

Bravura 2014

The Literary Journal of Palomar College



50th Anniversary Edition

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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.

"The concrete establishment of a tradition with regard to a yearly literary publication at Palomar College is an achievement that sorely needs to be realized. As a part of the college experience, as an exacting derivative of productive creativity, and as a representative accomplishment of the college, a literary magazine is an exceedingly important article. With these ideals in mind, it is our intention, and indeed our sincerest hope, that this publication of BRAVURA will mark the humble beginnings of a well-continued tradition."

— Kenn Cutter, BRAVURA 1964

Fifty years ago Kenn Cutter wrote these words in Palomar College's first *Bravura* discussing the creation of a yearly literary publication to showcase the various voices of decades to come. Today, the tradition continues, and we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Palomar College's literary magazine, the *Bravura*.

Collected in this year's journal are voices from both the present and the past, reflecting not only what Cutter called the "college experience," but also what William Faulkner called "the old verities and truths of the heart." The stories, poems, and visual arts in this 50th anniversary edition of *Bravura* show us how we remain the same, but how we have changed as well.

As we look back at the last fifty years, we can only imagine what voices the next fifty years will bring!

— Carlton Smith, Rocco Versaci, and the editors of the 2014 *Bravura*

"So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

— F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

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Contributor's Notes



Tom Hanks' Frozen Corpse

Travis Rivas

The summer of my twelfth year we watched Apollo 13
In a theatre that is now a two story fish market
My priorities included erections
Insecurities about erections
And girls

Dad and I used to go to the movies all the time
It was our thing
How's it going buddy? He'd say
Hey buddy, I'd respond
Our first movie was Top Gun
The folds of the curtains where they met the floor
Looked like feet to me
As though people held it
Waiting for the movie to start to pull them apart
We watched Tom Cruise blow communists from the sky
The seat folded back up on me
My legs blocked the lower half of the screen
But I didn't care
We arrived early to watch Tom Hanks float in outer space
Escaping the heat that made clothes stick to our bodies

Dad and I sat in crimson felted seats
With brown hard plastic backs
Underneath mustard yellow lights
The theatre across the hall played Species
And I wanted to watch as Natasha Henstridge
Cavorted nakedly twenty feet tall before me
But I never told him that
How's it going buddy?
I said nothing
Are you my buddy?
I don't know
He recoiled and placed a hand in front of his face
And his shoulders went up and down
The whole theatre heard his
Whimpers
He stopped before the lights went down
We watched Tom struggle
To get home to his children
And I secretly hoped he'd never return
That he'd stay lost in space
Forever
As cold and frozen as the rock he tried to land on



to the boy who once loved me

Melissa Yang

As we lay upon sullied sheets,
I breathe you deep into my lungs,
where you diffuse
across capillaries
into veins
like rivers
rushing to my heart.
And I wonder how you can lie there,
Thinking
about someone else, when I need you
Like an astronaut
on her last tank of oxygen.

One Small Step

Ricky McBrayer



How to Disappear Completely

Lora Mathis

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Anxiety

Marie Kodis

Wake up, 3 AM.
Stomach is churning and you
can't go back to sleep.

Someone once told me,
“It’s alright, don’t be so shy.”
Wow, thanks, I am cured.

I would like people
to know this isn’t easy.
It’s terrifying.

Your insides are ice.
Your face, in turn, is burning.
You’re feeling stupid.

Don’t you dare tell me
that “stupid” is too abstract.
It is to me, too.

Important phone calls
to the doctor or dentist
become a nightmare.

And public speaking,
even to a little group?
Haha, forget it.

Embarrassment is
a daily thing, I’m afraid.
And you have to pretend.

Pretend for your friends.
Pretend for your family.
Pretend for yourself.

“Just get over it.”
“Just get up there and do it.”
“You have to someday.”

How do I do it?
Please, just tell me it’s okay.
I feel like fainting.

Then I will wake up.
And at 3 in the morning,
Nothing can help me.

Al Tolui

Gabriella Pleasant

Boke can't get the blood out. It's soaked through the under-wear, the dress, and the sheets. Ribbons of red expand and become faint clouds in the water. She tries to focus on them, rubbing the slimy handful of fats and oils into the thick cloth even as it takes layer after layer of her skin with it. Not enough lye this time around to really stick, but the broad side of her hands give the soap the extra friction it needs. It slides away in brown clumps, slipping over the bend and almost out of sight. The gnarled roots of trees, drinking deep from the river, cling to the bloody bubbles and catch the slime underneath, displaying everything she tries to scrub away.

It glints in the light as the sun continues over the mountain. Sharp beams do not so much illuminate as turn the morning mist harsh and bright; obscuring her already impaired vision. It's a bad time to be out.

It's a bad time to be in as well. Stocky oiled paper covers the windows, smothering the sunlight inside the house until it's little more than a sick glow. Deeper than that is a thick darkness with shrill screams shattering any semblance of peace the house may otherwise hold. The newborn cannot keep up her complaining for long, even though the cold and absence of her mother's body persuades her to try. Her voice is ignored when it carries out to the farmers setting back from their small fields. Fresh dark soil clings to their dusty brown bodies in the blinding light when they pass Boke waist deep in the river. They pause only long enough to acknowledge her existence and then bemoan it. Their movements slow, sure, and full of an empty sorrow. A pair of women, nearly indistinguishable from their coarse, flat clothes, stop long enough for Boke to look up from her work.

"Have a hard time? We heard you crying out from across the river." Their mouths are forcefully unkind; pretty lips stretched into a flat, hard line when they look her way. Less than a year ago they

baked bread in one another's homes, speaking in hushed tones so as not to wake the men and children. They gave Boke sweets and complimented her fancy dresses, her husband's promotion, her strong boys. They were amiable and spoke often. Their old friend answers them now, focusing instead on the soothing cold as her body closes up. The woman who spoke steps closer, voice steadily raising.

"Can't you hear the crying? You should go back to the little bastard." Boke scrubs harder, rubbing her knuckles raw.

"What's wrong? Trying to hide it?" The woman's shoes breach the water's edge and that's what held Boke's attention: The lengths they go to. Her shoes are folded cloth and tied at the ankles; only talentless women made such poor shoes. She couldn't look away. The woman makes to speak again but the other one stops her, grabbing her arm and tugging her along. She turns back once, to spit gracelessly, the squelching of her poor shoes staying long after she had gone.

When the child's voice finally quiets Boke is already trekking back through the rocky bank, laundry rolled up and tied to her dripping back. The dirt path, once measured in feet is now measured in disgusted glances. She does not go inside her home immediately, having more pressing matters to tend to than the newborn's crying.

Stretched over the clothesline she can see the faint pink stains still left on the wash, dabbed over with rich red from her knuckles. It will do. Soon it will be faint brown stains, nearly indistinguishable from the countless blemishes on the old cotton. The house is old as well, but still the most solid structure in town. Made from splintering, blackened wood glued together by hardened clay. The mud climbs up the sides of the walls, making it look as though it grew right out of the ground and retained much of its original appearance.

The inside smells sharp and warm with a mess of small morning noises. A continuous blend of shuffling, thudding, and low voices. She avoids the sounds the best she knows how, going to her room and stripping off the sopping dress. Her body, previously round and strong is now flat and trembling. Dark blotches run from thighs

to abdomen, making a strange and repulsive pattern on her skin. Her dress is placed in front of the window, the oiled paper brushing up momentarily to smear the tar-like substance it had accumulated onto the side. It hardly made a difference so she does not move it, deciding instead to pull another tube of old fabric from her cedar trunk, buried under rich embroidery and bright colors carefully tucked away.

The sounds from the kitchen were evening out by now, her boys' voices rose over the now-pathetic wailing of the newborn. Once dressed, she took a moment to breathe, although the room stank of blood. She had scrubbed hard at the wooden floorboards but the smell will linger. She pushes open the old door; better to face the family then to stay and suffocate.

In the kitchen she finds the man of the house has helped himself to a bowl of the breakfast she left, broth and bits of greens dribbling over his clean-shorn chin as he gulps. He doesn't acknowledge the newborn on the table, but her boys more than make up for that. They argue over her, huddled close enough for their hot breath to redden her face. She's red all over, panting hard and moaning softly. But she's cold against her mother's arms, trembling in time with Boke's tender abdomen. Her wrappings are loose now, falling back and away from her head as her mother sat down. The boys stare accusingly at the child, dirty faces smeared with snot and revile. Although closer, Qadan tugs on his older brother's sleeve, mouth guarded. Tegus pushes him away and slides further onto the table toward the huddled form, chewing his lips before speaking. At this angle his narrow back is exposed; Qadan steps back on instinct.

"Mother, what is that?" They're transfixed while the child begins suckling greedily, a hidden reservoir of strength put into consuming as much warmth as possible.

"A new child."

"That's not a new child; that's a tomato." Qadan speaks from just outside arm's reach, knitting his brows together. A quick glance to Boke's right confirms that the man of the house has taken a keen interest in the conversation. His eyes roam from his sons to the new-

born, darkening as they go. The tiny head is covered with her grubby cloth before Boke could think not to do it. She watches him as she answers.

"All children look like this when born."

"Qadan didn't. He looked like deep, dark water." Tegus' face retains the thoughtful expression and in his words are the certainty of youth. One hand goes to his ear, which he first rubs before picking out a inky brown glob and wiping it absently on his pants. His brother points excitedly to the smear.

"I looked like that! Let them see!" He proceeds to tug onto Tegus' pants, causing him to nearly fall off the table. This deteriorates into a series of smacks and kicks, invasive in the glimpse of a tranquil morning. A low voice interrupts their play, as the man of the house very deliberately set his bowl down.

"If you have time to act like fools you have time to work. You spent enough time playing, now go!" This is accented with a slap to the table, which resonates through to Boke's bones. Her boys jump and bolt, the younger running and the older walking briskly with "Yes father" trailing behind him down the dark hallway.

She barely breathes. She doesn't move. The silence is thick enough to choke on but is soon filled up with the greedy sucking as the newborn resumes her meal. The man of the house keeps his eyes on her, calculating as he watches.

He addresses Boke when the child's sounds subside, his voice holding a much softer edge than was expected. In this moment of relief he is once again flesh and blood, a thick man with dust on his clothes, dust in the lines on his face, and dust under his skin. The passing of his anger an imposing shadow lifted. He runs one knobby hand over his hair, the only part of him unaffected by trials and time. It's beautiful. Long and pretty, tied back into a soft knot. So dark it reflects light back and away, if only to keep its pitch complexion. Despite this he is ugly in her eyes. Boke is also ugly, her children ugly, and the newborn in her arms the ugliest by far.

As he speaks she keeps her eyes on the newborn. The hair more pronounced as her skin turns from tomato to cream, leaving

the soft glow of a tiny flame on top; a beacon. The man of the house cannot seem to look away from this crime.

"Put it in the barn," He says. "We'll say the animals got to it while you worked." Boke nods as he speaks, hoping to distract from her trembling arms.

"Will you sacrifice an animal for it? We will have to sell the one we blame."

His response is immediate, the closing of a heavy door: "We'll not blame any animal. You will say you don't know which it is and cannot sell on assumptions."

"I will be branded." She doesn't want to speak but it comes out of her mouth anyway, making it feel cold and strange as a secret thought slips through. He pushes his empty bowl toward her, eyes once again on the newborn.

"That cannot be fixed. Another please." She places the newborn in the still-warm seat, having nearly fallen asleep during the exchange. There is no sound despite their combined pained breaths as Boke goes to the pot and dips his bowl.

When she returns to the table he has once again transformed. He looms, larger than before. His body molded into the faded brown uniform he wears, pulling it taught and fitting it tight against him like a second skin. The only life in him the shining from the medal he had received from the General. His eyes are dull, clouded over with his thoughts. They blend into the rest of his body to fade away and give room to this true identity.

She looks away on instinct, resting for a moment as she leans heavily against the table. This new task she was given, however small, weighs heavy in her mind and causes every part of her body to cry out in betrayal. The throbbing in her bones and the fire that bloomed once again across her thighs and up her back cripples her. She rests for too long, as the man of the house takes to aiming his glare in her direction.

"Well, what is it now?" She can only shake her head as she pushes his bowl across the table, vision swimming as she attempts to remain upright. He is quickly by her side, hands resting as gently as

they know how on her back even as he pushes her aside.

"Here. See, I will do this thing for you. Sit down and rest." His voice grates out awkwardly from between his teeth, pity audibly fighting his anger. Boke reaches for the sleeping newborn and grabs her roughly before the man of the house could. The child wakes with a start, crying loudly. Yektai removes his hand from his wife's back only to grab her shoulders and turn her toward the hall.

"If you're so determined then go." He gives her a push and she stumbles, panting. The child is pushed hard against her, legs dangling free as she shuffles slowly to the heavy wooden door.

Although thick and formidable, it's wedged into a frame that was originally too small, splintering wood leaving cracks to let in drafts and sound. Boke stands in front of the door, realizing belatedly that she does not have the strength to open it. *It would have been better perhaps, to let the man of the house take the child.* At the thought her heart seizes and she corrects her hold on the bundle, who cries regardless. Through the door came the faint sounds of her boys arguing over nonsense. She hesitates to call for them, glancing over her shoulder for the man of the house before pressing her face against the splintered cracks.

"Children. Come open the door for me; I am tired today." Their noises stop abruptly before being replaced with a hurried shuffling. The groaning of the wood mingles with the groans of their combined effort. She waits patiently, every part of her on edge and crying out in betrayal. *I must sleep after this. He will let me sleep. I must sleep.* She steps down into the cold dirt, walking as quickly as she could manage past her boys.

Tegus notices his mother's distress and grabs her roughly by the arm, forcing her to stop for a moment and breathe. He tries to speak but Boke could not listen, the barn ahead seems to swell and enclose her. After a moment of watching her hallowed stare he tugs her toward it, the mud cold and thick, pulling at their feet.

The 'barn' where the animals sleep is comprised of bits of decrepit wood nailed, tied, and wedged into thick chunks of oozing cedar. The warm smell of decay rises off the entire enclosure and on to

the house, so close her boys can reach their hands out their windows and have the animals bite them. The firm hand of her oldest clamps down almost painfully when they reach it, successfully stopping her.

"Well?" He prompts. The goats are out, wandering through the old tree stumps behind the house. This does little to comfort her; the baby will freeze to death instead. He releases her arm, rubbing himself down briskly while puffing out impatient clouds of breath. He looks like a miniature man of the house; a tiny Yekta. It causes a heaviness in her that is part fear and part sadness.

"Well?" He asks again, stamping his feet to keep from freezing. Her own feet are numb, being barefoot on the frostbitten ground. The baby is nearly out of breath and Boke is out of ideas. Her boy hesitates a moment longer before reaching out his hands. He waits until she looks at him, his voice lowering.

"I will do this thing for you."

It is difficult at times, to notice anything. In that moment she notices everything. Every oiled-looking clump of hair on his head, every angry line on his young face, and every knobby knuckle. She notices how far he has grown from her and how far he has to grow. Her comrades hate her and her sons are little men. She wants this newborn now with a sudden desperation not so completely devoid of sympathy that it wasn't still tainted by it.

"I will... do this." He hesitates at her response, lowering his arms and walking out of the barn. She listens for his steps until he stops beside the back door. He will wait to open it for her; he will wait a long time.

She slips out when the girl is mostly done crying, half running, half stumbling to an old brick house very close to the woods, so close a few large cedars grew together to block the back door. They shield a hole in the wall from the rain and the sun but the cold comes in fine. An elder lives there, her husband long dead and her livelihood paid for by the charity of others. She would take any offer given, any gift was worth something to her. Boke pounds on the door, her body shaking hard enough to rattle her teeth.

The cough comes before the footsteps. The door is opened

only a crack, one hanging cheek emerging under a critical eye, beady and direct. She huffs at the guest but opens the door wider nonetheless.

"What?" Boke holds up the newborn, who is crying and flailing the best she can. The old woman looks hard at her and laughs. Inside her mouth are five black teeth, scattered in the thick gums. The worst however is her tongue, which she proves any time she spoke.

"What would an old woman like me, too weary to care for even her own body, gain from such an offer? It has too much fire, it grows right from her scalp!" She waves her sleeve in front of her mouth, spreading a bit of saliva and then giving an impressive show of coughing. Despite this, her eyes still dance from child to mother, calculating through her whole display. When Boke answers her the voice is once again a stranger, the words tumbling out without permission.

"Anything. I have milk and brick tea and fine dresses. Only keep her for a year—"

"If I am to feed her and clothe her and let her grow she will be mine. Give her to me and I will take a modest sum." Finally, Boke's brain caught up with her mouth:

"If you keep her I will pay you nothing."

The elder strikes her tongue against her gums, lowering her arms in an exaggerated display.

"I would be doing you a great service and this is how you treat me? I would have asked for merely two fine gowns but you have tried to take advantage of me. Your elder, whom you swindle! Five gowns now."

"Two gowns and a bottle of brick tea."

"What use do I have for tea? My tongue is a brick in my mouth! But fine furs to chase away the bitter winter, now that's something. Five dresses."

"I do not have five dresses. I only have two." She flings her hands up, stomping one foot and spitting.

"Liar! I have seen them all myself! You have a dozen or

more. Four dresses!"

"Three dresses then. But only if I can look at the girl as she grows."

"Four dresses and you may speak to her."

"Deal. But only if I may speak to her in private." The elder smiles as she throws her hands down, gripping the girl in her long fingers.

"Bring me the dresses now. You made your deal."

"Give me some blood or my husband will ask for the body." The elder clicks her tongue, but leads her inside. It's dusty, damp, and freezing cold. A few chickens dart through the dark, squawking at the intrusion. She sets her girl down upon a pile of wood and seizes one as it attempts to run by. As she holds the chicken over a small pot, a knife is produced from her long sleeve.

"Come here and hold out your hands." Boke did as she instructed, hearing the squawk and feeling the hot blood spill over her fingers in the darkness.

"Now go and bring me the dresses. Come today or I'll kill the crimson mirror of your crime!" She holds the chicken over the pot as its struggling weakens, raising the knife in her direction.

When Boke emerges outside blood is once more on her dress. Comrades stare as she passes, pausing long enough to come to the wrong conclusion before hurrying on. Her little man is still by the back door, stomping his feet against the cold as he waits for her. He looks alarmed at the blood on her hands but opens the door without instruction. The warmth of her home is a comfort now, a weight lifted as she presents her bloodied hands to her husband, who is strapping his boots on by the door. He stands, clutching her wrists to examine them closely. After a moment he smiles, placing his hands on her shoulders and smearing rings of deep, dark red. He squeezes a bit and she knows the stains will never fade.

"Well done. Do not think of it any longer, we will have another of our own."



Half a Man
Robert Orozco



Shadows

Kyle Chandler

La Llorona Mujer

Mainardo Flores

Something distant had woken Cruz. He was not sure what he had heard. Like that feeling of falling you get just as you fall asleep, but in his ears. His little bed took up a third of a small bunkhouse he called home. The striped blanket over his body kept him warm and comfortable, sheltered from the cold temperature of the room. He glanced at his alarm clock.

2:10 AM. *Too early to get up.*

The sunrise would bring a full day's work. He took a ranch job over the summer to help rebuild after a bad flood that ruined the land the month before. He took care of the new orchards and maintained the trails, enjoying only his dog's company.

He heard the noise again, soft and far away. His dog's eyes lit up in the moonlight.

"What was that?" he asked his dog. The glowing red numbers on his alarm clock glared at him. 2:22 AM. *It's nothing.* He closed his eyes to go back to sleep.

3:18 AM. Cruz almost jumped out of bed, hearing the same noise but louder; closer to his bunkhouse. His dog whined. They both had heard it, a woman's voice; a lament of sorts, loud and painful. Could it be a woman? The ranch was one hundred and seventy-three acres of orchards, hills full of oaks and chaparral. A day's walk from any town. A wide creek ran through the property, and the bunkhouse sat on the west bank. The idea that someone was on the property was doubtful.

He sat up in his bed and looked out a small window. The full moon helped him see, but its light turned the landscape into a bizarre image of black and grey shadows. He searched the familiar scene with his keen eyes, a soft sloping hill across the creek covered with

oaks. The shallow water in the creek glimmered in the moonlight as it tumbled between river rocks. Nothing looked different or out of place to Cruz, but the voice had come from that direction.

It's nothing.

A cold chill ran up his spine. His dog sat next to his bed, pawing at the striped blanket. Cruz looked harder out the window again and saw nothing. *Maybe it's a coyote down by the creek calling its pups.* But he knew it was wishful thinking.

Cruz saw something move down by the creek near a couple of large rocks. He made sure that the thick timbers protecting his small home were still intact, and then looked back to the rocks.

He rubbed his eyes, straining to make out the form by the creek. It was a woman. She had moved further north along the creek. Twice more she had let out a mournful wail, making his skin crawl. He could see her a little better now. Her head was covered by a some kind of shawl, her dress reached the water as she walked in the creek. Her frame looked thin, her arms skinny as she reached up to the moon with each unintelligible wail.

Cruz stood by his small nightstand and opened the top drawer, quietly removing his revolver. Clean. Shiny. Loaded. *Just in case.*

He hurried to dress, afraid of changing his mind about approaching the woman, and tucked the revolver into his jeans at the small of his back, the hard geometry pressing against his spine. When he stepped out onto his porch, he tracked her figure among the shadows. His dog whined.

"Stay back, girl." He whispered, hoping to stay quiet as he moved away from his bunkhouse. *It's nothing to be worried about.*

The woman had gone a little further north and was now even closer to his home. She had kneeled down in the creek, digging through the black mud as if she was searching for something. He could hear her voice, moans and soft laments moving through the wind, but Cruz didn't understand what she was calling out.

He walked toward her. She was turned toward the creek, her back facing him as he came closer. She kept wiping the mud in front of her, reaching deeper and pulling out darker sand. Cruz neared the

edge of the creek and called out to her.

“Hey, are you ok?”

She let out a wail that frightened him to the core of his soul, but he kept his nerve. Sweat poured down his back as he summoned the courage to try to speak to her again.

“Woman, what are you doing?” he yelled out to her.

“Mis hijos!” she screamed out, her thin arms reaching out into the night sky.

Cruz clenched his jaw and ground his teeth into one another. *Maybe she was a migrant lost crossing the border from Mexico.*

Cruz understood Spanish more or less; his grandfather only spoke Spanish to him. He wandered into his mind to find the right combination of words.

“Señora, tu nombre?” He asked her.

She stopped digging at the sound of his words.

“Mi nombre?” Her voice sounded like a cold wind blowing across a stovepipe, dry and hoarse from her wailing.

Cruz’s hand rested on the revolver.

“S-S-Señora?” He stuttered.

She turned her head slightly toward Cruz, and he saw her dark eyes shining in the moonlight. Her shawl fell back and revealed locks of black hair that whipped in the wind. Her voice sounded very old, but her face was young; colored cheeks of brown skin, a strong nose and full lips. *She’s beautiful.*

He relaxed his grip on the revolver.

“Señora, tu nombre?” He asked again, reaching out his hand to help her up from the mud.

“Mi nombre,” she whispered into the night. She stared at him, her eyes looked lost. Suddenly, her eyes widened and became watery as if she were about to cry. Cruz saw a strange sadness and despair.

“Si, tu nombre, señora.”

“Malinche,” she said in a dry tone. “Malinche!” Tears began to roll down her soft brown cheek, and her flesh seemed to dry up and become decrepit. Her nose shriveled, and her eyes now sat

sunken in deep black sockets. Her veins swelled and turned dark against her pale skin, cracking around her mouth.

She spun full around to face Cruz. “Malinche!” She opened her mouth to wail again, her lips dry and cracked, and her mouth grew unnaturally wide. Her tongue turned black and snaked in her mouth, and she stood up from the mud.

“Mis hijos!” Her unholy voice carried across the hills.

Cruz recoiled in horror at the vision, bringing his arm back from her reach. The woman walked towards Cruz with outstretched hands, shuffling through the dark mud and wet leaves littered around the creek. He couldn’t focus on anything around him, but the grip on his revolver brought him back to his senses.

“Mis hijos!” She wailed again and again as she grew closer and closer to him.

A muzzle flash lit the night as Cruz fired at the woman as she moved faster toward him. He tried to keep his distance from her long, boney hands, and stumbled backwards into the dirt. Her overgrown nails came closer, dripping with mud and water.

Cruz fired twice more.

Darkness dripped from the holes in her chest, and her long hands fell to her body. Her mouth filled with black liquid that fell from her teeth.

“Mis hijos,” she spoke as she fell inches away from Cruz’s feet. The woman’s body became one with the mud, and her voice faded with the sound of water moving between the rocks.

He dropped the revolver in the mud and pulled his body away from the woman, closer to the water. His hand moved over something stuck in the mud. It was soft, almost like flesh.

His dog walked over Cruz’ legs, sniffing the spot by the water where Cruz had put his hand.

“Get back, girl.” He used his hands to move the dark sand and revealed a small hand buried in the mud, soft like that of a small child, but cold.

Mis hijos. Mis hijos. Mis hijos.



Farm Truck

Ricky McBrayer



Fallen Warrior

Juan Aguirre

To Covet Dawn

Kassidy Butterworth

To the misfortunes and despair
And misgivings toward the human race,
Is it wise to question if it's fair?
When day is gray and hearts begin to lose their pace
And a mother looks into her child's hopeless face
When you watch your haven crumble and fall
Fumes engulfed
Last only to not hear one's call?
I cannot see
For my eyes have turned away
Grew inward, sheltered from the light of day
And my voice has gone mute
No words can contain any significance
While the world is crashing
And my blind eyes look towards the Whip
that's lashing
Across the shores
I covet the horizon
To me once bore
Watercolors of beauty
Still wet after the stroke of a brush
When life was full of youth and lush
I would say it was the simple things
And questions not, whether it was fair
To witness life
Completely bare.

1960s

THE ARTIST

What can I know of literature;
That wondrous realm of art?
Where structured sentence rhyming
Brings rapture to the heart.
What can I know of hallowed halls
Where all the muses roam?
For Sophocles and Shakespeare,
This is the rightful home.
But I live in another world.
My thunderbolt is dropped—not hurled.
My tragedies aren't sweeping.
My comedies need piecing.

But, wondrous thing! How can it be
That people laugh or weep with me?

— Louise See

1966



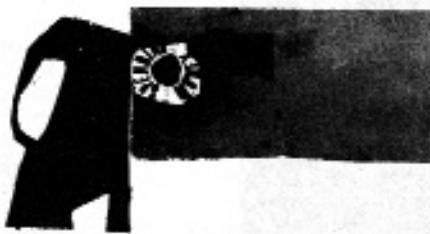


IT'S NOT LIKE KILLING MEN

I fly the sky and chase the Viet Cong.
I swoop and buzz the engine once or twice,
And they all scurry out around the rice
Paddys, just like lice, and I pick
Them out between the finger and thumb of my gun
And crush their skulls and backs. They run--
To wrinkles on the land, and over little warts
Of hills and under hairy tufts of trees--
But I still chase and search and pick and squeeze.
I tick the dead ones off with grease pencil--
I've quite a score blacked here, and still--
I free the land of vermin, lice, and so...
It's not like killing men you know...

Pat Folk

1967



to be nine

The soldier wipes the drooling sweat from his tortured face. The bugs, nats and flys swarm around his head and dip in to taste the salty slime. The tropical sun burns the jungle path. Vines and sharp-edged leaves switch his arms and face as he follows the straggling line of men.

He was the best marble shooter on the block until Billy Fariday moved to his Los Angeles suburb. He had the biggest gray bag of multi-colored glass marbles among all of the other boys. He got a blue two-wheeler bicycle for Christmas. He lost it in a tough game of poison to Billy, but his dad got it back for him. He was nine.

The old sergeant stops and lifts his hand in the air. The soldier stops with the other fourteen men. No one moves. They hold their breaths, rifles poised, ready for any movement in the jungle. Sweat stings their eyes. "Why did he stop? What did he see?" The soldier could hear his heart beating above the sound of squaking birds and chattering monkeys. "For God's sake why in the hell did they need this limitless waste pile of rice pattys mapped? Kill the enemy. Who was the enemy? Just any slant-eyed, slimy bastard who tries to stop us?"

He screwed the lid of the peanut-butter jar closed tight. He slapped two slices of bread together and grabbed a mouthful of sandwich. "What should I do now? I think I will get Grandpa's big magnifying glass, I can play with it if I'm careful." He ran through the house slamming doors behind him as he went. He found the glass in his grandfather's desk and slipped out through the back door. He sat on the lawn. It was summer time and all of the little birds sang to him from the big avocado trees. He focused the sun's light through the glass and concentrated it in a pin point of sharp blue glare. He burned up blades of grass. He burned up bugs and ants too, but he did not like the smell the little sow-bugs made when they burned. He was nine.

The sergeant motions forward with his hand and they again move up the path. The ebony mud grabs and slurps their heels with each step. The path leads, as the sergeant noticed, directly into a secluded straw village. The men enter the clearing. No natives can be seen; curiosity has not held them. "Probably thirty of those slimy bastards watching us from the bush," said one soldier. "If we was a hand-out party they'd be lickin' our God-damned hands."

He ran. The easy nickel tight in his grubby little hand. The Good Humor Man waited at the end of the street. He raced with Joey. Joey always got a Coca Milk Bar. He always got a cherry popcycle. He was nine.

The men struggle along in two disorderly files. A little boy skips from behind one of the huts at the far end of the village. He whistles, a smile on his face. His skin is olive, not too dark. His eyes are not too slanted. His long black hair is disarranged. Curls dance on his forehead. A warm breeze licks the air. His feet are free of shoes. He skips down the center of the village and smiles at the white, round-eyed soldiers as he passes the columns. The men march slowly on but the sergeant is watching the boy. Still skipping, he slides a long, round piece of bamboo from his ragged sarong. The sergeant fires. The forty-five slug splits the boy's head and pops it. The men dive to the side. The boy's body falls on the bamboo tube filled with grenade powder and it blows a large hole in the center of the village. He was nine.

David Bengtson 1964



FATE'S DEATH

The bloody heads of Tamerlane
Catapult over the citadel's walls.
Dead eyes fix, as from the sky they fall,
The heads of men who toiled in fertile soil.
Wives and grandmothers raped--
Babies sliced with steel,
Bodies castrated and split like boards,
Eaten by the dogs of the invading infidels.

Now men journey in newer years,
With sterner toils and greater fears;
Under the penalty of more terrible fate,
To have their entire essence melt,
And join the souls in the Van Allen Belt.

David Bengston
1964

night watch

Larry Smith 1965

It was the sort of day that made a man wish that he were an artist. As he pulled on his deck boots and his pea jacket, he noticed the brown sou'wester lying anonymously under another seaman's bunk. He looked out the tiny porthole. The sea gently rolled off to obscurity, without the least suggestion of telltale white foam. He mumbled to himself that a good sailor doesn't need a hat, not even thinking what he said.

Grabbing his own bunk-chain, he realized that he may have underestimated the size of the sea which was running on the starb'd quarter. This revelation was confirmed as he suddenly became conscious of the bang, SLAP of the sail overhead catching the wind at the top of a giant swell to send the ship crashing down into the next, only to fall again lax as the ship rose almost perpendicularly to the crest.

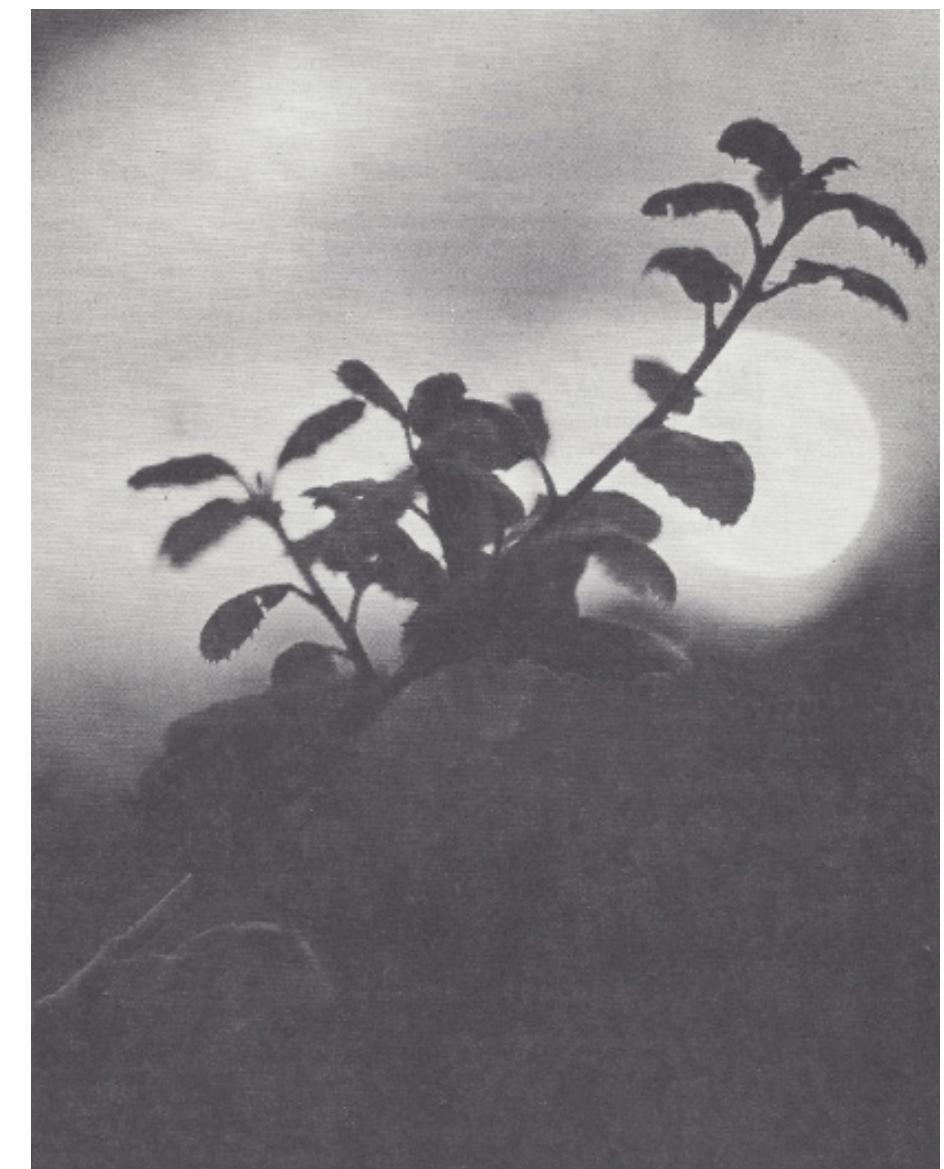
Clambering down the companionway, he heard the topm'st watch reporting land off the port bow, from the perch where he had been lighting the masthead. The thought of raising favorable anchorage passed through his mind.

The last hand had just gone below. In the all-encompassing gloom, the only light came from the moon and an occasional flash of phosphorescence from the anchor line as the ship swung slowly back and forth with the tide. The seals no longer romped playfully in the inlet; all were on the rocks closer in, breathing heavily. As he cautiously went forward, he heard the quiet slap of an occasional wave patting the hull. He noticed they came from port now. The tide had changed.

The gentle breeze suddenly nipped his nose - he buttoned his top button. The stars overhead seemed intensified and multiplied from the landlubber's sight. The mystery of the tall, jagged dark outline in whose irregularity they had taken shelter chilled him. He was nearly entranced by its overhanging gloom.

The night enthralled him.

The sound of a smelt jumping under the cutwater startled him from his reverie. Then he noticed that the eastern sky, which had been barely graying a moment ago, was now aflood with yellow and blue. Day enveloped the small creaking mass of wood, canvas, and manilla. 'Oh, well,' he said. 'I guess I better start the coffee.'



George Anderson 1967



easy wings
pass by
me
if
i remain
still
alone
while easy wings
pass by.
my head on my knees
your head on my shoulder
if
i remain
alone
while easy wings
pass
by
in the fog.
(silence)
in the fog
turning
leaves.
(silence)
the color of your hair
the sadness of your eyes
the color of your hands
the sadness in your eyes
upon my shoulder

Robert Gayton

1965

HE CLOSED HIS EYE ON THE SPARROW

By Elizabeth Niles Gunderson 1968

Home Companion is beside me in the double bed, the white sheet drawn half over his nakedness, snoring his way into the oblivion of the sated drunk. He reeks of alcohol and sour stomach with every reverberating breath. I am sure he is deep asleep and get up to bathe myself. The hot water and soap take way the stink of mansweat and the odor of his lust. I scrub myself until I tingle.

There are red spots on my arms and legs where the new bruises will be; yellow green blotches where the old ones are beginning to fade. I scour good and feel better on the outside.

My cotton nightgown feels of the iron and is fresh against my skin. I can smell the violets of the sachet. I brush my hair and ribbon it away from my face. I scowl. His things are next to mine on the sink shelf--his brush and mug, the thick leather strop hanging from its hook, the brown case holding his Granddaddy's ivory handled straight razor. They look brutish next to my tiny bottle of scent and powder bowl of talcum. I stand there looking at his things and trying not to think. You cannot not think.

Bronwyn shrills. I rush to her. She is not really awake. She whimpers. I lift her from her bed and sit with her in my lap in the rocker.

"Hush, Hush," I say. I cuddle her and brush her night dampened hair from her forehead. She nuzzles closer and rests her tiny star fish hand on my breast. I do not have a lamp but I can see her face--her eye darkening and her lips enlarged into a grimace.

"Poor Baby. Poor Baby," I sing softly.

He had come home in his cups shouting "Emmy" at the top of his lungs as he opened the door.

"Hush you, Home. I'm getting ready for bed." I called in a loud whisper from the top of the stairs. He came up heavy on the steps. He is a big man carrying more fat than he should. He goes slower than he used to.

Home sat with a thump-grunt on his side of the bed and undid his shoes. He dropped his shirt on the floor. went

into the bathroom and came back wearing just his underwear. He reached for me as I loosed my robe for sleep. I tried not to stiffen. He felt me go rigid in his embrace. Holding my arms in a fierce grip, he forced me back onto the bed and pushed himself between my legs. He caressed my neck and shoulders with his lips. Dear God. Against my will I began to respond. He pushed my gown and lifted me to him. Bronwyn called.

"Mama! Mama! I'm afraid. Mama!"

"You're alright, Sweetie." I called and tried to move Home from me. "Mama's coming."

"Like Hell she is." Home gripped me tighter, his fingers biting into my flesh.

"She's scared." I struggled.

"Of what?"

"A bad dream." I tried again to move him and pinched at his shoulders. He cuffed me and I cried out.

"Why is Daddy hurting you, Mama?" Bronwyn was at our doorway. He wrinkled yellow seersucker pajamas were twisted on her thin legs. She was dragging her blanket.

"Damn!" Home moved and I gasped with the release of his heaviness.

Bronwyn came rushing to the bed and pummeled at her father for hurting me. Home's anger rose. He struck out in his drunkenness and hit her, smashing hard at the side of her face. She fell and lay still on the braided cottonrag rug.

I screamed, "You've killed her too."

I crouched over Bron and cradled her head in my hands. Her eyelids fluttered open. I carried her to the bath where I laved her face with cool water and washed the blood from her mouth off her chin. She did not cry though her eyes showed her terror.

"Emmy, put the kid to bed." Home called, impatient want making his voice thick.

"Soon, Home," I answered.

"Now, or do you want me to?" He shouted and started Bron to soundless tears. I kissed her and gave her a baby aspirin.

"I'm putting her down now, Home." I tucked her in bed with her blanket and calico puppy and sat holding her hand until she would doze off. Home came thrashing in. He jerked me from the rocker and pushed and shoved me to our room. He had his way with me. Now... I am bathed again, holding my bruised baby on my lap. I feel revulsion for him and for me. I rock slowly and I try not to think. You cannot not think.

Bron wriggles. She cannot seem to get comfortable. I put her in her bed. She relaxes and stretches full length on her back. I smile at her.

I cross the hall from Bronwyn's tiny dormer to the other room. It is so empty. The bed by the window shows its bare mattress indecently. It is so filled with memory ghosts of Selena. Only ghosts. Why?

Home had come to the diner where I worked for his dinner everyday. He flirted me with his strange no-color eyes. He bought my favor with pretties and nice words until I gladly gave him all any girl has to give. At 16, who really thinks about tomorrow?

He loved me in his way. He married me and we tried to make the best of what we had. But, Selena and I became his millstones and he turned to drink, more and more to drink. His tenderness became indifference and his good humor, surliness. He drank to drown his despair with his lot and found only more despair. He hurt and lashed out against us all. It became a wall between us and a cold fear in me. Only when he would want did any trace of the man I had loved return, but more often than not, our coupling was besotted, one sided and with loveless violence.

And then, one morning, one Spring....

Selena came running up the stairs. At 10, she never walked if she could run or dance. Her dark hair bobbed against her shoulders. Her deep set no-color eyes, like his, shone. She flung herself at Home as he came from the bath.

"Daddy! I won! I won the contest with my poem!" she screamed. She grabbed his hands and tried to dance him around.

"I get it printed in a book, a certificate and a prize, Daddy! I won!" She threw herself at him and tried to hug him tight. He untangled her and shook his head against her shrillness and vigor. She hopped against him again and he shoved her. She careened backwards with screams, hers and mine, and lay crumpled at the bottom of the stairs, an unstrung marionette making no sound.

Home was hard sobered. He wept. For a while, without drink, we found good in each other. There was a closeness again and during this time we made Bronwyn. But, as soon as my belly rounded, he went back to the bottle, more than before. It killed my love for him and Selena sleeps under a small marble stone.

Bronwyn cries in her sleep again. I cross to her closing Selena's room behind me. There has been a change in the sky. It will not be long until the sun is up. Already the early dawn noises are sounding. I look at Bronwyn and I cry. In this light I really see the sealed shut blackened eye, the swollen bruised cheek, the split lips. Dear Lord! Her button nose is pushed aside and puffy. She is breathing sucky-like through her mouth.

The evil taste fills me. I rush to the bath and vomit until I am weak. Home's snores are even louder in here. I shut my ears to them.

I wash my face and hands carefully. I change into my day clothes and recomb my hair. I collect the things and go to our bed. Home is on his back rumbling and wheezing. I touch his slackened face and he does not move. I shake him. He never breaks the rhythm of his snoring.

I put the towels folded thick by his ears and on his chest and bring them together at his shoulders. I look out the window. The sky is streaked with morning pink. I lean over Home. I am surprised my hand is not trembling. I open the razor and draw it deeply across Home's throat opening him from ear to ear. He gushes red but moves little. The towels turn crimson.

I telephone them. They will come.

I go to Bronwyn's room. I hold her hand. I croon to her as I rock. I try not to think. Forever I've known you cannot not think.

Familiar Bed

Freddy Cleveland

Alex and I are alone. She's my cousin, the second child of my father's brother, but I try to forget about that. I try to forget about how we used to take baths together when we were kids, how we used to take naps in this bedroom, in this bed. I try to forget about all of that as I kneel and bow my head towards her lap like I'm waiting for her blessing. I kiss her leg and she lets out a slow breath.

Out in the living room, everybody's forgotten about us. All the rest of our family is telling stories. The aunts and uncles are talking in low voices while the cousins and grandchildren are gathered around to listen to the mythology of Pop-pop, my father's father, like he was Prometheus or Ulysses or George Washington's cherry tree. All I can hear through the walls are faint murmurs and bursts of laughter and then stretches of thoughtful silence when they remember that he's dead. As long as I hear the cadence of their voices, the jumbled rise and fall, I know that nobody will be looking for us. As long as they're telling their stories, they won't even realize we're gone.

Alex's hands draw furrows through my hair and her legs shift and her skirt strokes my cheek. Everything is soft except for the heels digging into the small of my back.

"Wait," she says. "Just a second..."

I raise my head and see her eyes are closed. Her lower lip moves and there is a flash of her teeth and her tongue.

"All right?" I say.

"Ok. I'm ready."

"You sure?"

"I said I'm ready you pussy."

She does that thing where she scrunches up her lips to try to hide her smile.

Earlier today, Alex and her mother, my father's brother's

wife, had an argument right before we were supposed to leave for the church. I was lying on the couch, using a stack of clean sheets as a pillow. The TV was off, but I stared at it, watching the reflection of Alex and my aunt argue.

"I said to wear something nice for the funeral and this is what you went with?" her mother said. She lifted the edge of Alex's skirt.

"It's fine, mom," Alex said and slapped her hand away.

"What would Pop-pop say?"

"He would say I looked like a whore."

"Well... I'm not going to say that..."

"But you'd like to? Mom. He hated Jews and every time he saw a black guy, he'd give him dirty looks and mutter under his breath."

"He was the product of his time."

"So was like... name any civil rights leader."

"They're all black."

"Ugh, Mom..."

"Connor, what do you think?" my aunt caught my attention and I turned around in the chair to look at them.

"That's not awkward at all," Alex said.

"Don't drag me into this," I frowned and turned back to the blank TV.

"Isn't it too short?"

"Eh?" I sighed. "But we should have been out of here like thirty minutes ago."

"Then why didn't you leave with your mom and dad?" my uncle said. My father's brother.

"I was waiting for you guys," I shrugged.

"Aw, thanks for the support, babe," Alex said, knowing it would make my ears get all hot and red.

"Stop being so weird, Alex," her mother said.

We got in the car, Alex and her older brother and I in the back seat and her parents up front. Her mom drove because her dad hates driving.

"You should have gone earlier," her dad said, "there's barely

any room for you back there with my kids.”

“Sorry,” I said.

“And Alex, what took so long?”

“I had to shower and do my makeup and everything. Pop-pop would have wanted me to look sexy.”

“What did I say about being weird?” Her mother said. “No more of that when we get to the church.”

But really, it was only a good thing that Alex stalled as long as she did. It just meant we got to avoid thirty minutes of people offering condolences while we hung out at the edge of the crowd and didn’t know what to say or do. Every single face I saw I had to ask myself if they were family that I was supposed to know from somewhere. Alex glanced at me and did her scrunched up smile thing.

At the church, people were already being seated in rows of pews and we took our place in the second row. Alex sat beside me and after a moment leaned in and whispered:

“I thought we were going to see his body.”

“Really, Alex?” I said. “Aren’t you kinda pushing it?”

“How can we even be sure he’s dead?” She muttered, but her eyes didn’t quite meet mine and she looked away again quickly. If her mom hadn’t been on her other side, I would have taken her hand and told her it would be all right.

When I was seven and she was six, she and her brothers and sister spent a summer at the grandparents’ while their parents went to Europe. I went to play with them twice a week, but they never wanted to play Clue or Monopoly no matter how much I insisted.

“Come on,” her brother Peter said. He was ten. “We’re playing hide and seek. If you want to be a faggot and spend the day inside, that’s not my problem.”

Alex took my hand.

“It’ll be all right,” she said. “You’re on my team.”

“There aren’t any teams, moron,” Peter said.

Then he counted to a hundred. Alex and I ran to the shed at the back of the yard. I didn’t know who built it, only that it was rot-

ting and the lock was broken. Alex and I hid inside.

The air hung heavy with heat and dust. It was hard to breathe like lying with a blanket over your head. We watched through the cracks in the splintered door as Peter found the others and they ran screaming for the coiled hose that served as our base. Nobody found us for three rounds and then our grandmother called us to lunch.

When I was eleven, I had a dream about the shed, except this time, we kissed and she reached a hand down into the front of my pants and started laughing. I woke up and thought I had wet the bed.

After we were all seated, a woman, a great aunt, my father’s mother’s younger sister, sang a sappy country song about dying young, even though Pop-pop was ninety-three and he fought in World War II and Korea. When people were wiping tears from their cheeks, Alex elbowed me and rolled her eyes subtly. I shook my head at her and she rolled her eyes for real and crossed her arms.

The priest began speaking. His voice was strong and firm and comforting. He talked about hymns and the light came through the stained glass window, throwing dusty beams all around him. I tried to listen to the words, tried to hear them.

“We sing our songs, we sing our hymns, about forgiveness, about the infinite grace of God, and yet for all our songs, are there not times when even the best of us will doubt? One day, we might remind ourselves of the psalms, but Psalms 55 says, ‘my heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me.’ Even the psalms can turn the mind to grief. In our earthly despair, we look up to the heavens and we sing, ‘Will the circle be unbroken, by and by, by and by, is a better home awaiting in the sky, in the sky?’ And the answer given to us by God is, ‘of course’. When we look forward and see nothing but darkness of our own making, we say, ‘Even for me? Even though I have been a sinner?’ and the answer given to us by God is, ‘through me, there is forgiveness. In me is absolution.’”

He paused to collect himself.

“If even Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of Christians, could find new life, if even men condemned to death in our prisons can find new life, if even those who have never heard the name of Christ

before can find new life, then it should be plain to us. A man such as the departed, a man as kind and generous and noble as Connor, surely has a place with God."

I hate hearing my name used for a dead man.

"Connor asked, 'is a better home awaiting?' And he knows with certainty now that there is. He is surrounded by glory and joy that we cannot comprehend."

In the pew in front of me, my grandmother cried.

Every year, there are twenty-seven days between Alex's birthday and mine when we're the same age. When I was fourteen and she was fourteen, we gathered at the grandparents' for her birthday. Her dad and brothers kicked us off the TV to watch football. We left the house and walked to the gas station on the corner. I bought a Mountain Dew and she bought a Diet Coke. I made fun of her for that as we crossed the street and walked the mile and a half to the old middle school. The gate to the baseball field was never locked. I pushed it open for her and we walked through the deserted school to the outdoor cafeteria. It was cold now. A breeze snaked through the buildings and bit at us until we drew close together behind the shelter of a low wall.

"Football," she spat. "How is that more interesting than Doctor Who?"

I shrugged.

"Doesn't matter anyway," I said. "We've still got each other."

"What?" She looked at me and smirked.

"Nothing. Never mind. Happy Birthday."

"Yeah, whatever."

We toasted to her health with our soda bottles.

"I'm as old as you are now," she said.

"That's not how age works, though..."

"Shut up and let me have this one. It's my birthday."

"Fine."

When I turned to look at her, she was facing me and she leaned forward to kiss me. The moment seemed to last for an eterni-

ty. I had wanted this for so long now. Every time we were with each other... She broke away and I realized that she was crying.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't..."

She pressed her face into my shoulder and I held her tight to stop her from shaking. Her arms wrapped around my neck. I rubbed her back until she pushed me away and wiped her eyes with her knuckles.

"What's wrong, Alex?" I traced her jaw. Strong shape, but soft to the touch.

"Nothing," she said and pulled her face away from my hand. "Nothing. I'm sorry. I just... God."

We talked until the sun went down and then we kissed again for a long time and walked back to my grandparent's house in the orange griminess of the street lights. Our parents were angry because we had been gone for hours and during dinner, her parents glared at me as if they knew everything that happened.

When Alex opened her present I got her, she did that smile thing even though she hated books. When we said goodbye, she hugged me a little tighter than normal.

Twenty-seven days later, she got me a subscription to Maxim magazine and we spent an hour in the front bedroom looking through the first issue. She kissed me again.

After the funeral, we came back to our grandparent's house. Just my grandma's house now. We had sandwiches with too much mayonnaise for lunch and we all sat down in the living room with all the couches and chairs circled around the coffee table. Alex sat down on the piano bench and I leaned on the wall near her.

Aunt Becca told about how when she was in high school, Pop-pop read all the same romance novels she did so that they would have something to talk about. My dad reminded everyone of how he taught himself wood-working how he loved to work with his hands, how most of the chairs in the room had been carved by him.

Alex's dad told the story about how he and Pop-pop went camping one time and how there was a storm when they were up on

the mountain and they had come down from the mountain surrounded by rain and lightning. And then, the storm still raging, he pitched their tent and built a lean to for their fire and managed to warm their dinner even in the middle of that storm.

"I just remember thinking how... manly he was," Alex's father said. "Brave and sturdy and strong..."

"Ugh, just marry him already," Alex muttered, low enough so that only I could hear.

Her father, my uncle, looked up suddenly and glanced around the room, as though realizing where he was. For a moment, I was afraid that he had heard Alex, afraid that he would look at her in anger. But he only shook his head and squeezed his eyes shut for a moment before leaning back into the couch.

Alex stood for a moment after that and went out into the front yard. I almost let her go. I almost didn't follow.

She was waiting for me beneath the oak tree where the dogs were buried. Their graves are marked by three stones, the dates of their deaths written in fading paint. She looked up as I approached and crossed her arms.

"Laddie," she said, tapping the most recent stone with her foot. "Remember him? He was a good dog. Nobody told stories about him."

"I mean... I remember Pop-pop burying him," I shrugged.

"I don't want to hear another story about Pop-pop."

"Huh. Sorry. I never knew you, you know... didn't like him or whatever."

"It's not that," she said and went back to examining the graves. "I don't know. Maybe I don't know how to deal with death or something."

"I guess that's normal," I said. "But really--"

"I mean," she interrupted. "What am I supposed to tell at story time?"

"I dunno," I shrugged. "Remember when you were drowning and he pulled you out of the pool?"

Alex fixed her eyes on me like she was sizing me up, like she

wanted to challenge what I said. I glared back at her. After a moment, she shook her head and looked away.

"Not today," she muttered to herself.

"What's not today?"

"Not the time to tell the story. Nothing. Never mind."

"Alex," I said. "You can tell me. We have that whole thing going... You can tell me."

"Fine," I could barely hear her voice. She stared down at Laddie's grave for a long moment. "You want to hear the story I would tell about Pop-pop?"

"Sure."

"When I was ten, I was feeling really tired so I went into the front bedroom to take a nap. I told grandma to wake me up when she was ready to take us to the pool. I was almost asleep when I heard the door open and I thought it was her so I sat up and it was Pop-pop.

"So I said, 'are we going?'

"Not yet, Lexi," she made her voice deeper, almost mocking. "'Just coming to make sure you're comfortable.'

"So I said I was fine and he asked if there was room for one more because old people need their naps. I didn't say anything and he laid down next to me and it was fine so I was almost asleep again when I felt his hand reach out to touch my waist and when I turned onto my side, he got close to me and sort of slid my shorts off and started touching me.

"And then I heard him breathing hard and I could feel his other hand moving back and forth behind me and after a few minutes, I felt him come on the back of my leg. Except back then I didn't know what it was."

She looked at me for a second and then looked away again. Her jaws twitched a few times like she was trying to talk and couldn't.

"And then he got up and told me to clean myself up in the bathroom. I did and then I tried to take a nap again but I was still awake when grandma came to get me to go to the pool. And while

we were there, I tried to hold my breath underwater while I was like... cleaning off the back of my leg. When I was coming up, I inhaled some water and when I started floundering, he pulled me out and made sure I was ok."

She reached up, I thought to wipe something away from her eyes, but she scratched her temple. My stomach felt tight, like I was hungry and my throat was dry. There was nothing for me to say.

"That's the story I'd tell," she said. "But I don't think anybody else would really appreciate it. So just... I want people to know, but when I think about telling anybody else..."

She sighed heavily and looked up at the oak tree.

"So is that why you've been a dick all day?" I said.

"Shut up."

But she had to hide her smile.

When we went back inside, all it took was a look from her. She led me to the front bedroom and we stood there looking at the narrow bed. After a long moment of silence, she reached out to take my hand.

"Thanks for putting up with me all day," she said.

"Yeah, sure. You have been pretty insufferable, actually. I feel like you owe me one."

"I know," she said. "Sorry."

She turned to kiss me on the cheek, standing taller than me in her heels.

"Not here," I said.

"Come on. Why not?"

"Everybody's out there..."

"And they care so much about what stupid little Alex and Connor are off doing."

"That's not fair..." I watched the door, afraid somebody would come looking for us.

"You said I owed you one."

"That's not what I meant..."

"It's fine, you creepy pervert," she put her hands around my neck.

"We should close the door," I said.

The voices in the living room became murmurs and then we were alone.

"I said I'm ready, you pussy," she says.

So I unbuckle my belt and let my pants drop to the floor along with my boxers. I kick off my shoes and she does the same. She reaches under her skirt and pulls her underwear down and leaves them on the floor with her shoes, coiled around themselves like a rope. I keep trying to forget that she's my cousin, keep trying to forget what's already happened in this room, in this bed that's all too familiar to both of us. She leans back on her elbows and watches me. I climb on top of her clumsily and after a moment, she opens her legs and lets me between them.

When we finish, the voices are still rising and falling in the background and we're both breathing hard, filling the room. I can smell it a little, but nobody will come looking for a long time yet. I lie on the bed next to her and she turns to look at me and after a moment, she smiles and doesn't try to hide it.



From Her to Eternity

Erik DeHaro

Ink Chanele Retuya

A voice too soft to express what needed to be heard.
You opened your mouth, but it came out as a whisper.
When you gathered your thoughts, you were at a loss for words.
In that moment, you realized how much you missed her.
And then your syllables began to stutter.
All you wanted to do was clear your head,
To get rid of all the clutter,
But there were too many things left unsaid.
When you let the ink spill across the blank page,
You craved a pencil and an eraser.
Words you wanted to rearrange.
Your deepest lines disappeared in the air like vapor.
It was the only time you felt elite.
We sat in silence to give the pen a chance to speak.

Con Coyo

Austin Torres

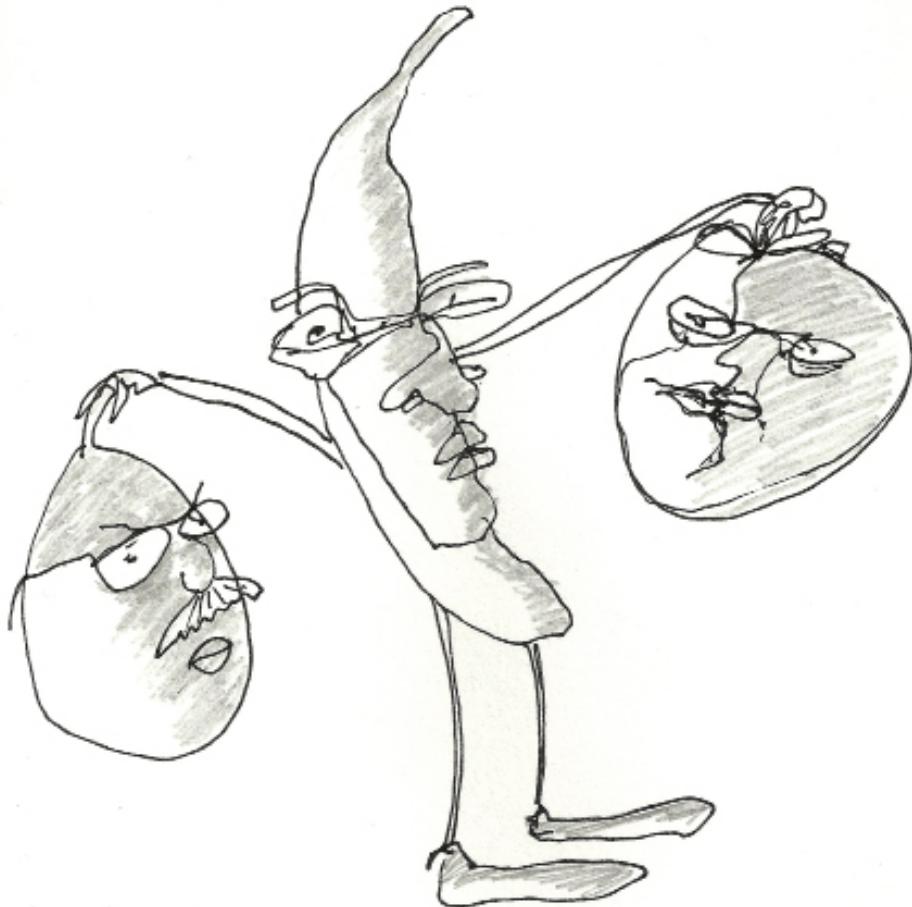
Honestly, I never liked to hunt.

 All that killing
 And bloodshed
And crying from the prey
 As I chomp
 The neck
 Or the stomach.

I don't need it any more.



On the Hunt Juan Aguirre



Fruit Fight

Robert Orozco

My Truths at Age Seventeen

Josiah Yerkes

Third Place, Poetry

Watermelons are one of many fruits
That tastes completely different
Than their candy counterparts.
Ronald is the name of the super creeper clown
That owns McDonald's.
He has over applied
Bright red lipstick all over his face.
Canada is a curse
Justin Bieber and Carly Rae
Both came from there
And their songs are hell on Earth.
Penguins spend most of their time underwater
To hide their shame
Of not being able to fly.
The desert is like dessert,
Without the extra "s" or calories.
France has the dopiest mustaches
Too bad it's mostly on their women.

At the End

Seth Valenzuela

There is no moon.
Had we been anywhere else
at any other time
I would have thought city lights
had blocked out the stars.

The sky is blacker than pitch,
black enough to make me want
to open my mouth –
to say something meaningful.

Wow.

They're really all gone
she says.

I turn to look at her,
but the pitch has melted
onto the land and spread
to cover the trees and hills
and her body and my eyes.

The grass next to me shifts –
I know she's trying to see.
I reach out my arm
to touch the cotton of her shirt.
Her hand finds mine –
squeezes.

How much time is left?

I sit up to listen
for people, creatures, movements.
Sounds of life.
I can feel her sit up with me.

Three days they said.

A bird cries somewhere.
Even though the pitch
still coats my vision
I know she's looking at me.

What do you want to do?

The wind makes us shiver.
I close my eyes tight –
rub them with a fist so that
just for a moment
I can see stars again.

I don't know.

As the words hit the air
and stick
I know they're not true.

Something meaningful.



Blurred

Ashley Fisher

Eulogy

Aimee Yturralez

I can barely bring myself to look
at the picture staring out at the room
with a fake smile and dead eyes.
She rarely looked at me in real life.
Why should I look at her now?

People come and go at the front of the room.
All of them say the same thing,
again and again.
“She was a loving wife,
a caring friend,
a sister, a daughter,
a mother.”
To too many children she never wanted.

When it’s my turn to speak,
I walk to the front of the room, avoiding her eyes.
Pink, yellow, and red bloom
against the glimmering satin wood,
but I stare at the carpet,
threadbare under my golden heels,
until I’m forced to turn and look at the crowd.

Pairs of tiny spotlights look back at me
in blank stupor,
waiting for me to speak.

“I’m sorry.”

“I have nothing to say.”

The Heart of the Matter

Ariana Chavez

Every pound on the door was a heartbeat.

 Growing faster with my father's fury.

"Never forget who runs this house," he told us
 what seems like seconds ago

We had nodded with wide eyes in agreement.

It must be our fault.

We pump his blood until he's banging down the door,
Some trivial fight pulsing his fury faster and faster.

Now here we sit, four girls and his wife,
 Huddled in this tiny lemon bathroom.

 Eventually he'll knock down the door,
I suggest we lock ourselves in the second room
 with the shower,

 But there my little sisters sit,
Pretending the cream soaps are candy.

In a flash a hole breaks through the door,
A hand from outside grabs for the locked handle.
 Never has a body been so terrified of its heart.

a poem

Jessica Sparks

You are the strangest thing in my life.

When I awake and, still endeavoring
to wrestle with consciousness,

Wrap my arms around you,

It is because I dreamed you were a bird,
And me, being afraid to fall, was left to watch you go.
What do you make of that?



Amelia

Brittany Springer

My Gift to the World

Danielle Cupp

Like a fresh peach plucked from the tree
My daughter was pulled from my womb
The coldness of the hospital room
Became her very first place to sleep
Though I'm told she didn't at all
In the time it took for me to come
They say she screamed as though on fire
Which makes the wait all the more sweet
Since I know she felt the same as me
But when I saw the creamy pale girl
That I'd spent the last, near ten months building
All that left my mouth was silence
I held my new, shiny, copper-haired angel
Untouched by the sun in her midnight birth
And marveled at how she rested soundly
How just my touch calmed her tense nerves
In a world where only I had known her
Felt her first acrobatic move inside me
She still wanted me
And I remember how my Mother had
Described this feeling to me
“Everyday you give them to the world
Little by little, you let go”
And it sinks in
Even though she may always be within my reach
She'll never be quite as close
As before.



Into the Fire

44

Kevin Craig

Fire

Sean Frede

Jack Mawhinney Fiction Prize

Fire does all sorts of weird shit. Most people like to say it dances. It doesn't dance, just explodes.

The wildfire took our home in thirty minutes. My mom and I only had time to grab photo albums and her Kitchenaid mixer. Now, with white breathing masks covering our mouths, we walk through the house as if the walls still stand, ducking underneath ghostly remnants of door jams.

Some talk about how fire destroys. Just absolutely fucking demolishes.

I walk outside, towards what's left of the garage. The '69 Volkswagen Beetle is covered in black soot and the tires have melted, leaving hard mounds on the concrete floor. I run my finger along the rounded top, revealing gray primer beneath. My dad and I spent four years re-modeling and had it running; just needed paint. Then he ran off to Bakersfield with a waitress from the Turkey Inn. I figured we could paint it once he came back, but that was two years ago and now his postcards of ancient oil derricks spurting black ask questions like, "How tall are you getting?" I don't respond anymore.

Fire doesn't care. It eats up everything in its path.

I hear my mom cough as she walks towards me and grabs my shoulder, leaving an imprint of black on my white t-shirt. There's a streak of ash underneath each of her eyes, and the only thing I can smell is burnt rubber.

All fire leaves behind is a black scar.

Breathing

Dayna Giehl

Editor's Choice, Fiction

My father swam the butterfly, a version of the breaststroke that involves difficult kicks and both arms working together in forward, circular motions. He was thin, and he didn't have much of a stomach. He took me to the big lap pool by our old house and taught me how to breathe between strokes, but I was always off. I kept practicing when he left, and I started to focus more on my stroke, more on my breathing.

I take a deep breath, watching the man at the check-in table highlight my name on the long sheet of other names. "Butterfly, eh?" he says to me. His eyes were a bright blue, almost metallic. I smile and nod. "Good luck, son." The man assigns me a lane number and I thank him, my eyes glued to his, and I remember my father.

Dad was practicing for a race, and he did the butterfly better than anybody. I sat on the floor of the pool near the stairs, watching his body make waves in the water around him. He left trails of bubbles behind his kicking feet, and his eyes went to the surface where his arms spread like wings to each side of his back. I watched his chest get bigger every time he took a breath. The curves of his ribs cut through the pool, and his back bowed like the spine of a dolphin. For a second when his hands were on top of each other in front of his head, I thought he was a dolphin.

I watched the air bubble come out of his nose, forming a pocket of air underwater that came up to the surface with the rest of

his body, and then his chest got bigger again. Every stroke seemed the same. He got to the end of the pool and shot his hands into the wall. I came up to breathe with Dad's waterproof stopwatch in hand.

"Fifty-nine seconds!" It was always under a minute, but he was never happy with the times I shouted out. He pulled his cap and goggles off and ducked his head into the water to move the hair out of his face.

"Thanks, Adam." He threw his gear onto the side of the pool, then swam under the floating lane dividers towards me.

I took some deep breaths. "During your last lap, I watched you from underwater."

"Yeah? What'd you see?" He smiled right before he went under another divider, and I never saw him smile at me like that. His eyes were a bright blue, but they seemed even brighter.

"I think that sometimes you're a dolphin when you swim."

Dad nodded his head and smiled at me again, then he hopped out of the pool and over to our spot. He reached into his swim bag and pulled out a pair of goggles that were blue like his.

"Try these on." He threw them in the water and got back into the shallow end with me. I stretched them over my eyes and he tightened the straps behind my ears. Everything turned a shade of blue. I remember thinking that maybe I could do the butterfly like Dad, that maybe I could be a dolphin like him.

I turn away from the man at the table and walk over to my teammates, most of them already in the warm up lanes. I sit on one of the dry towels, extending my legs into stretches and my arms follow. Fifteen second holds, *breathe steady*. I hold the arches of my feet and feel the sun fall onto my back as I scan the bleachers for my father.

"Adam!" Derrick hops onto the edge of the pool and moves his goggles on top of his cap as he shouts my name. He holds the shoulders of another teammate and says something encouraging, then lifts his feet out of the water. "The butterfly, huh?" He walks over and hands me one of the new, bright yellow swim caps. Derrick

is a senior, and he's never really talked to me before, but he's close with Coach and he watches a lot of us at practice.

"Yeah," I run my hand over the top of my hair and stretch the cap over my head, "it's one of my favorite strokes."

"Normally nobody wants to do it," he laughs and puts his hand on my shoulder, squatting down to my level, "but I saw you working at practice the other day and your times were *pretty* impressive."

I take a deep breath and smile, looking down at my feet. My times are always good, but on my turns I keep my hands on the tile for too long, and I have to kick harder to make up for it, and I get tired faster, and I hold my breath for too long, but my times are always good.

"Time?" I asked as I moved my goggles and gasped for air.

"You're just over a minute," Dad said, his palms firm on the concrete. He was wearing the big sun hat he bought in Cancun and the pair of jeans that was torn at the knee; the ones mom told him to throw away months ago.

"I held my breath for the last two strokes like you said to do," I explained.

"Were your elbows straight on the turn?" I couldn't get any words out. I just wanted to breathe. "Listen to me, Adam, were your elbows straight when you put your hands on the wall?" His eyes cut deeper into me.

I put my hands on the back of my head and took deep breaths, "I had them straight, and then I took them to the front when I moved my legs un—"

"They should have been bent, Adam." I felt like my words hit a wall.

"I got a good push off of the wall with my feet, though." I kept breathing.

"Your elbows need to be bent so you can push your torso away from the wall as your feet move onto the tile, so your arms weren't in position for the first stroke of your second lap." There was

nothing else I could say. He reached for the stopwatch around his neck and waited.

I pushed myself out of the water and got back into my starting position, bent at my waist, arms extended. I took my goggles down from my cap and secured them to my eyes.

Bend your elbows. Bend your elbows.

"Again."

I look up at Derrick as he lets go of my shoulder and pats my back a few times.

"You've got this in the bag." He reaches out his hand and helps me to my feet, then gets back into the water with the team. I watch him practice his backstroke, arms stretched with extended fingertips and legs immersed in whitewater. His right hand goes straight above his shoulders at times, and I watch the water drip down his arm. I watch his chest rise, and I watch his feet kick and make waves that continue down the lane until they slap the wall.

I walk to the pool stairs and hold the silver rail, stretching the muscles in my arms and back until I feel loose, shaking the weight out of my body. I skip the steps and sink into the pool, feeling the water level rise to my chest and over.

I keep my eyes closed, focusing on the pool and the cold and the movement of the waves. I hear the horn blow for the first event, muted by the water. I hear the people in the warm up lanes, and their voices, laughing. I focus on the long seconds, my feet falling to the bottom, my lungs, *one, two...*

"When did you lose control of your breathing?" Dad said, and then he gave me that look. His eyes were blue and narrow and they stuck to me as I slid my goggles into my hair. I watched my white feet under the waves, and the water slapped the turquoise tiles behind me.

"I think, when I turned on the last lap my breathing wasn't as good." My toes looked like wrinkled beans, and I wanted to join them on the bottom of the pool.

"Look at me, Adam." I felt the air get colder as I raised my eyes to his, and I lowered my shoulders into the water to keep my body warm. "It's important to exhale as you surface." His eyes didn't move from me. "Do you know why?"

"Because I have less than a second above the water, and I don't have enough time to exhale and inhale between strokes." I waited for a response, but then his eyes spoke with two blinks and a glance at the wall across the pool. I pulled the goggles down over my eyes and made sure they weren't loose, then pushed my body into another lap.

...three. I open my eyes when I hear the referee's whistle and the swimmers' bodies appear in a sea of bubbles on the other side of the pool. I feel the waves move around me, carrying me upward and toward the steps. I let my body come to the surface and take a deep breath, lifting my goggles and wiping the water from my face.

I grab a small towel near my bag and pat my face dry. I move the towel over my legs and upper-body as I head over to my teammates. The same man from the check-in table sits in the bleachers, close to the first row, but not my father. I start to think that maybe he forgot about my meet, or maybe he didn't hear me when I called him last week.

"My meet is next week." I sat down in the kitchen with some left-over pasta and looked at my swim bag by the couch. He didn't respond. "Dad?"

"Where n' when?" He slurred everything into one word.

"It's at my school on Friday. I'm swimming after the first freestyle races, so you could show up around four thirty." I told him when I was on the phone with him a day or two ago, but he was busy at work.

"I'm gonna try to come." I heard a woman's voice in the background, probably one of his new girlfriends, but I couldn't make out anything she was saying.

"I'm swimming the butterfly." I tried to tell him, but he said

something to the woman as soon as I spoke, and my voice was lost inside the telephone.

"Yeah, Adam, I'll try an' make it."

I take a deep breath as the second heat of freestyle swimmers fly into the water at the sound of the whistle, arms over their heads, perfect dives. I watch their kicks and how their bodies come to the top of the water, arms moving and backs straight. They take a breath every three or four strokes, mouths cocked like they were yawning.

"How do you feel?" Coach grabs my shoulders and shifts me so I'm facing him. He's clean-shaven, hazel eyes and a nice whistle around his neck.

"Nervous."

"There ain't a lot of swimmers who wanna do the butterfly, you know," he smiles at me and shakes my head, "these guys have nothin' on your times." He takes my towel and throws it over his shoulder, gives me a friendly "go get 'em, kid!" and pushes me toward the blocks.

I take a deep breath and wait for my race, two swimmers standing next to me. They check their goggles and shake their arms. I watch the reflection of the bleachers in the water in front of me, listening to the waves slap the tile.

The referee blew his whistle as the last freestyle swimmer pushes himself out of the pool. I step onto the wet block and place both feet toward the back. I tug on my cap and make sure my goggles are in place, tightening the blue straps around my head. I shake my arms like the other swimmers as I move my feet into position and arch my back. My eyes steady over the water, and I can smell the chlorine.

I feel the cold block with my fingertips, the wet surface, and I wrap my fingers around the rough edges. *Inhale.*

Dad sat on the edge of the bumpy concrete with his legs in the water, and I stood next to him on the block. I'd never been to this pool, but Dad said that it'd be good for me to practice my entries with blocks.

I had watched him jump from a block hundreds of times. He wanted me to feel the height and learn the right competition stance.

“Now, move your feet to the back of the block, and then place one foot in front of the other” he said as he touched my foot and I lost my balance. I reached down to grab the block and steady myself, then stood up straight and positioned my feet like my Dad would. “Make sure your cap is in place and your goggles are tight, and then dive like how you would normally dive from the edge of the pool.” *Back arched. Face forward.* “I’ll start time when you hit the water.”

Exhale. The whistle blows and I leap from the block, hands on top of one another, arms straight, legs pointed. A cold wave rushes over my body, from my head to my ankles, until my feet dip into the pool and I move into fifteen meters of dolphin kicks. I come up with my arms and take my first breath.

I move my hands and forearms underneath my chest, and as my body rises toward the surface of the water I remember to exhale. My head breaks the surface. *Inhale.* My arms come out of the water and swing forward, and I feel the pool move over the back of my neck and behind me. I pull myself through the water and remember my breathing. *Exhale.* My head peeks. *Inhale.* Water moves with the curve of my spine and I feel like a dolphin. *Exhale.* The wall gets closer and I take a final breath before the turn. I feel my chest get bigger and change the water around me. *Bend your elbows. Bend your elbows.* I put both hands on the wall, flat, elbows bent, and push my hands forward as my legs move onto the tiles in one motion. I move my body back into dolphin kicks and feel the water underneath me. *Exhale.* My arms come above the water and my mouth just above the surface. *Inhale.* I focus on the wall; the black tiles in front of me. I hold my breath for the last two strokes. I want the wall; my hands on the tiles.

It was early, and I woke up to the sound of a car door outside. I untangled myself from my blankets, rubbing the blurry corners out

of my eyes. Dad’s voice echoed upstairs as I wandered into the bathroom to grab my swimsuit for our morning practice. I struggled to find the leg holes, and the fabric was still damp from the day before, so it stuck to my legs as I pulled the elastic over my bottom.

I came out of the bathroom and saw Dad walk downstairs with a suitcase. I followed him around the corner and down each step, but he walked right past our swim bags by the couch. He walked right past Mom at the kitchen table. She was in her bathrobe smoking a cigarette, hair greasier than yesterday. I watched her try to talk to Dad as his shoes scuffed through the carpet. I followed him, but as he walked through the door I stopped near the couch.

He forgot our swim bags.

My hands hit the tiles, flat and together. The seconds seem longer as I wait to raise my head above the water. I keep my eyes closed and take off my cap and goggles with one hand, placing them on the edge of the pool. I feel the water crash into my eyelids; the blue and the cold, the bubbles rolling over the arch of my back, floating to the surface. I hold my breath and let my legs drop to the wall, hanging onto the edge of the pool with both hands. I hear people cheer above the water, murmuring voices caught in the ripples, but I keep my eyes closed.

I look up. He’s wearing the sun hat from Cancun, and his jeans are still torn at the knee, swim bag by his side on the bleachers. His eyes stare down at the water, at me, and he rushes to his feet when he sees my time. He yells my name with a smile stretched to his ears as I push myself onto the concrete, and he opens his arms just wide enough for me to squeeze in.

Then I opened my eyes.

1970s



GOVERNMENT PROPERTY

by Glen A. Hoglin 1977

As we climbed into the AmTracs
like being born in reverse,
the Sergeant checked out our packs
like a hospital report read by a nurse.

"Boots, 2; Trousers, 3;
Ammo, three bandoliers apiece;
Shirts, 2; Socks, four pair."
(He read it as if he really cared.)

"Laces, spare, 3; Tent-half, 1;
M16 Rifle, (not 'gun');
Magazines, 6; Bayonet, with stone."
(Like my mother when I left home.)

"Undershirt, Man's, 3; C-Rats, two days;
Paper/tablet; four tent pegs;
Map and Compass, 1 set."
(He checked it all lest we forget.)

"Underwear, 3 pair; Canteens, 2, full;
John Wayne, opener, can; 1 pen and pencil;"
(Life, 1; Blood, Pints, 8 approximately;
Everything, including the last, Government Property.)

BUM DREAMS AND SPIDERS

by Pat Madsen 1971

two men two bums are talkin insape in an unsane world
two dirty men with their own pure footprints

their own, you see
so they're alone, you see

and so these two bums are talkin
sittin and smokin stray Camels
they find between the tracks they're sittin on
jas sittin and talkin and smokin
wishin for dreams that would always come true
bum dreams
like Hvin in a castle in the clouds in the air
or findin the Road that will get you somewhere
jus dreamin
an laughin with their eyes a'shinin
as if they knew something
as if they knew something about laughin
jus laughin
until one bum says to the bum with the pierced ear
"hey man, you've got a hole in your ear!" an starts
to laughin
but the bum with a hole in his ear couldn't laugh
cause he remembered
and he remembered
a woman a needle and a kiss
a woman a needle and a kiss
an he jus smiles
an turns his head from the bum who's still laughin loud
an spies a busy black widow at work in the bush
spinnin out her crazy-quilted web her cave-in of silk
an he smiles
but now with both his eyes a-sparklin
as if he knew something
as if he knew something about bum dreams and spiders
an he jus smiles

Ersatz Graffiti

david terrazas

1974

The other day as I was buzzing around trying to discover the Infinite, a strange thing happened. I found him.

I had just eaten lunch--pepperoni and cheese pizza, hold the anchovies--and was about to head out to the coast. I was just getting into my jive-ass buggy when I noticed this short, fat, ugly, smelly little guy sitting in the back seat, drooling all over my brand new upholstery job.

"Hey man, what you doin' in my car, man?" I asked.

The little guy didn't do jackshit.

"I said, hey man, what you doin' in my car? Why don't you speak when you're spoken to? I was getting quite perturbed.

"Whadaya want, man?" I said, reaching in and grabbing his puny putrid body.

"What you seek is what you get," he squeaked.

"What's that supposed to mean, man?" I didn't want any little pip-squeak telling me anything.

"It means nothing, and it means all. It is all that you wish, and none that you want. It means that my Nielson rating dropped fifteen points this season." Even through all the hair on his face I could sense his eyes were looking at the chick walking by my car.

"Why don't you go follow that and leave me alone, man? I gotta go to the coast and find the Infinite, and I ain't gonna have room to keep any little man in the back seat of my bug, man." I knew the logic of my words would convince him to leave. But just in case they didn't, I took out my knife.

"There is no need for violence,

my son. To injure me will only serve to injure yourself," he said.

I could see the logic of his statement. Besides, his knife was bigger than mine.

"Okay, man, you can come with me to the coast," What else could I do?

So I shut the door and gave my baby some juice. Yeah, I wasn't about to let any three foot shrimp spoil my day. No sir.

So I boogied on down to the coast, got out of my bug, locked her up nice and tight, and trucked on over to a group of my people who were gathered by the waters edge pondering and meditating over the Infinite.

As usual, I ended up getting loaded and having a ball. Yeah. But after all, you can just sit around waiting for the Infinite for so long before you say the hell with it and get down to having some kicks.

Well anyway, I made it back to my car, opened the door, and fell in on the driver's seat.

"Watch where you fall, my son," mumbled a strange lump from under my chest.

"Whazzat?" I said.

"I said, watch where you fall. You are in the process of crushing the hopes and dreams of your life and your children's lives." The lump was moving toward my belly.

"What's goin' on? . . . hey, I thought you'd be gone by now, man. What are you stickin' around for?" I asked.

"To aid you in your struggle for knowledge. Not to mention love, peace and happiness." The lump was opening a rather large knife.

"Okay, okay man. Just let me get myself together." I said as I fell backwards onto the sand.

"I don't feel so good," I thought. "This little creep has gotta be the product of my imagination."

"That is correct, my son," said the aforementioned little creep.

"What is?" I asked.

"That I am the product of your imagination; and not a very good one, I might add." The creep was scratching somewhere around the area of his left armpit.

"How'd you know that?" I asked more than a bit bewildered.

"Do you think I like looking like this?" he replied.

"You've got a good point." I admitted. I didn't know how much more I could take. I was on the verge of insanity.

"Okay, man. I give up. I can't take anymore." I sighed. "What is it you want?"

"Why nothing, of course," he said, apparently surprised by my last outburst. "You seem to have misunderstood me, my son. I am the Infinite. I am all you seek. I cannot be bought or sold. Obtaining a distributing franchise is more difficult than you could possibly imagine. Why, my son, I am here to fulfill your wishes!"

"Go away," I shouted.

"But my son. . ." His arms were waving frantically.

"I said get lost, man."

"Don't you know who. . ." he cried.

"Sure, man, but with you hangin' around how am I supposed to get any kicks?" I answered.

"But am I not what you seek?" he asked, quizzically picking his nose.

"Maybe, man, but if I find you, what's left? Tell me man, what'll be the point in pondering and meditating and getting loaded? Eh?" I

replied.

"Oh." He knew he was beaten. "Well, in that case. . . farewell, my son. However, before I depart might I confide in you one observation?"

"Sure, man," I said, feeling kind of sorry for the poor little guy. "What is it?"

"Well, my son, it is this: I have noted that the prevalence of attitudes similar to yours seems to be increasing with alarming frequency. It is most confusing. I cannot understand what could be taking place," he said. The little wimp began crying.

"Hey man, take it easy," I said, wiping the creep's tears with the edge of my T-shirt. "Listen, I know where there's this great party. Why don't we head on out there and check it out?"

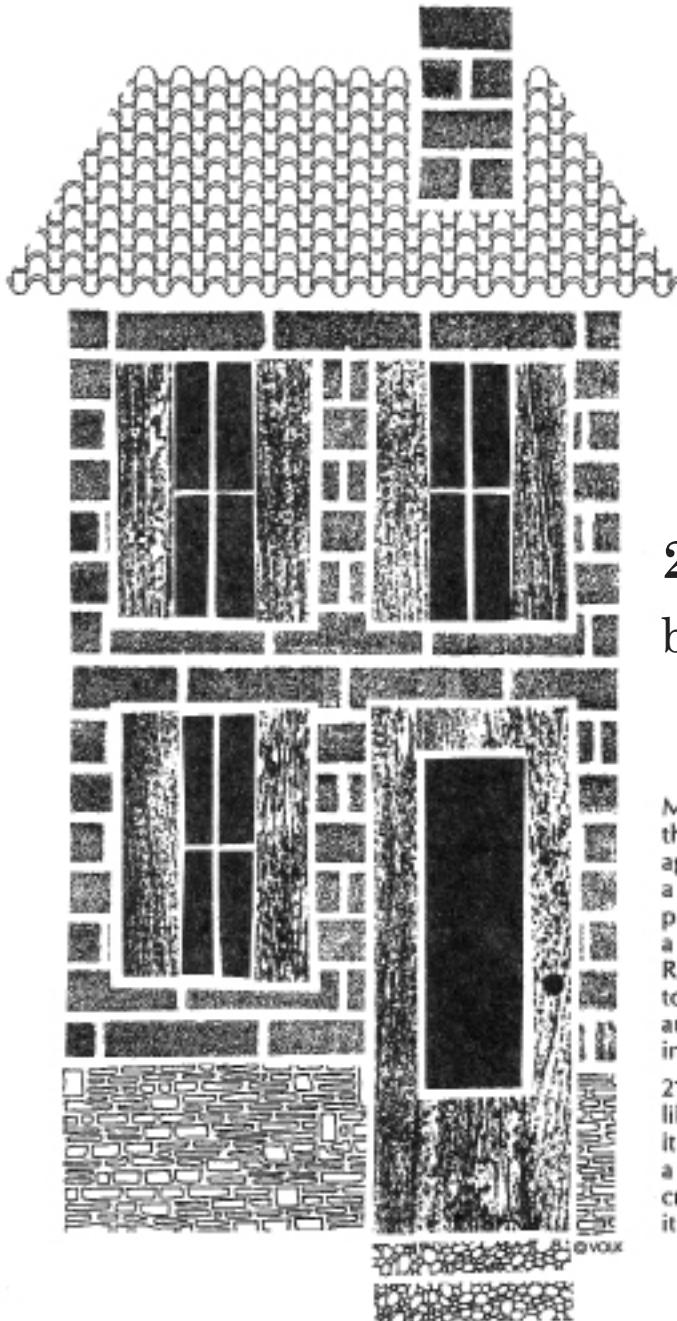
"I don't know, my son. I am not certain if it is proper for me to participate in such clandestine activities," he answered.

I could tell he wanted to go.

"Hey, come on. Maybe you can find out what's really goin' on," I told him, giving him a wink.

"Very well," he sighed.

Let me tell you, Infinite makes a wild party.



2122 Daley Street

by Patricia Moore

1976

My mind will never ignore
the beauty of the wooden door,
aged and paint-chipped,
a determined old man
protecting and sheltering me,
a father to teach me
Right and Wrong,
to show me life,
and hide its ugliness
in his own simple loving way.

2122 Daley Street held me
like a mother to its bosom,
it was a refuge, a sanctuary,
a broken plaster madonna,
cracked, but beautiful,
it was a home.



A Happy Tune

by Gina Valdés Hayakawa 1978

Mayumi belonged to an old, reputable family, had a cheerful disposition, and a lovely appearance with delicate, flawless skin like the wings of a pale butterfly. In the last few months, various go-betweens had been trying to match her with the notable bachelors in town, and foremost among them was Mr. Kato the widower who had visited her house on several occasions. After his last visit, her parents and brothers had spoken enthusiastically about him when they were all gathered at the dinner table, while Mayumi sat as still and quiet as a bamboo shoot, blending perfectly with the bamboos painted on the screen door behind her. "Mr. Kato would be a good mate for Mayumi," said the father. "She is so young, and he is mature and well established."

"Yes," said the mother.

Mayumi had never seen Mr. Kato and hoped that she never would as she recalled his voice like salted plums and his dried seaweed laughter that had pierced the screen door that separated the guest room and her bedroom. During the day, she was too busy with cooking, sewing, and other duties to think about Mr. Kato, but at night, his coarse and pickled sounds soured her sleep.

As Mr. Kato's visits became more frequent, Mayumi's house became saturated with his sounds so that she looked for every excuse to step out of it. She looked up and thanked the sun goddess who soaked up his acid voice and crumbled his parched laughter. But in the middle of the night the sounds of Mr. Kato sprang from the screen door like pulpy plums and resuscitated seaweed and slid on her silk quilt, keeping her awake and alert. When she finally fell asleep she had salted dreams.

The nights were long and the days were short and Mayumi began to visit the temples of the area, tying pieces of white paper on the branches of the trees with her wishes written on them, and staring enviously at the nuns in the hidden temples with their shaved heads and black and white kimonos. At night — what was left of her drying nights — she thought about the romance of taking one's life. She sat by the window of her room and offered her life to the moon goddess. She stared at the white, full face of the moon that looked to her like a motherly geisha.

That night, Mayumi slept as comfortably as if she were floating in a warm womb and woke up only once when she

heard a loud, high sound of a flute. She sat up startled and listened to the music until it faded away, then slid under her quilt and went back to sleep.

The following day was Thursday, her school day, and she woke up early and dressed eagerly, glad to leave her house and to learn more about flower arranging. When she stepped out of her house, she looked up at the sun and noticed the faded moon resting beside it, and she thought of two sisters meeting for a morning chat. A light, crystal sound echoed each step that she took, a tinkling that became louder until she recognized it as the sound of the flute. The watery sound was strongest in front of the pine woods that stood near her flower arrangement school, and weakened as she walked into the school.

Mayumi stood next to a group of young women who whispered to each other and laughed mildly behind their hands, looking like well arranged lilies. All sounds subsided when the teacher entered the room, and the girls quickly took their places on the tatami floor. For several weeks, there were only lectures, and Mayumi, like the rest of the girls, was eager to begin working with the flowers.

"One must strive to imitate nature," said the teacher, "for nature is always perfect. We must seek this perfection, this beauty." The teacher noticed Mayumi playing with the sleeve of her kimono and said, "One must know the philosophy behind this art before one can hope to practice it."

After class, Mayumi hurried past the school and stood before the pine woods. The sound was distant, as if muffled by the giant pines, but she could hear it. She had never entered the pine woods — few people did, since it was dense and wild and prickly with strange stories. She stood listening to the flute until it pulled her into the woods like a strong wind inhaling a butterfly.

Every Thursday, Mayumi left for flower arranging school with such enthusiasm that it made her parents proud of her. "Perhaps one day she will become an instructor of this fine art," said her father.

"Yes," said the mother.

As soon as class was over, Mayumi walked toward the woods with small but hasty steps, and when she was sure that she was out of everyone's sight, she loosened the sash of her kimono and ran into the woods.

When she was deep into the woods, she slowed down and tiptoed toward

the edge of a large pond that had a rock shaped like a small hill in the center. She sat under a pine tree and listened to the music and watched a young man sitting on the rock playing a long, thin bamboo flute.

Following the monotonous beat of the flute, Mayumi spread her kimono on the moss covered ground, removed her sandals, her white slipper-socks, her light underwear, and lay on top of her kimono looking up at the sun-covered sky. The music rippled the air and traveled toward Mayumi like lotus scent, flowing smoothly into her receptive body. Mayumi burst into musical motion. She was a slow beat — a slow beat that accelerated until it transmuted into pure sound. The sound she had become floated in the air like a spirited note and dived into the young man's flute.

And the young man played with delight. He played and played his flute with joy until the slow, repetitive tune became as high and clear as the rarified air it danced on.

When the music stopped, Mayumi felt she had burst like a crystal bubble and she found herself alone on the rock in the middle of the pond. The pond reverberated with the music and Mayumi slipped into the water. She floated in the vibrating pond that was warmed by the sun, waved by the moon, rocked by the flute and scented

by the pine trees around it. She closed her eyes and thought of recent nights when she slept in a comfort that felt to her like a lotus covered womb. She glided out of the pond, dried herself in the sun, dressed to the same beat she had undressed to, and walked out of the woods with a musical step.

The familiar people that she passed by on her way home greeted her and commented to each other on her grace and beauty. "What a lovely girl," said a toothless old woman to the old man standing beside her. "Just look at the way she walks."

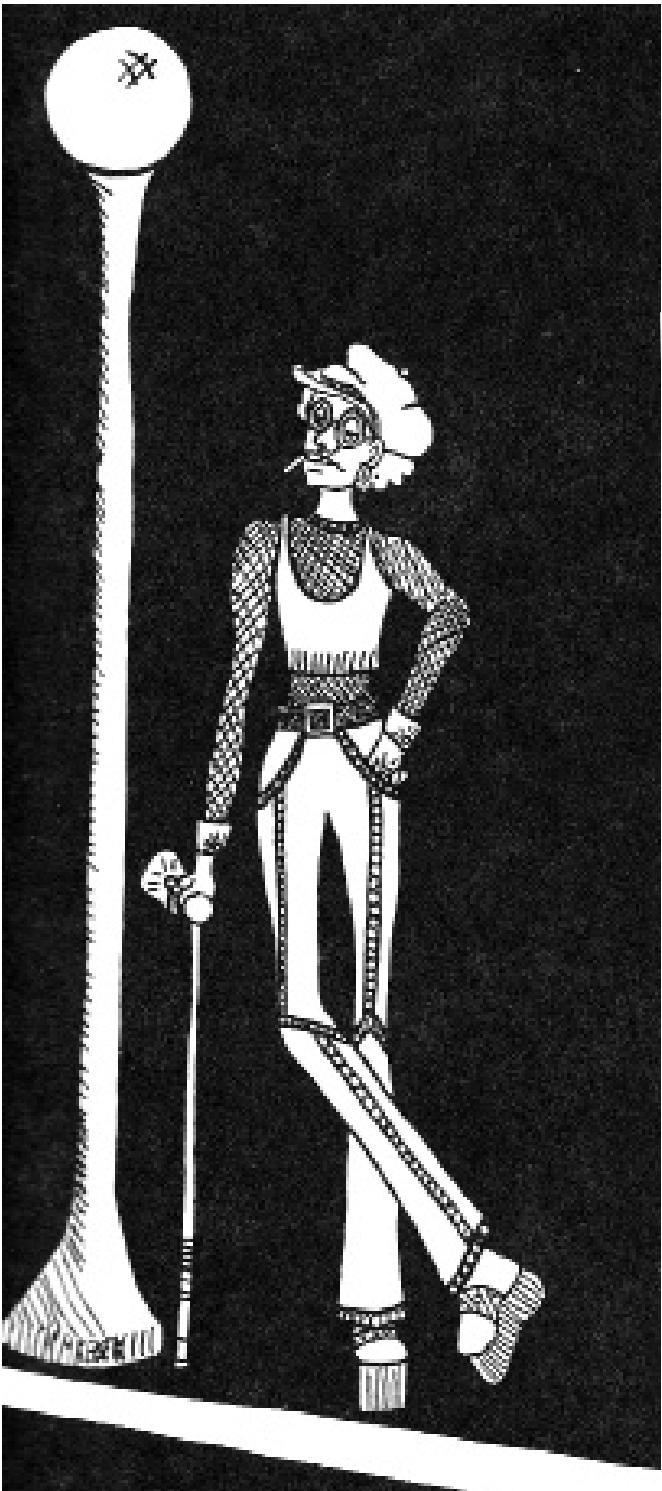
"Yeah," said the old man grinning, "that young lady dances to a happy tune."

Mr. Kato continued to visit her house but Mayumi was hardly aware of him. The screen door was no longer a sieve, but a wall, for his fermented voice and frizzled laughter; she had not heard her parents speak of him. She sat with her family at the dinner table and thought that they all looked like porcelain dolls propped up on thick cushions and marveled at the soundless movement of their mouths. "The gods have blessed us with such a quiet, obedient daughter," said the father.

"Yes," said the mother.

Before going to sleep that night, Mayumi stood by the window looking at the new moon. She could not see the moon goddess's face — only her slanted smile.





SUPERCOOL

is
long legs cheap
aftershave and shoes
that can't be walked
in. Supercool
is
pimp socks and apple
jack hats. Supercool
is
letting everyone know
what an unneeding unheeding
superfly- shaft bring- 'em
-back- alive- bad- ass
you are Supercool
is the only game in town
that you've got to lose
to win

by Nancy Foster

1975

Narrow

Chamber

Discordant strains
defoul the narrow
chamber,
compressing the air
beneath the inverted dome
into a thick venom
that is sucked in
by the cadaverous choir
and reflected yellow-gray
in rows of pointed
teeth.

The crouching woman
lifts her eyes to the end
of the hall
where an enormous eunuch
flacidly squats,
guarding the door,
moaning an acrid accompaniment
to the requiem.

Writhing,
she crawls backward
down the long tunnel,
clawing at knotted chords
that coil inside
like convoluted intestines,
ripping her
apart.

A wrinkled,
cackling hag
treads close behind,
dark-marking time
in the woman's quavering
wake.

An obscene Buddha
focusing his protruding navel
upon her, he wears only
his impotence
and linked around distended neck,
a heavy gold chain
from which hangs
a skeleton key.

As though falling
from nightmare,
the woman starts,
clenching at nothing,
then cringing,

In staggered aisles
onlookers squint sideways,
coughing solemnly,
belching
their disrespect.

she screams,
recognizing
just next to her ear
the jarring shriek
of sharp nails
screeching against
the cold floor
where the old witch
stoops low . . .
plucking withered petals
from the dust.

Lynn Braun
1979



Falling Blossoms

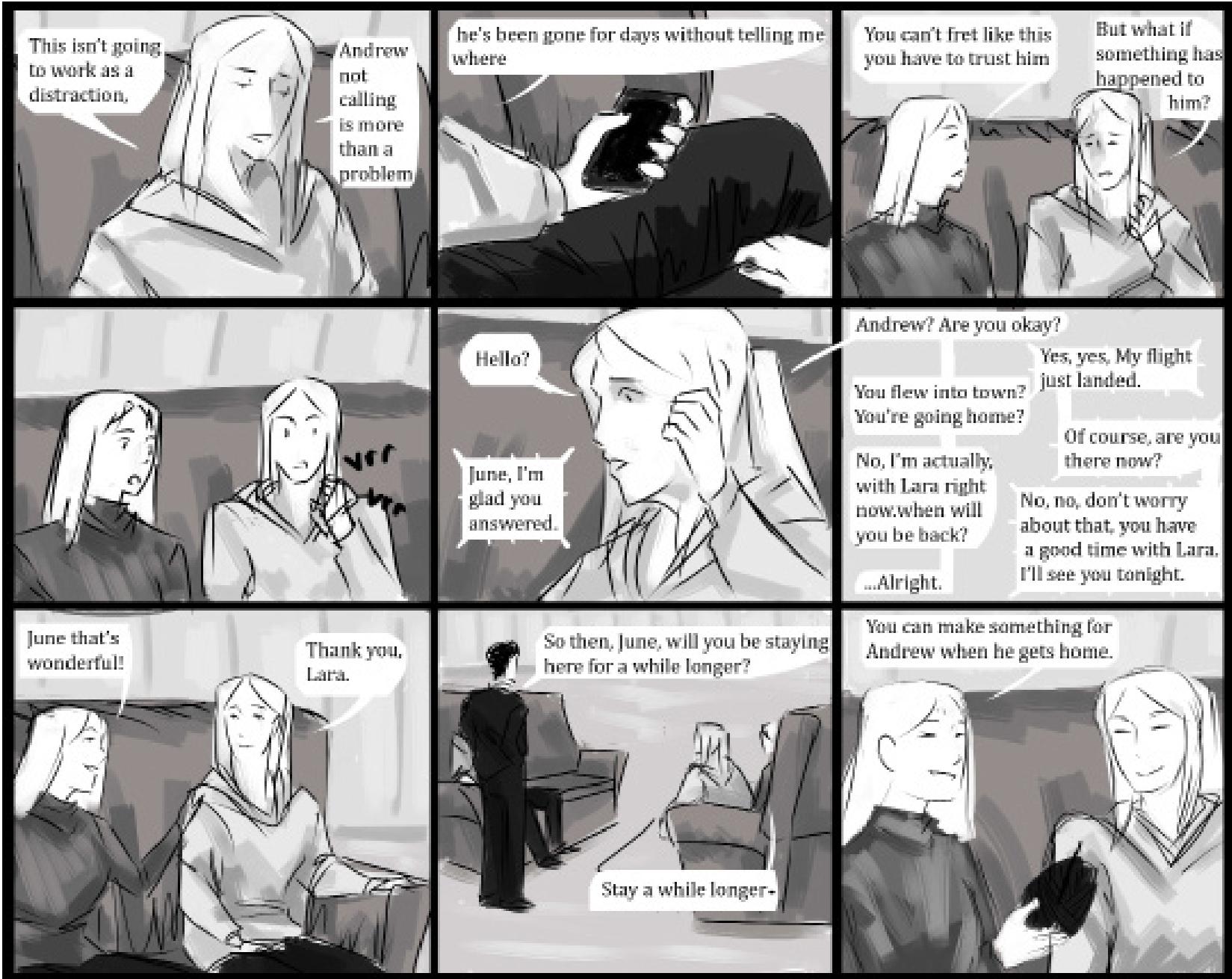
by Gina Valdés Hayakawa 1978

Rising suns and falling cherry blossoms
Sweet spring snow flakes, sips of bitter green tea
Summer rain storms, veils of black umbrellas
Hiding skin as smooth as butterfly wings
Rhymes of wooden shoes tapping wet stone streets
Mountain temples rest like wrinkled mushrooms
Soaked in scent of damp moss, drenched in flute walls
Gray robes flow past gray sand rock gardens
Trembling with gong echoes, Buddha laughter
Silent lotus blushing in midday sun
Gold sun rays weaving through giant hamboos
Reeds bending to shrill winds, backs arched to strangers
Sighs of bent old woman shining man's shoes
Icy autumn lakes, misty pine forests
Village taverns warmed by charcoal, drunk songs
Pink raw fish, soft white rice, crisp black seaweed
Deft hands slivering aged, pungent ginger
Mild twig tea, holy tea, sliding, warming
Winter nights perfumed by roasting chestnuts
Haunted by samurai yelps, geisha smiles
Red mouth, white face flower, dark tan lower
Searching fox eyes, throats hot with lust, sake
Heavy silk quilts caress and cool warm flesh
Moon trades places with sun, sun bows to dew
Porcelain child smiles, gold toothed woman smiles
Ancient Buddha smiles, rising red sun smiles
Cherry trees smile like meek geishas, quiver
Perform kimono striptease in nature's
Teahouse to the beat of half crazed samisen
Pale blossoms fall to premature death
Deranged by black smoke of busy factories

Circle of Friends Jennifer Byerly







The Seasons

Shekinah Kifer

Four characters,
Each with a beauty
Traveling a path,
That bends round and round
They trace each other's steps
In their own time
Before they fade
And make room for the next.

Leading the line a bitter old man
He freezes the world, bleaches it white.
Snow falls from his head
And blankets the path
At his ankles nips death
With each muffled step
And any spark of life
Hibernates until he's passed.

Once his time is over,
A young girl rushes in.
Small and sprightly,
She runs wild
Her laughter breezes through the air
Her tantrum's tears water the flowers
She's everyone's favorite
A fact of which she's aware

Coloring outside the lines
Marking whatever she pleases
Abandoning her own messes.

Sometimes she and the old man clash
As he lingers,
Such is nature's way,
For the old and young to disagree.

Next strolls a Bronzed goddess
Unconcerned with the other two.
Her touch spreads warmth and light,
Her days leisure in the sun,
Her nights study star peppered skies.
Yet it is the beginning of the end
For once she goes away,
The sparks of life
Descend and fade.

The last of the four,
Clings to the fading warmth
Jealous of the girl and goddess
And all they spread,
She fills her world with color
Trees of fiery orange, rusted red.
But she's overrun
By the old man's return.

This tale is no secret,
Nor is their beauty.
Any who wish to see
Need only look outside.

Songbirds

Jaime Marie Pinckard

I still remember the house when I first arrived at that miserable place. I can't remember how long ago it was exactly, but I do remember how it had changed, but yet, somehow always stayed the same.

I came before the songbirds did. I can't tell you how long ago they began roosting in the cherry trees in the front yard, but it was after I first arrived. There were only dying trees when I came. No grass. No flowers. Not that anything would grow there except for the trees. The yard was quite bare and desolate and remained so despite my best efforts at beautification.

When I first stumbled upon the house, I was lost. I had been wandering for many days, very far from home, and when I came to the dirt road, I followed it. There were two buildings on either side of the road, assuming the one opposite the house could even be called a building. It was more of a shack, really: hidden away in the shadows of skeletal trees whose bare branches were intertwined in a mass of tangles. The path from the road to the shack was mined with thorns and sharp stones. As I stood in the street, I had the distinct feeling that I was being watched by Something inside the windowless shack -- unseen eyes cutting through me. It unnerved me, and I quickly made my way up the path to the house opposite the shack. Nothing in the house could be as bad as whatever dwelled within those shadows.

I climbed up the squeaky wooden steps of the porch and knocked on the door. From inside, I could hear the jostling and commotion of a large crowd. When no one came to answer the door, I tried the knob and let myself in, eager to put a wall between myself and the unseen eyes across the road.

The common room was lined with long tables and benches, all positioned on the diagonal. There were low walls to divide the

dining room from the many hallways and staircases that criss-crossed like a maze in all directions. People scampered past me, evidently unaware or uncaring of my presence. I felt nearly invisible until I spotted the waiter and approached him. He was a middle aged gentleman, none too bright, but gentle and polite. I told him I had traveled from very far and was very thirsty and hungry. He smiled, but in a slightly vacant way, and led me to a long empty table. I felt awkward sitting at such a large table by myself, but as busy as the restaurant seemed to be, no one minded that I took up such a large area.

The waiter brought me a cup of water and milk and took my order. I waited for quite some time, sipping my milk from time to time and trying to rehydrate myself with the water. Meanwhile, I began to feel uneasy about this place as well. Unlike the road where I felt like I was being watched, the fact that no one noticed me here was almost equally unnerving. It ate at me so much that I rose and approached a fellow diner to inquire about a washroom (my face was awfully filthy). After repeating myself several times, the man I asked finally did answer my question with a vague hand gesture. I thanked him as graciously as I could as he seemed to look straight through me and began my search. I found the washroom, but it was occupied with at least half a dozen women -- none of whom seemed able to see me.

Further unnerved by my apparent invisibility, I strode off down another hallway, following the sounds of running water. Here were more vacant-eyed ladies waiting in line for a shower like dumb cattle. Fear now gripped me; where had I gotten myself stranded? Would I be herded like these women? Panicked, I turned and ran up the nearest staircase.

After an illogical number of steps and turns, I finally arrived at the landing. It appeared to be an attic of sorts, finished off with a door and walls. The door was slightly ajar, so I cautiously let myself in.

It was an attic in the process of being converted into a bedroom. There was a wardrobe, a bed, and a good amount of dusty

linens protecting slightly less dusty antiquities and furnishings. There was a window facing the front yard and a cushioned window seat. And on the window seat, shrinking away from the window, was a little girl. She turned as soon as she felt my eyes on her.

Big brown eyes stared deeply into my own. Unlike the unseen eyes, these eyes did not cut me to pieces. Unlike the vacant eyes down below, these eyes did not see through me. These eyes had a soul... and with them, she was looking into my own soul.

Silence.

"You're not like the others." The statement hung in the air like the dust between us. Her eyes had yet to stop seeing into mine. At long last, she asked tentatively, "Are you here for the birds?"

"The birds?" I echoed, confused. "What do you mean?"

She turned back towards the window, gazing out across the yard to the shack, and shuddered. She again faced me. "He talks to me sometimes. Oh no, not him. He scares me." With a wave of her hand and another shudder, she answered one of my many unspoken questions about the unseen being across the street. "The one who wants the birds. He talks to me sometimes. He kind of lives here. But you won't find him here. I've looked. It's just full of the people who aren't really people."

I sat down next to her, trying not to think about the unseen eyes boring into my back as I faced away from the window. This little girl spoke in riddles. "He wants... birds? Why?"

She looked down at her small hands. "He says we need to kill the songbirds before we leave. I don't know when we're leaving or where we're going, but the birds won't come to me. And he doesn't want me to kill them." She looked up at me, her big eyes pleading with mine. "Will you help with the birds? I don't want to stay here forever. The people scare me and... And..." She glanced over her shoulder.

My heart swelled. I reached down to squeeze her hand. "It scares me, too. But I'll do whatever I can."

We sat there and talked for hours. Or maybe days. Or maybe years. To this day, I don't know how long we sat there together, basking in our tiny victory over the lonely silence of that place. We straightened the room, and hung some of the dusty linens over the window for privacy. At last, she started to nod off, so I tucked her in the bed and carefully bolted both the door and window before climbing into bed with her.

Our sleep was dreamless and, in our own private oasis in the midst of the suffocating silence, it was a blessing.

When we awoke, we agreed to brave the downstairs together. We needed to eat, especially since we had to work on the yard in order to attract the songbirds. Hand in hand, we slowly made our way down, each of us trying not to let our fear show when we caught one another's eye.

When we reached the first floor, we stopped short.

Silence.

And dust.

Everyone was gone. There wasn't a trace to be found of any presence of life. All the tables, benches, railings, and walls were covered in a thick layer of dust and cobwebs.

And yet, on one of the dusty tables, there was a platter with a fresh loaf of bread and two apples. The food looked out of place in the dismal surroundings, but hunger and necessity drove me to it. I pulled off an oversized hunk of the bread and handed it to my small companion. Rather than sitting on the dirty bench, we both stood, eating silently. After both apples and the bread were gone, I cleared my throat.

"Did he give us the food?" She nodded.

I paused, looking around slowly. The feeling of being watched was back, but it wasn't like the feeling of the Unseen Eyes outside. It was almost comforting... And very intriguing.

My eyes wandered back towards the table. There were an

array of hunting knives tucked neatly into a leather belt. I could have sworn that belt hadn't been there a moment ago...

I buckled it to my waist and turned to my friend. I licked my lips; I wasn't relishing the thought of facing those unseen eyes again. "Are you coming out with me?"

She nodded, her ponytail swishing emphatically. "I'll gather the firewood."

At the time, I had no idea what she intended to do with the firewood, but I didn't argue with her. I would be glad to have her company to distract me from whatever lurked in the shack next door. How many days we passed working in the yard, I still am not sure. My diminutive friend told me that the songbirds loved to roost in the cherry trees, so I focused my energies on tending to the rather sad looking trees. After quite some time, my efforts were rewarded with a few meager blossoms. We also worked on building an altar and piling up wood for a pyre. All the while, the silence threatened to close in on us like an asphyxiating smoke.

I still remember the first time I saw one of the songbirds. What a splendid beauty she was. Stunning rose-colored feathers gave way to an amethyst crown. Her grace as she twirled and danced from one branch to another could shame a prima ballerina. She and her golden-hued mate were lovingly crafting a nest for their young. The sweet, honeyed notes of their love song cut me to pieces as I started to realize the truth:

I was to cut their lives tragically short.

Holding the hunting knife in a shaking hand, I turned to my little friend. She too knew what was coming; tears were shining in her big, innocent eyes, begging me silently not to do what we both knew I had to.

I swallowed hard. "W-Why don't you go get supper ready?" I tried to force my voice to be casual. A mechanical smile was forced on my face. "We both know you're better at that than I am."

Obediently, she rose, nodding with those shimmering eyes I

couldn't quite bring myself to meet. I turned away and waited for the sound of the door shutting before I started advancing on the birds.

As I stood there watching the mated pair dance and sing of their love, I could feel the unseen eyes digging into my being with sadistic amusement. My shadow was beginning to grow long; I feared being left out in the dark with that evil presence across the street.

I had to act now.

With two quick throws, my knives struck home, but not fast enough to wipe the look of betrayal and pain from the birds' faces. I could feel the threat of tears stab at my eyes, but I balled my hands into fists and stared at the ground. I had just committed a sin. It's a sin to kill something so innocent, I was sure. I was vaguely aware of why the little girl had been forbidden from committing this sin; she was too innocent to bear the guilt of this sin... of this murder...

The ground in front of me was turning red. Distantly, I realized I had been gripping the knife by the blade and cut my hands painlessly. I carefully uncurled my hands to put the knives back on my belt where they belonged. Mechanically, I bent down to pick up the two tiny birds. I was bleeding freely, but I cared little. There was no pain to tell me to care.

In a strange, trance-like state, I lit the pyre. There, my first victims were burnt to ash. For my atonement or condemnation, I am still unsure. The weight of what I had promised to do crushed me like never before. But I had to keep doing this, for the sake of that little girl. She didn't deserve this kind of pain.

For days, weeks, months, I continued killing the innocent. It never hurt any less and I always felt like I was watching myself commit these sins in a strange, painful disconnected agony. And I never let my little friend watch. I could never let her mind be scarred the way mine now was.

Then the day came. I had been stalking my next prey when it suddenly dawned on me that I hadn't seen my companion in hours.

My knife sailed through the air, but missed the jewel-toned creature. Wiping the sweat from my face, I bent down to retrieve my weapon.

My eyes scanned the windows of the house. Strange... it was now past midday. She was supposed to come tell me when she was ready for lunch.

And then I saw it. The ribbon I had braided into her hair that morning, caught in a thorn bush in front of the shack.

My heart stopped.

My feet were carrying me as fast as they could go, caring not whether I was cut on the sharp rocks and thorns. My longest knife was dancing in my hand, lustful for blood. And my heart was caught somewhere in my throat, crushed with fear.

I beat my hands bloody against the door of the shack. My throat went raw as I screamed threats and curses, as I pleaded with the unseen eyes to take me instead. And then, with a loud crack, the door broke.

As frightened as I was, I could never have prepared myself for the look of abject terror on my precious friend. His skeletal hand gripped her shoulder with a cruel strength, his face curled into a sardonic twist of a smile.

What happened next is a blur of instinct and adrenaline. I ran at him, pushing my dear one out of the way. I remember the knife flashing red repeatedly as I plunged it to the hilt only to pull it out and do it all over again. When I finally crumpled to the ground in a pool of dank crimson, he slunk away into the shadows... Hiding once more behind his cowardly shield.

My hands could not stop shaking. I had nearly killed a man.

A small whimper behind me snapped me back to reality. Instinctively, I rose and picked her up, carrying her from out of the shadows of this horrid place. Though my vision was blackened with shock and terror, I did not stop running until we locked the door of

the house behind us.

Questions I could scarcely bear to ask flooded my mind. I knelt down in front of her and pulled her to my chest before holding her at arm's length to look her in the eye. I drew a shaky breath.

"A-are you...? Did he...?" Terrified eyes met terrified eyes. I looked away. I could not bring myself to look into those eyes. "Did he touch you?"

The question hung in the air like a death sentence.

Her little arms were thrown around my neck as she shook her head, over and over again whispering, "No... no... no..."

A tear of relief rolled down my cheek. A small sob threatened to overtake me, but I quickly crushed it down. I picked her up and walked up the staircase to our sanctuary... Our hiding place.

How long we sat in each other's embrace, I am not sure. At last, the exhausted little girl in my lap fell asleep, her breaths slow and steady against my neck. I stroked her hair, whispering up a prayer of thanks to whoever kept us alive and safe this long in this terrible place, pleading with Him to save us from this place. But I couldn't keep my eyes from wandering to that shack across the road... to the unseen eyes I knew still lurked there. I swore on all my hope for deliverance from this hell to make this solemn vow:

He could have me. I am a murderer. I will never find atonement. I deserve this. But this precious One, this innocent One. It's a sin to destroy something so pure.

And even though I am a murderer in need of salvation, I will sacrifice my hope for redemption to spare my precious Innocence the weight of this sin.



Powder

Alyssa Sheppard

Sunset Boulevard

Robi Foli

Angelo Carli Poetry Prize

I'm still crawling out of my skin and, after two years,
I still try to scrub him off in the shower and I still try to swallow and digest his whispers.

It took me a week to go back to class and listen to his smug chuckle next to me,
and listen to his stories of the girls' virginities that he held.
And I wondered how many more of them were taken, not given.

It took me ten minutes to use a pass to go cry in the bathroom
and two months to leave school completely.

He didn't have to hold a blade to my neck and I knew he would never hit me.

He didn't have to
because he had twelve counts of willingness against one night of "no's".
He placed the words into my mouth and I can still hear myself saying:
"I know you didn't rape me."

I tried to drive away, but I found his sweater in the street;
a sweater he had told me was his grandpa's.
And all I saw was myself lying there next to it,
forming a pile of his nostalgic treasures that he had discarded that night.
A pile of things he used to love until he was done using them.

I wrapped myself up in his grandpa's old sweater,
Hoping that it would bring me the warmth that it had
when he had given it to me as we walked down Sunset Boulevard in December,
and hoping that it would bring me the comfort that it had
on the night that I had two beers too many
and he wrapped me in it before taking me home.

But the red and blue wool was now woven with stones from the asphalt
and it only made me shiver more furiously.

He would never come back for this tired old sweater;
A sweater now covered in mildew from the rain that night
And rough from asphalt still stuck between the buttons.

Down at the Taco Bell

Sofia Leggett





Sarah
Danielle Shultz

Sappy Villanelle Mariafernanda Sanchez

You're in my head and you're in my heart.
You have promised me the sun and the moon.
You're how I want my days to end and start.

And you've given me all the stars so far,
I wouldn't ask for anything so soon.
You're in my head and you're in my heart.

Though we are hundreds of miles apart,
We make it work on our good afternoons.
You're how I want my days to end and start.

I know others don't think we're very smart,
Because we've been in love since late June.
You're in my head and you're in my heart.

I know it will be hard to depart
Next time we see each other, it's too soon.
You're how I want my days to end and start.

And I know this is for us both uncharted
Territory, but the time's opportune.
You're in my head and you're in my heart.
You're how I want my days to end and start.

El Chingon

Briana Munoz

My sister and I hated these stupid Mexican rodeos. Every Sunday my dad would drag us to his charriadas, to knock down bulls by their tails and prove his manliness and skill to the other charros. The few brave ones attempted El Paso de la Muerte, “The Step of Death”, where they jumped from a tame horse to a wild one as they galloped around the dirt stadium. Sweaty Mexican men celebrated with tequila shots at 2 o’clock in the afternoon.

We cringed at the stench of horse manure and whined when getting dirt in-between our toes because all we owned were sandals, and we starved all day because the older ladies in aprons only sold pig guts and pig feet and other animal body parts that we didn’t want to eat.

Meanwhile, my best friend Katy and her familia visited her white wrinkly grandmother’s cozy home once they got out of church and ate freshly baked apple pie and other normal food while playing board games.

One Sunday, my sister told my parents she had cheer practice and went out with her friends instead. So I invited my friend Katy to the rodeo.

We sat in the arena bleachers, drinking a bottled cola and swatting flies away from our sunburnt faces.

“I wish our parents would finally let us go to the beach alone or anywhere other than here. We’re thirteen.”

“The beach would’ve been fun but oh my gosh Bree, there’s so much to do here. Do you think we can ride a horse?!”

“I’ll ask my dad later. I don’t know where he is right now...”

“Oh my god, look at your dad! He’s doing donuts with the horse. How does he do that?”

There he was, my papa, in the center of the arena steering the horse in circles. If you looked at it too long, it would make you a little queasy. This was to show how disciplined his horse was to the judges. He spent more time parenting his horses than he spent on me.

My dad called it bonding, my summers spent stuck at the ranches where he trained horses. There, the only supply of water I’d get was from a hose. And my dad would trick me into cleaning the horse stalls for 5 bucks. I mean, 5 bucks, isn’t that child labor abuse or something? I never got into riding myself because after almost getting bucked off, I’d had enough.

“Come on Katy, this is putting me to sleep, let’s see if my dad will let us walk to McDonald’s down the street, ‘cause there’s no way I’m eating that gross Mexican food. One time I saw a Band-Aid floating around in the horchata.”

“I love Mexican food! Do they sell chimichangas?”

“Suit yourself, but if you end up in the bathroom the rest of the day, don’t say I didn’t tell you so.”

Katy walked away from the food stand with a smile on her face and a big plate of nachos.

“If I was with my family right now, I’d be losing my mind, playing Jenga for probably the twelfth time in a row or still stuck at church listening to old ladies sing gospel. You’re so lucky you don’t have to go to church. You need to invite me here more often.”

“Katy, this basically is my dad’s church.”

After Katy licked every bit of the yellow cheese off her plate, we searched for a port-a-potty. Then we came across my dad.

“Hey girls, you having fun? Hey, why don’t you and Katy go ask those boys to get you on a horse?”

“Ahh Bree, let’s go! I call that one, he’s cute. Thanks Mister Munoz!”

While Katy had a blast flirting with the cute boy in chaps, I got stuck with the chubby boy with bright red cheeks.

“Eres la hija de Don Tony?”

“What?”

“I said aren’t you Don Tony’s daughter?”

“Yeah, so what?”

“No one can make a horse do things like your dad does.”

“Yeah, he’s all right, I guess.”

“He’s all right? He’s the best charro around. Tu papa es el

chingon!"

"What's the horse doing? Make him stop!" I said, as the horse bucked.

"Loosen your reins! Don't you know what you're doing?
You're Tony's kid."

"Get me off, I'm so over this. Come on Katy."

We made our way back to my dad's truck. The old white Ford in which I would duck in when he'd pick me up from school, hay flying out from the back and loud mariachi music blaring from the speakers.

"Hey, what does el chingon mean? What that boy said about your dad."

"It means like a bad-ass or something."

My dad made his way over with a trophy, no different than every other Sunday. We dropped Katy off at her normal house where she'd go home to do normal things and eat normal food.

"You think Katy had fun today, mija?"

"She asked if she could come next weekend."

"Sure, as long as it's okay with her parents."

I muscled the window lever in circles and settled my chin on my hand. We passed identical two-story houses where all the normal white kids lived and their parents beemers on every block.

"I was wondering if you'd teach me how to ride next time."

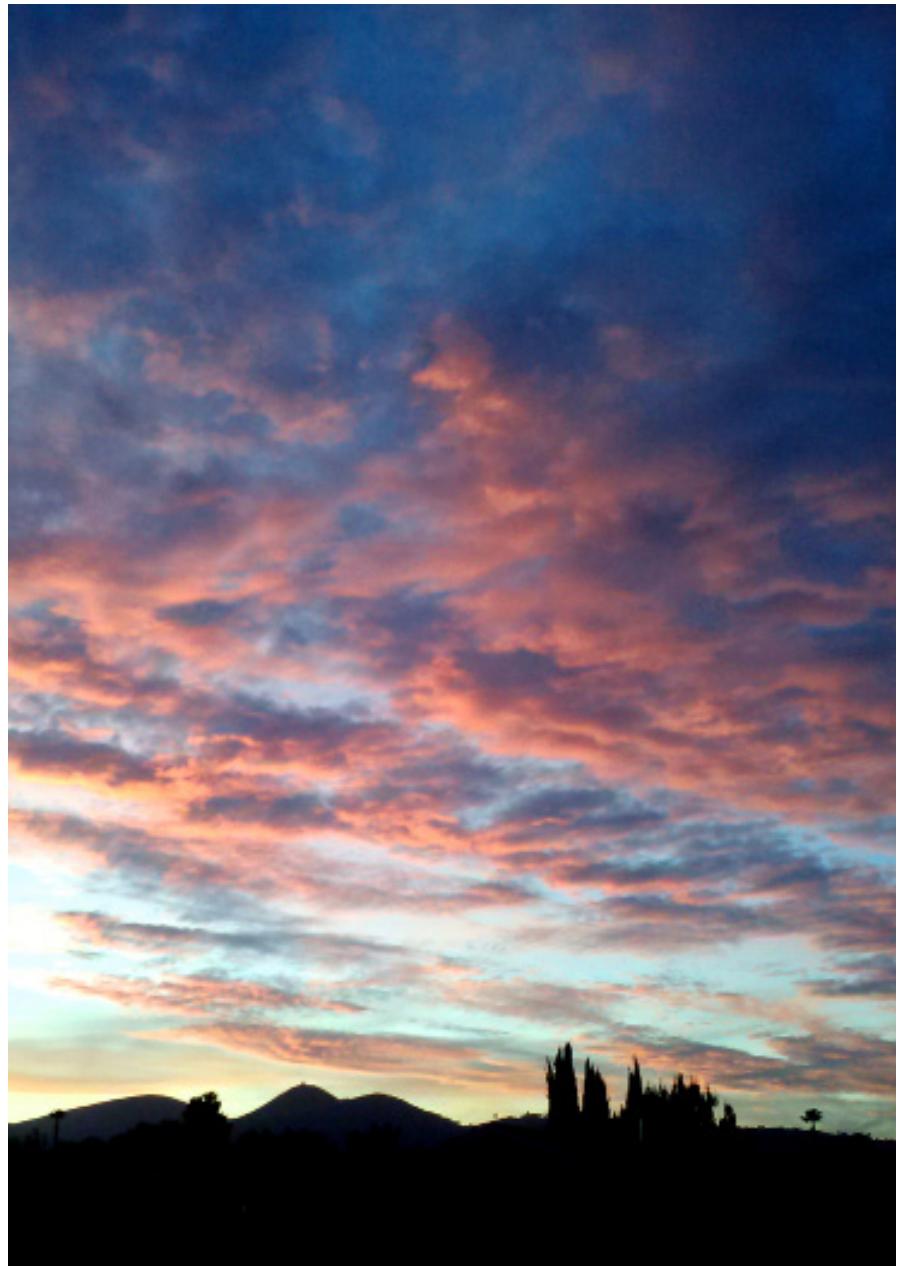
"You want to start riding? Then we better go buy you some boots!"

"Yeah, these sandals probably aren't going to do."

I turned up the music and my dad sang along in tune with his favorite Vicente Fernandez song, words that didn't make any sense to me.

"He's saying that the horse's back legs were white and 'pajaro' means the horse was light like a bird but fast. That's what makes a good horse."

I sat up tall and didn't ask him to roll up the windows. Like in an open grassy field, the fresh October air hit my face, and we continued galloping toward the sunset.



Incandescent

Taylor Dutcher

Self Portrait

Alexis Dawn

Editor's Choice, Poetry

I am not the buoyant bare face in the morning
gleaming with natural beauty beneath virginal bedsheets
Yesterday's makeup is today's messy pillow
and I am a peevish grizzly

I am neither the sandy beach bottom nor the lustrous sunbleached locks
I haven't seen Paris at night or ruined a fresh pedicure on white beaches

I am not the brandname bag-toter, feline and libidinous
My soles are calloused from chasing after busses and trains
My bag is always teeming and my shoes are always sullied

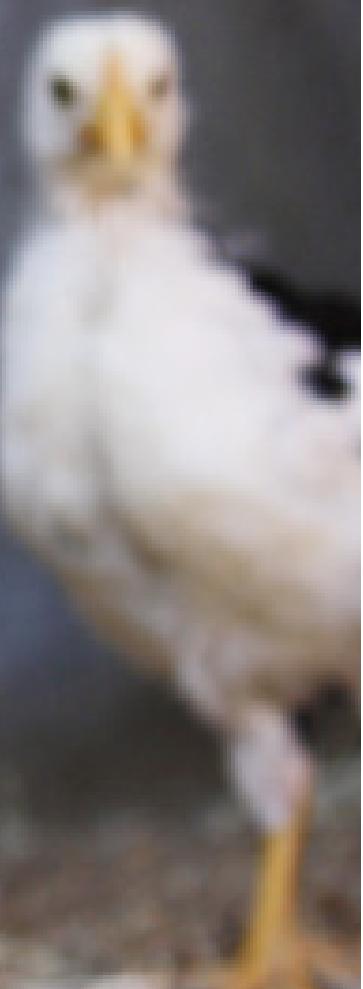
I give in to my cravings
and with childlike pleasure
I dance in grocery stores and hide throughout the aisles
I laugh obnoxiously and say the wrong things
I always have a drink too many and a dollar too few

No, I am not the lissome domesticated goddess
with young eyes next door surveilling through open blinds
Despite my efforts, my makeup always smudges
My bones sound like broken twigs
My breasts are uneven
and my body curves in all of the wrong places

I am indecisive and easily bored
a ball of nervous, forgetful energy
an awful planner and a constant daydreamer
who believes that
Watches are unnecessities
Givenchy is just another mispronounced name
and \$10 is still too expensive for a pair of jeans



I Am the Walrus Robert Orozco
First Place, Visual Arts





girls in the yard

Ruth Rice

banty legged sleek
heads bobbing empty
they draw the circle of blood
around an other
bloody show of weakness
fallen to their feet
and peck a place
in the hierarchy
when the broken shells
and amniotic debris
consume them waist high
when beaks are awash
in blood, and cannot
support a breath
their chests swell
an egg proud moan
now who, will
the rooster own?

Naked Neck
Sandy Kimball

Blue Moon Rising

Christian Smith

Two midnight blue silhouettes,
melded into the night,
slipped down
a dark and slithering path,
lined with various canvases,
staked into place and held erect by poles.

Inside,
pale blue veins
slept in bags,
oblivious to the presence
of the two shadows
as they glided past.

Deeper into the makeshift city
the two figures trekked,
when they spotted blue
halogen lights, strung into the dirt path,
emitting a glow
that gently washed over their sneakers.

The two men,
eerily glowing
came across an empty camp
equipped with its own canvas,

a group of folding chairs
and a cooler stocked with Blue Moon.

They sat directly across
each other,
bathing in the blueness
that hung like fog in
the early morning
air

The effect was strange—
their beards seemed to
recede into their faces
and their scars faded, leaving
only a pale, bluely sheen
of smooth skin.

The gradual change
brought both men to their knees
and as they held each other
the two began to weep,
when the white-blue sun
rose, amongst the tents.



Sunflower
Alyssa Sheppard



Waves
Teal Hankins



zig-zags

80

Melissa Scrivnor

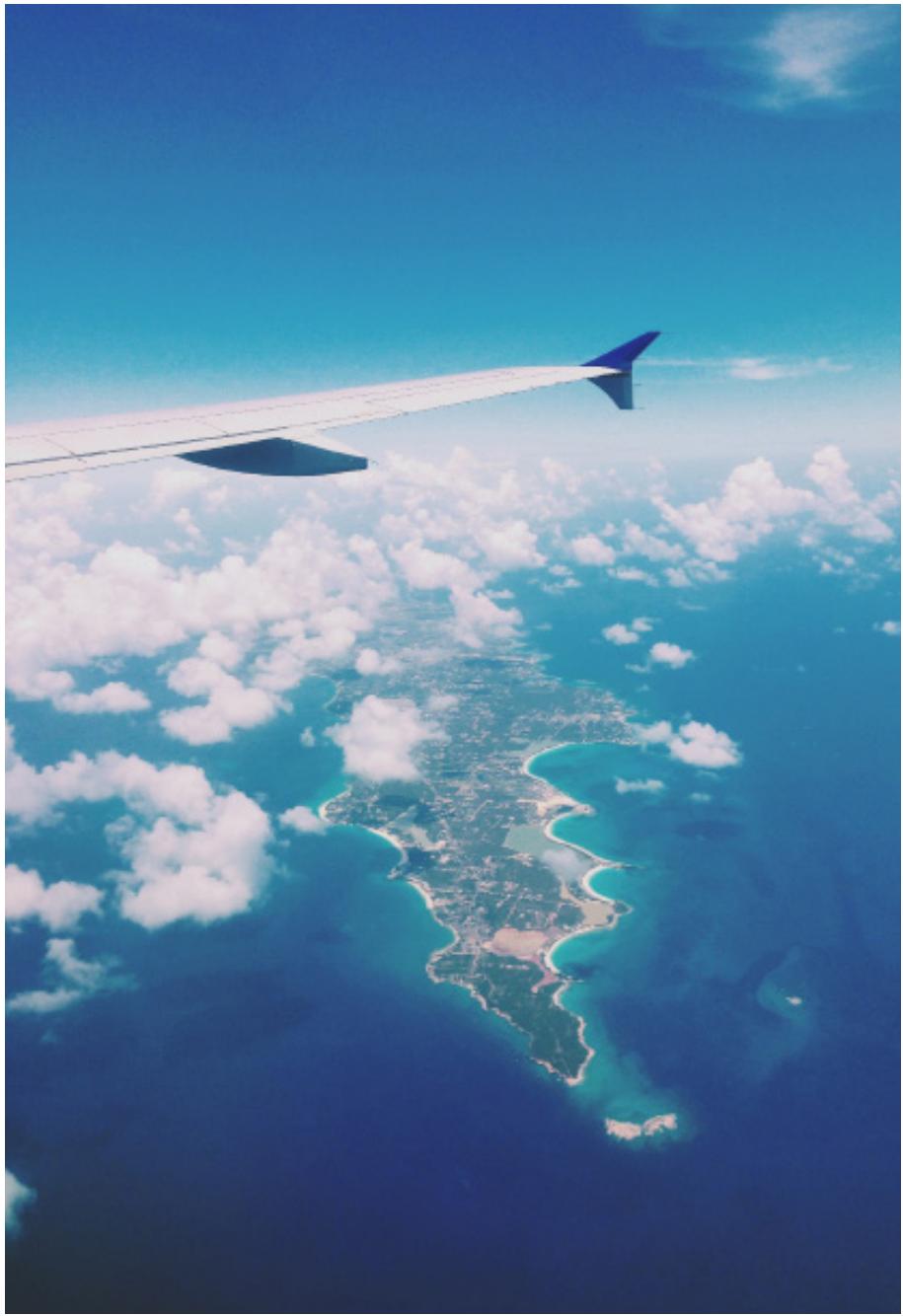


Macaw

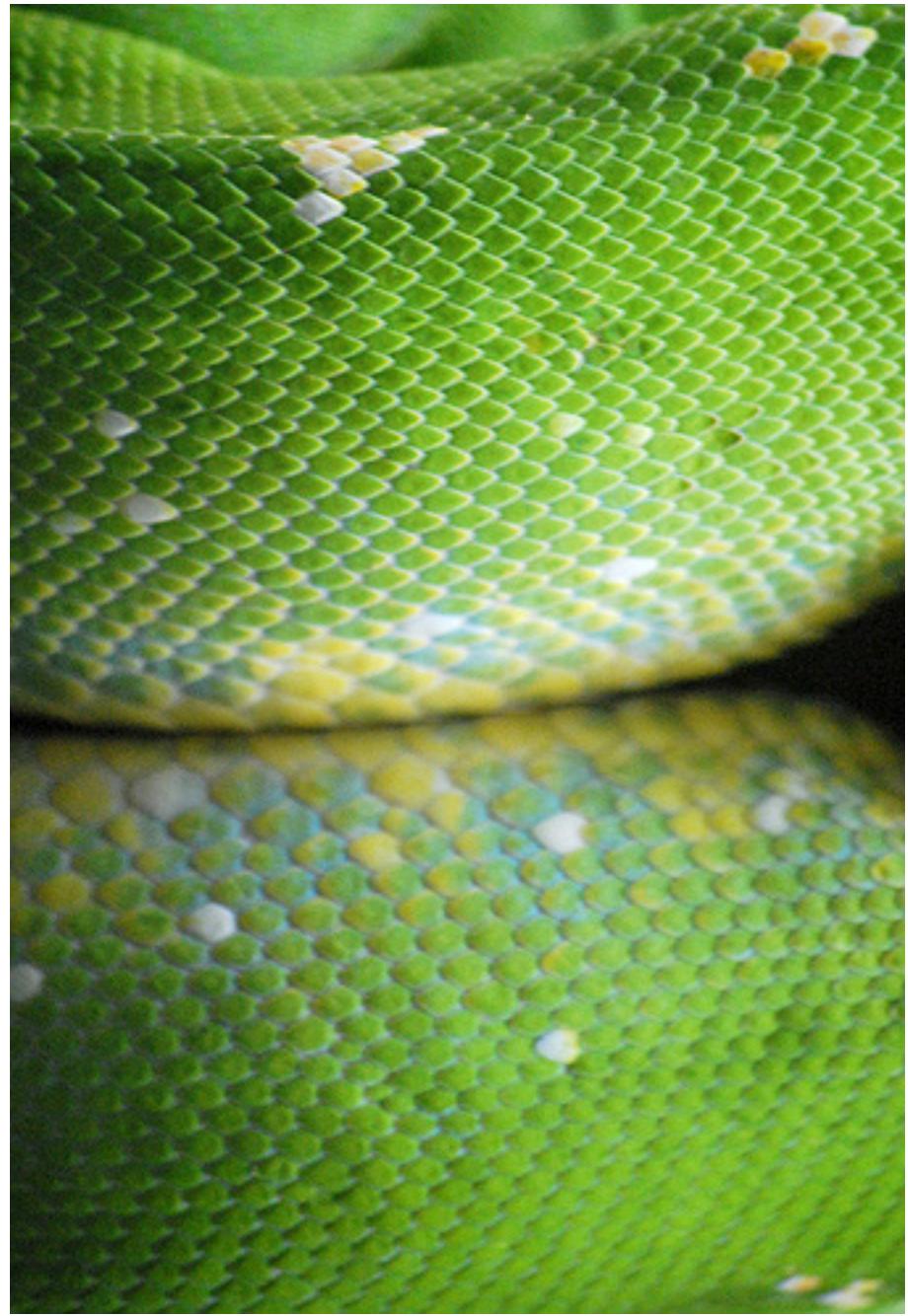
Zuzana Vass



Got Sugar Zuzana Vass
Second Place, Visual Arts



82 **Flight**
Taylor Bishop



Skin
Taylor Bishop

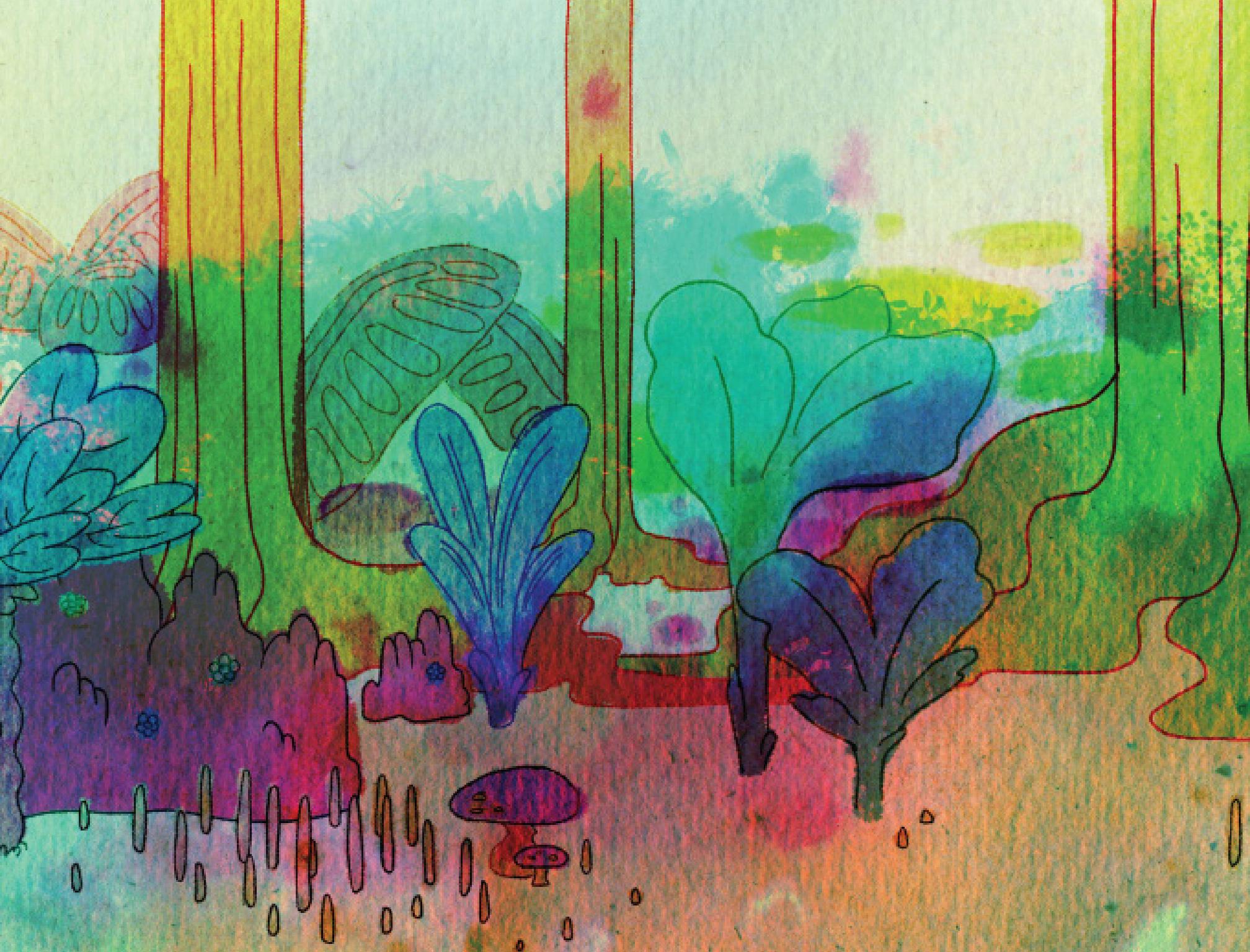
Bombie Village

Amy Genduso

By eleven a.m. the schools have taught all they can
and from the passing bus can be seen
children strolling home in staggered groups
along the only road
girls holding hands of girls
and boys holding hands of boys
in their issued black sarongs and black slacks
scuffed up with the same dust
that covers all of us



Coiffure Amy Genduso
Third Place, Visual Arts





Cute Cyborg Boy

Emily Rock

He wanted robot legs
So he could run three minute miles.
He traded in his arms.
Were supersonic push ups
A possibility?
Next he gave up his nethers
Because women like a bionic penis.
Finally he gave up his heart.
All that was left
was a belly made of flesh.
No more robot parts,
Because with a robot heart
He began to desire
Humanity.

Jungle

Nicky Rojo

It's All Sweet

Cotton Pettingell

Garberville is a shit hole.
We rolled in as the fog
rolled out
up the 1, the 101
sleeping in a van
running from God who
is our societal expectation
sleeping in the belly of
the fish from the getgo

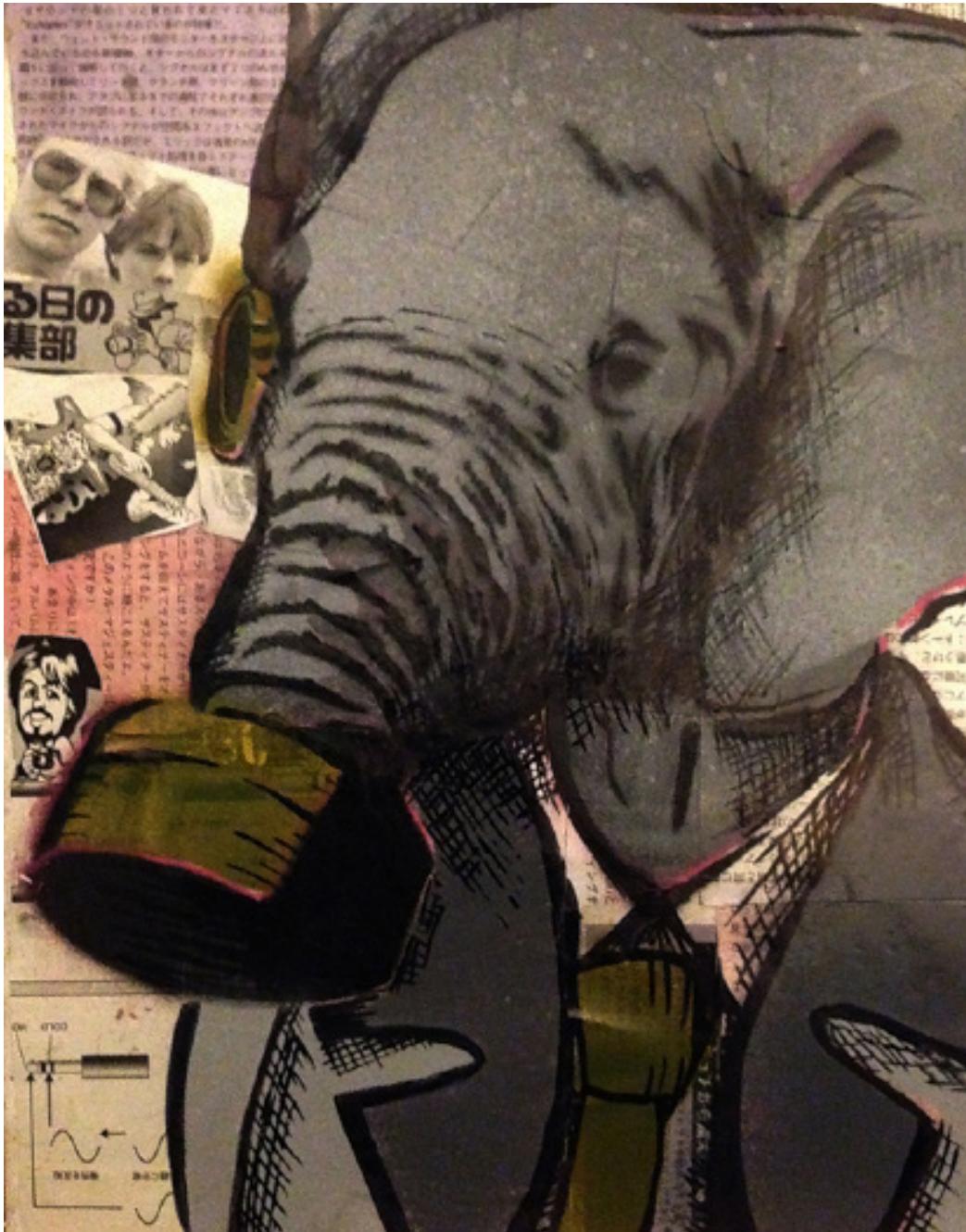
bums
bums like us but dirtier
who slept on the street
who hiked the footpaths
to oblivion which some call
Oregon
or south to hell
which I call everywhere
they wear beanies and beards
and boots
wear so many clothes
they live inside themselves

we parked in front of
a motel 8
turned the tires toward
the curb in the rain
and hung towels over the
windows
and the sound was soothing
on the metal roof
because life knows what
brings it and life knows
it's sweet
but we haven't figured
it out yet
because we know it's
bullshit

morning
warm up the car
need some gas
get some coffee
classic gas station convenience
store
piss all over the bathroom
floor

my girlfriend says
“he doesn’t like flavored
coffee”
the bum with dreads
dirty gloves and clean eyes
clean like fresh blown glass
bright, right out of the crucible
“you don’t like flavored coffee?”
no, it’s too sweet
“Haha, it’s all sweet man,
it’s all sweet.”

I do like the taste
of bitter coffee
love to hate
like old ladies who
tell their sad stories
to kids visiting the old
folks home
life finds a way
to make you enjoy it

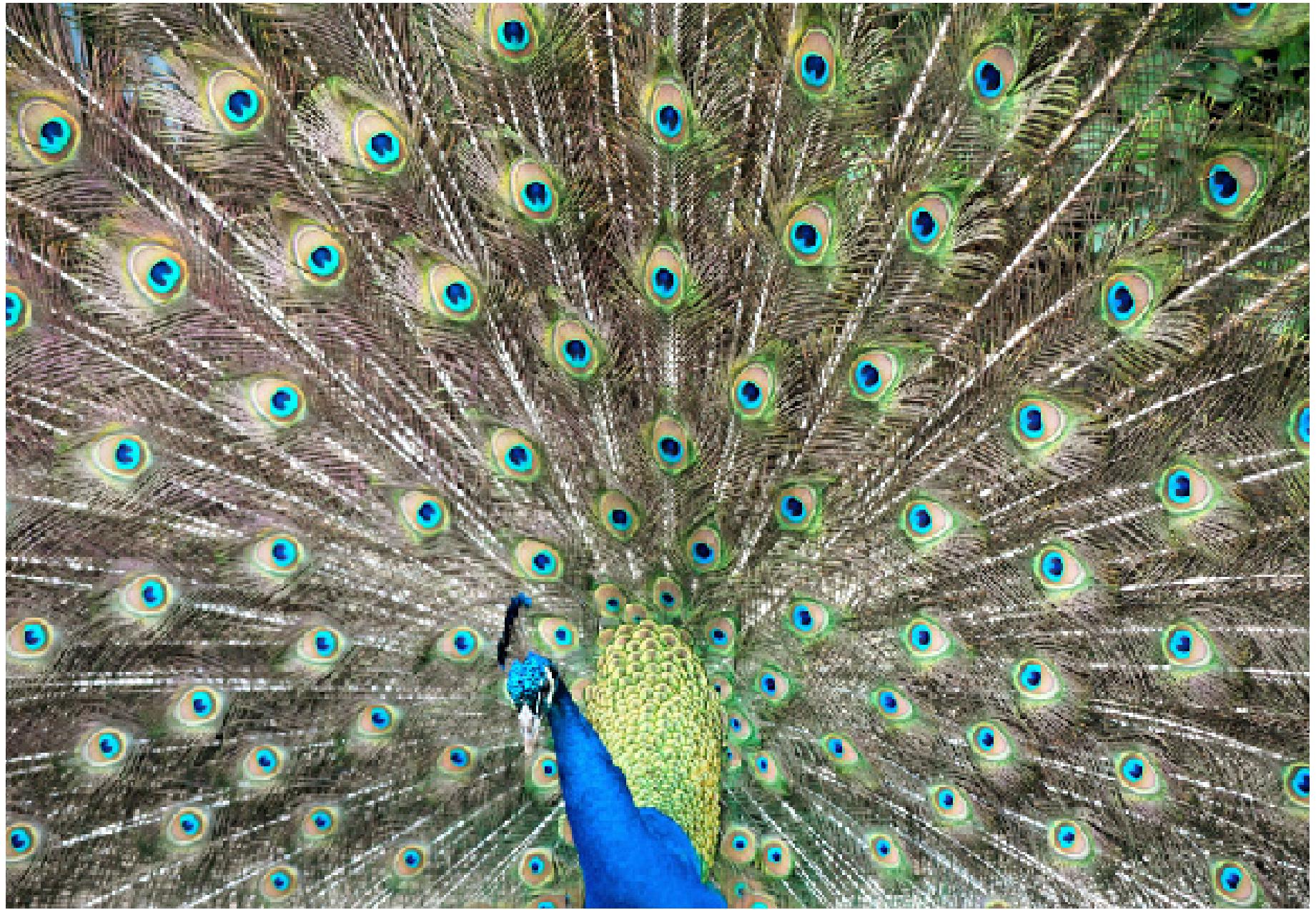


Corporate Elephant

Ricky McBrayer

America Luis Porraz

I see torn faces, in a car, in a club, at a bar
I see lost hope, in a scar, in a tub, in a jar
The density of emotions is unbearable
Violence without care it's so terrible
Hearing gun shots at bus stops
Danger runs shops, no safe spots
Keeping secrets from the people
Making us think that we are equal
Constant lies to keep them indoors
Some don't even have doors
I'm no mastermind, I stand in line
To pay the fine, to live a life that's mine
To the 1% that don't know rent
Is when you can't save a single cent
People stab each other in the back
So they can see the paper stack
Best friends become enemies
Loved ones become memories
Some exchange hope for dope
Some can't cope and take the rope
Shedding tears for those held dear
Hiding years of all kinds of untold fear
If you start feeling something strange
You must know it's time for change
America if you don't agree, then it must be me



Plumage

88

Taylor Bishop

Wistful Thinking

Melanie Helgesen

I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and looked at the clock. The red numbers read a quarter after three. Fantastic. I flipped the bedside lamp on and looked over at Tom, who was sleeping like a baby. No, not a baby, I thought. Babies sleep fitfully. He was the opposite of that. He was gone to the world like a dead man.

“Are you awake?” I asked him, obviously knowing the answer. He didn’t budge. I nudged his shoulder until I saw his eyes flutter.

“What is it?” Tom snarled. I looked at him sheepishly until I noticed the twinkle in his eyes. “You couldn’t sleep, could you Janie?”

I nodded and he put his arm around my shoulders. As I nestled in, he suggested that maybe we should just stay up and talk for a while. I talked about coupons and the church rummage sale. Tom talked about the upcoming baseball season and how he thought we were going to get rain soon.

For a second, it was like it was before. Before I learned that sorrow isn’t something you just feel. Before I learned that it’s something that you carry with you and that grows as the days pass. Before we knew what cancer looked like.

I saw the first morning rays peek through the curtains. “Would you like some breakfast? I’m buying,” I said, poking Tom in the ribs.

“Janie, you know I’m not really here. I haven’t been for a long time.” I realized that he didn’t sound like Tom anymore. He sounded an awful lot like me.

“I know that. I know that,” I said.

I saw his smile fade, then his hands, then his eyes. I waited until I couldn’t see him any longer. I waited until I thought I couldn’t stand it anymore.



Bucky
Jennifer Byerly

1980s

Amnesia's History

L.Y. Hovan 1983

Remember the Lamb,
The Tyger,
The Jew?

The town of Jones
Remembered by some
Forgotten few
Allied Forces
Forced to eschew
Remembering the Lamb,
The Tyger,
The Jew?

The Planting Bird

D. Ray Turner 1981

The sun glistened on the wings of the bird as it darted over the Iowa farmyard. Its path dipped and soared with every other breath. The brown thrasher was returning for its third summer to the Hays farm.

There was the pigsty, good for nesting fodder, and the white, two-story house with steep eaves and some new shingles. The barn had bins of oats, corn, and barley, but he swung a wide circle around it. He still bore a scar on his back from the owl in those rafters.

Up ahead a line of shagbark trees lay north of the farm where the thrasher had a memory of the green hickory nuts. He soared over a man on a tractor who was waving frantically.

The bird landed at the crest of one of the woolly hickories and almost immediately started to sing. He sang of Florida orange groves, ponds, and southern woodlands, and the great green fields. He would sing for about fifteen minutes without stopping or repeating, and most of the songs were new.

Lee was in the north field when it happened. "Bout time," he thought. He'd finished cultivating the last five acres today. Thirty years in these fields and the soil was still dark and rich.

Today was April 17, and he'd been waiting all day. Sure the cultivator had spiraled up the fresh, moldy soil, and the furrows were straight. But they weren't things he had to think about. They happened as surely as the April sun.

Lee knew the bird the minute he saw it. Larger than a robin, it had a long, twitching tail and streaks of dark brown on its belly. He waved at it, stood up on the tractor, and started yelling.

The bird had flown a thousand or so miles, flying only at night. A week earlier it would have been spotted a hundred miles south of here. But on April 17th it would fly by day if necessary to get there on time.

The tractor shuddered and jerked forward as Lee nearly fell off. Nellie had always said his body was strong as hickory, but his head was a little nuts. He dropped to the seat and gave the clutch a sound thrust. The bird continued to sing.

Nellie heard Lee's yell all the way back at the house. "Old fool," she thought. The kitchen was dark. The curtains were pulled because the sun was too bright.

Beans and ham hocks were on the stove. They'd take about four hours to come out proper. She gave the batter a couple more whips and put it into the fridge to thicken. If she had a dime for every batch of cornbread . . .

She had pains too numerous to mention, but then who'd listen anyhow? Nellie sat in the kitchen chair with a heavy breath. Sweat gathered in the wrinkles on her face and trickled down her arms. "Looks like I been properly irrigated," she thought. She'd have to sit and rest a while before she could make it into the front room. Maybe some needlework later, but then she remembered her hands. They were gnarled so bad she hadn't been able to pick up a needle for years. And her back was hunched up just like a snail. "Yep, twisted up and toiling damply like a snail," she thought.

If she could just last till harvest. Harvest? Lee hadn't planted the corn yet. The blamed fool was so superstitious. Oh sure, he'd already laid the beans and the clover, but that was just to give the soil a rest. But finally it was April 17. Judging by his yell, he was out there acting like an idiot again.

Lee called it the Planting Bird 'cause it always arrived at corn planting time. No mystery in that. The little grubber loved the grain. But Lee thought it was something special. He even claimed its song said "Drop it, drop it, drop it! Cover it up, cover it up!" Well, now the corn would go under real proper.

As he soared overhead, the thrasher watched the tractor sowing. The planter threaded the soil together over the beads of hard corn. Still there was some spillage. Then the thrasher and others would dive in after the yellow stones.

Some birds had straight beaks and could poke into the soil. But the thrasher's bill was long and curved like a scythe. So he had to settle for spilled seed and whatever insects his flat yellow eyes spotted along the way.

But planting didn't take long, and the thrasher was soon looking elsewhere for food. When the hickory nuts grew larger and harder, he spent more time flitting through the elderberry hedges catching whatever he could. The berries wouldn't appear until late summer.

At nightfall the thrasher headed toward the farmhouse where there was always fresh water at the old pump. He and thirty or forty other birds gathered around the pump until nearly dark when Nellie came out and spread leftover cornbread and sometimes chunks of pork fat.

Unfortunately the barn owl would sometimes pick this hour to begin its nightly forage starting at the pump area. One night the thrasher was the first to hear the flutter of large wings.

"Toree, toree, toree!" He split into a low flight toward the house, chirping a loud alarm. Feathers scattered every direction, but the thrasher skimmed into the thick bridal brush in front of the house. He heard a thudding impact and knew what it meant. He could feel the talons in his back, but it was only memory. He shivered and stayed in the tall brush until well after dark.

He was startled then by a loud roar and the rush of bright lights into the brush. Deftly escaping the bright tangle of branches, he flew straight up into the cool night air.

Below him he saw a man jump out of the dark car and run through the headlights onto the porch and into the house. The man was carrying a small dark bag. The thrasher pulled strong, steady strokes towards the safety of the shagbarks.

One lamp lit the dresser full of photographs. "You're going to be fine, Nellie. You just have to rest. Take it easier." The young man took off his dark-frame glasses and put them into his bag. He walked out of the bedroom without looking at Lee standing by the door. Lee followed.

Nellie looked at the pictures on the dresser and

shivered some. "Don't you fuss none," she said. But her voice hardly carried beyond the quilt and pillows.

"Goin' to see my boys pretty soon." One of the pictures showed a handsome boy of twenty standing in front of a dark, shiny Hudson. "Never should have got him that car," she said. "He used to shine that up with butter fat." She smiled to herself. "Boy, that car goin' to turn into black cheese." She turned in to her pillow, but she still saw the black, smashed-up Hudson and his arm sticking out the window. She looked back at the picture.

She didn't have a picture of the other boy. He was born dead. It made her feel like a tomb. Then she started looking like a tomb. Old Doc Stevens said it was because she ate pork while she was pregnant, and it affected her kidneys. Whatever the reason, in three months' time she was all hunched up and hollowed out.

Poor Lee. He took it real well, even when she grayed so quickly. People that didn't know them thought she was Lee's mother, he being strong and straight.

Tomorrow she'd have Lee set up a cot on the porch so she could watch the birds. They wouldn't be around much longer. Summer passes by like a feather.

Lee threw the fodder into the trough: corn cobs, some grain, and a little milk fat. He only had two pigs left, and the sow was getting so old her teeth were bad. She'd have trouble with the corn cobs. People asked him why he didn't slaughter the sow. Everyone knows that one pig won't fatten by itself. He'd have to kill them both.

He walked to the chicken pen and spread a little corn. "Here chicka, chicka, chicka." The feed made it easier to gather the eggs. Anything else could wait till tomorrow.

Back at the house Nellie was lying on the porch all wrapped up like a cocoon.

"Thin on eggs," he said and took them inside. Then they sat and watched the sun go down and drank hot soup before retiring to summer sheets.

The corn grew fast and tall. At night when a breeze struck up, it rustled the fields with the sound of thick petticoats. The summer changed but remained the same like an old photograph.

One day on the porch Nellie noticed the thrasher dart out of the bridal brush by the door. "Like to scare the breath out of me," she explained to Lee when he returned.

Lee separated the branches in the brush. "Lookie there," he chuckled. In a fork of limbs was a loose collection of sticks lined with chicken down.

"Easter eggs," said Nellie, smiling. In the middle of the nest were three blue-green eggs with buff speckles. The Planting Bird had mated and nested.

"Careful now, Lee. That be a real feast for old fox." Lee closed the branches. "Or wood weasel or Jerry-cat."

Lee scattered his tracks, and they agreed not to look there anymore, but just to wait for the young to emerge. Nellie talked quietly about the harvest as the night crept in on dark leaves.

The two thrashers got used to seeing the Hays on the porch at evening. That meant the owl wouldn't visit the pump so early. There was no more spreading of cornbread, but that didn't matter. As the corn got taller, the insects were more plentiful.

The thrasher returned one morning to find the eggs had been punctured and eaten. The female had been scared off by the pair of wrens that had taken over the nest. Nellie heard the screeching battle of wings from the house as the thrasher chased off the wrens. But the female was gone, and now the Planting Bird had no need for the nest. He returned to the shagbarks.

In late summer the black elderberries ripened. They provided a feast for the thrasher. But elderberries meant the cold would soon be starting.

Lee's breath was visible in the morning air, as he pulled the blue pickup in front of the porch. Nellie sat on the side of the steps and watched him. "Hurry, Lee," she whimpered. Her shoulders were quivering, and she could hardly feel her hands. The first frost had awakened in her shoulders weeks before it hit the air. Lee swooped up the cot with the mound of blankets and put it in the bed of the truck.

He picked up Nellie like a bride, carried her to the cab of the truck, and gently set her in. "This is damned stupid," he said, stalking around to the driver's seat.

She hadn't heard him swear for months. He wasn't a pious man, but words were something he invested like seed. They were far between and slow in growing.

When they were young, Lee's reticence used to bother her. She'd do anything to get him to talk. The thing that had worked best was reading to him from the tool section of the Sears catalog. But she had long ago given up this deception.

When he turned the ignition key, the engine grated. The motor had started immediately, but Lee was still turning the key. The truck lurched out of the barnyard into the dirt road by the mailbox.

Lee steered carefully down the road, avoiding most of the ruts. The line of trees was up ahead to the left. Nellie watched the fields of windy corn growing real proper. It was ready for harvest and every delay could only mean be done now before the birds had robbed her of the chance.

The truck turned into the double path that ran parallel to the shagbarks. She could see now the crowded elderberry brush that grew beneath the trees. They were green but looked so bare. Were they too late already? The truck pulled to a stop.

Lee was out of the cab and around to her side in seconds. He was fast, and yet he lifted her so gently, just the way he used to deliver a new calf. He carried her around to the back of the pickup, thrust the blankets aside, and laid her on the cot. Then he tucked the blankets firmly around her.

"Lee, we're too late," she said wearily. He didn't say anything, but looked at her and shook his head. Then he disappeared. Nellie tried to look up over the sides of the truck but couldn't lift her head.

"It was wicked," she thought but smiled, "the first time Lee brought me here." They were newly married, and they had come, stuffed themselves with berries, and laid together in the back of the truck. Lee was still romantic, and they always came here at the end of summer to eat the black elderberries together.



"Here," Lee appeared at the side of the truck. He seemed out of breath. "Here they are." In his hands he held ten or twelve of the black, wicked fruit. "That's the last of 'em." And they stained their lips as they'd always done.

The crest of the house was lined with an assortment of birds, mostly pigeons, though the thrasher was there. He surveyed the farmyard filled with people in fancy dress and black cars with an occasional blue or green one.

The thrasher's yellow eyes did not really discern color, only shade, but that was as meaningful as colors were to others. An assortment of shades meant fall was coming on. All the dark shades meant the fields were becoming bare again.

The harvest party was the last good fattening the thrasher would get before his lean migration. He eyed the picnic tables with speckled cloths and tall plates of eatables. But mostly he watched for the fall of crumbs and pieces. When he swooped for a morsel of bread or bacon, the much faster sparrows would scatter, making a clear path for him.

"Lookie there," yelled Lee, jumping up from one of the benches. The Church ladies in their fine hats glanced at him suspiciously.

"Swoosh!" Lee swerved his hands through the air like bat wings. His eyes followed the thrasher's arc through the air back to the roof.

Lee felt a little tipsy, not being used to the sweet wine the parson brought. He dropped back to the bench, though his head still followed the path of the bird.

"Nellie!" he cried out. Lee suddenly became aware of a stillness on the porch.

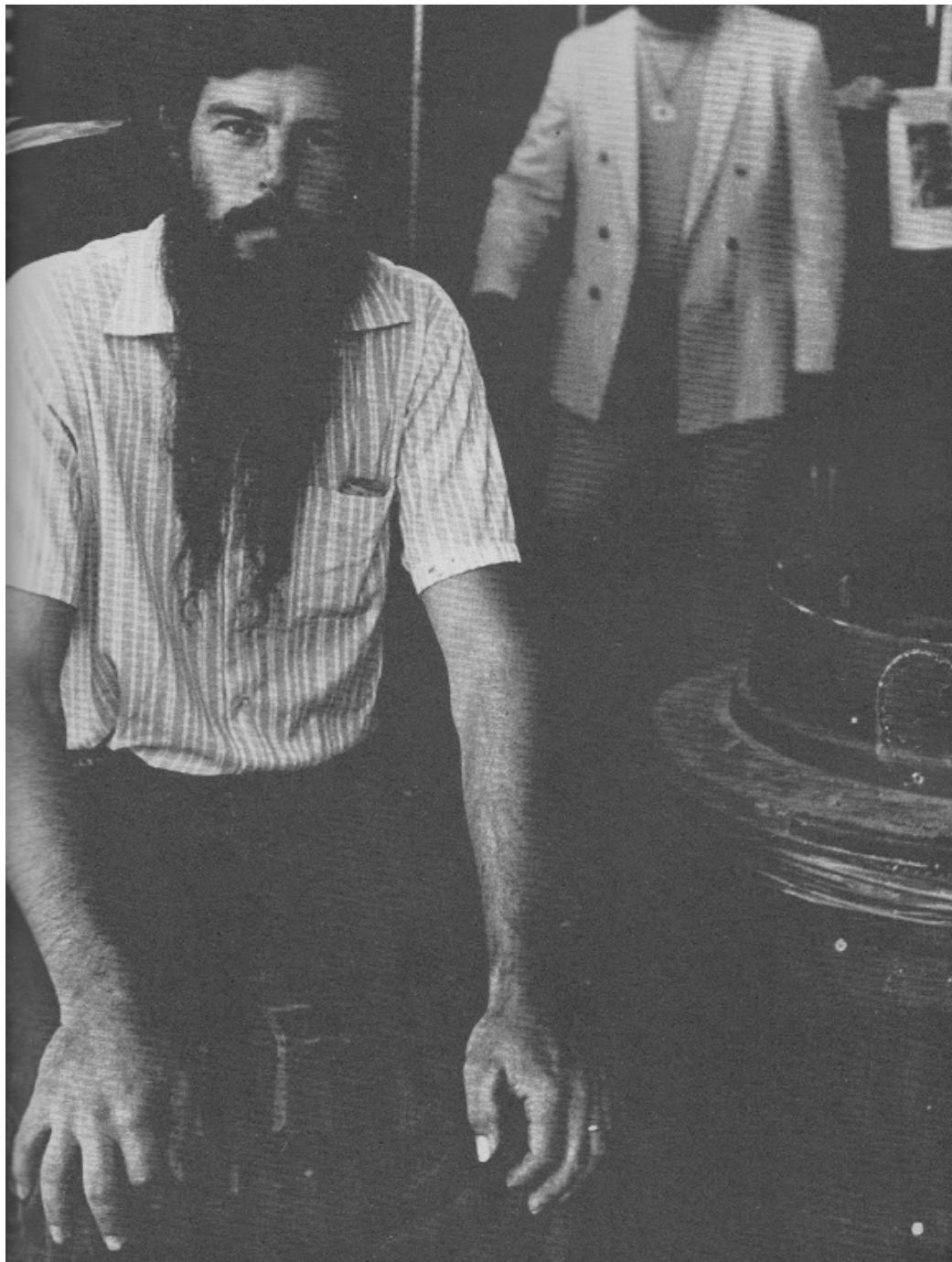
"Blamed fool." The voice was small and private. Nellie could barely see Lee standing over her. He seemed to be in a cloud with dark closing in on the sides.

She pushed back the branches of the dark before her. There she could see Lee's eyes like two blue-green eggs. "Lee?" Then her voice startled her. It was loud and clear. "Here come the fox!"

It was early nightfall when the thrasher winged over the farmyard. The sun was disappearing in the west beneath the last, frail fingers of summer. He swung a circle around the barn. The old barn owl had been shot after harvest by a neighbor boy who was out rabbit hunting.

The thrasher thrust his wings down vigorously. He flew over the pigpen, though this was more a matter of habit. The two pigs were gone, and so was the fodder. This was the bird's last flight over the farm. Today he would start south. He'd stop at the grain silos in Hamlin for a while before moving on. He flew over the house.

On the front porch a man was sitting by himself, his head covered by his hands. It mattered little to the thrasher that the man didn't see him or wave at him. The thrasher was heading south to the fat, orange trees and the large, dark beetles that never seemed to die. ■



California Sleeping

Douglas Nicoll 1983

We be-bop to the drummers beat
we catch the waves and ride them far.
We burn our soles in summers heat,
and in our dreams we are the stars.

In Belfast soldiers killed a man,
in Poland soldiers rule the streets.
Thousands die in Afghanistan,
Beirut rocks to Israeli beats.

We echo loud the A-M beat
and cruise in sexy low-slung cars.
We laugh away the summers heat,
and in our dreams we are the stars.

*Richard Shatzman
1980*



Rochelle Garcia

1985

i will reinvent the world

nicholas roth 1982

i'll reinvent the infinite.
i will reinvent the earth. i'll make its sounds more muted,
and its seas more shallow. i will dig deeper roots.
i'll redefine existence. i will make it real and perceptions
less tangible. i'll reintroduce mysticism.
and i will make things unknown, and everything ultimately unpredictable.
and i will invent a new source of light, warmth,
without burning and cancers.
and i will reinvent skin, softer.
and i will reinvent god, and this time have him really exist.
and i will abolish his ten commandments.
and i will abolish hell and replace it with poor unemployment.
and i will turn the bible back into a beautiful myth for all americans
who feel chained to its tenets.
and i will reinvent america with windmills.
and i will abolish ignorance.
i will hold auctions in my home and sell my old clothes
as antiques for thousands.
and i will drink until midnight and then reinvent soberness.
i will bring back into favor the donald duck nightlight.
and i will have it rain in greater quantities
with larger drops.
and i will reinvent noah's ark.
and i will reinvent my place to live and make it large
with woods and a garden and many other stereotypes.
and when i am finished i will return to my bedroom
and scribble down notes on the next reinvention.
i will lie in bed with a big chief tablet and re-reinvent the world.

The Unknown Soldier

Linda Appelt 1983

Face down in midnight puddles,
memory fogged like city panes,
a paradox against the walls
of bullish Wall Street gains.

Arising to the reveille
of dumpster rounds at dawn,
he cracks the sheath that seals
his joints, all feeling in them gone.

Slow struggle from the trenches,
he staggers to wrapped feet,
and bravely slumps against the wind
to find a warmer street.

No medalled bouts with hunger.
No torch at Potter's Field.
No valor praised for bloody cough
that finally makes him yield.



William Wendt

1984



Waiting

Teal Hankins

The Eternal Struggle of Love and Fear

Kellen Bertrand

She knows not that you write of her,
Simply that you write
Casual waves and tempting winks
drive your heart to the point of failure

Every day you wake
you swear will be the day
The day you profess your desire,
and await her reaction

You've over-analyzed every possible outcome
every reaction, every consequence
With chin up and chest out
you march to face her alas

The fluorescent lights of heaven
delicately highlight her face
Dead in your tracks,
you are paralyzed by fear

Only moments away
from tearing this secret from your skin
A single bead of sweat quickly treks
along your questionable backbone

Your mind set on confession,
and your mouth full of nerves
overflowing with angst
opens to reveal

A sudden recurrence of realization
of an unfavorable reception
shapes an open mouth to a smile
and postpones the struggle another day

The Birds Remember

Derik Steinkirchner

Before everything, the Men brought gifts.

Little manlings sprinkled bread crust and granola on the docks,
And they squalled when we descended upon them, hungry.

But then came the signs,
Do Not Feed the Birds
they said.

But there are scraps regardless,
Without the little one's help.
And we fed.

Then came the owls,
Like gargoyles upon the
Sun-bleached aluminum roofs
To strike us with fear of screech and claw.

But they were only statues,
And we learned.

Then came the spikes,
Covering our favorite roosts with needles
That bit into our legs and scraped our feathers
But the Men could not cover everything,
And we glared down from rafter and lamps,
And we perched.

Then the final signs came,
And the Men bid us unwelcome,
But we did not put up signs,
Or place spikes under their nests,
Or erect statues of wolves to frighten them,
We only came first.



The Stare

Juan Aguirre

Cubicle

Robert Coe

Second Place, Fiction

Set: Office cubicle center stage. Desk chair in middle of cubicle. Desk on stage right side of cubicle. Filing cabinet on stage left side of cubicle. Downstage of filing cabinet is a small trash can that has a few crumpled up pieces of paper. On top of desk is a computer, cup of pencils, and files stacked neatly. Calendar tacked to upstage wall of cubical. Several days are marked off. Everything is very neat. Ambient noise if possible, telephone ringing, people typing, whispers, office noises.

Lights up

Steve is preset in office chair diligently working away. He is looking at the computer screen and typing on the keyboard. He reaches over and picks up a file. Looks through it, back at the screen, notices an error, grabs a pencil and writes in the file. He puts the file back and keeps typing.

The Voice: Pst. (Steve does not hear)

The Voice: Pst. (Steve looks. He looks around the cubicle and sees nothing. He looks toward the audience as if looking into other cubicles and sees nothing. Goes back to work)

The Voice: PST!!! Hey Steve.

(This time Steve is startled. He looks around again. He stands up and looks over the cubicle walls. He sits back down but doesn't continue work).

Steve: Hello?

The Voice: Finally, I've been trying to get your attention for, like, ten minutes. How ya doin' Steve?

Steve: What?

The Voice: I said How ya doin'?

Steve: Who's talking?

The Voice: It's me Steve. Remember? Your old pal?

(Steve looks worried and turns back to work trying to ignore what he is hearing)

The Voice: Come on Steve. That's no way to be. It's been a long time since we last talked. How ya been?

(Steve stands up and starts looking around his cubicle. He looks over the walls (except the upstage wall), under the desk, and in the filing cabinet.)

The Voice: Hahaha are we really going through this again? You know I'm not there Steve. You know where I am. So you can stop looking around. (Steve sits back down defeated. He gets back to work) Atta boy Steve. Now tell me what you've been up too. How's the wife and kids? Still treatin' you like the pushover you are?

Steve: (Quietly like he doesn't want people to hear) Shut Up! (Continues working, more hunched over)

The Voice: Haha I'll take that as a yes. Aw I'm sorry my friend. Well don't worry. In my eyes you're always number one Steve, the head honcho, the leading man, the cream of the cake, the king of the

caboose, the man with the plan, da boss.

Steve: (More angry with each name. Still whispering.) Go away!

The Voice: Oh come on. After all those nice things I just said about you? That's no way to be. I could start acting like your family. (In a higher, more womanly voice) Steve you disgust me. Every time you come home I want to go into the bathroom and throw up everything I had for lunch and breakfast. It'd be better if you stayed at work and just sent home the check. And sleeping with you. Blek! That is torture. I'd rather take an ice pick and shove it up my...

Steve: (Finally yelling). Shut Up!! (He realizes what he did and looks apologetically around as if to other workers in other cubicles. He turns back and starts working with renewed vigor.)

The Voice: (Back to normal voice). Whoa Steve calm down. You don't want anyone thinkin' you're crazy now do ya? And besides I'm only messin with ya. You know I am right? Steve...Right...Hello...Anyone home?...Earth to Steve.

Steve: You're not there.

The Voice: What?

Steve: (Through gritted teeth) You are not there.

The Voice: What do you mean I'm not there? Of course I'm there... Where is there?

Steve: (Very rehearsed) They said that there was nothing wrong with me and that if I was hearing something it was only from the stress at work and the stress of raising two teenage daughters. You are not there.

The Voice: How can I not be there Steve? I've always been there... or here...or wherever. I've been your side kick since you've started working in this dead ass job. I've been with you when your wife tells you that she wishes she married that ape of a quarterback from her high school who is now only a contract away from signing with the Pittsburgh Steelers. I was there when your oldest girl, Maggie, brought home that guy who rode the motorcycle, what was his name, Tyler...Tyson...Trevor? Trevor. That was his name. Remember, the guy with the face tattoo? Yeah him. (chuckles) He was a character. Didn't he pull out a knife, put his feet up on the table, and start cleaning his teeth? (Starts laughing) Now that's a story you want to tell after walking her down the aisle. (Still laughing)

Steve: (Madder) You are not there. (Pulls out file and starts writing in it again. Goes back to pretending that he does not hear the voice.)

The Voice: Oh come on I was only joking Steve. Steve? Steve?... Steve?...Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve...(As this continues Steve gets angrier and angrier. He runs his hand through what hair he has left, tries to keep working, breaks the pencil, and slams his hands on the table.)

Steve: Ok ok you are there. You happy? YOU ARE THERE! (Steve realizes what he did, looks around, and goes back to work. He remembers he broke the pencil, throws it at the wall, and grabs another one from the cup.)

The Voice: Wow Steve. I didn't want to make you mad. It's just that we haven't talked in such a long time and I was starting to feel like you forgot me.

Steve: How can I forget you? You're always there commenting on everything that I do, say, or think. How can I forget the parasite that sits in my head and doesn't shut up? I thought you had gone for good this time.

The Voice: I wasn't gone Steve. I was thinking. Thinking about how I'm gonna get you out of this dump. You've been working here for so many years that your chair has grown an imprint of your ass on it. And haven't had a promotion since God knows when. Its time you were running this joint. Don't you agree Steve? (Steve continues working.) Steve?...Again with whole the ignoring thing? I know you can hear me. And you know I know you can hear me. And I know you know I know you can hear me. If you couldn't hear me you wouldn't be grabbing onto your pencil so damn tight. (Steve snaps the pencil in half. He looks around to make sure no one saw him, grabs another pencil, and goes back to work). Come on buddy. It's not like admitting it is gonna hurt anyone. It'll be better for every party involved. And once you admit it, there's gonna be a party involved. (Steve bows his head in defeat and puts down the pencil.) There you go Steve. Just admit it. I'm on your side anyway. Now are you gonna accept my help or what? (Steve sighs.) That's the spirit. Think about this. Who has been working at this company longer? You or that dumb ass Mr. Halls?

Steve: (After a long pause and quietly, still defeated and begrudgingly.) Me.

The Voice: That's right. And who knows this entire company like the back of their hand? You or Mr. Halls?

Steve: (Not as quiet.) Me

The Voice: There we go! Now who is older and has more experience when it comes to business and other...uh...money...making...magic?

Steve: (Starting to look as if he half believes it) I do.

The Voice: And who is more handsome, daring, and has better hair than Mr. Halls. (Steve looks up at his receding hair line.) Bad example. Come on man. You can do this. Just walk up to his office, kick

down the door, and say "I want your job you bastard. Get out of MY chair." That slob will be so shocked he'll probably jump up and sign his own resignation.

(Steve stands up looking determined. There is a beat where it looks like he might actually do it. Then he realizes what he's doing, sits back down, and gets back to work.)

The Voice: NO! Come on Steve! You were so close! Just a few short steps and you were on your way to not only changing your life but this entire company. Not only that, but if you got this promotion then your wife will start treating you right. When you walk through the door it won't be (In womans voice) Blek! (Normal) it'll be (Womans voice) Oh Steve welcome home. I've been waiting all day just to see your face. I've made you your favorite dinner. While you're eating, I'll go upstairs and slip into that maid's outfit you've always wanted to see me in.

(Steve starts to laugh)

The Voice: (Normal voice) What? The image of you wife in a kinky French maid's outfit is funny?

Steve: No the idea that she would cook. Last time she did anything in the kitchen she set the oven on fire and we spent Thanksgiving at Panda Express.

The Voice: Oh that's right. Well for the sake of this motivational fantasy pretend she can cook. (Steve snorts) All of that could happen Steve, if you just do what I said.

Steve: I'm not calling him a bastard.

The Voice: What?

Steve: I'm not calling Mr. Halls a bastard.

The Voice: What? Why not?

Steve: Because I'm not.

The Voice: But people listen more when you swear. It's human nature.

Steve: I'm not doing it.

The Voice: Ok...we can work around this...um...ok what about shit head?

Steve: No.

The Voice: Ass hole?

Steve: No!

The Voice: Dick Hole?

Steve: No!

The Voice: Butt Hole?

Steve: NO!

The Voice: Dingle berry?

Steve: (After considering this and a little begrudgingly) Fine

The Voice: Dingle berry. Um...Ok...we can work with that. Now all you need to do is get mean. Come on Steve let me see your mean face. (Steve doesn't do anything) Come on Steve. No one is gonna take you seriously if you say an awesome line but look like a pansy.

Now show me your mean face. (Steve does some sort of facial expression that isn't mean.) That...um...never mind. Let's just get serious and be serious. People have to take seriously if you look serious. You know what I mean? Try serious. (Steve does another weird facial expression, semi serious) That's it. Now get on your feet, march on over to Mr. Balls' office, and kick down the door to your new life. (Steve stands up, still with semi serious expression, and stomps off stage right. Once he's gone, a man stands up from behind the cubicle wall. He is young, clean cut, dressed in a shirt and tie. When he speaks we recognize his voice as The Voice. In his hand he should have some sort of cone or tube that he would have spoke through to make Steve think the voice was in his head).

The Voice: That never gets old. (Starts laughing. Still laughing as curtain goes down.)

Curtain drops. Scene.



Geometry
Kevin Craig

Expectations

Everett Kekoa

If you were there
when she was a baby,
you would think that every

Cube,

Cylinder, and

Triangular prism

passively in their places
could have been suggesting that
this child would go further than
a six-figure salary.

If you had been there
when she was a girl,
you'd probably think it cute
whenever she played house with
that Easy-Bake oven and
her imitation offspring

like those kids in the commercials;
she looked like she could be one.

If you were there
when she was a woman,
you might be disappointed
to learn she paused from school;
it was for a second job in
hopes she'd climb the ladder
as if the glass ceiling
wasn't held up by false ladders.

If she was there now
as a working mom of two,
she'd say it's what she wanted
'til she reached six feet beneath.

Rise

Apolonio Rosas

We are legion. We can't be stopped by the system imposed upon us. We're numerous and autonomous. Unity is force. Humanity is the source. The empire will fall. Politicians will crawl begging for mercy. Masses will finally wake up and see. The earth is filled with corruption. It's time for a positive reconstruction. Instead of being forced to work in order to live and function. Forced labor is self-destruction. Before you know it you're old. Your youth sold. The rich profit off your time. You get paper and they get gold. Stay quiet. You can't get bold. You're too concerned with feeding your household. You fail to realize what the truth unfolds. Once you do you'll realize that you weren't meant to be poor. Nobody was meant to pick crumbs off the floor. Open your eyes and walk through the door. Truth is on the other side. There's no need to hide anymore. Come out and see... the world is evil and full of greed. It seems impossible to succeed and produce viable offspring. The food is filled with chemicals. The water is poisoned. People profit off others by sending them to prison. Freedom is a commodity. You become property. Stamped and labeled. Your liberty is hand held. Hand shakes seal deals you disagree with but no one rebels. But you can implant the seed of righteousness on this planet. Use technology to your advantage. Inform and empower yourself. Mainstream news is filtered and brainwashing. The truth it's bashing. Your pockets get empty while they cash in. You struggle to survive while their bank is flashing. Your brain gets small. Their stacks of gold get tall. You sit and stare at the TV while subliminal messages get installed. You buy things you don't need, eat fast food, and drink disease. You sip on death out of a straw. Stop and think. Question the law. Read. Don't be easy to deceive. Education is the key. You'll take gulps of knowledge. The system wants to own you. Get up. Resist. It's time to challenge.



Legion

Erik DeHaro

Star of India

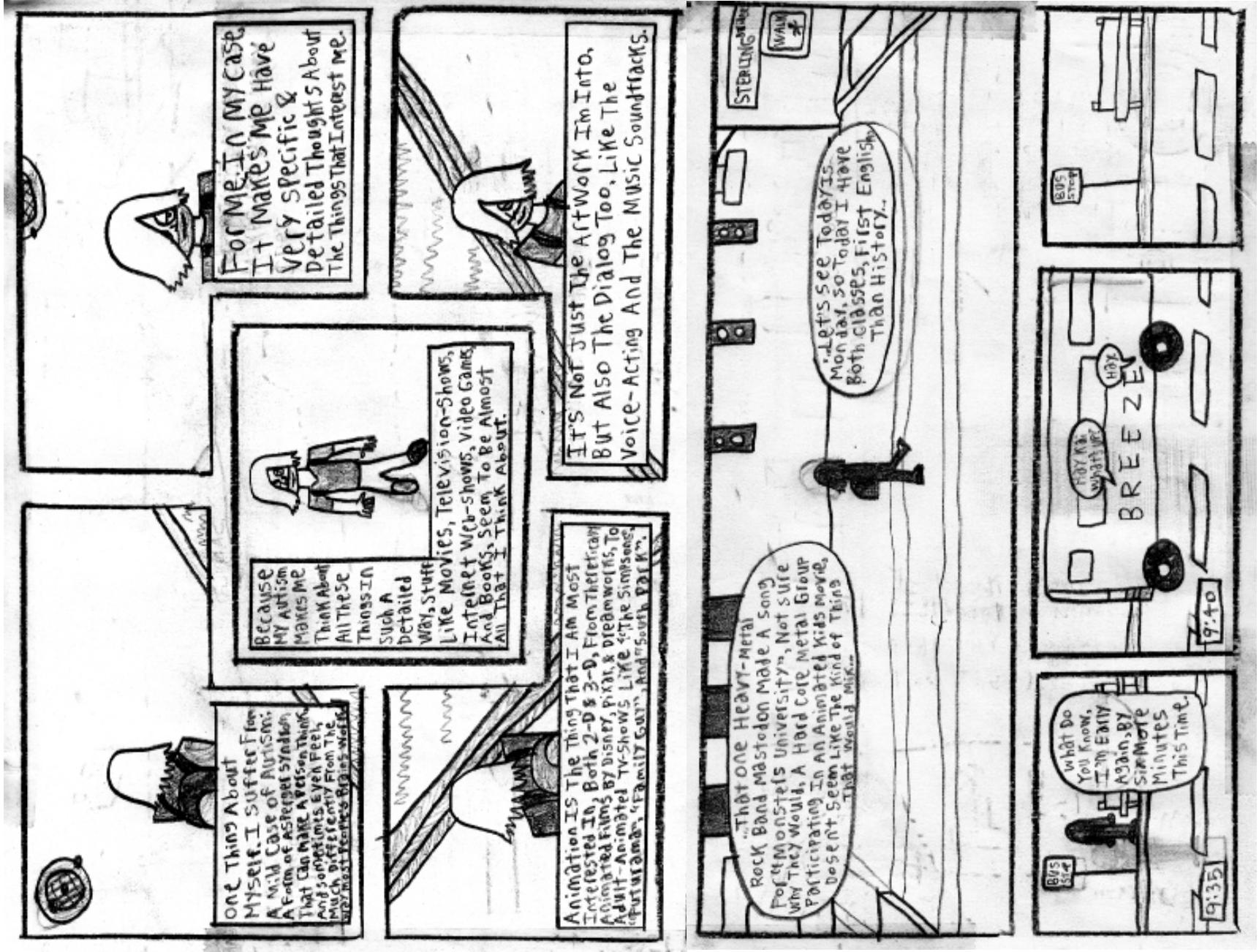
Nathan Ware

Second Place, Poetry

We were special.
None of the other crews
got hot chocolate
on their watch.
Even stunning Josephine
Already a star at eleven
couldn't swing a slice
of chocolate pudding pie
in the icy night of her watch.
Let them scowl in the daylight
as we carry the captain's dinner.
They wait for kitchen scraps
while we belt galley shanties
wafting feast aromas down the line.
We our hold heads high,
not lithe like riggers,
not bulky as the boatswains,
but filling their bellies
with spiced rat stew.
And when we'd chased the night away
clutching chocolate in our hands
we filled our classmates' sleepy ears
with pots and pans clanging
to signal the end of our watch.

One Thing About Myself

Max Bolduc





Shiva

Melissa Scrivnor

Hugs

Kristen Cox

Hugs, arms, and the steady rhythm of a caring heart beating, feeling the breath of a friend encompass your entire being, becoming engulfed in someone else who you wish could carry the weight of your life on their shoulders. I miss that. Simple sentences of love, and the whisper of an “I love you”. I am aching for an ear to listen, a caress, a conversation of intensity that shakes me to my very core. Time in the desolate island of “no man’s land” is coming to an end, however for now I am in peril, in seclusion, and invisible. The barking requests of perfection impale my wall of pent up insecurities. There is sun, and light, undoubtedly the end is near, yet so far. The light at the end of the tunnel is through the woods of despair, past the mountains of confusion, to the left of anger, a mile away from love, and three stops too soon of understanding. Hot tears form and I wipe them away because tears are not on the agenda. But I want, ache, desire, need to cry, to be held, and hugged. I hurt in my heart because I miss comfort, and affirmation. It’s a dangerous request, to want what you can’t have; to desire that of which is not possible in the “here and now”. But I feel as if these very words could kill me. Words that if kept inside could devour my soul and happiness from the inside out. The people who once fulfilled this hole have been replaced with pain staking memories of vulnerability at its finest. I want to scream and cry- move to primitive tactics and howl at the moon if it will subside the feeling that I will drown amongst my emotions. I long to be close, make something important that can’t be taken away. But everything can be taken away. Every word, feeling, desire, person, want.

Vernacular hyperventilate

1990s

Potluck Jello

By Elaina Nader 1999

shivering viscous mass
glimmering poison green
smooth as slime
slick as scum
No one will touch it
Picnickers pass over it
shuddering.
When the humans turn their backs
it slithers from the table
oozes along the ground
and disappears in the distance.



"Untitled"

Anthony Macizo

1995

River Phoenix

I heard the other day
River Phoenix
dropped dead.
Just like that.
River Phoenix, yes
I guess you can say now
that he's just like
any timeless teeny bopper
heart throb.
Movie star dead
before his time.
Marilyn Monroe
James Dean
Not like Marlon Brando
who at one time
looked very handsome.
Now everyone just
thinks of him as the
fat old man Godfather
in dire need of a cough drop.
Yeah, River Phoenix
will never be old,
crippled with Parkinsons disease
or senile from Alzhiemers.
He'll never have a
mid-life identity crisis
or sell out to daytime T.V.
Only because he dropped dead.
Just like that.

Sy Turner

1994

Whoever it was who said, "It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness" obviously never worked the graveyard shift at the Circle K on Palm Street in Lemon Grove. I mean this place is like a "bug light" attracting all the riffraff and scum-bags in east San Diego. I don't mean you, of course. It's just that this is the only market open around here this late at night, and you wouldn't believe the stuff I see while I'm working behind this counter.

I guess me and Stanley should have known better. Stanley's my husband. He was stationed out here with the Navy and all, and when it came time for him to retire, he said, "Gladys, let's go back to San Diego and live by the ocean."

Romantic, huh? But I'm sure you know how much it costs to buy a place with an ocean view. So we buy a place in Lemon Grove. You can't exactly see the ocean from here. Not that I'm complaining, mind you, but this is the city with a giant concrete lemon downtown that has "Welcome to Lemon Grove" written on it. But like I said, we should have known better.

All things considered though, this neighborhood didn't used to be this bad. If it was, I don't think Stanley would've let me start working this shift. Now we're kind of hooked on the money and all. With inflation, Stanley's pension doesn't go as far as it used to. Still, like I said, it didn't used to be this bad. I don't know if you remember what it used to be like or not. Say, I don't think I've seen you before. Are you new here?

Uh... yeah.

Well, now, not to offend you or anything, but maybe that's part of the problem. Too many new people and too few jobs. That's why crime's so high and all. People steal cause they're hungry. They take drugs cause they're depressed. Hell, I'd be depressed too if I couldn't find a job!

But like I said, crime's high. If it weren't for the cops in and out of here during the course of the night, I don't know what I'd do. Like officer Martinez? He usually stops in here about 4:30 or so to get his morning doughnuts. And I'm sure glad he does. What is it about cops and doughnuts anyway? You know what I mean? Well, like I was saying, one morning he wanders in here and catches this guy wearing a ski-mask and holding a brown paper bag in the back of the store. Yeah, right back there where the charcoal lighter is. So officer Martinez asks him what he's doing, and the guy says he's shopping. Can you imagine? He was carrying a knife, too! Officer Martinez arrested him, but they had to let him go. He hadn't done anything yet. Guess they'll have to wait until he comes back and cuts my throat.

God, I remember the first time I got robbed here. I thought the guy was kidding. You should have seen him! He walked in here, and I never thought twice about it. Kind of a nice looking kid he was. Dressed pretty nice too. The only thing, he had this Mohawk haircut, and he was wearing a red headband. But like I said, I never thought twice about it. He mulled around looking at the magazines for awhile. Then he came up to the register, kind of bellied-up to the counter, and said, "This is a holdup."

I looked at him and said, "Are you kidding? You are kidding me, aren't you?"

Then I noticed his gun. Like I told you, he bellied up to the counter and was

holding the gun against his stomach and on top of the counter so it wouldn't get picked up by the security camera. I remember later the cops asking me what kind of gun it was, and I said, "Hell, I don't know. It was a gun!" I was pretty scared. Anyway, he said I should put the money in the paper bag. It was only about sixty bucks or so.

Maybe I couldn't remember what kind of gun it was, but I gave the cops a pretty good description of the robber. They caught him, and I had to go downtown and identify him. Had to testify in court against him, too, which was kind of exciting. Seems like such a shame, though. To go to prison for stealing sixty bucks, that is. You ever been robbed?

Uh uh.

Well, I guarantee you wouldn't like it. I mean some of these people are downright strange. There was a guy who walked in here one night wearing a flowered turban and carrying a gun. After he got all the cash I could give him, he made his getaway on a little kid's bike. There was this other guy who came in here and robbed me, and then he made me make him one of our deli sandwiches before he left. Guess he was hungry.

You know, I really think most of these folks are just hard up. There was this one pathetic guy who came in here with his finger in his pocket, and he was pretending like he had a gun. Like I can't tell the difference between a finger and a gun! Anyway, he shouts, "Give me all your money!" So I shout back at him, "Hell no!" And he shrugs his shoulders and walks out of here.

I guess I just don't get it. It's not like these folks can get any real money. Every time I get any cash built up, I have to drop the money in the safe. And the safe can only be opened electronically.

But you know what really pisses me off, pardon my French? You see, I could care less about the money. What makes me mad as hell is these people have taken something from me! Something I can never get back again. Something they had no right to take, and that's my sense of security and well-being. You know, I don't sleep as well as I used to. I have nightmares sometimes, and I'm not as friendly with strangers as I used to be. Maybe my sense of security was only an illusion. But it was my illusion, damn it! And they had no right to take it from me. Don't you agree?

Uh huh.

But I guess that's just the way it is. You know, the scariest I've ever been was last February when some guys came in here, tied me up, and began loading our video games into a truck parked behind the store. Man, I was so scared! They could have done anything to me tied up like I was. But they got their just deserts. It had been raining hard, and every time they loaded another game into the back of the truck, it sunk farther and farther into the mud. Officer Martinez spotted them trying to get the truck unstuck and called for backup. Sounds like something you'd read on the back page of the newspaper, huh? You know, like the *Union-Tribune*, or the *L.A. Times*, or the...

Okay, okay, okay, lady! I hate to be rude and butt in like this, but I've got to get going! Would you please put the money in the bag so I can make my getaway?



Extase
Mimi Blot-Sampson 1996

Word Power

Madge-Marie Moy 1995

I am a literate woman
Fear me
Words are my weapons
Prose my shield
I am a poet
working at my craft
weaving words into lines
and lines into stanzas
turning experience into stories

I was born in Dixie
(no joke)
the odd girl-child
ignored and segregated
by virtue of gender
when I wasn't hiding
from the horrors of reality
I listened
to the old black woman
ancient even then
who was hired to look after the house
while my parents did
whatever it was that parents do
I listened to her stories
and took them for my own

I listened to the grandmothers
the blue haired old ladies
that went to the beauty shop
with my mother
and commented that I was
such a quiet child
never knowing that all the while
I was stealing their lives

I followed my father around
to the places that men go
to the garage and courthouse
and listened to the men
discussing and debating
everything from politics
to the weather
memorizing their lines
for later use

I heard the stories of love
and the stories of hate
I heard the good things
and the bad things
grand and glorious triumphs
embarrassing and painful failures
I know the secrets
the dirty, nasty
little family secrets
an archive of memories
a collection of anecdotes
I know them all
the family scandals

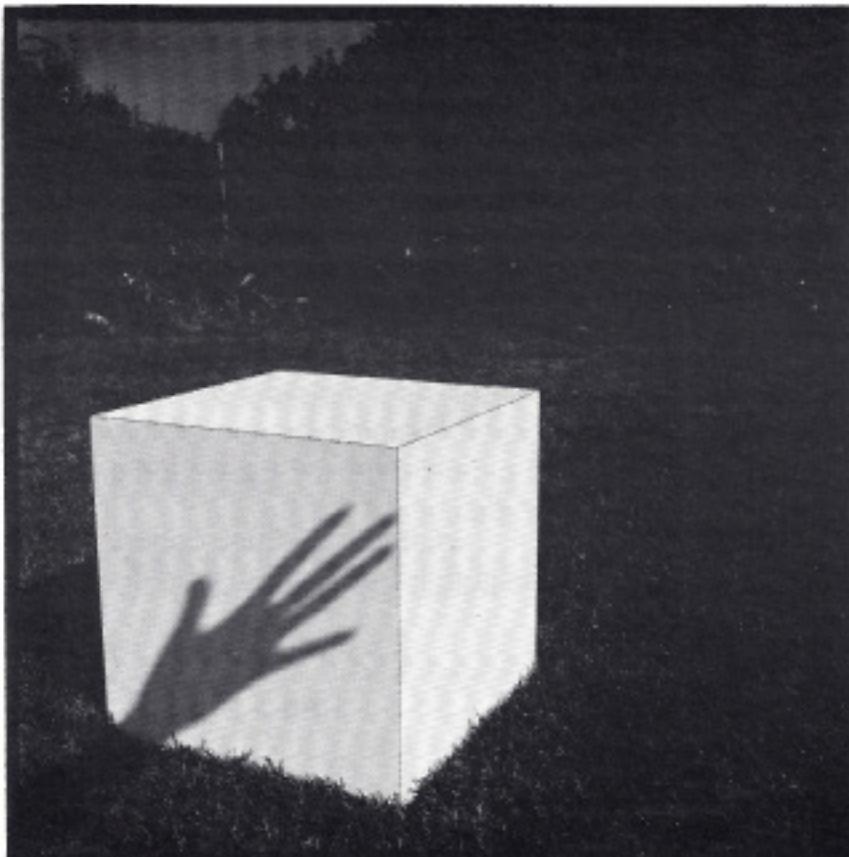
the local gossip
I know where the bodies are buried
and where the skeletons hide
I listened
and I learned

Power comes with the knowing

My mother reads my poetry
and she cringes
because she never knows
what I will say next
my brother reads my poetry
and swears I have lost my mind
our neighbors read my poetry
and say I was never raised like that
and wonder where it was
that I went wrong
coming from such an obviously Christian home
(You should never let a woman learn to read)

They say that a prophet
is not without honor
except in his own hometown
but I suppose
the same can also be said
of poets

Better Tomorrow



Tom Pappas
1991

His hair
Is the blue of a neon sign
His silver eyes
Reflect nothing but the green glow
Of the screen before him
His metallic hand
(Better than the real one)
Feels nothing
As he taps the keyboard on his lap
He is surrounded
By the plastic remains
Of the night's synthetic meal
Outside
The rain pours down
On the great grey monuments of man
Its very touch
Killing the trees
Yellowing the grass
Technology
It's the will of the people
A hope for a better tomorrow.

-Brian Oldfield
1991



Spanish Eyes

Linda Belford Woods 1997

Shell

Alyssa Thielemann

When we first met,
You took me to the beach
And you smiled so wide
That it made it unfair for me to mention
That I actually hated the ocean
And its itchy water creeping up my ankles
And every sticky grain of sand that lied around it.

We walked along the edge of the water
And somehow your arm around me
Made the feeling of the sand stuck between my toes
A little less bothersome.

Suddenly the sun was no longer above us,
It had made its way down to the water
And was now only peeking over the horizon
Like it decided to take a dip in the sea
Before leaving for the night.

As it sat there over the water,
It painted the sky with a dim, shallow light
The colors like paint strokes of yellow, orange, pink
Falling into one another so perfectly
As it dipped lower into the sky
And deeper into the water.

We were laughing more than we were talking
When something caught my eye
Reflecting the colors of the sunset so beautifully

A shell
But not like the other shells
All broken apart and tattered.

No this shell was different, better
It was completely whole
So genuine and pure and complete.

It was so mesmerizing
I couldn't just leave it there
For someone else to take and cherish
So I picked it up.

I placed it in your hand
And you held it there
Just looking at it for a while
Admiring its beauty as I did
“It's perfect” you said,
“Perfect...” I thought.

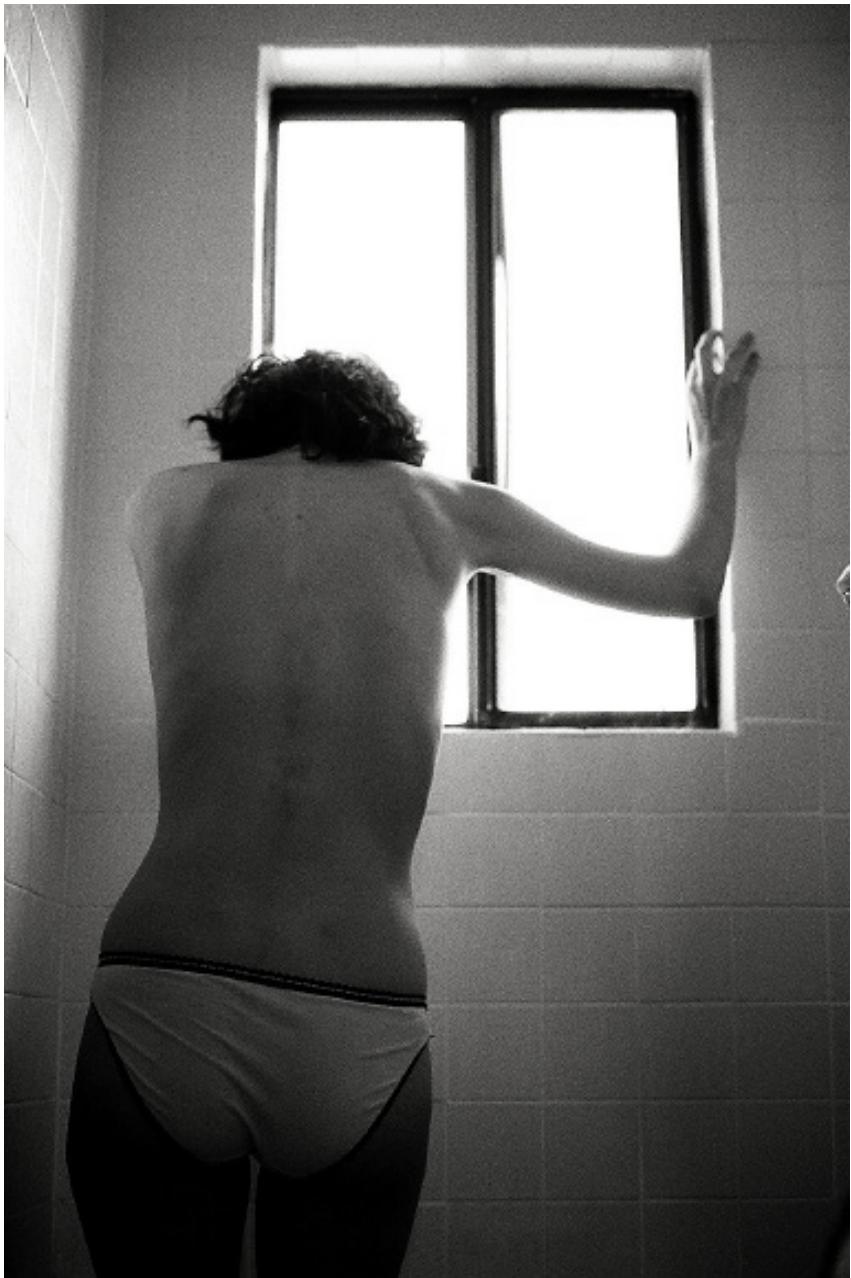
You've always held onto that shell
Taken care of it, protected it
Never let it break or crumble
Always made sure it remained just as beautiful
As the very first day
We happened to stumble upon it.

And every time I begin to drift away,
Like our shell would have drifted away with the tide
If we hadn't been there to find it,
You pull out that shell to remind me why I'm here
And why I've always been here
And why I'm never going to leave.



Silhouette

Alyssa Sheppard



Window

Ashley Fisher

122

Somebody's Daughter

Larry Narron

Third Place, Fiction

I walked down the long empty hall to my father's room, thinking about the visions I had of him the night before, and all the other nights before, a specter haunting my dreams, covered in ashes, gray-eyed and wrinkled, hiccupping soot as he licked his lips and smiled at me, mumbling the unspeakable as he came closer, rising up at the foot of my bed. In the East they call it the demon sitting on one's chest. Those of the special talents, when they were close to the periphery of sleep, would see them suddenly appearing, a little man made out of shadow standing there at the foot of the bed, and when they saw him, they were paralyzed with fear. You literally can't move, like when the mind wakes up far before the body, and the limbs—even the lungs—ignore all the body's ordinary commands to move. The sense of powerlessness might be compared to drowning, I imagine. Anyway, I wasn't paralyzed now. I was walking down the hall to my father's room, ready to face whatever I found in there.

I knocked on the door and let myself in. My father didn't hear me approach. He was sitting on the far edge of his bed, facing away from me, watching TV, some History Channel show about flying saucers where they were interviewing pilots who said they've seen them zipping over Europe during the Second World War—foo fighters, they called them.

The afternoon sunlight was coming in through the window directly behind the TV, the rays making what little white hair my father still had left on his head shimmer like the frail yet brilliant

feathers of an ancient bird grown so thin that they had been loosened from the skin. He was like a weathered angel in the light, a shape that seemed to defy his nightly incarnations in my bedroom.

I noticed a little book about the rosary on his bedside pillow. I wondered when he'd decided to convert to Catholicism, or if he just suddenly found little religious trinkets comforting in the confusing, muddled landscape of old age. Maybe, in his mind, he'd always been a Catholic. My father tended to imagine things in order to fill in the gaps in memory that had been appearing with greater frequency and range in the years since he'd been admitted to this place. Often times the made up things were more real to him than the things that actually happened, the things he couldn't remember had happened, or the things he refused to remember.

"Hello?" I said, trying to get my father's attention. "Mr. Wernick?"

My father turned and smiled at me. The pale blue cores of his eyes still shone through the foggy gray layer that had clouded over them both. "Nurse Lucy," he said, flicking off the TV with the remote and tossing it onto the bed, "we meet again." He stood and walked around the foot of the bed toward me. "You look beautiful, my dear, as usual."

My father hugged me and I hugged him back the best I could. I was surprised by the warmth in his hands, his arms, his body, and I could tell that his body was not made out of shadow, but of flesh—he was a real man with blood in him that was still warm and flowing, wanting pump to his heart for a little while longer still. Even so, I didn't understand how anything warm could be coming from him. The skin on his hands was spotty; it hung loose on his bones. Finally he let go and sat back down on the bed, facing me. I put my purse down on the floor and sat down on the chair across from him, against the wall.

"And call me Sal," my father said. "You know the drill."

I did know the drill—I'd been visiting him at least twice a month since he'd gotten sick. I looked out the open window behind my father on the far side of the room. Between the transparent white

drapes that had been pulled aside, the hills of Fairfield were yellow, turning golden as the sun went down behind them. The green oaks lay scattered from each other in the golden hills. I wondered how anything could grow like that—alone, separated from all the others of its kind.

"That's a very pretty skirt you're wearing," my father said, pointing and smiling. "You look as beautiful as my wife did on her wedding day. Of course, she's dead now," he added, still smiling.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Wernick."

"Oh, that's all right," he shrugged. "It'll happen to all of us. I came to terms with that a long time ago—I was only seventeen." His smile faded. He folded his hands in his lap and looked down at his fingers for a moment. I couldn't think of anything to say. But then he looked up.

"Well, Nurse," he said, his smile reappearing mysteriously as he sat back down on the bed, "you look just lovely, just like some of the girls from the war. There were so many beautiful girls in the war," he said. "Have a seat."

I dropped my purse and sat down in the chair by the door. Without any warning at all I lifted the hem of my skirt and moved my knee out so he could see the exposed tan flesh of my inner thigh. I pointed to the cigarette burns there, keeping my eyes locked on his.

He looked down at my thigh. "There were a lot of beautiful girls in the war," he said again, this time with the remote and detached, ethereal monotone of someone talking in his sleep.

"Mr. Wernick," I said, closing my legs and pulling my skirt back down over my knees, "do you think we can try it again today? That is, if you're comfortable?"

He looked up suddenly. At that moment he had the appearance of someone trying to come to their senses after being shaken out of a deep sleep. "Always comfortable," he said, and lay down on his back on the bed, closing his eyes. He pushed the rosary book to the side of him and laced his fingers together over his stomach. He let out a huge sigh. "Kind of suits me, if you know what I mean."

"Certainly," I said. "Try to relax, Mr. Wernick."

He did try, and I proceeded to put him into a deep, deep sleep by reciting the little mantras we'd thought up together. I wasn't sure if hypnosis would make him remember anything—it hadn't so far—but I was desperate to keep trying, to do my best to help him recollect the past. Perhaps it would require more than just showing him cigarette burns.

Once I'd gotten him into the trance I said, "Tell me about your daughter. Tell me what you remember about Cynthia."

He shifted on the bed. His eyelids wrinkled and it seemed he really was trying to remember something. I looked at my father and was startled when I saw how old he looked; it seemed to occur to me suddenly and all at once. As he squeezed his already closed eyes even more tightly shut, his eyelids resembled the tightly twisted knots in the middles of ancient trees.

"Somebody's daughter," he said.

I waited. "Yes?" I said when he wouldn't go on.

"We'd taken a hill."

I didn't understand. A hill? I tried to remember anything about a hill.

"We'd taken a hill," he said again, "and we were in the trees. The village was burning. McCormick had already torched it, and the whole place was on fire. We used to mow them all down, you see, without thinking one bit about it. At first it was just the enemy, of course. But then it wasn't clear anymore who was the enemy. Nothing made any sense. We were so tired and it wasn't clear. No sleep, the way you get after killing, what it does to you."

Silence. I waited for him to continue. Finally I had to ask him: "What about somebody's daughter? Whose daughter was she?" We seemed to finally be getting to the point and I hoped he would finally face it.

My father sighed, his eyelids twisting up even more in the trance. "I was in the trees," he said, "walking between the flames. I could hear McCormick and the others calling me. I was still looking for survivors, anyone we could take as prisoners."

He stopped for a little while. I just sat there, looking at him.

I didn't know where he was going with this, but somehow I knew that, whatever he was going to tell me, it wouldn't be fantasy; it wouldn't be about the Rosary, our mantras, my assumed identity of Nurse Cindy.

I focused my attention on the pained look on my father's face and I almost wanted to wake him up. I wanted to distract him from whatever it was he was in the process of trying to remember. I thought he might start crying. And besides, I wanted to bring him back to trying to get him to talk about me. But I couldn't speak, except to urge him to continue telling whatever story this was from the war.

"The little girl," he said suddenly, "walked right up to me through the burning trees. She was wearing this brown dress with little straps, but the straps had slipped off of her shoulders. The dress was coming off of her, peeling off, you could see quite a bit. The flames were going up on both sides of her, the smoke rising into the sky. I could see the huts of the village burning behind her. It was her village. I looked at the little girl and she looked at me, just standing there with her dress coming off. She had those dark eyes they all have. They just looked right inside me. But they weren't studying me or anything. I looked back and tried to see inside her. I couldn't. There were just these dark eyes that wouldn't let up."

He paused, let out a long heavy breath as if he hadn't realized he'd been holding it in and needed to let it out now. "But I remember," he said, "thinking it was somebody's daughter. She had to be, didn't she? But she was all alone by herself and the village was burning, the heat making the sky quiver the way it does at airports when the planes are getting ready to take off on the runway. The girl had to have been only about six or seven. I remember how I raised my pistol and pointed it at her. I don't know why, but she just stood there and kept looking at me like nothing had happened. She was somebody's daughter, I kept telling myself. Where were her parents? Were they burning somewhere? 'Where's your mommy and daddy?' I said. But of course she just kept looking at me; she didn't understand. Finally, I lowered my pistol. I thought she might run

away then, but she just went on with those eyes of hers. I remember thinking maybe I should take her with me, back to the others. We could find a medic or something. I remember how I thought I could get her out of there—I could save her life, if I really wanted to. But then I thought about how McCormick and the others would think I was crazy, how they'd tell me we couldn't just take some little girl away with us. And I thought how it didn't matter anyway, how her parents and whatever brothers and sisters she might have had were already burning. We'd killed everyone. Then, there was an awkward moment, I remember, when I tried hard to say something more. I really wanted so say something. But I didn't know what. Then I just turned on my heel and started walking back through the burning trees. I could feel the girl's black eyes on the back of my head, burrowing, watching me retreat through the black smoke in the trees that started billowing up with the flames, covering everything."

My father stopped talking. He just lie there quietly, almost like he was sleeping. I watched the steady rise and fall of his chest beneath his shirt. Outside, between the window's white curtains, the sun was going down beyond the hills, their gold flaming out into brilliant reds and oranges. The gnarled trees darkened.

"Nurse Cindy," my father abruptly said. "Are you still there?" He didn't open his eyes. But he had asked me this strange question—if I was there. At that moment something strange dawned on me: I realized right then that he wasn't in a trance at all, that he couldn't be in a trance and ask me a question like that. He had merely pretended to be hypnotized, perhaps so he could tell me this story he wouldn't want to express or even acknowledge while he was awake. Had he been faking the trance all these times I'd come to see him? I wasn't sure. He hadn't told me anything like this story until now.

"I'm right here, Mr. Wernick," I assured him. The sound of my voice seemed to put him at ease.

Both of us were quiet for a long while. It was apparent my father wasn't going to say anything more.

"After a while," I said, "when you hear the sound of the door

closing, Mr. Wernick, you are going to wake up."

Supine on his bed, my father nodded in his fake hypnotized state. "Okay," he said.

"You can watch TV," I said, "until you get tired. There's something on about UFOs. I won't be here when you wake up."

"Okay."

I picked up my purse from the floor and stood. I was about to head for the door, but something told me I should stay. I just stood there and looked down at my father lying there on his bed, the sunset spilling through the window onto his bed. I thought I should say something, maybe about the burns, but I didn't know what exactly. Finally I just reached over and picked up the rosary book and flipped through it. I knew it was filled with mantras I knew I would never want to familiarize myself with; it didn't offer me the kinds of false memories I needed. I put it in his hands and his fingers closed over it firmly, his eyes still closed, his expression still unchanging. In that moment, he might as well have been lying in a coffin. I turned and walked out the door, closing it softly behind me.

The long white hall outside his room was still empty. I walked down the hall and into the lobby. Nurse Lucy, who'd let me in, whose name I shamelessly assumed during these visits to my father, was gone, but there was a receptionist behind the front desk. I didn't look at her, didn't sign out, just walked past her and out the door into the soft evening light. The dark sunlight was shining on the asphalt, making the shadows lengthen as I walked across the parking lot toward my car.

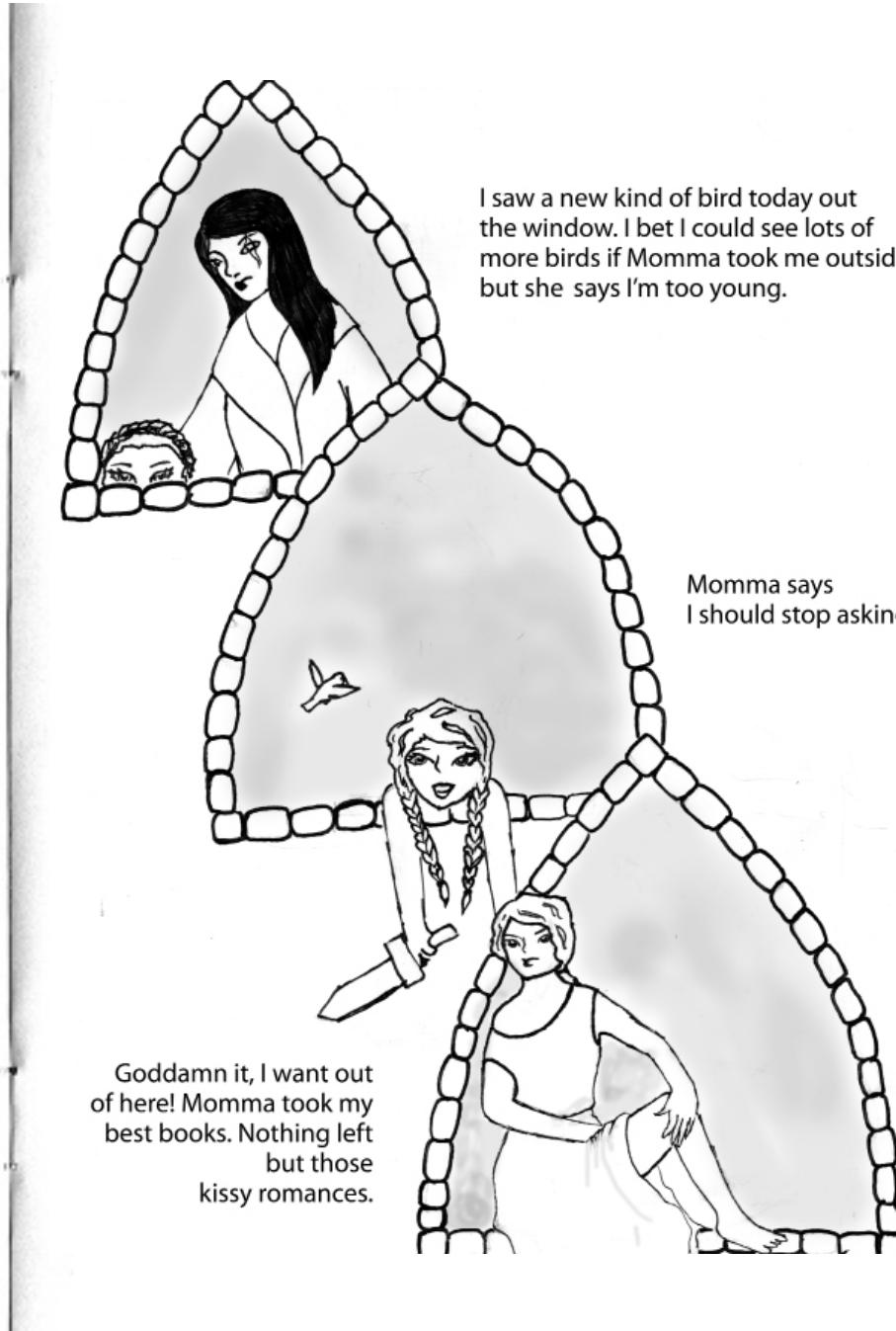
A part of me wanted to go back, to ask him once more if he could at least try to remember me, what he did to me. But the truth was: I was scared. I was afraid that if he did remember, and he said my name, I would look at him and wouldn't be able to recognize him at all. It wouldn't be my father there anymore, just someone made out of shadow, someone who could paralyze with a stare.

Raizel:



A Sapphic Fairytales

by Amanda Williamson



Search:
What happens when I get married?

Search: Sex
Blocked by Parental Controls

Search:
How do I get around
Parental Controls?



Search: Sex
Open Cached page

Search: How do I tell my
mother I don't want get
married?

Search:
Can I be forced
to get married?

Clear Internet History

Daddy gave me a pony finally!

I named him Butter. Duke Elliot's son
who's staying said it was a stupid name
so I punched him.

Some stable-hands dumped a
water bucket on us and told our parents.
I'm not sorry.

Search: Dyke
Search: Lesbian

Search:
Am I a lesbian?

Search:
How
to
come
out
to
your
parents

They're still trying to turn
me into a 'proper' princess.
They made me grow out my
hair and they took away my
breeches so all I have is this
stupid skirt to ride in.



The stable-master and I
finally put Dev out to stud.
My new boy Roy is a
grump and a devil,

but I like him.



I'm taking him on our first
long ramble tomorrow.
Mother's been hinting
about that Duchess
Marina again, and if
she makes one more
innuendo I'm going
to break something.



I met the most beautiful girl today



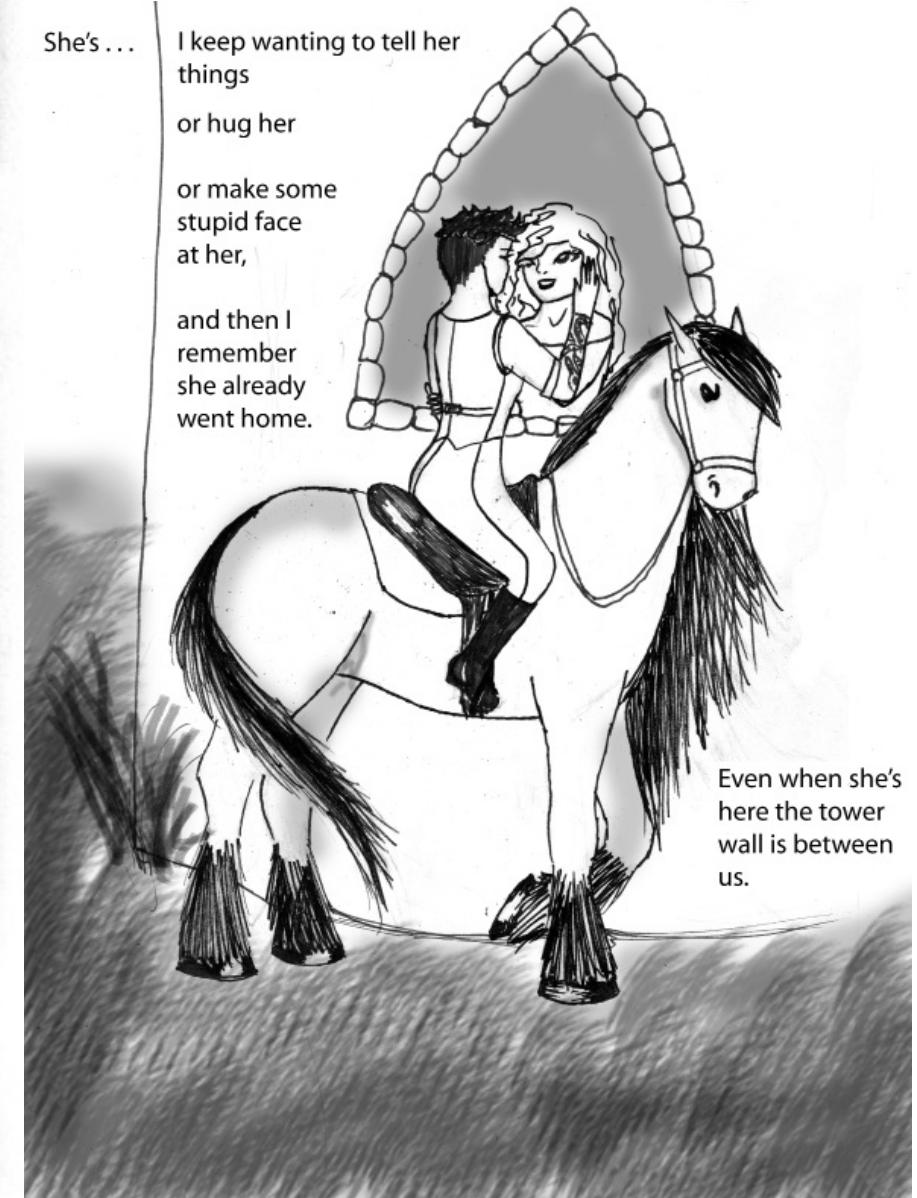
She's ...

I keep wanting to tell her
things

or hug her

or make some
stupid face
at her,

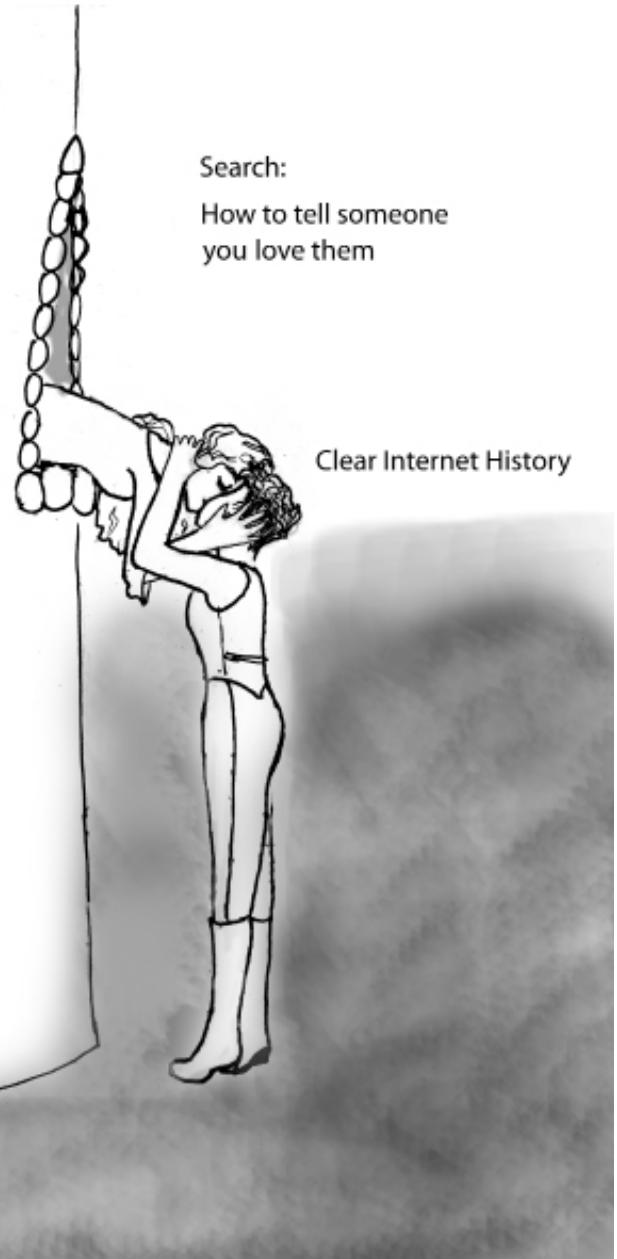
and then I
remember
she already
went home.

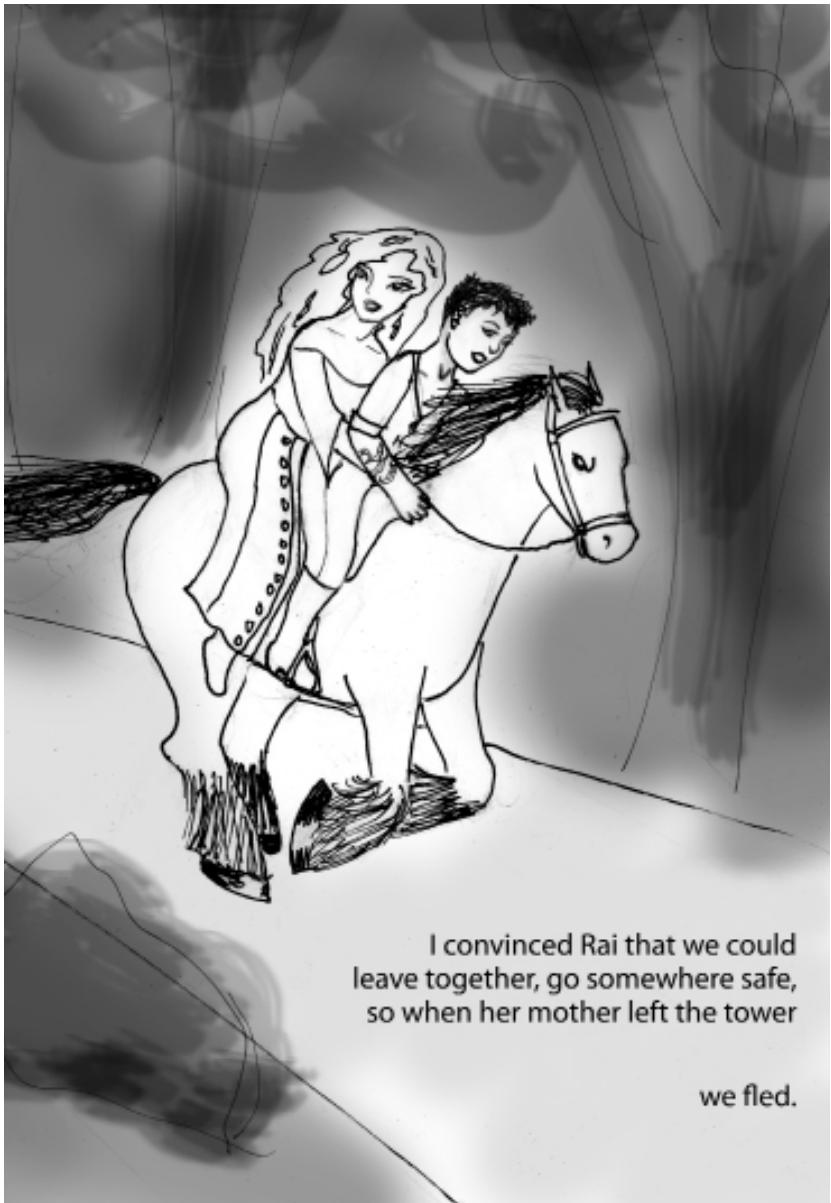


Even when she's
here the tower
wall is between
us.



Search:
How do I know
if I'm in love

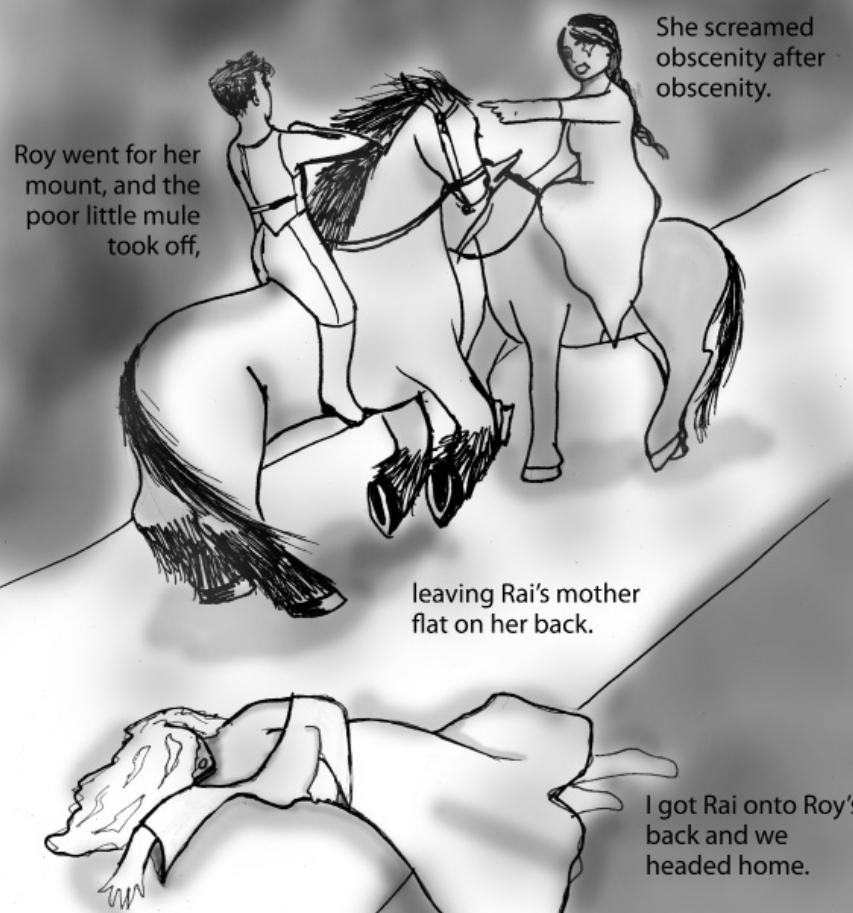




I convinced Rai that we could leave together, go somewhere safe, so when her mother left the tower we fled.

A few miles into our escape Rai's mother caught us on the path.
I froze up with Roy, and Rai fell hard onto the ground
injuring her arm pretty badly.

I managed to get between her and her mother.



Roy went for her mount, and the poor little mule took off,

She screamed obscenity after obscenity.

leaving Rai's mother flat on her back.

I got Rai onto Roy's back and we headed home.

After the doctors set Rai's arm
back to normal they
dosed her up
pretty good.



She's really adorable
when she's asleep.

Even when she's
drooling on the pillow.

Yes, yes we are.



Nightbird

Nile Wilson

What bird is it that sings at night;
Causing younger children fright?
Singing many different tunes
That render their dreams destitute.

Here, there is a little girl
Who in her dreams, her nails curl.
Then her nose begins to stretch,
And mouth becomes a part of it.
Lips then pull, and too they curl;
Until they're shaped like half a pearl.

Before you think she's in a twist,
Just listen to the rest of it.

Her sight improves a billion-fold,
And she enjoys this truth be told.
She shakes her arms, checks the skies,
Spreads her wings, begins to fly.

From high she swoops on down below,
And perches near some mistletoe.
From out of joy she tries to cry,
But all she hears: A little sigh.

She cannot talk, to her surprise,
And inner doubt begins to rise!

Soon, her doubt would much increase;
She falls and sees her fall is steep.
Because of doubt, a trick from hell,
She cannot try to save herself.

With a "thud" she hits the turf,
Her eyes go black, she isn't hurt.
At this, she then begins to wake,
And feels the sun's warmth on her face.

She'll soon forget her sleepy tale
Of flying in an eagle's shell.

Too often we forget post-night
Of our imagination's might.
For little does she know: Outside
That little nightbird ends his cry.

You see, her dream was not her own
Because she heard the nightbird's song.
She listened to his cries and slurs,
And bird had dreamt his own through hers.

Train Hopping

Carol Colclasure

We wait.

Crouched under the sapphire sky, we swig wine and swap stories, waiting under the cool shade of the bridge, our teeth gleaming like pearls in mud until we spot the small dash moving toward us and we pack up, retie our laces—double-knotted, can’t risk them getting caught by unforgiving wheels—sprinters ready to launch ourselves, the screech of brakes our gunshot start, and we’re off, running bent to tuck behind the first boxcar while motormen check, load, and stock; we look for the right car—no, not this one, its heavy metal door ready to seal out the air, and not this one either, its dark corners maybe hiding rough passengers—but yes, these here, open-top hoppers, and we climb the small ladder and pass on the first, stacked full with giant steel pipes ready to crush our bones, and pass on the second, also full, and onto the empty third one, where we climb, one by one, the cold, rusted steel scratchy on sweaty palms, feet moving one over the other as the whistle blows—departure coming—and time slows. My foot slips on the last rung, and I feel myself falling into forever, missing my chance, but a strong hand grasps my pack and pulls me up, up and over, and I collapse to the steel floor of the car, my fluttering breath and heart drowned out by the final shriek of the whistle, and then we jerk to a start, and then we move slow, and then less slow, and then faster, into the blurred tunnel of our futures.



Workboots

Amy Genduso

Camilla Rebecca Sterling

I remember her like a
sunflower.

I called her my friend
even though we'd never
exchanged words.

If I could reach out,
past the casket,
and touch her face,
I would feel wax.
She looked perfect
in bright lipstick,
with a scarf noosed
around her toothpick neck.

She was in college,
And that's where she'll stay.
Young forever
so maybe that was her intention.
She was a pretty girl.
That's why nobody
saw it coming.

2000s

She Dreamt She Was A Bulldozer

Nolan Turner 2006

Claire and I stayed as faithful to each other as we could. We were perfect for one another, after all. But sometimes the drinks were free and sometimes the smiles at the end of the bar were new and mysterious and sometimes the nights were just a little too cold and sometimes the poverty and loneliness just stung a little too much. But when it was all said and done I loved her and she loved me, and that's all that matters, right? I could set her free and she'd come back—she always came back.

The thought of Claire screwing other guys didn't bother me all that much; it was the kissing that drove me crazy. She could've fucked the whole Bay Area and I would have forgiven her as long as the kisses didn't mean anything. But the thought of her sharing that tender kiss with another guy—the kiss I was selfish and stupid enough to believe was only for me—made me want to vomit. When she'd go out for the night I'd usually just drink until I pissed myself and fell asleep in a sea of vomit, gin and urine. When she came home I'd wake up and throw myself at her feet, praising God she was back. I would try to kiss her but she wouldn't have any of it—"Alex," she'd say, throwing her coat onto our old brown recliner. "Look at you, you're covered in piss. What the hell were you drinking? It smells like rubbing alcohol in here." I'd start to ramble on about her fucking other guys. She'd never talk to me until I sobered up. We'd get into bed just as the shafts of light from the morning sun started to creep into our bedroom and she'd apologize, even though she knew it wasn't necessary. "You know I'm sorry Alex...it doesn't mean anything, sometimes I just get carried away..." I know, I'd say, and kiss her forehead gently. I did the same thing. I just think in the end I was more sensitive than her, or at least I showed it more easily.

I met Claire in college. Washington State. Thanks Mom and Dad. I was an obnoxious English major who listened to the MC5, smoked pot and thought the world was fucked. She was a philosophy major who listened to Nick Drake, smoked A LOT of pot and thought the world was just fine. We fell in love our senior year and dropped out. We spent the next few years wandering along the Pacific coast, eventually settling in San Francisco. All we could afford was a tiny basement apartment on Haight Street. The landlords, Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, were a nice couple from Texas. They moved to the bay area about ten years ago to get away from the dry Texas heat. Mrs. Shaw took a shine to me because I "had a good head on my shoulders", and Mr. Shaw flocked to Claire because she was the "hottest piece of ass" he'd ever seen. Our relationship with the Shaw's worked out well for us—we didn't always need money to pay the went.

Cash was always an issue for us. Claire's job at a record store didn't pay well, and I'd have months at a time where I didn't have any money coming in. Writing's a tough thing to break into when you don't know anyone and don't have any money and aren't particularly good. I made some cash every now and then doing art for local bands: flyers, album covers, t-shirts, all that. Problem was the bands were even worse off than us so I rarely got paid in cash...just shirts or records or passes to shows. But we survived, we didn't need a lot of money to live. Claire stole any of the records we wanted from her store and never got fired, even though everyone knew she did it. That's what girls have over guys, they can get away with that kind of thing—well, the good-looking ones at least. People are usually more sympathetic to a cute young girl with a nice body and a quavering voice. Her flirtatious demeanor worked to my advantage a lot, so it was hard for me to get down on her about it. It's a lot easier to overlook a person's faults when they're all you've got. Despite all the shit we pulled on each other we both knew there wasn't another person who gave a damn about us in the world.

Claire didn't believe in marriage. For a while she had me convinced I didn't either. Even the discussion of marriage made her uncomfortable. She shied away from the topic in every imaginable form. One summer our landlords were heading off to Las Vegas to renew their wedding vows, and they wanted me and Claire to be their best man and maid of honor, respectively. I remember the day I asked her if she wanted to go; it was a warm summer afternoon and the air was humid and salty coming down from the crowded streets. We were listening to the new Slint record that had just come out. Spiderland.

"The Shaws invited us to go to Vegas with them this weekend."

"Oh? What's the occasion?"

"They're renewing their wedding vows, I guess. Sweet, huh?"

She wasn't listening. Her thoughts were somewhere far off...on an isolated shoreline drizzled with ice.

"Claire?"

"Huh?"

"Isn't it nice that the Shaw's are renewing their vows?"

"Oh, yeah, it is."

"Well?"

"Well what?" She was annoyed.

"Do you want to go?"

"Oh, sorry...No, not really. Just listen to the music, this album is fantastic."

Her parents split when she was 14. From what she tells me the whole thing was pretty nasty. It hit her really hard because she's an only child; there was no one for her to confide in. Once when she was at her father's place she tried to kill herself. She downed half a bottle of Vicodin and chased it with a few shots of Grey Goose. She was in a coma for a few months after that. The doctors gave her about a 30% chance to live—but dammit, Claire's a tough chick. She fully recovered and ran away when she was 16. She had to work three jobs to put herself through college, but she always said it was the best thing she'd ever done. I guess that's what I loved about her—she'd been to hell and back, to the very bottom of the bottle, and I know it's cliché—but if anything she's stronger for it. She knew that the world was fucked up but she could still see all the beauty around her. She told me once, "You know Alex—there's beauty in this place—but we don't always see it."

She was the kind of girl I always wrote about but never actually knew. She had the kind of life I used to wish I had. That kind of life was great for a writer—all the hardships and triumphs really gives your stuff the kind of authenticity you couldn't buy or fake. But me...I was a rich little shit with a nice car and happy parents. After a while the whole thing made me sick. So I started to write about people struggling with addiction, disease, love, death, poverty...all these things I didn't know anything about. I thought it couldn't be that much worse than the shit I was going through. Then I met Claire and it just changed everything—the dull and distant sadness in her eyes, the way all her body movements seemed defensive and guarded around strangers. She really changed my life—and my writing too. I wouldn't be half of what I am today if she never came into my life.

About two years ago Claire and I had a kid. It wasn't planned, that's for sure. We spent a good three weeks at the beginning of her pregnancy deciding what we should do about it. I wanted to keep it; she wanted to get an abortion. Who was I to make her keep this thing inside her if she didn't want it?

"I just don't think I'd be a good mother," she said once, her head emerging from the toilet after vomiting. "Look at us...look at how we live—there's rats under the floorboards and the heater doesn't work...can we really bring a child into this shithole? And how would we afford it?"

"We'll manage, we always do."

"Alex...I'm not ready for this kind of thing."

"It's up to you, baby."

"Look at MY parents. They never did a damn thing for me,"

"They're only human, Claire..."

"I just don't want to raise a child that's only going to end up hating me."

We decided to give the baby (a beautiful boy) up for adoption. It was rough. The pregnancy really changed Claire. She had to stop drinking, stop smoking, but she didn't care—she was a different person. Responsible. She even stopped stealing from her store. But in the end the kid needed a fair shake at life—having parents as fucked up as us was no way for him to start. Some real nice couple from Petaluma took him. They seemed to have their heads on straight. He was a doctor and she was a teacher. He had a gentle smile and she had soft eyes, it was comforting. As they drove away I saw Claire wipe her face with the sleeve of her shirt—she was crying. I don't know if Claire cried often or not...but if she did she sure as hell never let me see it. That was the first and last time I ever saw her without the armor she always wore. Without the defensive mechanisms and sarcastic wit. Her eyes were bloodshot and her sobs were soft and delicate. I guess Claire was fragile after all.

She never got back into her old habits after the kid was born. I guess it's admirable. Everyone's got to grow up a little eventually, right? Those days when she came home at 4 a.m. the smell of vodka and cheap cologne were nowhere to be found: just red eyes and salty cheeks. She quit her job too, told me the whole grunge "revolution" thing that was going on really made her sick. I didn't believe her. She had outgrown the store, the apartment, the city...me. The smell of the cool air off the bay creeping through our windows on a brisk autumn day wasn't enough to keep her there anymore. I tried everything I could to spark the old flame in her again. I suggested moving, getting a real job, having another kid...nothing. She didn't want to do anything. She was already gone. So when she finally did leave it didn't come as much of a shock. That didn't make it any easier to bear though. Coming home one day and seeing empty spaces where her clothes used to hang still felt like a rusty chisel being beat into my chest. She left all the furniture, all the records...everything but her clothes. Either because she couldn't carry them or because she was a sweet sweet loving woman until the end. I like to pretend it's the latter. I sat down in the old brown recliner and wrote what was probably, to this day, the worst attempt at a poem I've ever made. Words couldn't do justice to how I felt. I was never much of a poet, either.

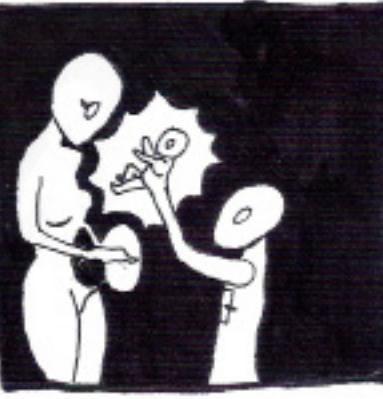
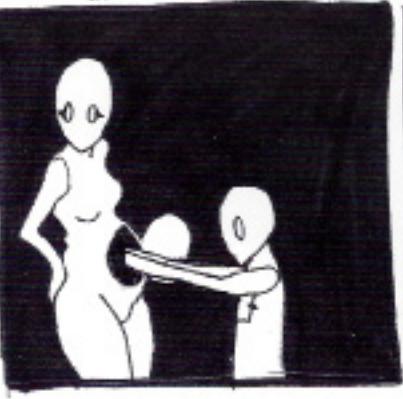
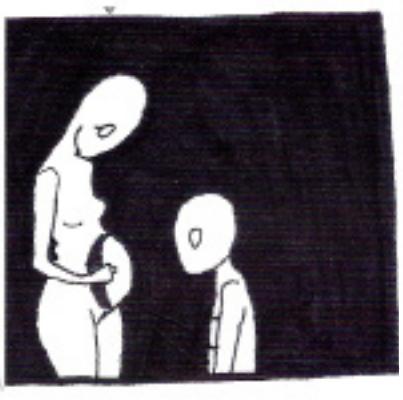
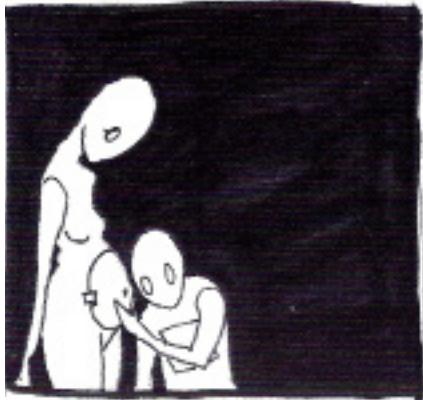
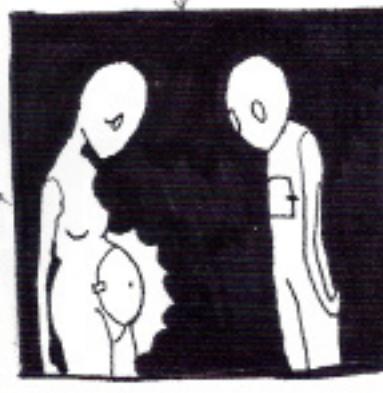
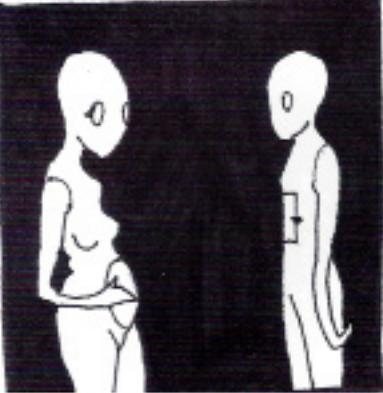
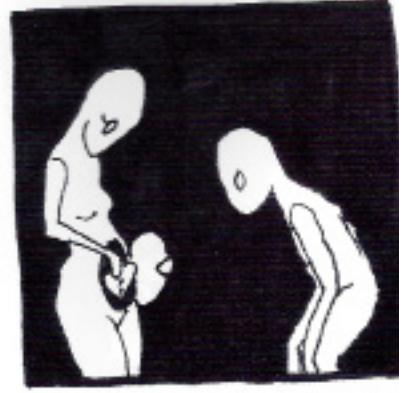
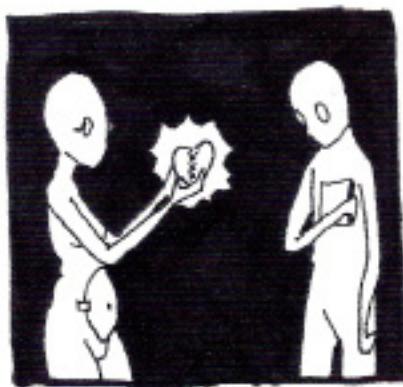
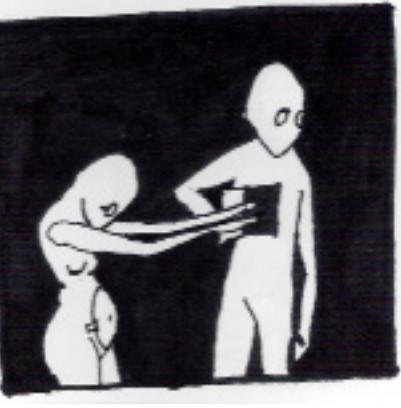
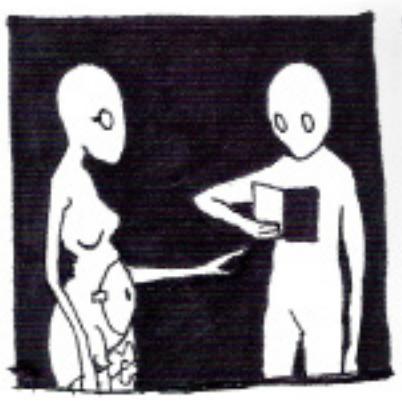
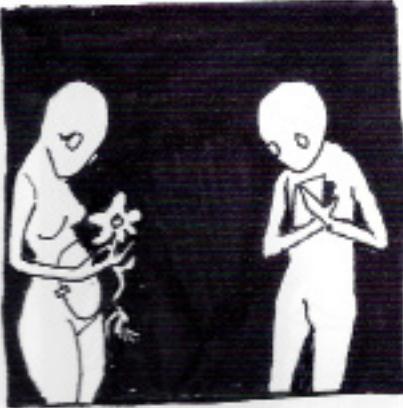
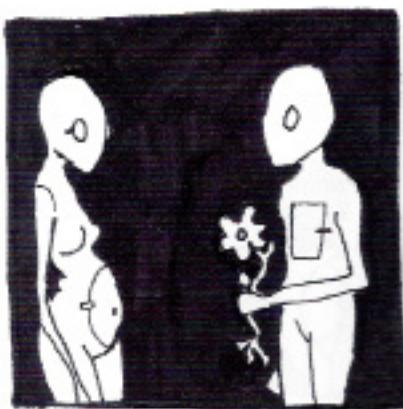
In the end I moved back to Washington, finished up college and got a teaching degree. I prefer fucking up someone else's kids to my own. I haven't seen or heard from Claire in...eight years now? Even if she wanted to contact me, or I her, it's not like we could—we both have different lives now. She could be dead right now for all I know. I try not to think about her too much, because I'd be lying if I said it didn't still sting a bit. But I'm engaged to a sweet woman named Emily now. She's smart and fun and has a good heart. Who knows, we might even have kids. A tan Volvo with car seats and ice cream stains—I can see it now. In the end Claire, I wish you luck in finding whatever it is you were looking for. And just remember that whenever I catch the scent of cheap vodka on a woman's breath or a belligerent argument about the merits of Nirvana I'll always think about you. And to David Weakland of Petaluma CA, good luck in whatever it is you've become or are becoming. Just remember that your father was a bum and your mother was a dreamer—she dreamt she was a bulldozer, she dreamt she was alone in an empty field.



Seeds *Natalie Schrik* 2002

Mating Ritual

Nicole Rudolph 2003



THE GOLDEN ABYSS

[DONNA DELLINGER]

2011

Y E L L O W I S H light tried to shine through the greasy candle globe set on the table. It seemed to flicker with the thunder outside. Hamerin sat slunked over, lining and re-lining up his collection of shot glasses. The waitress named Maggie kept the whiskey coming, but for some reason, she never cleared the empties away. Perhaps she thought he needed them. Something to keep his hands busy. Certainly not to occupy his mind.

"Same Old Song and Dance" started playing. Hamerin had dropped coins for that song what seemed like hours ago. He lifted his full glass to a face of knots on the pine paneling and toasted, "To Rose." He brought the drink to his mouth, then tilted his head back sharply. The amber liquid ignited his throat as he swallowed. He sucked air through his clenched teeth; his eyes swam for a moment, and he closed them, reveling in the rush.

When he opened them, he noticed that the glasses had doubled and immediately set his hands to straightening them, fingers going right through some.

Then the song cut out. He whipped his head around in the direction of the juke box. Two men were standing there. "Hey, that's my song," Hamerin shouted to them. He pushed out of his chair and walked over in shaky strides, teetering before grabbing the edge of the nearest table.

"We don't listen to that old crap, do we Ted?" said the bigger guy with a squared-off crew cut.

The other nodded. One of his rhinestone studs caught the light from the juke box and flashed neon blue.

"I used to play that song. Me and the band." Hamerin wavered, but stood tall.

"You can't play shit."

"No, look." Hamerin reached into his wallet and pulled out an old guitar pick. "And I'm gonna play again, too." He shook it in their laughing faces.

"Get lost, loser." Crew Cut grabbed for it, but Hamerin swung his arm away.

The pick slipped out of his hand. Hamerin bent down to get it and toppled to the ground as the two men muscled past. On his knees, he continued to grope for the fallen object. He thought he saw it peeking out from under the juke box. One long reach put his fingers into contact with its cool, plastic form. "There you are," he whispered. Then his body melted into the floor. It just felt so good to be one with the carpet.

There you are. The words seemed to repeat in his head as he lay on the ground with his eyes closed.

"I've been looking for you." But no, the words were definitely outside of himself. A female voice. He thought he felt a small jab in his side, like someone was prodding him with a pointed toe.

Hamerin looked up and the two heads above him became one. An attractive young woman was staring down at him. Her blond hair glowed like a halo, but her glinting ruby lips hinted worldly experience.

"I'm Deidre." She pulled him to his feet, then handed him a card as if presenting an ice cold Corona.

Through blurry vision, he read, *DD's DD Service.* "Double D?" He grinned.

"Turn it over."

Let me take you home, it said on the back.

"You are an angel." His grin became wider.

Deidre slipped an arm around his waist and walked him out. He felt the warmth of her body through her slickered overcoat.

Outside, colored lights pooled in the pavement, dazzling his eyes. Deidre helped him dodge the water that had collected in the pitted parking lot. The smell of rain filled the air, but the clear night sky signaled that the downpour had moved on.

With her arm still tightly around him, Hamerin fumbled for his keys when he spied his old pickup, then stopped, realizing it was her black Mercedes they were headed for.

That's okay, he thought. He would sit close, maybe nibble her neck, fondle her breasts while she drove.

"Wait—" he started as she guided him into the back seat.

"Shh," she said, pushing him the rest of the way in. She bent over him and fastened his seatbelt, her cinnamon breath brushing his cheek. Her lips should be there too. He leaned in for a kiss, kept leaning until he flopped over face first on the leather bench seat.

When Hamerin awoke, he was in front of his apartment, his angel still with him. His head pounded as she helped him out of the car. The cool night hit him in the face, and his headache subsided. He could see clearly now, and anticipation rose up inside of him as he studied the curves that had snuck out the front of her coat.

Together they climbed the few steps to his door. For some reason, Deidre was the one unlocking the lock...with his keys.

"So there they are." He tried to make it sound funny, but he realized it really wasn't. He frowned at himself for ruining the mood and tried to get it back by slipping his arms under her jacket and around her waist. He was surprised at

how cold she had become. The slight chill in the air must have gotten to her. He would warm her up soon.

But she politely removed his hands, hanging on to one in a handshake. "Nice doing business with you." As they continued shaking, he thought he could feel the bones within her fingers, but that could have been the whiskey.

"My pleasure," he said. He swung the door open and entered first so he could get the light, then stopped when he realized that she hadn't followed. She was still standing on the porch, the booze making her look a little fuzzy at the edges.

"You comin' in?"

"No sir," she said. "I just need what's coming to me."

She started to come more into focus. The night was coming back to him. "I get it. DD. You're a designated driver."

"Yes sir."

"What do I owe?" he said, fishing out his wallet. "Never mind," he added quickly, grabbing whatever was there and putting it in her hands. "Take it all."

She sifted through the crumpled bills in her hand and pulled something out. "This too?" she asked, holding up the pick.

He snatched it from her hands.

"No," he said. "No, not that."

As she walked to her Mercedes, Hamerin turned the old guitar pick slowly in his fingers. The tiny embossed word was barely discernable to his touch: Rose.

He looked up and stared after Deidre's taillights. Then he blinked, and she was gone.



America

Elizabeth Dobbs 2006

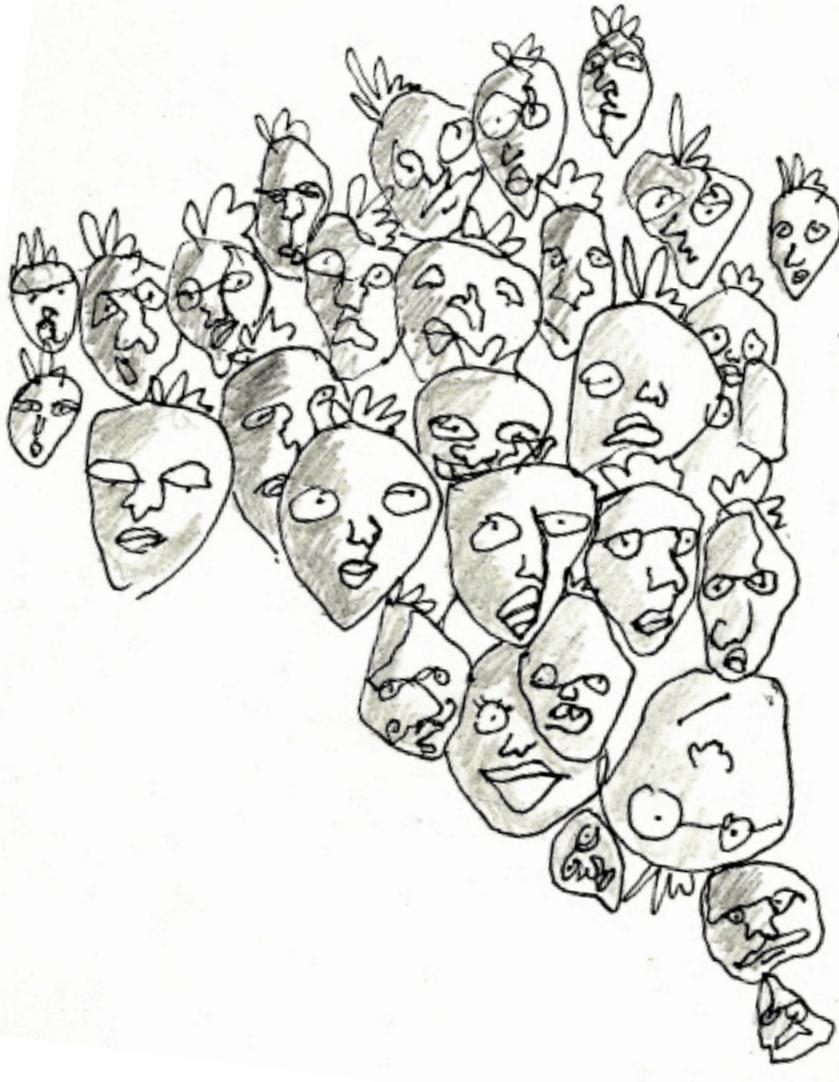
Palomino

Kelly Callahan 2006

She bit her lip as she worked,
Her fingers intertwined in gleaming strands of sunshine,
separating and straightening as strays
danced in summer's afternoon whispers.

Kneeling, she reached the end of her descent.
The last wisps fell from her fingertips,
rejoining the glittering others
for a fleeting moment of flawless beauty.

But the world cannot condone such perfection.
With a stomp and a swish,
the flaxen and gold burst into myriad pieces
and were cast into the wind
to settle once more in tranquil chaos.



Strawberries

Robert Orozco

Sunshine

Cassidi Joi

I walk toward the donut shop feeling grossly overdressed. I run my hand through my hair for the thousandth time, reflecting on the long night and all the extra hours of sleep I'd lost recently. Last night was the worst it's been in years. I had laid on my rooftop for hours after I gave up on trying to sleep again, the sounds of the night drowned out by the ticking of my Quartz watch.

I couldn't help but scowl as I had watched the sun peek over the horizon and begin its gradual climb, painting the clouds in brilliant oranges and yellows. It seemed wrong for days like today to have any beauty. Almost as if on cue, the clouds had thickened and a light rain began to fall. After that, I just went inside and pulled on my stiff clothes.

It's still sprinkling even now, as I approach the store, prepared to get the strongest coffee they offer in preparation of today. It's still early and I can tell I'm the first customer of the morning; the owner is still in the back preparing the last of the pastries for the day. I know I have a lot of time but I couldn't sleep at all last night and I just want to get today over with as fast as possible.

The bell on the door rings once for me and once more for someone I didn't notice entering behind me. I turn around and the adrenaline hits me like a wave.

"Leanna?!"

"Gavin!" her smile is teasing. All at once my exhaustion is washed away and replaced with joy.

"I haven't seen you in almost two weeks! You stood me up last Thursday," I say, hoping she won't remind me it was never an actual date.

"Oh please, Gavin, you know they're not real dates." Damnit.

"Well, what are you doing here? I've missed you."

"I can hang out for a little while but I have an appointment at nine o'clock, sharp," she says as she leads the way out the door of the empty donut shop. I decide to skip the coffee for now and glance at my watch before I follow her. 6:35. It seems like too short of a time, but I know she won't let me talk her into staying longer.

As we walk, I can't help but admire the way she still wore a sun dress, even on a cold and wet day like today. It was sunshine yellow with big orange flowers, as if she was trying to compensate for the dreary grays the clouds cast the world in today.

"Where are we going?" I ask her, even though I'm pretty sure of the direction she's headed.

She glances back at me with her playful smile. "Guess."

"The diner where you ditched me?"

"Hey, that wasn't my fault! And at least we're going now, okay?"

We get there and sit outside at our usual table. I laugh at her for being so stubborn, sitting outside in a dress on such a gloomy day. I open a menu out of habit but she just stares at me until I put it down.

I give in. "What?"

"You know exactly what I want you to order!"

I do. She's been wanting me to try the Vegan Breakfast Smoothie since the first time we came here, 8 years ago now. The primary ingredients were avocado, banana, and spinach and we liked to joke about what the green mush might taste like. Neither one of us has been bold enough to try it, but that also had to do with the restaurant's famous French toast recipe. The smoothie was the latest addition to the classic menu, probably an attempt to appeal to a

health-conscious clientele.

Our usual waitress comes out to greet us with the usual rainy-day drink, a giant mug of hot chocolate. "Thanks, Hilda," I say for both of us.

"No problem, sweetie. Will it be the usual this morning?" she asks me.

I suddenly decide I want to surprise them. "No, actually. I think today's the day," I look between them so I don't miss their reactions. "We'll have the Vegan Breakfast Smoothie."

Leanna's jaw drops into a shocked grin. I can tell she never would have seen this coming. Hilda just cocks an eyebrow at me suspiciously. "Okay, honey, you want whipped cream with that?"

"Sounds good."

The smoothie really wasn't as bad as it sounded in the menu. It was a strange mix of flavors, but the consistency was pleasant. The hot chocolate didn't go very well with it, though, so I saved it for last. I checked my watch after the last of the hot chocolate was gone. About 7:20. I wish the minutes would slow down.

"So, where to next?" I ask her. Leanna looks around the street and up at the sky, which is still filled with clouds, but not sprinkling anymore.

"The park," she announces definitively. "But not for too long. I have that appointment, nine o'clock. Sharp." "It's been years since we've been there," I recall out loud.

I realize immediately that that wasn't necessarily true. We used to play there as kids, before we grew up and got jobs. That was when we started going to the diner instead, but the park was still her favorite place to go on nights like last night, when I could not coax my mind into silence. We'd lie together on the tallest part of the jungle gym, just looking at the stars and talking about whatever came to mind.

Now, we walk together in mostly silence, the only sound our feet in the puddles and her sweet voice humming "You Are My Sunshine". It reminds me of the card I gave her for her birthday one year. Her birthday always seemed to fall on a rainy day, so I got her

a card that played the song when you opened it, in the hopes that it would make her smile. Last time I saw it, the card still sat on her bedside table, even though more than a year had passed since I had given it to her.

When we arrive at the park, the first thing I notice is the monkey bars we used to play on that I remembered being taller. I touch them easily without jumping as we pass them.

We take our places on the swings the same way we always have: Leanna on the Left swing and me on the right. I start swinging and she begins to laugh, so I start swinging higher. The higher I swing, the more I can hear her laugh, but then I get tired too quickly and just let the swing gradually settle again.

I look over at Leanna as my swing carries me back and forth. She just sits on her swing and smiles at me. I wonder silently why it's been so long since we've played on these swings. I had forgotten the rush they brought so easily. If only I could hold onto it longer. I check my watch again once my swing has finally stopped. 8:30. Time has gone by way too quickly. I still haven't gotten those donuts.

I run my hands through my hair and shoot Leanna a pained look. "Can't we just spend the whole day together like we used to?" I beg her. "Please?"

The look she gives me is as stern as she can muster. "Gavin, you and I both know that can't happen. Besides, I have that appointment, remember?"

We say it together. "Nine o'clock. Sharp."

She smiles her sunshine smile. "Let's go get those donuts."

We walk back together in the drizzle and I pick out two dozen of her favorites to take with me. The donuts in the box look way too cheerful for a day like today.

"Are you ready?" she looks at me expectantly. "Can't be late, not today."

I follow her down the street, in the opposite direction of the park and the diner. We reach the steps and she turns to face me with her magic smile. She's so beautiful that I can't help but smile, too.

Her happiness always was contagious.

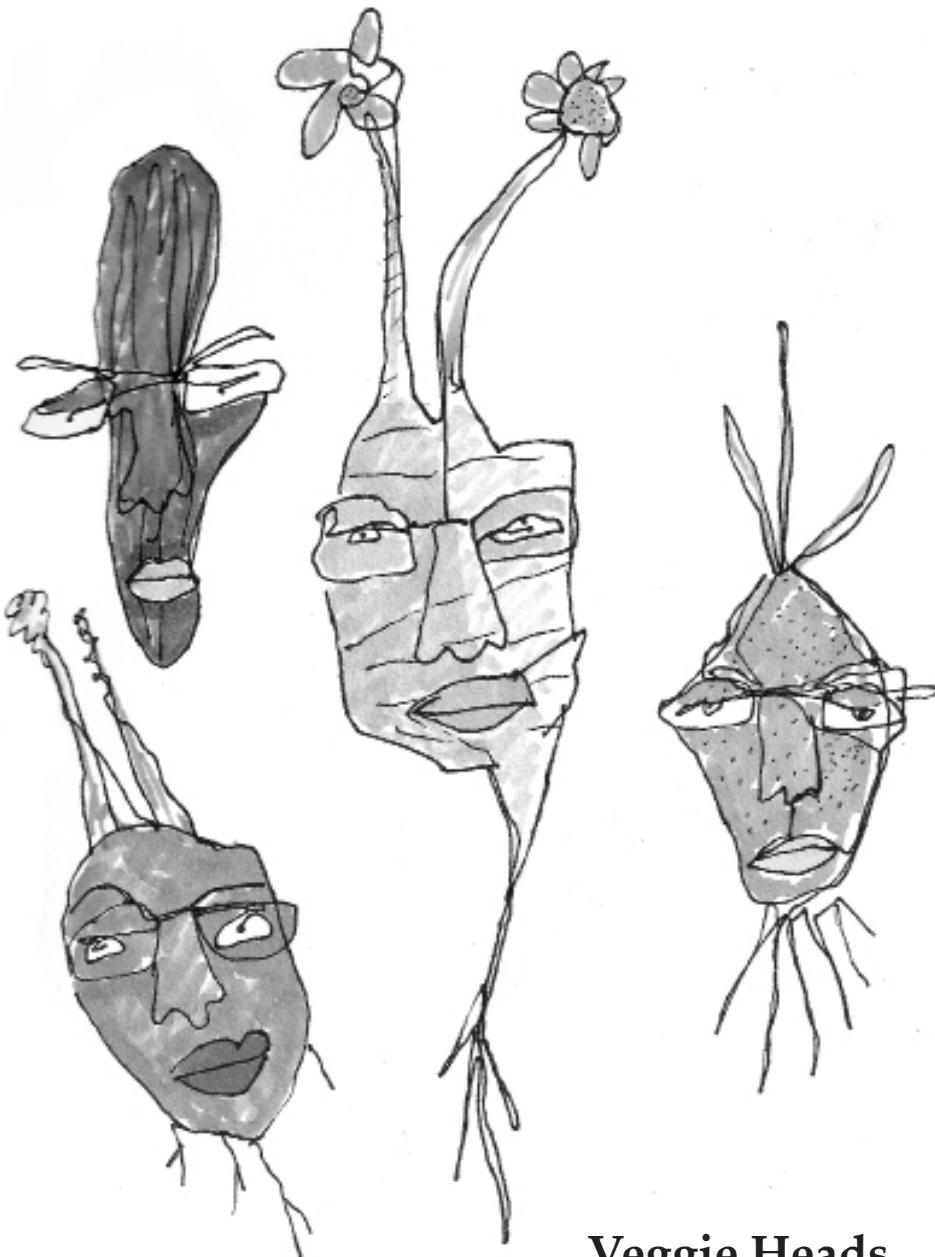
"You can cry if you want, but promise me you'll stay strong."

"I'm not gonna cry," I lie. "I just wish I would have told you—"

"Shhhh," she stopped me. "I already knew. You didn't have to say it. I could tell." She smiles apologetically. "I know you won't believe me right now, but you can do this without me. I promise you, the time will come when you'll find someone else; I'll even give you a sign when it happens. Okay? You can do this." She kisses me on the cheek.

"I can do this," I smile through the tears. I turn away from her to face the stairs. I wipe my face with my sleeve and take a deep breath before leaving my smile at the bottom step. Just before the church doors I look back, but she's already gone. I enter the packed church where every pew is completely filled, and people are standing wherever else they will fit. I hand the box of donuts to the usher and hurry up the aisle. My mother has saved a seat for me in the front row, and I sit just as the priest begins.

"Family and friends, we are here today to celebrate the life of Leanna Hill..."



Veggie Heads
Robert Orozco

Horseradish Ashley Fisher

Lift me by my sour green scalp
Expose me root to tip
Hang me; Head down
Sever it with sharpened sheers
The means to grow the grimy leaves
Remove each stem

My true form
Meant to live underground
Not black like your stupid presumption
I simply lack color

The solvent land from which I came
Grown from dirt; It lives in my skin
Useless attempt to scrub my flesh with iron wool
Expose dense fat

You must thrust me back
Into the ground
From which I came
Hack me with a shovel
I will hide mangled and deep

Drenched and grown dim
I let out a sigh
Clay muffles sound deep in the earth
Nerves dissolve
I am eaten away in a peaceful bliss

For if I have no eyes to see
No ears to hear; blind in dark
I can pretend I am but a seed
In waiting to be watered
Forever on a moonless night



Consciousness

148

Eric Ramirez

Fear Mariah Key

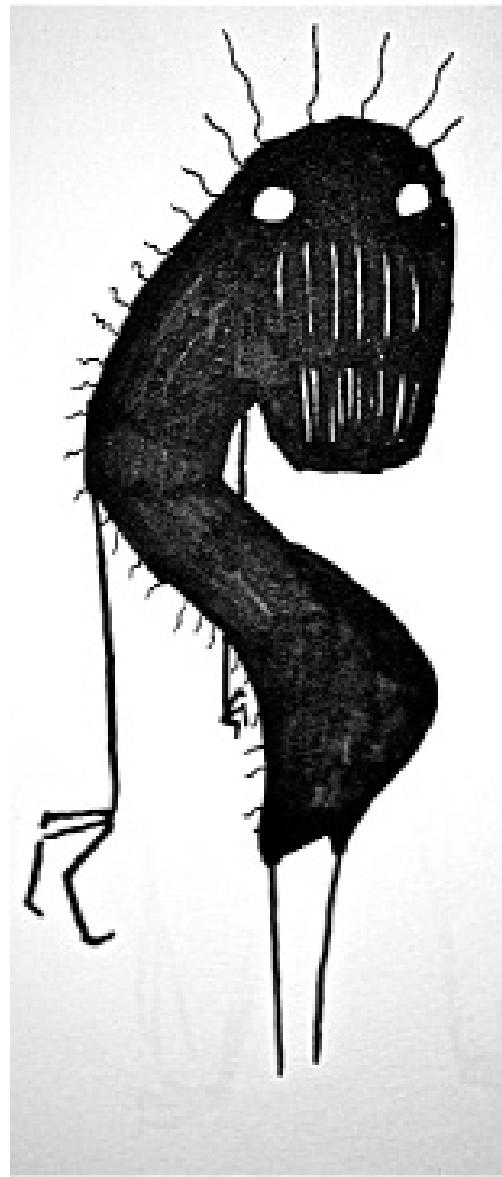
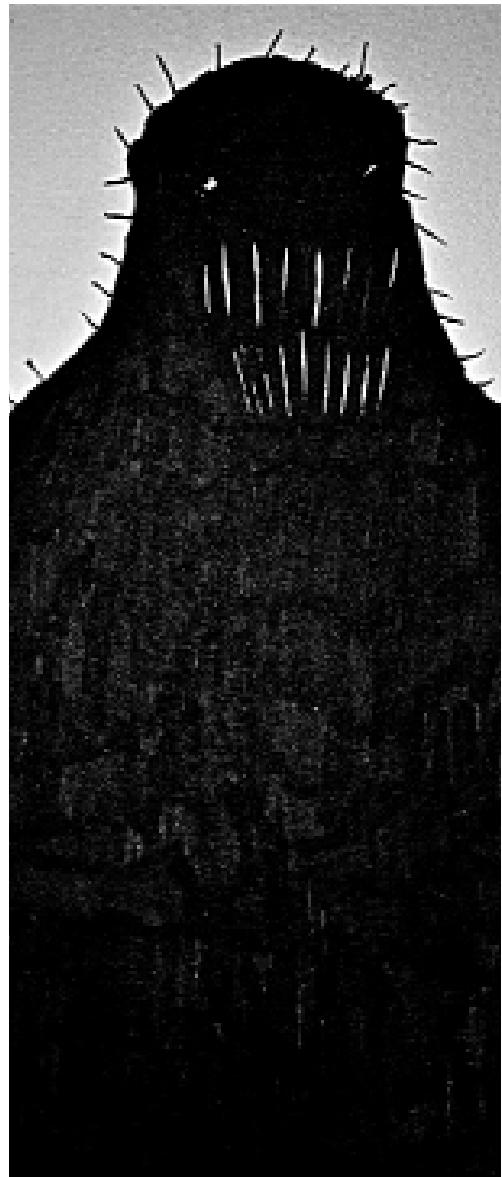
It's just a four letter word,
But we let it control so much.
A life that could be limitless

Fear of that final goodbye,
Fear of you not coming home.
Fear of that man at the door confirming you're gone.

Fear of driving past that one curve,
 But I'm almost home.
Fear of that car behind me late at night.
Fear of that man from my past.

Fear of being alone, but fear of being in a crowd.
Fear of dying before my name is known,
Yet fear of being the center of attention.

Fear of not knowing the right answer.



Monsters

Robert Orozco



Breakfast Dishes

Stephen M. Davis

Clumsy Me

Alex Brown

Glass.
Smooth to the touch.
Slick on the hands.
One carefree bounce,
Before heartbreak.

White shards
Shatter and take flight,
A flock of frightened birds.

Reunion

Peter Figlioli

You showed me videos and I put on my best laugh,
Making sure to show teeth and have a glimmer in my eye.
I listen to what you have to say
And I say what you want to listen to
Hoping that you will want to listen to what I really mean
but laughing at that possibility inside.
We say our goodbyes and exchange
our “I love you”s.
It was nice seeing you, Dad.

Daisy

Laura Parkes

The sun was setting as I walked outside, settling myself on the white porch swing. Today had been a day of reminiscing. Five years ago a very dear friend of mine died. She'd changed my life, and I'd been thinking about her all day.

It had been twenty years since my life had been forever altered by a chance conversation. It was just a simple opportunity, that led to bigger opportunities, that eventually led to a different sort of life for me. I reminisced about that moment, while sitting on my porch. It was late summer now, and the warm breeze felt good on my skin. I watched the ocean waves crashing, and closed my eyes, drifting back into the past.

I'd had just turned 19, and had spent the past year and half basically homeless. I'd been working odd jobs around town since I was 15, which gave me enough money to pay a harmless guy I didn't like to live in his house. Well, a crappy unfinished room in his basement anyway. I was one of the lucky ones, really. It sucked, but at least every night I got to sleep inside with lots of blankets, even if some of them were full of holes and moldy smelling.

That month that everything changed, that was a bad month. It was mid- February and the after holiday rush had died down, so no one needed me. I had one regular gig down at the docks that payed my rent and left very little for anything else. This time of year I was almost always hungry. There was a diner on the edge of town I frequented when I was low on funds. The coffee was semi-decent and they had some cheap food options.

I grabbed the last of the cash I had, a measly five dollars and shoved it into my black jeans. I got paid tomorrow, but that didn't

help since I was starving now. I mussed up my hair, making sure my overly long bangs covered my face. I didn't like people looking at me. I'm sure I made them look anyways. It didn't help that I was ethnic looking. It had always been a trigger for me, that people in this day and age still judged people off the color of their skin. My Dad was white, but my Mom was from Iran. I looked Middle Eastern. That combined with my fuck life attitude never made people really like me.

The mirror showed me my reflection and I stared back. Long black hair, hazel eyes that were mostly dark gold and an odd combination of sharp planes and soft features. People said I was striking, when they'd see me, but I was never sure if that meant they found me beautiful or just strange. I barely cleared 5'2" and never wore heels to make myself taller.

I was tiny all around, but had been fortunate to at least grow some boobs, even if they weren't huge. Who really wanted porn star boobs anyway? I had few curves, but from months of working at the docks had gained plenty of muscle definition. I screamed lightly, chiding myself for thinking about my body as if it had ever really mattered to me. I left it up to others to judge me.

People didn't like me, and I didn't really like them. They judged me, before they knew me. Not that I'd proved them any different if they did get to know me. I was that girl, because I was short and radiated anger. I wore black clothes as often as I could and walked quickly, with my head down. I never had a problem cussing someone out, or shoving them out of my way.

I scowled at my reflection in the cracked, dirty mirror, grabbing my hoodie and leather jacket before strolling out the door. The key didn't work, but I'd learned if you yanked the door hard enough, it seemed like it was locked.

It was bitterly cold out, and I watched as my breath materialized in the air. The diner was nearby, only a few blocks away. I walked past a young couple, and sneered at the girl giving me a disapproving stare. She seemed like the kind of girl that cared what people thought about her. I stepped up my pace, getting to the diner

quickly.

The bell over the door announced my arrival, and I shuffled quickly past the entrance, my fingers rubbing the money in my pocket. I wouldn't be able to get much, but at least I could order something hot.

In the bright lights I got a better look at myself in the mirror. I didn't look homeless, but I wasn't exactly clean looking. I shuffled to the corner booth in the back. It afforded me the perfect place to watch everyone else, but not really be seen myself. The light above that particular table rarely worked. I glanced around furtively, my eyes narrowed and my body tense.

People weren't my thing. Being social wasn't my thing. It had never helped that I'd been dealt a shitty hand in life. I'd been told that my early life was pretty good. Happy parents that had loved me. Then my Dad had been killed when I was only three and my Mom had been blinded by some smug semi-rich man. I think she married him because she thought he would be a good father figure for me.

He wasn't. I hated my step-dad. I'd hated him even more after all the things he'd done to me. Abusive son of a bitch. He'd never liked me, but since he wanted my Mom he put up with me. Then my mom died when I was nine, leaving me in the care of someone who could have easily won a worst parent award, if they'd had them to give out. My step-dad put on a show and claimed he would take care of me, so they let him keep custody of me. With my Mom out of the picture... that's when the real scary shit started happening.

I felt the anger coursing through my veins, my fingers tracing over the scar on my wrist. It never soothed me, only helped to remind me of why I'd run away and why I hated people. I looked around, catching the eye of the blonde waitress that usually served me.

She wandered over and asked what I wanted. My eyes drifted to her name tag. It said Daisy. Maybe in another life she would have been pretty. Average height, average build... everything about her was average. She had dirty blonde hair that was twisted into a

tight knot on her head and a dull, tired looking face. I hoped I never looked that bad when I got older.

"Darlin? I can't stand here all day."

I asked for a coffee and some toast. She looked at me, and confirmed that's what I wanted. A sneer took over my face, and I pulled the five dollar bill out of my pocket.

"This is all I have. So yes... coffee and toast. Please." I spit out the last word. She sighed.

"You get to eat regular meals little girl?"

"I'm not little." Why must people always feel the need to say little to girls, or women, who were both short and looked young? It was aggravating.

"You didn't answer my question." She placed one hand on the table, and leaned down towards me, a look of exasperation mulling her average features.

"Why are you asking?"

"Because I don't believe toast is going to solve your hunger issue." I looked at her face, and I thought I recognized compassion. However, my life had been so fucked up for so long that I'd learned not to trust anyone. I'd seen people wear the angel mask in public and then become a devil behind closed doors. Trust no one, I thought.

"I already told you I can't afford anything else. What... do washed up waitresses make commission now?" She looked at me with what seemed like understanding, as if she knew all the reasons why I was acting the way I was. It was unnerving and I wanted her to go away.

She stared at me for another minute longer, while I stared at the menu. Though they'd probably taste like cardboard, I couldn't help but stare at the pancakes. It had been a long time since I'd had pancakes. When I looked up again, it was to see my waitresses retreating back.

She was back a minute later with a cup of coffee. She brought a tall glass of milk too, even though I hadn't asked. I looked at her and she stared back. Life had taught me that hoping for good

was pointless, but the way she looked at me... maybe she understood what it meant to be hungry and without a real home.

I didn't even like milk that much, but it was calories. I'd take what I could get. I poured milk, little by little into the coffee, adding a lot of sugar. Those without access to grocery stores and kitchens can't be picky, or too worried about being healthy.

Another few minutes passed. I stared morosely into my coffee cup, turning the spoon around slowly and watching the liquid move. I heard, rather than saw, plates being dropped onto my table. I raised my head to look and saw two plates heaped with food. My brow furrowed in confusion, anger starting to spread through my veins. Had I not told her I couldn't afford this much food?

"Now, sweetheart, before you go on getting mad at me, this food is on me. Ok? So eat up." She turned away, making it clear that she wouldn't put up with an argument from me. "Oh, and eat the eggs and sausage first. Pancakes can be eaten cold." The expression on her face, as she looked at me, was irritating me. It was full of compassion, I was sure of it now, and something else I couldn't quite place. It had been a really long time since anyone had been nice to me.

I shoveled the food down quickly, just in case someone made Daisy take it away. Maybe waitresses here weren't allowed to buy food for customers. I ate all of it, feeling slightly sick. This was what it felt like to be full, I'd almost forgotten.

It was impossible not to think about what had led to this becoming my life. I shoved the thoughts away and dropped my head on the table. God only knows what was now on my forehead and in my hair, but I lacked the energy or desire to pick my head back up.

The cushion underneath me moved, and I knew that someone else was sitting in the booth with me. I immediately raised my head, all systems on alert. I'd been through one too many situations where a guy would slide in next to me at diners to proposition me. Instead, I saw Daisy. She started talking before I could demand she leave me alone.

"Look, I know your type. I've seen you around here be-

fore. I know you aren't completely homeless, but it's obvious you don't have a safe, comfortable life. I'm here to offer you one of two choices, if you'll accept either of them. One, you come in here, once a week around this time of night and order whatever food you want. I'll pay for it. I'm a single mom hon, and I can't afford to feed another mouth everyday. But once a week, I can swing it. Or, if you don't like charity, you can work here. The other waitress that works this shift quit earlier tonight, and the owner wants to hire someone else. Your choice... you let me know. Either way... I need to know your name."

I wished I could have seen what I looked like when she was speaking to me. My expression must have changed a million times in that short time. She was right, I didn't like charity. It was impossible for me to believe that people could be nice, but she had bought me dinner tonight. I weighed my options.

It was obvious that I should accept the job. Regular pay, plus measly tips and there would probably be access to food. It wasn't a good job, but it would be better than drifting around between all the odd jobs I worked.

"I'll take the job, if you're really offering." I wrapped my hands around the cold cup of coffee, and stared into the light brown liquid. "What are the requirements?"

"You have to be eighteen, for one. You look at least eighteen, or I wouldn't have offered. You've seen what waitresses do. Take orders, carry food, make coffee, and clean things up. The ten to six am shift is what is needed, so you need to be able to work that four or five days a week. You can arrange your schedule with Bob later on."

"I'm nineteen." I said quickly, then paused. "Ok. I'll take the job. When can I start?" Daisy looked at me, both sad and happy.

"You can start next week. I still need to know your name." I stared back at her. I'd always protected my real name, it felt like the kind of name that didn't belong to the type of life I'd lived. I didn't even know what I meant by that, but it's what I'd always thought. I told people to call me Jenny, because it was the first name that

popped into my head. “Your real name, honey.”

“Liana. My name is Liana.”

“Ok Liana. Come back in a few days, and you can talk to Bob, get things all figured out. I’m going home now, have to get my kid to school. You take it easy now, you hear?”

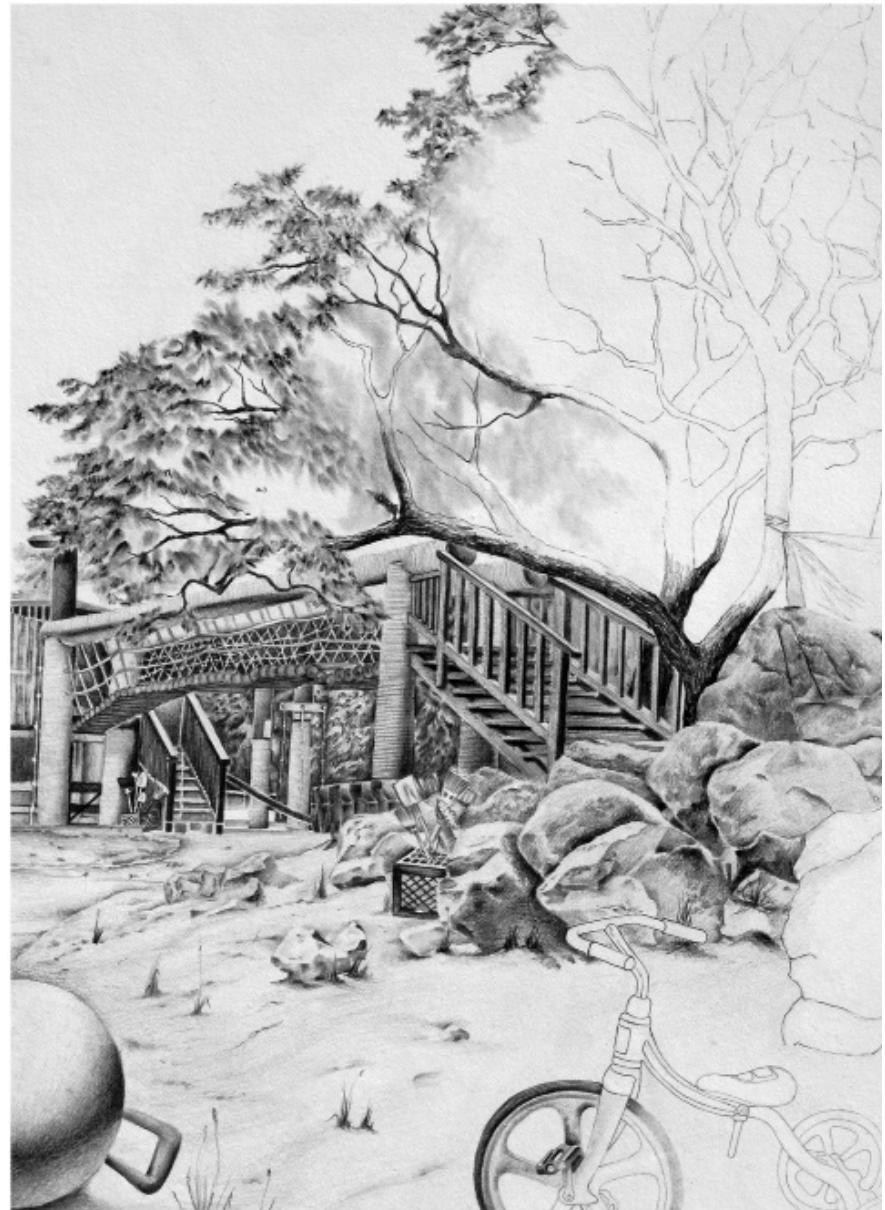
I nodded and went back to staring at my coffee. I felt shy suddenly, and couldn’t figure out why.

Exactly one week later, I walked into the diner to work my first shift. Daisy was leaning against the counter, a small grin on her face. She held out my apron to me, and a name tag. It had been a while since I’d seen my real name printed on anything. It was just a waitressing gig, but I allowed myself to feel a bit of hope that this was an indication that my life had turned a corner. I smiled at her.

“You’re gonna do well kid.”

In the end, she was right. I did do well. I opened my eyes, smiling at the memories. With enough distance, you can be grateful for almost anything. I’d never wish my early life on anyone, but I learned a lot. My life changed because of a woman named Daisy, and I lifted my head to the sky to thank her. The air had finally cooled off enough that I was cold, so I walked inside and shut the door firmly behind me, ready for sleep after an exhausting day of reminiscing.

Life was good.

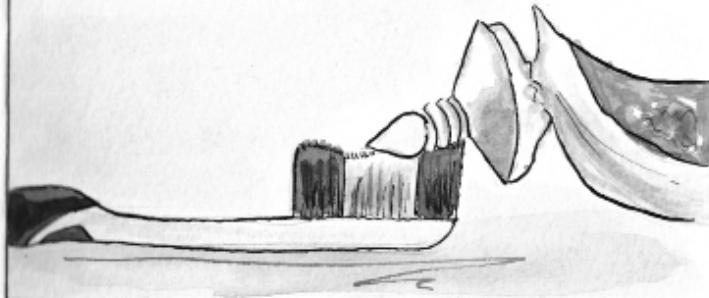


Garden
Zuzana Vass

Toothpaste!

by Rachel Chambers

One day I was going to brush my teeth and I ran out of my black licorice toothpaste. There was only a tiny bit left.



So since I didn't have enough black licorice toothpaste, I used some mint toothpaste as well so that I had enough.



Contributor's Notes

Juan Aguirre is a current student at Palomar College who hopes to transfer to UCLA's school of film in the fall. He is an activist in the community and enjoys protests and helping others. He is also an aspiring film maker, musician, and actor.

Kellen Bertrand is a student, Veteran, future Doctor, musician, and a highly self-critical writer who can only successfully express his thoughts through written word and drunken slur.

Taylor Bishop is a tattoo collector, adventure seeker, coffee enthusiast, and lover of all things Johnny Depp.

Max Bolduc is a student at Palomar College.

Alex Brown is a student at Palomar College.

Kassidy Butterworth is a Psychology major who plans to minor in art. She hopes to become an art therapist and help children utilize creativity as a healing process. Her dream is to travel the world and is a Beatles enthusiast.

Jennifer Byerly gratefully contributed to the 2014 *Bravura* in honor of the 50th Anniversary.

Rachel Chambers is a student at Palomar College.

Kyle Chandler is an artist and actor with interests in photography, cinematography, and stencil art. He hopes to one day be a part of a major motion picture.

Ariana Chavez is a full time student and full time adventure-seeker. She loves outdoor activities but leaps at the opportunity to relax by a fire and write for fun.

Freddy Cleveland believes that mythology is everything. But also, he thinks Michael Bay is on par with Terrence Malick? He's a complicated man. In his spare time he writes, draws, films, and plays music, but all just serve as distractions from his true passion: consuming movies, TV, video games, and cheese at an alarming rate.

Robert Coe enjoys performing in plays and has only recently decided to try writing. He now writes to entertain his friends and family and hopes to make people laugh with his writings. "Cubicle" is his first published

writing. Robert's script "Cubicle" is this year's second place winner in the fiction category.

Carol Valentine Colclasure is an English Education major who received her Associate Degree at Palomar College, and was recently accepted to UC Riverside to continue with her Bachelor's. She works as an English tutor for K-12th grade students and enjoys her free time outdoors with her son/dog, Loki Blu. She loves reading, writing, and arts and crafts, as well as mind-expanding activities. She is grateful for the opportunity to participate in and contribute to such a great literary work as *Bravura*.

Luis Correa is a Cinema major at Palomar College. He enjoys listening to obscure music, reading comic books, and watching cult movies. He also sometimes writes science-fiction stories.

Kristen Cox is a student at Palomar College.

Kevin Craig has a deep love for movies and is an aspiring filmmaker who, for now, creates short films and sketch comedy videos for YouTube. He has recently taken up photography as a new favorite hobby, which is an extension of his passion for cinematography.

Danielle Cupp is a student at Palomar College.

Stephen M. Davis is a student at Palomar majoring in Photography. He hopes one day to work as a Photojournalist.

Alexis Dawn is a student at Palomar College and an editor for this year's *Bravura*. Her poem titled "Self-Portrait" is this year's editor's choice winner in the poetry category.

Erik De Haro adores his family and cat. He thanks no one but them, not the ghosts who inspired the doodle. And while downfalls and triumphs are subjective, these late night realizations are only meant to convey his affection to one person.

Taylor Dutcher is an English major at Palomar College. She has a passion for poetry, and loves to take care of kids. Her hobbies include writing, binge watching Netflix, listening to music, and taking Jiu Jitsu and Muay Thai lessons.

Peter Figlioli is a student at Palomar College.

Ashley Fisher is a Psychology major transferring to UC Berkley in the fall. She has a dog named Winter and likes to spend her free time indoors.

Mainardo Flores is a writer and photographer who is inspired by myth and folklore. He is working on a series of stories based on Mexican folklore. Mainardo hopes to open an art gallery.

Robi Foli is a student planning to transfer to Columbia College Chicago to study Marketing and Photography. She enjoys couch surfing and watching overdramatic TV shows on Bravo. Her passion is music. Robi's poem "Sunset Boulevard" is this year's recipient of the Angelo Carli Poetry Prize (1st place, poetry).

Shaun Franklin is a talented individual with a great deal of potential and a staggering gift for not recognizing that he has either. He hopes to someday become a successful novelist who writes science fiction and fantasy stories. His contributions to Bravura are a slow steady means of him changing from a reclusive shy introvert who shares his works with his cat to a reclusive shy introvert who shares his works with other people.

Sean Frede is a fiction writer holding a Bachelor's degree from University of California, Riverside. His stories have been featured in both Bravura and Mosaic literary journals. He will be attending Boise State this fall for his M.F.A in fiction. He hopes to learn to tie his own flies and brew his own beers while he is up north. Sean's short fiction piece "Fire" is this year's recipient of the Jack Mawhinney Fiction Prize (1st place, fiction).

Amy Genduso is a student at Palomar College. Amy's photograph titled "Coiffure" is this year's 3rd place winner in the visual arts category.

With her father as her number one motivation, **Briana Munoz** is determined to double-major in communications and English. She enjoys writing fiction and poetry with a splash of her Mexican American background, which she hopes to publish in the future. She also hopes to become a Speech Therapist to help brain injury and stroke survivors, like her father, rehabilitate. With her motivation and passion, she hopes to impact the world one short story at a time.

Dayna Richelle Giehl appreciates the power of fiction and experiments with different personas and perspectives in her own writing. Her interests include fruit Mentos, human sexuality, French bulldogs, *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, and Donald Duck. She will double-major in English and Women's Studies at CSUSM starting in the fall, working toward a career in English education. Dayna's short-fiction piece titled "Breathing" is this year's editor's choice winner in the fiction category.

Marco Gonzalez is a first time contributor to the Bravura. He is an average guy who likes sports, video games, and photography. He enjoys reading, listening and watching stories. He will be attending CSU San Marcos next semester to complete his BA in Literature & Writing Studies where he plans on becoming a teacher so he can work with children and help shape the next generation.

Teal Hankins is an avid nature-lover who enjoys the simple comfort of her family and friends, and would rather read a book than go to a party. She is surprisingly good at cutting her own bangs, and she looks forward to majoring in sociology at Palomar College.

Brett Hays is a student at Palomar College.

Melanie Helgesen is an aspiring writer and currently a student at Palomar College. She has always been interested in writing and the arts, and is currently working with Trail Media on a children's book. She hopes to parlay this humble achievement into a career one day.

Cassidi Joi is an aspiring writer of novels, creative nonfiction, poetry, and comic books. Her primary interests include superheroes, tattoos, squirrels, video games, psychology, cats, dancing, and blowing bubbles.

Everett Kekoa is a student at Palomar College.

Mariah Key is full time student and full time worker who is too busy for a social life. When she should be sleeping, she is usually writing. She is working towards her two life-long dreams: becoming a writer and becoming a teacher.

Shekinah Kifer is a student at Palomar College.

With her first western novel due for publication in May, **Sandy Kimball** aims to become a novelist and, in the further future, a screenwriter, and is currently working on a series of short stories.

Marie Kodis is a student at Palomar College.

Sofia Leggett is a student at Palomar College.

Lora Mathis is a writer and student who is happiest when she is traveling or making something. She spends most of her time doing one of the two or dreaming of the next time she can.

Ricky McBrayer is a starving young artist, always pushing to reach further. An ambidextrous drawer, humorous, and friendly man, Ricky is

a beginning art student at Palomar College and an accomplished graphic designer.

David McCready is a student at Palomar College.

Larry Narron grew up in Escondido, California. He transferred from Palomar College to the University of California, Berkeley where he studied short fiction writing under Joyce Carol Oates and was awarded the Rosenberg Prize in Lyric Poetry. A frequent contributor to *Bravura*, his work has also appeared in or is forthcoming in *Eleven Eleven*, *Zaum*, *The Round*, and *Suisun Valley Review*. Larry's story "Somebody's Daughter" is this year's 3rd place winner in the fiction category.

Robert Damian Orozco is an aspiring artist in not just one particular field but any field to come his way whether that be as a children's book illustrator or an animator for Disney. He is currently studying at Palomar and taking as many art classes as he can to further his skills and expand his connections with other artists. Orozco has been influenced by Doug Durrant, a Palomar art professor who has been an avid supporter since the beginning for the young artist. Robert's artwork titled "I Am the Walrus" is this year's 1st place winner in the visual arts category.

Laura Parkes is a writer living and working as a nanny in San Francisco. An avid reader, her favorite writers include J.K. Rowling, J.R.R Tolkien, and Khalil Gibran. She is hoping to publish her first novel this year.

Cotton Pettingel is a student at Palomar College.

Jaime Marie Pinckard is a poet who enjoys astronomy, mathematics, and all things Japanese. Her favorite book is *Jane Eyre*. She hopes to find healing through her poetry.

Gabriella Pleasant is a Christian writer who tries very hard to convey profound meaning in her writing. Her labors produce intoxicating works of confusion.

Luis Porraz is a multi-talented individual gifted with expressing his emotion in any art form, whether it be singing, writing, or drawing. Overcoming a parentless and abusive past, his will is unwithering in the face of fear. He plans on becoming a professional artist and nothing will stop him from achieving his dream.

Rickety Ram is a student at Palomar College.

Eric Ramirez is a student at Palomar College.

Chanele Retuya is a student at Palomar College.

As well as writing poetry, **Ruth Rice** is an artist (watercolor, ceramic sculpture, foundry, fabric art, screen printing,) who is happiest with dirty hands.

Travis Rivas is a Palomar alumni and a previous editor of the *Bravura*. When he's not writing he spends his time reading comic books, watching Joss Whedon shows and running around with five year olds in his job as a Preschool teacher. Tom Hanks' *Frozen Corpse* is his first published piece in a number of years.

Friends of **Emily Rock** would say she is a savant with a pen, and has a certain affinity for the English language. Emily would say she's a poet who loves the color orange.

Nicky Rojo is a student at Palomar College.

Apolonio Rosas is an autogenous student from Oceanside, California majoring in engineering, philosophy, and psychology. He is inspired by his mother and propelled by social progress. Most of his writings are written arbitrarily.

Mariafernanda Sanchez is a student at Palomar College.

Danielle Schultz is a portrait photographer and owns her own photography business; D.A. Studios. She has enjoyed being a successful business owner and photographer for over 5 years. Danielle obsesses over taking fashion styled portraits and hopes she will work as a photographer for a clothing company one day.

Melissa Scrivnor is an artist at Palomar College. She aspires to one day become an art professor and is planning on transferring to CSUSM or SDSU.

Alyssa Sheppard is a philanthropic night owl with the ability to write for days and also drink copious amounts of coffee without having the side affects of caffeine. She went to art school in New York for a year and realized how mean people are so now she's back in California loving life.

Derik Steinkirchner is a student at Palomar College.

Christian Smith is a student at Palomar College.

Kyle Smith is a Journalism major who enjoys *Star Wars*, comic books,

reading, and movies. He hopes to transfer to SFSU.

Jessica Sparks is a typical muggle. She is transferring to UCSB in the fall to pursue her English degree and moonlights as a Social Media/Marketing Director. Jessica spends her free time writing, reading, and reviewing indie novels under the pseudonym Madeusbooks. She likes *Doctor Who*, Disney-land, T.S. Eliot, and Starbucks.

Brittany Springer is a student at Palomar College.

Rebecca Sterling is a student at Palomar College.

Alyssa Thielemann became a student at Palomar College after graduating from high school as a sophomore at the age of 16. After moving seven times throughout her life, she finds pleasure in eating and writing, both separately and at the same time. She spends her time with family and friends, and fights vigorously in the “Ban the Bra” movement. She has no real skills aside from being a ping pong master, but she’s pretty handy with a pen and paper.

Austin Torres is a graduate with an Associate Degree in Arts and Humanities, taking extra classes to strengthen his English and Literary skills with intention to write a novel based on his mild Asperger’s Autism. He has an athletic background of 6 years of Wrestling, 16 years of Martial Arts, and currently holds a 2nd Degree Black Belt with Z-Ultimate Self Defense Studios.

Seth Valenzuela fluctuates between crippling insecurity and desperate attempts at bravado. He would say he loves semantics, but it would take too long to tell you why. To fill the emptiness, he writes and one day hopes he’ll be worth a damn.

Zuzana Vass is a student at Palomar College. Zuzana’s painting titled “Got Sugar” is this year’s 2nd place winner in the visual arts category.

Nathan Ware is a student at Palomar College. Nathan’s poem “Star of India” is this year’s 2nd place winner in the poetry category.

Amanda Williamson is a student at Palomar College. She is three cats and fifty years away from being that old lady everyone thinks is a witch, a long-held goal of hers. At the moment she is generally found studying, writing, singing, and arguing with stubborn characters and plotlines.

Nile Wilson and his family have been raising horses in UCP’s local community for more than three decades. He was raised in the truly hidden hills

of Escondido; nature and art combined with his view to “bring a new light to Hollywood as a film director”, he even wishes to travel the West Coast with a band as a documentarian.

Melissa Yang is currently finishing her undergraduate education for Human Biology at UCSD. In between school and interning for a neurodegenerative disease research lab, she updates her Tumblr with short fiction, poetry, and her favorite quotes. Most days, she pretends her life is a musical and breaks out into spontaneous singing and dancing.

Josiah Yerkes is a student at Palomar College. Josiah’s poem “My Truths at Age Seventeen” is this year’s 3rd place winner in the poetry category.

Aimee Yturralez is a student at Palomar College, though she plans on transferring to CSUSM in the fall. She spends her free time reading and writing anything and everything fantasy-related. Table-top gaming, theater, and ice cream are just a few of her other interests.

John Zuill is a student at Palomar College.