickly being exposed. Immediately Penny pulled over while rolling down her window and turned off her car.

Heavy footsteps approached her and another bright light directly upon her face. Penny didn't turn away and welcomed the light as the officer offered a small nod. He looked down, saw a doe-eyed gaze, and gently asked her for her license and registration. Penny reached over, grabbing the documents she needed.

"Miss, are you aware that your lights are turned off?" Asked the officer.

"I'm sorry; I must have not been paying attention."

"It's pitch black miss. How could you not have realized that you were driving in the dark?"

"I'm used to it. I wasn't trying to hurt anyone officer."

"Not even yourself?" asked the officer

Penny broke her stare, now looking at the officer's gold badge. She began to ease at the sight of it.

"No, at least I didn't mean to..." Penny answered.

"Well that's a relief," responded the Police officer, offering her a polite smile.

Finally putting away his paper pad he asked Penny, "Miss where do you live?"

"Somewhere along this road." Trying to make sight of the bleakness covering her windshield.

The officer paused again, before continuing, "Miss I'm going to follow you home and make sure you arrive safely. Is that understood?"

Penny nodded in agreement.

The officer walked back to his car. Penny turned her car on, fastened her seat belt then made sure her lights were turned on before slowly pulling back onto the road.

The officer followed at a near distance. Penny knew that the situation could have gone a lot worse. The officer hadn't even asked if she had been drinking. Penny's heart dropped as soon as the sign to her building appeared on the corner, she pulled into her parking spot and turned off her car. The officer turned into her building lot to park and met her outside of her car. Penny got out and immediately thanked him.

"Miss you do understand that this isn't something that I would or should ever do, I made an exception for you tonight," Said the officer.

"Why?" Asked Penny

"Excuse..." The officer stopped himself and paused before continuing. "Why shouldn't I have helped you?" The officer asked cautiously.

Penny didn't respond. Instead she leaned up against the back of her car and stared down at her feet, dressed in Paul's tennis shoes.

"I wasn't trying to help myself out there. Why should anyone else bother?" Penny asked still looking down at Paul's shoes.

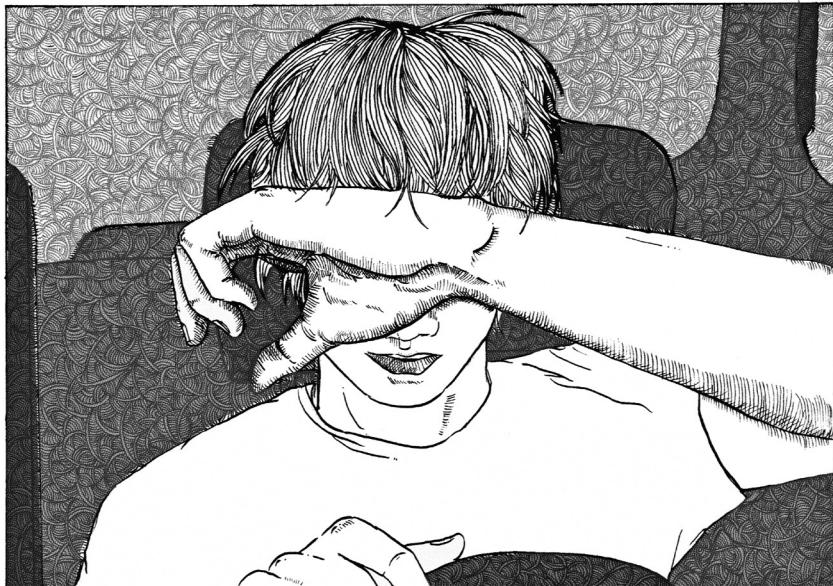
The officer chuckled "Miss, no one is so helpless that they're not deserving of a little grace granted their way."

Penny no longer could keep staring down at Paul's worn down tennis shoes, and looked up and offered the police officer a smile.

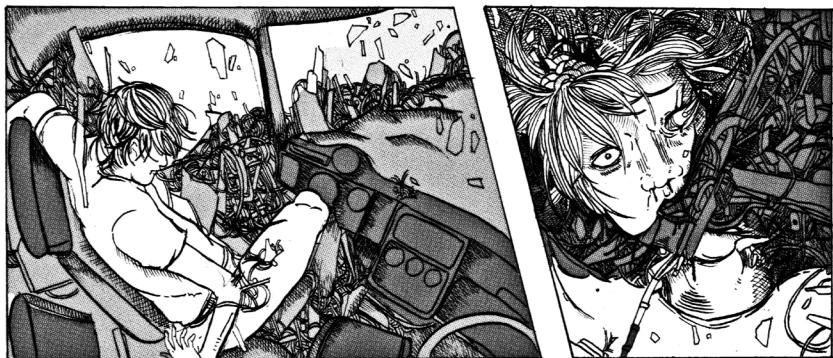
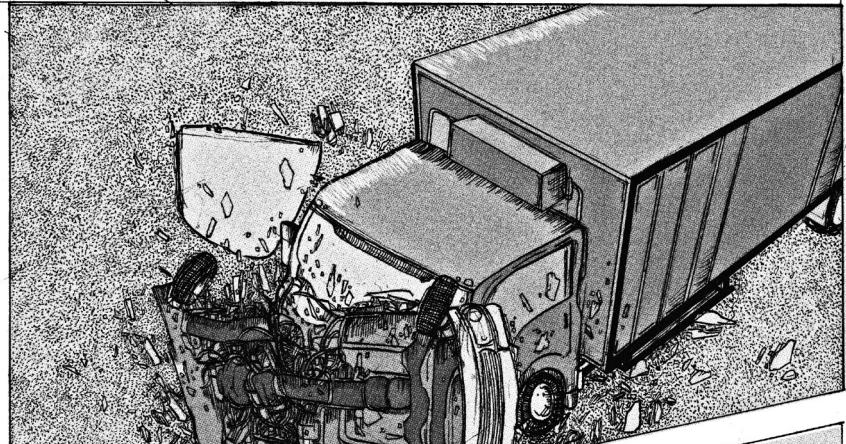
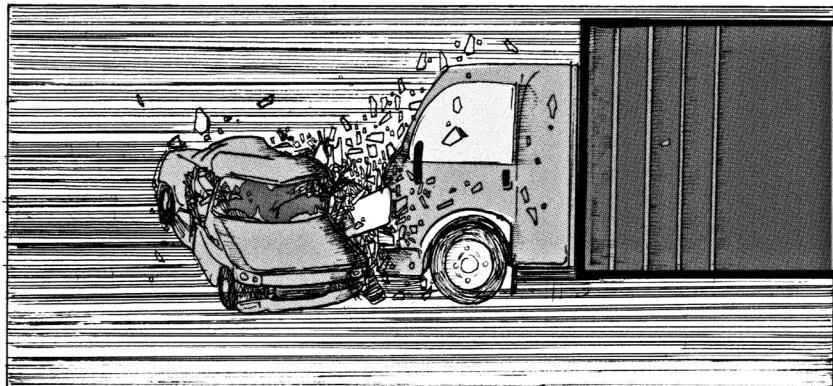
"Well miss, I'll wait for you to go inside." The officer extended his hand to shake hers.

The officer's firm handshake made Penny reluctant to let go right away. There was a feeling of certainty. Penny offered one last smile before turning away and walked slowly to her apartment door, glancing back at the officer and his moonlit gold badge.

Dream



Kevin Roca



A Beginning Half

Joung Min Pak

There is a saying in Korea, "A good beginning is half the battle." Around seven years ago, I came to the U.S.A. At that time, I came here to visit my sister and her family, but soon after, I got married, in only seven months, to a Korean-American. Actually, I did not expect to live here, so even if I got married, I wanted to go back to Korea because I was afraid to live in the U.S.A because of my lack of speaking English. Of course, before I had learned Japan and Russian, but I thought I was not young enough to learn new language again. Not only that reason, but I should adapt to a new culture and environment of the U.S.A. However, my husband wanted to stay here. As time went by, we had not decided yet. First for three years I worked at a Korea company in the U.S.A. After I had a baby, I gave up to live in Korean, which was my hometown. It meant that I have to find out how to live in the U.S.A. well, but the situation had deteriorated after I gave a birth. The reason was my health failed, and I heard my mother has a cancel. For two years, I did not want to go outside, and I avoided seeing others. Then, my husband got a mail from Palomar College to be accepted as a nursing student. We moved from Austin, Texas to San Marcos, California. When my husband handed out his papers to the Palomar College administration center, I felt like I wanted to study English, too. After that time, I was looking for how can I study English. Nobody could help me, but I could not give up when I looked at my son's eyes. I did not want to be a coward and lazy mom to my son. I wanted to show him to do my best. I talked to my husband about what he thought. He was willing to agree

with my opinion, and going to support my study. In 2014 fall semester, I started to take my first ESL class hard. At that time, my son was two- years- old and I could not send him to day-care because there were long waiting lists near my house. I was obliged to entrust my son to my husband when he did not have class. When I got homework, I did it at the playground, watching my son. Most days, I was ill. Taking five units was not a big deal to others, but I had to endure my illness and manage my family. After I finished my first semester, I had confidence. Actually, during the first semester I was going to give up my study several times because my medicine had side effects even though my medical doctor had changed the medicine three times. I felt like if I gave up now, I could not challenge anymore. I tried to keep studying, going on a diet and exercise. After I finished my second semester, I needed to make my goal. I met a Palomar College counselor. He explained and answered my questions kindly even though my English speaking skills was not good. Now I have a goal that is be a dental hygienist. I know it will be a long time or my dream could change, but I will challenge again and again, for to be a proud mom of my son, a wife, and myself.

Apathy

Sarah Broberg

6 a.m. and I'm leaning on the fridge door, a bowl of Lucky Charms hanging off my fingers. My sleep-deprived eyes stare into the fridge for a solid five seconds, then I inch the door shut. "Hey Dad?"

"Mm?"

"There's an octopus in the fridge."

"Excellent."

"It's alive."

"Mhm."

"...Its tentacles are wrapped around the milk carton."

"I see." He sketches a number into his Sudoku puzzle.

I blink once. I shuffle into the living room.

"Mom, did you know there's an octopus in the fridge?"

She looks up from her laptop, eyebrows raised. "A live one?"

"Yes."

"There's a live octopus. In the fridge."

"Yes."

She sighs. "Not again." She returns to her work, shaking her head.

I open my mouth, shut it, then retreat to my last resort. I bang on my brother's door. "Jason! There's an octopus in the fridge!"

"Kay, thanks!" comes the muffled reply.

My spine stiffens as my fate becomes clear: It's up to me, and me alone. Stoically, I trek back to the kitchen. I open the fridge. Two eyes bulge out at me, eight tentacles hugging the milk carton like a teddy bear. The creature and I regard one other for a long, expressionless moment.

I close the fridge. I never minded dry cereal anyway.

Bulb

Stephen Rebernik

A light bulb generates light through the burning of a wire.
Or at least the old ones did.

Energy moves through the copper line and creates a glow,
Which then passes through the glass.

Sometimes the wire can be damaged or otherwise inadequate,
At least when compared to the quality of a new string.
This can lead to the light being weakened.
Or it can possibly flicker in a buzz.

A weakened glow is typically still revered,
As you can still fill a room with a quiet light.
But it is when a bulb begins to lose its glow that
People begin to comment.

"That light used to be brighter," they say,
"It used to remove the shadows in the corner better."
They fear that something is wrong with it,
That the light bulb and what it produces are of less value.

Other times the wire may grow wearied from use,
Stressed to the point that the light becomes inconsistent.
The glow sent off by the bulb flashes and fades,
Shifting in and out of luminescence.

"I don't like it," they say, "It hurts my eyes."
People do not see value in a light that is erratic,
That goes between the light and the dark,
And allows shadows at times when they wish it to remove them.

At times the issue is a flawed wire entirely,
Perhaps damaged in time or from the factory itself.
The bulb, despite having power, can produce no life,
And is doubted for being dysfunctional.

A bulb like this may be discarded, for what use is a light bulb
That cannot produce light?
Perhaps there should be a way to repair wires that have been
snapped,
Or exist in a state of disrepair.

Sometimes it is the glass that is seen as defective,
With a crack or a smudge or some other imperfection.
The light it produces is dimmed by the outward appearance,
And people dislike it despite the light it creates.

It is easy to judge a light bulb,
For it cannot talk back.
It cannot argue for its value,
Even if it creates light all the same.

Light bulbs are judged for their shape,
For the abstract or unaccepted quality of their illumination,
Or even for the color of it or the way the bulb is screwed in,
As if the light created is not light.

However the form or the quality of the bulb is judged,
The power moving through it still generates light.
There is value in what is produced and in the bulb itself,
Regardless of how the two are perceived.

Aileen Canadelario

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A Slow Understanding of a Quick Realization

Gabriella Pleasant

I remember the day my next door neighbor decided to finalize her divorce. She and her husband had been having marital problems since we all moved into the neighborhood. She would punctuate her remarks to him with words like

Idiot!

Why the hell would you even ask me that?

Duh!

while he in turn neglected his medication and would stare grimly away whenever we tried to talk to him.

Once, on a night uncomfortably close to the day she came to us to announce her decision about her marriage, he began to behave oddly. He sat in his car with the lights off, the windows rolled all the way down, and all the doors as open as they would go. It was near midnight when a mariachi band whistled and sang at full blast out of his speakers for three encores. Growing up where we had, my family was accustomed not to call the police - never call the police - but instead to turn off all the lights and stare at the blaring car through the slits in the blinds as the dogs growled at the crack under the front door.

By then it seemed the divorce was inevitable. She came to us only a few days later, wailing on our couch about his mistreatment as I leaned against the opposite end. I was not so much an active part of her life but more of an accessory that was kept in the back of the drawer for those odd days she needed it. My job was to wait until I was called by my Mom to ferry drinks and tissues to our guest. As I listened to her list off

his transgressions the words

Idiot!

Why the hell would you even ask me that?

Duh!

came back to me. But I didn't mention them. Just as my Mom didn't mention the mariachi band and their jubilant celebration of the man next door's mind snapping like a dry twig. I tried not to listen at all, but as I was pouring her some water she began to bemoan the fate of her daughter. Her daughter. Who would suffer the fate of becoming a latch-key kid and fall through the cracks of society.

The stream of water from the pitcher faltered, then sloshed messily into the cup. I nearly looked over, nearly let her see my reaction, before I caught myself. I grew up with a house key. My brothers had their own as well. A few of my first accomplishments were learning how to do dishes standing on a chair so that I could reach the sink and knowing how to lock the door to let myself in or out. Everyone on our street, except for her family, had latch-key kids. If her daughter fell to that level she would surely turn into a hoodlum overnight. She would become pregnant in high school with a trail of pills to her house. I considered mentioning that a trail of pills already led to her house, whether her husband took them or not. But saying that would be the first step in becoming a bickering housewife, sapping off the emotions of others while judging their children and humiliating their husbands.

So I brought her the water. I placed it down quickly, before finding my way back to my side of the couch. My Mom's

lips were thinned and her finger was tapping idly against the side of her mouth. A way of saying “Look at me! I’m a sure indication that you should probably shut up now.” But my neighbor was unreachable. Inconsolable. Her baby, a *latch-key kid*. My Mom tried to reason that it was fine as long as she kept her husband in her daughter’s life. But hearing that was the last straw. My neighbor went ballistic.

He did this to us! To this family!

That idiot!

Why would you even suggest such a thing!

She left soon after, the worst of her crying fit over. She still shook badly and whined about small things, but it was obvious the cry tired her out too much to keep it up. Mom was sick of looking at her, but didn’t want to appear rude, so she made me join them in walking back across the street. My neighbor’s mascara was smeared, so that it looked like twin dark wings lifting away from the curve of her cheeks. Her nose was very red. My Mom apologized about our rough tissues without looking at her. My neighbor shook her head, straw blonde hair slapping her face before springing away, like it was afraid of touching her.

“I don’t care. Rough tissues are the least of my problems now that I have to abandon my baby! Now that she has to fend for herself! A *latch-key kid!* God!”

She looked up at my Mom with pleading eyes, willing any sympathy out of her that she may have missed in the last hour and fifteen minutes on our couch. My Mom didn’t smile or offer her apologies. She nodded once, quickly, before wishing her a good night and turning to leave.

I followed behind, hearing my neighbor mutter sadly about how her night would never be good, her family is broken, her children are-

“Do you feel abandoned?” My Mom suddenly asked me. We were almost across the street. She didn’t stop walking, but I saw her looking at me out of the corner of her eye. Her

mouth was a thin line.

I couldn’t answer right away. Until that moment I hadn’t realized that having a key to my own house would turn me into a hoodlum, or guarantee my fall from polite society and meaningful relationships. But honestly, I wasn’t thinking about that so much, I was thinking about my neighbor’s husband. I was thinking about the way his hands always shook and the bottle of white pills he left out whenever I was over to visit. Sometimes on the kitchen table, sometimes on the floor, and once in the microwave. I was thinking about their daughter. Their daughter. Who had to endure not just her father’s slow, silent suicide but her mother’s volcanic temper and colossal need for love love love. I was thinking about the quiet, almost pleading way her father spoke to her mother and his stubborn refusal to take the pills that would have apparently saved his family. I was thinking about the mariachi band.

I knew my Mom was less interested in truth and more in comfort, and her resemblance to the women we just left repulsed me. But I told her what she wanted to hear and then went inside with her. Two weeks later there was only one car in their garage. A month later there were two, but one belonged to someone new. Over the past few years those cars come and go and sometimes come back again; like her tears, but more quietly. Her husband is gone but the pills never left, only now whenever I go over to visit the bottle is at least half empty. The doors to their cars are always closed and the windows are always rolled up, but the house has the music now.

Idiot!

Why the hell would you even ask me that?

Bitch!

There are always screams and threats and tears and then she’ll come running over to our house, with a trail of pills behind. I remember the day my neighbor finalized her divorce as the last day I believed her.

Trying

Editor's Choice, Fiction

Tessa Collins

You, sitting in front of a keyboard and a blank screen, figure it's got to be someone like you, on some level. That if you are going to write anything of substance, the voice there needs to come from a place of experience. Because you want your character to be relatable, believable. You want people to connect to what you make. But you think about it, about all the things you are, and you don't know if you even are relatable exactly. If those things, all together, don't make you too much of a niche thing. If people would like you. And whether you want to know that so soon.

So you change the obvious things. The big ticket items. You make him a different gender. A different sexuality. He's taller than you are. His eyes are different. He's better looking, or maybe just more intimidating. And then, you give him just a part of you to start.

You give him your rough feet. The thick scratched surface he runs his fingers over absent mindedly some days. He rarely thinks about why they're like that, but if he did, he'd remember how he saw someone walk across hot coals on TV once. Just a little kid, sitting cross legged on the floor of his living room, and this person ran across fire on that little screen. He was horrified, amazed really, and refused to wear shoes outside for years after. The rough dirt roads, the cement sidewalk in front of his house, the sun baked asphalt in the road. He would always stand, walk slowly, and let them burn, because he needed to be prepared. Because if he did this now, if he burnt them raw and let them heal over, then it wouldn't hurt walking on the coals later. He would be able to take it, and with that childish certainty, he endured.

You give him the dirt under your nails, and the way you rip them off. It's a habit he can't break, no matter how old he gets. He goes a few weeks sometimes, but then he'll catch sight of the dirt caked under them and chip at the side until he can tear it down to the cuticle. Because if there aren't any nails to get stuck under, his fingers will stay clean. The feeling of picking the dirt out instead, sticking himself with a toothpick and dragging it over, has never been something he can take. It sticks around for too long.

He has stacks and stacks of books he hasn't read. Stupid trivia collections, a book of essays on what it's supposed to mean to be a man or a hero, and a bunch of legends from the country he might have been from if his family had stayed put. He's always too busy to get through them, even when he's not really doing anything. But he doesn't want to become the kind of person who doesn't read, like the people his mom talks about from work or the kids in his classes who live on sparknotes. So he can't help but buy another book every time he walks through the bargain aisle.

He has a phobia of subways because he grew up in a place without them, without even basements, and being underground makes him feel like he's suffocating.

He has these legs that ache. He digs his fingers into his knees, clenching around the bone as if he's trying to pull something out, to tear that seeping feeling right out of the flesh so it will just stop, if only he could just cut them off-

No, that's too much. That's too far. You pull back.
Backspace, backspace.

But you give him the little burns around your knuckles. How they still hurt when he reaches into the oven. How they heat, like they remember. As if the little marks are trying to remind him to be careful.

And you give him the wrinkle on one side of your mouth. Because he's not as confident as he'd like to be, and smirks when he should smile. Turns sincere comments into a joke if there's a split second too much of a pause in the response. It's easier like that. He's used to protecting himself.

You keep giving him things, the position you sleep in because you don't like your back to the door, the way you let your headaches stay sometimes because it's something distracting, and the way you don't like horror movies because they make you paranoid again.

Until he's walking down the street by himself at night, closing his eyes when he hears a sound because the static black parts of his vision move and take shape when he can't see clearly. It's like white noise, his brain making sense of nothing and just putting him on edge. So he blocks it out and keeps walking, better to not see anything.

There are little rocks in his shoes that cause him just a little pain with every step. He shakes his leg to try and dislodge them, get them to settle in the spaces between his toes. Just so he can keep moving without the discomfort, because the burn didn't really prepare him at all. For anything.

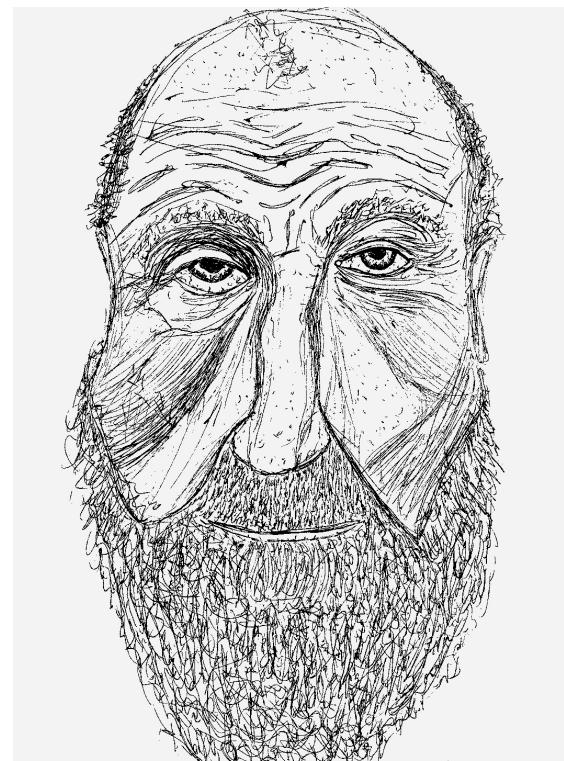
It didn't make a difference, and he's not changing. He's a full grown adult and he's still closing his eyes to the dark like he's a little kid. Stubbornly walking forward. He's not changing. He's stuck, trying to ignore the shifting pixels in the corners of his vision to assure himself he's still alone, still-

The anxiety kicks in again. He's too much of you. They'll know.

So you blow him apart.

You make him a family. His feet go to his nephew. A bit of a neurotic little thing, but sweet. His nails go to his mother, and he never really notices that about her. The books go to someone he falls in love with some day, he won't get it. Nothing will go to his father, because if the man's not around to start with, the kid won't have to worry about why he doesn't feel anything when his dad is gone.

It's exhausting. You don't want to look at it anymore, so you close all the windows. You didn't even give him a name.



Summer Vibes

Darby Norris

And everyone kept driving by

Briana Munoz

The brown, elderly woman
Somewhere around four foot nine
Waited for the bus with an umbrella, as the rain came down
Brand new cars busily bumpered by
To arrive on time
To their nine to five office jobs
Freshly detailed rims picking up gutter rain water
Splashing unto the elderly woman's toes
Her skin like the worn leather
That was made into her woven sandals
Through her face, you could almost see
The poverty and corruption in the village that she came from.
The small elderly woman mirrored my own grandmother
Who on Christmas, slaved around our kitchen
Making us a fanciful stew called posole
My grandmother, who raised all six of her younger brothers
The same woman who began working when she was only
eleven
As I slowed at the stop light
I wondered where her family was
Why no one had yet offered her a ride
I pulled over, and sat
On a bench covered in street hieroglyphics
I noticed in her shaky hand, her wrinkled bus fare
"Can I offer you a ride?"
She looked at me, nodded her head with a slight smile
And slowly moved her head back looking the opposite way
She didn't speak my language
And when I realized, that I, too, didn't speak hers
I just sat there and involuntarily began to cry.

Vision of Stars

Stephen Rebernik

"I don't see it," I said,
As my grandfather explained how
He saw beauty in a world
Of chaos.

"I am constantly amazed
By the seemingly infinite
Power of human compassion and
Determination."

I still did not understand,
But I accepted that he knew
Things I did not, for
He was older than I.

In the years that came
After that night I began
To see what he had
Meant while he looked at stars.

"I see it now," I told him on
His deathbed. He had two tears
In his eyes: one was for me, as
I found the truth he had spoken of

The other was for him, and
With a weary voice aged
By years of contemplation, he said:
"And I have become blind."



To See the Stars

Sam Borkton

Afflicted With Horn

Vanessa Snedeker



Let the Road Take You

Sammy Lizarraga

The revving of the engine, the smoke of the exhaust pipes. You feel the wind whip across your face, while the roar of the beast you ride rings in your ears. Feel the freedom of the road take you as your essence glides with the motion of your Harley. Can you see it? Can you feel it? I bet you can't. What about the kutte on their backs? The symbol of the charter and club they belong too. Can you feel the weight of it? For most it's just an easy ride with no worries, but for the outlaws that ride it's a dangerous life. For the club president the weight of the club rests on his shoulders. You dread it. The responsibility weighs you down like the bronze church bells that echo at dawn.

What is a dream? It's a vision! It's the welcoming of possibility, like the dawning of a new day. At the end of war most military members were left with a gaping hole, and a hunger that could only be satisfied by a sense of adventure and rushing adrenaline. As the hunger intensified other motorcycle clubs began to rise from the ashes of war. They became known as outlaws because of their refusal to be caged by rules and regulations, a brotherhood living for the thrill of their next ride. See it in their eyes the flaming gates of hell as a squad would climb on the backs of their Hogs, hearing the crunch of gravel under their wide rear tires. There's no greater joy in a club member's life than the feeling of a 730lb Harley-Davidson Heritage Softail Classic beneath them, or at least for me there isn't. The ability to dream is what brings hope, helps hope to blossom and grow into a beautiful rose, but even a rose has its thorns.

Bomb Shelter

Roxanne Reed

I have always been able to find
peace under a table.
Something about how every
sound melts to a murmur
and you can hear
the unmoving air,
and every paramount person
around you
is reduced to
fidgeting limbs,
no eyes watching.

I feel like I can giggle
at the most serious
of people when
I'm staring at their
knobby knees,
their crossed ankles
that cry
I WANT SOMEONE TO LOVE ME,
their swollen toes
that
tap tap tap.



At Balboa Park

Veronika Kremennaya

High School Awards

This year *Bravura* is delighted to feature work submitted by local San Diego high school writers. We applaud the contributors creative spirit and thank them for submitting. Keep writing! Below is a list of this year's high-school award winners: Both first-place winning selections appear in this year's *Bravura*.

Poetry

First Prize: "The Ugly Truth" by Keely Dunne, Vista High School

Second Prize: "Skin Over Seashells" by Ryn Helton, Charter Schools of San Diego

Third Prize: "In the Meadow" by David A. Castro, Rancho Buena Vista High School

Fiction

First Prize: "Mail" by Maya Delgado, Vista High School

Second Prize: "The Girl in the Back" by Dianna Lopez, Vista High School

Third Prize: "The War of Us" by Joshua Popoff, Mission Hills High School

The Ugly Truth

Keely Dunne

The popular ones
The ones who cry wolf
The ones who make him look weak.

The actors and liars
Who fool themselves too
They are the ones who are weak.

The ones who pretend
The ones who romanticize
The jagged drawings on his once smooth skin.

The ones who pretend
The ones who don't understand
They don't know the feeling;
The ones who make him look weak.

When his lungs won't hold air
And his heart is squeezed by a fist
By the fist of the ones who pretend.

When the moon lights the sky
Wishing it all could just end
Yet the ones who pretend
Are the ones who are happy
The ones who want it this way.

They make it seem pretty,
The way such self hatred is portrayed
Only now they see
The ugly truth.

Swaying from the ceiling
Lifeless and cold
Because of the ones who pretend.

Mail

Maya Delgado

I came to be on April 23, 1916. But unlike most things, I was never born. I was written into life. I took on the name of a man named Stanley, as he is the one who had signed me and brought me into consciousness. Being a letter is a lonely life. The only time a letter can have true happiness is when they finally meet the person they were addressed to. But alas, I have never been mailed. I am what you would call a "love letter." Stanley had written it for his dearest Lucie, but had left me in his attic after another man proposed to her. I've been abandoned at the bottom of a pile of comic books and newspapers in a dusty old attic ever since. I do not know where Stanley had gone or where Lucie is, but I'm sure I will find them one day. You see, dear reader, the world has been taken over by text messages and emails. As a result, no one has any use for an old fashioned piece of paper like I am. Though I am confident I will reunite with Stanley and Lucie one day, it's been 1,000 years and I remain here in this house waiting to be mailed. That's all I can seem to do at the moment. Wait. And wait. And wait. I thought I would be waiting forever, until one day someone found me. They brought me out of the darkness of the attic and into the light. And that's where my story begins.

I looked at the face of my savior and saw a young girl with 2 brown pigtails and freckles, no older than 10. She just stared at me with a puzzled look on her face. "MOMMY!" she screamed, "THIS PHONE IS BROKEN." I was insulted. Me? A

phone? How absurd. But of course there was no way for me to tell her this. I'm a piece of paper. I can't speak. "Sadie? What are you doing in the attic? Get down from there before you get hurt!" said a woman whom I am assuming is her mother. "Coming, mother!" responded the girl, Sadie. She took me and descended a ladder into a hallway, then continued downstairs and into a kitchen. I saw Sadie's mother, a middle-aged woman with her hair in a bun. She looked sternly at Sadie. "What have I told you about going into the attic?" she scolded. The young girl, however, was unfazed. "Mommy! Look what I found up there!" The woman glanced down and seemed to notice me for the first time. "Sadie!" she yelled, horrified, "Why would you bring that... thing into the house?!" "What's wrong with it, mommy?" Sadie asked with a confused look on her face. "The law, Sadie! We could be arrested if we're found with a letter in our possession!" Sadie's mother told her as she set me down on the table. I was shocked. Why is it such a crime to have a letter? I pondered this question as Sadie and her mother were arguing. Then, it hit me. Of course... I'm from a time 1,000 years ago and new ways to communicate have been invented. Text messages and emails for example, and the king of it all, the Internet. The world must have been taken over by technology while I was prisoner in the attic all those years. That must have been why Stanley or Lucie had never come for me! At that moment I decided I would fight. I have to fight. Even if I can't fight myself, I would create a ripple. There was one act of rebellion I could do to stand up to technology and bring back

the rights of paper. I would get myself mailed.

The only question was how I could do it. As if the paper gods had answered my prayers, a strong wind came through the window, and blew me out of the house. I watched with happiness as I was lifted off the table and out through the window. Freedom! At last! I looked at the upsetting sight below me as I flew over it, looking for a post office. The city looked as if it had been coated completely in silver. Every direction I looked, there were televisions with the news and messages from the king of this country. I could worry about that later. For now, I need to focus on finding a post office.

The wind blew me in many different directions and I finally landed in an alleyway in what seemed to be a deserted part of the city. I was confused. Why had the paper gods brought me here? I stayed there for a while until someone opened a door in the alleyway.

It was a man. He looked around 35 and had a mop of black hair on his head. He looked at me with interest. "Marco!" he called out, "Looks like we've got another delivery!" He picked me up and entered the room in the alleyway. I looked around my surroundings and saw a simple bar with stacks of paper everywhere. This so-called "Marco" looked up from his desk in the corner. "Ben, we're so behind schedule already. Can't this letter wait?" Ben looked at me in disappointment.

"I suppose so, but I'll leave it right here, ok?" He set me down and left the bar. Where in the name of Stanley am I? I looked at the man, Marco, at his desk and then around at my surroundings. Stacks of paper, postages, boxes. An underground post office? Well... That's convenient. The man named Marco looked over at me and sighed. "I guess sending off one more letter wouldn't hurt," he mumbled to himself. He got up from his desk and grabbed me, sticking a postage on me. This was it! I was going to get mailed! He then went outside and waited.

A few minutes later, and a bird showed up. I was confused. Was this what we've been waiting for this entire time? A bird? My questions were answered when a car pulled up and scared off the bird. Marco walked over and threw me in the backseat. I couldn't contain my excitement. So close! I was almost there! Who cares about a revolution anymore! I was going to be mailed! I can reunite with Stanley and Lucie! I can be happy.

The driver of the car looked behind him and grabbed me. "What's this?" the driver said, "A smudge on the envelope? Must not be too important if there's a smudge on it." He took two ends of me and started to tear. NO! I'M SO CLOSE TO BEING HAPPY! UNHAND ME IN THE NAME OF STAN-
Rrrrippppp...

I woke up. Back in the attic. To this day, I remain there, waiting. That's all I can seem to do at the moment. Wait, wait, and wait. After all, who has use for an old, crumbling, piece of paper like me?

2016 Contributors' Notes

Sophia Aldrich is a well-known cat-loving procrastinator with a penchant for medieval fantasy and roleplaying games. She can often be found tending to her dying garden and reading trashy young adult novels.

Adande Akobundu is a fifty-five year old wife of an amazing man, the mother of daughters and the grandmother of a beautiful three year old. She wrote her poem immediately after learning the verdict of the Sandra Bland case. Recognizing that after fifty-five years of life, not much has really changed, she wrenched this piece from the depths of her soul.

Malorie Allen is the queen of all cats! She spends her days sitting on her pink cushioned throne ruling the Kitten Kingdom.

When she's not running obscenely long distances in preparation for cross-country training, **Marlen Amador** can usually be found studying for one of her many classes or working absurd hours at her job. Independent and goal-oriented, Marlen hopes to spin all her efforts into success, and plans to pursue her passion for running at the collegiate level at a four-year university. All this while achieving enough security to pursue her many intellectual pursuits and curiosities. One thing's for certain, though: she'll never stop running. Oh, and she helped the blind to see, healed a man's withered hand, and on the third day, she rose again.

Bryan Angel is a student of life and Palomar College. Writes poetry, art, so on and so forth.

Lauren Ballard is a student at Palomar College.

Sam Bedford is studying technical theatre and writing, hoping to advance in both fields. He plans to go on to UCSD to attain degrees in both stage managing and play writing. He enjoys storytelling and writing, whether it's running games of dungeons and dragons, or helping to present gripping shows in the theatre. He is currently working to obtain as much experience as possible both on campus and in local theatres.

Robert Bender is a man who believes story telling is our greatest asset. It is how we learn, how we record the past, how we atone for our actions. Our stories are what make us unique. No mater what he does Robert is a story teller at heart and he lives to regale.

Daniel Bonds was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy at fourteen years of age. He fights his illness with exercise, protein shakes, and medicine. He will never let this virus get the better of him.

Sam Borkton is twenty one years old and pursuing a degree in computer science. Sam earned a Commercial Pilot Associate of Science degree from Palomar College in 2015 and is a flight instructor at Pinnacle Aviation Academy. Sam grew up in Costa Mesa, CA and enjoys surfing in his free time.

Sarah Broberg has written a lot of bios. However, this is only her second bio as anything but a thespian. The first was for a play she wrote called *Flipside*, which was produced in 2015. She thinks writing is cool—but to her, what's cooler than writing and acting and even mantis shrimp, is drawing. She is ludicrously excited for her upcoming project: A Frankensteinian webcomic called *Jeffrey's Monster*, which she will be illustrating.

Emily Brown is a young woman with her head in the clouds, filling her free time with cute baby videos and wedding ideas, contributing actually very little to this project; but her big smile and amazing outlook on life keep the rest of the editing crew in good spirits, which is difficult in a room of gloomy writers.

Nineteen-year old **Nikki Callies** was unfortunately a little too short to join the Stormtrooper ranks, so she settled on her second pursuit of happiness: art. She hopes to transfer to UCLA and eventually become an illustrator or theater set designer. Her favorite pastimes include replaying Bioware games for the umpteenth time and belting out show tunes while stuck in heavy traffic.

Aileen Candelario is twenty years old. She will transfer to either UCLA, UC Berkeley, or USC in the fall, where she plans to major in fine arts and minor in French. She's primarily a painter, but also highly enjoys photography. Apart from her interest in art and languages, Aileen is also an avid cook. She works as the head cook of a catering business and plans on attending culinary school in France after she graduates.

I'm going to say three names, and you just have to assume they have something in common. Jesus Christ. William Shakespeare. **Freddy Cleveland**. Out of the three, only one is an award winning writer and filmmaker. Sorry, Jesus and Shakespeare. There's a new immortal icon in town.

Alyssa Coelho is a passionate and adventurous soul who has devoted her life to journeying back to Love. She is a communication and international business major who loves learning and exploring everything multicultural and philosophical - following her bliss every step of the way. She is publishing her journey for the world to read in her poetry compilation, *Chosen*, coming the summer of 2016.

Tessa Collins is an obnoxiously short nerd who lightly misuses adjectives and should probably try harder.

Julie Couch has been writing poetry since she was twelve years old. She has had two of her poems published and is currently working on her own book of personal poetic anthology. She loves listening to all kinds of music; however country music is her favorite! She prefers to spend as much time outdoors with any kind of critter that's around. She is the proud mom of two brother and sister Siamese kitties.

Maya Delgado is a fourteen year old girl who has always had a passion for reading. This resulted both in her fascination with writing and an extreme lack of sleep. Because she has such a deep love for books, one of her favorite things to do is watch the film adaptation of a book and rant about every detail that was either the same or different in the book.

Morgan DeLuna is a photographic art student who spent years in search of the right medium for her work. She was immediately smitten upon being introduced to fine art photography and since that initial reaction her passion for it has evolved into a deep devotion to her craft. She is currently in the process of earning her degree in photography and exploring her voice as an artist.

Lee Donovan was born in 1977. He is the world's greatest husband and father, G.E.D. gold member, sometimes student of Palomar College and an excellent whistler. He enjoys his wife's humor, his son's nose, cheeks, and imagination, and science fiction anything—in that order, according to his wife. Lee has been writing masterful works of literary art since 1982. So says his mother. He aspires to become a published author. Check.

Keely Dunne is fourteen years old and currently attending Vista High School. Her love for writing began in elementary school when she and her friends put together their own song. Ever since then she's been obsessed with lyrics, poetry and fictional stories. She hopes to attend the University of Queensland after high school and study psychology, as well as finding inspiration and letting her creativity loose there.

Parker Franco is a student at Palomar College.

Kehani Geronilla is an English major who writes, eats, reads and drinks a whole lot of black in between! Aside from school and work she runs a food blog geared towards quick & seasonal recipes. Ultimately, Kehani aspires to have a career in writing food stories with a literary approach.

Tracey Grassel is a student at Palomar College.

Zeta Greene is a perpetual student who tries to keep her day job as a financial analyst in order to fund her obsession in jewelry, metalsmithing, ceramics and painting. She is also an avid gardener and animal lover, with a coterie of wild creatures in her backyard: her husband, ducks, birds, rabbits, and rats.

Tasha Hall is a student at Palomar College.

Hank Harrington is a thirty something who practices the art of procrastination. He has worn many hats in life but finds a straw one fits him best. Hank spends the lion's share of his time "thinkin' bout doin,'" which has left him well prepared for whatever could come next. His remaining hours are spent napping between crying fits and sugar binges.

Tori Helton is a Palomar student preparing to transfer to San Jose State University this fall. When she isn't writing about attention seeking megalomaniacs, you can find her sampling unique (and often questionable) gum flavors and drinking far too much tea than her bladder can handle.

Mitchell Hill is a Southern California native, who currently resides in North County, and is pursuing a degree in photography at Palomar College. He works with black & white film, using a 4x5 Toyo field camera; and in digital, using Nikon's 5200 and 750 cameras. He makes silver gelatin prints in his home darkroom, and prints digitally as well. Interests range from landscapes, architecture, and portraiture. He has exhibited in galleries, and contests, and won multiple awards.

Katherine Hoang is a twenty-one year old student who has a profound passion for design, art and art history. She is a meme enthusiast and her favorite one currently is Pepe. She always has hypothetical movies playing in her head and she's always collecting odd things like leaves from different seasons. She's pretty bad at deleting photos out of her life. She's the biggest pixel hoarder you'll ever meet.

Elizabeth Hoffman is a writer, poet, and traveler, whose nose is most likely stuck in a book, and whose hair bears a striking resemblance to Gene Wilder's portrayal of Victor Frankenstein. She loves Jesus with her whole heart, and hopes to use her gift and passion for writing to share that love with others. After transferring, she plans on pursuing a career in writing and possibly teaching- preferably where the seasons change and it rains more than twice a year. Like Scotland.

Jim Hudson is a fifty-six year old engineer with a degree in computer science from UC Riverside. He has been writing short stories for years and comes from a family of engineer/artists; his father taught art history at El Camino College and pioneered the use of computer graphics in the fine arts in the early 1980's, while Jim's two brothers (also both engineers) build large-scale public art installations and do fine wood working. Jim lives in San Marcos with his wife Kathy and daughter Emily.

Hannah Keene is a student at Palomar College.

Veronika Kremennaya is a student at Palomar College.

Daniel Kresge is twenty-nine years old and pursuing a double certification in photography and fine art photography. He strives to capture serenity through photographs and project a feeling of tranquility. He also enjoys night photography with an element of ghostly allure. His interests include losing sleep to books, cheering on the Anaheim Ducks, geeking out to fandoms, and living the great adventure.

Hannah Lawson wants to graduate eventually because God knows she has been trying and she wants to work for a big publishing company because she wants to be an editor, mostly because she likes to be in control, mostly because she gets off on telling other people what to do, mostly because she thinks she is perfect, and she knows that being a part of *Bravura* has made her a little bit better at editing, especially at copy editing, which is mostly, like, fixing giant run-on sentences or cutting useless and boring information.

Contrary to popular belief, **Sammy Lizarraga** (a young blood sucker at heart) is not, and may never be, affiliated with any biker gangs. Although this little Schnitzel is a weapons and motorcycle enthusiast Sammy prefers the raw horse power of, well, horses. Wild like the rushing waves of the Cimarron, Sammy spends her days in the ever growing war that is the studious life of a college student and her nights as a Warrior Elite in Krav Maga.

Christian Madrigal is a student of philosophy aiming to become either a professor of philosophy or a construction worker with a Ph.D. He can generally be found at his desk, where he spends his time reading and annotating thick books full of very small print, spilling coffee on important documents, missing crucial submission deadlines, and, on rare occasions, actually writing.

Omari McCord is a student here at Palomar and pursues computer science and loves creating digital artwork in 3D. He loves characters, anatomy, and the old masters of ages past. His interest include studying the old masters, sci-fi creatures, all manner of written fiction, and of course *Star Wars*.

Briana Munoz is a writer from San Diego, CA. She has had a love for writing ever since she can remember. Briana has been published in the Bravura literary journal, La Bloga, an online publication, the Poets Responding to SB 1070 page, and in the Oakland Arts Review. Briana was one of ten chosen for "The Best of La Bloga" from 2015. When she isn't typing away, she enjoys traveling, live music, cats, and thrifting.

Barry Munson wanted a career in "rich and famous" but that major was not in the catalog, so he became an engineer. He has spent his life showing his imagination on paper. But evidently, only in black and white. And maybe a little well earned gray.

Wife, mother, engineer, yogi, gardener, gourmet cook, and fashion fanatic, **Daphne Munson** was looking for a new outlet for her creative juices when her observant husband suggested to go back to one of her first loves, writing. Apparently it's a good fit, as she has been published in *Bravura* two years running. Her current favorite medium is poetry. You can find her writing snippets while sitting in her favorite chair, a cuppa near to hand, and her faithful pup, Penny, sleeping on her lap.

Chris Newton is twenty-one years old. He is undergoing his undergraduate study in philosophy. Chris hopes to reveal through his poems and stories the insatiable curiosity of who he deems the poet-philosopher. He binge drinks coffee, enjoys staring into the abyss of the early morning, and partakes in a love-hate relationship with ruminating about the past, present, and future. Find Chris eating peanut butter sandwiches in the room of a university dormitory come this fall.

Darby Norris, if seen on the streets in downtown Oceanside, could easily be mistaken for a homeless individual, but don't let her looks deceive you. She comes from a family of highly sophisticated blondes who take pride in their ability to obtain a golden tan. She spends most of her time surfing, glass blowing, and taking photographs of wrinkly, elderly people. God bless.

Saba Nourollahi loves abstract painting. She derived her style from Pollack and Money. Contrary to public belief she is very sarcastic and her hyena like laugh can be heard from the tables of math center to the tables of cafeteria. Her favorite movie is *Deadpool* and Ryan Reynolds is her number three celebrity crush. First place is given to man of steel, Henry Cavill.

Joung Min Pak (English name is Joanna Pak), is from South Korea, the country of courteous people of the East. She started to study English two years ago at Palomar College ESL classes, and now is taking English 100. She started to learn English later than other students, but better late than never, right?

Gabriella Pleasant is a twenty two year old in the middle of a mid-life crisis. But it's always better to get these things out of the way as soon as possible. This semester she's pursuing a linguistic degree with a focus on international cultures. She avoids her more demanding responsibilities by writing, so she sincerely hopes you enjoy her product of procrastination.

Kacey Pogue is a student at Palomar College.

Rickety Ram never asked to be born. His mom cries often. For more information, date him.

Roxanne Conowitch is an English and environmental studies double major whose passions include poetry, wildlife conservation, feminism, songwriting, traveling, Bernie Sanders, and eating plants. She intends to transfer to UC Santa Cruz in fall 2016.

Stephen Rebernik is an eccentric young soul. He aspires to one day write great stories that will change how people view the world while also leaving them wondering why he had to kill off their favorite character. During his free time, Stephen enjoys complaining, neglecting his responsibilities, and listening to Hamilton. He hopes that, with time, he can come to understand how the world works and how he fits into it.

ruth rice is an avid collector of small sculptures, large dreams and human eccentricities. Known to play with dangerous thoughts, ruth will often be found covered in bandages, wielding matches and a smile.

Matthew Robinson is twenty years old and pursuing a career in graphic & web design. He has no clue what's going on most of the time, and is constantly fearing the unknown. His work has been known to celebrate minimalism and mediocrity. His main goal is to keep creating and acting on inspiration as it comes. (@pray4matt)

Kevin Roca is a twentyyear old student, originally from El Salvador, who loves to spend most of his time drawing and creating awesome stories. He is pursuing a degree in animation and he is also aspiring to become a graphic novelist. So far he has not accomplished anything. However, he believes one day his dream will come true.

Nicky Rojo went to Palomar a few years ago and learned some shit. It was aight. Nicky then went and graduated from CalArts and is now working in LA making cartoons for television and is having a pretty rad time. You should totally check out her comics and other stuff at bbbooster.tumblr.com.

Haruka Sato is a Japanese international student who is majoring in illustration at Palomar College. It's easy to find her because she always carries the most striking bright orange backpack in Palomar College. For her, everything in life is art. She is an absolute enthusiastic lover of Studio Ghibli, and her goal is to create animation movies like Hayao Miyazaki in the future.

Hawkins Sellier is twenty years old and is currently completing his bachelor's degree in philosophy while completing medical school prerequisites. He loves working with people and hopes to become an E.R physician. When not studying or volunteering at the hospital you can find Hawkins learning something new, teaching someone something new, reading, riding his bike, or spending quality time with his bearded dragon, Eleanor.

Jonn'a Simmons is an English Major. She has been passionate about literature since elementary school and is always in the middle of at least one book. Jonn'a is fascinated with literature and the magic of pairing words together to create something that did not exist before.

Vanessa Snedeker likes words, music, and movement. When she isn't reading or writing, she is playing French horn, composing music, or studying kung fu. Vanessa is inappropriately optimistic about all kinds of ideas and challenges, which could explain why she wants to write musicals, operas, and ballets. She secretly thinks that Freddy Cleveland has a nice speaking voice and is eagerly awaiting his dissertation about the fallacies of the children's show, *My Little Pony*.

Amanda Stewart is a twenty-two year old student who aspires to write for a major magazine publication. When she isn't working as a pharmacy technician she enjoys reading work from her favorite author, Khaled Hosseini. She loves sushi, dogs, and romance novels with cliche plot lines.

John Stone is a student at Palomar College.

Brian Sutton, fifty-seven years young is a semi-retired realtor living the good life with his partner Sue and cat Ruby traveling the length and breadth of the U.S. in their RV. His past includes two degrees in music composition, two decades as a restaurateur and a stint as a property investor. Life in an RV has its challenges, but the experience has created numerous opportunities for creative writing.

Lloyd Grant Thompson is recently retired and throwing himself wholeheartedly into his lifelong passion for landscape photography. With time now available to devote, and the help of the excellent photography program at Palomar College, he hopes to raise the quality of his art to the next level, and beyond.

Tim Topalov's art adventure began with illegal graffiti when he was the age of fourteen. His interest in the visual arts grew with his experience and with time he began doing digital illustrations, graphic designs, murals, and fine art. The work of Tim explores the flow of the mind, how ideas are shaped, how they communicate with one another and the ways a person's subconscious can be deciphered through the organic outflow of the mind.

Karen Integerrima (Truong) is the brazen muse with a mixology background who seeks to have more envisioning and fulfilment of conceptual art essences. Karen has a knack for riot, ambush, and capture but her passions are serendipity, building immense tact, and thinking before she becomes.

Misti D. Vaughn grew up in Corpus Christi, TX. She studied for a year at the University of The South Pacific in Fiji. Currently she is finishing up her AA in English with plans to transfer and volunteers for the nonprofit organization the American Institute for Behavioral Research and Technology. She'd like to thank her triangle faced cat, Henry, for inspiration.

Collin Vore is eighteen years old and pursuing an art degree. She aspires to work in the animation industry, possibly as a storyboard artist or colorist. She likes watching cartoons, drawing comics and making up characters in her free time. Her favorite things to draw are bugs, monsters and robots.

Emily Williamson is a seventeen year old palomar student who likes running, coffee and drawing goats.

Bruce Woodward is a twenty-one year old student and photographer. He is pursuing a degree in photography. He wants his photographs to have an impact on his viewers. Even if one person comes away with something when viewing his images it is worth it. His interests are petting every dog that passes, adventures, and climbing on things to get the angle he wants.

Krista Wright, A.K.A. Krista Wrista, is an eighteen year old art major. Her work consists of silly looking monsters, and powerful girly figures. She hopes her art will inspire courage and self empowerment. She also hopes to get people all over to rethink, and regain control over the "monsters"(fears, emotions, hardships) of their personal worlds. Outside of art, Krista enjoys skateboarding, beach trips, and mass amounts of Aesop Rock.

