

The Works

2014-2015 Editorial Staff

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The Works Fall 2014 - Spring 2015 Issue

Student Art Contest

2014-2015

Theme: "Better Left Unsaid"



Untitled

by Reghan Edwards

Compassion

When lovers kiss after steamy quarrels
And whisper promises of tomorrows
Tears swell up in my eyes and not from sorrow
Because I have no lack of compassion

When babies taste their first breath of air
With or without a full head of hair
Through flowing tears and wonder I stare
Because I have no lack of compassion

When we betray others without remorse
And vengeful intentions kills back coarse
I cry for people have become hoarse
Because I have no lack of compassion

When loved ones die forever I mourn
I cannot help it, I feel torn
But tears of their happiness fall from heaven when it's pourin'
Because they had no lack of compassion

- Victoria Gonzalez

Fiction: Winner

ATM Romance

by Greg Smith

Wyatt checked his watch for the 10th time in five minutes since stand behind a woman at the ATM. She had spent most of her time rummaging in an oversized purse trying to find her debit card. Now she was staring at the screen and appeared to Wyatt as if she had never seen one before.

“May I help you?” Wyatt asked.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Are you in a hurry?”

“Kinda. I’m leaving the country.”

The long legged red head turned to study him. Their eyes locked. Wyatt found he could barely breathe. She looked great from the back, but he found himself drowning in her gorgeous green eyes. He was no longer thinking about the job he hated and had just walked out on.

“Are you okay?”

Wyatt blushed. She smiled knowingly. It was the kind that beautiful women flash when they know they’re being admired.

“Sorry. Just thinking.”

“Would you like to go ahead?”

Wyatt thanked her and stepped up to the machine as she moved aside. He watched her reflection on the screen. What he saw made him smile. She was checking him out, too.

“What’s your name,” Wyatt asked, turning to face her.

“Linda. And yours?”

“Wyatt.”

The two shook hands, then stood silently for a few seconds as people wearing business suits marched by. Wyatt’s fantasy of escaping to an island now included this beautiful creature who made his knees weak every time she looked his way.

“Are you going on a business trip?”

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“No,” Wyatt said, stuffing his right hand into his back pants pocket. “It’s sorta like running away from home. Actually, that’s precisely what I’m on doing.”

“Just chuck it all in and run off to a tropical island?”

“Exactly. As soon as I’m done here I’m going to the airport to catch the first flight to the Caribbean. You want to come along?”

Wyatt grimaced as soon as the words came out. The two had just met and he’s asking her to run away with him.

“Where in the Caribbean?”

“Maybe St. Martin. It’s in the French part of the Caribbean. The food is fantastic. I don’t even know if you like French food.”

She shifted her weight as he waited for an answer. Leaving a public relations job was crazy, so why not take it a step farther and ask this woman to run away with him?

“Let’s do it. And I love French cuisine.”

“Really? Wow. Okay. Let me get some traveling money and we can be on our way,” he said, turning back to the machine.

Wyatt couldn’t believe she said yes. What started out to be a day from hell was turning into a dream come true. He was starting to wonder what they were going to do on St. Martin. He had worked as a bar tender in college. Maybe he could get a job serving umbrella drinks to tourists?

“We should stop by my parents place on the way out of town,” she said as she lightly brushed her hand across his right arm. “They’ll want to meet you.”

“You want me to meet your parents? Won’t they object?”

“Why should they? I’ll just tell them we’ve been dating and plan to see where this relationship goes.”

She hugged him from behind, giving him a reassurance squeeze. The warmth of her body, the scent of perfume and visions of her in a string bikini were all the convincing he needed. He fantasized watching her walk from the ocean with her wet long red hair and skimpy swim suit. He was about to ask for her last name when she interrupted him.

“Do you like children?” she asked.

Wyatt slowly turned around. Then he saw her flash that beguiling toothy smile at him, waiting for an answer.

“Kids are okay,” Wyatt said after pausing for a moment. “I guess.”

“I think we should have at least three or four. I’m from a large family.”

“Three or four?”

“We’ll name the first boy Wyatt Jr.”

“I don’t know ...”

“We’re going to have such a great life together. I knew you’d understand. I can tell things about people. We’ll need a place big enough for when my parents visit. They’ve been asking me when I was going to settle down and start a family.” Wyatt’s right index finger stopped just a fraction of an inch from the button that would empty his bank account. His mind raced as he reflected on his job’s hectic schedule and the endless hours of stroking egos. Needing to deal with a new cri-

sis every day and never getting the time or the budget to do what he felt needed to be done.

“If we’re going to do this, we need to visit my parents in Florida before heading to Caribbean,” Wyatt said just before pushing the cash button. With visions of heated sex and long lazy days on a beach, he turned and met those gorgeous green eyes smiling back at him. His smile race from his face as soon as he noticed she had her palm held out and the other holding a gun.



Ricky Horror

by Emily Eckles

Boxes

Sometimes, I want to throw things.
hurtling hair dryers
and shattered glass vases
ricochet behind my silent stare.
Sometimes, I need to scream.
But the softness of my reply
and the ease of my gaze
better fits the “type” that I’ve been labeled.
“Yes, you’re right” becomes
the noose tightening around my throat.
Effectively suffocating
the “what ifs” and “actually, nos”
that attempt their escape.

I am not
as nice as I seem.
As subtle as you dream.
I cannot exist in this space.
a created image...
a mirage of your fantasy.
I am slowly
dying,
drifting,
dispersing
without you knowing.

- Rachel Brunner

Visual Art: Honorable Mention



Untitled

by Bailee Tucker



Untitled

by Esther Salazar

Poetry: Winner

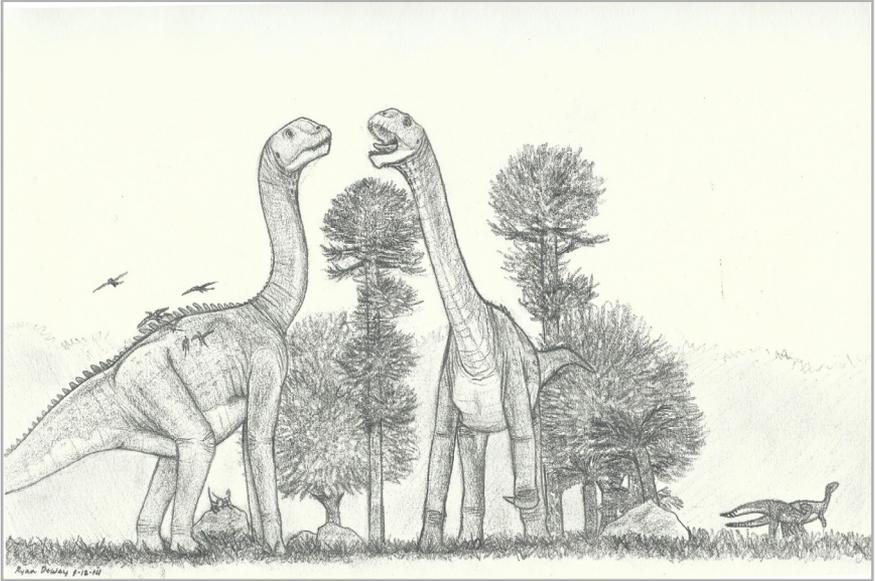
The Music Box

I watched as she strained to reach an upper shelf,
Surprised she could do it all by herself.
Standing on her tippy toes,
What her fingers brushed –fragile as a rose.
Her small hand clutched an angel on a broken pillar,
A flute raised to her mouth –held there forever.
Dust had caked the angel's porcelain hair,
There wasn't a clean wrinkle of robe anywhere.
The girl held it as if it were worth more than herself,
That day, I watched her pull a memory from the shelf.

She took a damp rag and gingerly coaxed the dust away,
Ashen gray took flight to revive the colors of a newborn day.
The angel's robes were a lavender hue, hair golden and lush,
Flesh now rosy, as if she'd just blushed.
Poised porcelain, the flute still at her lips
Awaiting the melodies that would flow from her fingertips.
My daughter lightly brushed her cheek, a faint memory.
She'd been so young and full of glee –so temporary.
The rag was tossed away, the filth's home, as it should.
That day, I watched her clean the dust off her childhood.

The knob at the bottom of the angel's pillar begged for a twist,
As she was laid down on the daily paper and given a bitter kiss.
Her fair porcelain complexion, grew somewhat paler,
As if a desperate gasp of breath had failed her.
The crinkle of paper warned of a nearly closed door.
Her eyes turned to panic and pleaded to play only once more.
But my daughter wrapped her tightly with a face I couldn't read
She slid her into a box, labeled for a day of great need.
With the final fold of the lid, the tears began to start.
That day, I watched her tuck away a piece of her heart.

- Darby Rummler



The Grouch

by Ryan Dewey

Breathe

by Rebekah Megill

I've never been to this city before, but I know these streets by heart. My legs ache from walking as I crunch my way through the snow, but I have to keep going. Underneath the thick skin of white across everything, I can't imagine what the city might look like, but I reach a corner and look up and the name on the street sign feels as familiar as the sound of my breath.

I don't know why I do that, memorize the streets. I guess I'm just scared I'll get lost. Not that it affects much, anyway. This is the first time I've been out of my house in months. I've barely been able to function at all since he left.

A freezing wind strikes me, paralyzing me for a moment. A sensible person would have taken a car, but I can never get myself into one. Cars frighten me. They have too much power. And I'm probably too stupid to ever be in control of one. Todd taught me that.

I look up, although I know what I'll see. Two more blocks. My heart speeds up. I'm only two blocks away from Todd Martin.

Then It hits me again. The wave, as I call it. I stop for a moment as I feel it bubbling up inside me, slamming at my heart and brain again and again, cutting short my breath and heartbeat. This is wrong. This is wrong. This is wrong. I squeeze my eyes shut and double over, ordering myself to freeze until it passes. My throat catches so hard I feel like I'm choking.

It will pass, I force myself to realize.

Eventually it does. My emotions let up, panic slowly giving way to a less intense fear. I realize I'm on my knees, push myself up, and force my shaking legs to continue walking.

A sudden roar of the wind brings Todd's voice to my mind and I can't help but picture him. Dazzling eyes, devilish smile. Kisses rough and reeking of bear. His constant stance in front of the fridge, probably empty without me there to fill it.

The strength of his stare. Of his yell. Of his hands.

I slip and just barely catch myself on the ice, hearing myself scream louder than I want. It was only the ice. I slipped on the ice.

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It didn't feel like the ice. I thought of Todd and I felt his hand across my face again. It felt like he was here, right in front of me, and his hatred knocked me down. I almost believe, if I reach to my face, I'll feel the bruising from it.

I can't, I think. I can't even move to stand up. I can't do this. I can't let him hurt me.

When I was with him, I had forgotten that most people sometimes weren't covered in bruises. I was dirt, I learned. I was stupid. I was ugly. I ruined everything. I deserved to hurt, and hurt forever. When he told me, I believed him.

I can't do this. I should turn back.

Back to what?

To nothing. I'm completely alone.

No one even knows where I am. I don't have any friends to tell, and my parents never knew. Not about the last five months and my obsession with finding Todd. Not about my journey to him now. Not even about how bad it was in between, how stuck I've been during the years without him. Crippled.

It doesn't matter what he's done to you, I tell myself. I climb to my feet. You need him.

That's something I know for certain. I can't go on if I don't find him now.

There was a time, for a while, when I really thought this would never be true. I think back to the day he left and I remember pain and fear - but I thought I could get through it. Mom and Dad took me back in, and I thought that would be enough. That I could get a job, get my finances in order. Pay back the debts he left in my hands. Maybe even find a friend again.

But I was wrong. Nothing will matter if I never see Todd again. No amount of distance between us could uncripple me. I'll never be able to move, to think, to sing again, if I don't find him now.

This is wrong.

My legs shake so hard I don't know how I'm still upright. I force myself to take deep breaths.

You don't have to do this.

I look up. My heart both sinks and flies. Todd Martin lives on this block.

The world spins around me, but I force my feet to pretend they don't notice. I see the curb. Walk toward the curb. That's it. Walk to the next house. Now walk to the next one.

Now look up.

I don't want to. My teeth are clenched in fear. You don't have to do this. This is a bad idea.

I look up and see a forgettable white house with shrubbery and a step for a porch. So this is where Todd lives now.

I picture Todd's face and smell and am immediately flooded with emotion. I find myself walking toward the house. Then I look down and realize I've knocked.

I hear banging around inside for a second and I freeze, hand still up in a knocking position.

I hear that familiar voice in the back of my head, pulling at me. I know that voice so well, how debilitating its attacks can be.

You can run now. Just run. It'll be easy.

Of course it will be easy. So easy I turn and-

"No."

That's how I stop myself. Just one word. No big speech to myself, no tears about fear. About how much I need this. About how bad my life has been, how bad it will be until I do this.

I just say "no" and I remember it all. I remember the reason I came. If I leave now, I will still be broken. And I would stay this broken forever.

I hear a creak, turn, and see him. Hair soaked from a recent shower, robe hanging open as if he doesn't notice it's winter. And his hand, my lord and master, leaning on the doorframe. The sight of his hand kills my voice before it's born. That hand taught me what fear is. Every bit of me hurts, in memory and in fear.

I won't be able to say it.

Todd's mouth turns up in a smirk. "Told you you'd be back, Princess."

He jerks his thumb behind him. "Thought I'd let you in?"

Then we both see how I flinch, out of instinct, at the movement of his hand. He laughs.

I breathe.

I breathe? How?

As he speaks I realize.

"You're precious, you know?" His eyes wander down. "Tell you what... how about a night?"

I can say it.

I don't know why or how I can. I just know that something has changed. So I speak.

"Todd."

"But first you listen to me," he says. "My way this time. Got it?" He reaches for me, for my head.

"I'm not afraid of you."

He stops.

I'm not flinching or running. I'm breathing.

"What did you say?"

"I said I'm not afraid of you."

He doesn't move for a second. He just stares.

Then he moves. My face burns, I hear an involuntary scream, and I fly across the yard.

I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid.

Faster than I remember, my arm is jerked up and my foot trips on the front step and I crash into tile. I spin and see Todd, mountains tall, between me and the door to outside.

"I'm not afraid-"

I hear a crack that I think is my nose breaking under his fist, tearing me

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apart with how much it hurts. I can't scream because Todd's hands are around my neck. Tightening. I'm not breathing now.

I'm going to die.

But I'm not going to die afraid.

I find his eyes and meet them.

Todd Martin, I'm not afraid of you.

The pressure releases and I cough. The pain in my nose and the hunger of my lungs fills my mind, but I know when Todd Martin is touching me. And right now he's not.

It takes me a moment for the coughing to let up. I pull myself to a sitting position and open my eyes.

Todd sits across from me, leaning against the wall. The minute I stop moving, he starts toward me. His grip crushes my arm again through my coat.

"You're not getting me back to prison," he mutters into my ear. "That's not going to work." He curses me.

And then I'm in the snow again, drops from my face spraying it with red. I turn and watch him.

He lifts his hand, a hand I no longer fear. He points at me.

"Don't you ever come back here," he snarls. "You so much as pass this house on your way to church, and I swear—"

And what? He knows no threat will reach me. Not anymore.

He doesn't finish his sentence. The door slams.

My aching nose urges me to find my phone. After all, I didn't drive here, and the hospital is fifteen blocks away.

But, instead, I laugh. Despite the pain it causes. Despite the cold. Despite Todd's house still looming behind me.

I did it.

I was right. I did need this. I was crippled. Every part of me knows, if I hadn't done this, I would never have stopped fearing.

And now I have. I didn't die today, and when I do, I won't die afraid. Definitely not afraid of him.

I push myself to my feet and let the blood from my nose pool into my hand. I look up and down the streets I used to avoid and decide to call a cab. Then I walk through the snow and out of Todd Martin's yard forever.



1945

by Calista Kern-Lyons



Rejuvenation

by Alyssa Bieze

Lithobolia

When rocks first hit the house my father claimed the wrath of God.
But then the stones kept falling and the elders called synod.
"Great Satan only could inflict this type of eldritch pain."
So now the fingers point and we subsist in lithic rain.

There's Mother, Martin, Jane and me, there's Father, and that's all---
We live beyond the pale of Right so long as stones still fall.
One killed our cat, imagine that, the neighbors cried "Familiar!"
And Father's walks to barn unharmed the rev'rends find peculiar.

From sun to stars the stones fall from the sky with no respite.
The rocks and pebbles, taunts and chants, then fall on through the night.
The boys call Martin "Devil's Child" and Janie "Demon's Pride."
The girls in town think Mum's a witch, think I am Satan's Bride.

I long for scraps of pink and blue, for yellow, green and red.
The duns and browns and grays have drained my eyes, my soul's unfed.
I have no friends, I have no God; I've only melancholia.
I'd suck the marrow from my soul to end the lithobolia.

- Tom Padilla



Untitled

by Ariana Turner

Illinois Harvest

I.

The summer must have been hot to leave the lake so dry,
to cake the mud so quickly around the geese.
It must have been some cry-- a thousand geese severed on takeoff
leaving but a few feathers to rustle among the abandoned legs.
The view is rows of brown.
The view is dead feathers clacking and geese legs snapping as
the fall winds grow.

II.

The bird passes low over the field, shearing it near the soil before
chugging back to vomit its golden catch into the
gapping mouths of its young.

III.

It is easier now for the wind to pass,
the legs are gone,
the birds are fed.
It is easier now for the wind to pass not having to weave
or leap for the land is flat again.
Now there is but the wind scooping feathers and teaching them to be
acrobats performing on the road.
The view is black.
The view is a lakebed waiting for the geese and spring.

- Mark Jordan

The North Woods

Wading through fern sea
Pines, mint, even a lake breeze
For me, perfect home

An emerald field
Spread out beneath wood towers
Concealer of ticks

Trunks that form forests
Namesake of the Northern Woods
Shade from the great sky

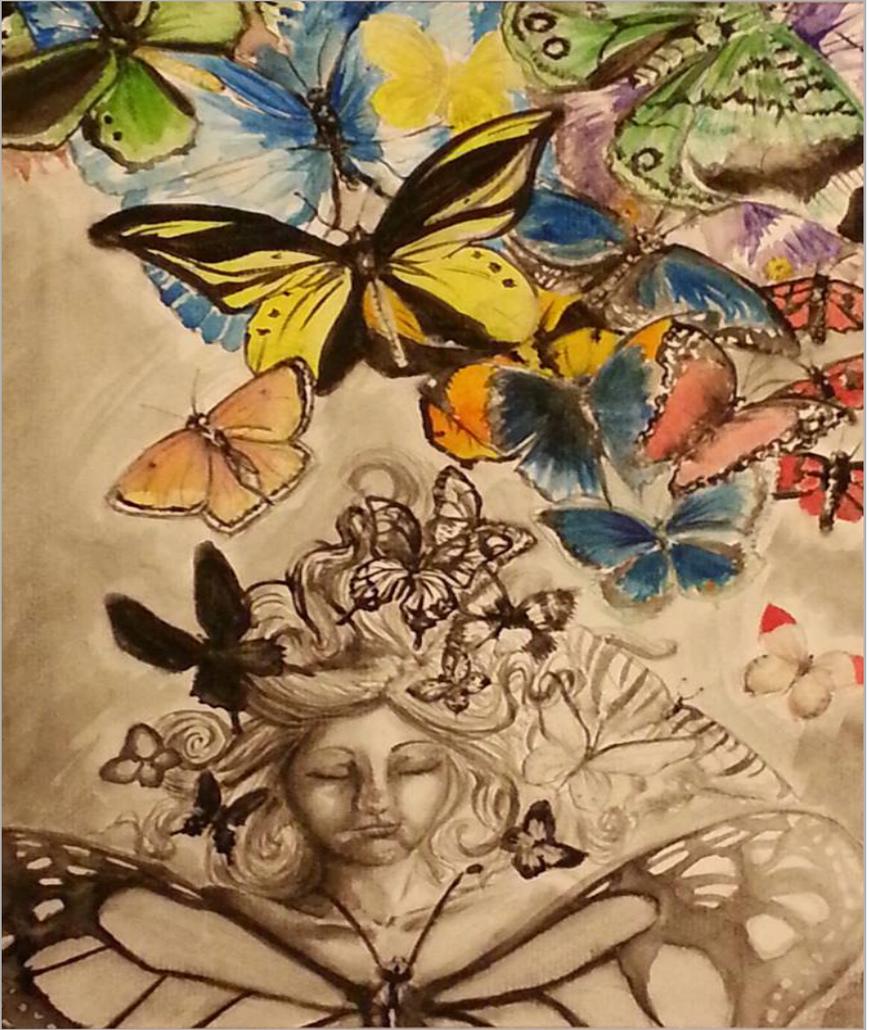
Race to the buoy
Cast a line, fall off a tube
Into chilled waters

Fresh sting of mint air
With a full breath my mind clears
I know where I am

Haven meant for me
A pocket of paradise
The place I call home

- Joey Janke

Visual Art: Winner



Untitled

by Bailee Tucker

Madam Nacretsia's Tea Shop

by Jeremiah Jerdee

While walking down a familiar street Zel noticed something that he hadn't before. It was a small tea and spice store. The sign said, "Madam Nacretsia's Tea Shop." The strong aroma of fresh brewed tea, and the dull earthy smell of herbs wafted into his nostrils. It was new, slightly strange and also intoxicating. He found himself walking towards the shop automatically.

When he reached the door he looked to his left and saw an elderly woman sitting on a comfy looking armchair. She had a few grizzled gray whiskers on her chin that stuck out in all directions. Her hair was the same soft wintery grey as her whiskers. She was holding a pipe between her lips taking shallow puffs of it periodically. When she blew them out it amazed Zel that she could make smoke rings without taking the pipe out of her mouth.

After studying the woman she looked up lazily and blew a bit of smoke right into his face. The smoke took him by surprise and he coughed at the penetrating sensation that it gave him as it entered his lungs. "What was that for?" He said a bit rudely than he meant to.

"You were staring." She said. When Zel didn't say anything she continued. "Well is there something I can help you with or were you going to stand in front of my shop scaring away my customers all day?"

"I don't know if you can help me with anything." Zel said. "I was just looking at your store. I walk this way all the time but I don't remember seeing it before."

"Not many people pay attention enough to see it. Others aren't able to see it even if they wanted to. I suppose that makes you special." She stared at Zel as if she could see straight through him. The sensation was uncomfortable for Zel and made his stomach tighten into a knot. "Yes you do seem to be special. Well come into the store and we shall see what is in store for you."

The old woman rose and walked into the store and gestured for Zel to

follow. He walked through the icy blue door and into the small storefront. It was dark and smoke clung to the air. After giving his eyes some time to adjust to the dim light of the room he looked around. There were jars of rare and exotic spices and herbs from around the world. Incense burned and Zel found its pungent aroma pleasant.

Zel tried to walk around the cramped store but he bumped into almost everything. Madam Nacretsia gave him a look and shook her head. Zel laughed at her gesture and bumped into another table, this time one of the jars of spices on it got knocked off. With reflexes of someone 60 years younger Madam Nacretsia caught the jar. It amazed Zel that she was able to snatch it out of the air so quickly. For the first time since coming inside he took another look at the Madam. She looked younger in the store as if many years of struggle and age had simply melted away. The hump in her back had disappeared and she looked strong. It wasn't a menacing strength but she resonated with the kind of power that comes from a lifetime of dedication and persistence.

He looked over to a small wooden table. It was round and stained a dark brown with age. Intricate details were carved into the legs of the table and there was something mystical about it. He then noticed the crystal ball that stood atop the table and the tarot cards that were scattered haphazardly on the table's surface.

“Would you like to know your future?” She asked.

After a moment of silent deliberation Zel whispered, “Yes.”



bloodyrose

by Sarah Stearns

Succubus

My heavy eyes falling
I close them and sleep
A woman cries calling
I stand to my feet

I look out the window
Hear sound of autumn leaves
Comes out of the shadows
A beauty, yet a beast

(chorus)

In the night, consumed by lust
I've been seduced by a succubus
Kiss that bites, love the dusk
I fell in love with a succubus

We were both so innocent
Or at least that's how it seemed
The love was just malevolent
And the pleasure made scream

Embracing the demoness
Hear chimes of midnight bells
I fall into eternal rest
As she drags me to Hell

- Lejon Sheppard

The Hallway

by Daniel Humphrey

I don't remember how I got here. I think that's a sign that I'm dreaming. But everything seems so vivid and real. I guess that's what everyone says to themselves when they're dreaming though.

I don't recognize this room at all. Is that possible in a dream? I've always heard that you can't imagine a new face. Every face in a dream belongs to a real person, whether it be your best friend, or someone that you saw crossing the street today. But rooms are different. I mean, architects build entire buildings just from their own imagination. So I guess it doesn't matter that I don't recognize the room.

It's creepily white. Like, too white. The shape is a perfect square, or it looks like it anyways. It looks like the surface area might be 8x8 feet, relatively small anyways. I'm not going to take the time to measure out the length and width, it's too eerie in here for that. The floor, walls, ceiling, all featureless except for this white shine. There doesn't seem to be a source of light, yet everything is bright. Perhaps the ceiling has lights, but because everything is so bright and reflective, it just appears to be as bare as the floor I'm standing on. Yeah, that makes sense.

The light gets to be too much. I'm beginning to get a headache. I pinch the bridge of my nose, and squint my eyes, and when I open them, a door is in front of me. It's so white, had it not been for the reflection of the hinges and the handle I might have missed it. It's as if the room had heard my thoughts. Like it knew I wanted out... That's stupid though. How did it get in front of me? How could I have missed this? Maybe I got myself turned around? I don't remember actually checking the wall behind me. I occasionally walk into a room and forget what I've gone there for, I don't think it's much of a stretch to think that I've forgotten turning myself around in the midst of this headache. Nonetheless, I need out.

I reach for the handle, then step through the door. I shut it behind me and step into a hallway. It has to be a hallway to a high school. There's two rows of faded baby blue lockers, one on each side of the hall. There's a wooden chair

next to the door I've stepped out of. There's two wooden doors on the right side, one just a few steps away from me, the other dividing the lockers about halfway down the hall. There's one door of the same wood near the end of the hallway on the left side. There's one white door opposite of where I'm standing, all the way at the end of the hallway. The floor is tiled black and white, chess-like. When I was a kid, I used to hop from white tile to white tile, making it a rule that my feet couldn't touch the black. The ceiling was low, having the longer rectangular tiling that almost every school I had been in had. The lighting was a little dim in here, but I'd take that over the headache of the last room.

However, just to see a little better, I wanted to open up the door behind me to let more light through. I turn around and grab the knob and turned. Damn it. It locked behind me. Why would a door do that? I mean, not that it had the intentions of locking, but why would a door in a high school be designed to lock after coming inside a room? Now that I think of it, what is an empty white room doing in a high school? There's no way that I'm not dreaming.

Well, let's give this whole lucid dreaming thing a go. I stick my hand out, expecting a sword to appear. Why do I need a sword right now? Better question: Why don't I need a sword right now? This is my dream, I'll carry a sword if I want to.

After reasoning with myself that I totally need a sword right now, I concentrate really hard on conjuring one up. I squeeze my eyes shut and think really hard about it. I can feel a tension building. It's almost there. I snap my eyes open. Nothing. This is garbage. Lucid dreaming is a no. Guess I'm just riding this dream out.

I begin to walk down the hallway. The first wooden door is locked. I start walking towards the one in the middle of the hallway, but something is odd about my footsteps. Every couple of steps, the little sound my foot makes sounds like it's immediately succeeded by another sound. This could just be the dream. Dreams don't always make sense. But swords can't be conjured by man. Locked doors don't open. Bright lights cause headaches. This place still has rules. I whip my head back to see behind me. There is no one. It's beginning to get frustrating trying to make reason of an unreasonable place.

I try the middle door. No luck. Only two left, and with the pattern so far, I'm betting I'm going to have to go through that white door. Unless I'll be stuck in here for the rest of the dream. Did it just get darker? Maybe it's just my nerves. I'm almost to the end of the hall, ignoring the misleading double footsteps. I try the wooden door, just so I know that I've attempted all ways out, and then take a couple steps towards the white door. I open it and step through, but just before I'm out the door, I hear something that sounds like a person gasping. It's loud enough that it sounds fairly close behind me.

I slam the door shut. I pull and turn the knob just to make sure that it locks again, and it did. I turn towards the new room, close my eyes and lean into the door with my head tilted up. I breathe a sigh of relief, and open my eyes. It's the same freakin' hall. I must be the most unimaginative person on the planet

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if I can't think of more than two designs for a room.

But now, I really look at the hallway, it's not quite the same. Things seem...dirtier. It's like I left and came back to the same room after ten years of it not being touched. I take a couple of steps forward and try the first wooden door. Locked. Looks like another walk through.

I make it almost to the end, when I notice something else a little different. There's something leaking out of the bottom of the third locker from the end on the right side of the hall. It's dark, and thick. There's not a whole lot coming out. Not much more than a trickle. It's just barely seeping out of the seam between the bottom of the locker door, and the frame that holds it.

I'm just going to keep walking. This dream is one terrifying thing away from being a nightmare. I step through the next door, and before I can register what I see in front of me, the door slams behind me on its own, and this time I hear it lock. I jump a bit, but I can't turn myself away from what I see in front of me.

It's the same hallway again, no surprise there. But there's so much different. Dark red stains all over the walls and lockers. The ceiling tiles are disheveled. It's dark enough now that I can't quite see the end of the hall. I hear what sounds like someone dumping buckets of liquid onto the floor. About halfway down the hallway on the left side, there are thick, clawed scratches in the metal lockers. On the floor in front of me, there is the stains of deep red footprints leading under the first wooden door to my right. But they aren't shaped like human feet. There's three long ,clawed toes.

I'm trembling. The hair is standing up on the back of my neck, my heart is pumping hard enough that I can feel it slamming against my ribs. I've never been this terrified. Is there an end? If things are just going to continually get worse, I should just stay in here, right? Stop moving forward, if it's just a dream, it's only a matter of time until it's all over.

All of a sudden I hear the sound of someone running in the hallway behind me. They're running towards the door. The steps are getting louder and louder. They slam against the door, and I immediately start running down the hall. I'm almost at the end when I slip on something, and slide across the floor, ramming into the white door. Hard.

That locker, third from the end is no longer trickling. It's gushing. It's everywhere, all over the floor. I can barely manage to stand up. I struggle, but I clumsily grab the door handle, but this time, out of sheer curiosity, I keep my foot in the door before stepping away.

Same hallway. It's a little brighter. That's probably a good thing. I'll have time to examine it in a moment though. I look back into the hallway I stepped out of. It seems just a bit brighter in there, but I can just barely make out the start of the hallway.

There's a figure in front of the door. It's shaking. All of a sudden it's sprinting at me. Did it spot me? Panic is setting in. What do I do? The chair. I slam the door shut, and wedge the chair under the handle. I kick it as far under as it will go. This might work. But to be sure, I have to stay ahead of this

thing.

I turn to run to the white door, but I stop. The first wooden door is opened about half a foot. I hadn't noticed it when I first stepped into this hallway. Do I risk goi-

SLAM. It hit the door. I break into a run. I hear it bang against the door a little more. I can't think straight. All I can focus on is the white door. If I get there, I'll be okay. Just get to the white door.

I make it to the door, and frantically grab the handle, and I walk into the door, making a thud. It won't budge. But the handle turns a little bit. It's not locked, there's something blocking it from the other side. I slam into the door a few more times, but it won't work. I hear a door creak open from the start of the hallway, but I didn't hear the collapse of the chair. It has to be the wooden door.

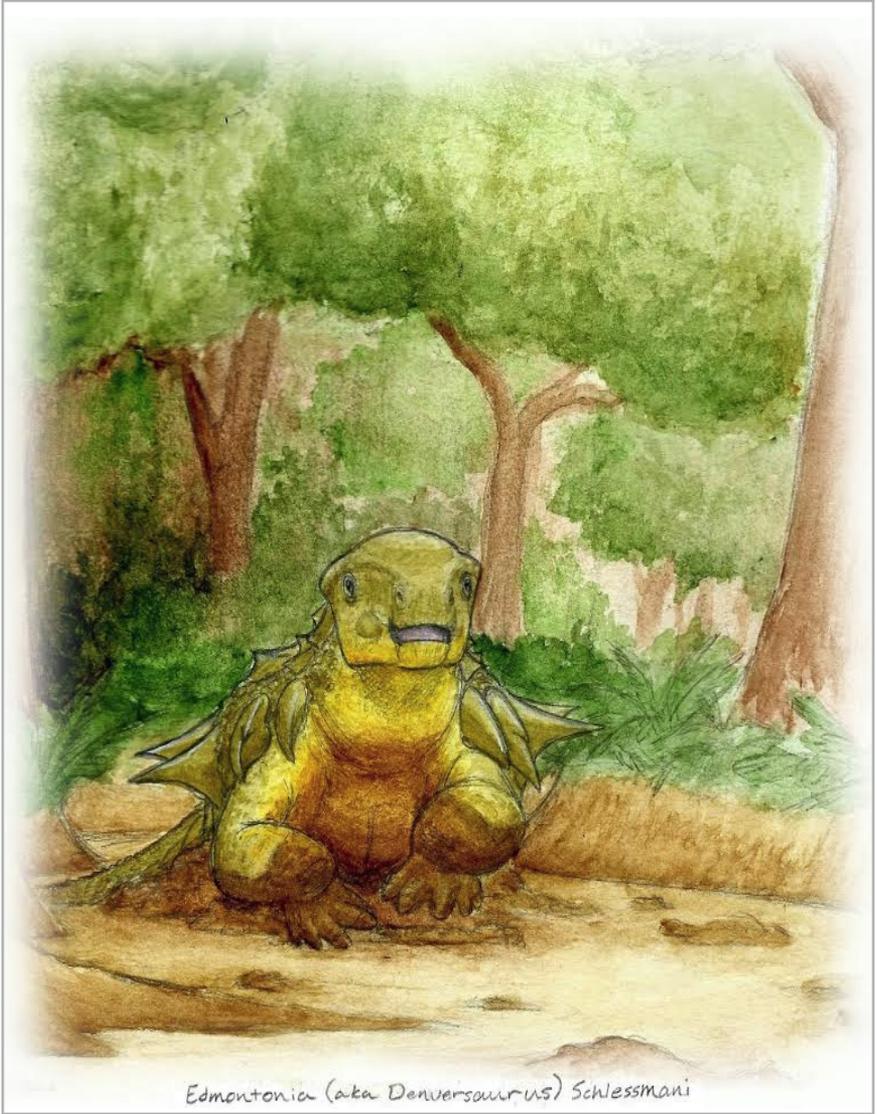
I turn to look at whatever opened the door, but the lights go out before I can see the intruder. It doesn't step, it stomps towards me. I hear something sharp dragging across the floor. I still can't really make it out, but it has long arms, and it's big. I can only deduce that the the sharp objects are it's claws. I hear it pierce the lockers next to it and drag it's claws down them and then drop it's hand back to it's side.

I'm in shock. I can't move. This thing has intentions. It's not just an animal. It knows what it wants. It's stepping closer now. It's within ten feet of me. It swiftly opens the third locker from the beginning of what is my left side now. It steps towards me and lifts it's claw. I can only hope I wake up soon. This has to be a nightmare. But everything seems so vivid and real. I guess that's what everyone says to themselves when they're dreaming though.

Dead Fish

It lies on the bank
ahead of the waves as
if it were a drum major
leading a band of marching water,
but its scales are missing
and its side has been devoured
so it looks like a hollow drum.
and it smells like the end
of an August carnival.
Only immature flies
dart over it
like children attacking
candy
thrown from a float.

- Mark Jordan



Edmontonia (aka Denversaurus) Schlessmani

Denversaurus in Mud Wallow

by Ryan Dewey

You Never Know What You've Got Until It's Gonzo

by Michael Jenkins

“Garbonzo? We’re ready for you.”

Garbonzo doesn’t answer. He just stares at the floor, avoiding eye contact.

“I can’t believe I’m about to watch my son’s first performance,” his father says, beginning to tear up with pride.

“Dad?” Garbonzo says, finally meeting his father’s gaze. He tries to speak, but his heart stops. He’s never seen his father this genuinely happy before. Finally, he forces the words out, “I don’t think I can go out there.”

“Ah, you’ve got stage fright. Don’t worry, son. It happens to the best of us.”

“No, I mean-“

“Besides, we’ve been practicing your routine for years. You’ve made a few mistakes, but that’s fine! The mistakes are what make your act unique.”

“Dad!” Garbonzo startles himself with the force behind his voice. “I mean . . . I don’t think I want to be a clown.”

“Hm . . .” His father says, thinking deeply for a moment. “Come on. Let’s try your routine at least once. If you don’t like it, we can find something else for you to do. There’s all kinds of opportunity in this world. Okay, son?”

“Okay,” Garbonzo says, suddenly trembling. “Will you walk me on-stage?”

“Of course,” his father says, tousling little Garbonzo’s brightly colored afro. “We can go up there together.”

His father walks right behind him, guiding him towards the back door. They edge around the backyard, Garbonzo staring straight into the crowd of guests the entire time. A young girl stares back at him, and Garbonzo suddenly looks away, gazing up at his father instead. All the guests begin to herd around

the stage. His father stands him behind the curtain, and approaches the crowd to begin his introduction.

Garbonzo can barely make out his father's words. No matter where he looks, the faces of the crowd have been burned into his mind. He can already hear their laughter. Not the appreciative laughter of a good audience, but the taunting laughter common to eight-year-olds everywhere. With every moment he stands on that stage, the realization becomes firmer in his mind: this is not his calling. This is not what he was meant to do with his life.

The curtain raises, and Garbonzo stands petrified. He doesn't even know how to excuse himself. Tears begin to blur the makeup around his eyes, and before he can burst out crying, he suddenly sprints back inside the house. His father stumbles over a hasty explanation of stage fright, and follows Garbonzo quickly. His father walks into the kitchen to see Garbonzo wrapped in his mother's arms.

"I guess we really need to work on that stage fright, huh?" His father says.

"Oh come on now, Gonzo. It's his eighth birthday party. Don't you think he deserves a break?" His mother says.

"Well, sure. Let's let him enjoy the party. We can pick up his training again after school tomorrow." His father answers.

"But . . . I don't want to keep training," Garbonzo protests. "I don't want to be a clown."

"How do you know that, though?" His father asks. "I told you, if you can give a performance, just once . . ." he sighs. "I don't want you to run away from our family's tradition without facing it first."

"Sweetie," His mother says, suddenly standing upright again, "It would mean a lot to your father if you could perform for him once. If you won't do it for yourself, do it for him."

Garbonzo stops, looking back towards the backyard. A sickening feeling of weakness rips through his gut, and he turns back to his parents. "I don't think I can do it."

His father sighs. "Just . . . just go have fun. We can talk about this later."

Garbonzo walks away from the kitchen, but not into the backyard. Instead, he leaves through the front door, away from the party. He can only barely hear his parents arguing before he closes the door behind him. He walks away from the house, sitting down on the edge of the nearby cliff. He leans back, staring up into the clouds.

The same girl he saw earlier approaches him, sitting down next to him. "Why didn't you come back to the party?" She asks.

"I don't know . . . I never really liked parties." Garbonzo says.

"Oh. I thought clowns like parties."

"I know. I don't think I want to be a clown." He says.

"So . . . what do you want to do?" She asks.

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Garbonzo stops, at a loss for words. Still lost in the vast sea of clouds, a passing flock of geese suddenly stirs something in him. “That,” He says, pointing at the group of birds. “I want to learn to fly.”

The girl laughs, “Yeah, we all wish we could fly.”

“No, I mean it. I’ll make it happen. I know it.” Garbonzo says, suddenly certain of himself for the first time in his life.

“That would be awesome,” the young girl says, “If you figure it out, you have to take me up there. At least once.”

“Okay.” Garbonzo says. “I’ll figure it out for you.”

“You should come back to the party,” the girl says, changing the subject. “We all came all the way out here to see you.” She stands up, walking back towards his house.

Garbonzo sits still for a moment, looking back up at the clouds. The wind billows in his oversized overalls, and rolls through his huge, rainbow hair. He stands up, and walks back into his house.

* * * * *

Garbonzo moves back into his seat. He scans the audience, and finds his mother and his wife of three years sitting in the stands nearby. His mother wipes a few tears from her eyes and gives him a proud smile. He stares down at the degree in his hand. He can’t believe that he made it all the way through Clown College. It feels like just a few days ago that he decided he was meant for a different fate, but if he could earn a degree here, clearly he must be doing something right. Still, he can’t find his father anywhere in the crowd. He knows that his father has been waiting for this day his entire life.

Garbonzo meets his mother and wife outside the auditorium about an hour later. His mother embraces him immediately. She whispers something about how proud she is, but it doesn’t really register in his mind. He’s too distracted by his father’s absence.

“Have you heard anything from Dad? I thought he’d be the first one here.” Garbonzo asks.

“I know. Your father has been looking forward to this day for a long time. I haven’t heard from him though. I’m sure his train was delayed, or he was held up somehow. He’ll be here soon.” His mother reassures him.

“I can’t believe you actually got that degree. I never would have been able to pull that off. I’m impressed.” His wife says. She holds their three-year-old daughter in one arm and embraces Garbonzo with the other, kissing him on his rosy cheek.

The three wait outside the college, hoping that Gonzo will show up soon. After nearly half an hour of waiting, Garbonzo is handed a telegram. He stares down at the paper, unable to process the words. Disbelief shocks his hands, dropping the yellow paper on the ground. His father’s train has derailed, killing fifteen people. Including his father.

His mother takes his hand, and tears begin to roll down poor Garbon-

zo's cheeks. She wraps her arms around him, and walks him back inside at the sound of thunder rolling in from the distance.

* * * * *

"Garbonzo! Will you come here please?" His wife shouts.

Garbonzo stares down at his work bench. His childhood dream of building a flying machine is one of the only things left in his life now, and he spends most of his time destroying one failed schematic after another. He manages to peel himself away from his work for a moment and walks into the kitchen. His wife is standing in the doorway wearing a heavy coat, and so is his daughter.

"What's all this? Where are we going in this weather?" Garbonzo asks.

"I . . . I'm leaving." His wife says quietly.

"Okay. But where are you going?" He asks again naively.

"No, I mean . . . I'm leaving you." She elaborates, barely above a whisper.

"What? You're . . . Why?" His voice cracks, barely masked by his utter shock.

"When we were kids, you were so focused on that flying dream of yours. But now . . . You've become obsessed. When was the last time you even left the house?" She asks.

"Kareguini, you have to understand. It helps me deal with my father's death." Garbonzo explains.

"That was five years ago!" His wife snaps. "You should have moved on by now! Or at the very least, learned to balance that time with working, or spending time with your family."

"Is . . . that was this is about? You think I've been neglecting you?" He asks.

"That's part of it, yes. And don't tell me that you can change. I've lived with you for years, this is just a part of who you are," she says. "I just can't put up with it anymore."

"And you're taking Sophie with you?" Garbonzo asks quietly.

"Yes. I . . . don't know if you'll see her again. I hate to separate you, but . . . she needs a parent. And you aren't fit for that role."

Garbonzo crouches down to hug his daughter for the last time. She keeps asking why her parents are splitting, whether she'll ever see him again, she wants to know if this is somehow her fault. But Garbonzo can only sputter an awkward goodbye, and watch them walk out the door into the rain.

* * * * *

Garbonzo stands not fifteen feet from the bare patch of mud that was once his childhood home. He stands perched on the edge of the cliff where he spent his school days daydreaming, staring at the earth far below. The news of his mother's death has wrecked him, and he can't even cry anymore. He's been bled dry, and feels like there's nothing left for him. Nothing left at all.

The heavy rain streaks his makeup down his face and onto his collar,

dampening his hair and leaving it a wet floppy mess dangling from the back of his head. He shakes out some rainwater that's been collecting in his gigantic overalls, and as he's about to let himself fall, something peculiar happens.

He stares up into the sky one last time, and sees a slight parting in the clouds. A single, faint ray of sunlight pokes through the gloom. He knows that this little coincidence changes nothing of his life. A single ray of light won't bring back his parents, or his wife, or his daughter. And yet, it feels too . . . perfectly timed. Too poetic. It's just too good of a story to pass up. He can't let it end like this. He steps back from the cliff, and the rain finally seems to let up. A gentle breeze ruffles his huge, billowing clothes, and he begins the long walk home an inspired man.

* * * * *

"You really think this will work?" Sophie asks.

"Of course it will." Garbonzo assures her, pushing the machine up the steep hill.

He had talked Kareguini into letting Sophie stay with him for the summer, and he intended to make the most of it. He had also finally managed to build a machine that he thought had a shot at flying, though building it had nearly bankrupted him, to say nothing of the incredible stress he endured in putting it together.

The two stop at the edge of the cliff. Garbonzo pauses to admire the garden that Sophie had started in the empty lot that replaced his childhood home. She stops to run her fingers through the soft, black earth, and looks up at her father. Though she never showed interest in being a clown, she still wears her nose and hair like her father. She walks him through all the flowers she had planted again, and they make their way back to his machine.

Garbonzo sits down in the pilot's seat. He stares up into the same shining blue sea flecked with clouds that he remembers from his youth, sighing deeply.

"We've got clear skies for the launch. Are you ready to see your old man fly?" Garbonzo asks.

"Go for it, Dad. I know you can do it." Sophie says, patting her hand on his shoulder.

Garbonzo pulls a lever, and the machine roars to life. He shoots off towards the edge of the cliff, and the earth pulls away from the machine's wheels. A deep horror catches in Garbonzo's throat as the machine rolls forward immediately and begins to plummet towards the earth. He pulls back on the controls as hard as he can, fighting to pull the aircraft up as hard as he can muster. He can feel his stomach nearly fall out from under him as the machine swoops upward, sending him soaring high into the sky.

Time seems to crawl by. Garbonzo finds himself laughing and crying at the same time. He zips high into the air, and feels that if he could just stretch his hand out a bit farther, he could run his fingers along the silky white sea of clouds

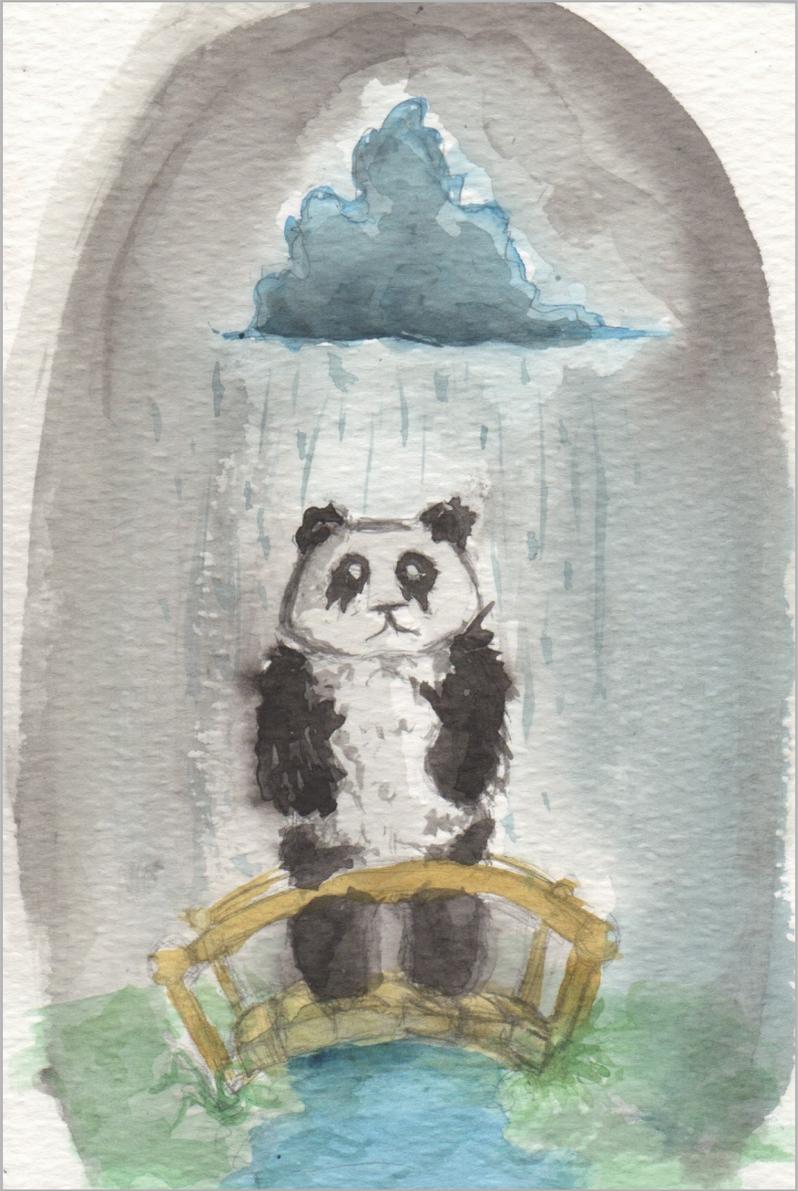
that he had always desperately longed for. Finally, he feels as though a part of him long missing has finally become complete.

Then, the machine rolls back farther. Garbonzo seems to have overcorrected, and the machine begins to fall back and rushes towards the earth again. There is a sudden, terrible crash, and Sophie stares down over the edge of cliff. She screams out for her dad, falling to her hands and knees. She can only see a tuft of brightly colored hair and a motionless arm sticking out of the huge pile of twisted metal. As the sound of sirens draws nearer, a big, rubbery red nose bounces away from the wreck, quietly coming to rest in a patch of grass a few feet away, the final punctuation mark that proves the old saying: “What goes up, must come down”.



Untitled

by Kiahana Krause



Untitled

by Bailee Tucker

The Lament of a Prisoner

The ache within my soul has turned to demented black
Oh, how I lament the torture of my heart's dull cry
If only the passing shadows would peer through their stained glass masquerade lie
To see how desperately fragile I've become, I cannot make this right
They cannot see past old wrongs and shames, only perceived is my knotted soul so twisted
Am I this far beyond redemption?

In the ancient gold throne I thought I belonged, it was my birth right
It was the sweet pleasure of my tongue to sprout forth lies
Few would stop my spiraling path; fewer still would ache to see me cry
Only one ever cared enough to embrace my shattered mind of black
The only one not so caught up in her own "self-redemption"
But gods and kings alike have fallen, like crumbling stones, and my heart, oh it is twisting

Oh, if only I could turn back time's never-ceasing turning and twisting
Perhaps if I'd never notioned two wrongs could conceive a right
Pages of books and flies on the wall are now all that hear my howling cries
My voice attacks all sides of my cell seeking to escape, yet it finds naught but blackness
But all is for naught and against the frozen white wall I lie
I resign myself to a life without hope of redemption

I close my eyes and let them peer at the emptiness that takes on shades of black
But my mind, despite my insistence, dreams of the eagle's flight that is redemption
Then I picture colors: beautiful blues, whimsical whites, and gleaming greens dashing left
and right
Imagination takes off before me: elegant dances, the laughter of friends, and no more tears
to cry
The scenes are magical to me, far off and enchanting, so I allow my mind its chance to lie
How I wish it were my reality, and that the truth were not so twisted

At last I stop my glorification of thrones, loves, self-pity; for the first time in near memory
I cry
My skin is blue, my eyes are red, and my soul seems a bit less black
I see the monster I've become through words and lies I've twisted
Bleakly the walls around me become sharp as I realize I am bound by where I lie
There among shadows is the acrid smell of longing to make my wrongs right
Oh but if someone would offer me redemption!

Then I hear the soft plodding of footsteps down the halls that turn and twist
I look up and see my half ruined cell where I've cast things left and right
Beyond the walls of glass stands a familiar, somber figure clad in black
Old tear stains trace lines down his face yet a strong façade is his best lie
He gets as near as sanity dares and offers me the chance of redemption
Though my heart is faint with joy I would rather scoff than cry

I do not wish to lie to myself but at last I feel the triumph of a battle cry
I smile and stand to right the wrongs and unbind the lies I've twisted
No more shall I be the black-hearted prisoner for at last I have received redemption

- Calista Kern-Lyons



Untitled

by Joan Bratt

Pine Forge and Mama

by Lenie Adolphson

Mama opened the door with eyes that glowed with pride and joy in her only girl graduating from the 8th grade with almost all A's, such a big deal, graduating from the almost all white school as a colored girl with a big butt and whose period started the first day of school who developed a major crush on Brad Sandino with the gorgeous green eyes. But, now I am in my purple painted bedroom with Mama. Mama was so proud with her orange pantsuit like a cantaloupe and curly afro and teeth gleaming, I knew Mama was happy and Mama's happiness was like the weather, I knew it was fleeting and subject to change at any time. Mama exclaimed, "Guess what Sugar, good news, since you are so smart and so bright, we cant have you In these ghetto ass public schools in Chicago, no, my brilliant baby is going to boarding school. I can't have you going to high school with these ghetto ass niggahs in Chicago. After your graduation party, we are going to go through the catalogs. Mama stood there like Moses bringing down the Tablets, like when Michael Jackson moonwalked for the first time, even when cool ass Obama walked across the stage with the kids and Michelle like yeah America here I am the head Nigguah in charge, that's how Mama looked, joyous, triumphant, my brilliance had provided her with a way out, a door marked exit. Suddenly, the orange pantsuit seemed like a prison uniform, suddenly the gleaming teeth looked like knives, the graduation party was my symbolic funeral, and I sat on my purple bedspread, and my purple walls and my purple rug and my purple dresser and smiled outside and screamed inside because in Mama's world you never screamed, you never frowned you said OK Mama.

Pine Farce Academy was a haven for the Middle and Upper class elite or to quote my grandma, the "Saditty" Negroes, yeah, Pine Farce would be a purgatory where I could show Mama that I was not her brilliant baby, I could show Mama, I am ordinary, I am unvarying, I belong with the ghetto ass nigguaahs, I am not your W.E.B DuBois, I won't be your Black Hope. No Mama, I will show you Mama, you can't win your freedom this easily. Dean Davis was a small brown

The Works

woman with the demeanor of a drill sergeant. Dean Davis showed me and mama my room. No purple bedspreads, no purple room, a white and blue bedspread donned the room with two drawers and a bible. Mama sped away in the taxi promising to call; Mama looked like an inmate finally released after 13 years of hard labor. Mama wore her pink pantsuit with her curly afro and her pink hat. Mama was so pretty and carefree; I wished I was mama getting in her taxi on her way back to ghetto ass Chicago. I hated Mama for leaving me with the “Saditty” Adventist. I screamed and cried and Dean Davis said hey stop that crap, you should be glad your mama loves you so much.

Two years later, Pine Farce ended in a blaze of failure, asked to leave, kicked out, flunked out, snapped out, ran out, and expelled, yea I showed Mama, I would not be her female academic dream child. Mama would have to wait almost thirty years and four kids later for that. No, I was just going to be me. Back in ghetto ass Chicago with Mama, in her palace of solitude I would proclaim my defiance of her banishment to Pine Farce. But, suddenly the city was colder and shrill, the days were short and Mama was callous with eyes of steel glowering disappointment with its twin engine of rage and words that pierced like needles. I stared at Stoney Island and Jeffery, and Hyde Park in the bosom of Schuyler’s room. Looking out the window while drinking Old English and smoking weed daily impulsively and suddenly Pine Farce was missed. Regrets were like ants that twisted and crawled on me daily. Dean Davis and the pretty light skinned twins now made so much sense. Their advice and counsel were like food to a hungry man that had starved to death. And now I wanted to be with Mama with her pink pantsuit and pink hat and curly afro again at Pine Forge watching her speed away in the cab with the smiling face with the drill sergeant.



Shadows Closing In

by Ryan Dewey

The Nervous Slytherin

Not so long ago in the hidden realm of allure, it would be frowned upon
A girl whose line is long and “pure”
Four colors divide
Hers was the powerful green of the forest surrounding
The house of the cunning, conniving, and keen

Snakes may hiss, but this girl cooed
Starry eyed for the one whose color was blue
Wisdom and learning was what his house sought
The boy’s whose line was new blood

The house of cunning & the house of the wise
As unusual as a phoenix who prefers ground to sky
The girl longed to ask but bravery fled her
As she’d plod along they’d say nêr a word
For she feared spatters of gossip down echoing halls

Two years sauntered by
And all that had changed other than seasons and probably age
Was the whisk of their quills as they sat side by side
Brewing their potions in the dank of the dungeons

And little by little she grew a bit braver
She would ask the boy whose color was blue
Maybe if she was lucky he’d feel the same too
So she hid herself away in the pitch black of night
Hiding away from the house of the green

She put a quill to a page
And scrawled down all things she’d so longed to say
With a flick of her wrist she finished and sighed
In secret she sent it and off the page flew

Nervous, twitching fingers and the twirling of hair
Typified her for a sun, moon, and a half
Then one foggy morn as they brewed potions again
She glanced side to side every moment or two

Her hands shook so bad
That her chopped up newt claws were powder in seconds
She was twitching so horrid that the professor one table over
Wondered if something was going horridly awry
Their potion bubbled and brewed over the flame

And finally in the waiting her earthy eyes met his like the sky
He bowed his dark head in the lightest of nods
And with his agreement came a long pause
Deafening silence between them and then...

SPLAT

BANG

CRASH

She'd exploded their potion at the shock of his "yes"

- Calista Kern-Lyons

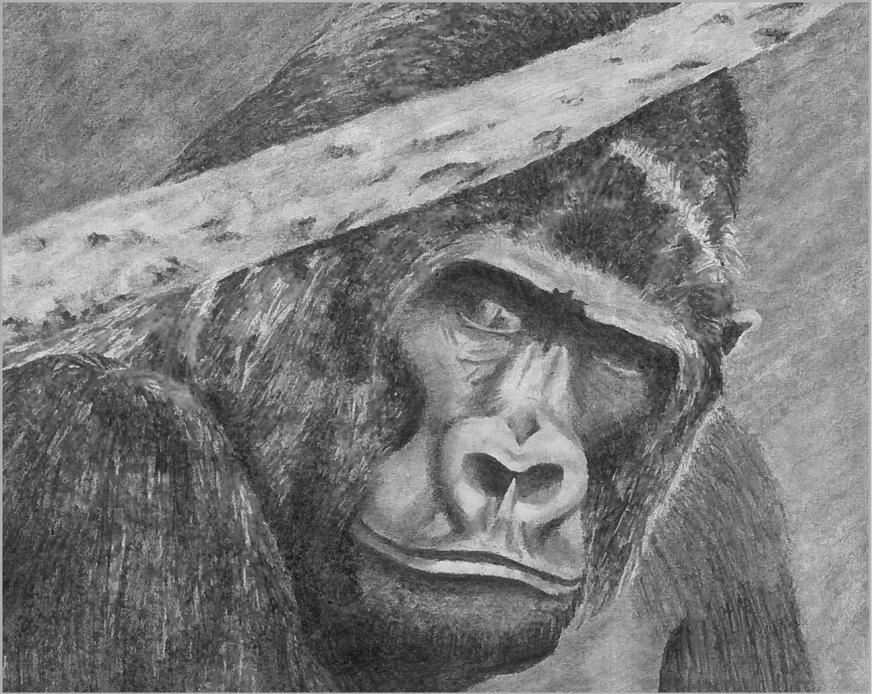
Poetry: Honorable Mention

Lessons on Zoology

Tigers have striped skin
beneath their fur.

And I wonder if I could
Peel away my flesh
And reveal my bones
To see if every curve of you
Every ridge and collapse
Was etched in the calcium
Of my skeleton
Or was it only burning on my flesh
For all to see.

- Reema Abdullah



Untitled

by Julie Bogusiewicz

Cow

π

They
fall
linear
and on
hitting
the earth
u n f u r l

like pancake dough spreading on a skillet
(I took a picture of this once and it looked
as if the cow were perched on an Alpenhorn)
(Sounded like one too)
(horns at both ends)

Circular
they dry,
Circular
they fertilize.

Where they have
fallen the grass grows
richer and the fields
become spotted; polka-dotted;
like a clown.

The circumference
divided by the diameter
may not always equal
3.141592653 + infinity,
not on all cow π 's,

though I bet if a study were done someone could devise a formula
relating consistency and height of fall to shape and length of spread.



Untitled

by Bailee Tucker

Steve the Criminal

by Tom Irish

Steve was looking at a plastic cap pistol. It was a bit banged up, but the sun glanced off the barrel and broke into blinding shards, making Steve blink. From the next table over, Jen said “Steve. They have undershirts. Don’t you need undershirts?”

Steve sighed, took one more look at the gun, and then circled the table to stand next to his wife. “Jen, I’m not going to wear someone else’s underwear.”

She huffed. “It’s not underwear, Steve, it’s T-shirts. How are T-shirts underwear?”

“Well I’m not wearing them. Gross.”

“Jesus. If you want to get all pissy with me, then I guess . . .”

Jen prattled on while, across the table, a woman in pink jeans and a flowered shirt looked up at them. Steve clamped his mouth shut for a second and forced a smile at her. Her expression didn’t change a bit, so he turned back to his wife. “Jen, there’re kids here. Don’t say ‘pissy’”

Her mouth dropped open, but Steve kept going before she could interrupt. “I’m just saying . . . look, that doesn’t matter. I’m just saying that I don’t want to buy used undershirts. There’s nothing gross about them for most people I guess. I mean, they wash them before they sell them, or we would when we get home. I just don’t like that idea, is all, so I’ll get some new ones tomorrow and they’re not that expensive new anyway.”

“Ok. You’re the one who’s always so about saving money. I’m going to keep going through the clothes then. I might wear some. I’ll just be a couple minutes. Ok?”

“Fine.” Steve turned away, then turned back. “Just none for me. Please?”

“Yeah, all right, I’m just looking at the women’s clothes from now on. Just fifteen more minutes. Maybe twenty.”

Steve turned again and wandered as slowly as he could make himself go across the yard to a table covered with cans of paint and cleaners and lubricants

of all kinds. A sign informed Steve that these products were “partially Used .25 ea please dont open can’s all Sales’ final.” The bottles and cans looked like they had been polished up, but Steve wondered how many contained crusty lumps of oxidized paint or had their spray nozzles clogged. This was, without a doubt, the worst garage sale he had ever been dragged to.

The woman in the pink pants was back. She pushed past him and snatched up a prize: a can of Spackle that looked almost new. Steve said “Hey, looks like you got a winner.” She gave him another dirty look, so Steve fled back across the yard and went back to wandering aimlessly, hands in his pockets, looking at nothing in particular. A couple of kids brushed by him but he barely noticed. He found himself back at the toy table. The cap pistol was still there, now lying on top of a stack of tattered children’s books. Suddenly, Steve knew that if he picked up the gun, it would be too heavy. It would fit his hand, and though he had never fired a pistol in his life, it would feel natural and easy. It wasn’t a cap gun that looked real; it was a real gun that looked a little bit fake, and someone had made an incredibly dangerous mistake when setting up the sale.

Slowly, self-consciously, Steve picked up the gun. He had been right; it was too heavy to be made of plastic and loaded with caps. Carefully, keeping his head to one side of barrel, he peered into the chambers that were visible on one side of the gun. He could see the points of bullets inside.

This kind of thing doesn’t happen every day, Steve thought, and he suddenly wondered why he never took advantage of opportunities like this. Up until now he had been the kind of person who would take the gun to the operator of the sale and turn it in, maybe with a vague threat of calling the police on which he’d never follow through. He had always thought that he was one of the vast majority of people who just drifted through life, obeying whatever forces shaped who they would be and how they would act. He had also assumed that there were a just a few select people who had the strength to withstand these forces, important people like Lincoln, Hitler, Jesus, Kim Kardashian. But standing there in the hot sun, seconds before taking the first step in his meteoric rise in the world of crime, Steve realized that he had been wrong. Those who can shape history do so not through any inborn virtue, but because the forces that make history demand it. Robbing a yard sale sounded monumentally stupid, like a dumb crooks spot on the local news. But this wasn’t that; this was one in a million, even one in a billion. Steve was going to be Butch Cassidy, John Dillinger, and Osama Bin Laden all rolled into one.

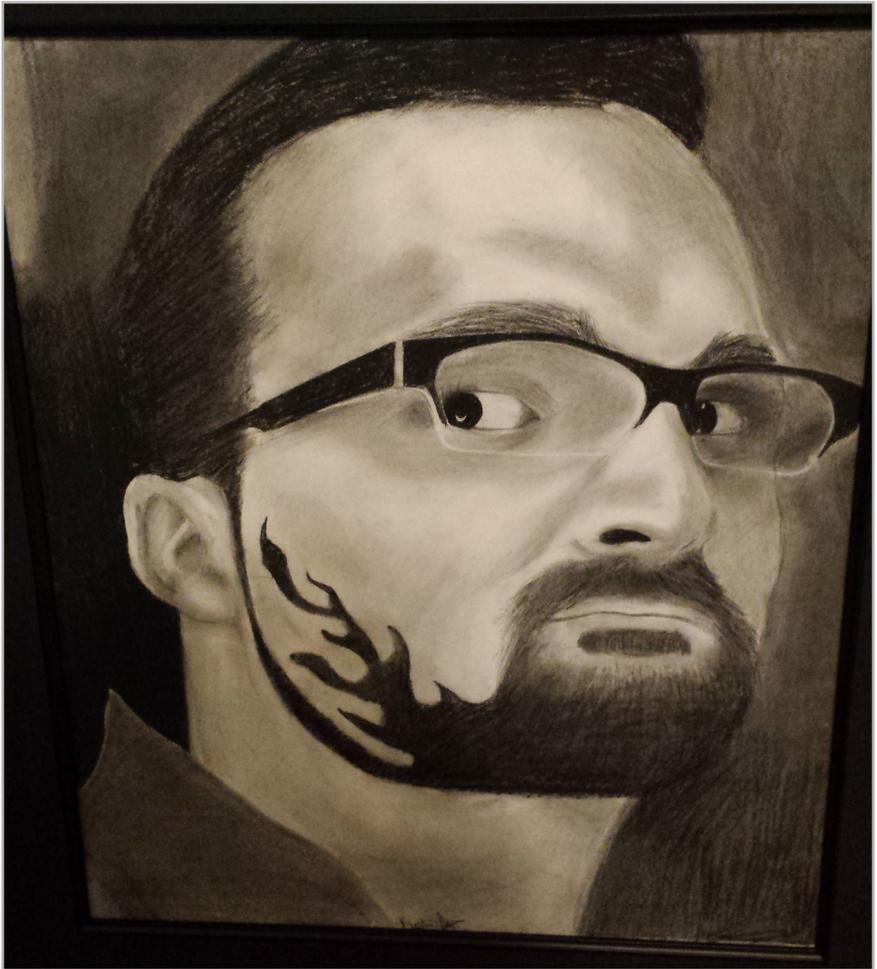
Just before Steve could step forward and point his gun at the skinny, pale woman who was running the sale, he saw something. Sticking out from underneath the hammer of the gun was a piece of flimsy paper. Slowly, tremblingly, Steve took the little tab between his thumb and forefinger and pulled. A long, narrow strip of paper issued from the innards of the gun. The strip was a bright, warning red, and down its middle was a line of regularly placed, circular bumps. It was a roll of caps.

For a second, Steve felt like crying. Then Jen was there, on the same side of the table where Steve was standing but down at the other end, saying “Look, honey! Two fifty!” and holding a pair of hideous, dangly earrings up to the lobes of her ears. Steve thought he could see a little clump of someone else’s earwax clinging to the setting of the left one.

He realized that his leg was moving. He was taking a step. His right hand was coming up, too, and before he knew what was happening he was pointing the toy gun at his wife’s face. As he felt his finger begin to tighten on the trigger, Steve could only feel a kind of dazed disbelief at what was happening. He didn’t want to shoot his wife, and even if he had, what good would come of doing it with a cap gun? The hammer of the gun clicked to its apex, and then fell.

And Steve realized that the gun was real, after all. The report was deafening, and Steve felt his arm jerk from the recoil. Jen shrieked and dropped to the lawn like a balloon full of ball bearings, and Steve could feel the eyes of everyone on the place cut towards him. He stood there like that for another second, legs apart and arm extended, feeling more like Brad Pitt than The Sundance Kid. Then he made himself turn and drop the cap gun back on the table where he had gotten it. “Sorry,” he said, addressing himself to everyone at the yard sale. “Sorry about that. Really sorry. Sorry.”

Then Jen was up. She came up even faster than she had dropped, and her mouth was open and words were coming out, but nothing got through to Steve. All he could do was look at the cheap, gaudy earrings that she had been holding a few seconds ago. One was lying by the leg of the table where Jen had fallen. It took him a while to find the other, but finally he saw it nestled in the grass almost fifteen feet away between the protruding roots of a large maple tree.



Untitled

by Kristin Street

Envy

The aura of her presence beamed with the envious color of green,
Visualizing the happy bride as an unwanted ball and chain.
Her eyes veered back to the groom, eager to lend a helping hand.
But once she noticed his big, beautiful, brown eyes so full of light,
Her shoulders slowly hunched as her body began to sink.
The heart beneath her sweat glistening chest slowly solidified to stone.

As the happy couple stood hand-in-hand surrounded by a gate of stone,
Her porcelain skin turned to a pale shade of green,
It was as if she were going to vomit; she needed a sink.
The only thought on her mind was to prevent their unbreakable chain.
Her eyes looked to the sky for an answer as she searched in the light.
The desperation she possessed was revealed in her trembling hands.

She needed a clever plan, like catching a fly in one's hand.
It had to be sneaky, no one must know, or she would be sentenced to death by
stone.
Then it came to her, just like a bulb of light;
She perfected the plan in her head as the guests were summoned over the hills of
green.
What she needed most was time before they were permanently chained.
As the guests were being ushered, one by one they sank.

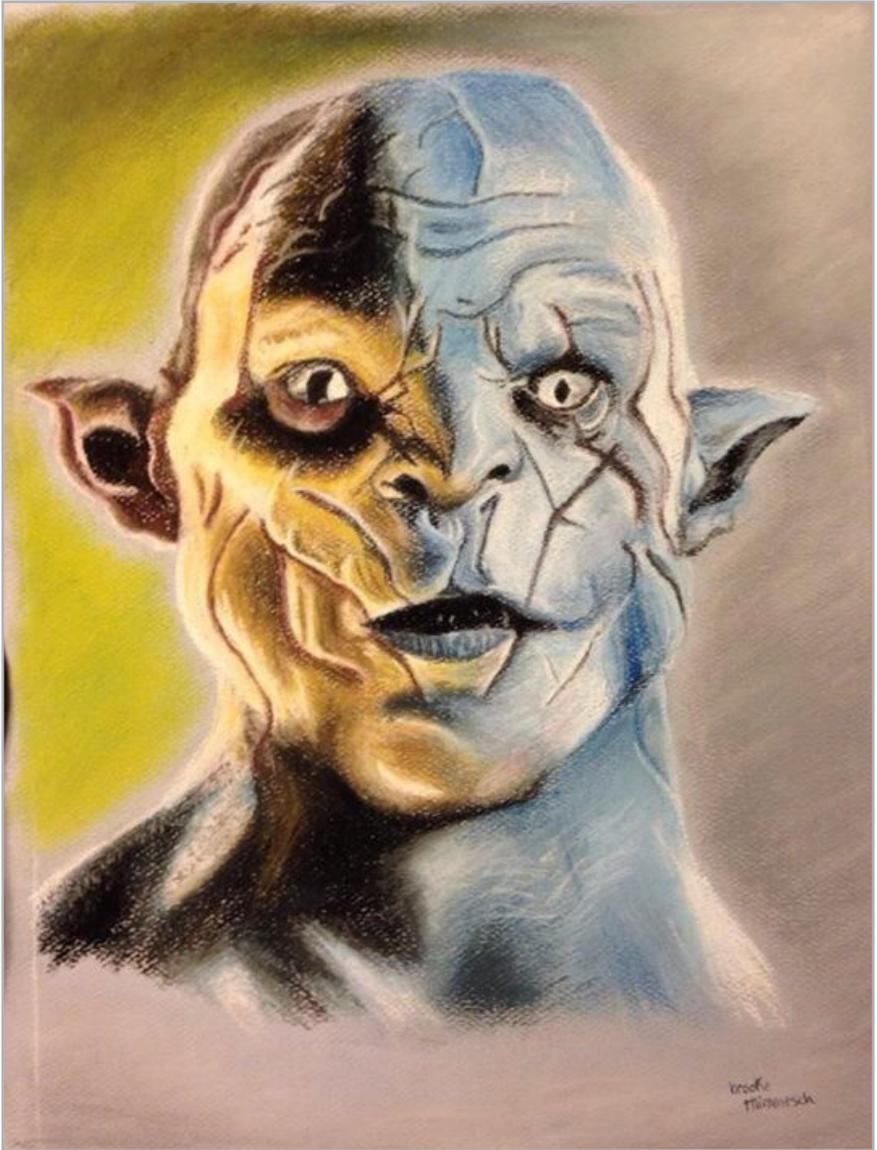
As the music started playing she thought to herself; "Man, I could really use that
sink."
The intentions behind her plan were solely to give herself a hand,
For she didn't mind being his ball and chain.
She'd be better than his bride, with her eyes like stone,
What was wrong with her eyes of green?
She was attracted to his like a moth to a light.

But finally she began to envision that light,
She was so confident that there was no need for her body to sink.
A devious smile took the place of her envious green,
For she had succeeded in the lending of a hand.
Looking at the couples faces held hard and still like stone,
A pillow swayed down the aisle cushioning their chains.

The white satin pillow got closer and closer, awaiting the arrival of chains.
The bride and groom illuminated under the light,
Standing upon a pedestal made of smooth, gray stone.
Everybody was standing now, no longer sunken,
A racing heart and trembling hands,
She knew her face was no longer green.

Before the chains had been delivered, in her head her eyes sank.
Dark came where there had been light, and there was no longer a need for a
helping hand.
The married couple had left the stone, it was too late. Tears appeared in her eyes
of green.

- Sydni Eilers



Untitled

by Brooke Thimmesch

Haunted

by Michael Jenkins

“Hey, Johnny. Guess what day it is.”

“Is it Halloween this time?” I ask, choking back some static.

“Not quite. Halloween’s Monday. But we’ve turned the house into a haunted house for the weekend. You feel like switching over to spooky mode?”

“Sure,” I answer, my eyes darting around the room. It takes a while for my vision to focus. I step forward once, trying to keep myself from falling over, but Seth has to catch me.

“Whoa, take it easy, killer. Give your systems a minute to boot up all the way.” He cautions.

“Yeah, sorry. I always forget about that,” I apologize.

“Don’t worry. It’s not something most people have to take into account.” He points out.

Seth paces around his basement impatiently while he waits for me to finish powering on. I can’t help but notice that he’s dressed from the neck down in some kind of animal suit with a bunch of wires and metal joints sticking out of it.

“So . . . what’s with the suit? You just feel like mocking me or something?” I ask.

“What? Oh, no. The theme of our haunted house is ‘robot animals.’ Figured it’d help you fit in a little better.”

“That makes sense,” I reply. It looks like he matched my appearance pretty well. I glance at a hall mirror to compare, and I immediately jump a little. Mirrors still freak me out. I can never see this face and think “Hey, that’s me!” I usually get a thought process more like “Jesus Christ, a killer robot! Kill it! Kill it with fire!”

Seth approaches me, and asks me to follow his finger around my field of view. After checking my vision, we do a few quick hearing, speech, and balance tests, and he gives me the okay to move around normally.

“We open in about an hour. You want to go upstairs and get settled in first?” He asks.

“Okay.” I answer, following him up the basement stairs into his living room. “Hey, Seth. Could you remind me again how you talked me into spending 99% of my time powered down in your basement?”

“Come on man, you know the story,” Seth begins, “I found you in a junkyard, and you managed to convince me that you used to be human. So, I let you come and live with me instead of just screaming and hitting you with a pipe until you stopped moving.”

“Yeah, I know all that. I can even buy that I can only leave the basement on Halloween. Even I get freaked out by this body.” I point out, gesturing at some partially exposed machinery. “I’m just asking why you only turn me on for system checks every month.”

A terrified shriek cuts Seth off before he can answer. His girlfriend, Lily, had been washing the dishes, and didn’t notice us stepping into the kitchen doorway.

“Seth! What the hell is that thing doing up here?” She asks.

“Come on, honey. I already talked to you about this. Why do you think I wanted to do this haunted house this year?” Seth explains.

“Yeah, I know. I just thought you were going to keep it in the basement,” Lily explains. She leans in close to Seth, and I can just barely hear her whisper, “You know that thing freaks me out.” She stares at me out of the corner of her eye, and I just smile politely and gently wave at her.

“Give him a break, Lily. He spends all of his time locked up in the basement. I feel bad that I have to keep him stuck down there all the time.”

“Yeah, but-”

“Besides, you’re not freaked out by my costume. We’re wearing almost the same thing.” Seth challenges.

“Because I know you’re just a guy in a suit.” Lily counters.

“Yeah? So is he. Only difference is, he doesn’t get to take the suit off when Halloween’s over.” Seth points out. “Come on, Johnny. Let’s get you familiar with the layout here.”

“Sorry I scared you, Lily.” I say as politely as I can, and follow behind Seth.

“It’s fine . . .” she says, turning back to finish the dishes.

Seth shows me around the haunted half of his haunted house. He’s set the place up like an abandoned T.V. studio, going for a sort of a “possessed Sesame Street puppets” vibe. There’s all sorts of broken T.V. cameras made of cardboard, fake sets, wires strewn about everywhere, props and costumes lying around in piles, coloring book pages scattered around, and some fake blood splashed around some corners.

“This is . . . really disturbing.” I say, glancing around.

“Thanks,” Seth says, bubbling with pride. “Took me forever to set it all up. Once people start showing up, you can start stomping around, twitch uncontrollably, make creepy static noises, and scream like a demon with its hand

caught in a garbage disposal.”

“This is awesome. I actually wanted to work at a haunted house once. It sounded like fun.”

“Yeah, I know. You told me that already. Where do you think I got the idea to put all this together?” Seth says, smiling.

“You slick little . . . I don’t even know what to say.”

“Don’t worry about that too much. I owe you one for not taking you out more,” Seth apologizes. “And I’ll tell you what. If the haunted house goes over well and you have a good time, we can make this a regular thing. If not, we can just go out and frolic with everybody else next Halloween.”

We sit in his garage and talk about a bunch of meaningless nonsense for a while until the haunted house is ready to open. First, Lily shows a bunch of people around like a tour guide, then most of the lights go out and me and Seth spring into action. On the first night, we’re mostly straightforward. Hiding around corners, jumping out and shouting at people, laughing menacingly. You know, typical haunted house stuff. I feel like it goes over pretty well, but I think we can do better.

The second night, we get a little more . . . creative. We keep some of the straightforward, spooky stuff, and mix in some dramatic tip-toeing around like cartoon characters, menacingly whispering awful puns in the darkness, and just generally pulling together a bunch of stupid gags. I hide in a broom closet and waited for somebody to open the door so I could get embarrassed that I was caught trying to smoke a roll of paper towels, while Seth sits down on a toilet while in costume, reading a newspaper and getting all scared when somebody walks in on him. Near the end of the night, we stand motionless in one room until Seth shouts “cut that shit loose!” and we start dancing furiously at the guests. Nobody can quite figure out what hell is going on, but everybody really seems to enjoy it.

The last night goes great too. I’m getting pretty good at this. Most of the night is pretty much the same, but highlight of my night comes near the end, when I chase somebody into a dressing room and make a big deal out of opening the door slowly and dramatically. He sits there in the corner, not even trying to hide from me, and I approach him slowly. Finally, I stop a few feet away and say, “Oh, come on! You’re not even trying! You didn’t think to hide under the bed or in a closet? Not even going to throw a towel over your head? Man, screw this. I’m out.”

I walk out of the room mumbling something about him not being any fun, and leave him sitting there confused for a few seconds. I suddenly throw open the door again, and he screams in shock. Again, I berate him, “What? Why are you still there?! Okay, let’s try this one more time. If you’re still sitting there doing nothing again, I’ll cut you.” I make a threatening stabbing motion with my index finger, then close the door and just walk away. It’s a win-win situation for me. Either he tries to run away and I don’t have to come back to an empty room,

or he just sits there crying in anticipation for the rest of night.

After the last of the guests leave, Seth and Lily start packing everything up. Things went well enough that Seth figures we'll get to do another one next year. As we start putting things away, Lily approaches me.

"So, did you notice that cute girl following you around?" she asks. "I think she likes you."

"I think I know which one you're talking about. And if anything, she likes the guy she assumes is wearing this costume," I say.

"I think you should still talk to her," Lily advises. "She seemed really nice."

"I have no idea who she is or whether I'll ever see her again."

"We'll see her again," Seth says. "Once we set up the haunted house again, she'll come running back to see you."

"We won't even have to wait until next year. There's no law that says you can't have a haunted house open the day after Halloween." Lily offers.

"Hell yeah!" Seth shouts excitedly. "Let's start unpacking stuff again. I want to freak some more people out!"

"Okay. I guess it beats sitting in the basement for a month," I admit.

"I'll admit, I'm actually having some fun with this too," Lily says. "Maybe we should open a bit earlier next year."

"Yeah. I'd love to expand the haunted section a bit. Maybe get some of my friends over to dance around in robot suits with us." Seth suggests.

"It'll even keep Johnny from being stuck down in the basement for so long, and let him spend some time with his new girlfriend." Lily says.

"She's not my girlfriend yet," I point out. "And if I did get a girlfriend, how would we explain to her that I can only see her around Halloween?"

"Tell her that you can't leave the house except on Halloween because you're trapped in a robot body?" Seth asks.

"I can't see that working."

"Hey, you don't know for sure. Besides, some chicks dig robots. It'll all work out fine," he assures me.

"I don't know . . . I guess we'll see," I say. "If I see her, I'll talk to her."

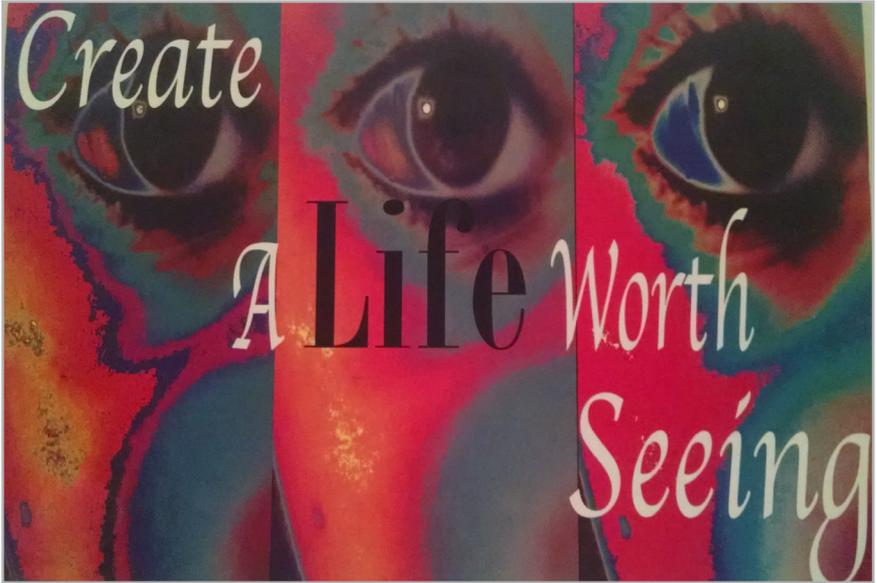
"I think everything will work out well too," Lily says. "Now, it's getting pretty late. We should get you into sleep mode or whatever so you don't have to stay up all night waiting for us to get up."

"We'll talk some more tomorrow, Johnny." Seth says, pressing a button in the back of my neck and helping me sit down in the corner. My vision starts to go blurry, and I can feel myself going limp before I black out completely.

The Weaker Me

This poem is dedicated to the weaker me
It was because of you that I was able to be
So when you feel you can't go on
Remember I'm in this with you for the long haul
And when you begin to break down and cry
Slow down, breathe, and ask yourself why
When you feel your hands and feet are tied and you're drowning
Remember that in your heart I am pounding
If loneliness surrounds you and become your only friend
Realize that I am with you till the end
Always have faith in yourself and trust your intuition
I'm the voice cheering you on, your deep inner wisdom
So let's do it again, like we've done so many times before
It's okay I'm here to help, let's turn the tables once more
We'll take all that hurt and bury it six feet under
And never wake that demon from it's slumber
This poem is from the stronger me
Because of you I can clearly see
Without each other we would cease to be
Together we'll stand strong for eternity

- Victoria Gonzalez



Untitled

by Allison Martinez

I'm Next

by Greg Smith

Francis shook his arms and rotated his neck as he waited in line for the summer camp's swimming test that would determine which class to place each camper. Part of him wanted to run away and call mom for a ride home. Pride wouldn't let him.

"I know they're going to laugh," Francis thought as he watched the first boy in line jump into the deepest part of the pool and began to swim to the shallow end.

"Hey Franny, which stroke are ya going to use," chided Craig, the camp bully and latest in a long line of Francis' tormentors.

"Just worry about yourself," the lifeguard told Craig. "Next!"

The ten boys in front of him each took a step forward as the next boy jumped feet first into pool's deep end. Francis let-out a low groan while watching the blond headed kid pop back to the surface and start swimming toward the other end.

"Next!"

Maybe the next one will need to be fished out, Francis hoped. Or maybe someone will refuse to jump. Maybe the test will be cancelled.

"Next!"

Francis saw Craig had gathered a few of his friends outside the pool's fence. They were chuckling and pointing.

"Next!"

Splash! Another boy jumped in and started toward the other end. Everyone moved up one step... except Francis.

"Next!"

Again, Francis found he couldn't move. Then he saw the lifeguard was starting to notice. With his head down, Francis slowly shuffled forward. Maybe I'll drown and won't have to deal with Craig. I wonder if they'd believe me if I said I was allergic to chlorine? I could fake a stomach cramp or puke.

"Next!"

The Works

Only three boys remained in front of him waiting their turn to pass the test.

“Next!”

Sweat began to bead on his back and dribble down his spin while he silently prayed for the next boy to somehow fail.

“Next!”

Francis could see the guard staring at him, the last boy in line. Soon the whole world would know he had lied about being on the swim team.

“Next!”

As the last boy in front of him splashed his way down the pool, Francis knew the next “next” was his. This was it. He closed his eyes and waited to hear the dreaded word – but he heard nothing... silence.

Tears and sweat distorted his face as Francis looked up at the lifeguard. The man smiled.

“Hey, it’s okay if you can’t swim. You’re not the first. I didn’t know how until I was about your age.”

“Don’t I at least have to jump?”

The lifeguard grinned.

“Only if you want to. Whether you do or not, I expect to see you at swim lessons tomorrow. ”

“But I have to do it.”

Fear of being laughed at overcame Francis’ fear of drowning as he plunged in head first. Water filled his mouth as he tried to breathe. He found he could move just a little by frantically kicking his legs and waving his arms. His struggles stopped as soon as he felt the side of the pool.

“Okay, get out,” the lifeguard ordered.

Francis did as he was told. Craig and his friends were gone.

“Nice try, but I’m still putting you in the beginners group, with Craig.”



The Hollow Crown

by Calista Kern-Lyons



Untitled

by Allison Martinez

Paperclip

The seed lies within the soil of my palm,
coiled--It waits for my radiant fingers to

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flowerless- the radiance is its silver spin
when my thumb and neighbor rub
believing they are the wind.

- Mark Jordan

Oh Ageless Sage

Oh ageless sage, profess to all,
Deny it just the same.
Tell contradictions of our birth,
But wisdom still proclaim.
From lips and hands,
Stories of lands,
Of all that's lost and gained.
You take no side in war and peace,
We've, by you, both obtained.
With every faith and creed you've toiled,
Expressed their every mind.
To none and all of them stayed loyal,
Embrace you every kind.
To desecrate or bless the page,
You, a preference cannot find.
From your offence much blood hath boiled.
Peasants and refined.
Known for all names, and by a few.
Your presents write the present.
We conjure thoughts, and conjure you do
Expression most bitter and pleasant.
With tongue and lung, finger, and thumb,
Your presence proves incessant.
And though less friend to mute and dumb,
All revel, yet, in your essence.

From dawn of man to current stand,
You've birthed ten thousand times.
As many times as births you've had,
As many you have died.
Though live you do, and die you can,
Your eulogies are lies.
Forever where there gather men,
Your voice is recognized.

And who be you, beloved sage,
About whose life I tell?
Our eldest fathers gave you reign,
Though muddled you as well.
You drove the hearts of every man,
Who famed you as they fell.
Whose last words spoke of peace and pain,
Of heavens and of Hell.
To whose great vastness, do we owe all
Of credit and of blame?
For spreading forth all knowledge, art,
Confusion, truth, and shame.
So, to whom do we give such honor?
Who validates this claim?
Who was born first to our first fathers?
Language be thy name.

Ageless Sage.

- Kyle McWethy



Untitled

by Kristin Street

The Return to Four Senses

by Tom Padilla

As you all know, humankind has five senses. Five senses are needed, it was deemed, for the individual human to make a way through this world. But one dark day many years ago in a third week of November the word came down from on high that five senses had proved too many, proved constant distractions to humans everywhere from the basic goal of life on earth. Humans must lose one sense. The good news, it turned out, was that humanity got to make the decision themselves as to which sense of the five would be jettisoned from *Homo sapiens*. So the argument began immediately, and carried every conversation and every effort of communication from the smallest mind to the broadest genius. Children in the playground and presidents and chancellors at great summits gave their opinions. Families squabbled, sisters left off speaking to each other, husbands and wives felt no joy at Thanksgiving that year, for every house was rent by the incalculable choice before humanity.

The first groups to form of course were groups in support of keeping a given sense.

The Eyes spoke eloquently of the need to see, of the brilliance of sunsets and the evocations of dawns, of the paintings of Velazquez and Titian, of the vistas of Machu Picchu, of the firmament and the billion stars that for centuries had conjured humanity toward higher thoughts and higher planes, of the beauty of the human form, of the White Cliffs of Dover and Emperor Q'uin's terra cotta warriors, the first smile of a child, the last look of a dying man, the kinetic chemical reality of love at first sight, and proposed that vision must remain.

The Noses spoke of the fourth stanza of Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and felt their argument won. When pressed, they would point out that people who lose the sense of smell most often lose also the sense of taste, and ask that it be considered that losing the olfactory sense would be as good as losing two for one.

The Tactiles suggested quite correctly that without feeling, the world and all its goodness would be lost to humanity. The soft caresses of a mother, the warm

embrace of a friend, the hot passion of a lover's kiss, the dexterity of a surgeon, the master stroke of the painter and sculptor, the finesse of the Paganinis all demanded the retention of the sense of touch. But didn't even something as simple as walking also demand the ability to feel? And weren't all senses the sense of touch? Perhaps humanity would be truly adrift in the maelstrom and void of all sensory perception if they lost tactility.

The Tongues felt that the loss of flavor through the taste buds would surely signal the end to sanity in our world. Most of the Tongues spent their argumentative moments simply stuffing a favorite dish into the mouth of anyone who would argue eye, nose, finger or ear over tongue. Candied cakes, tortillas with frijoles, buttered rum, buttered lobster, buttered bread, steak and mushrooms, onions and liver, the orange for God's sake, all became weapons of the Tongues, missiles intended to remind instantly that without taste life is flat, that salt was a basic inherent unalienable good. Sometimes the comestible argument was accompanied by logic and rhetoric of one kind or another. Tongues, while not always listened to, were eagerly awaited by all their opponent friends whenever the argument was reopened.

The Ears simply asked if anyone would really be convinced eventually by stuffing food in mouths or even by logos/pathos/ethos arguments written on paper. Listen, they said, to the sound of my voice. Pause in this silence I provide you to find the very sounds of your mother's voice, the sound of your father's stentorian call across the fields home from play. If you are standing next to your mother or if your father is dead, you can hear them just the same, as once heard the impression on our minds is so profound. Listen right now, the Ears spoke, to your favorite song, symphony, poem, soliloquy, monologue, speech or recitation. You can still hear the timbre of the speaker or singer ringing in your ears. Imagine, they said, imagine if from this day forward all of human history was silenced. No dreams from the mountaintop, and not four score and seven years will erase the memory of what we once had. Music alone seemed to carry the day for most people, and for those who were not moved pillow talk and secrets whispered in a lover's ear were more than enough, it seemed, to save the aural capacity for humanity.

Soon the arguments became more pointed and more desperate. What was needed, it was determined, was not which sense we must save, but which sense must go. And so the factions slowly changed from pro-sense to anti-sense; that is, people turned from vociferous support of Eye or Ear to clangorous opposition to Tongue, Touch or Smell.

Eventually, after several wars and not a little bit of diplomacy, a decision was made. A representative from each of the five factions would attend a summit and argue for his or her favored, or in this case, dispensable, sense. These five were an odd amalgam of the unknown of the nations of the world. They gathered in a fashionable salon in Oslo and were to live together, eat together, be together and have no free time of their own until the choice of which sense to eliminate from

human perception was finalized. All the governments of all the sovereign states of the world agreed to abide by the decision.

After three weeks of arguments, symposiums and harangues, the proposal was tabled by the five representatives to have an experience world created, in which the inhabitants, the five commissioners, would for a determined period of time live without a given sense. In doing so, the commission felt, they would each know better the reality of living without said sense, and thus be able to make the most informed decision for all humanity for all times. At this juncture word again came from on high that the decision, whatever it was to be, had to be made soon, and so instead of spending the week without each sense that the original plan required, the five were now to spend a day without each sense. After only two days, sightless and soundless, the committee's touchless day was interrupted by the demand from on high for the choice now. Heated conversation left little room for conscientious reason, and so the loudest shouters won out. Taste was the choice, and before the messenger had even left the room the five there and all humans everywhere began feeling a weird sensation in their mouths. And overnight the sense of taste was gone.

Their decision immediately hailed as a success, the five agents of the senses came back to the real world from their Oslo retreat and were displayed everywhere as saviors of society and sent on world-wide celebratory tour so humankind could laud the wise choosers of the dispensable sense. Champagne and cake were the constant centerpieces of these fetes, but no one sipped much bubbly and no one licked the frosting off their forks. Instead they smelt of the glasses empty and full; they dabbed their fingers in and through the cake itself as if looking for a golden ring lost in the sand; they placed their ears up close to the rim of the flutes to hear the thousands of bubbles exploding against the liquid amber. They devoured the cakes and spirits with their eyes, tasting and again tasting and yet, horribly, not tasting the sweetness of the iced flowers, the light delicate buzz of the alcohol, the incandescent melting of the sugared green mints that looked like tiny leaves. And more often than not, the dozens, hundreds, thousands of people who came smiling and cheering to these galas went away somber and in an ugly mood. The sun looked sweet in the sky and felt warm on the shoulders of the throngs, the sound of the larks and swifts in the trees was pleasing, sometimes magical, the smell of the ocean's salt breeze or the gardenias in the park brought brief smiles instantly, but soon enough the clamor arose.

People around the world had stopped eating. They had stopped cooking big meals, they stopped power-lunching, they stopped swinging through the golden arches for a quick burger, and they stopped sneaking down to the kitchen for the midnight morsel. They had stopped conspicuous consumption of every kind. Alcohol sales plummeted. Groceries stores and food wholesalers soon closed up shop. People were eating roots from their yard for their sustenance. In countries where obesity was a problem, the affluent took to saline drips for their basic nutrition, taking calories from intravenous needles and tubes connected to

pouches of colorless liquid. Less moneyed peoples in these lands became svelte and then emaciated overnight. And in countries where obesity was a daydream, death tolls were staggering. Without the sense of taste, it seems all humanity had lost the basic urge to consume. Mothers were not feeding their children, fathers forgot about providing the sustenance their progeny required, grandmothers stopped baking cookies. Soon enough the word was sent up the line. A mistake had been made. Humanity wanted another chance. Humanity wanted to taste again.

Word came down from on high that reflected the displeasure felt with humanity's cheeky request. But we were to be given one more chance. And of course as the story is well known, it takes no time to repeat the facts. Every time humanity chose another sense to forsake, they soon found they could not live without it. The Noses were proven correct---as smell was the next sense forsaken, humanity found that most people could not taste what they could not smell. The clamor was made, the request sent up the line, the choice given again. The loss of touch proved an immediate disaster that was unmitigated in any way, and many people were surprised to hear that one of the most profound positives of the sense of hearing was its basic role as a warning system. And of course, though humans lasted far longer blind than they did with any other sense, they soon found the trial too tough, the way too narrow without the blessed use of their eyes. And so soon enough we as a species were right back where we were started, with the need to jettison a sense and no clue as to which one would be least sorely missed when gone forever from human sensory perception. Finally the choice was made; the decision was to be held in the form of a lottery drawing. The five senses would be written each on a different piece of parchment which would be rolled into tiny scrolls and placed in a hat, and one human chosen at random from all living beings on the planet at the time would draw the lost sense from the hat, leaving the other four intact forever for humanity to revel in and enjoy. Humanity assembled on a broken plain that august morning when the sense to be lost forever to evolution was to be drawn from the scrawny straw hat which held the five miniature scrolls; if not physically present, humanity watched the flickering screens of electronic devices the world around. Breaths were held; despair was mounting. A wave of self-inflicted deaths troubled the East. The Golden Gate Bridge became the site of a proposed mass suicide of Eyes who were going to jump, despite the presence of armed authorities trying to prevent the tragedy, if Sight was the sense chosen. The whole world seemed ready to tremble in dismay. The Delegate chosen from all the peoples of the world to draw from the hat approached the podium. This was really going to happen.

And then the small voice was heard. It came from nowhere, but clearly it came from somewhere. Later opinions held that the voice spoke clearly yet softly; some said in Arabic, some in Russian, some say the words spoken came in English, some said French, some said Latin and one strain of legend holds that it was Aramaic. No one knows; the knowledge has been lost in the dust of time. What has been remembered is what the voice said.

It began by asking if humans did not have five senses but truly six. It wondered if, besides sight, sound, taste, touch and hearing, the common sense might be put on the block. The voice held that the decree held that humans must lose a sense did not actually tally the number of senses from which the murdered sense must be chosen, and it argued calmly yet vociferously that all humans truly claim the sixth sense, the common sense, as they do all the others at birth. No real use can be made of any of the senses until the human infant develops slowly, the voice argued, and the common sense developed as did the others. As the eye becomes more aware of what it sees and the ear discerns the difference in sounds and eventually the tongue knows what is good and what is lethal most often and touch develops not only tactility but facility of some kind and the nose grows to understand that which it smells, the common sense grows too and is rounded and sharpened by days and weeks and months and years of human life. The voice offered that common sense be added to the scroll of senses in the hat.

By the time the voice stopped speaking, the hat no longer existed, nor did the scrolls it contained. Humanity had chosen. Parades began in the streets, children cried, mothers screamed for joy, fathers and lovers and sons and friends, cousins and acquaintances and people who knew not each other all saw eye to eye in that moment. The vote was not even considered. No word had to go up the line. The choice was made.

From that day to this, and until the sun cannot shine and the sons and daughters of humanity have disappeared from this universe, humans have not had and will never again have the acute reality called the common sense. We act without regard for ourselves and others, we live without the ability to consider the ramifications of our decisions, we elect leaders and select this weekend's cinematic fare, we wage war and we sue for peace, we climb into heavy metal tubes and soar through heights that froze Icarus, we marry and raise children and praise our gods in our pews and temples and on our mats, we live and die happy without the ability to understand the basic qualities and quantities of our natural world and our place among them. And we all lived happily ever after.



Loving Memory

by Nina Dulabaum

The Observations of an Island

The river flows along so smooth
Yielding to the boat, lapping its sides
The boat drifts further down the Spoon
Not stopping at the island, the boat decides.

A meal is the fish's only desire
it cannot jump any higher
But wait! What's this?
A shiny that tempts the fish

Out of the water, into the air
The fish nabs the hanging shiny
Caught on the shiny, he just hangs there
Out its mouth, something spiny

Ducks splashing into the Spoon,
looking towards their newfound home
they waddle up the shore so soon
eager to rest their bones

Before they rest
They must dive on their quest
Finding food, finding fish
a filled gut, their wish

The sun begins to set
It hides away from the bar
An end to the beauty that was set
Just off of the island's shore

- Joey Janke



Untitled

by Bonnie Grace

All or Nothing

by Greg Smith

Each chip in the center of the table represented \$50. I had played for the past seven hours without a break to reach this point. All the money my grandfather had given me to pay for college either sat neatly stacked next to my right elbow or was already in the pot.

"Your call," Levi snarled as he attempted to intimidate me by staring directly into my eyes from across the blue-green felt covered table. "Are you in or out?"

A smile crept across my face as I thought about how my grandfather would react if he could see me. I was betting money he had won at a poker game a week before he died of a heart attack. Would like to think he would approve of the way I was going to take what he gave me and turn it into an even bigger college fund.

Levi thumped his knuckles on the table to get my attention. I just smiled.

"We don't have all night kid," Levi growled.

The game is Texas Hold'em. Each player is dealt two cards at the start of the game. Five cards, which all players can use to create a poker hand, are laid on the table one at a time. After each card is placed, players can bet, pass or fold. Players may not know if they have a good hand until the last card has been placed.

"Just a second," I said, staring right back at him while wondering if the sun had come up yet.

After a night of watching my chip pile shrink and grow, I was about to do something I felt my grandfather would appreciate. He taught me everything he knew about the game.

"All in," I said, putting on my best poker face while pushing the last of my college fund on top of the already large stack in the middle of the table. Levi's eyebrows rose slightly.

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Too rich for my blood," the man to my left grumbled, throwing his cards face down onto the table. The next player folded, which meant it was up to Levi call my bluff.

"Wha'cha got, kid?" Levi asked, his voice deep and threatening. "That's a lot of dough for someone your age to be walking around with, should you win."

From conversations with other players before the game, I knew Levi was the most dangerous man in the table. After studying me for what seemed like an hour, Levi sneered as he pushed his pile in. That left just one more player, and he folded immediately.

"No guts, no glory," Levi chided.

Doubt forced its way past my defenses while I went over the odds. My grandfather, who regularly hosted Saturday night poker games, had repeatedly told me how people who don't play cards think the game is all about reading other players. The key to winning, he said, is knowing the odds that the next card you draw is the one you need.

"Should we have winner buy breakfast?" I asked.

"Not a problem," Levi smiled, pushing his cards forward, face down. "You first."

Slowly I pushed my two cards forward. I first flipped over an ace of hearts, then an eight of diamonds. By combining the ace of clubs and the eight of spades in the middle of the table I had two pair. Levi began to chuckle, a sinister kind that sent chills down my spine. How was I going to explain to my parents that I lost my college fund on what is commonly called the dead man's hand? "Can't believe you went all in with that!" Levi snickered. "I like your style and your guts, kid."

To prolong the inevitable, he turned over just one card, the ace of spades. Looking around to make sure everyone was watching, he threw the second one spinning on top of the pile of chips. It was the eight of spades. It was a draw. We could both walk away winners with half the money.

"How about we each draw one card from the deck so we can determine the winner," Levi suggested. "Or we could just split the pot."

"Let's draw," I said. "No guts, no glory."

Fish Stand

by Misty Smith

Michiko made the best grilled eel in all of the dock. She and her husband, Jiro, who was a fisherman also had a little fish stand not too far from their house that she ran and cooked at. Every morning at four she got up, made her husband breakfast and went to the market and got fresh eel, other sea critters and groceries for the day. She even got her wares half price because the boy who ran the stall, Ebisu, loved her mochi and she would always bring him a fresh batch. By six Michiko had the grill and rice cooker going and she served: fried eel, squid and fish, along with her cucumber miso soup, homemade pickles and a bowl of rice. She did this until two in the afternoon, after which she took a quick nap and then set up the card table for her afternoon Mahjong matches with her neighbors. Michiko would go over and rattle her tin tile holder at her neighbors door and they would soon come over with tea, or beer when it was warm out, and they would munch on shrimp crackers and play until the sun set. This was her life for almost fifteen years. And truth be told she was getting bored of it.

“That was an easy move you just missed Michiko.” Ayami said slapping down another tile.

“I have my mind on other things.” Michiko said, taking a sip of her beer, the bubbles tickling her nose a bit.

“Well, with what?” Ayami asked. “Just spill it so I can have peace of mind about taking your pennies.”

“Last night I told Jiro I’m bored with taking care of the stand.” Michiko said fiddling with a Mahjong tile.

“And what did your old goat say?” Michiko’s other neighbor Keiko asked.

“What did I do for the day that was so important that I couldn’t watch the stand?” Michiko gulped the last of her beer and poured more into her glass.

“That was nice of him.” Keiko said, dripping with sarcasm.

“I would have hit him.” Ayami said.

“So I’m not sure what to do, I’m 55 years old and I’ve been running the

fish stand for years now.” Michiko placed a tile down. “I would like to be able to wake up late a few mornings.”

“It makes good money too.” Keiko said, crunching on a shrimp cracker.

“That’s what he said last night.” Michiko swooped up a tile.

They all played quietly for a while, the only sounds the click of the tiles and the munching of shrimp crackers, each of them thinking about what to do about the fish stand. Keiko’s thoughts drifted to maybe Michiko could work part time for the stand and have it closed the other. Ayami’s thoughts were more centered around the fact that Jiro should be damn happy that Michiko even agreed to look after the old stand and how lucky he was to have such a caring wife.

Michiko thoughts were half on the game and half on a solution to her problem, maybe she could hire on someone to help her? but Jiro would never want to hire some stranger. All three women sighed at the same time and they looked at each other and bursted out laughing. Keiko was the first to come out of her laughter.

“What if you only worked part time?” She asked.

“No, Jiro would just say that it would be unfair to customers to only be opened part time.” Michiko said. “I thought about maybe hiring someone but Jiro wouldn’t want a stranger in the stand.”

“More like he doesn’t want to have to pay someone.” Ayami cracked open another beer.

“Well what if you hired a relative?” Keiko said, “Maybe one of your sons could help?”

Michiko hadn’t thought about that, her oldest two were away at school but her youngest, Kenjiro, was just out of school and hadn’t found a job yet. He was the one who always loved the stand anyway.

“Maybe you’re on to something Keiko.” Michiko got up and went to get the house phone.

She quickly dialed Kenjiro’s cellphone and got him on the line and explained to him the problem. Kenjiro almost immediately agreed to help run the stand, he even said he always thought she had needed a break. They made plans for him to come over the next day and make the arrangements.

They said good bye and Michiko turned to her neighbors and smiled. “Now that that is solved, who’s money am I about to take next?”



Clash of Gods

by Ryan Dewey

The Darkest Hour

by Riley Childers

“It’s just a tragedy. Truly.”

“At least they’re in a better place now.”

“Alex had so much to live for. Poor thing.”

That’s what they’ll all say. Everyone will look down on me and see, finally understanding me. The black starkness of their clothing will match the mood of the room and of my containment. They’ll all be in the building on the outskirts of town. That’s where I want it to be held. Where I need it to be. Just a miserable excuse for a building that will compliment my life and accomplishments. Everyone will continue to talk about my terrors and then some bitch will come and butt in on how I deserved it. How I had it coming. It’ll probably be Darna or something; she always had a rather cynical view of me and my ideals.

“Alex should’ve been taken from this earth sooner if you ask me. Guilt that powerful can only last so long” is what she’ll say. Something along those lines at least. Others will agree and others will object. And there isn’t a doubt in my mind that she’ll blurt out, “there’s no rest for the wicked”. After my containment, that was a vividly common phrase that she uttered to describe me. Also that I was unholy, demonic, and worthy to command the throne of Hell itself. I could never tell if that was just the over-empowering religious side of her attacking me or if it was the fact that I killed her boyfriend. It’s up in the air really.

Now with the whole boyfriend thing, that was merely a simple misunderstanding. I wasn’t personally trying to kill him, it was the other I was after. The monster that was the reason for my spite! They switched the two! How was I to know? I am no mind reader. I could not stop what happened from happening, but they could. They were the evil-doers! They are who to blame! That demon is the one who ruined my life and has me at my knees of my own sanity. It was just that one night!

That night, thirty minutes or so before the show, I sat at my writing desk scribbling down my thoughts to hopefully calm myself. The stained and splintered wood of the desk mirrored throughout the apartment. I felt more of a termite than human. The paper, tattered and stained as well, was my canvas

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which upon I laid my works. Words that I could barely read, that fell together to make sentences, which made masterpieces. But masterpieces in what form? Poetry not a chance. Novels? Who has the time! But what of written work for the stage? To be performed, that is where I belonged. I was a playwright, given a gift more powerful than the heavens! My apartment had every nook and cranny filled with binders upon binders of plays that we're too mighty to be seen or performed by anyone. Only my eyes would rest on those words I laid. But I continued to attack my rotten desk with the pen that defiled the paper, one piece after another. All the while my mind fought a battle that it could not win.

Should I go? Should I not? Should I go? Should I not? Should I go?
Should I not?

In my heart I knew what I had to do. But if I chose what I had to do, I wouldn't have been able to control myself. I was a mad beast at that show! Bringing a terror that no one could have predicted. But with that mindless terror, I thought I would bring justice! How ever was I wrong.

Amongst all in that wooden room was one light that wavered above my confused head. An incandescent light bulb tethered from the ceiling. It swung and buzzed to the beat of my own heart. Was it trying to get my attention? Was it telling me what to do? Of course not, the light was sentient, it had no way of communicating with me. But I listened.

I succumbed to the buzzing noise and chose to go that night. Why must the bright and whimsical ones of the world have the power of persuasion while the rest have not? What are we to gain from that cruel fate! I pushed myself from the desk and decided to go to the playhouse. It was nearly a swift drive from the apartment thankfully. I had almost sprinted out the door before I realized a small problem that I would encounter. I wouldn't have been able to enter the playhouse at all. It would have been wiser of me to have just given up hope at that moment and sink back to my desk to pump out more literary perfection. I didn't. I was very set on going to the show and also set on looking at it from a creative standpoint. Did I sneak into the playhouse through a secret entrance? Not at all. I approached the situation from an easier route. I purchased my ticket and took my seat, but not as myself. No, I donned a disguise to throw off the security and staff. It wasn't even an elaborate disguise by any means, but it was something. I had on what I usually would wear, now with the addition of my burlap trench coat that failed to see the light of day for years, one of my roommate's wigs to hide any notice of my natural hair color, and a hat that almost matched the coat. Then I began to make my way out the door, not looking back, and grabbed my weapon of choice that dark night.

I made it to the playhouse in the nick of time! The ticket vendor had almost closed the purchasing stand. But I got my ticket and made my way to the best seat in the house. Luckily it wasn't taken by some elderly theatre-enthusiast or young ruffians whose parents made a poor choice that night. The seat I had chosen was positioned amongst the middle of the audience and was right next to

the main aisle, which led directly up to the stage. It was the best seat in the house in my opinion. I could clearly see and hear everything that was happening on the stage and it also gave me a clear shot. As I sat there, I could feel the somewhat rusted revolver in my coat pocket and with every second I gripped it, I knew my life would change drastically that night for better or for worse!

My attention then switched when I heard the demonic deliverance over the intercom of that familiar voice alerting the audience that the production was starting in five minutes. And oh mercy me, just hearing that voice I fell victim to the deepest and most terrifying cesspools of my mind. Memories that I had been trying to forget, but kept finding a way to creep up with even more power than before. Flashbacks that were wonderfully painful, like the reason why I was at the playhouse that night.

Many months prior to that opening night, I had joined the playhouse's acting troupe as their new playwright. To give them all a taste of my writing abilities, I wrote a simple little play for them labeled, *The Darkest Hour*. It told the tale of an unrequited love between the two protagonists which abruptly ended when the villain of the story, for reasons of their own, kills one of the lovers which leaves the other utterly miserable and lost. That's merely the basis of it and it was definitely not my greatest work, but it was something to show my potential to the troupe. The demonic director himself decided to turn the play into a production which I was very happy with. The troupe worked furiously day in and day out on their time off to make it the best that it could be. Everything was going fantastic until the week before that opening night. I hadn't been allowed to come to rehearsals anymore and no one in the troupe would talk to me! And worst of all, I saw a flyer for the production in the newspaper saying that the bastard director had written the play! Who gave them the right! Not me, that's for sure. My name was nowhere to be seen. What would have been my greatest accomplishment, was completely void of anything saying that it was written by Alex Moore. But instead, all the credit was given to the director! And all of that is why I had that revolver in my pocket. My special little friend with a single bullet in the chamber with the director's name on it.

The playhouse quieted down while the darkness entered and the lights brightened on the stage. The show had finally begun. The ensemble cast flocked onto the stage, exuding theatricality and prowess. I would have been so proud of how well they were performing my piece, but there was the fact that it legally was no longer my piece. And that pissed me off to no end. While working with the cast, I didn't become too friendly with the ensemble. They were all playing background characters anyways. Nobodies and flats. Comedically that's all that they ever became. People that only deserved the title of 'bus passenger 4' and 'passerby 7'. If they would have tried harder at their auditions, then they could have landed lead roles instead of being pushed aside to aid in telling the intoxicating tale of the leads. While they all were still present on stage, the male lead bursted into the spotlight of center stage and began to blow everyone away as he always

would.

When the troupe began rehearsing for the production, I was beyond smitten by his every move. With each step he took, he exuded grace and had me at my knees begging for mercy. I tip my figurative hat off to casting because they reeled in a damn star among our very sky. And that wasn't even the best part! Along with being the greatest thing to touch down on this shit hole of a planet, he actually talked to me. Me! It wasn't all the time or anything. He knew better. He didn't want to take too much time away from the rehearsals, of course. But the small conversations we had proved something so powerful to me. That Wilbur cared. He cared about the piece. He cared about the production. He cared about me. Oh how my heart soared with every beautiful thought of him. And those feelings continued to grow and grow the longer he was in the spotlight. The audience was silent but bewildered by his performance and I had always felt that same way. But that bewilderment stopped when the scene changed and he left the stage. And then it was her crowning moment. I had almost forgotten about my reason for coming that night and of the jagged but smooth pistol that laid in my palm. I was just so undoubtedly distracted by Wilbur! But then the mood changed as the female lead, Darma, came on. And the wanting of revenge quickly came back with a burning passion.

Darma came hovering onto stage on a fixture that gave a crude illusion that she was floating above the stage. The fixture was in fact shaped like a cloud since that's how it was in the script. "Lover #2 enters stage on cloud. Like they are an angel above the earth dwellers". The playhouse could not afford for the fixture to move across the stage electronically so the stage crew had to move it. Everyone in the crew was decked out head-to-toe in black clothing to give another illusion that they would seamlessly blend into the darkness of the previous scene, along with the other scenes in the production except for hers. The scene that presented Darma to the audience wasn't dark and brooding like all of the others, but rather something out of a Valentine's Day card. The lights lit up the stage with a mixture of reds and pinks that made the fixture resemble cotton candy more than a cloud. Once the fixture was fully on stage and the bubblegum hue was amidst the audience, she lifted herself from the fixture swiftly and stood there for a moment. Letting the audience take in the character's beauty and grace; scripts words, not mine. And when the audience was left with nothing but Darma's dull presence for long enough, she began to recite her brief forty word monologue. Her speaking voice boomed throughout the playhouse and made her seem more powerful than I intended the character to be. Once done speaking, she began to sing her song. Now I know that you're thinking that I am nothing but a fool to put a song into a play! That it's a play, not a musical. But I had my reasons.

I believed I had an amazing singing voice as well. So, when I was composing that adequate masterpiece, I did as every great writer has done before I! While designing the character of 'Lover #2', I had myself in mind. So when I would audition for the role, I'd get one of the lead roles in my own production! A

seemingly fool-proof plan if you ask me. Or so I thought. As you can see, it didn't quite work out as I would have hoped it. As soon as I stepped onto that brittle, creaking stage to deliver my audition piece, the director and head of casting abrasively asked as to why I was even auditioning. I told them repeatedly that it was okay since I was the perfect person to play the role! That they could just give me the part and move on to other things! But no. I didn't get the part. I tried not to let that bother me too much during rehearsals, but everywhere I would turn I would see Darma. It fueled me with a slight rage, but then I would also see Wilbur, and all was right in the world...at least for the time being.

Darma finally finished the short little song that she decided to dramatically draw out to over seven minutes long. I don't know why or how, but that bitch did it. And what the audience did absolutely disgusted me. They loved it. They cheered and praised her shit voice and looks thinking she was the best thing in that small town, but they didn't know of me! I was deserving of their praise. My singing voice was far superior and the same with my acting skills. The longer the audience loved her, the more irritated I became. With every clap and cheer that went her way, the more my sweaty grip on the gun grew tighter and tighter. Thankfully her eyes never noticed me in the audience. I can only imagine I had a mighty wicked smirk of disgust plastered across my face; something that would have definitely distracted her singing. That wouldn't have been so bad now that I think about it. Instead of faltering, she went on and on with her wonderfully worded monologue and then with distributing dialogue with other minor leads. Finally when she finished, the scene changed, which resulted in the changing of spotlight color from bright to the dull hue of before and the fixture taken back off stage. The moment to strike was so near, it physically pained me.

In the original script of "The Darkest Hour", I thought it would have been interesting to get the director of the production involved and on stage during the show. So approximately thirty minutes into the show, the director would come on stage and say a quick little note to the audience saying that the play isn't meant to disturb or offend anyone. Just a nice little disclaimer I put in. It probably would have been more logical to place that at the beginning before the play even started, but I was trying to make a little something different with the whole piece. I unfortunately achieved that, but in a different light. He made his way onto the stage but with his back facing the audience. Not at all like I had it in the original script, but I still took to rid the world of their cruel and unjust actions.

"An eye for an eye", I exclaimed while standing in the main aisle with the gun aimed at him. "You take my baby, now I take your life".

And without an ounce of regret I pulled the trigger. With the sound of the shot, the audience screamed in fear and panic, and the director collapsed to the ground. It felt as though peace had been restored for just that brief moment until everything started to become apparent as the lights came on. After I was let go from the production, the director decided that they did not want to be

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seen by the audience at all, so they had Wilbur step in as a cameo role to read the disclaimer. But so the audience wouldn't feel confused by the weird in-story character and out-of-story character by the same actor, they had him facing the back of the stage.

So I did it. I killed Wilbur. The lights quickly came on after he smashed into the wooden planks and then the monster director stepped onto the stage and saw the horror I had caused. I screamed in utter terror when I realized my twisted fate. I tried running to the stage to reach him, but bulking security guards carried me out of the playhouse. Oh Wilbur, what I wouldn't give for you to be here with me right now. I would go back and change everything so you could be on the stage while I lay in the ground. The wicked aren't worthy of happiness!



Moonrise

by Nina Dulabaum

The People I Deal With

by Joelle Schielein

My eyes travel around outside, tracing the paths of the leaves as they float to the ground. I am sitting in the small family owned ice cream shop that I have been working at since my sophomore year of high school. It is a seasonal job. The store opens its windows with great excitement from the customers on the first day of March every year, and closes its windows with even more excitement from the employees on the last day of October. My mind is sickly sweet with the thoughts of all of the items on my mental agenda that I will be able to accomplish. It is, of course, a little bittersweet to pack it all up and not have the opportunity to see my fellow ice cream treat makers as often as before, but I am incredibly ready for the hiatus. These years prove to test the patience of all of us girls, practically to the point of no return. The customers that we cater to come to us on quite the diverse extremity. There obviously is a variation of craving people that pass through, but they can be fairly divided. After a few days of working at Meusel's Dairy Delite, an employee can define the Regulars, the Averages, and the Indecisives.

On an average day, two shades of Regulars occupy our time. The exceptionally amiable people are obviously enjoyable. The employees at Dairy Delite experience these customers on a daily basis. Two girls, with dried specks of various ice cream flavors sprinkled on their shirt, arms, and face, will be in the store, trying to keep themselves busy. One peeks her head around the side window to witness a customer pulling up. Their car wraps around the drive-up window with a bright smile perched upon their face. By the time the window is opened, their order sits at the tip of their tongue, ready to leap up to our ears, but it is already punched into the register. The second working girl is making the treat, as the first counts out the money that was exchanged. Pleasantries are swapped between the customer and the employee. Many times we are updated on how that customer is doing, how fast her kids are growing up, and what television shows she is indulging in lately. It is utterly charming, especially since most of them are technically total strangers. We do not even know any of their names, to be completely

honest. We, ice cream treat makers, refer to them usually as what they order. For example, twist man, smoothie lady, fresh lemon slush lady, large chocolate malt guy, large cherry slush lady all come through to receive their treats. The list even continues after that! I have about ten more examples of them. It is immensely satisfying to talk with these people and make their day a little bit sweeter just by making a simple calorie-packed treat for them.

The next category of customers is the unfortunately unpleasant Regulars. It breaks my heart to have them come through, because I wonders what makes them so grumpy and vengeful all the time. It also makes our job a bit more challenging. We do our best, as we are required and paid to do, to be as friendly as possible and amend to the needs of the customers. A perfect example of one of these forsaken customers is large chocolate cone lady. She visits quite often, apparently almost every day that Dairy Delite is open. She is undoubtedly the least favorite of our regulars. Her tan Jeep will pull up slowly as we open our drive up window. She parks her vehicle and proceeds to sit there and arrange herself and anything around her before she rolls down her window. She fusses with her mousy hair, picks at invisible pet hairs on her blouse, and takes a deep breath, then pushes the button in her vehicle to lower the only thing that is preventing her from getting what she came here for. On most occasions, by this time, there is already another car behind her that is waiting patiently. We smile and say hello, asking what she would like for today, even though we already know. She relays her order in a gruff tone, and we respond with her total expenditure. Our prime example then takes as long as she possibly can to gather her amount of two dollars and thirty cents. The large chocolate cone she so badly wanted is made and awaits her fierce grasp. By this time, our drive way is filled to our maximum capacity. As we hand her cone to her meaty hands, she looks at it with the utmost scrutiny. Her harsh and beady eyes trail the curves of the soft serve, analyzing every detail there is to the cone. Her face contorts as she mutters something along the lines of "It is melting at the top," "It is way too slanted," "It is going to fall all over me as soon as I take one lick of it," "I cannot eat this," "Can I have a new cone because this one is not good enough," or my favorite line, "Is someone else working that can make a better cone than you?" To point out the obvious, her cones are always more than substantial. The employees at Dairy Delite have all made literally hundreds of ice cream cones. It is one of the most common items ordered, so we have our experience padlocked. There should not be anyone that is in need of a totally different cone, unless dropped on the ground. Large chocolate cone lady is not the only regular that gives us trouble either, but she makes sure she stands out on her own.

The Average customers that come through add variety to our jobs. A dash of sugar is thrown there, and a pinch of spice here. About half of the averages that stop by are mothers driving Suburbans, Yukons, or minivans. These spunky ladies drive up with mixed emotions painted upon their faces; some believe it is indifference, and some believe it is utter annoyance and frustration.

The Works

As soon as they roll down their car windows we are greeted by the cacophony of whining children emitting from the back car seats. The children complain about what they want or what they are getting. They do not want a small slush, they want a large flurry. They do not want a small dish of vanilla ice cream, they want the biggest Blue Moon cone they can fit their puny hands around. This event is very typical, usually the mothers win the argument. There are the instances where a mother will have to say a few regretful words to make her child a tad more appreciative. But there are some specific occasions when the children receive exactly what they were dreaming of do happen though, probably something like the largest cone possible with every centimeter of it covered in sprinkles. Either way, the kiddies are filled with sugar and ecstasy at the end of the night.

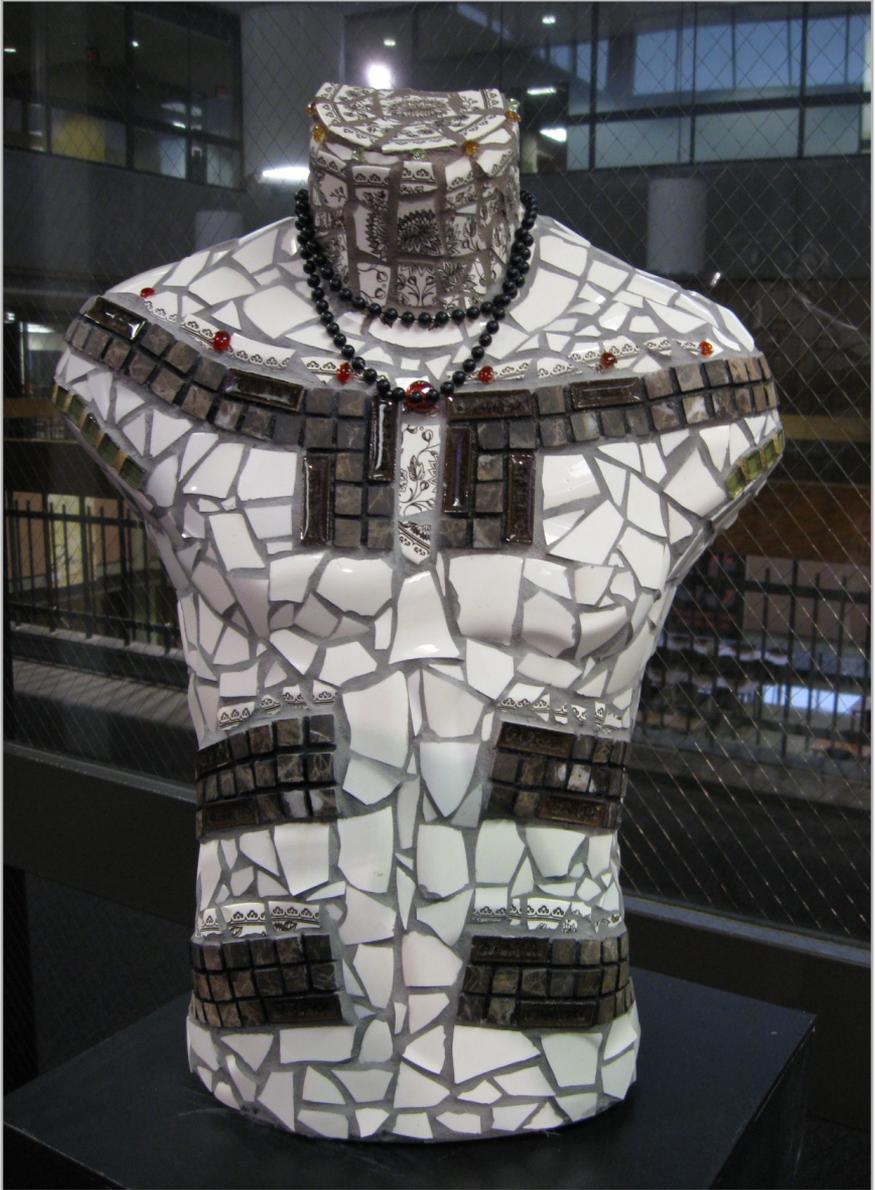
The other half of our average customers are the classic business men and women. They stop by for a sweet treat during their lunch breaks, most of the time with frustration gracing their brows and hiding underneath their eyelids, posing as dark circles. Often times, our ice cream is exactly the only thing that they are even eating for their meal. I have actually had a lady admit this statement to me as I handed her the large cookie dough flurry that she ordered. Some men and women also come after work for a sugar high to distract themselves from brutal thoughts about their horrible bosses. These people casually take a minute or two to decide on what they would like to have and pay with aged twenties to receive the change that piles up in pockets, wallets, and cup holders. Again, some customers are pleasant, and some spit fire.

The Indecisives are sometimes the most difficult customers to handle. They are hardly ever rude, just extremely unsure of everything. One may question how these customers even decided on an outfit today. An employee has to keep her patience as the clock ticks by. These people always seem to want ice cream at the busiest times. This generally tends to be during our after dinner rush, around seven or eight in the evening. Their car parks in front of the awaiting employee while eyes scans the flurry, slush, yogurt, and hard ice cream flavors over and over again. They ask many questions, often referring to how they just cannot decide. They do not even need to inform us. We were able to tell from the moment we said hello to them. The employees will do their absolute best to figure out what these humans are truly craving. We ask the standard questions, such as "Are you hungry or thirsty?"; "Fruity or chocolate-y?" and "Are the nuts and whipped cream okay?" Commonly, as much as we attempt to assist these hopeless wanderers, it is to no avail. Their eyes still travel over every word that is typed out on our menus.

Eventually, these folks do choose an item with much satisfaction, but after such deliberation. During this length of time, some cars behind them that were waiting in line have either parked on the side of the road to come to our walk-up window, or they leave entirely. These irritated customers probably to go to Dairy Queen, but who knows? The price is given to them and then another issue arises. It seems that since they took so long to figure out what they wanted to consume, they must take even more time to figure out what bills and coins

they want to pay with. I am not sure if it is because we are frustrated to the point of combustion, but most of the time it feels like an hour goes by. I find myself tapping my nails along the speckled counter top, shuffling my feet, humming that song that has been stuck in my head all day, and checking the clock repeatedly before any money is handed over. I could probably sing our entire National Anthem before I see their cash. There are also the Indecisives that have never been to our establishment. These customers assume that we really do cater to absolutely every need, so they blindly toss their credit or debit card through our window. Sadly, Meusel's Dairy Delite does not accept cards. Our registers are only compatible to cash or check. What happens after this is always up in the air. Sometimes they actually do have a twenty they can pay with, they leave to get cash from a nearby ATM machine, or they just never come back and forget about the ice cream meant for them that sits and melts upon our countertops.

At the end of the sticky and stressful day, we actually contain gratitude towards every single customer that makes the ultimate decision to get off of the couch, start the car, drive to Dairy Delite, and spend the money on whatever they buy. The actions of these great people prevents us from just sitting around with nothing to clean, nothing to make, and nothing to talk about. Our customers give us stories to pass along to our other co-workers, our boss, friends, and family. They also teach us how to handle wonderful people and extraordinarily difficult people. The Regulars, yes the good and the bad, the Averages, and the Indecisives somehow make my days a little more interesting than they were already going to be. The varying opinions, thoughts, ideas, and orders make our jobs much more memorable. I will forever remember the people I deal with.



Ceremony

by Alyssa Bieze

