

The Works

fall 2018 and spring 2019

**The official arts
publication of
Sauk Valley
Community
College**



Cover artwork: Fish in a Bowl, by Eden Spring Buyno

The Works

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Special Thanks To

President Hellmich, Vice President Nunez, SVCC's foundation, and SVCC's English department for making *The Works* possible.

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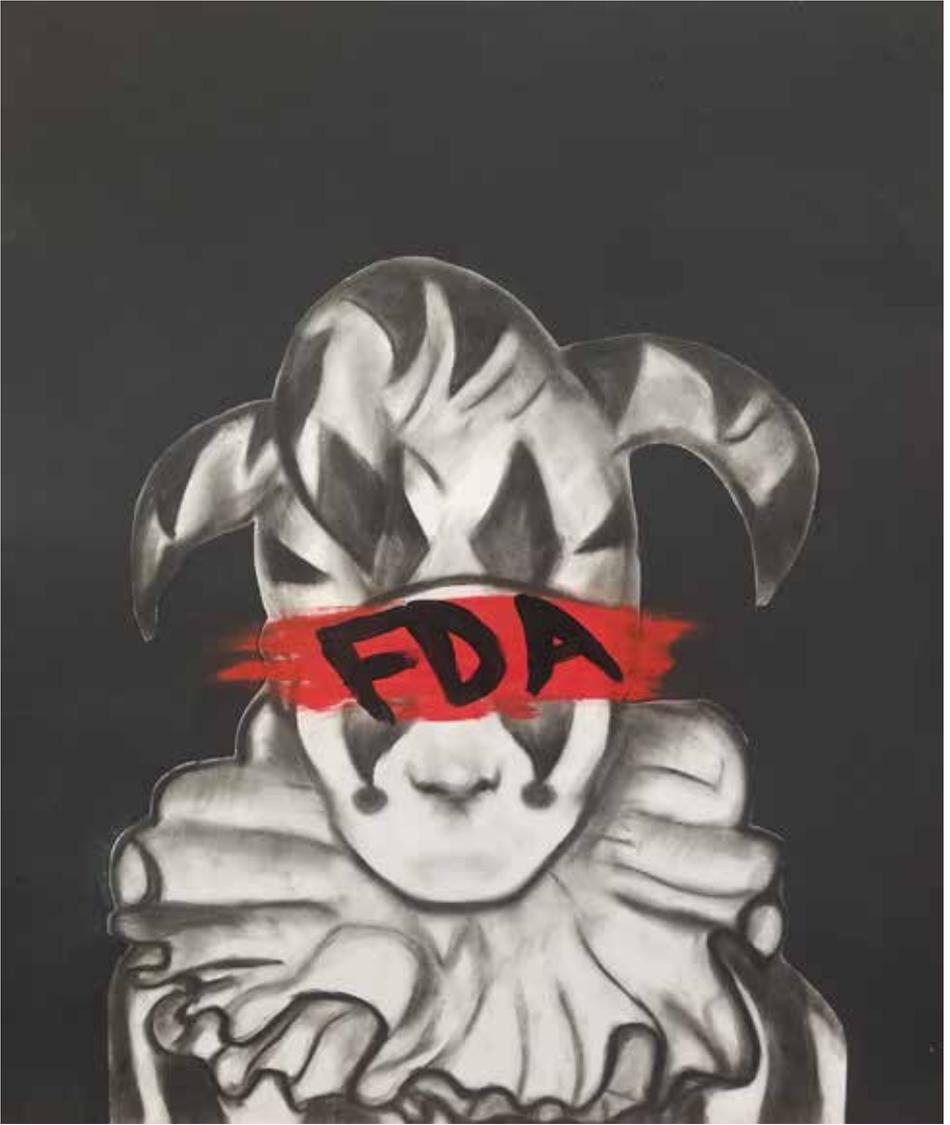
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What a Joke

by Alyssa Devine

A Love Poem for my Me-Me

Me-Me big boy,
I chose to have a croissant because
fuck your chicken strips.
Unfortunately I almost dropped it because
you hollered in my face.
I have a basketball game tomorrow
that she's gonna come to,
if the road works ahead.
I gave her an avocado
for Chrysler because I only had
69 cents,
not enough for chicken nuggets.
I hope she makes some fresh avocado
before hurricane Tortilla hits.
She doesn't mind that I'm 19
and I never fucking learned how to read
and mother trucker on a buttcheek on a stick
that's all I could ask for.
She's not lesbian,
but I thought she was American.
'What are thoseeee!' she asks,
'you got eggzma?'
I just ask,
'can I please get a waffle.'
Her dad told us a story
where he brought Myrrh
or was it mur-dur?
Judas didn't explain well.
We found the good kush at the dollar store
and discovered a child
is worse than a rapist.
This is love
and I ain't ever gonna stop loving you,
bitch.
Yeet.
Love ya boy,
Trey

-Olivia Esther

The Final Night

Embers fall on an empty field
Weapons still clutched by all
Souls depart the vacant vessels

Dried blood solidifies on the deep incision in his forehead
The final night
Reaching up feeling the gash
Wincing back in pain he pushes forward
Stepping over lost memories

The armor rattles with each step
Shaking itself lose
Stripping the night of any protection
The cold, shivering, body rattles to the core

Laying down accepting defeat
The nights story draws to an end

A new Dawn approaches, a new age of man
The fight has ended, but the war still rages
As the sunlight crawls over the horizon
The night surrenders his land
Saving himself from a worse fate

Now locked away
The night a prisoner of dawn
He plans his escape
To reclaim his land

Slipping between the cracks
The rough concrete walls
Run along this thin veil called flesh
The wound reopens once again

Crimson droplets fall to the floor
Forming a path behind
Dawn follows like clockwork
Betrayed by himself
Night falls one last time, contemplating it all

What's it worth?
The unending cycle
He almost got out
The old snake slithered free

Dawn returns once again
Striking down night for the final time, ending the cycle

But the memory remains constant
No matter where he goes
The story will be told
Of the final night

-Caleb Plumb



Like to Doodle

by Glenn Bodish

A FRIEND INDEED

by Kathy Marine

Jennifer and Rebecca just sat and stared at each other. They were facing each other in a dismal room of cinder block painted in bilious green. Jennifer couldn't understand how and more importantly, why they were sitting alone in a police interrogation room. Rebecca's one phone call was to Jennifer in which she was hysterical. She told Jennifer, now a successful trial lawyer, she was arrested for murdering Roger. Jennifer told her not to say a word to anyone until she got to the police station.

"Okay, before you tell me what the hell happened, did they read you your rights?" asked Jennifer.

"Yeah they did, but oh my God! I don't know, Jen, I just don't know. I came home from grocery shopping. After I put everything away, I went into the living room and found Roger lying on the floor his head in a pool of blood. I went into a panic and called an ambulance. When the paramedics got there they started working on him. Finally they turned to me and told me he was dead. The next thing I knew the police were in my house asking questions. And then the coroner came and Roger's body was taken away. My poor children! They lost their father!" replied Rebecca.

"So why did they arrest you? What are the charges?"

"They said I killed Roger. There was blood on the corner of our coffee table and they said I probably pushed him during an argument. This is so unbelievable. Why would I push Roger?" Rebecca started to sob again.

"Now, listen to me. We are going to get this all figured out. There will be a hearing tomorrow or the next day and I will get the judge to set bail. I'll pay the bail and get you out of here. You can come to my place and we will sort this all out. In the meantime, I will talk with the arresting cops to find out what they have."

"Jen! I can't stay in jail! I've heard that people get killed in jail. I'm scared out of my mind. Why can't I get out right now? My kids are with my parents. They have no idea what is going on."

"They have 48 hours to bring you in front of a judge and bring charges against you. Then I will ask for bail. Don't worry, all those stories you heard don't usually happen in a lock up. You should be just fine until we get to court. I promise I'll check in with your parents and make sure the kids are fine."

Rebecca glumly nodded as a female guard escorted her back to lock up.

Jennifer smiled and gave her a “thumbs up” as Rebecca left. With that, Jennifer went in search of the detectives that arrested Rebecca.

The meeting with the arresting officer was somewhat contentious, but Jennifer learned that all the officer’s information was turned over to the District Attorney. Jennifer knew the DA well. She had tried quite a few cases against him and won some of them. Since it was still early enough, she called his office and asked if she could stop by. Adam’s secretary said it shouldn’t be a problem and to come by in about an hour.

When Jennifer got to the DA, his secretary smiled and told her to go right in. Polly knew Jennifer and they always liked each other. Jennifer went in Adam’s office. They greeted each other, exchanged a few pleasantries and then Jennifer got down to business.

“Adam, I know it is very early and we haven’t even got to the bail hearing, but from what the detective told me, it doesn’t sound like you have much of a case. I don’t understand how you even got an arrest warrant” said Jennifer.

“Jennifer, I know at first look it doesn’t amount to much. I did some digging and found some past police reports regarding spousal abuse. In each case the police were called by the neighbors claiming there was a very loud disturbance coming from the Simmons apartment. When they got there, it was evident that Roger Simmons did in fact abuse his wife. Because she refused to file charges, there was nothing the police could do. Because of these past reports of abuse and the manner in which the body was found, there was probable cause to obtain an involuntary manslaughter arrest warrant”, replied Adam.

“So tell me how the body was found. What did the coroner say was the cause of death?”

“The body was found in his living room next to a coffee table. There was blood and hair found on the corner of the table that conclusively matched the deceased. The coroner said that death was caused by traumatic brain injury. When he performed the autopsy on the head, he found that the skull was fractured and there was significant brain bleed and because head injuries have a tendency to bleed profusely the body was found in a pool of blood.”

“So how does that make my client allegedly guilty of involuntary manslaughter? It sounds like Roger had a bad fall and hit his head hard on the corner of the coffee table. Did the coroner run a toxicology screen? Was Roger drinking or on some kind of drug? I mean there are any number of reasons for the head injury”.

“Yes, they ran a preliminary “tox” screen. He had no alcohol or drugs in his system. There is no doubt that his fall caused his death. That’s why it strongly appears he was pushed.”

“Adam, have you seen Mrs. Simmons? She must weigh all of 115 pounds soaking wet. How can someone that size push a person, who had not been drinking by the way, the size of Roger? He was at least 6’1” and weighed around 200 pounds. He was also on the muscular side. I’m having a hard time wrapping my brain around that.”

“I see your point. But it’s entirely possible Mr. Simmons was going to abuse her again and this time she fought back. Adrenaline can cause people to be stronger than they usually are. All that considered I plan on going on with the case.”

“Well Adam, that is your prerogative as the DA. What I would ask you is that

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you don't fight bail on this case. Also can we have hearing tomorrow? She has two children and is not a flight risk. She will stay with me a few days and then go to her parents who are looking after the kids."

"Okay Jennifer, I won't contest bail and I'll push for the hearing to be moved up. How does \$100,000 sound? Can she raise the 10% needed to pay the bail?"

"Yes she can. Thanks Adam. I'll see you at the bail hearing."

Jennifer left the District Attorney's office with a smile. So far she won the first round. Rebecca will get a fast bail hearing and Adam promised he wouldn't contest bail. She knew he was a man of his word and wouldn't renege on the promise. Coming up with the bail would not be a problem for Jennifer. She knew Rebecca would pay her back. Jennifer just wanted to get her out of jail and then begin to work on the preliminary hearing. She felt confident she could get this case dismissed at that hearing.

The bail hearing went off without a hitch the next day. Rebecca was surprisingly composed when she stood up in court and entered a not guilty plea. Then Adam asked for \$100,000 bail and the judge granted it. Jennifer asked for 30 days because she needed time to prepare her case for the preliminary hearing. The judge agreed and set the preliminary hearing for a month later.

Rebecca and Jennifer left the courthouse and went directly to Jennifer's apartment. Her apartment was spacious and felt very comfortable and inviting. It was a far cry from the ugly interrogation room they were in a day ago. Jennifer made fresh coffee and the two friends sat down to discuss the events of the past few days. For the next several hours Rebecca answered Jennifer's questions. When Jennifer was satisfied that she had a handle on the situation she drove Rebecca to her parents. The children were ecstatic to see their mother. There were tears and laughter and kisses and hugs. Jennifer left Rebecca there and went home. She had a lot of work to do and only a month to get it done and was determined to get her friend out from under this accusation. Jennifer returned to her apartment and settled in with a glass of wine and began to reflect on the last couple of days.

It just seemed unbelievable that her very best friend was being accused of killing her husband. All the years that they have remained friends, since eighth grade, Rebecca was always the quiet, retiring girl who never had a cruel word to say about anyone. Because of Rebecca's diminutive size and shyness, she was often the target of some bully. And as always, Jennifer was there to defend her little friend. After a while, the bullies left Rebecca alone, mainly because they didn't want to take on Jennifer.

Then Rebecca met Roger. Jennifer sensed something a little sinister in him. She always kept him at arm's length but also kept a watchful eye on him. After they got married and the abuse started, Jennifer tried so hard to get Rebecca to leave him. Jennifer really feared for her friend's life.

And now, through some horrible twist of fate Roger died and her best friend was being accused of his demise. Jennifer was not going to let that happen. Over the next four weeks Jennifer worked like a woman possessed. Under discovery laws she obtained all the information the DA had on the case. Just as she suspected, their

case was weak. They were focused on the spousal abuse angle and maintained the Rebecca caused the fall that ultimately killed Roger, because of adrenaline giving her the strength. The autopsy report was short and to the point. The victim died from a massive cerebral hemorrhage. The autopsy also stated the approximate time of death to be two o'clock in the afternoon.

The first thing Jennifer addressed was the time of death. Rebecca said she was grocery shopping at the time the coroner said Roger died. Jennifer asked Rebecca if there was anyone who would testify that they saw her at the grocery store at that time. Rebecca saw two women at the store that day and gave Jennifer their names and addresses. When Jennifer contacted them, they verified Rebecca's shopping claim and agreed to testify at the hearing which would definitely give Rebecca the alibi she needed.

The second item on the list was the prosecution's adrenaline theory. Jennifer researched adrenaline and its effects. She found fantastic yarns about both men and women lifting cars and other heavy things off their loved ones. However, Jennifer found articles stating there isn't much scientific proof that "hysterical adrenaline" is real. Unfortunately she couldn't find any experts to testify in this area. She did interview Rebecca's family physician who said he would testify that it was very unlikely that Rebecca could have pushed Roger hard enough to sustain the injury found by the coroner.

The day of the hearing arrived. Armed with the witnesses and the information Jennifer researched, she felt confident that she could have the whole case dismissed. The prosecution put on their evidence which did not include anything new. When they were done, Jennifer stood up and proceeded to rebut all the prosecution's evidence. The two witnesses testified that they saw Rebecca in the grocery store at the time the coroner said Roger died. Jennifer then offered into evidence the research that debunked the adrenaline theory. Next the family physician testified that Rebecca was not physically capable of pushing Roger that hard.

After careful consideration of all the evidence, the judge dismissed the case with prejudice. A case dismissed with prejudice is over and done with, once and for all, and can't be brought back to court.

Jennifer had done it. Rebecca was free and could take her life off of hold. She called her parents with the news. She promised to be home right after she had a victory lunch with Jennifer. The two friends went to a nice restaurant not far from the courthouse. For the first time in over a month they both had an appetite.

"Jen, how can I ever thank you? You have given me my life back."

"I told you years ago I would always be there for you. This was no exception. I knew there was no way you could ever hurt Roger. You don't have that in you. So, what are you going to do now?"

"Be with the children, maybe take a vacation with them and get a new apartment. I can't go back to our old apartment. I'm also thinking about going back to teaching. That way I can be home with the children."

"Sounds like a very good plan. Let me know when you find a new place. I'll help you move. Now let me drive you to your parents. It's time for the happy

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reunion.”

As they stood up, Rebecca hugged Jennifer. They paid the bill, and Rebecca was on her way to a new life.

Epilogue

Jennifer let herself in to her apartment. She kicked off her high heels, poured herself a glass of wine and sunk into her favorite chair. She sighed with contentment and then smiled. Her best friend was free. Free from conviction, free from that creep of a husband and finally free to have a happy life. She thought back to the day she met Roger. He was tall, somewhat muscular and good looking in a rugged way. Rebecca told her he was studying accounting. He didn't quite look like the accountant type, but Jennifer did not want to stereotype him. Not every accountant needs to look like Wally Cox. Roger's demeanor was one of money and privilege. Even though Jennifer could see that Rebecca was definitely in love with Roger, she had misgivings about him. He seemed just too perfect, too accommodating, and too polite. She kept those feelings to herself because she knew they would just fall on deaf ears. Besides she could be wrong.

As it turned out Jennifer was completely right about him. He did have a sinister streak in him. He treated Rebecca horribly. Jennifer was well aware of the beatings Rebecca sustained because of him. She tried time and again to get Rebecca to get out of her situation. She constantly made excuses for him. He's under pressure at work, it is tax season and he has to work long hours, he hasn't been feeling well and so on. It was maddening to Jennifer. Rebecca was her closest friend. She still wanted to protect Rebecca, just like she did all those years ago.

Jennifer decided she was going to rescue her best friend. On one of her visits at Rebecca's home, she noticed a bag of coffee. She asked Rebecca to make some of that coffee but Rebecca said she couldn't do it. That was Roger's very special blend and only he can drink it. Jennifer was flabbergasted. Who does that? Did he think he was royalty or something?

It was then that Jennifer hatched her plan. On her next visit, when Rebecca left the kitchen for a minute, Jennifer poured some white powder into the bag of coffee. She shook the bag to mix the powder with the coffee and sat back down at the table. As the weeks went by, Rebecca told Jennifer she was worried about Roger. He wasn't well. His stomach was always bothering him, but Rebecca couldn't convince him to see a doctor even though he seemed to be getting worse. He just chalked it up to stress and thought he was getting an ulcer.

What Rebecca didn't know was that Jennifer had mixed arsenic in with his "special coffee". Jennifer knew Rebecca would never think of having a cup of that coffee, so only Roger would drink the poisonous mixture.

The poison finally did him in and he struck his head when he passed out. He was dead. Jennifer figured the finger would be pointed at Rebecca, but she knew that she would prove Rebecca's innocence. She was a damn fine trial lawyer.

The best part of her plan fell into place while she was preparing for the preliminary hearing. Not only did she get rid of the poisoned coffee, the coroner re-

leased Roger's body and his family had him cremated. They held a service for him and were quite adamant that only the children should attend. How absolutely perfect! It was Jennifer's experience that coroners did not usually test for poisons unless they had some inkling that poison could have been the cause of death. In this case, the coroner felt confident that the head injury was the cause of death and now Roger was reduced to a pile of ashes.

As Jennifer sat in her favorite chair, she had no regrets. In her mind, Roger was the worst of any bully that Jennifer had to protect Rebecca from. Now her little Rebecca would never be beat on again and will never have to live in fear. Jennifer promised she would always protect Rebecca and she kept that promise. Your welcome Beck. Sleep will come easy tonight, for both of us.

Stop Worrying

This park is deserted
Yet packed with desserts
Despite its abandonment
Everything here works
The ferris wheels turnin'
And the lights are all on
The food courts all open
And no lines for the john
It's just us
In a world just for us
Rid of adults
So why make a fuss?
It may be suspicious
But, look, bumper cars!
Let's get on the rocket ride
And sail to the stars
We tossed some rings
But missed by a hair!
Well, look, no one's watching
Just take a stuffed bear!
You won't get in trouble
Cuz no one is here
So stop getting worried
There's nothing to fear
I hear there's a show
Should we go check it out?
Everything's been awesome
So enough with the doubt!
You can stop with your fussing
It's gonna be fine!
Now, hurry, we'll miss it
It's almost about time
There's no use in worrying
Get excited instead!

I can hear the crowds cheering!
It's just up ahead
There's where the show is!
In that red and white dome
Then after that
I promise!
We'll find a way home

-Eden Spring Buyno



Vapers

by Cindy Skiles-Hacker



Beveled

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox

-Cold Coffee-

When given the choice of coffee or tea,
It's definitely tea for me, please
No, thank you, I'll pass on the coffee.

And when it comes to a blend,
Offer me lavender lemon or chamomile
A box or two you may send.

I can tolerate the vanilla bean aroma
Fresh coffee in the morning
With toast, dry roasted from Aruba.

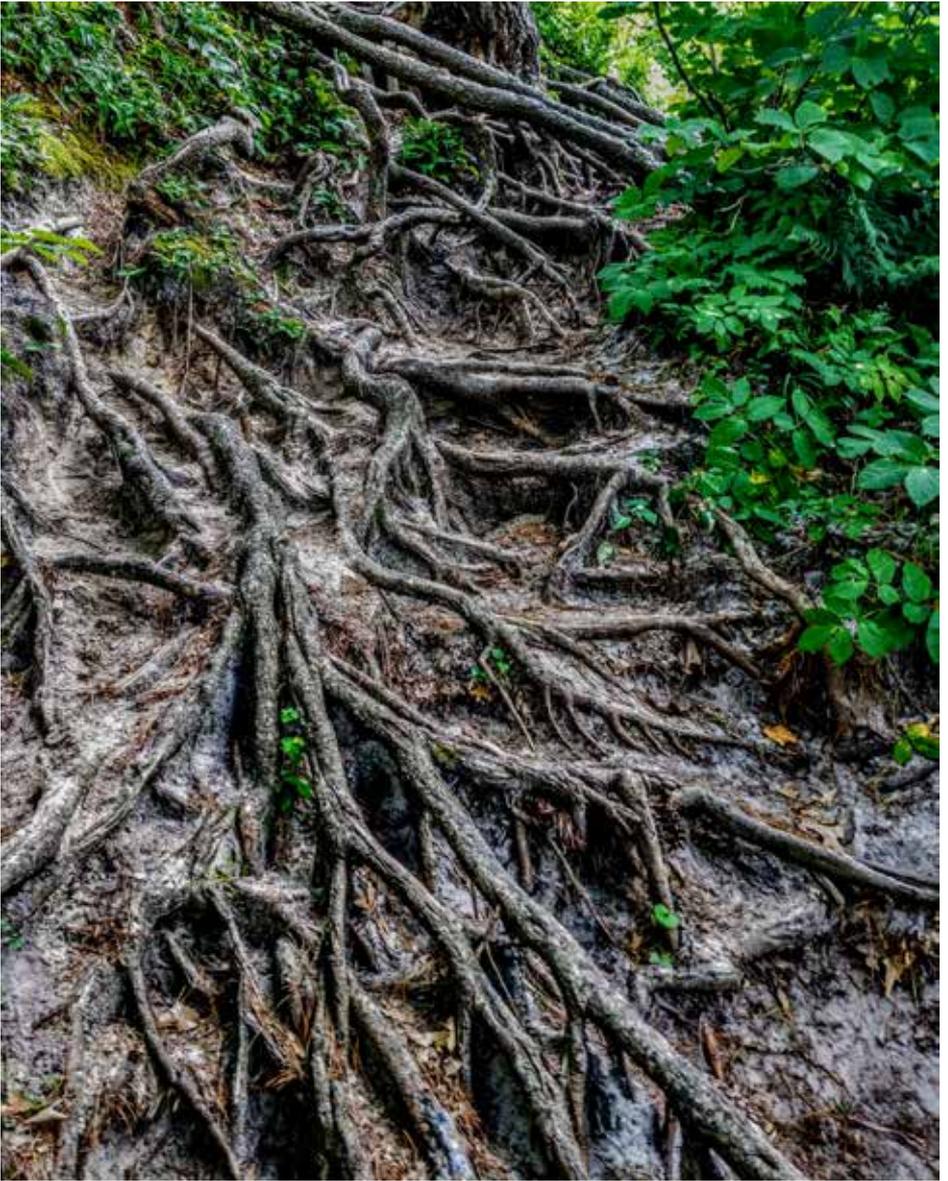
But dare place a cup near my plate
And as a sage, it would age
As I cannot fathom the taste.

Let the conversation linger
Over politics and world peace
As I sip my lemon Ginger.

A cup of tea I could savor
Green teas, herbals, bagged or loose
With all of its varied flavors.

So bring on the weathered tea pots
The floral, brightly decorated tea cups
Saucers, teaspoons and the lot.

I prefer my flavored tea hot
Please pass the Biscotti
And regarding the (now cold) coffee—NOT!



Untitled

by Keana Alba



Lost

by Desiree Warmoth

3 Dogs

3 ceramic dishes sit in separate corners of the kitchen.

But now only 2 dogs eat from them.

3 fluffy pillows lie on the floor.

But now only 2 dogs sleep on them.

3 leashes hang on hooks by the back door.

But now only 2 dogs are walked by them.

3 bags of treats sit on the counter.

But now only 2 dogs will eat them.

3 wet noses made smudges on the window.

But now only 2 dogs will smudge them.

3 dogs made this house a home.

And 3 dogs will be loved forever.

-Kali Nave

Shedding Light

It's crazy to watch people fall in and out of love
Like a light switch being flicked off after a quick visit
Or the sun quickly rising after the short darkness of night
They burn so bright, seemingly ever strong
Only to be blown out by slight distress
Passion knocks at every door, drawing them in
While pain lurks at every corner, as they turn on each
They swear to never give up the fight
But quickly give into life's darkest depths
The temptation to cheat or run
The fun that could come with one night
Or one day away
It must hurt
To move that fast
From one intense desire
To another
Of course those willing to jump in
Must also be willing to drown

-Olivia Esther



Untitled

by Alejandro Aburto

Where, When, Why

I walked into a world
Of wizards casting spells
Where trees would dance in crooked lines
And frogs would croak like bells
Where Circus freaks would play the geeks
In reruns of sitcoms
where kids would talk like big adults
While dad's will play the moms
Where logic doesn't matter
and the facts the same as fiction
Where tinkers would rather tatter
And where pictures depict depictions
Where fries are soaked in honey
And sundays go to sleep
Where sense seems senseless every second
with every sentence I speak
Where pineapples belong on pizza
And the Mafia sells roses
Where not much...rhymes with... pizza..
And where tippies spin on their toeses
And 'where' seems to be the question
Just where, I want to know
And when I finally get there
Just when I'll get to go
But why...
Don't kids get attention
And why teachers can't read cursive
Why left and right are mentioned
And in turn, assumed subversive
Why dictators are their first three letters
And, in peace, we bomb ourselves
Why your bias may assume this poem
Is meant for you and no one else

Give me a chance to figure dance
This tune sung upside down
Leave the world Where dandles die
And memories always frown
When good and evil switch
And why we're fighters and rarely lovers
For this senseless world I leave
I'll trade it for another

-Eden Spring Buyno

Gemini

A horror of symmetry, bounded by blood
Two grotesque faces share bodies as one
They piercingly stare with bloodshot eyes
With razor sharp fangs, the other must die

One slays the other at night's thirteenth hour
Chewing the flesh of his brother, devoured
His bloodthirst quenched by decapitation
Satisfied by conjoined mutilation

-Maxwell Schaefer



Steampunk Girl

by Ciara Gale

Portals to Alzheimer's

She believes someone is chasing her, wanting to do her harm,
she hears drumming, "Who's there?" she cries,
her world one of visions and voices known only to her.
"Make them leave me alone!" she screams,
and they burn with sheer terror
and I hurt for her.

It's over for now, the crisis,
and I see they're brimming with tears
and the knot in my throat grows.

So they go back to grieving,
grieving for a life she knows she had,
fragments morphing and blending
in a senseless collage of images irrelevant to time and place.
Like crystals in a kaleidoscope.

They really are windows to the soul.

Suddenly, she smiles and her hands stop clutching
A memory has freed itself from the tangles.
They're shining now, radiant, and I wish time would stop
but it doesn't
and just like that it's dragged back
into the black hole that has become her mind, her life.
And like a candle, the radiant light flickers and goes out
and I'd do anything to bring it back for her.

I look at her knobby fingers as they clutch the wheelchair,
at the favorite yellow sweater, once perfect, now two sizes too big,
at the little-girl Mary Janes on her feet, so appropriate,
at the pearls around her neck.
I see they're blank now, drained
and there's nothing I can do
and I cry inside.



Breaking Light

by Debbie Thompson

The Mall Experience

by Noel Berkey

The mall was mostly dark anymore. Passing by at night on a recent visit, we had mixed feelings about this.

We remembered its grand opening years before, how everything that was shiny and new was suddenly within our reach, including fashions and other products that seemed more exotic than we deserved, more colors and details than we could think in our own little minds, so many that we felt disoriented, maybe even anxious. There was a mood ring for every finger, for just a couple bucks each, and you'd have some money left over to buy something purple to slurp. You could walk around inside this wide-open space slurpin' this thing while dreaming about all these new possibilities that could help lift you from this sort-of-nowhere town you had lived in for as long as you could remember. It was intoxicating being part of this new climate-controlled future, almost like we were someplace better than we actually were.

After committing the layout of the mall to our memories and dreams, together with our parents or older siblings we developed a routine that served us well each time we returned in those early years. We would park in the multi-acre lot, head inside the main entrance, the one with the word MALL above it (in what we later came to see as an outdated font), and first thing go to that rustic-looking place that had toothpicks in little chunks of cheese and sausage. You'd eat as many of the samples as you could before the employees looked at you too hard. You'd pass aisles with all these fancy mustards and crackers and nuts and similar treats and dream of little dinner parties your parents might throw someday, ones where they'd dress up and spin a new album on a combo-entertainment-unit while playing one of the board games marketed on TV and in magazines. The adults would have a few colorful cocktails mixed up in a blender and tell dirty jokes that would make your mom blush as she served them snacks from this fancy place. It made us feel warm inside imagining our parents doing things successful and happy parents were supposed to do. It was nice having these collective dreams spelled out for us.

Getting our fill there, we would next step into one of the big stores that

had different departments within but was really just one big store. First we'd head through the women's section with mannequins in saucy poses, then past a perfume counter, maybe stopping for a few sniffs, and then we'd get all curious looking at a variety of kitchen gadgets, even if we really didn't need new ones, and there'd be this little extra fancy section with delicate plates and silverware, and a kind lady with a sweet smile would be standing there all ready to offer advice and help you buy whatever. We'd say we were just looking and smile back at her, feeling a little guilty about not asking for assistance from a lady who wore such an earnest expression.

Out in the main concourse, turning in every direction, with groovy album covers to gaze at over here, horror and romance novels to browse through over there, tasty food of primarily unhealthy types to eat both here and there, and people of all ages to watch shuffle around in every direction and look at the same stuff we were looking at, we found ourselves enclosed in what we came to realize was an inescapable destiny of sorts.

When we stayed late near closing time we watched a maintenance guy buff the floor of the main concourse till it gleamed. Even this was romantic in its way. That gleam could mean one thing to someone and something different to someone else. Or maybe not. It was hard to say.

As kids we couldn't help but dream about the mall, going in after hours and finding the key to the arcade, flipping a switch and turning on all the machines. We'd play all the games in our dreams, and win them too. Cute girls from school would admire our hand-eye coordination and cool disinterest in the adult world. Even at an early age we had realized the arcade was a place that adults weren't invited and youth ruled. It was noisy and full of teenagers who were mainly skinny and seemed to possess a knowledge that we envied. There was a look on their faces that was semi-mysterious in its confidence. Those without tokens, who always seemed to be without tokens, and always seemed to be standing behind cool friends who did, usually did not have that same look of confidence. Even this lesson, the benefit of having something versus not having something, was reinforced at the arcade. So in our dreams we played the games, were envied by others, and tore through the mall on our skateboards while doing tricks that would be admired. Before we'd wake up we would skate out of the mall, likely being chased by frenzied store managers, with all the cool stuff our parents could not or would not buy us but that the kids we envied at school possessed.

When we later became the teens we thought we wanted to be, we found ourselves rebelling against authority in new ways we hadn't considered before. A friend of ours stole some candy from a store in the mall one afternoon after school. That was the first thing. We ate it while walking through a field behind the mall. This candy tasted awful too. It seemed stale and like it was sweetened by something that had gone rancid. But we ate it and claimed to one another that it was alright. Not too long after someone stole better-tasting candy, and another friend wrote crude graffiti on a table at the diner that was a hub of activity in the center of the mall. He ended up working at the diner within the next year. His boss sold weed too and dated the most attractive waitress there. When we cruised around in the winter months in another friend's pale blue sedan he inherited from his grandma, we waited for the mall

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to close before doing aggressive donuts on the snow-packed surface of the parking lot. No seat belts were worn, and a couple stray shopping carts were destroyed, along with a headlight or two.

The mall by now had come to represent something fake. Something about our parents and the world we were inheriting. We felt that in many ways we had been misguided. We had been manipulated by forces larger than us, tempted by glittery things. The mall was a key resource for marketing all this nonsense. Our impulse to rebel against these lies was real. The music in the car fueling our aggression was real. The aggressive accelerating and turning into these donuts, spinning hard this way, and then that, felt good.

We moved away and read some books and found that our thoughts and feelings were shared by others. We learned how populations through the ages had been exploited to serve tyrants. We learned that slavery still existed, that we should fight to escape such bondage. We came to realize most everyone we knew had been manipulated into believing that having choices at the mall equaled the only kind of freedom required, that while being offered opportunities to spend beyond our means by the credit industry, we could also easily become enslaved by debt we unleashed. We learned that true freedom existed outside the mall. Not only because we'd been told, but because we found out firsthand through our own experiences.

There was the time we came back for Christmas as freshmen in college with hardly any extra cash and we needed to act like adults and buy a gift or two for our parents. We found ourselves wandering around the mall looking for slippers and mittens, or some other affordable thing that would pass for the occasion. We felt a little down that we couldn't buy better gifts, that whatever our parents unwrapped would somehow be misconstrued as the true measure of our feelings. The talking Christmas tree we had grown up with during the holidays still engaged shoppers with ideas concerning the season's newest choices. "Don't forget that trapping freshness in your leftovers is as important as it's ever been. Kitchen life-savers straight ahead!" We couldn't help but listen while admiring a finely crafted nativity set we didn't have enough money to purchase. There was a music box near it that we also could not afford. We opened the lid and listened to its gentle song nonetheless. It reminded us of times alone, like when we looked out a window and thought about our place in the world. For a moment we felt nostalgic for our hometown mall, even if it wasn't as fancy as others in bigger cities. Ours didn't have more than one level, so there weren't any escalators to go up and down when we didn't have anything better to do. There wasn't a movie theater either. And the food courts at some of these other malls offered healthier choices, a priority we had been thinking about more and more. But this was our local mall. It was almost a family member. So before buying the gifts we could afford, we lifted the lid of the music box again and listened closely. There was a message here we did not wish to forget.

Some of us moved to bigger places. Some of us spent time in other malls. Some avoided malls altogether. Still, we were all informed now and then about happenings at our hometown mall. We'd be getting on with our lives, seeking

freedom in different ways, not always being successful, and suddenly we'd be brought back, almost in time really, to a place that still wished to claim us. There was a news story someone had forwarded about a tiny tornado tearing through the mall like a buzz-saw one summer afternoon and causing loads of damage. This old guy who would power walk laps in the air-conditioned concourse and smile and wave at everybody he passed, spreading cheer and all, was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It's reported that the tornado ripped through there with hardly any warning and dislodged some big ceiling tiles. One of these tiles struck this power walker and injured him pretty good.

We hoped that our hometown mall and the old man would recover. Soon enough we heard that he was in a wheelchair after the accident, and his head was bent at an odd angle that looked awful painful. But apparently he still smiled as best he could while cruising laps at the mall, even as he navigated around construction workers tending to structural damage. We couldn't say why he was so eager to return and do the laps since he wasn't getting much exercise anymore. We couldn't say why he needed to smile so much. Picturing him going around and around made us hopeful though. Maybe we were searching for something to make us feel this way.

Years passed. We worked many hours, got stuck in routines, found ourselves searching for answers to questions we hadn't imagined asking. Many of us focused our searches online anymore, whether for confirmation of our perspectives, for music or other forms of expression to help shape our identities, or for other stuff we could purchase to help build who we were, or at least distract us enough to avoid facing emptiness. This new online shopping experience was comfortable. Hard to beat really. We were usually at home wearing wrinkled clothes and sitting on soft cushions while pressing buttons. Going to the mall, we would have had to make a show of it. But here we were. There we so many choices at our fingertips, more than could be contained in a physical structure the size of our hometown mall. In little ways we began to realize that our mall and the world that existed before the online world had once succeeded in making us think we had more dreams in common than we really did. But now we felt that our interior landscapes were in fact far more unlimited than the contours of the mall and all items once displayed there would suggest. The online world was vast. Our identities were limitless, beyond the generic personas marketed in unnatural poses by faceless mannequins. We believed we were making progress by realizing all of this.

We returned home for the holidays eventually. Our parents were getting old. We were getting old. There had been a shooting incident at the mall a couple years before. Or almost. Some confused man had stood in the main concourse and pulled a revolver from his jacket, shouting something about the American dream, how we had lost it, before sending a single round into the ceiling. Apparently there was an enormous banner hanging up there that read "EVERYTHING You See Is 4 Sale!" The bullet hit a corner of the banner and some wire holding it in place, and then in slow-motion, as reported by the local newspaper, the banner kind of swung loose from its injured side and the gunman got all tangled up in it as it fell. In the confusion, an older gentleman who was there to buy some sandals at the discount shoe store, one of a handful of stores remaining, and who was familiar with karate and undistracted

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by the falling banner, delivered a couple swift kicks and executed a series of simple moves that disarmed the gunman and left him twisted like a sad pretzel. We were miles and miles away in a bigger community with problems of its own when we'd heard this story. While this had happened in our hometown mall, it also felt like just another absurd story in the daily news cycle. Neighbors and family members of the man who pulled the revolver claimed to be perplexed about his actions. Somehow, it felt as though we'd heard all of this before.

When we stepped inside that last time, we found ourselves feeling as empty as the mall before us. Almost every storefront was locked tight. Here and there we caught glimpses of lonely spaces littered with boxes and different sorts of debris behind the metal barricades. This made us long to see the carefree crowds we had known in the glory days of the mall, if only momentarily. We wanted an opportunity to step back into that collective dream, to give ourselves over to its promises. Feeling directionless now, and moving perhaps a little slowly, we saw that we were in the company of just a few others making the rounds. The smiling old man in the wheelchair wasn't there though. Hadn't been around for years apparently. Neither had the arcade. Or the diner. The mannequins had all been corralled too and shipped elsewhere to serve others' interests, or perhaps gather dust in a similarly empty space. This was it. We knew we were at the end.

For a brief moment we imagined navigating through a large crowd of fellow shoppers and buying ourselves a treat, a mood ring maybe, to see if it revealed how we really felt and who we really were. We still wanted confirmation. We wanted a simple transaction to serve as a path to our dreams. But we left without making a purchase.



Cityscape

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox

A Higher Power High on Power

Twisted around,
inside out and upside down.
Shaking the ground,
lightning strikes as thunder pounds.

The animals leave their dusty cages,
as humans earn their measly wages.
The old book stripped of all it's pages,
this cycle reaches its final stages.

The discharge dried on the sealing wound,
the summer starting after the flowers bloomed,
for the sun the Earth has swooned.
The final note has been tuned.

I once created this place,
to fill empty space,
you all share my face,
but the stride has lost its pace.

The original plan is no longer clear,
as the final moments draw near,
I ask you to not fear,
I will shed the final tear.

Long after the light had faded,
I look at this new world I had created.
Rid of all the things I hated,
My ideas all feel jaded.

Wiped away by an ultralight beam,
unrecognizable is the original theme.
Maybe it's time to give up on this dream?

Maybe it's time to start new?
Forget all that I once understood,
try something different.

-Caleb Plumb

2018-2019 Art Contest

Student Winner, Fiction

Butterfly Stumbling

by James Hutchison

Dave sat in the waiting room of the unemployment office just days after being fired from his last job. He was nervous and still upset from being fired from his last job as an agent of death.

“Dave Law?” said the unemployment counselor.

“Yes, uh, here.” answered Dave.

“This way, please.”

Dave stood and proceeded to follow the rather tall, round woman, only to stumble over his own feet and then reach out to brace his fall on a nearby water cooler causing it to rock violently under his weight and smash through the sixteenth story window that it had been placed in front of and crash into a freshly laid concrete walkway below.

Dave managed to catch himself before tumbling out after the water cooler and stood there, defeated. The counselor looked on with nothing more than a raised eyebrow and made a check mark on the board she carried and then repeated, “This way, please.”

Making it safely to her office, Dave saw a nameplate on the desk that read, “Joyce Bones” along with pictures of a cat hanging on the wall and stacks and stacks of vanilla folders with even more stacks of papers tucked inside. Joyce sat on her side of the desk and gestured Dave to sit in the chair opposite her.

“It’s, uh,” he began but hesitated.

“It’s what?”

“It’s a bit small, isn’t it?”

“It’s what we have, Mr. Law.”

“Right. Ok,” he answered and then sat in the chair, surprised he did fit into it, but also aware that he must look silly sitting in what must be a child’s chair.

"Ok, Mr. Law," she began.

"Oh, uh, Dave." he said, cutting her off.

"Mr. Law..." she began again, searing him in half with a gaze that nearly set off a panic attack within his bones. "...you're here to file paperwork to begin collecting unemployment money from Mass Death Avoidance Incorporated. Is that correct?"

"Yes. That's uh, that's correct," he said nervously.

"What description would you give of your job?"

"Well, we kill, er... take out certain people to keep their actions from leading to, uh, more people dying."

"And, would you say you've been successful, at least according to your job description, in fulfilling your duties to the living as an employ of MDAI?"

"I've done my best!"

"I see. Let's take a look at your first file entry, first assignment."

At that moment, the two of them disappeared in a cloud of black dust and reappeared in a shadowy hallway. The metal floor beneath their feet resounded ever-so-slightly as Joyce led Dave towards a light around the corner where sat E.J. Smith, Captain of the Titanic.

"This was the night you were supposed to save the Titanic from sinking. Why did you fail?"

Just then, another image of Dave appeared and approached the captain lit only by lamplight. It was a view of the past exactly as it happened all those years ago. Young Dave walked to the Captain and began conversing with him.

"I told him not to move so fast through the water. I even told him what would happen."

"You were supposed to kill him."

"I know! But I just..."

"You lost your nerve."

"Yeah. I guess."

Then, the image of younger Dave disappeared and almost instantly, the Captain jolted from his seat, clearly shaken from his encounter with death. He paced for a moment and before long, his eyes widened, and his brow furrowed.

"Telling him the future had the opposite effect," explained Joyce. "Life, death, the afterlife, and how fleeting it all is became more real to him than it ever had. His regrets flashed in his eyes and he did what the living do when they see the end. They run."

They followed the captain into the wheelhouse and watched as the understanding of life and death battled for time across his face in the form of tears and maniacal laughter. The crew noticed but dared not say anything to the captain as he approached the throttle and pushed it yet higher. Even as the sounds rang that signified the ship's increasing speed, Smith's eyes widened and glared into space.

"It would have happened if you hadn't come for him. The only way to stop it was to kill him. Instead, you expedited the worst possible outcome by aiding those series of events rather than halting them."

"I had never killed before." said Dave, hanging his head low.

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“One life or a thousand?” asked Joyce.

He had no answer as they disappeared from the Titanic as it slammed into an unseen iceberg in the distance and scrapped along the side.

When they reappeared, it was at another place in time and more recent.

“Your last assignment.” said Joyce looking into the distance at a man crossing the street into the park where she and Dave now stood.

“New Year’s Eve, 2015.” said Dave, immediately realizing where they were.

“That man is the crux of everything terrible that happens for the next four years and you spared him. Why?”

“I got distracted...” answered Dave, never taking his eyes off the ground.

“A phone call, wasn’t it?”

“It wasn’t even important. My sister’s dog ate all of her left fitting shoes.”

“And now, that man still walks and the living, whom we exist to protect, suffer daily for it.”

Once more, in a burst of black dust, they appeared back in the counselor’s office. Dave’s head hung low and a frown sat frozen on his face.

“You were fired for gross negligence and attempted murder via Death Touch.”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Law, as you may or may not be aware, unemployment benefits can only be collected by an employee who has been fired for such reasons as negligence and murder if that employee has no previous record of incidents with that employer.”

“But it was so long ago!” said Dave, desperately.

“That may be the case, but the rules can’t be bent. I’m afraid I cannot approve benefits at this time. I will, however, provide a list of jobs that may be hiring.”

“Fine.” said Dave after a deep sigh.

As he stood, the tiny chair that he had been sitting in must have clamped around his shirt tail. When he realized it, he turned to try and remove it, knocking several stacks of documents to the floor to the dismay of Joyce the counselor.

“Oh, sorry!” he said as they fell and turned the other way to try and grab the chair that was still stubbornly clinging to his shirt.

“Wait, no!” cried Joyce, but not before the chair swung the other direction smashing yet more stacks of documents to the floor.

“Damn it!” she yelled in frustration.

“God, I’m really sorry!” said Dave, just as he turned yet again but Joyce caught the chair from slamming into the picture of her cat.

“Stop moving!” she ordered, and Dave froze. “The shirt is caught in the chair. If you just...”

But before she could finish, Dave popped the snap button on his shirt and let it fall to the ground along with the chair. He stood there shirtless for a moment, his bones glinting a dull white against the bad lighting in the small office. Then, he sighed and walked out of the office.

2018-2019 Art Contest

Non-Student Winner, Fiction

Carrie Eats Macaroni

by Michael Jenkins

A knee-high mountain range of snow chunks, mottled brownish with dirt, holds pristine white sheets from the grayish slush in the streets. A small, boxy car, with a cracked fender and the hood a different shade of blue, rolls to a stop in front of a short, white house on the corner, wheels digging into the snow pile, searching for the curb.

The engine goes quiet. Twenty-four year old Valerie Vernandez, dressed in a black overcoat and heavy winter boots, steps into the slush. She walks for the front door of the house, turning her face away from the wind, shuffling sideways and trying to see around the side of her hood to keep the snow whipping up from stinging her face like a hail of icy needles.

Valerie kicks the door shut behind her, and stomps her feet loudly on the tile entry before walking across the living room carpet, countless tiny points of snow still nestled in her long, black hair. She drops her keys on top of a bookcase next to a black, leather recliner, and stuffs her gloves into her coat pockets as she walks for the kitchen.

She has to stand on her toes to softly set a brief kiss on Trevor's cheek. He turns his head just enough to make eye contact, smile gently, and then turn his attention back to the sink full of dishes.

"Hi," he says warmly.

"Hey," Valerie says, unzipping her coat. "I could barely wait to get home today."

"Work was real hard on you?"

"It's Carrie's birthday," Valerie chuckles. "Don't tell me you forgot," She jabs playfully.

"Oh . . . yeah . . ." Trevor says slowly. "Uh . . . Carrie really doesn't like to acknowledge her birthday, though."

"She's six, Trevor. All kids her age get excited for their birthday," Valerie says firmly, setting her coat over the back of a chair in the dining room.

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"I mean . . . sure, she likes presents and ice cream, but the words "Happy Birthday" sting her like a hot needle, and she's allergic to parties."

". . . ."

"Please, tell me you didn't plan a surprise party for her," Trevor says gravely.

"What? No," Valerie answers defensively. "I don't think there are any parents around here willing to give that another chance anyway. Not after what happened last time . . . Where does she keep getting all of those snakes from?"

"Outside. They're everywhere around here. It's not hard to get some."

"Even in winter?" Valerie asks.

"Well, then probably the basement," Trevor says. "It's warm down there, at least compared to outside. They keep finding their way into the house somehow, and then into the hands of our fun-sized hellraiser."

"Where is Carrie, anyway? I'm surprised I haven't heard from her yet."

"Backyard," Trevor says, still focused on the sink.

"Unsupervised?" Valerie asks sharply.

"She's not unsupervised," Trevor corrects her. "I can see her from here," He points at the window with his elbow.

Carrie sits cradled against the chest of the birch tree in her backyard, nearly six feet off the ground, fully absorbed in a monster encyclopedia made for fourth-graders. Her fluffy parka and poofy snow pants give her the form of a little purple marshmallow, sitting stone-faced against the frigid bursts of wind.

Valerie bursts out the back door, zipping her coat up again and walking sharply towards the tree.

"Carrie! How many times do I have to tell you to stay out of this tree? Get down from there before you fall and hurt yourself."

"Bite me," Carrie snaps loudly, without looking up from her book.

Trevor steps into the backyard, wearing an unzipped gray coat, still drying his hands on his shirt and quickly shoving his hands into his pockets.

"Don't you talk to me like that," Valerie scolds. "Now don't make me drag you down from there."

"Piss off!" Carrie hisses, still refusing to look up from her book.

Shock ripples across Valerie's face. Carrie peeks up over the top of her book, and smiles down at her with her eyes.

"Where did she learn to say that from?" She asks Trevor, more accusing than inquisitive.

"Certainly not from me," Trevor answers. "I do know that telling her not to is only going to make her say stuff like that more. Carrie is way too smart for her own good. She's only doing it because she knows she's not supposed to. Watch," Trevor looks up into the tree. "Carrie! Don't talk to your mother like that."

"Je m'en fous," Carrie answers bluntly.

Valerie glares at Trevor.

"Uh . . . okay, maybe she learned that one from me," Trevor says meekly, trying not to look at his wife. "My point still stands, though. If it doesn't make Mom flinch, it stops being fun," Trevor looks up into the tree. "Isn't that right, you little demon?"

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Carrie lays her book flat, staring down at her father with the kind of smile that deserves fangs instead of teeth.

Valerie shakes her head, and starts walking over to the tree. Carrie squeals in surprise, and scrambles to her feet. She holds her book in one hand, and lifts herself onto the branch above her with her other. Valerie suddenly breaks into a sprint, but the best she can do is grab the air where Carrie's ankle was a moment ago.

"Carrie! I am not playing around right now. Don't you make me come up there!"

"Val, I don't think that's a--"

"Eat shit and die," Carrie sneers, holding up the wrong finger.

Val's hand slaps onto a branch slightly above her, and her boots smack onto the bark. Trevor walks over briskly, and Carrie shrieks loudly, turning around and scrambling higher up the tree. Val struggles a bit to pull herself up, but Carrie only has so much tree to run away to. Trevor follows Carrie around the tree, watching her carefully. Carrie tries to circle the tree without dropping her book, only ever holding on with one hand.

"Val! Get down here. You're not helping. Carrie! Take it easy. You're gonna-- SNAP! Crack! Crack! Floomph!

And then a soul-shredding, glass-shattering shriek cutting up out of the snow. Enough to get a dog barking somewhere down the street. And a heaving, wailing, sobbing, and the forceful thud of Valerie's boots making a crater in the snow.

"Carrie! Carrie, are you okay, sweetie?" She cries, rushing to her side. Valerie grabs Carrie's shoulders, pulling her face out of the snow and sitting her upright.

"DON'T TOUCH!" Carrie screams, thrashing against her mom, slapping at her sleeve with one hand while keeping the other clamped onto her cheek, only settling down at all when her mom lets go of her.

Trevor kneels down in front of Carrie.

"Carrie, can you move your hand? I need to see."

She doesn't answer. She just sits in the snow, silently sobbing, blood and tears dribbling down her cheek and soaking into her collar.

Valerie reaches for Carrie's wrist, but Trevor catches her.

"I don't want to have to pull your hand away," He explains to Carrie.

"Please, move your hand so I don't have to."

Carrie stares at him for a moment, then pulls her trembling hand away from her face. Trevor winces at the long, red gash running diagonally down her cheek.

"That's probably not gonna close on its own. Val, where did you put the keys?"

"They're on the bookcase."

"Can you walk, Carrie?"

". . . uh-huh . . ." she whispers softly, climbing onto her feet..

Trevor leads her inside, and fishes around in a kitchen drawer. He hands Carrie a pad of gauze.

"Hold this over your cheek. Nice and tight," He tells her.

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After a seven minute car ride, a very squirmy and thrashy examination with a doctor, a lot of coaxing Carrie to get out from under the hospital bed, lots more crying, a dozen more cries of “Don’t touch!”, and three sutures, a fresh pad of gauze, and a piece of candy for Carrie, Trevor helps Carrie back into her booster seat in the hospital parking lot.

“That could have gone better,” Valerie sighs.

“Could have gone a lot worse, too,” Trevor adds.

Valerie’s face curls in confusion.

“Yeah, really,” Trevor affirms. “You know how many sharp objects you can find in a hospital? Honestly, how surprised would you be if Carrie whipped a needle out of nowhere and stabbed her doctor in the thigh?”

Carrie smiles at her father as he clicks her seatbelt and stands upright.

“She wouldn’t do that,” Valerie insists. “She’s a brat, not a monster. There’s a difference.”

Trevor looks down at Carrie. Her smile is trying its best to sharpen her teeth into points with sheer willpower. He looks up at Valerie again.

“She’s milking it, Trevor,” She says accusingly. “And she’d probably be better behaved if you’d stop encouraging her.”

Trevor sighs, and closes the car door.

“Can we not turn this into an argument today?” He asks. Val doesn’t answer. He stares at the ground for a moment. “Look, we were going to go to dinner for Carrie today anyway,” He says. “Want to save a trip and go now?”

Valerie stares at him quietly for a second, then sighs and nods.

Carrie spends the second car ride with her forehead pressed to the window, silently sucking on her sour apple candy and occasionally gently brushing her fingers over the gauze pad taped to her cheek. It’s not long before they pull into the parking lot of Charlie’s Family Diner.

The building is small and gray, with twice as many parking spots as tables. Inside is pretty noisy, and nearly all of the tables are full. Carrie, quite poorly, tries to hide behind her dad as he walks her over to a booth in the farthest corner of the diner. Carrie curls up in the far corner of the booth, trying to shut out the rest of the diner, but she seems to relax when the waitress sets down the menus. Or rather, two big boy menus, and more importantly, a paper kid’s menu and a box of eight crayons. Carrie doesn’t even glance at the front of the menu. She flips the page over to the empty reverse side, and grabs a black crayon without hesitating.

“Hi,” the waitress smiles, pushing her glasses up slightly. “Can I get you anything to drink?” Her face sinks a little when she sees the pad of gauze taped over Carrie’s cheek. “Oh . . . what happened to her?”

“She fell out of a tree,” Trevor answers. “Cut herself pretty deep on a broken branch.”

“Aww . . . I’m sorry to hear that,” The waitress says warmly. “I hope you feel better soon, sweetie.”

Carrie tears her face away from the page just long enough to show the kind of frown only Carrie could make; the “You’re lucky Mom snake-checked me in the

parking lot” kind of scowl.

“Yeah,” The waitress says, a touch uneasy. “So, what do you guys want to drink?”

“I’ll stick with water,” Valerie answers.

“Water,” Trevor says, then turns to Carrie. “Carrie, would you like apple juice?”

Carrie nods silently, still scribbling on her paper.

“Okay. I’ll be back in a moment,” The waitress says, turning and walking away.

Valerie turns her attention to the picture Carrie is drawing.

“What are you drawing, baby?” She asks.

Carrie turns the paper around so her mom can see it. The picture is very helpfully labeled.

“Aww . . . she made a picture of Mommy,” Valerie coos.

Carrie reaches for the box of crayons again, and holds the red crayon against the page as hard as she can, wildly scribbling and smearing red wax all over the paper.

“BLEAAAAGH . . . BLOOD . . . BLOOOOOOOD . . .” Carrie growls, her smile still wishing for a set of fangs instead. Valerie’s smile is nowhere to be found. At least Trevor is smiling with her.

“I told you to stop encouraging her,” Valerie says sharply.

“She’s being creative,” Trevor says defensively. “You know, if you showed some enthusiasm for her interests, maybe somebody else would get eaten by a dinosaur for once.”

“Dine - ar - sarr . . .” Carrie grins, drawing a kind of spiky, kind of lumpy, green monster in the space that’s left. She’s so absorbed in covering her dinosaur with spikes and extra heads that she doesn’t notice the waitress set down everybody’s drinks and taking orders.

“Carrie, sweetheart, what do you want to eat?” Valerie asks again.

“I want macaroni,” Carrie answers flatly, still focused on her paper.

“Is mac and cheese even on the menu?” Valerie asks. “Did you even look, Carrie? Let me see the menu.”

Carrie slides the paper away from her mother, clutching it tightly against the table.

“Don’t worry,” The waitress chimes in. “We have mac and cheese. It’s not a problem at all.”

“Thanks,” Valerie says. Once she sees Carrie settling back into her paper, she turns back to the waitress in a hushed tone. “You know, today is her birthday,” She tells the waitress. “Do you guys think you could sing for her?”

“Of course!”

“Val!” Trevor hisses harshly, making a vigorous “cut it out” gesture.

The argument between the two is brief, but still leaves the waitress walking away baffled.

Soon, Carrie runs out of space and has to flip the paper over, drawing on

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top of the menu and coloring activities. She notices the cartoon elephant mascot in the bottom corner, and drives the crayon hard into the page, covering the cartoon's smile with an exaggerated frown. And then a whole bunch of sharks and blood. By the time their food is on its way, there's barely half of the red crayon left.

Trevor notices the small parade of waitstaff headed for their table before Carrie does. He flinches before they even reach the table, still on edge as they get within earshot.

The sudden blast of singing sends a surging shock through Carrie. When she sees all of the strangers making so much noise, and almost the entire restaurant turned to look at their table, a low, guttural wail bubbles out of her. As deep a sound that can come out of a six year old girl, anyway. The song continues, despite Carrie's obvious crawling horror and anguish, but it's actually stopped by the manager shouting before Trevor can intervene.

"Scott! Why aren't you singing?" The manager asks fiercely.

The diner goes relatively quiet now, even more than it was before.

"No . . ." Scott says firmly, his arms crossed. "No . . . you can't make me. You couldn't possibly pay me enough money to get me to humiliate myself like that."

"God damn it, Scott. This is a family restaurant!" The manager shouts. "Show some hospitality, would you?"

"No," Scott shakes his head. "This tradition is retarded, and I refuse to help perpetuate it."

"Is singing a happy birthday song really so terrible?" Another waitress asks.

"Stay out of this, Denise!" Scott snaps. "I would sooner put a fucking gun in my mouth and pull the trigger than sing that stupid piece of shit song one more time."

"Okay," The manager says. "Go ahead then. You can't sing if you're dead, right? Go ahead! Put a gun in your mouth and pull the trigger!"

Scott hikes up the vest he's wearing, reaching for something by his back pocket. There's a black blur as he lifts his hand to his face-

BANG! . . . Thud!

Scattered shocked screams ring out. An oppressive, agonizing silence chokes everybody in the building. Not for very long. Carrie promptly melts the suffocating quiet, first with a soft giggle, then with enthusiastic laughter and energetic applause.

Not a word gets said until about five minutes later, when their car pulls to a stop at a red light a few blocks away, a pile of take-out boxes piled up on Valerie's lap.

"I don't know if I've ever seen anybody this grumpy with a free meal in their lap," Trevor jabs playfully.

"Really?" Valerie asks, baffled. "How could you possibly be so passé about something like this?"

"Well, I'd be lying if I said this was the first time I'd seen something like that in this town," Trevor shrugs.

"What about Carrie?" Valerie asks. "This is going to affect her for the rest of

her life. Our daughter has been traumatized.”

“Really?” Trevor asks. “Does she seem traumatized to you? She’s always like this.”

Valerie looks back over her shoulder. When Carrie sees her mom looking at her, she holds her hand like a gun, points her fingers into her mouth, and makes a gunshot sound, playfully falling limp against the back of the seat. Still laying back, she quietly giggles to herself, smiling at her mom.

“There is something seriously wrong with your daughter,” Valerie says harshly.

Trevor rolls his eyes, and pulls through as the light turns green.

2018-2019 Art Contest

Co-Student Winner, Poetry

It's just a game

Round 'em up
Two three four
lock the windows
lock the doors
It's just a game
It's all for fun
Just count to three
Then two
Then one

Shhhh

It's just a game
Go run and hide
But plug your ears
Don't look outside
Close your eyes
And count with me
Let's go from one
And count to three

Shhhh

Do it quietly
In your head
Hide and seek
Under the bed
Don't be scared

Look at me
Mama's here
Count to three

Shhhh

The man outside
He's playing too
So close your eyes
He won't find you
I'll be back
It's all for fun!
Just count to three
Then two
then one

Shhhh
Duck down!
Don't let him see
Like I said
Just count to three
It's just a game
So please don't cry
But just in case
Let's say good--

-Eden Spring Buyno

2018-2019 Art Contest

Co-Student Winner, Poetry

Opportunity Rests

Once upon a time, I fell from the sky
And now my time is ending, please don't cry.
Dust clogs my wheels, and sand paints me red,
I'm tired now, and it's time for bed.

I wasn't the first to roll across this land,
And I'm not the last to show Earth's hand.
Across space and time, I've flown from home,
To a tiny red dot to ride and roam.

Rocks and soil became my life,
And my view of Earth showed no strife.
I found plains and hills and tasted the air,
It would danger you here, but I've lived with flare.

And live long I have, to great surprise,
"Design and planning!" you might surmise.
But I like to think it's heart that ages my frame,
Or maybe just the knowledge that you know my name.

I'm going now, my vision has left me.
The storm still rages, and I've taken a knee.
Remember my name, I know you will,
And remember my mission, it was a thrill.

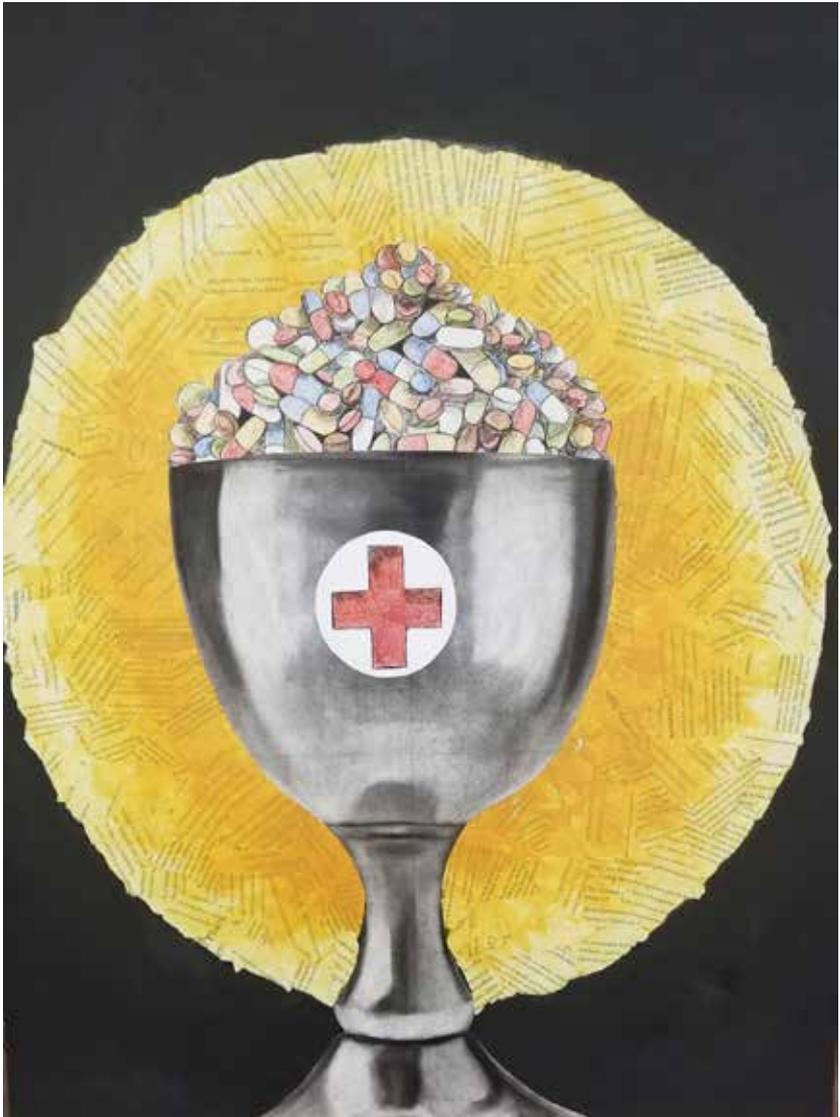
-James Hutchison

Fall 2018 - Spring 2019 Issue

2018-2019 Art Contest

**Student Winner, Painting/Drawing:
Unholy Communion**

by Alyssa Devine



The Works

2018-2019 Art Contest

**Non-Student Winner, Painting/Drawing:
The Meadows**

by Debbie Thompson



Fall 2018 - Spring 2019 Issue

2018-2019 Art Contest

**Student Winner, Photography:
Untitled**

by Keanna Alba



The Works

2018-2019 Art Contest

**Non-Student Winner, Photography:
Reflections in the Loop, Chicago**

by Glenn Bodish



Fall 2018 - Spring 2019 Issue

2018-2019 Art Contest

**Student Winner, Digital Art:
Floating Feelings
by Eden Spring Buyno**



The Works
Ruined.

He was the only one who ever took notice;

My laces

My smile

My hat

My laugh.

Only one that ever mattered;

Old sneakers

Overcast days

Drinking fountains

Sweatshirts.

Only one that ever made sense;

Scanned copies

Old t.v.

Elder hair

Concrete walls.

Only one that ever stood out;

Crank projections

Stormy seas

Pencil lead

Chimney sweeps.

Only one that cared.

Wolf

Hawk

Goose

Dorian

Maynard

Loren

Hughes

Paul

Billie

E in Europe

A in America.

All fifty shades of them.

But.

But after a while I took notice;

His eyes.

Sharp blades on the bottom of our old sneakers.

Winter water below. Overcast above.

Mocha steam wafting up from our gloved palms;

Neither of us wanted to use that fountain.

We are surrounded by fresh snow;

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Our sweatshirts and matching midnight scarves biting into the white.

But its him that keeps me warm.

His eyes; how they caught mine

as he dipped me down towards the ice.

The echos of floor versus chair rang in my ears.

Two scanned copies plop on my desk.

Silent silver screens were the topic.

But I wasn't there.

I was lost in him.

Interrupted by the elder man.

He called us both and proposed a question.

Both approaching, we left our chalky answers on the board, attached to the walls of
concrete.

His eyes; met mine when we turned to return to our
seats.

The crisp air around us, as we set in the bed of his ford.

The whizzing of the crank projector nearby.

Tree around, but not obstructing.

The Perfect Storm just starting,

beginning scene; stormy seas.

Pencil lead scratches, I turn.

He's drawing me, carries a scratch book always.

After credits rolled, we wanted to make our mark.

Taking out like lighter and knife,

We marked the paper white tree.

Ash covering our hands, looking like chimney sweeps.

His eyes, so full of light, looking back I wonder
what happened.

I took notice when we stopped carving ice.

I took notice when we stopped getting lost in class.

I took notice when we stopped making our mark.

I took notice that he didn't think I mattered

That I made sense.

That I stood out.

I took notice that he stopped taking notice of me.

His eyes.

His eyes. His eyes.

His eyes eyes

His eyes eyes eyes eyes

Eyes

His eyes. His eyes. His eyes.

His eyes.

His eyes ruined gray.

-Robert Kerr



Untitled

by Kenana Alba

-Terrified-

Twas an old, broken down shack
standing alone in a field
Someone tossed a cigarette back
and soon plumes of smoke did yield.

The farmer hadn't noticed right away
as the flames ate up the broken wood
Only the pot belly stove would stay
a spark is all it took.

Sirens wailed in the distance
filling the night sky
As the fire ignited and flames danced
people watching timbers fry

Fire trucks and hoses littered grounds
all that could be heard
Were the crackling and snapping sounds
soon all would be lost without a word.

Smoke rolled into gray clouds high above
billowing and scattering ashes all around
Surrounding weeds blackened, shoved
Within moments nothing of value was found.

The trucks dispersed, on their way
back to the firehouse, safely tucked
When all was said and done
The farmer, on the other hand, was totally fucked!

-Kay Clark

When You Caught Me

The second time you caught me staring
it wasn't because I was imagining dancing with you,
my left hand settling on your hip,
my right starting at the soft curve of your breast
and trailing down your side to your waist.
I was not picturing the warm, silky feel of the bare skin at your midriff
sliding beneath my fingertip
as you spun underneath the lights.

The third time you caught me,
it was not because I was convinced that the entirety of the universe was one huge
movie set
and you were an extra hired at various times to play the part of
a fellow third-grader, and then a sorority girl at a party, and then a barista.
I did not really wonder how you felt sitting there, mouth set in a determined line,
praying that I didn't recognize you because, if I did,
you'd be a shitty actress who would never be hired to play a reoccurring role.

The fourth time that you caught me staring,
I'm sure it wasn't because I thought I recognized you from another place or time.
I don't think that I was trying to decide if your hair was the same wiry hair
I once plunged my hand into during a kiss,
or if your face was a slightly looser version of the face
of the centerfold I was obsessed with for weeks in junior high.

The fifth time that you caught me,
I guess I may have suspected that we had some sort of mystical connection.
I could have been wondering if we both enjoyed reading by candlelight,
or if we both hated olives but would sometimes eat them anyway.
But there's no way that our fates are actually intertwined,
that our lives are somehow destined to coincide again and again
because of chiaroscuro or Mediterranean fruit.

The first time you made eye contact with me,
I was really trying to look at the girl next to you, but somehow
your eyes met mine.

The next time you'll catch me staring at you,
I will definitely be wondering
if you're wondering about me.

-Tom Irish



Not Quite

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox

THIS IS US

We swim against even the strongest current
We take action without planning
We dance to our own music
We dare to dream the most lucid dreams
We speak our minds revealing the rawest of truths
We are the ones who run the extra mile
We are the ones that aren't afraid to stand apart from the crowd
Society says no, we hear yes
Society says stop, we hear go
Society says can't, we hear anything is possible
Every negative word assault only ignites the fire that will take us higher; causes us to
burn brighter
We won't fit the mold, We cannot be controlled
Their words only make us stronger, they only fuel our desires
We will not change, like a wildfire we cannot be tamed
We are who we are, This is us

-Victoria Lira

Cyber Love; Alter Egos

by Kay Clark

Jake and Khloe have been carrying on a love affair through Instant Messenger for awhile now and Jake has an opportunity to fly out to Denver to finally meet her in person.

“You know, Jake, this place isn’t going to fall apart if you were to take off a week,” Hank advised. “You’ve been burning the candle from both ends for the past few months trying to get this campaign off the ground. With your leadership and management skills you’ve outlined all that has to be done here. I think with this dedicated team we’ve got I doubt you’d have anything to worry about. Really! So, go. Get outta here. I remember you telling me once a long time ago how much you loved Colorado. Go! Get some of that fresh air, relax”. Hank tried to sweeten the pot...

“Shouldn’t the aspens be turning about now? And when was the last time you took a vacation, man?” Hank was the manager from the Research and Development Department and had been with the company about seven years. Jake could sense the quality in his choice when he interviewed him for the job. Jake leaned back in his chair and steepled his fingers under his nose, pondering his suggestion. He could surely use a vacation. He was right on that account.

“Yes!” Jake reflected on the bright yellow glow the trees lent to the scenic landscape. It was breathtaking. Hank was right. Jake had put in quite a few extra hours over the last three months and it was beginning to take its toll. He blamed the mirror for putting those bags under his eyes. He actually had to stop and think of the last time he took some time off. He was blessed with a talented and gifted staff whose level of energy and enthusiasm almost surpassed his. He had trained them in the company’s mission, processes and policies most of which he had created and implemented. He knew from experience what worked and what didn’t in this competitive climate. It was a daily challenge trying to keep up with the market pricing but Jake readily accepted it. He made it his mission to inspire and motivate his crew to focus on the vision of where they could take the company and their stockholders. He wasn’t near retirement but as a manager it was his duty to start passing the baton.

Jake had to agree with Hank. He had lived and worked just few miles outside of Denver and he loved it there. It was a different climate. He loved the mountain

ranges, the scenery, the seasons, the people were laid back and friendly. He really enjoyed his position of Feature Reporter for one of the local papers. If given the opportunity, he would jump at returning in a heartbeat. He missed writing

Since having met Khloe, he discovered she owned a timeshare in Breckenridge, about two hours south of Denver. He was very familiar with Breckenridge as he'd been skiing several years ago and found the area to be quaint and relaxing. Khloe had told him she would be spending a week there soon and even invited him to accompany her. When she made the reservation back in February, she was hoping she would have found a male companion to join her but hadn't found anyone she had come to know that well or trust. And then Jake came into her life. She felt an instant connection with him; a comfort level and a trust. She surprised herself with her bold invitation.

Jake was sorely tempted to take a long weekend and escort her around his previous stomping grounds. Khloe did her best to convince him that a long weekend five years ago just wasn't enough for such a dedicated employee. She further argued that it wasn't a good idea to ignore the health benefits of taking time off to enjoy the fruits of his labors. "Not many people on their deathbed regret spending more time at the office when they could have spent that valuable time with their family and loved ones." Indeed, she created valid grounds for her case. The gold carrot had been offered in such a neat package. A part of him wanted to mentally pack his suitcase and order that Bloody Mary on the flight. But it just didn't seem to be good timing. His department still needed more time to pull everything together and finalize the roll out. He felt his presence was crucial to seeing the project and campaign to its completion. Hank wasn't about to let up...

"Jake! You KNOW I'm right on this. We can handle things around here. We've done the grunt work and the crew is just as, if not more than, dedicated to seeing this happened as you have been. C'mon, have Becky make the reservations. She's a pro and will get you the best rate on flights. Do you have a place to stay or do you need a reservation for a room?? Oh and by the looks of your eyes, you've already started to pack your bags." Hank said with a smirk. He had made his point. Jake shot a glance at him as he discovered he couldn't blame those on the mirror after all.

"No, I have friends out there. In fact, I know of someone who's heading out that way next week."

Jake stopped himself right there. He didn't want to blurt out any more information for fear he would say the word, "she", and he wouldn't be referring to his wife. She was now spending her time with her father's condo sifting through the memories and wondering what to do with it now that he'd passed. Their marriage was pretty much in the dumpster. It was the timing that stood in the way now. And yet Jake wasn't sure that he was ready to make their marriage a thing of the past.

He really didn't want to hurt her. And yet, what was his life like now? He was lonely and missed a warm body in his bed at night and even though he wasn't a gourmet cook, he did a fair job in the kitchen. Jake was an "Oscar", not a "Felix". Ok, so he wasn't a neat nick. He had other priorities. And he tried to have a life outside of his demanding career. He couldn't ace everything. Jake took pride in juggling several different aspect of his life at the same time. It was enough to boggle some and he was

The Works

pleased with his abilities to keep a certain balance in his life. This was important to him as he would carry this into his work life.

And then he met Khloe. It seemed that using the route of an online dating site was the way to go nowadays. He had heard of several satisfying relationships that had started that way. After two of meeting a few different ladies, Khloe chimed in one night and in a short period of time, they discovered their preferences and interests were quite similar. Soon, their banter took on a different, exciting flavor and they discovered after a days, and several hours, which them into the early morning hours, it began to take them longer and longer to close on their conversations. The mutual mental attraction was quite evident.

Jake couldn't believe that he was actually being given permission to either accompany or follow Khloe out to Colorado for a full week of fun and frolic.

"Seriously, Jake, put Becky on alert and see what she can come up with for you, OK?" Hank was on his way out of Jakes' office with one hand on the door-knob. He closed the door and Jake heard his shoes pad down the carpeted hallway. Jake sat up in his chair and on impulse summoned Becky through his intercom.

"Becky?"

"Yes, Jake? What can I do for you?"

"Will you see what flights are heading out of Chicago, Friday, the 28th?"

"Sure! Would you prefer a morning or after departure?"

"A morning flight would be fine."

"I'm on it, Jake. No problem."

"Thanks, Becky!"

Should he call Khloe and ask about her flight plans or should he surprise her? He was familiar with the resort she was staying at. If he called her they could just rent one car. He didn't see a problem with that. Since he was so familiar with the area, he could show her around to some of his favorite haunts. He would let her into his world on a deeper level. A smile crept across his face and he could feel the excitement radiate throughout his body as he gazed out of his office window. She had told him the condo was a two bedroom. He wanted to know what they would do with the second bedroom and she was quick to admit that she didn't know; "maybe install a trapeze?" Jake found himself chuckling out loud. And to further tantalize his alter ego she added, "What happens in 'Breck, stays in Breck!'" His imagination went into overdrive. Not wanting to formally ask her what flight she was taking and spoiling the surprise, he tried to get into her head and figure out when she would leave. But then if she arrived sooner than he didn't she would have already rented a car and why rent two? He decided he could casually approach her on the subject and ask when she thought she'd arrive; plain and simple, right? Besides he had already figured out that when he asked a question, she would explain, at almost exhaustive length, every detail in her answer. Why? For one, she was a WRITER and writers rarely give you a quick answer to anything. This would be a slice of ingenious and no problem. Becky was standing in his doorway with a glint in her eye.

"Here's the flight information you wanted Jake. Did you want to make a decision yet tonight?"

“Ah, you’re a gem. No! I’ll take this home with me and figure that out and get back to you tomorrow, OK? Hey thanks a lot; appreciate the help.”

“No problem. I’ll see you tomorrow. Have a good evening.”

“You, too!”

Checking his watch, it was 5:00 pm and just about time to start closing up shop. His demeanor was one of the Cheshire Cat. Was he really going to be to pull this off and surprise Khloe? He grabbed his jacket behind the door with his briefcase in hand, switched off the light and closed the door. With a new spring in his step he passed the empty cubicles and pushed the button to the elevator. Still smiling, the doors opened and he stepped in, hit “G” for the ground level parking and the doors closed. Once inside and alone, Jake let out a whoop and a holler! “Colorado, here I come!” mission to inspire and motivate his crew to focus on the vision of where they could take the company and their stockholders. He wasn’t near retirement but as a manager it was his duty to start passing the baton.

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The Works

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Estrellas

If I look at you long enough my eyes will not deceive me
like snowfall in the evening, our backs against the earth.
The moon glazed over stars illuminate our lives.
Higher than that hillside my love is for you.

8

If I hold you in my arms my sense of touch will stay keen.
A calm waterfall after a day of heavy rain.
A cold night before like every other night
but a warmer feel of home when you laid with me.
Even when tears shed
a pool of sorrow grew together
just to evaporate tomorrow.

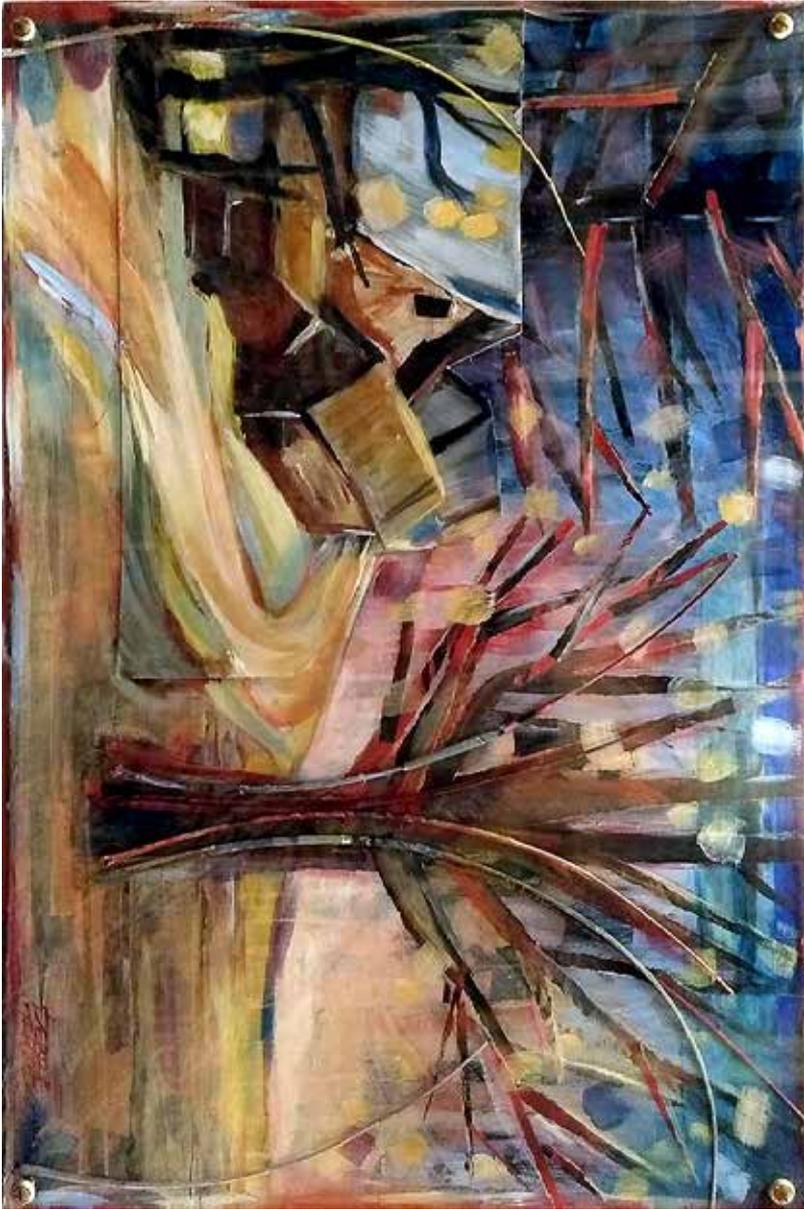
9

My lips upon yours I taste all of your glories.
A walk around the building my childhood developed,
words spoken about dreams three minutes to fulfillment.
In that corner of the world, a vital question,
a collision
of my heart to yours.

1

A voice of pure elegance
a stadium of angels weep.
A lullaby or two you have sung to me.
Through turmoil and longing no longer do I cry,
not fully, at least
you are by my side.
Kiss me under the stars for one last night
under the roof
of our first home.

7



Memories of the Farm

by Debbie Thompson

Untitled

I walk down a path of misplaced dreams,
Surrounded by the chorus of a thousand screams.
Wading through the pit of which that's become my mind,
I look for the attention that only one can provide.

But as I struggle I soon find out,
That such a one does not exist along this arduous route.
It's up to me and me alone to battle these evil thoughts,
And come out on top or watch it all fall to naught.

Though worn and battered, my heart beats true..
Singing the song that it once sung..with the subject being you.
Causing my mind to rage and my countenance to shatter..
It's a safe bet that once again, I will become madder than a hatter..

How can this be? I purged it all!
But yet with a single word, my defenses fall?
This can't be right, this can't be true..
Why does everything always lead back to you?!

I fight these feelings, my heart I struggle to reclaim
But the damage is done, the pain is one that stems from your name.
It's a pain that burrows deep and spreads itself in kind
Bringing questions and thoughts and all that rot to the forefront of my mind.

So as I walk, I feign a lock on the emotions that I feel
For the time will come when the day is done that they will all become too real.
This path I'm on has now become the object of my bane...
The only question left to ask is will I survive this all sane?

Utterly Redundant

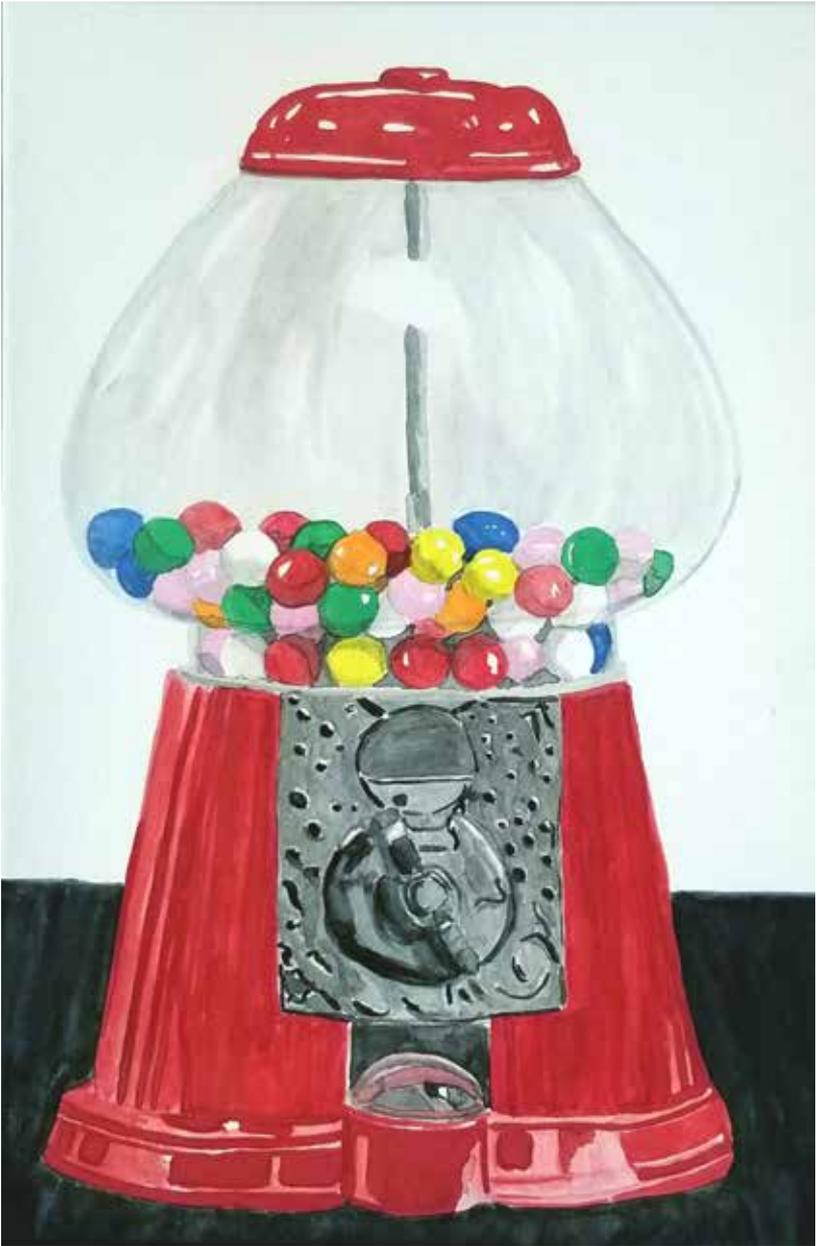
by Terly Dundant

A most egregious happenstance, his crap-and-stance I saw.
It was dour and stout, much like sour kraut, when it fell into the maw.
Round and round it swirled, by pound and pound it hurled,
It flitted down, with the only brown sound, and fell into a curl.

Leering and jeering and nearing a searing, a scent the air was kissing.
It swayed and laid waste to snouts with haste, for a breeze was not missing.
He reached in a fever for the crevice reliever, but found nothing but a rung.
Struck by terror, he saw the error, the roll of life too far was flung.

With a waddle and a toddle, he cursed and traversed, but his goal he did not make.
It wasn't frippery that the floor was slippery, and he tumbled with a bellyache.
Yelling at his felling and mourning a lack of warning, he laid defeated by circumstance.
The lesson is clear and you must not veer, else risk a most egregious happenstance.

-James Hutchison



Bubblegum Machine

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox



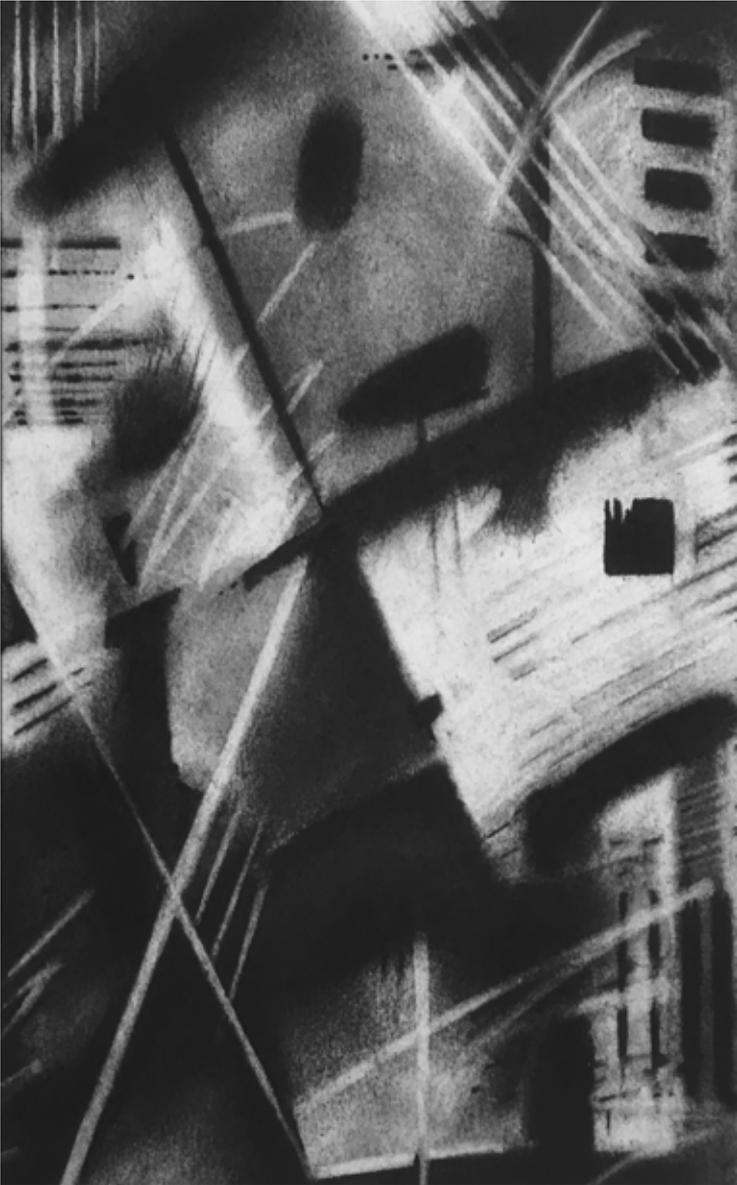
*Japanese Beetle
Inside Lily*

by Kay Clark

The Lying, the Switch, and the Wardrobe.

Class at attention.
I thought I was prepared.
Before I speak, eyes are welled.
Everything will change I suppose.
I can stop lying to myself.
Words fly; fears gulped; eyes supporting.
I never understood “the closet”.
Before I thought I was; I though I never could.
Everything about me now knows I am.
I have always been; it is but isn’t really a switch.
World turns, more myself.
I have never said it aloud before now.
Before now I’ve felt trapped.
Everything was fine, but I felt off.
I step out of my wardrobe.

-Robert Kerr



Carbon Sequestration Series

by Glenn Bodish



Bottoms up

by Eden Spring Buyno

My Wishes

They say you were a good friend
They say you can't come home again
They say things and I don't believe them
They say things
I wish I didn't hear them

You always said you'd be okay
You always said "just pray"
You always said the right thing somehow
You always said things
I wish you'd say something now

I can't stop looking back
I can't stop the flashbacks
I can't stop hoping this is a nightmare
I can't stop
I wish you were here

But I know
Or at least I hope
That what mom says is right:
"The Lord will fight for you"

I'm wishing for a breakthrough

- Irma Solis-Nieto

Untitled

My life felt like a writer was typing away
And all was good until one day
My life started

control
out of

s p i n
b u t u

And suddenly my story became filled with



plot
holes

-Kelly Suarez



Zen Tiger

by Eden Spring Buyno

Hey You! Draw something! Right here!

While you're at it, take a photo of your creation and email it to litmag@svcc.edu for next year's issue!

