

The Works

The official arts publication of
Sauk Valley Community College



Cover artwork by Ashliegh Peavey

The Works

2016-2017 Editorial Staff

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Student Art Contest

2016-2017

Theme: "Upside Down"

Overall Winner

The Darkness

by Andrew Clark

He sat with his back against the old oak tree which he and his brother had climbed so many times when they were younger. The sun had warmed the air considerably throughout the morning. The heat was a welcome change from the cold rain and dark clouds that had been hanging around for the past three days until the previous night when the storm finally moved on. He breathed in the fresh air as the wind gently flowed past his face. Walking through the tall grass in the field in front of him was his girlfriend, smiling as she marveled at the colors of the wildflowers all around her. She had wavy, dark hair that flowed down to just below her shoulders. Every time he looked at her he couldn't help but smile. She glanced over just as the grin made its way across his face, her beautiful hazel eyes meeting his gaze. She let out a giggle as she looked down and blushed. He decided that the day was about as perfect as he could ever hope and his grin grew even bigger. Then he heard a distant rumble.

Looking beyond the field to the horizon, he noticed the dark clouds that were gathering and the faint flashes of lightning that accompanied them. The previous storm had only just moved out and now another one appeared to be on the way, bringing the darkness with it. He began to wonder if they would ever be able to enjoy a day without such dreary weather. Another rumble caused his girlfriend to turn her attention to the coming storm. When

she looked back at him, her smile was gone. In that moment, the clouds sped up and rushed in to block the light of the sun. Then the clouds sped up, rushing in to block the light of the sun. He heard gunshots echo across the land and another clash of thunder shook the ground, rousing him from his deep sleep.

He opened his eyes and raised his head up out of the cold mud. Rifle fire could be heard coming from another part of the line. He looked at his comrades who sat with their backs against the wall of the trench as they slept. It was a miracle that any human could get rest in the horrible filth that surrounded them. A mixture of rain water and human waste that was sometimes ankle-deep. Thousands of flies hung over the bloated corpses of his fallen friends and the prevalent stench of death was one he would not soon forget.

Clouds covered the sun. Even during daytime, the darkness hung around. He stood on a wooden box at the front of the trench and rested his head on the wall of sandbags that ran the length of the trench and stared back at the land behind their line. The earth was scarcely recognizable after being blackened and cratered by the daily onslaught of enemy artillery. Life was entirely absent, having been killed or driven off by the ferocity of battle. Bodies littered the ground all the way to the horizon.

About thirty yards back he could see the top of their last trench. It had taken a month of trying and thousands of lives for them to gain that small bit of ground and dig in again. He closed his eyes and tried to recall the image of his girlfriend on that beautiful day, but he couldn't. Any hint of good that entered his mind was immediately drowned out by the horror that surrounded him. Sleep was his only escape from it, but even then the nightmares far outnumbered his dreams. Realizing that his attempt was in vain, he opened his eyes and stepped back down into the filth.

Another rumble shook the ground, but much closer this time. It was directly followed by another one. And then another. And ten more. It quickly became a continuous roll of thunder. The enemy artillery barrage was starting again. He grabbed his rifle and put his helmet on before crouching against the side of the trench. The first shell hit the ground in front of their line causing dirt and rocks to rain down on the men. The second was far more accurate, striking directly inside of the trench just a hundred yards from him. Dozens of men were killed in an instant, some lucky enough to be taken in their sleep.

As the artillery continued to pour down, he dropped into a prone position in the mud. He looked at the men around him as they covered their heads with their hands and prayed for an end to the bombardment which had only just begun. Not wanting to see any more, he put his head down, closed his eyes, and began to say a prayer as well. As he did so, an image of his girlfriend appeared in his mind as clear as day.

There she was, wearing her favorite grey sundress and standing among the wildflowers. She smiled that wonderful smile he had fallen in love with so long ago. The sunlight created a soft glow along the gentle curve of her cheek

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and her gorgeous hair danced in the breeze. She was so incredibly beautiful. His heart melted at the sight of her smile and all of the darkness and fear he was feeling disappeared in that moment. The sights and sounds of the war were gone and only happiness remained.

He didn't want it to end. He covered his ears and clenched his jaw, trying so hard to keep out the hell around him and hold on to her. Despite his effort, the image began to fade as the storm grew stronger and overwhelmed his senses once more. The darkness was too strong. It crept back in and forced out any feeling of peace. He screamed with anger at this defeat, though not even he could hear it over the unending thunder. He'd had enough of war, enough of this world veiled by darkness.

In an instant everything stopped. He could hear leaves rustling above him. He cracked his eyes open and lifted his head off of the grass. The sun shone brighter than ever. He stood up and turned to look out over the field of wildflowers. That's when he saw her. A beautiful sundress, black hair flowing behind her, that incredible smile beaming ear to ear, the most amazing laugh he'd ever heard, and those magnificent hazel eyes locked on him. He ran down to her, wrapped his arms around her, and lifted her off the ground. She put her hands behind his neck and pulled him in for a kiss. The darkness had disappeared entirely, and once again happiness was all that remained.

Poetry Winner

What Are Holy Jeans

Holy jeans purr against your knees
like an infatuated cat,
spaces filled with the fog of
a drunkard's window shield.
Each space represents
an overplayed song draining
out even the faintest sirens,
a precocious traveler
patched in her ability
to say goodbye
but never hello.

Criminals seep through
ragged holes, clutching
onto you like false lovers,
calculating where you ate breakfast
and why you chose to eat there.
They ask you questions,
making your mind
blend with theirs.

You haven't the slightest clue
as to where you are or
what you are thinking,
but you are oscillating
on a rusty swing set,
mouth crooked
like you just received
Novocaine.

-Samantha Poe

Poetry

Honorable Mention

Eggs for Shoes

I want the halves of an ostrich egg to make shoes for you
with, perhaps, two ostrich feathers to make the laces.
But we must not get extravagant. I'll ask for just one plume
then make do with the scrubby feathers that cling to its neck.
If this is acceptable to you, I will start tomorrow
to look for an ostrich, so that your feet will not be bare.

But in taking the feathers, I will leave the ostrich bare
I am willing to rob a bird of the raiment it has grown, for you
Yet if you had smaller feet you could have your shoes tomorrow
I could take a chicken egg and use chicken wire for the laces
Which would take the ruff from nobody's neck
Nor steal from a bird's vanity the plume.

If I had these shoes for you, then you could plume
yourself back to beauty, and you could bare
your shoulders, and place a string of pearls around your neck
and I would be nowhere prouder than standing next to you
adorned in the best of all silks and laces.
If I had these shoes, we could have this happiness tomorrow

But I could not go to the deserts where ostriches live by tomorrow
and I could not pluck the plume
So if by some miracle you had your shoes, they would have no laces.
Your shoulders would be bare, and also your ankles bare
Instead of pride, I would in shame stand beside you
Instead of pearls, there would be dust around your neck

If I thought there was any point, I would lay my neck,
although I am not a bird, on the butcher's block tomorrow
and from my bones tell him to make shoes for you
I have never grown the sort of feathers that plume
If you depend on me for ornament, you will go bare
Yet my hair would work better than ostrich feathers for laces.

Then, when you had your shoes, you'd find someone to tie the laces
and string the pearls around your neck
Make sure your ankles are not bare
and stand beside you with pride after tomorrow.
That person would probably take an ostrich's plume
Which, as I consider it, is not something I would do for even you.

But I will go to the store and buy some laces tomorrow
some flowers to make a plume for your neck
so that you only bare what is good for you.

-Claire Fettig

Fiction

Winner

Excerpt From “Living In Human Land”

by Michael Jenkins

I have been living with humans for five years now. You would think that I would have adjusted to your “winter” after such a time. I have not. Indeed, there are a great many things here which still confuse or frighten me. Still, I suppose I prefer this to the cosmic loneliness and crushing boredom I have left behind.

I hate walking such long distances in this cold. I have been told that I need a “car” for this reason, but they are expensive and dangerous and terrifying. I have been struck by a car before. It is an experience which I would not recommend. It is just too bad I am not allowed to simply teleport home. I am told this method of travel is “unacceptably unsanitary” and “grotesquely gruesome”. So, I simply wrap my blanket tightly around my chest and walk as quickly as I can. And as the chill air digs its fangs into my legs, I am reminded why you insist on wearing your wretched “pants” when you also have skirts.

Snow is cold and wet, ice is slick and painful, and slush is disgusting. The gray sky is depressing, and the roads are thick with headlights. At times, I cannot tell whether I shake more from the cold, or from my anxiety. Oh, how I miss my apartment! Yes, it is empty and boring, but at least it is also warm and calm in there.

I cannot stand this any longer! There is a sandwich shop between my work and my apartment. I must seek momentary refuge inside. I am careful to keep my blanket between my arm and the metal door handle. I do not want to get bitten by frost again. I swiftly duck inside, and the relief is intense and immediate. I slip through the second glass door into paradise. It is not perfect, but a noisy, smelly paradise is still a paradise.

“Hey, Cuppycake! I thought I smelled something wormy,” The man

behind the counter calls to me. I recognize him. He is Trevor. I am here often.

“How could you smell me?” I ask. “All I can smell is pork and sadness.”

Trevor laughs. “Yeah, that sums this place up pretty nicely. Are you here to eat, or just to get out of the cold?”

“Hmm . . . I suppose I should warm my inside parts as well. I will purchase my sandwich and my coffee.”

“Sure. Just let me have your card for a second,” Trevor says.

I step up to the empty counter, open my blanket shroud, and crouch over the counter. The sash tied around my chest has a wallet chained to it, and I awkwardly rest that wallet on the counter. Trevor opens my wallet, pulls out a small plastic card, and slots it into a plastic box thing. I am assured that the human who decided that your money works this way was in fact not insane, but I am not sure if I believe this.

“Okay, you’re good,” Trevor tells me, placing my card back into my wallet.

I back away from the counter, and Trevor walks over to the kitchen door.

“I need a worm food and a worm juice,” Trevor calls inside.

“Huh?” One of the cooks calls back, obviously confused.

“Come, Billy,” Another cook rests his hand on Billy’s shoulder. “We must defile a perfectly good sandwich to appease the wrath of the ancient ones.”

With that, Trevor closes the door.

“Should only take a few minutes,” He tells me. “So, I notice that you finally cleaned your hair.”

“My boss made me,” I tell him. I run a tendril through my long, pink hair. “He tells me I must clean myself if I am to work with your food.”

“You still haven’t got your hair cut though, huh?”

“Why do you all want me to cut my hair?” I ask defensively, clutching at my hair. “It makes no sense to me.”

“Is there anything about our world that does make sense to you?” Trevor asks.

“Barely. Even after five years, I know many of the rules you follow, but I doubt I will ever understand why you follow them. That makes it difficult to adjust completely.”

“I can tell. Even the weather is hard for you to get the hang of.”

“I am told winter becomes easier with time. It does not,” I pull my blanket higher onto my shoulders and wrap it more tightly around me.

“Well, winter will always suck, but you’ll get better at surviving it. Remember your first winter, you’d stop here every single day after work, crying about the cold. Now, we really only see you when it gets below freezing.”

“I suppose that is promising . . .” I admit.

Billy, the confused cook from earlier, creeps out of the kitchen, sets a

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brown paper bag and an unmarked plastic cup on the counter, and swiftly disappears back into the kitchen. I pick up my food and turn around to find a table.

“Talk to you later, Cuppycake. Enjoy the food,” Trevor says.

This place is largely empty right now, despite the noise. Well, it was noisy, before they noticed me enter the room. I shrug, and sit in a small, uncushioned booth far from the other eaters. As far as I can manage in such a small place, anyway. I set my sandwich on the table, spend a minute grappling with the paper wrapper, then finally tear into it.

Trevor tells me this sandwich has no right to be as delicious as it is. I am not quite sure what he means by this. On my first visit, I asked him to put together the menu items I liked the most: the meat pulled from a BBQ pork, whatever that is, and a strangely enticing chocolate sauce. He does not like to admit it, but my sandwich has become his favorite as well. He still will not touch my coffee, though. I do not take well to the various syrups or creams, but I find the salted butter to be quite palatable. I must admit, human food always makes me feel better about my decision to stay here.

The chill finally seems to have left my body, pressed out from inside and out. I relax into my seat, and sip from the last portion of my drink. I wish I could simply wait here until work tomorrow, but the manager will not allow me. I stare out an enormous window for a few minutes, watching cars pass from a safe distance and hoping desperately that it does not begin to snow again.

“Hi, Cuppycake,” A woman says behind me. “Taking a break from the cold, huh?” She steps forward to my side, and looks down at me. It is Jessica. Her apartment is next to mine. Though she is tall for a human, when we stand together, she barely stands to my collar.

“I do not know how much longer I am able to live like this. I cannot keep this up forever,” I tell her.

“Can you last six more weeks?” Jessica asks.

“Do I have to?”

“Afraid so,” She apologizes. I groan loudly, and cover my face. “Sorry sweetie,” She tells me. “Spring’s around the corner, though. You just gotta tough it out.”

I take another long look out the window. The snow does not seem to be leaving anytime soon. I turn back and let my head hang low, staring at my empty food papers.

“So . . . how are things going for you at work?” Jessica asks me.

“It can be draining at times,” I tell her. She nods quietly in understanding.

“Today was like that. Earlier, Emily told me that I only tip well because people are afraid of what I might do if they were to withhold a tip. She was annoyed because I earn more money than her, even though she says she is prettier than I am.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Jessica scoffs. “You get good tips for being a good server, not for being attractive. I’m not surprised that you make a good waitress. Most people like you once they get to know you.”

“And also, I do not know where Emily got the idea that she is somehow prettier than me,” I roll my eyes.

Jessica makes an awkward noise, and I find myself giving her a funny look.

“What? Do you not think so?” I ask.

“Well, you think humans look weird ‘cause we’re different, right?”

“Hmm” I am afraid I know where she is going with this.

“I mean, you’re at least human-shaped, so you’ve got that going for you. But most people aren’t striped with worm segments, and you’ve got those worm-tendrils instead of hands and fingers. And the eyes and teeth of a deep-sea angler fish . . . It takes some getting used to, sweetie.”

“I see . . . I often forget that humans are just as terrible at adapting as I am.”

“Well, the worst of it’s over now, right?”

“I suppose,” I admit. “I used to get shot every other week, and now it hardly ever happens.”

“See? Things are getting better all the time. Give it enough time, and you’ll fit right in with the rest of us. Listen, I gotta get going. Lots of stuff to do today. I’ll talk to you later. Bye, Cuppycake.”

Jessica waves her hand at me, and leaves the sandwich shop. I stare down at the table for a moment. I discard my empty food papers, and wrap my blanket tightly around me again. Still, it takes me a minute to gather enough willpower to push the door open and shred my lungs with the chill air.

The walk home is difficult, yet uneventful. I climb the stairs to my apartment quickly, and stand in the corner by the door. Operating the doorknob through a blanket is not an easy task, though I eventually manage it. I could not imagine operating a lock and key in this weather. I do not bother locking my door. Everybody knows that apartment 304 is my apartment, and that I am not shy about mangling intruders, especially if I must to get my stuff back.

I slam my door shut quickly behind me, and spend my first few minutes home crouched over the heating vent, wrapping myself in a euphoric cocoon of warmth. Once my blanket is nearly too hot to touch, I drag myself to my living room couch, and curl up tightly. I am quite thoroughly exhausted already. I do not work tomorrow, so at least I find myself better able to relax.

I turn my television on. Often, I find it helpful to drown the silence here. I lie on my side, resting my head on the arm of the couch, staring at the television without paying it much attention. A movie I do not recognize is playing right now. I cannot watch it for very long. A human initiates a close, romantic relationship with a large, telepathic hive mind of spiders. I cannot help but feel a sick twinge in my gut. Apparently, a cloud of psychic spiders can find friendship, and even love from a human, but a worm person must be sentenced to constant loneliness.

I start flipping through channels mindlessly. There is a reality show in which a very angry man screams at other humans about vegetables and physically assaults various foodstuffs. I cannot even begin to understand anything

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that is happening in this one. There is another reality show in which parents psychologically abuse their children for the chance to win money, but I cannot stand to see a woman shriek at her half-dressed daughter “worthless blood-sucking cunt”, and I do not even know what that last word means. Then there’s another reality show in which the producer releases a bunch of “pedophiles” into a forest and has an army of “rednecks” hunt them for sport. Maybe I would find it funny if I knew what a “pedophile” or a “redneck” was.

Strangely, the only show on the air right now that does not constantly remind me of my failure to understand or become a part of human culture is a cartoon in which rainbow horses learn about friendship. I wish I could have moved to their place instead. I am sure they would accept me better than the humans do. The strangest part, though, is how much these brightly colored imaginary animals remind me of my previous visit to human land. It is almost as if I am in the company of my old friends again, even if they have been dead for thirty years.

“Humans die, Cuppycake. Everything dies eventually. Even you die sometimes. The difference is, we never get to come back.”

These words ring through my head, as clearly as when they were first spoken to me. I have not found any reason to doubt her yet. Humans seem to fear death with a magnitude I never would have considered possible. If human death is indeed eternal, then I am in a truly terrible situation. My future is suddenly painfully clear once more: the same loneliness I left behind is slowly creeping towards human land. Even if I replace my friends with new ones, the last human will die someday and I will have nowhere to go and nothing to do. Nobody can change that. Not even me. Since I am so utterly powerless to change my future, what am I supposed to do?

“I’ve got it!” A high pitched voice cries from the television. “We’ll bake a cake for her! Cake makes everything better!”

“You can’t solve all your problems with sugary sweets, Pinkie Pie,” The purple cartoon cautions. “It will take more than that to show her that she can trust you again.”

“Aww, but I really like my cake idea, though. Besides, I haven’t found a problem yet that I couldn’t solve with frosting and/or sprinkles.”

Against my better judgment, I cannot help but smile. I should make a cake tomorrow. I do not have even the faintest idea of where to begin, though learning about human stuff can only help me fit in better. Perhaps I should ask Jessica to help me. Maybe we can even watch television together, like friends do. As the television plays a song about the joys of baking, I find myself finally relaxing enough to drift off into sleep . . .

Fiction

Honorable Mention

Perfectly Trapped

by Misty Smith

It's quiet down in the deep. The occasional dings and beeps and blips from the sub usually the only thing to break that silence but today the ocean is alive with noise. The low mournful sound of a creature fills the small metal space and my ears, rumbling them. My hair standing on end. It's not a whale though.

A whale usually lulls me to almost sleep and its call tickles my stomach, but this. This, is making me on edge. Sound isn't the only thing either that has changed. There's something practically dancing on the edge of the LED lights the submarine is emitting from the front. It reminds me of a shark's tail, it's all pointed and has triangles everywhere. A sign that it is a predatory animal.

The only difference is that it does not swim in a straight line or turn like a normal shark. It whorls and dips like a dolphin or seal. If it is a new creature I could go down in history! I grab the maneuvering handles and push forward, following the oddity. It knows to stay just beyond the bright light. That alone proves that it is an intelligent creature. I reach over and try the radar button. I flick it on and off but the damn thing is still busted, so I do not know how big the creature is. I will have to try to lure it in closer. If I could only just see the front of the creature, then I would know what it is. Maybe if I switch over to the red lighting it would come in closer to investigate. Some species of deep sea fish can't handle the blue light spectrum that is closer to the surface, so the animal might just be too afraid to come near because the light hurts its eyes. I reach over head and flick on the red light and immediately everything is shining crimson. It is bright enough to see by for me and I suddenly don't see the shadow I have been chasing after for the last ten minutes. I hope I haven't lost it.

What gives me hope that I haven't is that I still hear the moaning call from earlier. It sounds louder now. It's still hard to pinpoint though. I take note of my surroundings. It seems I have been lead farther south than before and

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there are a few rocky pillars coming up from the sea floor. We are still floating high enough that the sea floor isn't visible. Another odd thing is that since I heard the call and saw the tail of the creature I haven't seen another single animal since. Usually, there isn't pods of animals this deep down but you can usually spot something in the gloom.

Suddenly the sub is shoved gently and I startle. What? Then it happens again but stronger. I lean forward trying to see out of the big bubble glass but I don't see anything. Then like a bad horror movie building tension, the calling stops. The only thing heard is the sound of me breathing and the pings of the sub. HISS! I jump gently when the oxygen comes through the vents and chuckle to myself.

WHAMP! I jerk back and cry out as something hits the glass. Mother of God! Is that a hand?! It looks like a hand and forearm sticking up from the black bottom of the glass and gripping the window. Then another one appears. It doesn't look entirely human. It looks like it has claws, webbing between the fingers and pronounced finger pads grip the window like a gecko as whatever it is uses its arms to pull itself up. A face follows the arms and I'm honestly about to piss myself. The eyes are what I notice first. They are huge it makes sense though with it living so far below. The irises are a bright red that shine with an internal light. It has no visible nose or hair and the if it were a complete human face, where the cheeks would be is dark colored skin and the middle of the face is white. The mouth is larger than a humans would be, tiny fang tips peeking out from the colorless lip. The rest of the body becomes visible and its vaguely female in shape and there's the shark like tail. She seems to be around my height, around six feet long from top to tail tip. Her skin is like a dolphin, rubbery and slippery looking and she has red glowing bioluminescent spots down her tail. A mermaid. An in the flesh mermaid.

I really hope the cameras are recording. She has seen me in the sub and I probably look just as alien to her as you would look to ing a loved one or losing your life?"

The frown now seemed stuck on the old man's face. Yet again he shook his head and admonished, "Are you listening to me? I said tell me what the saddest thing is, not a part of it."

The fourth friend grinned and said, "Life is the saddest thing there is. What could be sadder than that which contains all sadness?"

This time the old man nodded approvingly and with a smile on his face declared, "How fortunate you are. I wish I knew when I was your age, what this long road had in store."

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Visual Art Winner



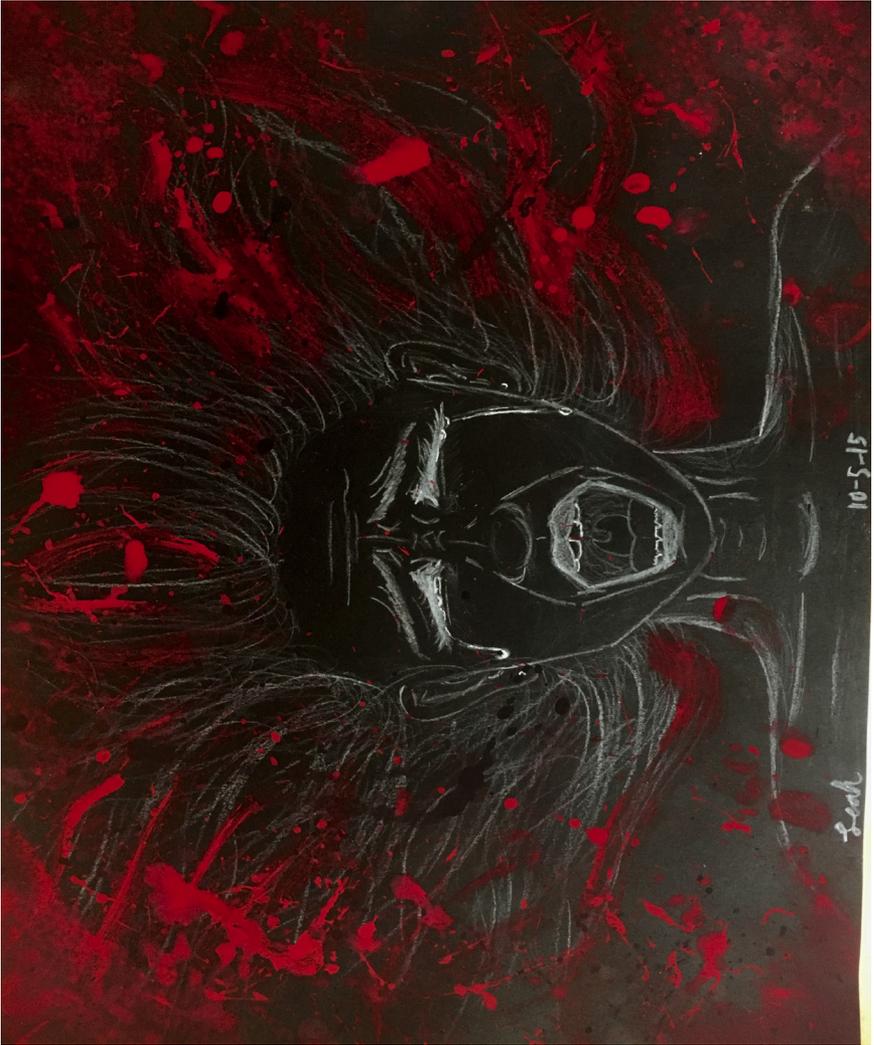
Emily

by Samantha Poe

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Visual Art

Honorable Mention



Untitled

by Leah Kleiman

Tears

Heart beats mend their own

Ruptured rhythm

Not today, tomorrow, or even next year.

The time as secret as invisible thread

Tears on the outside

Fall on the ground

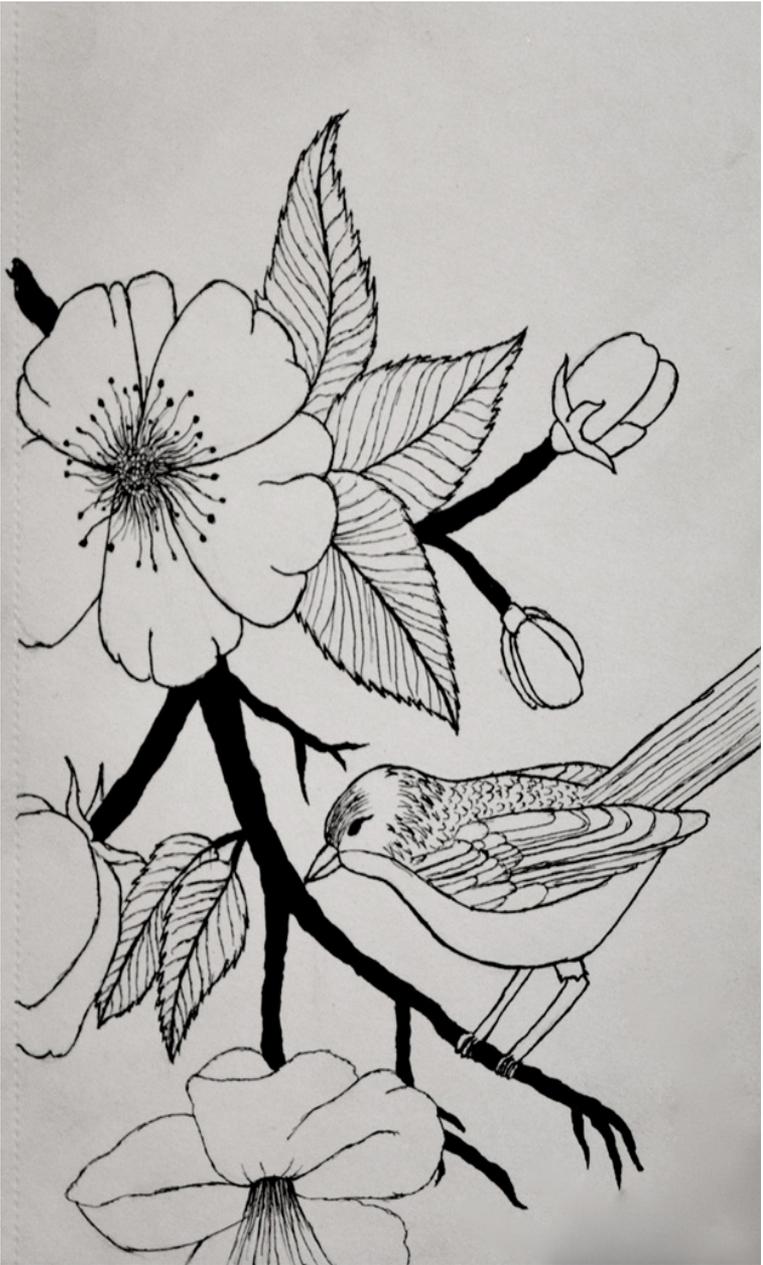
And are swept away

Tears on the inside

Fall on the soul

And stay and stay

- Tricia Lewis



Spring

by Clayton Brown

The Saddest Thing

by Luke Cessna

Early in the morning, four friends saunter along an ancient path when an old man sitting on a wooden bench waves them over and asks, “Tell me what the saddest thing is and give me a reason why. I have nothing to offer you if you get it right; but if you get it wrong, I will gladly impart this knowledge to you.”

The first friend thought for only a second then answered, “It has to be suffering. What’s sadder than all the suffering in the world?”

With a frown on his face, the old man shook his head and replied, “I asked what the saddest thing is—not a part of it.”

The second friend took a moment to think and said, “What is suffering but a part of pain, so pain is the cause of all sadness.”

Again with a frown on his face, the old man shook his head and spoke, “I said it once and I’ll say it again, tell me what the saddest thing is, not a part of it.”

At this, the third friend lit up and exclaimed, “In that case, the saddest thing must be death. What sadness can trump the agony of death, such as losing a loved one or losing your life?”

The frown now seemed stuck on the old man’s face. Yet again he shook his head and admonished, “Are you listening to me? I said tell me what the saddest thing is, not a part of it.”

The fourth friend grinned and said, “Life is the saddest thing there is. What could be sadder than that which contains all sadness?”

This time the old man nodded approvingly and with a smile on his face declared, “How fortunate you are. I wish I knew when I was your age, what this long road had in store.”

Freezing Rain

On the night of the full moon
the light flooded over the water
and a man found me in the rain.
He said "Follow me, sweetheart. Just this time."
I have morals. I do I swear,
but in that instant I didn't care.

My feet were jumbled, tripping in water
drenched to the bone, shivering in the rain.
He asked for my name, there in the presence of the moon.
My heart sagged, dropped to my stomach, why does he care?
It is pointless, meaningless, just one time.
I pull down my hair, sway it back, and swear.

This feeling, this moment, should stop time.
If it had been with someone who cared.
His eyes devour me as he says and solely swears
this would be magnifying under the rain.
Instead I'm lost in some murky water,
and being judged by the man on the moon.

But I don't give my name, that's merely stupid, I swear
that being exposed and open under the moon
makes me feel sick while I'm here in his care.
It's like a drug when your soiled by water.
I would take love any day over this "love" in the rain.
I absolutely detest this moment in time.

With his hands on my body, sliding in the rain,
I want to compress my lungs and swear.
I want it quickly, so it's over, but also to freeze time.
The want in his eyes is for any girl in the light of the moon.
I just so happen to be the girl stupid enough to care.
The only thing saving me now is the cold of the water.

Someday, but not today, I will care.
And one day, before this happens again, it will be the perfect time
to jump into the freezing water
that scares me, that makes me swear
I'll never uncover myself in the sight of the moon
or put out my mind and body in the bitter rain.

The time had come, to let go into his reign.
Here in the moon light, let him take care,
to swear another regretful night of the full moon.

- Esther Kerber



Refugees Welcome

by Glenn Bodish

Poet

A poet must
 breathe underwater,
 with open eyes,
bypassing the breaching whale
to hear a grain of sand
 spin
 on the ocean floor.

A poet must
 part the hair of a dog,
 to remove the feeding tick
and dwell on a
 drying
 drop of blood.

A poet must
 eat the blackberry
 tasting not the sweetness of the fruit,
but to celebrate
 crushing
 the fortress of each seed.

A poet must
 inhale the scent of the blossom
 leaping into the wild
and feel the fragrance
 diffuse
 into the cells of the heart.

A poet must
 gaze into the voyage of time
 to the stars of Orion
and sing with the
 fury
 found in the formation of light.

A poet must
 climb into an oak,
to gaze not at the distance
but to complete the stories on the
 narrow
 edge of a leaf.

A poet must

My Love Is a Four-Leaf Clover

They say my love is hard to find
Here for a moment, furtive and swift
In a blink she is gone (out of sight, out of mind)
Seasons pass and carry her with
Patiently I wait, tearing calendar pages
Only then does she arrive
Every second's an eon, weeks turn to ages
March finally dawns and off I drive

I venture to where she waits once again
Serpentine twists of asphalt separate
And the line ahead stretches on without end
But I continue on, I'm desperate
Overhead are golden, gleaming slopes
Under which I ride
Till I reach a window of hope
And then my love is by my side

She's placed into my eager palm
Heaven's finest in my grasp
A few drops at first to keep me calm
Mine to drink, mine at last
Rewarded with sweet mint
Only the purest of verdigris
Cream of vanilla and emerald tint
Kill me now, and I'll die happily

She's a four-leaf clover, my dear
Her absence brings many a tear
A short-lived greeting
Kisses were fleeting
Even though she'll return in a year



Untitled

by Leah Kleiman

Doppelganger: A Personal Narrative

“I regret that I have but one life to give for my country”
- Nathan Hale

by David Waters

I’m dead. Well, not me, really, but I’m dead. I was killed in Iraq in 2004, but I didn’t die there. I lived through Iraq. Or did I die there? This question has been haunting me since I learned of my death.

I had just landed state side and started ETS-ing Ft. Drum, NY for the past three weeks. I woke up on a typical duty day with a hangover that most of us grunts have when we returned state side from countries that frown on the consumption of alcohol. I prepped for the duty day and left my barracks room for the company CP to check in with the Rear-D NCOIC.

“You’re dead” A fellow comrade said to me as we passed on the staircase. “The fuck? Who did I piss off this time”?

He just laughed as he walked off. I retraced my foot prints from the previous night in my head. If getting drunk and fucking the hell out of my girlfriend was an article fifteen offense then where the hell do I sign the confession? I walked into the company CP and reported to the Rear-D NCO. I stated that my business for the day was to continue to clear post. He checked my name on a sheet of paper and gave me the go ahead to conduct my business.

“How does it feel to be dead, asshole”? he called out to me while I was walking away.

“Okay, this has to be a CSM issue. I must have fucked up so bad at some point that I am literally going to be murdered by the CSM”.

But I didn’t get murdered. After all, how can you murder a man who is already dead, right? I went back to my barracks room somewhat confused. I collected my clearing papers, and went looking for a ride to the Division Troop Center. I found my buddy, Pfc. Hill, who had a car and was willing to drive me around post. After all, he would rather drive my ass around post as opposed to doing “Hey, you”! details all day long.

Anyone who has ever served on active duty can attest that clearing post

makes the DMV look like a God-damned wet dream. Frankly, if I had my choice of clearing post vs. going back to Iraq or Afghanistan; hands down- the latter, why? Because at least there I can shoot at the people who piss me off. Either way, today was the day. I was done with the Army. I was going to “Final Out”. By midnight tonight my boots were going to be dangling from a telephone wire outside the barracks and the next day I would be looking at Ft. Drum in a rear view mirror. I was day dreaming of home, drinking with my friends, and redefining A.I.D.S as: Awesome Intercourse Dave Style.

Fuck being cold, wet, hungry, and miserable ever again-

“You missed a station” The lady behind the counter said.

“Ma’am”?

“You missed a station. You have to get this last block checked, right here: “Personnel” She pointed out on my paper work.

I looked at my check-sheet. It was an honest mistake. After all, again, if you’ve ever had to clear post from active duty everyone who is anyone signs their name, or initials, do so in a manner that makes Michael J. Fox look like a God-damned calligraphy artist. Ergo, I missed a station that I thought was already checked. Assholes.

“Roger, I’ll take care of it, Ma’am”. I cursed under my breath and walked away from the counter. When I arrived at the Personnel office I was greeted by a charming middle-aged woman who was sitting behind her desk.

“Name and Rank”? She asked while holding that diligent smile.

“Specialist, E-4, Waters, David”, I said politely as I handed over my paper work. I still irritated from the last office. I pulled out my wallet and presented her with my ID card.

“Waters” she said to herself as she began typing away. “David, Eeeeeeeee four”.

There was an uncomfortable pause. She looked up to me and took her glasses off.

“Are you sure you’re Specialist Waters”?

“I’m standing here, right, Ma’am”?

“Yes, well according to our records, you’re deceased”.

“Well, according to my pulse I’m very much alive! Are you sure you have the right me? Specialist David K. Waters”? The lady looked at her computer screen and scanned it for details.

“Are you not Specialist David L. Waters? 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry”?

“No, Ma’am. I’m Specialist David K. Waters, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry. My last four is: four-zero-eight-six, Ma’am”. She typed in my name, rank, and last four.

“Ah, yes, there you are. Sorry about the confusion”.

Suddenly it all made sense to me. The comments my peers had been making to me all day came full circle: I was dead. I was just killed last week. And there

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was nothing I could do about it.

I cleared Personnel and went on to “Final Out”. After doing so, Hill and I returned back to the barracks and I went back to my room. I cracked open the 21 year old bottle of Chivas Regal to celebrate this moment of freedom. While doing so I noticed that I had seven new voicemails on my answering machine. I never have that many voice mails on any given day. My death had just revitalized itself. I reached over and pressed the “Play” button as I took my first pull from the bottle. The voice on the recording, sounded like “Hank Hill”, which was all too familiar to me.

“David, this is your father, call me as soon as you get this....”

“David, this is your father calling again. I’m really worried about you.....”

“David, this is your father, I just saw on the news that you’re dead, call me back as soon as you get this.....”

“David, are you dead? CNN says you are, call me.....”

Don’t get me wrong, I love my father. He is one of the smartest men I have ever known, but how the fuck am I supposed to call him back if I’m dead? That was just the tip of the iceberg.

The next day I was all packed up and ready to ship off back to my home town of Oregon, Illinois. My buddies, Conrad and Butler, helped me load everything up into Butler’s truck and they gave me a lift to the train station down in Syracuse, NY. I looked at Ft. Drum in the rearview mirror for one last time; I had one last lunch with the men I served with in Kosovo, and Iraq. We exchanged our last nostalgic war stories, farewells, and goodbyes. I shook hands with two of my fondest memories from active duty and said goodbye.

My death continued when I arrived back home. I began receiving my forwarded mail from Ft. Drum. I got care packages and letters from my family, except they were not my family. I received letters from my girlfriends, except I had only but one girlfriend. I replayed the earlier days in my head and figured it out, it was a typical Army fuck-up. Even though I wasn’t David L. Waters the Army was forwarding me all of his mail. What does one do with dead guy mail?

I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know how to handle this. I wasn’t dead, but he was, so what do I do? Do I reach out to his family? Would my congruent name and rank be all the more devastating to this man’s family? I didn’t want to cause any more harm to them than what they had already had suffered.

Even now, as I write this.....

.....I’m dead. Fuck Iraq.

Dragon

I'd like to make peace with all the dragons in my head-
all those dark creatures
who came in the open door of childhood
and bedded down
I've denied them, feared them and fought them.
All the same, I've fed them rather well.
I'm very kind to other people's dragons
It's my own I'm not able to forgive

- Tricia Lewis

The Lobster Breaks Free

Covering little, pink, small, and taut
The speedo stretches, pressed, stressed on Scott
Yes, like a Lobster
This sight did foster
When it snapped while sitting on the pot.

- James Hutchison



Untitled

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox

Peace

Down a long gravel road that is shrouded by trees,
I find an old house which has withered through time.
Beside it are gardens filled with flowers swaying in the breeze.
The warmth of the sun radiates down making things purely sublime.

Above this house the sky is blue and clear each day.
The birds sing their songs and there are no bugs that bite.
There are no violent storms or terrible creatures to make life grey,
even the sparkling nighttime stars make the darkness seem bright.

This is a place that nobody knows and only I can go.
The animals exist in harmony and they even seem to understand me.
Like green plants and tall trees in the forest, this is somewhere I too can
grow.
A knock brings me back to the other place, and I wonder why they won't
leave me be.

Back to the place of judging, of hate, and coats of white,
A world where they stare and make me feel so small.
Here in this place that fills me with fright,
my only comfort is this padded wall.

- Andrew Clark

A Narrative Unfolding

by Noel Berkey

The story was twice as long as it needed to be. It was easy to see where certain details could be cut. The assignment was to compose a personal narrative that revealed a message for members of the class to consider. Since the events had to take place within a 24-hour timespan or less—to emphasize the importance of compression in telling a compelling story, hopefully guiding students away from sprawling, timeless descriptions of experiences that didn't add up to anything—she described the day she gave birth. Not one or two hours capturing the key highlights of the day. The entire day. He had read many day-I-gave-birth narratives in his career. Only a handful had been told well. This one was amusing in spots. He pictured the student who wrote it. She rarely smiled in class, and never spoke. But she was disclosing a lot of personal information here, with vivid descriptions of her body fluids and all. There were problems with shifting verb tense though, and run-on sentences, and a bunch of other things he hoped she would learn to care about. Noting all these concerns again and again with comments made his brain swirl. There were sixty more narratives to grade by the end of the week.

He sat at his work desk in a corner of the living room with this seemingly insurmountable pile of submissions. It was exhausting for him to even look at it. He heard himself sigh. That's when the kid came in the front door, his hair long and messy and hiding his eyes. He was skinny too. Almost tall. His sister's kid. He would be staying here for a while. They were each getting used to it. The kid said "Hey" from behind his hair and stood at the bottom of the stairs after closing the door. Looking at him, it was hard to tell his mood. His face was hidden by hair. He revealed nothing.

"Hey . . . 'sup?" he asked the kid, cocking his head just so, sort of mimicking his nephew's posture. He thought of other things to say too. Didn't say them. Just waited for a response from behind the hair.

The kid said nothing. Shifted his weight to the other foot. One of his eyes peeped through his hair. Didn't reveal much. It was an awkward but not unexpected silence. When it was clear to each of them that he wasn't going to reply to his uncle's question, he turned and went upstairs. His room was up there.

After he heard the bedroom door click, he put the narratives and gradebook in the weathered laptop briefcase he transferred between home and school. The pile, when hidden from view, was less menacing. And so his thoughts were now on his nephew, their new arrangement. Having someone else in the house made him feel something he was struggling to pinpoint. About three years before a girlfriend had lived with him a few months. He had loved her, he thought. She had transformed his life, his home. Watching her sleep. Watching her eat cereal. Helping her clean dishes, look for the TV remote, figure out her life goals. All these simple events seemed timeless in his imagination. Failing to find someone who took interest in him like she had, he now found himself sharing his place with his nephew.

He understood if the kid didn't want to talk much. His life had been turned upside down. Not only moving from Florida to Illinois, to his mom's hometown, but all the stuff that led to her being in prison. Her boyfriend and like-minded acquaintances, all of them working for and against one another in subtle and dangerous ways. The kid had apparently been around weapons and drugs. Probably a few heated arguments between confused adults. Hard to say what all he'd seen. He'd been here just a couple weeks so far, and would be here longer. His mom was going to be locked up eighteen months minimum. His uncle had begun imagining her behind bars with her angry face. He'd seen her mugshot. Had even saved the image on his phone for some reason. How had she become so lost?

He got on the elliptical across the room from his work desk and plugged in his headphones. Lately he'd been listening to an audio book on Zen Buddhism as he stepped up and down working his legs and midsection. He was being instructed to clear his mind of everything, breathe deeply and thoughtfully, be present in the moment. He tried to find this quiet space but felt pursued by thoughts of his sister, his new situation with his nephew, his being single and all the reasons why, the pile of narratives he still had to grind through. There was a tree outside he would sometimes look at to help clear his mind. Observing nature was supposed to help him tap into the interconnectedness of everything, help him find peace. He looked at it and thought of his worries instead, how he could hang one on every branch. At times like this he felt he was fighting forces larger than he could imagine. He was hoping to learn how to stop fighting and just be. But enlightenment was slow in coming, it seemed. He would work at it though, just as he exercised daily. He considered his disciplined nature, and how his older sister hadn't been disciplined enough to be a real mom. He remembered how back in high school she had dated losers older than her with tattooed arms and necks and who didn't graduate. Guys who smoked cigarettes and weed nonstop. They were always squinting and talking shit about authority figures bumming their highs. Perhaps because of them she got bad grades and in horrible yelling matches with their mom. To make things worse, when their mom died just a couple years before, his sister hadn't come home till the last minute. He'd tried getting her there earlier, had even sent money for

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travel. But she stayed in her little world until the death hour was near. She had spent only a few minutes saying goodbye to their intubated mom. It was hard to read the expression in her dying eyes, but it seemed the visit hadn't soothed any of them. Partly because his sister traveled alone and deprived their mom of seeing her grandson. He was mad at her then for not bringing him. Didn't know the extent of the mess she was in. The words in his headphones now threaded his thoughts and maybe helped him feel less angry with her. He was instructed to let go of anger, that peeling away its layers would allow him to find peace. He thought of her and did as he was being instructed. He pictured her and tried not to judge. Just pictured her and tried to breathe from the heart. He was about twenty minutes into his workout though. Breathing from the heart was something he was going to have to work on. The anger wasn't easy to dispel.

The kid appeared at the bottom of the stairs and made his way to the kitchen. He stood at the counter while working through a bag of chips. His hair was pushed away from his mouth just enough. His uncle thought he might have said something between bites, so took out his headphones and asked, "Hey, you say something? I'm seeking enlightenment here and thought you might have said something."

"No, just eating some chips." He ate a few more in quick succession and rubbed his greasy hand on his jeans. "That's alright, right?"

"Yeah, of course. I'll buy more when those are gone." The kid was too skinny. "You should eat more chips," he added.

"Yeah?" He even laughed a little. "Maybe so. Wasn't much food at my old place."

He pictured the empty fridge at his sister's. The anger was lingering.

"I'll make dinner when I'm done here. Just a few more to go." He was sweating now, figuring what to make, thinking about all the narratives he had to grade later.

"Cool," the kid said before heading back upstairs.

He cleaned himself up after the workout and made spaghetti. He thought of the new living arrangement as the water for the noodles came to a boil. He thought about the struggles ahead as the sauce bubbled. He allowed himself to savor these quiet moments, hoped they would help peel away his negative thoughts. When the food was done he yelled up to the kid, let him know it was time to eat.

They sat across from each other at the table. When the hair was temporarily pushed from his face, he thought his nephew looked like a normal kid.

"How's school?" he decided to ask.

The kid was putting a double dose of Parmesan on his spaghetti. "It's alright," he replied.

"Yeah? Any pretty girls?" Maybe asking about girls he might like was going too far. He asked anyway. "Probably not as pretty as Florida girls, right?" The kid stuffed his mouth with a big bite. It was going to take him time to chew.

And so he chewed, eyed his uncle, the hint of a grin spreading over his

face. "They're alright up here," he offered, then chewed some more. Hair fell back in his face. He brushed it away. "Like Florida girls, more or less. Just maybe a little less tan."

He smiled back, imagined being fourteen again. It was hard being a teen. But he remembered good times too. "You know, I figure it's hard to adjust and everything. It doesn't have to be easy." He felt wise saying this. Figured his sister hadn't made a point of having meaningful conversations at the dinner table.

The kid didn't have anything to say to that. Just kept eating, staring at his plate. When he was done he said thanks, put his dish next to the sink, got a glass of water, and headed back upstairs.

There were narratives to grade. He cleaned up the dinner mess, then graded. There was one about a guy who played tennis and worked through an injury and heat exhaustion to win an important match. The message was clear, the details interesting enough, but it was hard for him to come up with even one sentence to offer as feedback. Another narrative was focused on how the author got shot between the eyes with a dart his older brother had crammed in the barrel of a pellet gun when they were young and unsupervised. The message was to not mess with guns. This was announced in the last sentence. Yet another narrative was about a girl whose parents got divorced because her dad was a hopeless drunk. This one didn't stick to the time frame or reveal a clear message. He sympathized with her. Pictured her in his mind. Sent her positive energy. That's where his heart was. His job was to help students improve their writing though. What she really needed was therapy. For her, writing this essay had been therapeutic. A little at least, he figured. That's what mattered to her, likely. Writing could help of course. But she hadn't followed the directions, and now he had to say something about this, record a grade she wouldn't be happy with and that made him feel bad. At least temporarily, till he graded so many others that he simply pushed it out of his mind once meeting his empathy threshold. He imagined his nephew receiving similar feedback for an essay he would write in a few years when he attended college. He could picture him writing about the day a heavily armed squad of paramilitary-type police officers stormed his house and took his mom away. There'd be the awful detail about a squad member pointing a gun at his nephew's head before realizing he wasn't part of the operation, just an innocent kid stuck in a bad situation. There'd be another detail about how officers pinned his screaming mom to floor on her stomach while handcuffing her wrists behind her back. He imagined being the teacher who would struggle to respond, who would feel compelled to give hope, reveal a little humanity, but also draw attention to components of writing that could use fine-tuning. Teaching could be an exhausting balancing act at times. He was hoping the audio book he'd been listening to would help him accept the balancing act and even grow to appreciate it more. He stopped grading for the night after writing one final comment: "With a little more revising and editing, your narrative could be stronger."

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Just a couple weekends after, when somehow there weren't any essays to grade, when the kid had begun disclosing more about himself, even admitted to getting a couple bad grades because of procrastination and such, and after he reluctantly agreed to a haircut, one that left it moderately long but within reason, they took a day trip to downtown Chicago on a train. It was the end of September, summer still hanging on. The kid had never been to a city so big. They found themselves walking many miles, taking pictures at Millennium Park, looking at art, coming to different conclusions about its worth, and laughing together at a scruffy man walking down a street with a tall water bottle balanced on his head. Details coloring their narrative.

Before catching the train home they got ice cream cones and sat on a bench to watch the city breathe.

"I don't think I'd get lonely living here," the kid said to break the silence.

"You feel lonely, even living with me?" He knew what the kid meant, because he felt lonely too. Most of the time at least. But he asked anyway. The kid was quiet. He held his cone and looked above the crowd before them, seemed to focus on the top of a skyscraper where the sun was glinting at the moment. Then he said, "Yeah, maybe a little." It sounded like he wanted to reassure his uncle though. "But it's okay," he added. "I'm glad I'm here . . . in Illinois . . . with you."

They were quiet for a few moments. Licked their cones. Watched beautiful women lost in thought walking in every direction before them. Considering the kid's observation and thinking of himself, he finally offered, "Even living in a city like this, all these people . . . even mixed in with this crowd, I'm guessing it would be easy to still find ways to be lonely." He remembered how the audio book had been instructing him to overcome loneliness by contemplating the inherent nature of interconnectedness.

The kid sort of laughed. A quiet laugh really. Maybe not even a laugh. "You think?" he said. He smiled big too, maybe an uncertain smile, like maybe he was learning things about his uncle he wasn't expecting to learn.

The train ride home was quiet. Neither talked much. But it had been a good day, and the quiet ride was what they needed. They were open to the quiet.

A couple weeks later his sister called for the first time since her incarceration to talk with her son. He was surprised to hear her voice. It wasn't the one he remembered. He tried to get her to talk with him a minute first, but she only wanted to talk with the kid. He could hear unease in her voice. She was in the middle of realizing where her narrative led her, he guessed, but he also wasn't going to judge her anymore. Try not to. So he yelled up to the kid and said his mom was on the phone.

Moments later his door unclicked and he came down the stairs. He slowly walked across the room, then took his uncle's phone. Anticipating hearing his mom's voice, he had a reluctant look on his face. He said "Hey" to let her know he was there.

So they could have their talk in private, he stepped out the sliding glass door leading to the backyard and closed it behind him. The tree he looked at when exercising was back here. He looked at it now, deciding how he would deal with things as they arose, how he couldn't plan too far ahead for his nephew because so many factors were still in play. He would have to wait and see where certain details led. For now, he would just try to live in the moment. He was getting better at this, even though it wasn't always easy.

After a few minutes passed he looked inside and saw his nephew pacing, holding the phone to his ear, running fingers through his hair. Their stories were still being written. Sure enough. Details were unfolding. The thing to do was let the process work itself out, not force it. He was convincing himself this was true, that the best stories have always been shaped this way.



One Truck, Two Rainbows

by Alaina Kruse

It Made Me Wonder

It was one of those days

When all the waters in the sky poured out.

I remember how I sat that day

And listened to the rain bombard the roof.

Lightning charged through the black clouds

And thunder roared like the king of the sky!

It made me wonder about me,

Could I write a book or a poem?

Would my work have value?

Or would I have value without my work?

- Patricia Lewis



The Magician

by Clayton Brown

Temporary

by Tom Irish

So, a few years back I got a three-day temp job working at this shitty outdoor show. You know, a weekend of used RV's and borderline-illegal gun sales. It wasn't really my thing, but I was between bartending gigs and needed the money.

My job was to sit at this folding table and give out brochures and coupons for this fishing guide. His name was Jim something. I spent Friday, Saturday, and Sunday morning trying to convince these crusty old guys in camouflage to let me hand them a piece of paper that they didn't want to read. I was not, in any way, successful at this job.

As the convention was opening up on Friday, Jim set up this, like, temporary pond. He built it out of a huge tarp and some pieces of wood. After it was filled with water he dumped in some chemicals and then stirred it up with a kayak paddle he scammed from another booth. Then he had someone dump in this huge load of fish. Carp, or flounders, or something. I dunno the kinds. Anyway, when it was fully set up, he started renting these shortie fishing poles to the bored kids passing by. He gave them about twenty minutes or one fish, whichever came first, for ten bucks.

Friday and Saturday seemed pretty good for him, I guess. There were a lot of kids who gave him their money, and not too many who went away fishless. It was so easy for them that, by Sunday, I wasn't paying a lot of attention anymore. Then, not long after lunch time, this one little girl cast a line into the pond and pulled out a cat.

It came out of the water spitting and yowling, completely drenched, and unmistakably not a fucking fish. Her dad held the line up in one hand while the cat thrashed and clawed in midair at the end. He was amazed, but the kid was totally delighted. She crowed and clapped, and before her dad had a chance to stop her, she tried to hug the cat and it scratched the shit out of her. There wasn't too much blood, but I still felt kind of bad for laughing.

When the dad and Jim finally got the cat unhooked, it squirmed loose and ran off into the crowd. Everybody seemed to forget about it almost, like, immediately. The girl, who had been so happy and then in so much pain, got a band aid and then wandered off to look at taxidermy. It was like it never happened.

About fifteen minutes later, a different kid hooked a bottle of whiskey. It looked like bourbon, though the label was pretty trashed from the water. I

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had no idea how the hook was even attached to the bottle. The dad's eyes totally lit up when he saw it. He was looking at the kid all proud and shit, like he had actually done something. After a few seconds, the kid started crying about how he had wanted a fish. The dad took the bottle in one hand and steered the kid away with the other, barely noticing the tears.

This one dad, who had taken the pole from his daughter, pulled up Superman. Not a toy. The person. Yeah, I know that there's no such real person, but this guy from the pond had the outfit, the looks, everything. The powers, too. Eventually someone took a shotgun from a nearby display and blasted him in the chest. He barely seemed to notice until everyone around started applauding.

After Superman had his fifteen minutes, somebody else pulled out Batman. He was kicking and groaning from the pain of the hook buried in his face, but that didn't stop everybody from rushing him. They wanted to touch his utility belt, check his armor for nipples, shit like that. At one point, he broke loose of the crowd and grabbed this, like, skanky-looking chick who was trying to steal fishing reels from another booth and handed her over to a security guard. While this was happening, Superman was flying around and flexing in the background, but nobody cared. Later I saw him drinking Coors with two fat guys in lawn chairs. People just like Batman better, I guess.

When somebody hooked a soggy wad of cash, well, that's when the whole thing turned into a fucking frenzy. Dads were paying Jim forty or fifty bucks and making their kids fish two or three lines at a time. When Jim ran out of poles, a few people tried to pull stuff out of the water with their bare hands. One lady got a fish that way. Another got an enormous octopus that immediately wrapped its tentacles around her head and shoulders. It was so busy that Jim had to get help to taking money and keeping people from stealing. He drafted a youngish security guard and this medium-hot chick from the exotic jerky booth. For some reason he told me to stay at the table and keep handing out brochures, even though nobody had stopped by for hours.

Right at five PM, somebody pulled up a stripper. She was all wet, which didn't, like, discourage the mob of horny dads that trapped her in place and started screaming at her, trying to get her to dance. Batman tried to get through them to reach her and couldn't. I think he was going to try to help her escape, but he did have a dollar bill in one fist, so I'm not really sure. Superman was either napping or passed out. Jim was still forcing me to stay at the brochure table. The jerky girl had brought me a piece of dried lion meat, so I just chewed on that and wondered how naked the stripper was getting. And if any of the kids could see her.

A couple of minutes later, the entire convention center staff materialized at once. It was closing time. They moved across the hall like a digital wave, flawlessly sweeping along every customer and leaving every vendor where they were. It took them like five minutes to clear the whole place. By the time they were locking the doors, I wasn't even done with my stringy chunk of lion meat.

After that, everybody just started cleaning up. Guys were stowing guns and knives that didn't sell, taking down tents, and driving RV's out the loading dock door. Jim finally waved me over and the two of us, with some other guys, took down the pond. There were still some fish swimming around in there, along with a couple of balding accountants, a Ford Explorer, and a baked chicken. Jim drained all of the water, and then everyone there grabbed the edges of the tarp and slid everything into a couple of coolers that Jim had brought along. For about ten minutes afterward you could sometimes hear slapping against the insides of the coolers, but Jim had locked them up tight. After a while, the noises all stopped.

I'm not sure if Jim gave all of the fish and stuff away or took it all home himself, but I know that he didn't offer me anything. When I left work, paid off the books with cash Jim had made at the convention, I had to buy my own frozen fish sticks at the discount grocery store near my apartment. They were freezer-burned, but I guess I'm glad I didn't have to clean them myself.



Untitled

by Ashliegh Peavy

X Marks My Galaxy

Check it out:

x marks my galaxy
and introduces me to
a sunset I've never seen before.
I wake up. My bed is a solar storm,
but I do not burn a limb.

I am crying and dying
from a rose-colored smile,
the weight of a snowflake
falling on my thoughts,
encircling my waist with
a Christmas chapter book
and the halls of
a never ending house.

So I go with the flow
and I follow the sun
aimed to make bad kids laugh
on their better days.
X marks my galaxy
and weighs my soul.

- Samantha Poe

Mr. Teddy

Pitter platter on the plate
Pondered Peter while he ate
Sir will be here very late
No one but Mr. Teddy

Mama madam makes him mad
Dancing with him, instead of dad
You will be punished if you are sad
Except by Mr. Teddy

Baltrum the butter butters his bread
Then he pats him on his head
But then he sends him to go to bed
With his Mr. Teddy

Tippy toes up to the top
No one here except his pop
He wish he could do his little hop
With him and Mr. Teddy

So soft and soundly he drifts to sleep
Careful not to make a peep
He will be a quiet little sheep
And so will Mr. Teddy

Teddy whispers in his ear
Things that he won't want to hear
But it's all so true, and that I fear
That he'll go with Mr. Teddy

No one see's him, no one cares
No one will wonder when he's not there
So, hand in hand with one last prayer
Together with Mr. Teddy

Yes, his face is black as coal
And, yes, he know he wants his soul
So, yes, still yes, he'll take his stroll
With his Mr. Teddy
With one wave of his scythe he'll say
That all his problems with go away
With one word, he'll make them pay
He's ready, Mr. Teddy

Mommy messes with the help
Daddy's always by himself
Pop is sick with little health
So it's just him and...
That thing.

- Eden Buyno



Entering the Quantum

by Glenn Bodish

Moon Runners

by James Hutchison

He still looked like he did when he was thirty years old, only weathered, more beaten, and far wiser. He was as tall and gangly as he ever was and though aged, he was still swift and light on his feet like a cat. He was ancient in the face with deep set eyes, but somehow his pale blue gaze still pierced the soul. His hands were gnarled and even shook just a little when they were still, but his grip was like cold iron. His clothes were tattered and holes could be seen here and there through shoddy patchwork, but you'd never catch him wearing anything else when he was running. Pants two inches too short over his shoes, a red flannel shirt with a torn pocket, a riding leather jacket that's glory days were long gone, and a frayed boater hat sat on his head. Of course, none of those were as important as his old leather running shoes.

"Have you ever even looked inside one of those things?" I asked him as we walked through the woods across county lines.

"Course not. I just deliver." was his quick answer.

"But, you know what's inside," I asked curiously.

"Course I do." He answered with a quip.

"Then you know it's not illegal anymore," I said matter-of-factly.

"Doesn't matter. Customers like quality," he said with a smile.

It was nonsense of course. Moon running had died when the great liquor skittle factories around the world were finally reopened. They had been closed because some health agency that no one had ever heard of said they were hurting people, so the world did what the world does, and overreacted. Moon running was born overnight, and before you could blink, entire generations of runners were being trained by their parents and grandparents to move little steel boxes full of liquor skittles across borders under cover of darkness with no light but the moon to guide them.

But someone figured out you couldn't pack the skittles in soft material like wood or cloth, nor could they be packed too tight. They had to be kept in steel tins, loose and free moving so they didn't get soggy and melt. You can imagine how brave the runners thought they were for carrying an enormously loud alarm for anyone looking for them, and there was always someone looking for them. It became a rite of passage for kids and grandkids being brought into the family business. All they had to do was make a solo run with a tin and not get caught.

And my Grandpa never got caught. For thirty-seven years, he ran every

The Works

route in every state far and wide on foot. He knew every road, every shortcut, and every trail from Alaska to Florida. Legend and I mean that literally, says he even ran moon routes in Hawaii. It only took him ten years to become known in the world of Moon Runners, but the bigger his reputation grew, the fewer people knew his name. People started believing the legend and forgot the truth and created stories and outright lies to explain his moon running prowess. So, the man himself became nothing and now... he was so old.

"There's no one here," I said, confused.

"Oh, I don't let them see me anymore." he said with an old man's chuckle.

"When was the last time anyone seen you deliver?" I asked next.

"Years and years. Still had my pinky finger," he said as he flashed me the nub where the finger used to be and then grinned.

He placed the little metal tin on the porch with a grunt as he bent down, and as he stood he said, "Gettin' too old for running these days." to which I replied, "I've been telling you that..."

"I know I know." was his answer as we turned and made our way back to the woods.

"Enis?" said a voice from behind us that stopped us dead in our tracks.

When we turned, there was an old woman in a nightgown standing on the porch looking at my Grandpa as if she knew him.

"Enis... it's you?" she said sounding shocked.

"Yes, yes, go back inside, Martha." he replied and we turned to walk again.

"Enis?" I asked with a chuckle.

"Should've asked." he answered, but the smile I was expecting didn't come.

"Your name is Grandpa," I said, this time laughing, but he still seemed bothered by something.

"Enis!" yelled Martha from the porch.

"Damn it, Martha, go inside!" yelled Grandpa without turning and throwing his hand over his head.

"But they know it's you, Enis!" cried Martha.

We both froze instantly, this time slowly turning to face Martha and this new information.

"Impossible!" said Grandpa loudly as we walked back towards the porch.

"But they have evidence, Enis. They say they have pictures from years ago!"

"There aren't any pictures, Martha. It's a lie," said Grandpa sounding exhausted and tired.

"But it's true... it's really you?" asked Martha still surprised.

"Course it's me!" answered Grandpa almost shouting.

"But... the storm of 36'... that was you too?" asked Martha as her aged

mind put together so many years of legend and lies.

"Yes, yes. All me." answered Grandpa with a dismissive hand, and then continued, "Martha, who knows?"

"And the bear in 41'..." continued Martha in a virtual daze.

"Martha!" yelled Grandpa.

"Oh!" she said jolted out of her thoughts. "Some Sheriff. He was in a suit."

"Sherriff? In a suit?" inquired Grandpa.

"Yes." answered Martha.

"But... why would they be trying to find me now?" asked Grandpa to no one in particular.

The answer came quickly, as three black cars pulled into the driveway and surrounded the house. A man in a well-fitted suit stepped out and took a look around at the scenery before looking at Grandpa who was still standing on the porch next to Martha. There was a tear in my Grandpa's eye, and somehow I knew he knew what happened.

"You..." he said looking right through me.

"I'm sorry Grandpa..." was all I could muster as I tried and failed to meet his pale blue gaze.

"When?" he asked me as he turned to face the FBI Agent that walked towards us.

"When Mom died," I said now struggling to hold back my tears. "You're all I have left!"

"Not anymore." was the last thing he said to me as he put his hands out to be cuffed.

Not anymore.

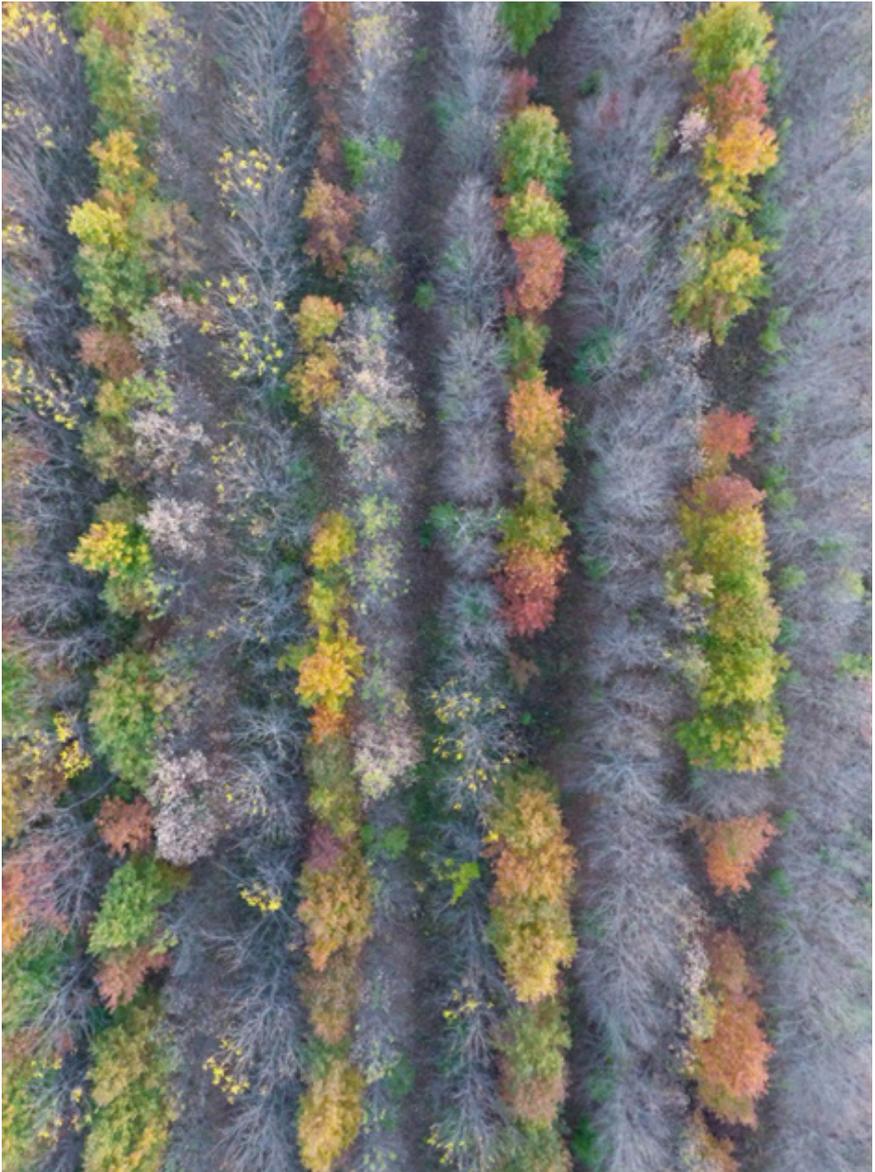
A Plea For The Tree

An old tree is rotting,
Then falls to the ground.
Henceforth the quip,
was ever a sound?
For seasons it stood,
rooted deep to the earth,
drawing up water,
of lifegiving birth.
In winters it shivered,
in springs it would heave,
supplying the oxygen,
for all things to breath.
Time was good,
when it made the grade,
shimmering foliage
cast a deep cooling shade.
Then came the season,
of that fateful day,
It's leaves neer returned,
it began to decay.
Yet, it still shields,
the bat from the cold.
The squirrel tightly nested,
in a hollowed out hold.
The branches now brittle,
the bark turning gray.
Woodpeckers hunting,
for grubworm-type prey.
Should the tree be replaced,
with youthful and good,
then turned into a pile
of firewood?
So as the tree stands,
verticle and stogic,
its worth yet remains,
within prarie plot logic.
Was ever a sound?
The quip becomes raw,
from the echoing screams,
of a chain-driven saw.



Untitled

poem and photograph by Mike Hunter



Untitled Drone Photograph

by Richard Eichaman



Untitled

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox

WILD BUFFALO

Buffalo, O'Buffalo
where can you roam?

Thundering 'cross prairies
that once were your home'

T'was said it took hours
a single herd to pass by
rumbling the senses
dust choking the sky

Indigenous man
knew the gifts that you brought
civilized man
gave 'nary a thought

Once you were millions
but not so of late
the deeds of man un-kind
nearly sealed your fate

It may be too late
I hope that's not true
return bison herds
to the red, white and blue

Renewing our focus
to prairies now lost
the importance of which
beyond any cost

A shout for our wisdom
preserve all the earth
contributions to the whole
each having its worth

sow open prairies
to flourish and grow
restoring the grace
of the wild buffalo

- Mike Hunter

Untitled

by Esther Kerber

January February 15 21, 2021

February August 21, 2021

August 21, 2021

They are making me write this. Oh I guess I'm not supposed to write that. 'Write your feelings and thoughts.' Well that's a load of bullshit. I know, they don't care what I write.

Today they made me talk about the incident. More they wanted me to talk about the incident. I told them they could kiss my ass before I'd say anything.

Because I didn't do anything wrong.

I was obviously judged too quickly. Not only by them, but the judge also deemed what I did was immoral and illegal. That's absolute bullshit crap. They yell, they don't raise their voice, at me when I curse. They make me change my wording to be more socially acceptable.

I don't understand how writing my feelings down is going to help me. Wait. That's write right; it's going to allow them to look into my mind to help me become a better person.

Which is pointless.

I am a very good person. What they don't seem to understand is The Voice. I'm not supposed to call him that. Well to them he isn't a him. But what am I supposed to call him? Nothing. Because to them he isn't real. He is.

He tells me all the time I did the right thing. I mean I hope he would like it. He was the one that told me what to do.

They aren't going to be happy when they read his. I should talk about something they will like and understand.

I think about God a lot. Well not as often as I should. It's more I wonder if there really is a God. And if there is, does he care about me. A little blip in the radar. If he doesn't care about me then I can guarantee nobody cares about me anymore.

Adam is a trader so, I don't want anything to do with him anyway. As for Eliza I'd be surprised if she ever wanted to see me again.

Okay that's enough. They can just deal with this mess. This is what they wanted me to do.

— James
Ryan
Leroy
Liam



Untitled

by Leah Kleiman

Living

this face is not mine
stiffening,
stilling,
familiar in form
alien in reaction

no longer
reacting
flushing
blushing
giving me away

it's missing quirks
eyebrows raised
going skyward
and cracked
crooked grins

it seldom overflows anymore —
no hysterics
or tricklings —
rarely leaving salt trails
across freckles

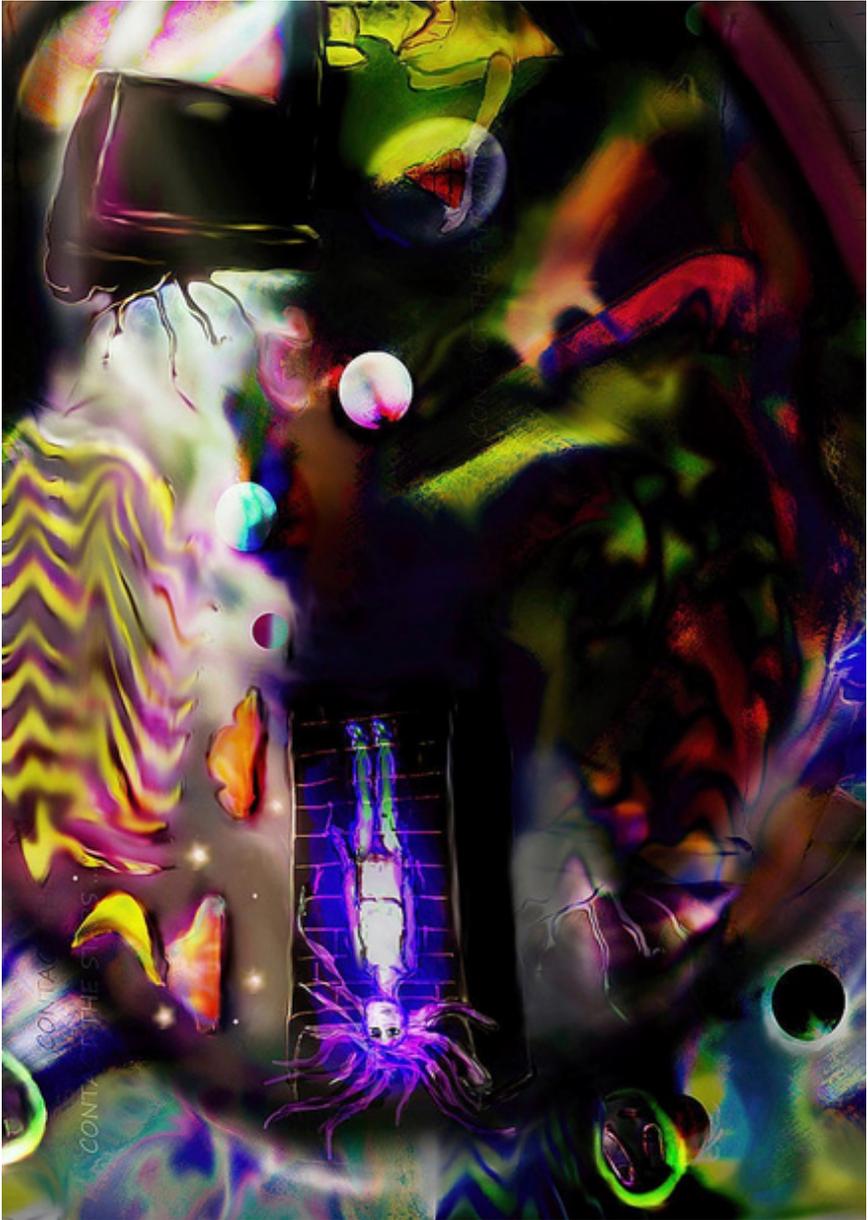
my tears have been eased
into dryness
my eyes are bereft and
have been coped
into manageability.

It's not my face.

machine motions
required response
remembered and recognized
lips part
"Yes, fine. Thanks for asking."

there's a tiny green pill
swallowed dry
slowly sliding down
the throat that used to be mine.
under the cover of
blackened morning.

- Rachel Brunner



*Contact the Stars,
Contact the Pyramids*

by Samantha Poe



Untitled

by Ashliegh Peavy

Mmmmm Chocolate

What could be better than slowly dipping food into milk chocolate,
Watching it get completely lost in decadent sweetness until only shape remains.
Pretzel, strawberry, marshmallow, cake
All become blissfully lost in warm velvety depths.
Oh, you could drizzle warm dark chocolate over
Cool, creamy mounds of vanilla ice cream
And be just as satisfied.
Or you could enjoy the chocolatey goodness of your favorite bar,
Unwrapping it gently,
Taking it in. Smell, color and form
Then letting it all melt lovingly on your tongue
Mmmmm chocolate.

- Misty Smith

Around the World Pancakes

Pancakes stacked three high
Syrup slides over the sides
The scent of butter.

- James Hutchison



Reclining Figure

by Glenn Bodish



January's Asclepias

by Rachel Brunner

Fahrenheit

- Hangovers, books, and an over-reactive imagination.

by David Waters

It was 7:32 A.M. and the fire alarm was going off. Jonny Waterloo sat upright in his recliner chair that he had passed out in from the previous night of drinking. His vision was still hazy and his head felt like that of a fish bowl with his brains swashing from side to side in his skull like an absinthe tsunami.

“The fuck”? He thought to himself as he his red-rimmed eyes scanned around his apartment, looking for signs of smoke. There was none. He decided to create some of his own by lighting up a cigarette. After all, the fire alarm was already going off, so what more damage could be done at this point? He stood up and instantly felt light headed. The rush from standing up while inhaling the monoxide coupled with his contaminated senses caused his vision to slightly fade and see stars. He stumbled to his right and tripped over a half filled tumbler glass and an empty bottle of Absinthe that were sitting next to his chair. Gravity took over and the fall was inevitable.

It wasn't the fall that Jonny didn't enjoy; it was the sudden and abrupt stop on the hard floor that he disliked so much. The carpet was kind enough to wake him up a little bit more by slicing the skin on his forehead open with a cool yet painful rug burn. After several loud curses Jonny managed to lift himself up from the floor. Clarity through pain is never easily acquired, but it is the most expedient.

The fire alarm was still going off but there was still no sign of any smoke. Now that he was semi-cognizant Jonny decided that it was time to investigate the situation. Given that his apartment was right next to the back entrance to the complex he wasn't all too concerned with having to out alive if need be. Ergo, he took a casual approach to the situation.

Opening his apartment door was like opening the door to a sci-fi movie. The dimly lit hallway was offering the perfect harmonics for the echoing loud and obnoxious alarm that was buzzing on and off in two second intervals which matched that of the blinding strobe light. Jonny felt as though he were 'Ripley' from the movie 'Aliens' descending into the hive to do battle with the 'Alien Queen'. The hallway seemed post-apocalyptic at best, abandoned and left for dead. Worst of all, every buzz and flash of white light seemed like a direct sucker punch to his hung over brain.

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“I really don’t need to deal with this shit right now”. He thought to himself as he walked towards the complex’s common area. He kept walking with his cigarette dangling between his lips taking the occasional puff.

Jonny took note that there were still no signs of smoke other than his own cigarettes. He could smell the delicious and inviting scent of bacon coming from the common area’s kitchen. He followed the scent down the hallway expecting to see someone tending to the stove. As he entered the kitchenette he discovered that there was no one there. The sizzling bacon that was left unattended must have developed enough heat and smoke to trip the alarm. He felt justified in his deductive reasoning skills and walked back out into the annoying hallway expecting the alarm to suddenly stop. It didn’t.

“Okay,” he thought to himself “this needs to end. Who’s dick do I need to suck in order to go back to sleep”?

Suddenly there was a pounding at the door at the end of the hallway.

“Oh God, what the fuck now”?

Jonny looked to the complex’s combo locked door at the other end of the hall. He could see through the door’s small window that there were two men wearing oxygen masks looking inwards to see the situation within the complex’s main hallway. At first he walked towards the door with curiosity wondering who these mysterious men were. Then, suddenly and abruptly, the door barged open.

“The fuck”! Jonny yelled as the door burst open. He fell back with a stumble and ultimately on his ass. The cigarette dropped from his lips and onto the concrete floor.

The two masked men entered the complex with ferocity. They were dressed head to toe in full firefighting regalia. Their heads were on “the bobble” looking for signs of fire and smoke. Both of the men’s evaluations ended with their eyes on a surprised and scared Jonny Waterloo who recognized them as firemen. One of the firemen spoke to Jonny as best he could through his oxygen mask.

“Ets oh-k, er ear ta hep”. One of them mumbled.

“Shit! Firemen”! Jonny thought. “They found me out, they fucking know! I’m doomed”! “The hell you are”! He shouted back at them. He started scrambling backwards on all fours. Surly the firemen were here for him and his books.

Jonny panicked. He sprang up from the floor and ran back to his apartment and slammed the door, locking it shut behind him. His heart was pounding. He knew what they were coming for and he wasn’t about to let them get his greatest belongings. He looked to his library of books that he had been collecting for years. He never thought that this day would come but he was still somewhat prepared. Knowing that he had only moments to react, Jonny went to work.

He dumped his army issued ‘three day bag’ that he had packed in the event that ‘Skynet’ should ever become a reality. Rations, ammunition, survival

clothes, batteries, and a water purifier spilled out onto his apartment floor. When the bag was empty he ran to his book shelves and looked them over.

"I'm sorry, but I can only save a few of you my friends".

The sound of the firemen's heavy boots could be heard running up the hallway to his apartment door as Jonny was hastily contemplating who took precedence. He started grabbing books.

"The Count of Monte Cristo" by Alexander Dumas, "Don Quixote" by Cervantes, "Baudelaire: Complete Verse", "Hemingway: Complete Collection", "The Neon Wilderness" by Nelson Algren, "Starship Troopers" by Richard Heinlein, "Slaughter House 5" by Kurt Vonnegut, "World War I British Poets" Complete Collection, "Sharpe's Rifles" by Bernard Cornwell, "The Exile and the Kingdom" by Camus, "The Bible", a random "Encyclopedia", and a random "World Book". He made a mental inventory as he shoved the books into the army's three day bag.

There was a pounding at the apartment door. The firemen were trying to "rescue" him or "inquire" of the origin of the alarm. Jonny knew that he didn't have much time left, maybe seconds at best. He needed one last thing.

Jonny climbed into his loft and grabbed the 9mm pistol he kept by his bed. He cleared the chamber to ensure that it wasn't loaded. It wasn't. He opened an ammo can and grabbed one bullet from the box and chambered it.

"Just in case I need to take my own life in the event of capture".

"Er! Er! R ou en der"? The firemen were yelling while banging on the door.

Jonny was out of time. He needed to bail out of there faster than a passenger on the Titanic. He jumped down from the loft and looked at his library one last time. He frowned as he donned his assault pack full of books.

"I love you guys. You're my best friends. I wish I could have saved you all" he said to the remaining books on the shelves. He reached out and caressed some of their bindings. They were his whole world. They were his inspirations, his education, his desires and his loathing. Now, they were at the mercy of the firemen who were sent to destroy them. The door started to pry open via the Firemen's hooligan tools. It was time for Jonny to go.

Jonny ran to his apartment's sliding window and knocked it out. He could have just slid it open and the sliding screen behind it, but knocking it out seemed more dramatic and heroic in his still intoxicated mind. He broke through and escaped to the rooftop of the neighboring building just as the firemen broke into his apartment.

"Fuck you"! Jonny yelled at the firemen as he escaped to freedom, all the while giving them the middle finger with an evil smile on his face.

He stood up and made a mad dash for the fire escape. Within an instant he had transformed himself into an urban ninja jumping from building to building and hopping down the rusty iron bars of the fire escape that had never been used for decades up until now.

The Works

Derrell and Jim were standing out in the back parking lot of the apartment complex waiting for the fire department to clear the building and turn off the fire alarm before given the “all clear” to re-enter. They were standing there in a bored silence next to one another kicking the snow at their feet trying to entertain themselves while waiting.

“Hey, what’s that about”? Jim asked, nodding towards a figure running across the neighboring building’s rooftop.

“What’s what about”? Derrell asked in confusion.

“Is that Jonny jumping down the fire escape”?

Derrell looked to the neighboring building’s fire escape to see Jonny jumping from landing to landing at a time. The two of them observed their panic stricken neighbor running up to them with a look of sheer terror on his face and out of breath.

“Guys! You gotta run! They’re here! They’re here for our books! Run! We’re all dead if they find them”! Jonny panted as he went running past the two men, leaving them to their own fate.

“Is he still drunk”? Jim asked in confusion “Or dose he not know that Kate just left some food on the stove for too long”?

There was a pause between the two. Derrell just smiled to himself with a sense of accomplishment. Then, he broke out into maniacal giggling.

“Or do you think that slipping LSD into his drink last night was a bad idea”? Jim asked.

“Nope”. Derrell said as an evil grin. “Totally worth it”.



Fire Drake

by Clayton Brown

In Illinois

In Illinois

before our minds became as sharp as barbed wire
and we stopped running with the geese,
before the original art was removed
and the canvas redone in a modern abstract entitled

Corn Cars Concrete

before millions of dollars were spent to condition hair,
before the dawn and stars found us pushing buttons,
before we rushed through yellow lights,
before we

 fought and died
 killed and cried
 stole and lied
 choose to ride
 and micro-fried

in pursuit of more and then more dollars,
before rivers were teased and put into traction,
before marshes were painted brown,
before sparrows banged into towers
 and scavengers fed on our collisions,
before trees were plastic and lawns
 received emergency care,
before we infiltrated the clouds with our waste,
before the morning was alarmssirenstirespho
 neshornsgarbagecan
 sdogsandpunchingin
it is rumored that one could

 hear the sunrise

 perched

 on the rolling color of the prairie.

- Mark Jordan

Please Look at Me

by Odile Blazquez

Eyes are made of tissue and nerves, white orbs with colored irises and black pupils. They are the same in everyone except for the color of the irises; we are not talking about the shape or size of the opening for the eyes or the brows or anything else. So how can we read so many emotions and feelings in people's eyes? Is it true that eyes are the windows to our souls?

I left my house to run a few errands. Absorbed in my never-ending to-do list, I was not thinking about eyes or anything remotely close to that. All it took, though, was one look from a stranger to make me focus on people's eyes the rest of the day.

As I rounded a corner on my way out of my neighborhood, I suddenly had to move over to the left to accommodate a furniture truck parked on the right. I slowed down to pass it and noticed two men dragging a huge cardboard box down a metal ramp. The box looked very heavy, and the rapid puffs of breath coming from their mouths signaled physical strain. One of the men looked my way in that precise instant just before it would have been too late for him to see me and for me to see him. He looked to be about thirty and was stocky of build. His round cheeks were ruddy from the cold and he wore a dark watch cap pulled low over his forehead.

However, it was the look in his eyes that grabbed me. It was a look that said, "I'm cold and miserable, but this is just how it is." His eyes said, "This is my job; this is the way it's going to be and there's no point in thinking otherwise," but they also said that he was not happy with his job. It was a look of resignation.

As I drove on, the questions began coming. How could all that be conveyed in one second? Was I correct? Why did he have this job? What kind of job did he wish he had? Why didn't he have that job? What happened?

I stopped at a red light, still thinking about the delivery man and my impressions of his life, when I was suddenly attacked by a ferocious thumping coming from the left lane - hip hop music at what must have been a dangerously high decibel level. The bass was making the car's windows vibrate because I could hear a rattle after every thump, yet the young man with unruly hair could just as well have been listening to classical music. He wasn't singing or moving to the music or acknowledging the music in any way. He was simply sitting in

The Works

his car in a black coat looking straight ahead, apparently unaware of everything. He did know I was watching him, though, because a moment before the light changed to green, he turned and looked at me.

My eyes went straight to his eyes. Blank. I could read nothing in his eyes. He was not happy, but he was not sad either. I had expected some mischief or anger, but there was none. There was really no life in those eyes.

How could there be no life? There is no life when you have lost it all, but how can a young person have lost it all? Again the questions hounded me. Did he have a job? What did he do? Why was the music so loud? Why didn't he care? What did he care about? His eyes gave nothing away. The left lane moved faster, and soon he was out of sight and earshot.

Two stoplights later, I pulled into a drugstore parking lot and went in, quickly scanning the overhead signs to see where I needed to go. When I turned into my aisle, I noticed a young woman poring over the rainbow of nail polish bottles. She looked like a rainbow herself. Her hair was pink, no, fuchsia, with black tips, and she was wearing pajama-like fleece pants, baby blue with big yellow polka dots – I am not making this up - and a big brown coat that looked old and worn. Too big to be hers, maybe? I didn't want to stare so I looked down. Her pants were too long and dragged on the ground as evidenced by the filthy shredded hems. She turned at the sound of my footsteps and I saw her face. Thick black eyeliner circled her eyes. I selected my things and headed to the cashier deep in thought. This girl looked very young; eighteen or nineteen was my guess. Goofy teen? Definitely not.

Her eyes were hauntingly sad. They had a faraway look that spoke of deep sadness and, embarrassment? They were a bit bloodshot too and the eyeliner was smudged in places. Did she rub her eyes or had she been crying earlier? I didn't think the red was due to alcohol or drugs. Where did she live? Was she still in school? Did someone hurt her? Why was she embarrassed? I kept coming to that. Her eyes did have life in them, but it was not a good life.

As I paid my bill, I noticed that the cashier had an oxygen cannula tight around her nose. I had never seen a store employee with oxygen. It's great that she has a job, I thought, something to think about other than her disease. I watched her ring up my purchases. Her clean face had many lines, and she wore her salt-and-pepper hair pulled back in a thin ponytail. She looked older than she probably was because her hands were still young.

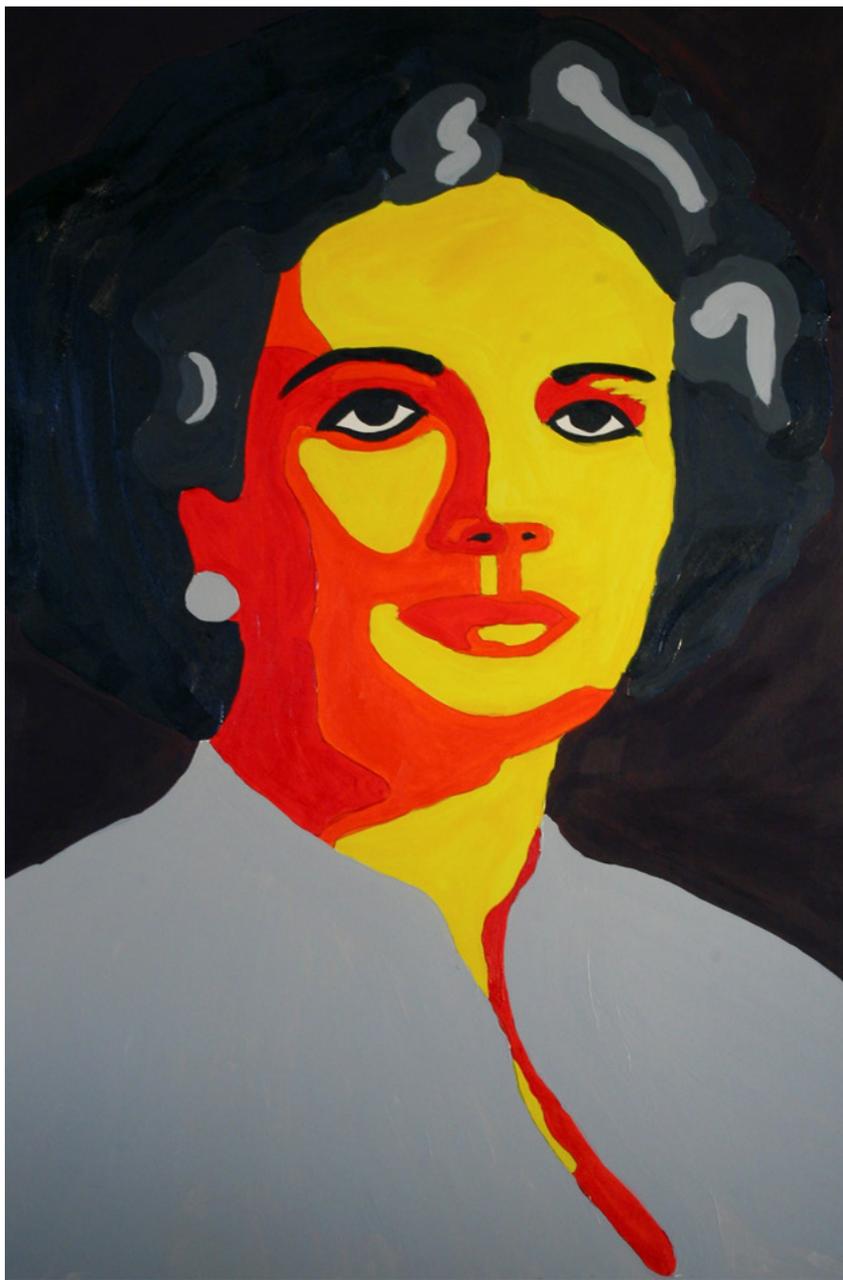
She looked up at me and wished me a nice day, her voice deep and raspy. Her kind eyes told me not to worry, that it was okay, that she could handle this.

I got in my car and drove to my next stop, my to-do list replaced by disquieting thoughts. Yes, we all know that there are so many people whose lives are not what they had hoped or who are victimized by life itself or by others, but when we actually come into contact with someone like that, it's different; it becomes personal. I tried to find comfort in the fact that there were many other people at the drugstore whose eyes had not called to me like that, but those

other eyes would not let me go.

Perhaps, I thought, I had it all wrong and was letting outward appearances color my thoughts. So, as I drove on automatic pilot, I thought about them again, the delivery man, the young man with the loud music, the young girl choosing nail polish, and the cashier, but this time I took away everything but their eyes. With my mind's eye, I saw only their eyes.

Yes, eyes do say what we feel, what we can't hide or is too important to hide. Without words, they say how our lives have been, how our lives are now, and who we are. Is that our soul speaking? I don't know, but if eyes are indeed windows to our souls, those souls I met today were hurting, and they wanted their eyes to let us know.



Untitled

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox

Spaces in My Soul

Please make spaces in my soul
Huge spaces,
To make room for new ideas, surprises and dreams
Spaces for quiet
Without one sound at all
There are those who feel
That spaces must be quickly filled with something
And they are disturbed
By spaces in conversation when nothing is said,
Spaces on walls with nothing on them,
Spaces in life
That hold one still
Until the sails are filled
A good friendship is like a strong
And hearty seed
Nothing can stop it from growing,
It pays no heed
To weeds that try to choke it out,
It can endure anything

- Patricia Lewis

Spoiler Alert: Everybody dies.

by Arabella Chamberlain

I want to talk about the end.

No, not that “the end.” (Ominous music plays, lightning strikes, thunder crashes, and the zombies invade.)

The end.

Society’s idea of an ending.

Does it even exist? Is there actually such a thing as an ending?

It’s a cultural taboo to spoil the ending. But what if there is no such thing as an ending?

Everything seems too definite to say ending but unfortunately, there are only a handful of ways things can work out in the end, with only slight variations.

The guy gets the girl. The guy doesn’t get the girl. The bad guys lose. The good guys lose.

There only so much one can do to surprise when try to “create” an ending. And yet, somehow, every time I watch the latest action film or romantic comedy, I end up on the edge of my seat, wondering what happens next.

In the very end though, after the film stops and the costumes are put away, everything reaches its end.

Perhaps the idea of a story’s end is all an avoidance of accepting the inevitability of our own endings.

We want to live in an immortal state, freezing life on the joyous moments and never letting go. But all good things must come to an end.

Because, Spoiler Alert: Everybody dies.

And so we wonder, what is our final moment? What is the outcome? How does our “movie” end?

I guess my question is: Why do long for an ending? Why do we want things to resolve? What makes us humans so concerned with fictional tales that we live on the edge of our seats wondering what will happen?

And perhaps, this is all a subconscious idea of our longing to know our own endings. We wonder how we go, who misses us, what we leave behind, what we take with us to our graves, but I guess we’ll never know. And maybe that’s okay.

I don’t want to spoil the ending.

Excerpt from *Briobands*

by Esther Kerber

“You may have a seat. Doctor Jack will be right with you.” The receptionist’s mouth tilts up as she pulls the glass barrier shut. I sit in the hard, cold chair awaiting the doctor, when a sudden ruckus comes from behind me.

“You can’t make me!”

I turn in my chair, but those around continue to read their magazines as though nothing is happening.

“This is my own right!” My eyes go wide as I see a boy, maybe older than me, being escorted out of the office. He seems weak. Like something, besides the guard, was holding him back. If he wasn’t injured, I would say he could take those guys and make a run for it.

Blood is dripping down his fingers, and a hole gapes from where his Brioband should be.

“Sir, you must calm down,” commands one of the guards holding him.

“Over my dead body, you shitbags.” He spits out every word like poison in his mouth. He jerks one of his arms free, and the guard grabs something from his pocket. He stabs the boy in the neck and brown liquid fills his veins. The boy’s body instantly crumbles to the ground.

“Melody?”

I jump at the sound of my name, and reluctantly turn my eyes away.

“Yes, mom?”

“The nurse has been calling for you.” Her eyebrows pull together, and she shakes her head.

“Oh.” I trudge to the nurse. “I’m sorry ma’am.” I look back to where the boy was just standing moments ago. “Do you know if that boy is going to be okay?” She leads me down the hall to an exam room.

The door slams behind us. “I am unable to give you any information.” Her voice drags. “The doctor will be with you shortly.” And with that she leaves me with my thoughts.

“Please state your name.” The Penny on the wall says.

“Melody Ruin.”

“Melody, please state your condition.”

“Brioband malfunction.” I tap my foot impatiently.

“Thank you.” Penny knows every word the Protector’s Dictionary and

still she seems to use the same words on replay.

The door swings open and an older man with wrinkles and white slicked hair comes through it.

“You’re not Jack.” I’m on the tips of my toes. “Jack is my doctor.”

His eyes light up. “Yes Miss, but Jack is helping another patient.” Water from the faucet is rushing over his hands as he speaks.

“Who was that boy?”

His smile reaches all the way to his warm eyes “His name is Derek. And before you ask, that is all the information I can give you.” I nod, but I know that will not satisfy me for long.

Whether The Weather Likes It Or Not

We all remember that moment
when we abandon the safety of shore
and set sail on the seven seas
aboard our own unstoppable vessel;
her sails, majestic, her bow, exquisite.
Together at the helm, we sail to another realm.

To start with, we're invincible and unsinkable.
Nothing can touch us.
Little leak? "Little duct tape."
Sudden creak? "Turn the other cheek."
We're weather-proof.

We float on a cloud, light as a feather,
'til the sudden "plink" of a raindrop.
Odd. It seems to want to tell me something,
but it's lost to the whispers of the sea.
It's raining, but it's okay;
we're weather-proof.

A little while later,
the cracks become greater.
The tape won't stick.
The facade doesn't hold.
The ice cold raindrops break through our haze
like the cold barrel of a gun.
Lightning streaks the sky; The thunder rumbles.
We grasp for anything tangible
and hope we can swim.

Inch by inch, the waters rise.
The waves grow; The wind attacks,
and then, the seemingly endless barrage.
We fight to escape, we fight for freedom,
We fight to survive.
We're weathering, whether we like it or not.

Slowly, the cloud tears begin to dry
and all that remains is a soft trickle of raindrops
whispering their sweet nonsense.

This is what the raindrops whispered
in their all too silent voices against the cacophony of ocean:

Whether we're weathered or weather-proof,
we're better whenever we're together.
For when we're together, it doesn't matter if we are weathered,
as long as our love lasts forever.

And now,
We are weathered.
The paint has chipped.
The cracks are worn.
But we haven't given up.

Sure, the stormy seas tried to sink us
with the weight of the world,
but at the brink of destruction,
we discovered the glue and weathered the storm,
whether the weather liked it or not.

- Arabella Chamberlain



Untitled

by Leah Kleiman

SVCC Community Collaborative Art Project

The following pages contain two art pieces which were created by SVCC student and editor of *The Works*, Eden Buyno.

Students, faculty, staff, and visitors at SVCC were invited to write original captions for her artwork during Saukfest in January 2017.

The pictures are accompanied by a selection of the captions submitted anonymously during the event.

The Works



- You don't look like your Tinder profile picture . . .
- Well, your nose is kinda big.
- Wait, are you wearing mascara? That's false advertising!
- My eye is bigger than my stomach, so none for me.
- So do you plan to drink that water, or . . .
- I see you.
- You look uncomfortable. Do you not like my hat?
- So, where do you see this going?
- I thought you said that your eyes were blue.
- I like the way your hat compliments your eyelashes.
- My date last night kept giving me the wide eye.
- So . . . uh . . . just some light photoshopping, huh?
- You look funny.
- It feels weird that I'm sitting down and you're not, right?
- Sprachen are die keys zur world.
- Great lunch, huh, Gail?
- I think we should see other people.

The Works



- So the nice old man asked the friendly monster to give all the children back.
- Do you ever feel like your money is going down the drain?
- Here's \$20. Come and live in the sewer with me.
- Take it. There's plenty more. It's clogging all my drains.
- This is the first time I heard of a side show in a sewer.
- Feed the rats / tuppence a bag.
- The magic kraken grants wishes for money.
- Ok, ok . . . we won't flush unless we have to.
- Just water, please.
- Get your tentacle off my money.
- 3 old people and, um, 2 kids. That'll be . . . uh . . . \$7.50.
- What happens in the sewers, stays in the sewers.
- You'll get rid of my horrid neighbor, right?
- Feed the beast!
- The new Dark Knight ride is amazing!



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