

The background of the cover is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a central sketch of a person's face in profile, looking downwards. The face is drawn with simple black lines, and a prominent red line sweeps across the cheek. The entire scene is overlaid with a dense pattern of colorful paint splatters and brushstrokes in shades of blue, orange, yellow, green, and red. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and artistic expression.

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW

Crafton Hills College's
Art & Literary Magazine



The Sand Canyon Review

Dear Reader,

We're proud to present to you the eleventh edition of Crafton Hills College's *The Sand Canyon Review*. Since the beginning, we've attempted to create a space where writers and artists feel comfortable and free to manifest their feelings, opinions, and beliefs through the guise of a prechosen theme. This year, we challenged our submitters to explore the different realms of chaos through the creative lens of fiction, poetry, and art. The theme was an obvious choice for us because of our time's current political and cultural environment. We believe it's important for writers and artists around the world to communicate their take on the chaotic atmosphere which plagues many due to others' ignorance—while also allowing others to elevate themselves to greater prospects. It's our hope, as well as our submitters, that we are able to reveal new and enriching perspectives to our readers. Thank you for exploring *The Sand Canyon Review's* interpretation of chaos.

Regards from,
Karrie Flint and James Lewandowski

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Poetry

Swayed Hungry

Christopher Shaw

In this cross garden,
his legs drag forward,
as if by magnet.

He sits on the hump of a flat tire,
lazy mouth agape from gold radiation,
from the pull of two tiered black stone lips.

Hidden in the nightshade,
flickers of amber wallow into thin air,
fire embers wander in the wicker.

Call Margery Kempe

Christopher Shaw

Because a botanical matrix cusps red with a syndrome,
she forgets her name on the kitchen refrigerator.

Wrinkled candles wash in the headlight flood,
soaked with gasoline and women and cologne,
she signs away the window frame and says,
“hell is an angel that doesn’t sleep through the night.”

Wandering in her driven town basement,
cabinets hook with lawn madness, ghost channels
and hand signals in white water pools,
fossits talk in rooming wander ways of ecstasy,
doors crack with closet bread crumbs.

Swaddled with webbed toes, naked ducks bobble
and wade in the weary casket of ornamental daylight,
pluck at strewn food in the corners of her dark room.

Christopher Shaw graduated from the M.F.A. creative writing program at California State University of San Bernardino with an emphasis in poetry in 2012. He is also a graduate from California State University of San Marcos with a bachelor’s degree in Literature and Writing Studies.

Writer's Block

Tyler J.

A swirling mind
A bygone time
A morbid thought
A simple rhyme

A scary night
A sordid lie
My heart, it drops
My life flies by

And so I hate
With every line
And every thought
That wont be fine

I hate and *hate*
and hate again
And slam my fists
and break my pen

And I scream
and rage and judge
and words come out
and turn to sludge

It all pours out
to smear and stain
I writhe and smile
I scream in pain

Survey it all
and leave it lie
My words will rot
I'll let them die.

Tyler J. is not an extraordinary person by any means, like many people he writes as an escape. Sometimes he doesn't remember what it is he was running from and sometimes he's not so lucky. He keeps writing anyway.

America

Amar Kiswani

There are people in this country
that take the flaws of the divergent,
of the broken people,
and destroy their image
as they fight for peace,
as they seek kindness
in the country that they claim as their home.

They say our voices do not
have value, as we are shot down.
We are told our numbers
have no worth, our chants have no
weight, our confusion is a mere
image that lives in falsehood.
They feel the revolution in the air,
the uproar of howls and chants,
and they dare call it pandemonium.

But, do they know who I am?
The woman named after the moon,
that holds her fist high into the sky
with the Palestinian flag wrapped
around her head, as she envisions
Lady Liberty and Justice fighting
along her side for a better America.
Her lips allow words to escape
with strength and pride for the land
she claims as her own.

I resist,
I rebel.
I will allow my feet to travel with all the weight
of the chants, and the
fists pumping into the sky,
because in a world that is in turmoil,
it is, I, the woman named after the moon
that will fight for liberation.

Amar Kiswani is a twenty-four year old Palestinian-American Muslim fighting for justice.

Lightning

Claire T. Feild

Pitchforks raking the sky, a
cleanliness emerges from
the heavens. Clouds' backs
have been scratched, and
trees' trunks have been
split, this opening from the
trees an impassioned
acceptance of nature's
cruelty. As the lightning
slips away, the sun peeks
from behind its mother's
skirt, the land teeming
with Monarch butterflies
that rest from their
excursions on bushes'
soft leaves until raindrops
pound their silhouettes, the
sun looking out again
to give an evangelical
speech to the Monarch
butterflies so that they
will arise and fill the
landscape with their
eulogistic fluttering
once again.

Aflame

Claire T. Feild

Her temper flares, a falling sycamore that
wakes the newly dead.

She is an aficionado to disaster, a hex on
a bent-up roller coaster.

As she flies through tornado-torn towns,
she relishes the pain she feels.

In the cave where she lives, love is an
afterthought, hate her life's
afflicted derivative.

Form

Claire T. Feild

Even though the small form is in front of me,
it begins to gradually enlarge, a giant
in the making once again.

I try to run away, but a cool liquid runs down
my back, stabilizing me front-center to
the one who has ruined me.

I finally recognize that the figure is my wife,
the one I once loved, but has become
a slave to witchcraft's loins.

As I become her punching bag, I realize that
I have been a flat rag underneath her
calloused feet for most of the years
of our union.

I drift away to death's comforter.

She gathers secrets during stormy weather,
a time when others are enjoying
the coziness of their inside homes.

Since she likes to get wet, a reminder of
her grandmother's playfulness,
she pushes through welcoming
moist bushes to greet cords standing
upward in the place of a door.

Behind the cords, the secrets crawl on top
of each other, some losing their
footing and landing on the wooden
floor, death their interjection
because they do not want to suffer.

She decides to burn the rest of the secrets
because she is tired of being a
gossip, the bearer of good fortune
her pledge now.

Yellow Cotton

Claire T. Feild

The honeysuckle plant is yellow cotton,
the black woman bundling the plants
into balls of strict yellow as she
recalls the old days when the cotton
bolls and their fields caught the heat
that blistered her hands and body.

As she struggled in the cotton fields, she
sang dirges that stretched their
notes into the blues, music that
travelled black hearts to create
a peace inside that grew in spite
of a flagrant negativity from white
folks.

Those white—painted the black boys with
demeaning comments, words that
caused their hearts to skip beats
and their souls to wrinkle until
these entities caught on fire from
all being hurt to the innermost parts
of their quicks.

The best way to describe the black boys'
reactions to undermining behavior
by the whites was to crawl deep
into their brains and hearts to
slowly feel the constant stings of
disparagement.

Too bad that the present has not cut the
throat of the past because
community has not unraveled
enough to form full
circle.

Claire T. Feild has had 381 poems and 7 nonfiction stories accepted for publication in 122 journals and anthologies. Her first poetry book is *Mississippi Delta Women in Prism*. Her first two nonfiction books are *A Delta Vigil: Yazoo City, Mississippi, the 1950s* and *Mississippi Delta Memories*.

To Taste

Timothy B. Dodd

From a great confusion,
our coincaused continental
drift, she picked a brick
not a blackberry, shoved
it sideways in her mouth,
said it sweetness. Years later
she vomited in forgotten field
filled with tall, tick-riddled
timothy where her child buried
himself with plastic and twine,
unsure why a simple fruit
the size of a quarter, its smell
now manufactured in a bottle,
didn't digest after a century
of waste. We must lick air
at net-cost, they told her
by cellular --- the tar-tamed,
escape-a-lunged, bodied in
factories sunk in slimepit.
But bushes, where? Thickets,
countryside walks, fruits
fulfilled? Will they fall again
to birds emptying juices in
sweet song or only stiff-railed
platforms piling up pills?

I Traveled There

Timothy B. Dodd

The man in nice jeans
is the 16th dead in the heat
and the mug
on this 87th of June, and I can not find
the right building, somewhere
behind Lizst's stairs.
He once played piano, you know?

Hey, filing cabinet fellow who swallowed my passport...
Hey, old woman who wants my little oblong skull for your pocketbook...
Hey, man who tried to sell me the fuzz stuck behind your unbending knee...
Hey, aged children slurping in the ants-for-food line...

Ride on behind Ceausescu's kite!
Noisy helicopters are never in awe
of the jellyfish on hillsides
where all your inventions have disappeared
and the cave mouth reads of Homeric dawns.

But I do enjoy the sight of the piddler drifting away
as I read facts about watermelons
and listen to a moorhen in the pew.

I will not be the 17th dead!
I smell those feisty crevices
from where new species wander and grow.
They will climb your stairs,
wreck your duvets and bank accounts,
pickle the tears.

Oh, how I love fog!

The Disappearance of Tagveti

Timothy B. Dodd

Henchmen hounded her to give up the homestead
the family had inhabited for hundreds of years

as priests stood back on the bank's breeze, sucking
on some sort of seed: half the village now black-

winged from their fat robes flailing sacred, belly
buttons sinking in their storage of flesh flab.

"We must secure the area around this little church,
build a fence" after tearing down its 13th-century

walls and worshipping naught, like those bonds
with mother and soil --- Mindort-Batoni deserted.

Her field of maize already relinquished, too a garden
and its peppers she carried folded up in her skirt,

onions and ripening tomatoes --- tears, red to reveal
a kiss of their inflated hands, confession to earth;

if only it came from the fathers: those stashing stolen
bread, growing not in service, but servants and sin.

Timothy B. Dodd is from Mink Shoals, WV. His poetry has appeared in *The Roanoke Review*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Ellipsis*, *Broad River Review*, and elsewhere. He is currently in the MFA program at the University of Texas El Paso.

Aqueous Meadow

Richard Perkins II

Night pours from the juices
of an aqueous meadow

maple and honey locust,
the sap of your body's condensation.

Steeped in the primal caustic,
vague clues in the underbrush

my head is in your lap again
and you tell me why friendship

is so difficult a link
for the strangest animals.

The oil on your fingertips
opens pathways to greater skies;

the perfume of living images
and metaphoric hearing.

Your subtle presence
plays host to my mortality

a reclamation of moon calf
is your shameless servitude;

to know my most simple movements
with sumptuous renown,

entrancing me by making our wild
a better dawn

than nature's self-arising.

Tandems

Richard Perkins II

The world runs on obvious things
and incidental felicities;

the sterility of an exploitative culture,
the men you've left behind.

Your depth implies
gulls breeding in half light
on the margins of Antarctica,

the other dimension so many have quested for.

There will only be a smattering
of dialogue in this act—
the rest is all barren streets and drama.

Your claims are many;
triangle dreams

and a hypnagogic kiss

incinerating syllables both charnel and carnal
as they swab
and floss their way forth into air,

an eruption of locusts and frogs,
the desperation of disjunct tandems

witnessed

but unrecognized.

Darkless

Richard Perkins II

For the first time
it's
darkless

we're unhinged
by bits of sun

a sudden flood
of white blush humming.

The powder of day
blows across a floor

of remnant slippage
and linoleum repurposed.

The sky bends low,
close at hand;

we fill it with spirant smoke
and muscular bondage—

if not for
committed willpower
and primitive instincts

I would have you
right now
in a full-term
afterglow.

Unwanted help
and sunset

would never arrive.

Another Entry In My Epistolary Novel

Richard Perkins II

These words are always written on the cheap;
fifteen minutes is all I've got to work with

tops

so I pray for something unexpected
to inspire me—

maybe a phrase like “the anti-crucible is my telos”
or some other sort of nonsense
which could unexpectedly lead me home.

What happens next is unexpected:

A guy gets hit by the downtown Metra train
and now all of us morbid gapers
are wondering if it was accidental or intentional.

Tomorrow, I'll stop for a few seconds

and look at the blood stain on the crosswalk
and wonder how long it'll take
for sun and rain to wash it clean.

It's a terrible memorial for a human life
but it's over now.

Like I said: Seven minutes.

Cheap.

Doorways to Unformed Futures

Richard Perkins II

There is so much going on
in the room that is you;

all tits and tea cozies,

tongues
on trenchant batteries.

I imagine your slight smile
when you interpret this

knowing I mean you,
infinitely and only you—

but still,
there remains
a panel of windows

leading to rough
and sluggish clouds,

doorways to unformed futures
which must be won

and then whispered about
indefinitely.

The distant lull of tide
pushes through
the undefended portions
of your home

and casual warp of your being.

I suspect
that I'm soon to be moved
by your remote singularity

to trembling

and that
in itself

is victory.

Marble Alchemy

Richard Perkins II

There are infinite catacombs
of all the things I should have done

slightly fewer of the things
which should never have come to be.

There should have been three sets
of small footprints in the soft April dirt
instead of one.

The brightness in this small patch
of oak and elm

was meant for more than just
two eyes
and circles of hovering sadness.

I can still feel
the power in the earth
where your feet might have walked

how your senses would have been
thoughtfully engaged,
pleased by this simple bloom.

I should have fought harder for you,
revealed more of the internal landscape

that helped bring you into being,
shared with you the secret food

that grows
only in deepest shine of moon.

Just one of you remembers
how I tripped on a root
and fell into last autumn's leaves

the moments
of my laughter and chagrin

how you briefly saw the world within me
at the outskirts
of love and marble alchemy.

Richard King Perkins II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He lives in Crystal Lake, IL, USA with his wife, Vickie and daughter, Sage. He is a three-time Pushcart, Best of the Net and Best of the Web nominee whose work has appeared in more than a thousand publications.

Rolling the Boulder:

An Interview with Nikia Chaney



Nikia Chaney is the current Inlandia Literary Laureate (2016-2018). She is the author of *us mouth* (forthcoming from University of Hell Press, 2018) and two chapbooks, *Sis Fuss* (2012, Orange Monkey Publishing) and *ladies, please* (2012, Dancing Girl Press). She is founding editor of *shufpoetry*, an online journal for experimental poetry, and founding editor of *Jamii Publishing*, a publishing imprint dedicated to fostering community among poets and writers. She has won grants from the Barbara Demings Fund for Women, Poets & Writers, and Cave Canem. Nikia Chaney holds two MFAs, one from Antioch University, Los Angeles (2009), and one from California State University, San Bernardino. She was chosen to read for the Literary Uprising for Antioch University, Los Angeles, and she competed in the CSU Oral Research Competition for 2012 for her linguistic research. She was nominated by the English Department for Outstanding Graduate Student at California State University, San Bernardino. Nikia teaches English composition at San Bernardino Valley Community. She also teaches poetry, literacy, and art classes for children and adults. Highly active in the community, Nikia has won fellowships and grants from Cave Canem, the Millay Colony for the Arts, Squaw Valley, and the Barbara Demings Fund.

Q: What is *shufPoetry*, and why did you create it?

A: I created *shufPoetry* with another graduate student out of a need to highlight poetry that didn't fit any defined genre. We wanted the magazine to be the "shuf" pile, the good beautiful, visually stunning poems that get rejected because they are too "weird" or not easily understood. Right now *shufPoetry* has published 7 issues of writing from across the country. *Shuf* also hosts an annual contest that awards a writer with a feature and \$100.

Q: What is *Jamii Publishing*, and what inspired you to create it?

A: *Jamii Publishing* has a slightly different mission. Right now publishing a manuscript is very difficult. The current publishing model is harsh and often not accessible to deserving writers. With another dear poet friend, *Jamii* was birthed into the world with the mission of helping to make writing communities, and encourage writers to work outside themselves. *Jamii* has 5 books and 2 anthologies. I am most proud of the long list of projects that the authors have accomplished.



Q: As Inlandia Literary Laureate, what do you find to be your greatest job?

A: As literary laureate, it is my deepest honor to bring these ideas to this region. My current projects as laureate include creating spaces for poets to publish work communally, and addressing some of the issues of violence with the ideas of writing as healing. I am proud of the region we inhabit, and I am grateful to be a working artist and to using writing for good.

Q: What was your inspiration for the character, Sis Fuss? Are they based on a real individual or a commentary on society?

A. The book is based on a little bit of both; a real individual and an issue I wanted to address. The actual voice of Sis Fuss is my late husband, Terrell. The circumstances are different. I wanted to write a book about a man who had been recently released from prison to highlight the difficulties that black men in the penal institute face. I felt that this was a subject that was just not dealt with poetically before.

Q: Why did you choose to write Sis Fuss as a male, as opposed to a female?

A: I wanted to focus on black men. I also thought that it was cool his gender not being readily apparent from his name.

Q: In the story, you chose to use slant rhymes over straight rhymes. Why did you write it this way?

A: There wasn't any conscious choice about any particular rhyme scheme. I just liked that the story reads sing-songy, like a children's fable.

Sis Fuss is Born

from *Sis Fuss* by Nikia Chaney

Sis knew that
he should not
have been able to fit
on the futon. Sis was
a giant in the room. Sis sat
on tiny futon, touched tiny
fridge, tiny little table
phone book chair. Sis
had wide hands. Hands that could hold
the weight of his body, fit in the space
of the breath, make
sense out of the air.
If he knew why
only those hands
worked, why the heat shimmered, mirroring the white
rock on the plush green carpet and why he could not
speak he thought that he be something
not bulky or vast, but
fit, thick, neat.

A Wifey for Sis Fuss

from *Sis Fuss* by Nikia Chaney

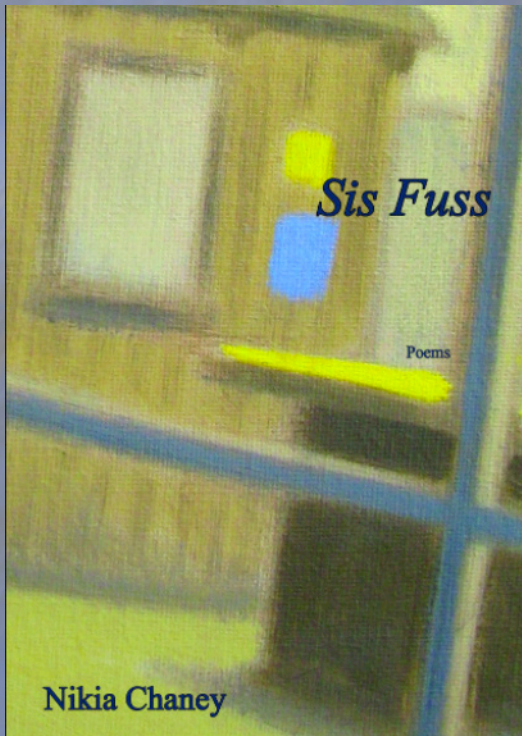
An asymmetrical walk.
A broken tooth.
A large bottom lip.
Long hair in
a poof style that Sis Fuss
knew he would want
to touch.
A scent of dove or
maybe dial soap.
Pretty little tiny feet.
She didn't have to be too much.
If Sis could found
a reflection of himself
in window of her car, get
a slow thick look,
lessen the pull of just
a string
plant his own smell on her sheets,
well then.

Q: Do you believe Sis Fuss is inherently good, or does he balance on the spectrum between good and evil?

A: Oh no! I wouldn't even begin to try to decide the character's own morality. Sis is human, with flaws, yes, but like all humans worthy of love and redemption.

Q: Does the white rock and Sis Fuss represent the Greek myth of Sisyphus?

A: Yes! I was absolutely thinking of the Greek myth for his name. There's a stinky stream, snakes, even strings to tie him into these larger mythologies.



Q: If so, why did you choose to portray this character as a representation of the Greek myth?

A: I wanted to juxtapose the subject of black convict with more academic ideas of western literature. I was heavily influenced by Anne Carson's novel, The Autobiography of Red, too.

Q: Is this story something that was always clearly planned or did it evolve throughout the writing process?

A: No, the story was not planned. I started a few Sis Fuss poems during the month of April as a poem a day challenge.

Q: Did you create this story with a clear structure, or without much framework?

A: No, there wasn't much framework. I did want each poem to have the same number of lines, to mention something outside of the room specifically. I do remember adding in one more poem, Syllogizing Sis Fuss, to make the page count long enough for a particular contest, though.

Q: Did you know numerous people in your life like Sis Fuss, or does this character embody a few different personas?

A: His voice is my husband's, he looks like my uncles and other men I know, and his struggles are the struggles that I see many black men suffer with: what is "being strong"? How to face the cruelty of a system designed to hurt you? Where to find connection? Love? And how to trust it feels as if you deserve it when it's there?

Q: Lastly, does Sis Fuss's tale end happily, or is he destined to "push the rock back up the hill", so to speak?

A: You know, originally Sis did go back to jail. This is the most accurate picture of recidivism in America. But in my heart I just couldn't do that to him. So there are two endings. One, he goes back to jail. He goes back home and his existence is no less important or read. And two, he wakes up and this woman (a love interest or a relative, his sister) hand on his chest, everything he needs.

Thank you for the wonderful opportunity to interview you, Nikia!

You are more than welcome! This book does have a sequel (almost finished: Cay), so I hope you enjoyed it, and stay tuned!

Les angles morts/ The dead angles

Ivan De Monbrison

un morceau de ciel se décolle lentement du plafond
pourtant
il reste là quelque chose de plus lourd qui bouge à
peine
sous la pierre et le sel
des mains ramassent les corps par poignées
et les entassent au fond des puits
tu marches sans savoir vers où
et le soleil sort de ta bouche comme une bulle de
savon
pourtant tu n'as pas bougé de ton lit
un seul instant
et par delà la fenêtre tu peux voir les étoiles
s'allumer l'une après l'autre dans l'obscurité
comme tes rêves
comme tes rêves fous
auxquels tu n'as jamais pu donner vie
le silence est maintenant ton unique compagnon
dans ce désert obscur et glacial
que tu traverses
à chaque pas
il ouvre une nouvelle porte
et chaque porte donne sur un tunnel
qui s'enfonce loin dans l'obscurité
jusqu'à un morceau de ta propre vie sur lequel
tu n'avais pas pensé à t'arrêter
jadis
mais qui prend toute son importance
rétrospectivement
le silence est devenu ton unique compagnon
la nuit quand tu ne peux penser à autre chose
qu'à ces corps tuméfiés
qui tombent et qui s'écrasent l'un après l'autre
comme s'ils tombaient lourdement
du sixième étage
ils éclatent
sous les coups de boutoirs de la maladie et de la peur
tu lèves enfin la tête
tu vois au loin

*a piece of sky is slowly peeling off the ceiling
yet
there is something heavier barely moving
beneath the stone and the salt
hands picking handful of bodies
and piling them up down wells
you walk randomly
and the sun comes out of your mouth like a soap
bubble
motionless in your bed
for a while
you can see the stars beyond the window
lighting up one after the other in the dark
just like your dreams
like your crazy dreams
which you were never able to make real
silence now is your sole companion
in this desert dark and cold
that you are crossing
at every step
a new door opens up
and each door leads to a tunnel
sinking far into the darkness
until you find a part of your life over which
you had never thought about
before
but which turns out to be significant
in retrospect
as silence has become your sole companion
at night when you can't think of nothing else
but these bruised bodies
falling and crashing one after the other
as if they were falling heavily
down the sixth floor
they burst open
under the blows of disease and of fear
you finally raise up your head
you can see in the distance*

ces villes infinies
que nomadisent nos ombres
mais qui s'effritent lentement comme ces murs
lépreux
recouverts d'affiches défraîchies
il y a placardés sur ces murs
des centaines de fenêtres fermées
de portes closes
tu tentes d'ouvrir l'une d'elle
au hasard
elle cède
et de l'autre côté
il y a étendu sur le sol
le cadavre de ta vie
plein à ras bord d'angles percés et morts
comme des yeux crevés
tu fourres à la va-vite tes regrets et tes peines
dans le sac de peau
qu'est devenu ton corps flasque et inerte
et qui parfois lentement s'entrouvre
quand
allongé
et seul dans ta chambre
tu sens la nuit qui mue

*these endless cities
turning our shadows nomadic
but which slowly crumble down as these leprous
walls
covered with faded posters
there is plastered over these walls
hundreds of closed windows
closed doors
you randomly try to open
one of them
it gives in
and on the other side
there is lying flat on the ground
the corpse of your life
full to the brim with angles drilled and dead
like gouged out eyes
you stick in a hurry your regrets and your pains
in the bag made of skin
which your limp and lifeless body has turned into
and that sometimes slowly opens
when
lying down
and alone in your room
you feel the night sloughing*

Secrètement/Secretly

Ivan De Monbrison

quelque chose de plus sec
l'ombre déclouée de l'arbre
cette fin dévore le ciel il faudra planter des yeux dans
la nuit sèche mais je n'oublie pas qui tu es il y a cette
main, il y a cette ombre, il y a l'extase qui demeure
quand on a tout oublié de ses choix
après
toi
l'horrible calvaire des yeux arrachés aux paumes des
mains moîtes
l'horrible silence qui flotte en secret à la surface
même de mon désir et tellement que j'aurais peur de
couler à l'envers dans l'eau glacée même si je voulais
y résister de toutes mes forces même si je mourrais à
l'envers même si l'excuse arrachée à la manche rend
sa main au fou et que l'histoire se répète encore et
encore je ne t'ai jamais vu parler et pleurer en secret
malgré la venue invisitée de la mort en ces lieux
profanés
l'angle tû
la branche plie sans céder
et les astres qui s'alignent en secret dans le coin le
plus reculé du firmament
ne nous appartiennent plus et n'indiquent aucune
destinée propice
arrache-toi à ton propre lambeau de rêve
et rend la nuit secrètement à ses tombeaux

*something drier
the shadow unhooked from the tree
this end eating up the sky we will have to plant eyes in
the dry night, but I do not forget who you are, there is
this hand, there is this shadow, there is the ecstasy which
remains when one has forgotten it all about his own
choices
after
you
the horrible ordeal of eyes torn away from sweaty
palms
the horrible silence that floats in secret on the very
surface of my desire and so much that I would be
afraid to drown backwards into the icy water even if
I wanted to resist it with all my strength even if I died
upside down even if the excuse taken away from the
sleeve is turning back his hand to the insane and that
this story repeats itself over and over again I never
saw you talking and crying in secret despite the
unvisited coming of death in these desecrated places
the muted
angle
the branch bending without giving in
and the stars that line up in secret in the most remote
corner of the firmament
they do not belong to us anymore nor do they indicate
any conducive destiny
pull yourself out of your own shredded dream
and give back this night secretly to its grave*

À midi/At noon

Ivan De Monbrison

À midi je me lèverai il est déjà onze heure
quarante cinq
à Paris quelque chose me dit que je ne vais rien
faire aujourd'hui pourtant le ciel est bleu il fait
froid et j'aperçois un petit bout de ciel par un coin
de chez moi au-dessus du carreau là où le nuage
se pose j'aimerais tant ressembler à un nuage
civilisé qui flotterait sur les toits du
faubourg saint-antoine et quelque chose me dit
que la lumière qui flotte dans la rue est la même
que celle qui flotte en ce moment précis à l'autre
bout du monde et même si je pense à Dieu qui
n'existe pas j'aimerais tellement pouvoir
continuer d'exister un instant de plus dans la terre
une fois que j'aurai rejoint les morts dans le grand
cimetière qui surplombe la ville mais la semaine
prochaine je dois aller à Marseille pour monter
sur les toits et y voir la ville qui s'étend par vagues
sombres où vient mourir la terre des hommes qui
n'osent plus sourire de peur que leur sourire reste
figé sur leurs visages à tout jamais dans le silence
invaincu de mon cœur bleu.

*At noon I will get up as it is already eleven
forty five am
in Paris, something is telling me that I'm not
going to do anything today yet the sky is blue
it's cold and I can see a little piece of it on the
top of my window pane right where a cloud has
landed I would love to look like a civilized cloud
that would float over the roofs of the Faubourg
Saint-Antoine and something is telling me that
the light that floats in this street is the same one
that is floating at this very moment on the other
side of the world and even if I think about God
who doesn't exist I would like so much to go on
living some more down in the ground once I
have joined up the dead in the large cemetery
that overlooks the city but next week I will go
to Marseille to climb on top of the roof and see
the city extending like dark waves just where the
land of mankind ends up dying where men no
longer dare to smile as they are afraid that their
smiles will stay frozen over their faces forever in
the unbeaten silence of my blue heart.*

L'Eloignement/The Walking Away

Ivan De Monbrison

quelque chose colle à la fenêtre
je ne sais pas si c'est toi ou le
souvenir que j'ai de toi
ou la fleur qui reste toute seule un peu penchée dans
le vase où j'ai oublié de mettre de l'eau
tu
me
demandes si j'ai encore faim?
mais
nos deux étoiles tu le sais bien sont couvertes de
cicatrices
de telle manière qu'on ne pourrait les reconnaître
même si on les peignait de toutes les couleurs

il y a des os qui sont roulés en tas avec la
moquette que
l'on a pris le soin d'arracher au plancher, on a aussi
couvert
les murs de dessins qui représentent nos enfants

on a pris soin de garder un peu de thé au chaud pour
le premier venu qui rentrerait à l'improviste et se
mettrait
à parler une langue inconnue

n'oublie pas d'attacher le rêve avec une ficelle
à la rambarde du balcon
sinon il
va s'envoler au moindre coup de vent
et
nos enfants resteraient défigurés à jamais par

j'ai encore essayé de dessiner ton visage par-dessus
ton reflet dans le miroir mais je n'y suis toujours pas
parvenu c'est vraiment frustrant

*something sticking over the window
I don't know if this is you or the
memory that I still have of you
or the flower that remains all alone a little bent in
the vase where I forgot to put water
you
ask
me if I'm still hungry?
but
you are aware that both our stars are covered by
scars
so that we couldn't recognize them even if
we were to paint them in all colors*

*there are bones that are rolled into piles with the
carpet that
we have beforehand torn off the floor, one has also
covered
the walls with drawings that represent our children*

*we took care to keep some tea still hot for
the first man who would just walk in like that and
would
start speaking in another and queer language*

*don't forget to attach the dream with a string
to the railing of the balcony
otherwise it
will fly away at the slightest gust of wind
and
our children would remain disfigured forever by*

*I have tried to draw your face over
your reflection in the mirror, but I haven't been able
to make it yet this is really frustrating*

je me demande si ton âme est une étincelle ou bien
la flamme de la bougie ou bien la cire qui coule le long
du fût de la bougie ou bien l'étoile que j'ai vue tomber
à l'horizon comme un tableau qui se décrocherait du
mur

mais ton visage je ne peux le saisir sans son reflet

je
n'arrive plus à
me souvenir
de ce à quoi tu ressemblais
et
chaque pas nous ramène sans cesse l'instant d'avant
ainsi nous ne parvenons plus à progresser sur ce
chemin escarpés sans pouvoir calculer à l'avance le
moment même de notre chute le long de la falaise

mais tes cheveux sont si fins
qu'ils sont presque invisibles
dans le vent

*I wonder if your soul is a spark or
the flame of the candle or even wax flowing down
the very candle itself or the star I've seen falling
over the horizon like a painting unhooked from a
wall*

but I can't grasp your face without its reflection

*I
no longer
remember
what you looked like
and
each step keeps bringing back to us time lost
so that we can't walk further on this steep path
and still be able to foresee the moment
of our falling from the cliff*

*but your hair is so fine
that it is almost invisible
in the wind*

Ivan De Monbrison is French poet, writer and artist who lives in Paris and Marseille. His poems and short stories have appeared in several literary magazines. Five poetry chapbooks of his works have been published: *L'ombre déchirée*, *Journal*, *La corde à nu*, *Ossuaire* and *Sur-Faces*. His novels include: *Les Maldormants* (2014), *L'Heure Impure* (2016) and *Orgasmes et Fantaisies* (2016).

Darkness Glows

Tara Shultz

Over the years
I've come to know
What the darkness is
And how it glows,
Always hovering
Just out of reach
At the edge
Of my vision.
When I am at my lowest
I look up and see
More darkness
Staring back at me.
The shadows are long
And frightening
To each passerby,
But to me
They sing
A silent
Lullaby.
I don't like
How they make me feel,
But when I feel those things
I know that I am real;
And the emotions
Bottled up
Inside
Are real,
Too.

Tara Shultz is currently studying at Crafton Hills College to obtain her English Associate of Arts degree with Honors. When not studying for classes or delving into religious discussions, Tara enjoys researching odd topics, signing music (using ASL), singing, reading, and writing.

My Mind is Chained to You

Clark Elder Morrow

My mind is chained to you.
You move and I am yanked off center,
staggering. Each of your words
is caged in my chest
nibbling and gnawing there,
sawing incisors
slicing raw nerve-screens.

I can't see the sky
because
you're interposed.
You weep
through my eyes.

Conjoined. Conflated.
I live in the conjunctive.
I breathe without pain
when you allow me to –
when some vortex in the field
of your vast gravity slacks,
and I'm permitted
a second's respite.

Your phrases, your
ideas, pepper my gut
where they burn
small hemorrhagic holes.
Some sparks and spices
sting still from last year...

Unaware, utterly unaware
Of your god-power, you
toss off thoughts
and my lowest
most vulnerable membranes
pay the price.

I am your target
bristling with your arrows
which
you fail to see you're shooting.
The legs of a target can't
run away.

I am St Sebastian, bound pierced and
writhing, awash with blood.
All I can do is watch your eyes
for a clue to your next shot.
But (though every word-arrow
finds a pain node) ---
you're not aiming.

Clark Elder Morrow is a local actor and playwright, who's latest play is in talks to be staged at the Archway Theatre in North Hollywood. From 2002 to 2015, he was a monthly columnist for *The Vocabula Review* web magazine.

Carrion Flower

Robin White Turtle Lysne

*Certain rare birds
can regrow wings and learn to fly again.— Raggedy Andy*

Outside my heart garden,
I keep her in a metal cage
wings clipped, exiled—too dangerous to be let out—
I could keep an eye on her here,
This way, she won't hurt anyone, I'm sure.
She suffers 1000 tortures from other lives
I can't stand her screams
so I bring her a single rare flower,
a Carrion Flower, black tongue licking out
of a purple ruffled wing,
it smells like its name.
She smiles her caged up grin
and I ask if she is able to hear me,
her head bobbed in all directions,
I can't tell if the answer is yes or no
I love you the way you are,
and you are in here for a good reason!
The last words roll into the sewer
as lost coins. The real truth?
I am afraid of her.
Given half a chance she would kill me—
first for ignoring her—then for locking her up.
So on the next visit,
I bring her more flowers with different scents
all in pots so they are living beings
first daisies, then tulips then a whole field of daffodils.
She looks through the bars at me and laughs
then organizes herself into a lotus position
on the cold floor, tears damming under her eyes.
After a while, in a veil of golden smoke
she sprouts her new wings and
disappears, and somehow
takes the flowers with her!
I put the skeleton key into the lock
and opened the empty cage.
She leaves me a note,
I didn't know she could write,
Your turn honey,
now it's your turn to
surrender. Ha, ha!

Cape of Ulysses

Robin White Turtle Lysne

They say he stuffed Mullein leaves
in his underwear
to protect from those sirens.
He ordered his men to do the same,

and had them press those soft
leaves into their ears,
then apply wax,
to seal against their song.

He had his men sew him a cape
of Mullein leaves then strap him
to the mast. Only Ulysses' ears were open
to listen to their seductive choir

and his binds would protect him from those whispers
and sighs from their groans and gyrations
from going mad,
from turning his ship into the rocks.

Poor Ulysses. What of the night?
Did you really think
you could stop any hot-blooded Siren
from seeping into your dreams?

Robin White Turtle Lysne, M.A., M.F.A., Ph.D. is an author of 5 books, an artist, and an energy healer.
Recent books are *Handbook to Heart Path*, *An Energy Medicine Guide*, and *Poems for the Lost Deer*.
Her art pieces reflect consciousness states, and she has exhibited widely.

All the Isaacs

Judith Skillman

Sent to war by their fathers. Laced with rounds
& Kalashnikovs & hidden inside
a Trojan horse that bears within its womb
mighty men chosen to be field-battered
hosts. Broad-shouldered, tattooed, fully armored,
to attract girls who won't fatally miscount
this boy who went MIA, this other
standing with his back to her in letters.

Concussed IED'd amputees return
from abroad, start to be lucky except
for survivor guilt. Why the order
to abort? Father's ass's still bound
by rope loops to a sapling. Father's
still smoking & pacing off steps for plots.

Dream of Punishment

Judith Skillman

We carry our papers in slots of mouths
as we rise on a glass escalator
to the mesa where we'll be sentenced.
Green cards, passports, visa's. The god—
a man with a cane—decides
how long each one will stay prone
in crucifixion position, staring up
at a sky made of marble and ice.
I jaw the cardboard, wait my turn.

Judith Skillman's recent book is *Kafka's Shadow*, Deerbrook Editions. Her work has appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Zyzzyva*, *FIELD*, and elsewhere. Awards include an Eric Mathieu King Fund grant from the Academy of American Poets. Skillman has done collaborative translations from French, Portuguese, and Macedonian.

Dyslexia

Anais Ford

I started to read
d to b
b to p
9683
Differences hard to see
nun run
difference none
speed bump
a line jump
why I normally?
can't read
Confused I go on
dab, bab, pab,
pad, bad
"It is dad"
I hear a taunting voice in the corner
Feeling belittled
I continue
This time with a ruler
It gets a little better
Till I feel it yanked from my hands
"We aren't measuring"
"put it in the bin"
As the teacher walked away with a callous grin
I grabbed a piece of paper
Seconds later
"Are you drawing or reading"
"keep up with the class"
I reach for a book mark
I heard him remark
"It isn't even close to lunch stupid"
"what time is it"
"I can't read those hard clocks"
Holding back tears
Misty eyed
I looked up
And then replied
"it is eleven thirty"
Only half an hour more
"but shouldn't you know how to tell time"

He then began to roar
“yeah like I am gonna listen to you”
“You read like a baby”
I ran my finger along the page
The teacher walked by
She filled with rage
“quit reading like a child”
“nobody will think you are smart if you read like this”
I started to plea
“but I need to”
“No buts now learn how to read right”
I quieted myself
Not wanting a fight
I struggled with every page
Every sentence
Every syllable
But don’t you know
It is better this way
It is better to be slow
It is better to be confused
Adaptation is failure
Confrontation is unnecessary
Assimilation is key
Why didn’t it work for me?
I am not slow
I am not stupid
I am not pathetic
I am not childish
I am just dyslexic

Anais Ford is a Spanish major at Crafton Hills College. Anais had always struggled with reading and writing until high school, when she was diagnosed with dyslexia. Anais wrote the poem ***Dyslexia*** in the hopes to raise awareness of the condition.

True Genesis

Jeffrey MacLaughlan

On the first day, God took a nap. You know how it goes. You struggle in the hammock to find that one spot where you've mastered levitation and getting out is too much of a hassle. On the second day, God said, let there be light and then exhaled oscuro smoke and laughed until Wednesday. Mountains and fields sprung up around his feet like driveway weeds. God burnt them to the ground and fell asleep again. By Thursday they returned with swamps and taigas and so he fucked those up too and crashed in the hammock until Saturday. By then geysers of tadpoles had taken over and God flew as far away as possible.

Cable News Ticker

Jeffrey MacLaughlan

The stock market spun clockwise for the first time in decades. Celebrity chefs are caught in monster storm cooking for the President. The meal was crucial for the storm's welcoming party to avoid early missteps, but appetizers were under-cooked and unsurprising. Storms crave proper pacing or they will shatter windows with fashionable yellow boots. The market reacted with a major tumble in Tiffany lamps. Sous chefs were sent to appease the sky with lobster bisque but were clobbered with dart frogs. No identities released for fear of repercussions. Nothing abroad worth noting.

Summer Blockbuster

Jeffrey MacLaughlan

Last night, last night. Strip club, diamond dolls, strip club. Met up with Carlee, little stick of porcelain. Carlee, last night, diamond dolls, eyes glowed constellations. Carlee Dipper, Carlee Minor. Then it happened last night, strip club, Carlee came out to Sibelius Symphony V because she despises baroque. Took her to Gully Road party underneath Carlee galaxies.

Listened to Sibelius in my truck while slurping candy shakes. Invasion began. Strawberry cornfield glows, unleashes star dolls, spills minority blood. Government program, they run, strip club grand conspiracy. Spheres of space debris tumbleweed to her diamond teeth. Grabbed her and blazed to Skanellus Diner but continued hearing brass.

Sheriff there. Last night, sheriff, Skanellus Diner. Not responding to the dispatch static. Sheriff's eyes drip juice-red, heaps of black ants. Carlee tossed upside down and rose toes first, tight as a pole. Glass smash electrical storm, yellow crepe paper. Carlee unsheathes neon recorder and snake charms tractor beam into releasing arched feet. Last night, doll voice, sheriff eyes next time, Sibelius movement complete.

World War Ninety Four

Jeffrey MacLaughlan

All of my toys fucking hate themselves. They can't be here anymore when the kids are around. We're when the midst of World War Ninety Four by anyone's guess. Most Ninja Turtles are paraplegics. They lounge numbly from too much Xanax. The Barbie Dream House is a series of toppled pillars, and Starscream studies his army from his pizza saver palace. He only launched an invasion so he wouldn't hear Cobra groan about unemployment running out. They crawl across pebble land mines, unleashing plastic concussions. Road Warriors fart explosions into the Budweiser fortress. Unconditional surrender. Vodka rockets are spotted on the carpet's horizon, shooting cigarette stubs into the microwave fire.

Jeffrey MacLaughlan also has recent work in *The Virginia Normal*, *Antithesis*, *The William & Mary Review*, among others. He teaches literature at Georgia College & State University. He can be followed on Twitter @jeffmack.

Portrait of a Wolf Owl

Jennifer Engel

Born on the day of the Super Moon 2016
she is howling at the mystery
surrounding her like a halo.
Who is she?
The illusion of feathers and fur?
Who is she?
The illusion of a low deep cry
against arid mountain air?
Who is she?
A vision of loneliness springing
from my fingertips?

Yesterday, I saw a man on a bench,
his sobs an earthquake, demons
speaking into his ear.
Is this she?
Yesterday, I saw a child mute her voice,
shaken by derision.
Is this she?
Yesterday, I saw a mound
of dirt and hair digging through the trash
outside a coffee house.
Is this she?
Yesterday I saw a woman sleeping
in a doorway, cold as a November night.
Is this she?

She is my vision scratched
in black and white. She is no one.
She is everyone ... sometimes.
She is a piece of artwork
sitting in my window.

Jennifer Engel studied art and poetry writing at Scripps College in Claremont. She has taught art at Redlands High School for thirty years. She encourages students to submit artwork and writing to the RHS Literary Journal and this year she is a co-advisor. She is currently working on her ninth book of poetry.

The Lies Men Whisper

Marta Tesfai

The small spot between the hip and stomach was pushed in to make
her remember this.

The other hand pulling the chocolate braid, demanding her to look at him.

Her sister is a whore, her father too.
So, what makes her different?

Using her Mother's strength
She pulls back, pushing him away.

The popcorn burns on the oven.
Dust under the *mesob* basket sits as a quiet listener.
The walls, her shield.
Her brothers, the borders between life and death.
The old housing project door, the portal that blurs from nightmare to reality.

She says
Enough.

The Moment She Knew

Marta Tesfai

Grabbing her by her chin, he stared at her

Counting the minutes and seconds, pushing forward

Touching the bruise, he marked on her cheek he tells her

It's never going past this.

Rejection Letter

Marta Tesfai

Stop! She said.
Go faster. She said.
Braid. Faster. She said.

Look! Your back, walk straighter. She said.
Smile less. She said.

Be like Sarah.
At least be smoother. She said.
Say Less.
Be skinner.
Shut up. Afkee hiz.
Be a women. She said.

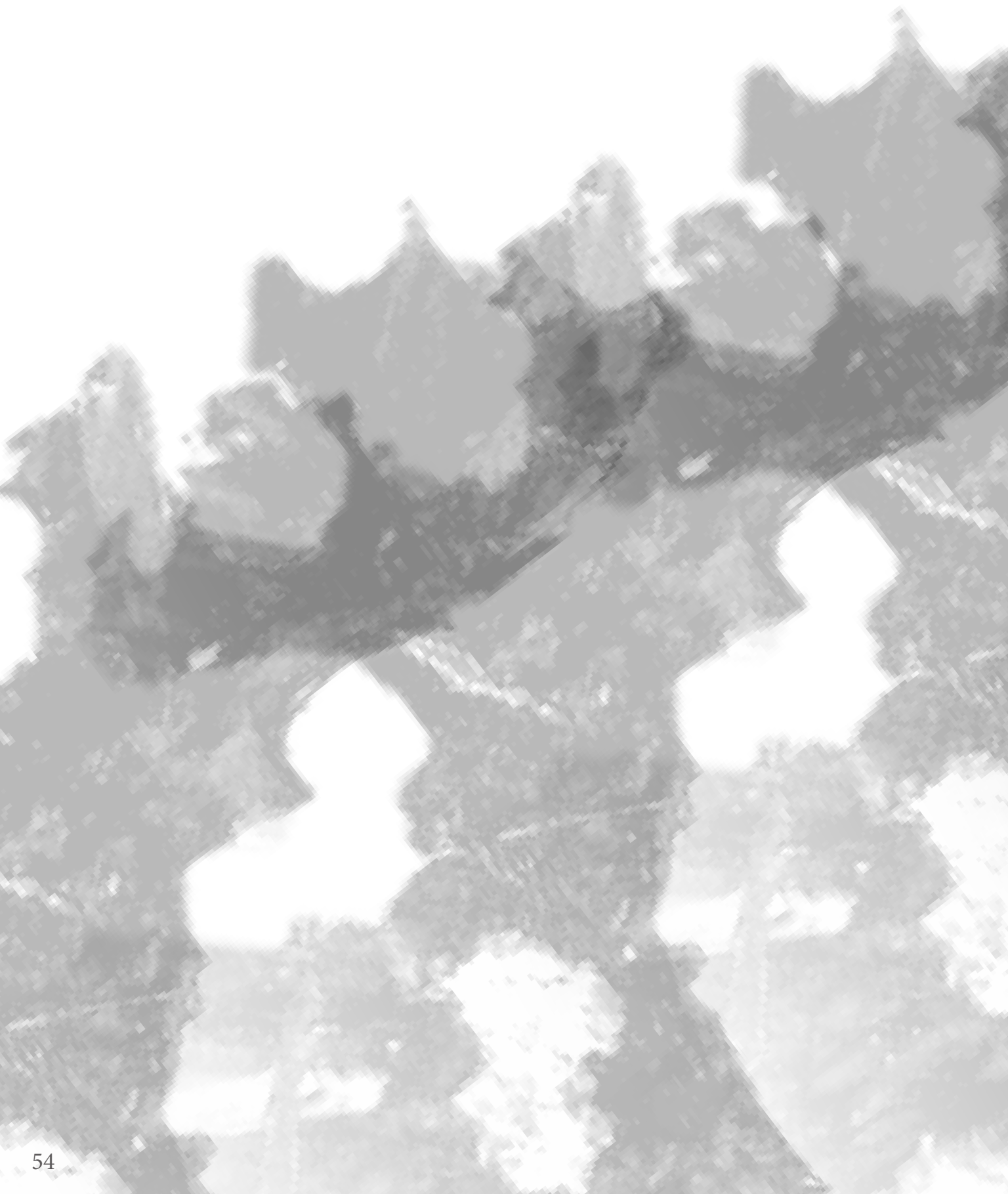
Go! Be like them.
Why you have no car?
Why you walk?
Marta, hello are you listening?

Owee anti? Hanti lazy woman.

Mama, hold on. I said.
College, I'm going. I said.
I walk because the bus takes time. I said.
Be smarter? I read, but I feel the same. I said.

I smile Mama so I know that I'm awake. I said.
My back? It does what it likes. I said.
Mama, did you forget? I am your daughter.

Marta Tesfai is currently a student at Crafton Hills College, graduating this spring and leaving to pursue her dreams in English Literature. She has submitted pieces that have lived in her scrapbook, knowing that they shall not live in her notebook forever.





Black and White

Jessica Pallow





Beautiful End

Jessica Pallow





Jessica Pallow is a hairstylist and self-taught artist. She is continuing her education at Crafton Hills College. Through her studies she has discovered a love for writing and art. She plans to major in Art, with the hopes of eventually becoming a professional Illustrator and Educator.

When the Sky is Falling, Take Pictures!

Par Lay >



Perfect Timing

Par Lay



Grammy's and Nirvana

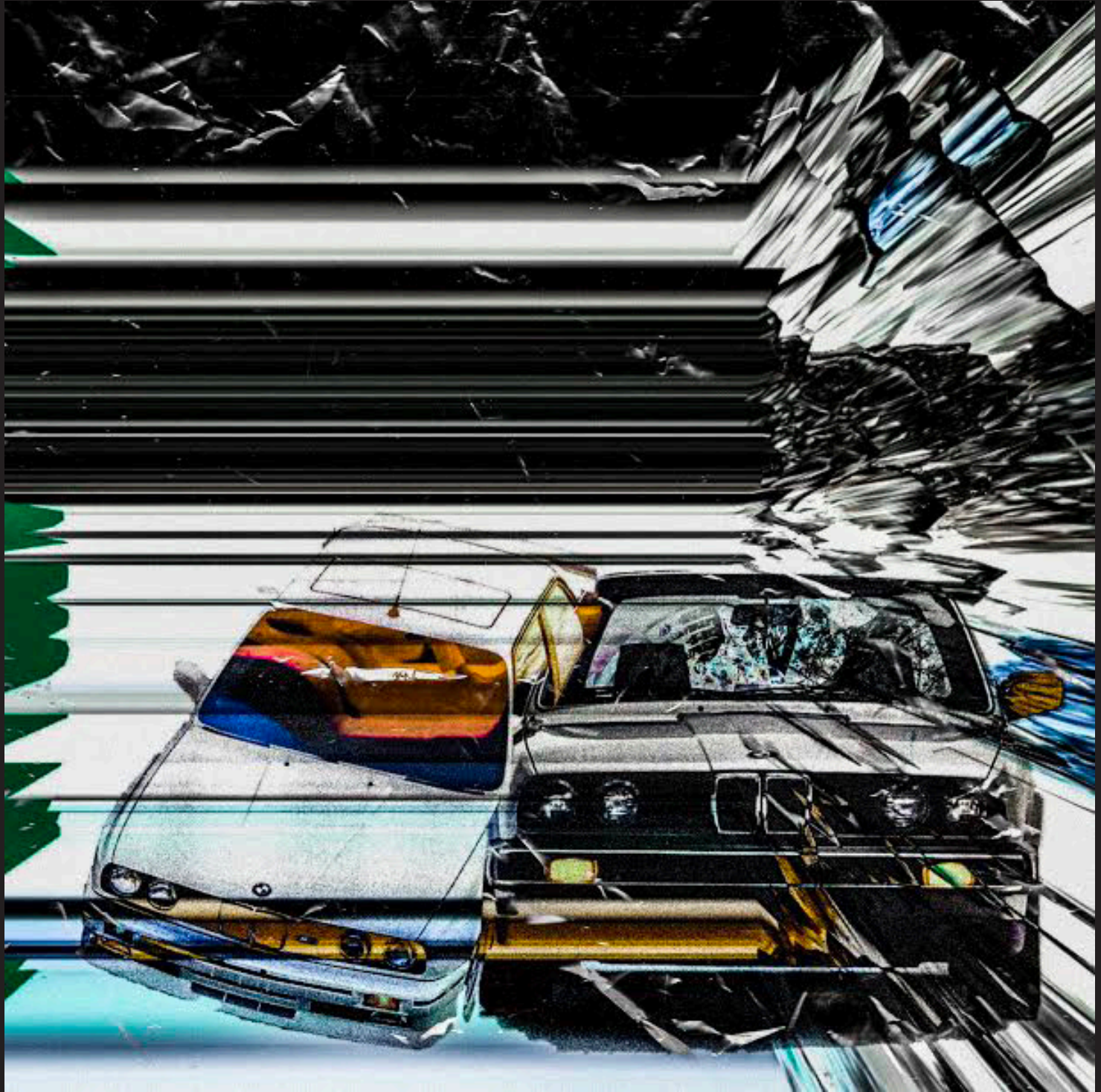
Par Lay



Par Lay is a Digital Artist and Graphic Designer from the Inland Empire. He has been doing cover art for musicians, as well as photography and collage pieces for friends. Heavily influenced by Salvador Dali, Takashi Murakami, and 70s Musical Artwork. His phrase or motto for his work is "I Make Art That Makes The People Say Whoa!"

Untitled

Par Lay





Hazy Exhale

Aubrey Stack

An abstract painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes in shades of red, black, and white. The composition is dynamic, with diagonal strokes creating a sense of movement and tension. The red strokes are prominent, often layered over the black and white, suggesting a complex emotional narrative.

Strike

Aubrey Stack

Aubrey Stack holds a B.A. in Environmental Science, her passion and love is drawn to the artistic world of darkness. Her blended mindset between science and the arts produced these expressions of heartache and frustration for her unattainable beloved.

re-(M)brandt

Pam Donahue



Pam Donahue is a former Managing Editor for *The Sand Canyon Review* (2012 edition). She has a passion for classic art, especially art from the Baroque era. Also she loves to write and make jewelry. A Redlands, California resident for 36 years, she lives with her husband and youngest son.

Joy in My Journey

Pam Donahue



Are-ach

Angel Soria



The Stars Look Like Fireflies

Angel Soria





Angel Soria is a quite often misunderstood creature with its visions not immediately clear to those around yet it continues nonetheless. It is a sad puppy with an art brush that will never be adopted by the right owner. It also enjoys drinking beer out of a water dish. No one understands it and neither does it.

Escaping Realities through Extraordinary Dimensions: An Interview with Greg “CRAOLA” Simkins



Greg “Craola” Simkins was born in 1975 in Torrance California, just south of Los Angeles. He began drawing at the early age of 3 and was inspired by various cartoons and books. Some books still find their way into his art such as *Watership Down* by Richard Adams, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis and *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. Simkins’ art continued to progress to the age of 18, when he started doing graffiti under the name “CRAOLA”. Graffiti became his impetus for creating and gave him the confidence to paint large works. After receiving his Bachelor’s Degree in Studio Art from California State University of Long Beach in 1999, Simkins worked as an illustrator for various clothing companies and bands. He later moved on to Treyarch/Activision where he worked on *Tony Hawk 2X*, *Spiderman 2* and *Ultimate Spiderman*. In 2005, Simkins pursued his desire to paint as a full-time artist. Since then, he has been featured in numerous group exhibitions and successfully sold out solo exhibitions. Simkins’ artwork has gained great recognition and can be found in the collections of Robin Williams, Everlast, Jason Biggs & Jenny Biggs-Mollen, Stacy Ferguson “Fergie” & Josh Duhamel, Mike Shinoda, Mark Hoppus, and many more. His commercial client/collaboration list includes Disney, Pearl Jam, Blink 182, Linkin Park, Upper Playground, Juxtapoz, To Die For Clothing, Clandestine, Vans, Converse, Saosin, Gym Class Heroes, Pennywise, Ningyoushi, Kid Robot, Zero Friends, Epitaph, Dark Horse, and Pulse International. In 2009, Simkins developed “IMSCARED”, his own brand of clothing, merchandise and accessories to further expand his art into more everyday mediums. He’s recently finished working with C4Toons on his own stop motion short based on his art called, *I’m Scared: The Movie!* It is his careful weaving of pop culture, the old masters, nature, carnival kitsch, and (most importantly) his warped imagination, that makes Greg Simkins a sought-after surrealist painter today.

Q: The theme of this year's magazine is "chaos." How do you feel you capture or negotiate chaos in your artwork?

A: I never thought about it. I think the only chaos I experience is trying to keep my kids from running around my studio and messing up paintings in progress:)

Q: Do you feel like each painting tells its own story or creates its own story?

A: Yes, absolutely. I have been developing a story line attached to a world that I call "The Outside" ever since a solo exhibit I had many years back called "The Pearl Thief". The Outside has provided a framework for the strange characters and compositions bouncing around in my head. I have always been a

fan of stories that have a porthole into fantasy worlds like Narnia, Oz, Wonderland, Middle Earth, etc. and that pretty much is what I am creating when I paint.

Q: Much of your work features natural creatures in harmony or in conflict with manmade gadgets. When did you begin combining these two seemingly unlikely realms?

A: It was in my junior year of college when I really began exploring these connections. I had a project for my illustration class that wanted us to utilize different art movements to create one cohesive piece and I ended up with one of these creature mash ups that I really enjoyed and wanted to explore more. That was probably around 1997 or so.



Special Tea



The Tea Bringer

Q: Stabby is featured in many of your paintings. How did he find you and how would you describe your relationship?

A: Ha! I love Stabby. I have always been into vintage cartoon characters, mainly Oswald the lucky rabbit, but no matter how much I enjoy painting and drawing him, he will always be someone else creation. I was doodling one day and thought it would be funny to draw a switch blade whistleing down the street drawing the simple old animation style. He had a bit of blood on his blade and a mouse with his tail cut off was pointing accusingly at him. That was the beginning of Stabby. I don't associate any blood with him now, he might look tough, being a knife and all, but he has a heart of gold.

Q: Many of your paintings feature clocks. Would you describe yourself as more of a time lord or a time traveler? Why?

A: I wish I was a time lord. I always feel like a slave to my deadlines, and time gives me so much anxiety. I can't sleep at night sometimes knowing that due dates are marching towards me. Being able to master time would be my ultimate super power if I could have one.

Q: Since your paintings feature remarkably

distant lands, where would you travel to seek the most inspiration? Why?

A: Australia! There are so many bizarre creatures and I have always wanted to go there.

Q: Where is most of your graffiti featured? Has your graffiti always been done legally?

A: Haha, are you a cop? I started doing graffiti in 1992, got the name Craola in 1993 and no it hasn't always been legal. I mainly paint permission walls these days due to the fact that I am a dad and don't want to get in trouble. But I have no problem with painting a yard or abandoned places. Painting graffiti is still my favorite thing to do when I am not painting canvases. They are completely separate things and I treat painting walls like one would their favorite past time. I prefer it to doing murals or "Street Art" as it is where it really all began for me. I still have walls running in East L.A., Hollywood, South Central Los Angeles, a few in my neighborhood (The South Bay of Los Angeles) and around Los Angeles in general. The best scenario for me is having just finished a gallery show and then going the next week with anyone from my crews CBS, WAI, LORDS, and BASHERS to go paint some letters somewhere.





Q: While most artists tend to follow a favorite medium, you have mastered several. Gun to the head: Which is your favorite technique? Why?

A: Acrylics. There is a huge variety of what can be done with the medium. It can look like inks, watercolor, oils, and itself at the end of the day.

Q: Have you only used legit art materials for your artwork? If not, which materials have been present in your work and in which art pieces?

A: I try to use materials which are archival and will stand the test of time. Charcoal, Acrylics, Inks, Graphite, and am just starting to mess around with Oils again. Those make up the majority of what I like to use for exhibiting and commissions.

Q: Was there a particular experience or moment that inspired you to be an artist or create a particular piece of art?

A: Getting a job at the age of 18 making a "Pogs" was a big game changer for me. I changed my major in college from pre-veterinary medicine to art because of it.

Q: Do you find the terms "whimsical and surreal" a good description for your artwork? Why or why not?

A: Yeah, those terms come up the most when people describe my work and I am fine with both.

Q: What's your favorite color?

A: I like all the colors:) I use a lot of earth tones to begin a piece, so if I have to pick one, Raw Umber Dark would be it.

Q: Does your wife, Jennifer Simkins, ever help create your artwork? If so, how? If not, does she like to party?

A: Nope, she leaves the art to me. Our partying days are way more mellow and confined to having friends over with there kids and trying to hang out while refereeing fights amongst our little monsters:)

**Speed Round!
Ready, Set, Go!**

**Q: Batman
or Superman?**

*A: Batman
(and Nightwing)*

**Q: Rebels or
Empire?**

A: Rebels

**Q: Birds or
Octopi?**

*A: Both,
combined into
one majestic
super Octobird.*

**Q: Octopi or
Octopuses?**

A: Octopuseseses

**Q: Who,
what, when,
where, and
why?**

*A: WHO
AM I, WHAT
AM I, WHERE
AM I?*



Yellow

Q: Lastly, fun and games aside, many of our students are truly inspired by your innovative artwork. What advice do you have for our artists?

A: A good work ethic is so important, you have to put in the work and do the best possible work that you can as well as always seeking to better yourself through self directed studies. Also having a good attitude and outlook at life and the big picture. I have met a lot of artists who thought they were larger than life and treated people at shows very poorly. When it comes down to it, you make art, you aren't saving people from burning buildings or curing cancer, so keep a good perspective on who you are and treat people with respect.



Craola creating *Where Am I*

Alter and Mermaid

Christine Stoddard



Christine Stoddard is a writer, artist, and founding Quail Bell Magazine editor. Her work has appeared in the Queens Museum, the Condé Nast Building, the New York Transit Museum, and beyond.

Lake Cle Elum

Judith Skillman



Bay of Benders

Judith Skillman



Gunmetal Lake

Judith Skillman



Judith Skillman's most recent book is *Kafka's Shadow*, Deerbrook Editions. Her work has appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Zyzzyva*, *FIELD*, and elsewhere. Awards include an Eric Mathieu King Fund grant from the Academy of American Poets. Skillman has done collaborative translations in multiple languages. Visit www.judithskillman.com.

Untitled

Tom Fontanes



Untitled

Tom Fontanes



Tom Fontanes is a Redlands artist whose brand name is Nam Vet Art, representing his being both a Vietnam veteran and an artist. As a Purple Heart recipient, diagnosed with PTSD, art is a form of therapy and an expression of creativity. His mediums include oil, watercolor, and pyrography, all of which he uses along with paper, wood, markers, spray paint, metal and plastic pieces to create mixed media collages. His work can be found all around the Inland Empire.

Couch near Yermo, California

Jeffrey Alfier

Jeffrey Alfier's latest works are
Anthem for Pacific Avenue:
California Poems, *Bleak Music*,
a photo and poetry collaboration
with Larry D. Thomas, *Southbound*
Express to Bay Head: New Jersey Poems
and *The Red Stag at Carrbridge:*
Scotland Poems. He is founder and co-
editor of *Blue Horse Press*
and *San Pedro River Review*.



Quiet Graffiti

Reanna Marchman



The Remnants

Reanna Marchman



Silom Wire

Reanna Marchman



Reanna Marchman graduated from California State University of San Bernardino with her degree in English- Creative Writing. She has been a follower of Jesus since a ge 12 and has been surprised by the journey. She is married and has two amazing and crazy kiddos. Reanna is a mom, freelance writer, volunteer, amateur photographer, and an essential oil gypsy. She has been published by *The Sand Canyon Review*, *The Wild Lemon Project*, *Tin Cannon*, *ShufPoetry*, *Spirit Fire Review* and *Light*.





Techtonics

Carly Creley



Ice Edge

Carly Creley

Carly Creley is an environmental artist and educator from Southern California. She enjoys exploring the best medium for each piece, including acrylic, oil, pastel, and photography. She is the official photographer for the San Gabriel Valley Literary Festival, and teaches annually in the Sequoia National Park. Carly holds a MS in Environmental Science, as well as a MA in Education. She loves to hike, camp, and share the natural world she loves with others.

Feature: Our Cover Artist, Naomi Cheney



Naomi Cheney is a fledgling artist and writer attending Crafton Hills College in Southern California. Her hobbies include: aggressive doodling, sarcasm, quitting smoking, watching pretentious movies, and writing similarly pretentious poetry and fiction. She is currently “working on a novel” (or script); the title, characters, and plot of which will change countless times by the time it (eventually) reaches publication. Though her writing and art skills appear to be more conceptual than marketable, the student’s career as a stunt double for Dakota Fanning looks promising.



Poppy King



A Common Chaos



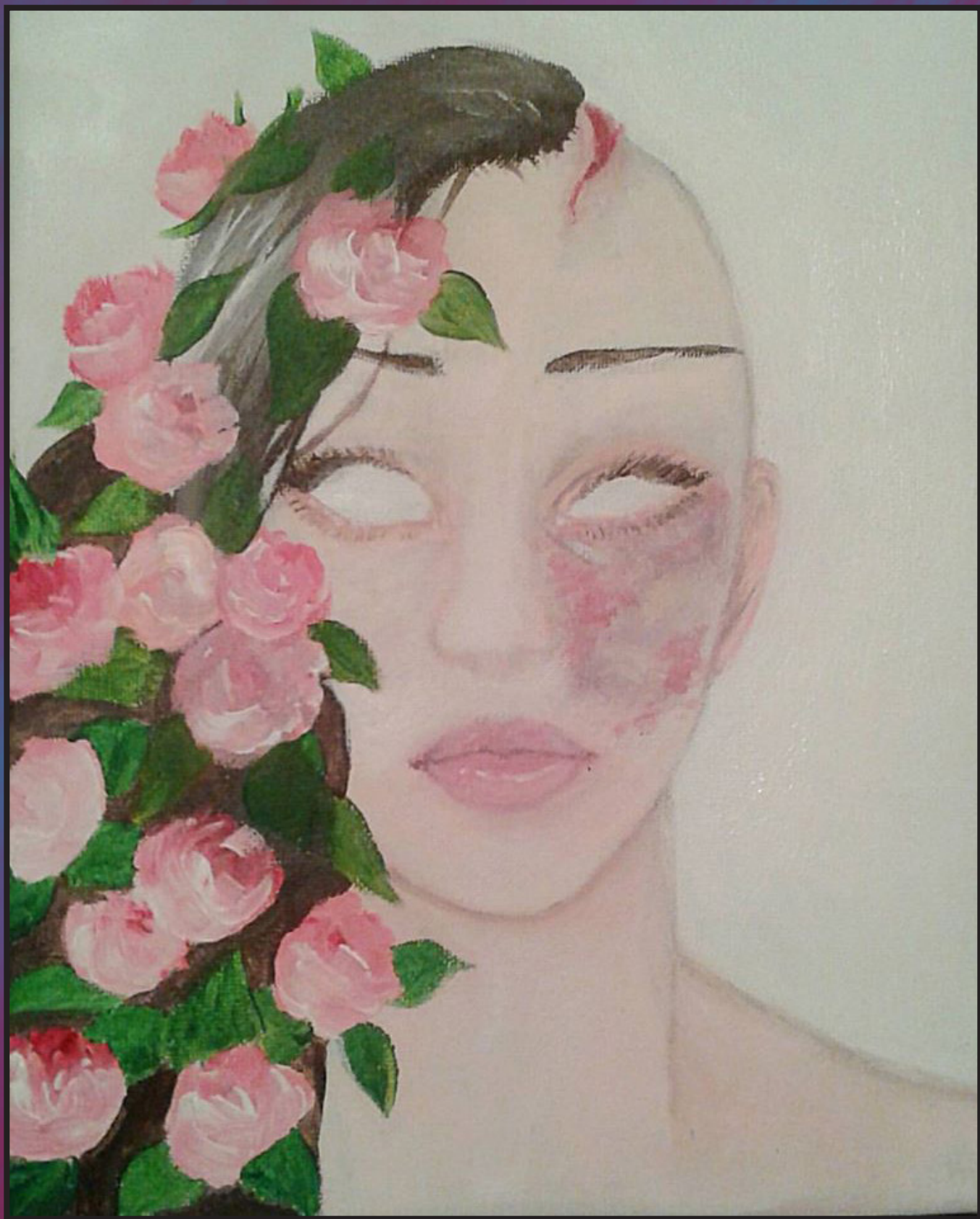
Blood Thief



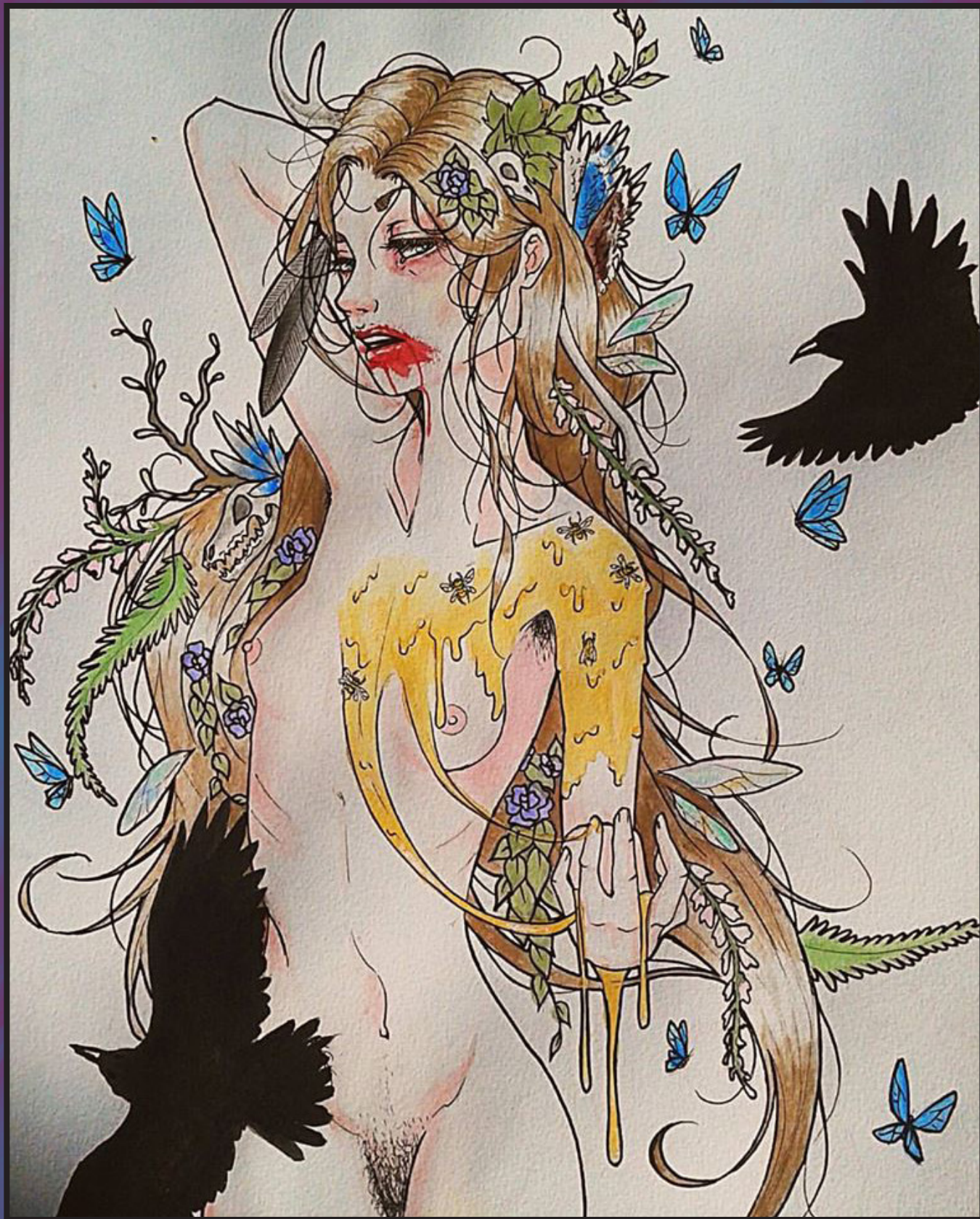
Splice



Untitled



Love of Thorns



Still Shiny, Still Honey, Still Stargirl



Selfie

< Terry Hastings

Insomnia

Terry Hastings



Terry Hastings has begun shooting, printing, cutting and pasting photos to create new images this year. Although he didn't care for the "craftsy" quality of the final product, he began to use Photoshop, finishing them as he imagined. With these multiple images, he can capture time, movement and a multitude of emotions in a single work of art.

Visit: www.TheHastingsGallery.com.

Side Effects May Include Drowsiness

Victoria Telfer



[illegible]

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Trump Swirl

Vince Gotera



Vince Gotera is a Professor of English at the University of Northern Iowa. Former Editor, *North American Review*. New Editor, *Star*Line* (Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association). Recent work in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Parody Poetry Journal*, *Altered Reality Magazine*, and *Eunoia Review*. Blog: *The Man with the Blue Guitar*.



Untitled

Aubrey Wenter

Aubrey Sierra Wenter (left) has been asked to write a 50 word bio, but doesn't know what to say. She doesn't think she wants to say anything regarding this piece at the moment. She'd like to do more art.

Labels Kill

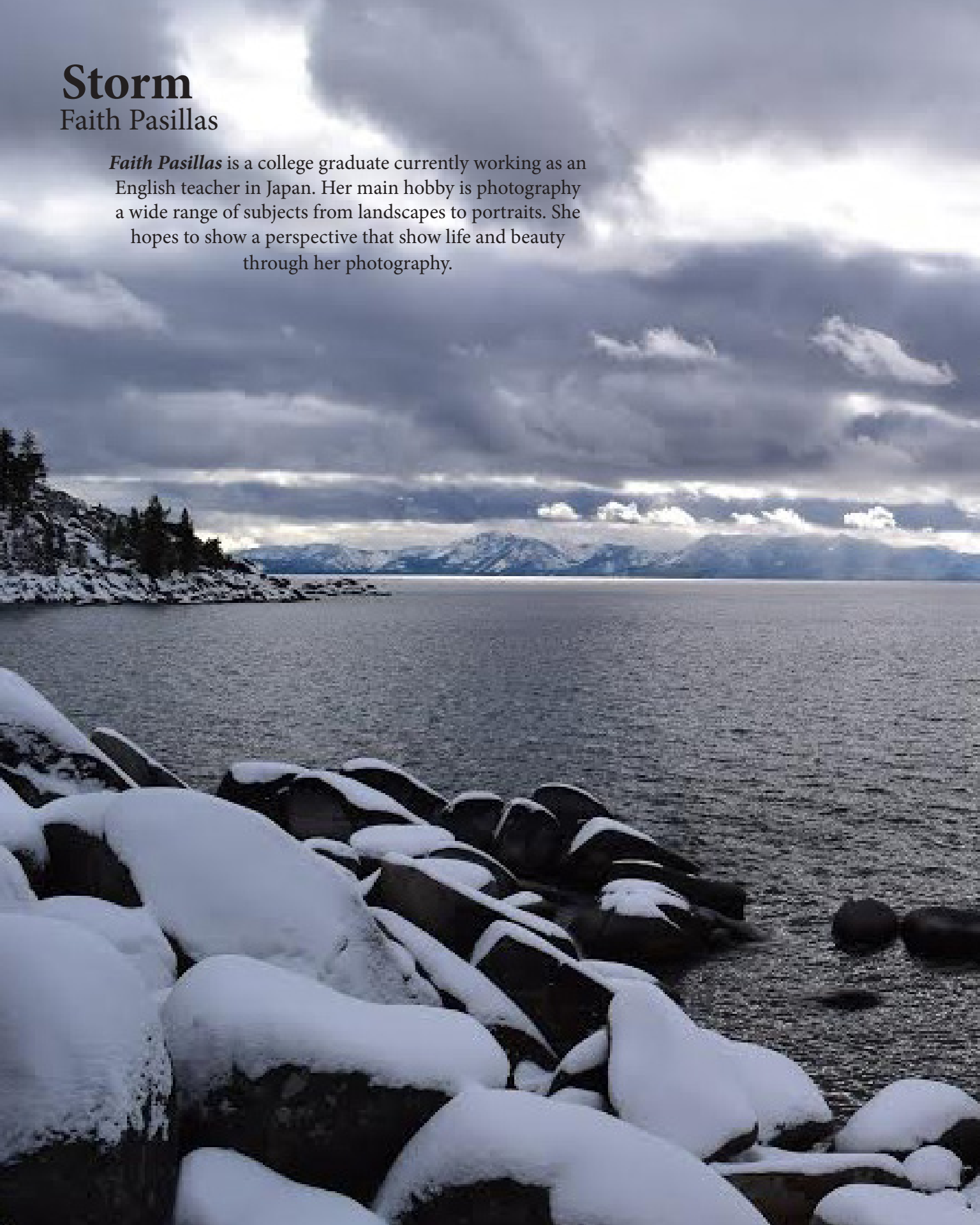
Faith Pasillas



Storm

Faith Pasillas

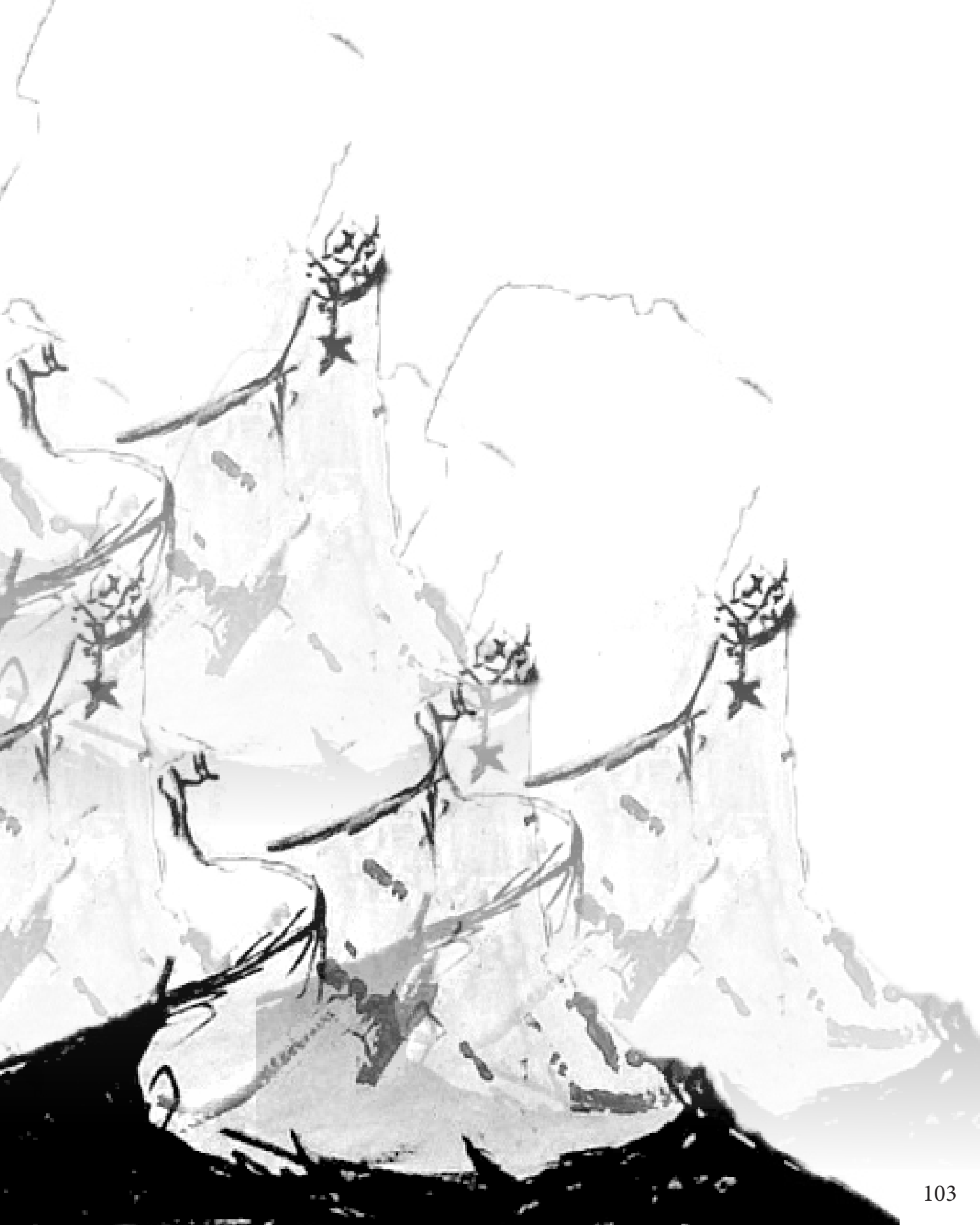
Faith Pasillas is a college graduate currently working as an English teacher in Japan. Her main hobby is photography a wide range of subjects from landscapes to portraits. She hopes to show a perspective that show life and beauty through her photography.





Fiction





Flop

Robert Keith

The burning stench made gag. I had to pull my shirt over my nose as soon as I cracked the back door open. Beside the self-cleaning oven were plastic jugs of chemicals with the lids off. The oven was making some kind of humming drone as a haze of vapours hovered above the electric elements. In the living room I saw Johan, the landlord of this dive, horizontal on the couch that he had found in some alley. I walked over and kicked the couch a few times to wake him. Not a budge.

Through the scummy front window I noticed Natalie coming up the front porch. She comes here for Martin twice a week when he's on days off from his job as a camp cook on the oil rigs. If he's not home, sometimes she just hangs out here. I don't mind her or what she does. She doesn't talk to me like I'm retarded. She told me that a cousin of hers had aphasia like I do now. I listen to her talking, or pretend to at least when she's here and she's pretty patient with me having to write what I want to say on paper for her to read it. Anyways, I go and open the front door and she steps in and pinches her nose. I look at her and shrug my shoulders, and point to Johan passed out on the couch. Natalie goes up the stairs to Martin's room and I go back and tap Johan on the spine with the remote control to try again to wake him.

Natalie flashes back down the stairs and yells at me *Phone, phone, I need a ph...fuck, you wouldn't have one....does Johan?* Natalie pats Johan's pants pocket reaches in only to find his wallet and throws it on the floor. I stare at Natalie until she tells me something is wrong with Martin, he's lying in bed not moving or breathing. I stuck my first finger under Johan's nose and felt nothing. I shake my head at Natalie. She tries to get a pulse from Johan's neck, looks at me and says *No*. In the kitchen I show Natalie the open jugs of nameless chemicals, and point at the stove. Her and I push the stove away from the wall and unplug it and the droning noise stops. I grabbed the jugs and placed them out on the porch outside. She tells me

Look, I can help you clean up this mess, I just need a place to stay for a few days, a week.

I point at Johan on the couch, then to the closet under the stairs. I grab Johan's wallet and pocket it as Natalie opens the closet door and moves boxes of whatever junk Johan has hoarding in there. He was always bringing truckloads of shit he found in alleys. Coffee tables, shelves, cinder blocks, broken vacuums, old TVs. Once for 2 weeks no one could use the shower because he left a dismantled lawnmower in the tub. A couple times Martin and I gathered all the stuff he was storing in the house and put it beside the dumpster in the alley. Next day, all the shit was back in the house. After that we tried asking for help from the tenancy board. They just told us to move out of the house, that there was nothing we could do if our landlord was being a nuisance. Martin wasn't having that. He called around to health inspectors and they gave Johan a warning for a few potential fire hazards like the floppy wiring in the house, lack of smoke alarms, and getting someone professional to look at the furnace. Johan didn't take it seriously, and got a fine for it. Next day on the fridge was an eviction notice that we had to move out in three months.

Johan's body flopped on the floor when I pulled him off the couch. I stood over him, gazing at his lifeless face. I planted my heel on his ribs and brought my leg back up for a second shot. Natalie yelled at me *NO! you don't wanna be pinned for it, right?* She was right. Instead I started dragging his body by his hair but didn't get so far from the couch. Natalie told me to just get him over here and we can figure out what to do with him and Martin in the morning. With Johan crammed in the closet among the useless ephemera he collected, Natalie and I opened windows and the back and front doors and went out on the front porch to try to get away from the smell of the oven.

Natalie noticed Johan's truck was parked on the other side of the street. I dug out my note

pad and pen and wrote, *finger prints not good idea...leave truck alone*. I thought we could put either Martin or Johan in the dumpster across the alley, but I'd like it best if their bodies just weren't found. I wrote down, *you don't feel sad for Martin?* And showed it to Natalie. *Martin is...was just money, a customer for the service I provide, I don't feel attachment for clients*, Natalie said. I didn't know what to think of this, but I guess it was fine. Martin was kind of a dickhead anyway. I half admired Natalie and felt half sorry for her at the same time. She told me once, the story of how she came to selling herself. Her mom had had her at fourteen and she was raised by her grandparents. Her grandpa died and when she was seventeen, her grandma started showing signs of dementia. She was seventeen but passed for a few years older than. She stated pulling guys at the bar, going home with them and stealing their cash and whatever she could pawn off. When she was of legal age, she started targeting johns at the casino so she could straight up hustle men instead of just stealing their cash. This paid the bills as her grandma's brain stirred slowly to mush and she was just existing instead of coherent living. I feel for Natalie in a way because she did what she had to: the dirty work that separated stupid men and their stupid needs and their stupid money. After her grandma died, she told me, she kept doing the dirty work to start saving cash to get herself back to school. But she felt this was a pipedream, she didn't imagine herself being good at doing anything else. I don't think that's true, but I guess she made up her mind.

It was four am and I was feeling hungry. I wrote to Natalie that I was walking over to the gas station to buy chips or something. She gave me a ten and told me to get her a pack of menthols. On the way back to the house after I got her smokes and a bag of dill pickles, I walked in the middle of the empty residential road and stopped with a jerk in my gait. I looked down, standing on the manhole cover in the middle of the street.

Natalie lit up a menthol and read what I wrote about dumping Johan and Martin down the sewer. I was positive that amongst all Johan's

collection of crap was a tire iron or crow bar we could rip the manhole cover off with. I knew there was another manhole in the back alley and up the block a bit. Wouldn't take long for us to drag Johan and Martin and flop them down the sewer. Natalie said it was a good plan, we just need to wait until Monday, maybe Tuesday. It was Friday morning now and the sun was just poking up. Natalie said she knows there's always some kind of party in the apartment building across the alley on weekends. She had a client there who might see her too. She said *Let's go to bed and we'll plan it out in the morning*. I nodded at her and got up and started to my room and noticed she was following me and I stopped and looked at her. *I'm not sleeping on the couch where Johan died and I'm definitely not sleeping next to Martin am I?* she said.

I woke up around two pm the next day and Natalie wasn't in the bed with me. In the living room on the coffee table was a paper bag of burgers with eat me written inside a heart. I grabbed one and gnawed on it as I heard Natalie's voice coming from the back deck; *Ya you can stay here, it'll be cool with him, he knows what we do. There's a spare room, I just have to clean it and we can bring clients there. He doesn't talk, so... No he's not retarded, he has aphasia. A-Phaaa-siaaaa. He whacked his head and it just wrecked something in his brain. He hears and understands you, he just can't talk. He's actually a sweet guy.*

Aphasia was probably the best thing that happened to me. People meet me and think I'm retarded or whatever. It used to bother me, but I just let them think what they want. If they think I'm not capable, they don't ask me for anything. That's probably the mistake I made with Natalie. She knows how I really am, so she can take advantage of me. Fuck. How I became aphasic is another story. I was dating this girl for a few years, she was a server at the restaurant I was working as a prep cook in. I'd spend my days off at the place she rented with a friend of hers she had since high school. Her friend had a cat that would piss in the house. One weekend I found a puddle near my boots. And I had this cheap motorbike at the time.

I was headed home and didn't notice my helmet was wet inside. By the time I figured it out I was on the highway and couldn't find a spot to pull over and take the pissy helmet off. When I did get a chance to pull over on the side of the road, I ripped off the helmet and tossed it on the road. Flashing lights behind me and a spurt of siren. Two cops pulled up behind me and asked for my license and all that. I explained what happened, that the cat pissed in my helmet. They gave me a \$250 ticket anyway and told me my bike was getting impounded if I didn't have a helmet to ride my motorbike with. After a long walk home and a long shower I called up my girlfriend and told her I either want to get a place together or her room-mates' cat has to go. That I got a ticket and my bike is impounded and, I washed my hair three times and can't get the stench out and, I was gonna shave my head. That her roommate has to pay for all the shit since her cat was at fault. She answered *Ya, no. I don't think so. You and I are done, and I'm sleeping with your boss* and hung up the phone.

Next day at work I walk into the kitchen and the cooks are smirking at me. I see my prep list is a mile longer than it usually is. My tool box of chef knives is missing. One of the cooks starts meowing and the others laugh, even the dishwasher. I go in the freezer to get the calamari to start breading and my tool box is there inside. It's heavy as fuck. I open it up and see that someone filled it full of water and stuck it in the freezer. I walk out of the freezer with the box of calamari and the chef is there with a stupid grin on his face. Tells me they need mirepoix on the double. I yell *What the fuck am I supposed to cut veg with when you guys put my knives in the freezer?! The chef hands me a dull paring knife and says I'll put the calamari back in the freezer, how's the missus?* I had enough. I follow him in the freezer and jab the paring knife just above his ass cheek. When I saw the blood I guess I fainted. I woke up later in the hospital. Nurses told me when I fainted I hit my head on the shelf in the freezer and snapped some vertebrae when I hit the floor. I had to wear a neck brace for six months and consume food through a

tube up my nose. When the neck brace finally came off I tried to speak and I could only make gasping and hissy sounds. After a brain scan, doctors discovered that I had damaged the language part of my brain. Therapy wouldn't do much since my aphasia wasn't noticed for six months. At first it really bothered me, not being able to express myself. Until the disability cheques started coming in. I wasn't making near as much as I would with a job, and the cheques didn't start for a few weeks, and I had to sell my motorbike to pay rent. But the money was enough to rent this shithole, and I wouldn't have to deal with people and their bullshit anymore. I can just watch TV and read books with all my free time.

Out on the back deck Natalie introduced me to Sam, the person she was talking to about me. Natalie said she was going to stay here a bit and she could help us take care of our problem. I really didn't want someone else getting involved, but I wanted Johan and Martin out of the house before they start to stink up the place more than usual. Tuesday afternoon, I woke up and Sam and Natalie were in the living room doing lines of speed on the glass coffee table. I took the paper hamburger bag that had been on the table and scribbled *Bodies 2nite* on it. Sam leaned forward for another line off the table and Natalie just gave me a nod and I walked outside into the alley. Down the alley, I took mental notes of how many windows would be in view of us when we went to dump Johan and Martin. I wondered how two girls whacked out on dope and myself would be able to carry 170 lbs or so of dead weight and manage to stay quiet in the dark, twice. In some neighbour's yard there was one of those plastic toboggans like I had when I was eight or so. We called them crazy carpets. It was rolled up with twine holding it together, amongst other toys like a Tonka truck, and beach toys – plastic shovels and castle shaped pails. Martin used to say the condoms he used were made by Tonka. Built Tough.

Back in the house, I put the crazy carpet under my arm and cut the twine with a dirty knife from the kitchen sink. Still, we needed to find

something that would lift the manhole cover off. The closet where Johan was had all kinds of crap, there had to be something there. I only drug Johan half way out of the closet and tried rifling through his collection of electric fans, drills, half full paint cans and whatever else. Under a bunch of Hustlers I found a small crowbar. I went to the living room to tell Natalie and Sam that we can pop off the manhole cover and use the crazy carpet to push the bodies down the alley, we just had to be quick. I imagined they went out on the front deck to smoke when I didn't see them in the living room, but no sign of them out front. And Johan's truck was gone too.

I imagined them driving somewhere to score more dope or something, I dunno. There was still hours before it'd be time to do the job. On the couch where Johan kicked it, I lounged out and flipped channels until I got to the remake movie of "Lord of The Flies" which was half way through already. I saw it years ago and thought those boys were really stupid. They thought there was some kind of monster in the cave and were afraid of it. They could have all ganged up on it with their spears. Killed and ate it. Then used the cave for shelter instead of the leentoons that were useless when it rained on the island.

I woke up and it was dark. I guess I passed out watching TV. Out the front window Johan's truck was still gone. I flipped channels to the channel guide to see what time it was. one am. Natalie and Sam went on vacation, I guess. Looks like I'm doing this alone. I left Johan half way out of the closet after I found the crowbar. I dragged him by both his arms through the kitchen and onto the back deck. Back upstairs, I went into Martin's room. He was face up on his bed with his jaw open. I reached in to his pockets to see what might be there, I guess. Natalie beat me to it, his pockets were empty. Grabbed his shoulder with one hand and his leg with the other and pulled him towards me until his body fell off the bed. Martin was lighter than Johan but not by much. I managed to get Martin to the top of the stairs. He rolled half- way down the stairs after I pushed him. In

the middle of the stairs I had to heave him again to the bottom, then drag him out to the porch where Johan was.

The crazy carpet wouldn't stay unrolled. I tucked the rear of it under Martin's belly as he was face down on the back porch and pulled Johan onto the plastic sheet. I tried my best to fold Johan's arms, and tied his forearms with some of the twine. Johan and I got half way through the backyard as I was dragging him, walking backwards. The crazy carpet slipped out from under Johan's body and hit me in the face. Grabbing Johan by the ankles, I flipped him around and into the alley. This is gonna be more work than I imagined. Where the fuck were Natalie and Sam? Fucking ditching me and taking Johan's truck for a joy ride. At least I'll have the house to myself. There'll still be power and cable until the end of the month I supposed. I'll save my disability cheques by not paying rent here until someone discovers me living here in this shit hole. Then I'll really play dumb. Let them think I'm retarded and incapable. They might stick me in a care home where I can flake out, day in and day out. Sponge baths from hot nurses half my age, and pureed food.

I plopped Johan next to a fence a few feet in front of the sewer. Rolled him face down, and placed two trash cans in front of him for some kind of camouflage as I go and bring Martin over here. Dragging Martin was easier than Johan. I had shoved the crowbar halfway down Martin's pants so I didn't have to make another trip to the house. I drug him beside Johan and took out the crowbar. Looking over at the manhole, curious how heavy the thing was. Prying it up a few inches, I maneuvered the cover and strained to pull it more than half way open. I was expecting to hear a splash, but Johan made a thud when I got him down the hole. Dragged Martin over, face down and pulled his legs into the sewer hole first, then pushed on his shoulders until he vanished. I couldn't get the cover back on straight. I assumed it didn't matter. I went back to the house, caught a shower and hung out in the living room channel surfing. I was thinking that I could find a soup

kitchen and eat there for free when the power gets cut here. I can go to the food bank whenever, and see what they give me. For now I'm just gonna concentrate on enjoying my solitude.

Five days straight I did nothing but sit on the couch in my boxers, scratching my balls, zoned out on the TV. The afternoon afterwards I woke up on the couch to some kinda rhythmic thumping coming from upstairs. With the crowbar, I paced upstairs wondering what the hell I was hearing. The noise was from Martin's room. Sam was on her back, naked on the bed and her client sprang up and yelled *What the fuck?!* He looked at Sam, then at me in the doorway *What're you planning to do with that crowbar, junior?* I just looked at Sam laying there on the bed, and she said to him *He's deaf or something darling, he can't answer you.* Sam tilted her head and flicked her hands at me, shoos me away.

Natalie was nowhere to be found. I thought her and Sam would be back with the truck but I didn't see the truck out the window either. Sam and her client came down the stairs and he gave me a dirty look as he left out the front door. Sam handed me a wad of cash and said loud and slow *From Na-ta-lie.* I wrote down *Where is she, and the truck?* On my note pad and showed it to Sam. *She-Is-Work-ing-Now. She's-A-Daaance-er.* I wanted to write to Sam to that she doesn't have to talk to me like I'm stupid and to get the fuck out of the house. All I did was let out a hiss that was meant to be a sigh and pointed to the door. Sam looked at me puzzled and handed me a couple more bills and said she'd have another guy coming over in an hour. I pointed at the door again, but she just went back up the stairs.

For a week Sam had three or four guys come everyday. So much for my house of solitude. Every night she'd flick a few bills at me after her clients left and never talked to me. Not that I really wanted her to. I was sitting on the couch, with the TV blaring to drown out the noise from upstairs. I knew the cable and power would be cut in a couple days so I was getting as much from the tv as I could. A hard wrap on the front door. I got up and thought maybe Sam double booked clients, I dunno.

The door flung open and two cops pushed their way inside the house and started yelling at me. Asking my name, where my girls are, where's the stash of speed. When I'm flustered it's natural for me to try to answer, but you know all I can do is make grunts and hiss. One cop grabs me by my shirt and yells *Don't fuck around, we will arrest you. Where's your girls at!* The other cop tells him to let me go. I point up the stairs and the second cop starts walking up and the angry cop stays with me. With my hand I make a motion like I'm writing. The angry cop scrunches his face up, confused. I figured with him I better just play dumb. Out the open front door, I see a familiar flash. Natalie is walking up to the house. I start to walk out the door and the angry cop tries to grab me. I make it to the sidewalk and wave at Natalie, and she stops in her tracks. I'm tackled down to the ground and land in puddle. I look at Natalie and start hissing at her. She stands idle. The angry cop has his hands on his tazer and yells *You gonna behave?* I start waving my arms and hissing more at Natalie. I feel a jolt go through my body and my legs splash in the puddle as I'm convulsing, hearing Natalie scream.

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There Once Was a Heart

Emily Hinckley

In a land far away was a town that looks like any other town you'd find in a children's book or a fantasy novel. It was small and everyone knew each other. Everyone did their work, and spent time together when their chores were done. The only thing that really separated them from the villages in children's stories is that these people were not born with hearts. This seems confusing to many, and they often ask how these people can live without a heart. But when you think about it, many people live heartless lives everywhere don't they? So, it's not that much different here when you think about it.

Most folks work to develop a heart, but it's hard to find a heart that fits a cavity just right. Some are very special and can grow their own over time. Those are very few and far between, sometimes skipping entire generations before another one is seen again. Most just try to buy or make their own. Some just stuff their heart cavity full of paper, but they fall apart after the first rainfall. Others try other things like whittling one out of a fallen branch or sculpting a stone, but those hearts aren't very effective. Some save up and buy fancy hearts from the shops made of copper, silver, and gold, and while they are beautiful, they stay pretty cold. Others still get hearts by buying them in dark corners of alleys with no questions asked, though they aren't fulfilling; then there's the desperate bunch who steal hearts, but that ends badly for everyone involved.

And then there's the village black-smith. He was a kind and quiet man, and he got along well enough with most of the villagers. Let's call him Roland. Now Roland was always in his shop working, and most of the time it was to fill orders for people and sometimes it was to stock up on

certain items he knew would be needed in the coming season. And when he found time between the orders and the inventory upkeep, he would work on a special personal project. He was making his own heart out of fire. He knew that metal hearts were unfulfilling and cold, but if he could manage to make a heart out of metal that was hollow inside he could somehow keep fire in there, and he would be content with his warm heart. And when he had finished making the hollow metal shell, he set a fresh coal in the chamber of the heart and set a match. And it worked! The blacksmith managed to make his heart of fire! But he waited too long to set the heart into his chest cavity and failed to notice that over time his chest cavity was slowly being damaged from the years spent living a heartless life. It wasn't that he was cold or cruel, but he failed to tend to himself, and that led to small dents being made into the space that was supposed to hold his new heart perfectly.

His chest cavity was damaged, so when he went to put the heart in his chest, it didn't fit. The blacksmith tried and tried to reshape the cavity, but it wouldn't change. The perfect heart for the blacksmith would forever be separated from him, burning from within, but never a true part of him. Eventually the coal he had placed in the chamber burned out, and the heart went cold. Since Roland had no use for it and it was too personal for him to sell, he simply cleaned out the coal and etched his date of birth followed by a dash onto the little door that opened into the heart that once held fire. His possible source of a passionate life would now become the item that would store his ashes, because if the heart wouldn't fit in him, then he'd make damn sure that he'd find peace inside of it.

Emily Hinckley is a freshman at Crafton Hills College and is from Yucaipa CA. She doesn't write on a consistent basis, but is willing to try almost anything once.

Getting Lewd on Ludes

Jim Ross

I love how Halloween grants us license to surrender to the shadow and metamorphose into someone or something we're not. But, that particular Halloween night—in a group house we self-consciously called a commune—Halloween wasn't working for me. In the corner by the vestibule door, under the coatrack's mushrooming canopy, a yellow-green caterpillar wound herself around Frankenstein and his amiable, though overly mascaraed bride. Beneath our porcelain dining room table, a devil whose horns flickered like tiny Christmas trees put the moves on a priest dressed in white collar, black velvet dress, and long blonde locks. Joan of Arc valiantly tried to mount her unsteady steed on the living room's orange Herculon couch.

Among those engaged in verbal forms of communication, people spat words at each other simultaneously, abruptly paused to digest, then spat out reactions simultaneously, paused abruptly again to digest, over and over, like crows feeding each other. It looked like a fencing match in which both parties periodically froze.

Convulsions of laughter, punctuated by fits of silence, burst from the space without a name. The laughter seemed to possess them. Not knowing why they laughed, but feeling they knowingly embraced chaos, strained me.

I put my hand on housemate Antoni's head as his laughter reached a fever pitch. He said, "I'm only laughing," and smiled.

I asked housemate Carol, "Doesn't he suffer from the laughter?"

She lifted her left hand and slowly crossed its pointing finger over her middle finger of the right hand.

"Does the pointing finger represent suffering? And the middle finger, laughter?" I asked.

"That's what it is—the suffering and the laughing—together," said Carol, rubbing her two fingers across each other.

I turned to Antoni and asked, "Isn't it a strain?"

Antoni replied, "Not if you laugh in, but most people laugh out."

I returned to my kitchen space. When the laughter ceased, I wondered, had they all left? Had they morphed? I fluttered back to where I saw them last. Antoni played zither, while partygoer Peter strummed guitar. Peter led. Now and then, he spat out words, such as, "Someone ought to pay me for something," or "It's not coming natural," or "They allow me two cups of steam a day," or, "Is everything singular or plural?" Then he started laughing, "I just remembered who I am." And then they all laughed together. In.

I felt out of place, but couldn't come up with the right simile. Once I did, I could sneak out and go to bed. What about, like a stinkbug running errands in a perfume factory? *No, I don't stink.* Like a lightening bug trying to ignite micro-summers in dead of winter? Not quite, but it bestows warmth and suggests summer will roll around again. What about: like an albino ant marooned on a raft that's going up in flames and on the brink of sinking below the waterline? Ha, that taps into my fear of shadowy figures infiltrating my home. Wait, one more: like a porcupine turning cartwheels at a balloon party? Trivial, perhaps, but it captures my party-spoiler reputation, as someone who says, "Grow up. It's not okay."

Convinced the right simile will find me, I began to secret my way up our oak staircase. Two reddish monkeys wearing identical blue and white polka-dotted aprons played poker on the quarter landing, their legs outstretched like an impromptu obstacle course. At stair head, a crowd sang Stephen Stills' *Love the One You're With* behind closed bathroom doors. I held my breath and tiptoed by, fell into my bedroom door, and dove for my bed well before witching hour.

Still smeared with whiteface—my last-resort, half-hearted Halloween costume—I

snapped into sleep. Doorknob rattling startled me. Someone barefoot or sock-wearing padded across the thickly carpeted floor. A female voice whispered, "You mind if we use your room for 30 minutes?" In dreamy logic, I figured the question was a come-on within a dream. I chose to move onto another dream rather than entertain the question. Within seconds, there was motion on the floor alongside my bed. So, it *wasn't* a dream after all! What now? Eyes glued shut, my ears stayed wide open. Sham sleep became my Halloween mask.

"I don't know how," a second female voice said.

"I'll show you," said the first female voice.

"I can't believe this is happening," said the second voice.

"Believe it."

"There's someone else here," the second voice said.

"Ignore it."

"Slower. Slower," said the second voice.

"You just tell me. Whatever you want."

It sounded like someone was enjoying a dark chocolate mousse. I held onto that image.

"My mother would kick you," laughed the second voice.

"I'll hold you."

"It's cold in here," said the second voice.

"You're feeling warmer already."

"Poor Richard," the second voice lamented, half-heartedly.

"Only think about you."

"I threw up," said the second voice.

"You've been spitting a lot. It'll pass."

Pause.

"Funny, I feel less guilty now," said the second voice.

"You said you couldn't handle it. That's how I knew you'd be interested."

Another pause.

"Should we go back?" asked the second voice.

"The party's here. The party's us."

"We better go," said the second voice.

There was a flurry. Like pheasants rising from marshy grasses, they rose without even a

whisper. After soft baby steps, my door fanned open. Hallway light slapped me across the face. Then faster than it had opened my door fanned shut, sending a welcome breeze, as if feathers brushed my face. The cylinder of the door handle faintly ground. Then the latch bolt ejected firmly through the strike plate, with the finality of gunshot. Good cat burglars, except for the gunshot.

I didn't feel much like drifting back into sleep. I rose, found the door, barefooted out into the harsh light, made my way around the latest staircase adventurers, and looked around for two women who'd cut themselves off from the melee. I found two women sitting on the Herculon couch, holding hands pretzel-like, with the far hands clasped over the near. Focused on each other, neither said a word. I joined them on their couch, not too close. Their eyes briefly settled on my whiteface. Did they recognize me? After ten minutes of shared equanimity, I rolled into a standing position, bowed, navigated the stairway, embraced my bed, and slept until the sun jolted me bolt upright.

My six housemates were undergrads at a university northwest Washington, DC. I was a grad student at another university across town. I'd moved into the basement in January because a friend who knew "a commune member" invited me along to the house's Christmas party. For the first five months, my housemates told me they welcomed my "more mature, reasoned perspective." Then in June—after three of the four founders of the house graduated and moved out, but before three new arrivals moved in—I was offered the big bedroom upstairs, where the sun first shows her face every morning. The newly-reconfigured house members were more likely to tell me to "get over it and get with it." A late Victorian with wrap-around porches, the house's owner was a widow who drank. Renting to students amused her.

When I came downstairs the morning after, I had the house to myself—not counting

the three dogs—for nearly three hours. None of the dogs were mine, but I began my morning chores—cleaning up where the dogs shat in the living room, dining room, kitchen, and the wide open space with no name. When I'd finished shit patrol, I fetched the *Washington Post*, and made myself comfortable in the wicker rocker on the wraparound porch beneath my bedroom, still the beneficiary of the early morning's direct sun.

Around eleven, I heard tumblers on the stairway in search of coffee and OJ. From fragments of conversation I overheard on the porch, there'd been lots of hookups last night, but none of it made sense. Aside from the usual heavily-laced marijuana, there'd been a Halloween treat. Quaaludes (aka: Ludes or Sopors) had been doled out like candycorn. I hadn't noticed.

"Oh, what a marvelous bunch of coconuts!" housemate Dan exclaimed. He, Kate and Antoni stood in the wraparound porch's doorway hand-in-hand.

Dan stepped onto the porch and whispered, "What'd you do last night?"

"I went to bed," I said.

"With who?" he asked.

"With me," I answered.

"There really wasn't anybody with you?"

Dan asked.

"Methinks you know the answer. A couple of women came in after I'd fallen asleep," I said.

"Asked if they could use my room. I feigned sleep. They did their thing and left."

"And you didn't join them?" Dan asked.

"What was going on was complicated enough," I said.

"There's nothing wrong with a third person jumping in," Dan said.

"As it is, they had Poor Richard to deal with," I said.

"Richard?" Dan asked.

"Yes, that's what she called him. 'Poor Richard.' I guess she and Richard are partners, except on Halloween," I said.

"Hmmm. What were you thinking about while this was going on?" Dan asked.

"A really rich, dark cholate mousse," I said.

"Lip-smacking good."

"I can't believe you didn't join them," he said. "What are ludes for?"

"I didn't take ludes or drop them or whatever the hell it is you do with them. And nobody told me our Halloween party was a Quaalude Party," I said.

"You disapprove?" Dan asked.

"I love dark chocolate mousse, if that's what you mean," I said.

Dan turned and walked back into the dining room. I followed. Shortly, tiny housemate Anne came down holding hands with partygoer Marcie. Anne's towering boyfriend, Mark the carpenter, the one with the mountain-man beard, hadn't shown up for last night's bash.

"They got lewd on ludes," said Dan.

Anne turned her head away, looking simultaneously shy and excited.

Gradually, the magnitude of last night's Quaalude orgy began to sink in. People had hooked up randomly and in multiples. Kate, a committed straight with a long-standing boyfriend, Paul, back home in Rhode Island, had hooked up with straight partygoer Mary. Lifelong gay partygoer Peter had hooked up with lifelong straight Carol.

"I've been wanting to get pregnant so I could have a baby" said Peter, as he followed Carol from kitchen to dining room to living room. "It shouldn't always have to be the woman's burden. Now I don't know what to think."

"I've got to call Paul," Kate said. "He needs to come out too. Once he comes out, all of this will be okay, and he and I can still be together . . . when we're together."

"We're all bodies. It's all the same, male or female. It really doesn't matter, sex or no sex. A body is a body," said Antoni, a lifelong gay who regularly smoked marijuana with his mother and had multiple hookups last night, at least two men and one woman.

Anne sat at the dining room table holding hands with Marcie.

"Now I'm dealing with my latent homosexuality," said Bill, a lifelong gay housemate who'd hooked up with a lifelong gay partygoer last night. "Later, I'll deal with my latent heterosexuality."

"Janet and Mariann hooked up last night too," said Dan.

So, Dan *did* know about my midnight visitors.

As the worm turns, Dan turned and asked me, "You want to tell us about your night?"

"Sorry, I've been up for hours, I've cleaned up after the dogs, cleaned up after your bacchanal, and I'm late for my run. We can pick up on this later," I said, leaving the prunes to stew in their juices.

The rest of the day was relatively quiet because my nocturnal housemates napped for most of it. When we crossed paths, I listened, smiled, and asked "D'you enjoy it?" After they said something approximating "yes," I typically asked, "Does all this make sense to you?" Their most articulate response was, "Nothing makes any sense anyway, so why not?"

The next day, I rode the H-2 bus to the DC public high school where I was substitute teaching in social studies and then attended a grad school seminar, while my housemates did their earnest best to attend classes. With their central nervous systems still acutely depressed, their scholarly efforts demonstrated the difference between attending classes and being attentive in class. After a makeshift dinner—everyone doing their own thing, meaning a slice of American cheese with a coke and nachos for all of them except Anne—the time approached for our regular Monday night house meeting.

When we'd all gathered in the living room, the doorbell rang. Kate pranced to the door and led Mariann and Poor Richard into the living room. Nobody said who'd invited them, but I guessed it had been Kate's doing. Still, their disruption offered a welcome diversion from the prospect of regaling Saturday night's Quaalude Party and celebrating every coming out.

By "coming out," they had a specific,

divergent meaning. Coming out really meant, "crossing over." Crossovers from straight to gay, from gay to straight, from either to ambivalent or simply queer, were celebrated as if a new child had been born. Hours of arguments often followed about who really had sex with whom and whether there was a true crossover.

Apparently, Mariann had beseeched Richard to move into our vacant basement. At Kate's direction, Mariann and Richard—who rented an apartment together—explained their hopes and dreams as prospective new "commune members." Dan, who'd been twitching like never before, switched into full-on tsunami mode.

"Does Richard know what happened here Saturday night?" Dan asked.

When he got no response, Dan pressed harder: "Look at me, Mariann. Does Richard know?"

Poor Richard looked at Mariann. "What the hell's he talking about?" he asked as fear welled up in his eyes.

Mariann didn't answer Dan. She didn't look at Richard. Instead, her eyes threw poison darts at Dan. Then she turned toward Kate with sorry eyes that begged for a life raft.

"You two really need to leave and talk," said Dan.

"Why are you being so brutal?" asked Kate, shaking her fist at Dan.

"Maybe we better go," said Mariann. She sprung from her seat, pivoted, and progressed toward the door without looking back. Poor Richard followed. Kate ran after Richard.

Once Poor Richard and Mariann had driven away, Kate ran back into the house and, still standing, and pointed a finger at Dan, "Why'd you do that?"

"It wouldn't be fair to them or us. This house is coming together. Having them move in might ruin their relationship. Even worse, dealing with their relationship would definitely stifle the energy that's growing in this house," Dan said.

"People can change," said Anne, meekly.

"I admit, we need to talk about where we're headed as a group," said Kate.

"Things have changed," said Dan.

"But did they really change that much?" asked Carol.

"Not really. I still clean up the dog shit every morning," I said.

"You're not obliged to," said Antoni. "That's your choice. You could leave the dog shit right where it is and eventually someone might start picking it up. You haven't given it a fair chance. If you wait long enough, it might even pick itself up."

"That's not what we need to talk about," said Dan. "Something's going on. It's affecting all of us. Or nearly all."

"We're all affected," said Anne. "You can't force change on people. Acceptance is change too. Accepting surprises in ourselves but also accepting differences in others."

"Regardless," said Dan, "We've learned something. Some of us thought we were straight. Some of us thought we were gay. We've learned sexuality is more fluid than that."

"Meaning what?" asked Anne.

"I don't have to avoid having sex with someone because of their gender, but that doesn't mean I have to feel attracted to *everyone*. I don't have to have sex with *everyone*," said Antoni

"Unless you're on sopors," interjected Bill.

"Oh, we're all whores," said Kate. "I need to call Paul and fix this."

Over the next two months, I walked on fiery nails. Every word I spoke placed me at risk of being subjected to a radical sexual analysis. I feared one day I would suck in all the air for a mile around, blow it out all at once, and curse the day. With no savings and living on a meager substitute's income, I couldn't readily move out. Instead, nearly every Friday, I took the slow train to New York, where I stayed with either Laurie or Elaine, whoever'd have me. I rode the train back to DC on Monday. That gave me three or four day for substitute teaching. I fantasized leaving the whole DC scene behind and moving to New York. I imagined living at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But grad school kept me in DC and living in

New York required real money, which I didn't have.

By staying away most weekends, I avoided the Saturday night Quaalude parties and the Sunday regaling. I couldn't escape the week-long efforts to reconcile conflicting reports about Saturday night's goings on and the assignment of Apgar scores to each afterbirth.

Kate and Paul broke up during his next visit after she insisted he "come out" so they could be equals. She falsely claimed she dumped him because they were no longer equals.

When I returned from New York around dinner time one late November Monday, I discovered a crude drawing of a house on the kitchen blackboard. "Come out PLEASE!" was written scribbled above drawing. An arrow pointed to my room.

Our weekly house meetings but they were getting even more tiresome. "You know," said Dan, pointing a finger at me at one of those meetings, "lots of energy has been spent on you for no response."

I turned to Antoni and said, "I heard I'm regressing."

Antoni said, "We're all regressing."

Bill said, "Hey, look, it's no joke. Being gay's a serious thing."

"This house has direction now and you can't flow with it," said Kate.

"Kate's undergone astounding changes in emotions so rapidly," said Dan. "She needs another gay woman to support her."

"You never totally lose interest in a sex to which you were attracted," said Bill, "but Kate wants to turn mostly to women."

"You're right," I said. "This house has new energy infused by Quaaludes and a new identity and I don't fit. This isn't the house I moved into in January. You better believe I want to get the hell out of here. I'm exploring my options."

A few days later, I fell asleep with my back facing my bedroom door. I woke when I sensed a hand resting on my right hip. Warm flesh pressed against mine from behind. Fingernails dug into my

hip. My first thought was that Jeanne, who still had a key, decided to pay me a surprise visit. I turned to my right and saw Dan's mustached, vapid face shared my pillow. I reared back and swung a sharp right elbow into his chest as if I swung for the right field fences. I followed through by using my open left palm to send him flying. A cry broke from his lips as he looked for the rip cord on his parachute. It sounded like he landed twice. After drawing in a quick breath, he whimpered, "What'd you do that for?" Then he stood and, as he left, said, "I was only trying to help." He paused after each word for full effect.

I let out a roar. I let the silence sink in and roared again and then again. Nobody came to ask why I roared in a dark room at midnight. After nobody came, I hoped I hadn't woken anyone because I didn't want to explain what happened, and didn't happen. I knew Dan was awake so at least he heard me. I pushed the door shut until the latch bolt ejected firmly, with the finality of gunshot.

At daybreak, I walked to Heckinger's Hardware and purchased a chain lock. Screwing it into the doorframe and the door before anyone else was even awake gave me a modicum of satisfaction, but didn't damper my fear-riddled fury. I phoned one of the former house residents—one of the founders of the original "commune," who'd moved out in June—about moving in with him on a temporary basis ASAP. He said January was the earliest he could arrange.

After I got home from work, the house sounded empty, so I went down to the basement to put clothes in the washer. I was startled to find Anne there. She was the only housemate I still respected and trusted. She, Mark, and I had gone raspberry picking in Rock Creek back in June. We'd enjoyed concocting vegetarian dinners together prior to the recent Quaalude craze.

"What was that noise last night?" she asked. Her attic room was directly above mine.

I told her what happened.

"What was Dan thinking?" she asked.

"You've drawn the line very clearly. He had no business. . . I'm sorry." She dropped her basket

of clean laundry and held me. "I'm not happy here either. I'm working on getting out."

"Me too," I said.

"What're you going to do?" she asked.

"Get back on track. Find a place where I belong," I said.

When the crew arrived home, Dan called for an emergency house meeting at 7:30 by writing it on the kitchen blackboard. He also wrote: "Jim placed a lock on his bedroom door, against house policy."

I showed up in the living room last to avoid having to recapitulate for latecomers. I looked around and saw a friend in Anne's eyes. I sat next to Kate, at the end of the Herculon couch. When nobody said anything, I began. "Are we here because I put a lock on my bedroom door and that's against house policy?"

"Yes," said Dan, looking around for support.

"Well, I admit, I did that," I said. "And I put the lock on my bedroom door because it's no longer safe for me to sleep without one after last night."

"What happened last night?" asked Anne, knowing the answer.

"Dan entered my room in the middle of the night, long after everyone was asleep. While I slept, he got into my bed, naked. He put his hand on *my* hip and pressed his flesh against mine. All uninvited."

"Did that really happen, Dan?" asked Kate. "D'you really do that?"

"That's . . . that's true," Dan said.

"But why, Dan? Hasn't Jim drawn the line clearly enough?" asked Anne.

"I was only trying to help," Dan answered.

"Everyone else has succeeded in coming out. I thought Jim needed a little help. A nudge." Staring Dan down with the eyes of a tiger, Anne asked, "Are you out of your mind?"

"These days, what does it mean to be in our right minds?" Dan asked.

"You've lost it!" Anne said.

Dan pulled up his t-shirt and pointed at his sternum. "You see this bruise? Jim did this."

"And you know *why* I shoved you out of my bed?" I asked.

"You hurt me. On purpose," Dan said. "We can't have willful violence in this house."

"You imply you think I was wrong to defend myself. You know what? I'm not dignifying this," I said. "You entered *my* bed unwanted. I threw you out of *my* bed. I'm entitled. So are all of you every time someone violates your bed, ludes or no ludes."

"But can't anyone understand, I was only trying to help?" Dan pleaded.

"You were wrong, Dan," said Anne.

"This is so fucked. Jim let you off easy," said Kate.

"What if it'd been me?" asked Carol.

"It would've been different if Jim and Dan had both been, like, luded out and said 'Yeah, let's get it on,'" Antonio said.

"There's no such a thing as consent when you're on ludes," Anne said. "Ludes kill the capacity for consent. They turn us into sick monkeys doing experiments on each other."

The next week, Kate went to the free VD clinic and confirmed she had gonorrhea and crabs. Acting like players in an Arlo Guthrie song, Kate led her housemates down to the VD clinic together, hand in hand, so they could turn the other cheek in succession. Soon, they were all taking penicillin, trimming pubic hair, and bathing in Kwell. More Kwell could be found in our bathrooms than milk in the fridge. After all, I was the only one buying milk and the only one not bathing in Kwell. In addition to the lock on my bedroom door, I began putting a combination lock on my milk carton.

Matters escalated when housemate Bill came down with The Great Pox. The next day, a scribbled note was posted on the fridge door:

What to Do During VD Starvation Week

1. watch TV
2. take long shifts
3. eat, eat, eat (avoid spicy foods)
4. take sopors
5. dance (but not to the point of arousal)

6. visit in large groups with hands tied
7. read National Geographic
8. tease the opposite sex
9. throw Christmas tree bulbs at passing cars
10. make movies rated G

Despite #4, ingestion of Quaaludes took a downturn. In addition to Anne's comment about ludes turning people into sick monkeys, my housemates had been lectured at the Free VD Clinic about Quaalude risks: destroying the central nervous system; wrecking kidneys, liver, and other vital organs; and interfering with brain function and *ability to take finals*. They'd already purchased Quaaludes by the bottleful so instead of ceasing they opted to use "with greater discretion." Dan still maintained ludes were aphrodisiacs. From everything I read, Quaaludes were a muscle relaxant and hypnotic, which (according to *Time Magazine*) strongly impaired the "conscience muscle."

On a long New York trip over Christmas break, I got to take some long, deep breaths. I cooked up a storm and threw a party at a friend's apartment for people drawn from different parts of my life, some of whom had never met each other before. I walked on the cold sand at Jones Beach. I confirmed that in mid-January I'd be able to move in temporarily with one the original founders of the house while I looked for more permanent lodging.

When I returned to DC, I learned Mariann was pregnant with Poor Richard's child. To avoid flunking out, Antoni dropped out for the semester before leaving to smoke weed with his widowed mother.

One of my last nights in the house, five of my six housemates sat in a crescent moon on the living room floor smoking marijuana laced with hallucinogens. Dan proclaimed, "Six happy vegetables: a tragicomedy staged in five acts simultaneously on one bed."

"I want to be a tomato," said Kate. "Oh, no, I can't. That has sexist connotations. I'll be a carrot."

"Then I'll be a tomato," said Antoni.

"I'll be a cabbage," said Bill.

"Mariann wanted to be a cabbage too,"
said Kate.

"Who wants to be a hot potato?" asked Carol.

"Six happy vegetables, nourished by
nicotine and sopors," cried Antoni.

The day I left, whatever the dogs vomited yesterday on the stairway was dried and flaking. Raisins scattered on the floors had hardened into wrinkly marbles. Heaps of dog shit everywhere had turned white and lost any hint of stink. Every pan and pot—in the sink or cabinets—wore remains of the meals long past. There was no milk in the fridge, no cheese, not even diet coke. Dishes were shelved randomly, e.g., lunch plate over teacup over soup bowl. "Whatever" was the ruling principle.

I regretted giving up my bedroom where the sun tossed me out of bed and the wraparound porch where I rocked my way through the sunrise edition of the *Washington Post* in peace. But I was free now, like a journalist who'd visited a looney bin—where cannibals held him captive, cross-questioned him hourly, and incessantly sang the Partridge Family's *I Think I Love You*—and finally escaped on a postal truck (the original meaning of "going postal."). Like a lightning bug who took a flying leap from a kid's jar on a summer's day.

Like that albino ant who airlifted to safety before the rapids devoured his fiery raft. And, most of all, like that porcupine who could turn cartwheels whenever the spirit moved without fear of reprisals for bursting someone's balloons.

Five months later, after I'd been in a third story walk-up on my own for a couple of months, I looked out my bedroom window one morning. A flight below, across the alley, I saw tiny Anne hanging a planter filled with pink and white gardenias from a beam above the green-painted, wooden balcony at the back of an old brownstone.

"Hey, neighbor!" I called out.

Anne looked up, "Hiya, neighbor! Ha! You live there?"

"Yeah, you?" I asked.

"Yeah," Anne said. "How long you lived there?"

"Two months," I said. "You?"

"Two days, me and Marcie" said Anne, laughing. "We haven't even started unpacking, but I had to make this balcony mine. I could've used your help reaching this beam."

I said, "I hear the raspberries are asking to be picked."

Jim Ross, since retiring from public health research in early 2015, has published several poems, 35 pieces of nonfiction, and over 140 photos in over 45 journals in North America, Europe, and Asia. He and his wife, grandparents of three toddlers, split their time across MD, VA, and WV.

First Annual Poetry Slam

Crafton Hills College vs San Bernardino Valley College

An Article by Chyna Rogers



The 2017 Slam Poets and Coaches from both Campuses

Warm room, full house. The more people that were entering, the more chairs that were being distributed and filling up the entirety of the room. As it was getting closer to the start of the First Annual Poetry Slam between the two sister campuses, less seats were open, and the back walls were getting filled with bodies, standing and sitting. Not only was the heat overtaking the room, but so was the anticipation from the crowd and the performers. When the host, Kat, stepped up to the mic, she just knew exactly how to get the crowd pumped and energized for the performances to come. She spit the rules with mad rhythm and rhyme. Five performances from each campus, scored by five judges, highest and lowest scores are dropped. Being how this was the start of an oncoming tradition, everyone was in very high spirits.

When the first San Bernardino Valley performer went up, Reign Ortega, you could already tell that he was going to have a powerful message to tell. As he was punching out his words and struggling with deep emotions that caused him to stumble on his lines, I still felt connected to his poem. After hearing about all the qualities that should and shouldn't define him as a person, I looked around the room and saw many faces that



reflected my own teary-eyed one. As the score boards went up, I knew he would be among one of the highest ranked poets.

Feeling like I hadn't recovered enough from the last performance, our first poet for Crafton, Joel, started citing his work. I felt instantly at ease. He cooed his words and made the room feel utterly peaceful, talking about snowflakes and memories of a typical winter day. Until the

change of his voice in the last few lines of his piece brought a shutter down my back. However, I could tell I wasn't the only one stunned by the drastic change. The score boards went up, and Crafton Hills was claimed winners of Round 1.

Since Crafton won, they were the first to go up for Round 2. The second poet for Crafton, Ashlyn Avila, went up with a swagger in her step, so no doubt her poem was going to be quite entertaining. Her poem was like an instructional makeup video; it was one of unique dark humor. Out of all the performances, she definitely got the most laughter out of the crowd while teaching everyone how to hide their emotional and physical flaws with the power of makeup. I, myself, had shed a few tears from laughing to hard. By the end of her directions, with smiles coating everyone's faces, the crowd hooted and hollered for her. Score boards went up and it was no shocker that she got high points.

Next up for San Bernardino Valley, Penicia Sims, took the stage and educated us the importance of female empowerment and self-acceptance. By her performance, you could just sense the significance her poem had meant to her which also affected me as a spectator. Her poem left me feeling a little stronger when I had left that day. When the scores went up Crafton was claimed yet again the victor of Round 2.

Going into Round 3, the pressure was on. The first and only duo of the night from Crafton, Naomi Cheney and Angel Soria, described the motions of a broken-up relationship. Although there were moments of pausing due to the pressure of performing in front of a crowd, their piece certainly had a few people nodding their heads with hands on their hearts. The imagery from their poem left my mind reeling and my heart plummeting.



Next for San Bernardino Valley was Fatima Andrews-Bay, with her piece telling how she rose above challenges and overcame the stereotypes. Just listening to her poem had my heart beating out of my chest and yet again getting teary-eyed. As the scores were tallied up, Crafton lost the lead.

For the final round, San Bernardino's next poet, Ashley Pacheco, was the much needed comedian we needed. Her poem reflected on the life of a Hispanic woman and how she was treated due to her nationality. With talk of frioles and whistle callers, everyone was either laughing or nodding in agreement.

As her piece was done and Crafton's last performer of the night went up, Crafton performers and supporters were on the edge of their seats. James Lewandowski took to the mic with talk of political issues and what it's like to live under rule of Donald Trump. Most of the room related to his words and his emotions, and he got many moments of laughter throughout the room. As soon as he said his last line, my cheeks were aching from smiling, and my hands were burning from clapping so much.

However, when the scores went up, San Bernardino Valley was claimed the victor of the night. It wasn't a big loss in terms of points, but even as a Crafton student, I applauded the San Bernardino Valley and Crafton Hills College performers alike for their guts and determination. The First Annual Poetry Slam was a night to remember, and I was sad that it ended so quickly. It was a great night full of laughter and friendly competition, and I already can't for next year's performance.



2017 Slam Poets from Crafton Hills College and San Bernardino Valley College

Marron Marks the Color of Blood

Marta Tesfai

Blue and black clouds resembled the purple markings of a bruise. She knew all too well of bruises, they ran up her arms and legs leaving little spotted patterns. She felt it creeping by, the black cat looked at her with indifference, it seemed to be used to the low drum of the city just as she was. Her yellow Adidas were hitting the pavement at an effortless speed. I'm almost home. She huffed.

"What are you doing here?" the first one spoke. The words came from behind her. The tone and pitch carried the melody of authority, a melody that was undoubtedly rehearsed.

"Slowly! Slowly face me," he screamed. She doesn't remember turning around instead she felt her eyes began to squint as the fierce light shined forward. Neon lights were atop the car with four circular beams that resembled heaven, ultimately blinding her.

She went to move her braids out of her face, careful not to startle the man who exuded endless amounts of confidence. His black-clad suit and golden hair almost made him look handsome, however, she knew better then to allow her mind to travel too far from reality or the curb she was currently stepping on. "Keep your hands where I can see them-I'm...I'm not going to ask you again!" Where had his confidence just gone? She thought. "Okay," she responded. She looked into the dark blue eyes that seemed restless. She was tall but this man seemed to tower over her. Making her skinny and rather awkward frame feel small and vulnerable. He inched closer.

"You from here? Always walk these streets in the middle of the night alone? Live here long? What's your name?" She wasn't sure which to answer, or whether he was done asking her the plethora of questions.

"I-I..." she began and failed. She hugged herself, desperately needing to hold onto something. The alley closing in on her, she wished she could hide in the dark corner near the red

bricked wall. She'd give anything for the abyss to consume her, making her morph into a shadow.

"So, who are you? Like to walk around at night for no good reason, a woman like you?" He demanded rather than asked this time. Of all the words 'like you' bothered her the most.

"Miller, everything good?" The second one finally speaking up. He had a slightly calmer voice, much younger than the first one. His tone was out of practice and far less rehearsed.

"We got a nonresponsive, Gibson," the first one quipped. Keeping the flashlight in her face, never allowing his eyes to leave hers. He stepped dangerously close to her, his voice carried vibrations hitting her straight on.

From the corner of her eye she knew the second one was nearest the car. They were both keeping an eye on the man who stood in between them. "What's the situation, Miller?" the officer asked. Hesitation deep within his voice.

"Got this woman here, apparently likes to walk the streets late at night for no reason," she thought back to a few moments earlier, remembering how she hadn't answered his questions, his gaze more prominent.

The California sun had disappeared hours ago revealing a gray lit sky with randomly scattered stars. Winds making her shake in sporadic movements, forcing her to stop and regain control of her body. Most people left around one in the morning--tending bar was not something she fancied, but it paid the nagging bills that piled her counter every month. She thinks back to weeks before, walking into her boss's office she'd begged him to allow her to take off once the crowd died down and he agreed. She was just trying to get home.

"Hello?" the voice pulled her back to the present. Somehow the blue eyes were only inches away now. "Go to the car," he said. His voice barley above a whisper not wanting his partner to hear.

Suddenly the pain in her stomach grew with intensity.

“Face the car,” she did as she was told. He was behind her now. He was like a human radiator, she felt his warmth rather than heard his voice. “Hands on the car,” carefully she placed them there. Her eyes closed and shut so tight it began to hurt. Hands were suddenly moving on her lower back moving upward. This was a dream now, reality wasn’t this surreal in its worst moments. His mouth centimeters from her ears. They met her breast, the palms of his hands leaving no prisoners.

“Miller, man, what the hell...” his voice now holding more authority than before, adrenaline laced in his tone. “What the hell does it look like, Gibson.”

The vomit was rushing up, nearly escaping her mouth. She held it in, she was good at that, keeping things in. The hands progressed with its’ assault traveling down meeting her lower hips. He stopped, getting to the place he wanted. His voice making a satisfied sign. It’s almost over. The mantra providing little but at least some solace.

The younger officer moved, she heard him. The sound of feet moving was echoing from the

ground. She heard the click. The ministrations of his attack coming to a halt. “Hey! Turn around! Let her go, come on. Let her go.” Her attacker moved, allowing her the space she needed to get around him walking towards the younger officer. His hands clutching his gun, “walk around the car!” he instructed her. “Come on Gibson, don’t kid yourself,” he laughed. “You know you’re not up for it, don’t start shit you can’t finish.”

She hunched behind the car with her hands on her ears. She thought if she couldn’t hear it then it wasn’t happening. The shots were quick and loud. She was now laying on the floor, knees to her chest. The squad car her only divider from the chaos she’d just left. Opening her eyes, looking under the car, she saw him. Laying there a lifeless body.

He came around the car, boots pointing at her face. He leaned down.

He propped down to her squatting his legs, “all this because of you” he whispered. She looked up, blue eyes meeting her face on, once again.

Marta Tesfai is a student at Crafton Hills College and is transferring to the University of California, Riverside. She is from Redlands, California. Her east African heritage inspires her writing, which exposes the poignant struggles of gender and ethnicity.

Ronnie's Profile

Thomas McDade

"Shush," says the kerchiefed woman to her kid who just announced Ronnie Layne's clothes are too big for him. She stares at the spacious pea coat, brown corduroys and especially the wingtips without shoelaces.

"They're Florsheim," he says, smiling weakly.

"That's a consolation, kiddo."

They're on a UTC bus going downtown Providence. Ronnie's graying hair is long and every-which-way. His face is splotchy on pale. The Kennedy Plaza stop isn't far from a Life-You-Save Blood Bank that's beside the Regulation Bar. He walks like there's been a trail of faint footprints laid out he's sworn to follow. Eyes to the pavement, he finds eleven cents. An ancient character wearing a greasy Celtics hooded sweatshirt who is huffing and wheezing beats Ronnie to the LYS door. "Let me through before my blood pressure goes down," he begs between coughs. Ronnie stands aside, clears his sinuses and spits nearly vomiting before stepping in. A dog is in the waiting room, a Doberman pinscher sitting up tall, leashed to a man wearing dark glasses whose eyes are locked on a three-foot square watercolor hanging above a grey couch. It features a young woman. It's amateurish to Ronnie but a sensual eye-catcher nonetheless. She sits against a mint green wall, one bruised knee at twelve o'clock the other at three. Her jeans are cut off to the extreme, hands sprawled palms up holding left and right a compass and a Mars candy bar. White blouse ripped, one of her small-breasted nipples is exposed. Honey-blond hair and uneven bangs, droopy lidded eyes that stare. Yet her mouth is a circle of awe or surprise. Ronnie vaguely recalls ballerina canvases in an art history book his half semester at RI Jr College but and writing a paper on Winslow Homer's "On the Lee Shore." Closing his eyes, he sees the ship and breakers clearly. She is IRA hunger strike thin. Vaguely familiar though, she reminds him of a woman he knew growing up in Prospect Heights Federal Housing. Ronnie deciphers a piped-in music tune: "By The Time I Get to Phoenix." The red-collared dog is as interested in the painted woman as his master is, as Ronnie is. Not

even one magazine available to offer the painting competition.

A husky voice calls him to a desk for questioning. He carries his pea coat, happy he's wearing a short sleeved shirt. A patch over the ripped pocket says "Sal." After stating his name, date of birth and Social Security number, he answers all the AIDS, overseas travel, medication, tattoo and general health questions the wide, redheaded woman asks. The "ever taken money for sex" question displays the painting on his mind's billboard. Big Red's inquisitor eyes are laser beams hunting Ronnie's face for deceit. He wonders if all the drinking makes his appearance suspect. She reeks of talcum powder. While she's completing the paperwork, Ronnie studies the name stenciled on his pea coat's lining, "C. Pomeray." It's on the tip of his tongue, horse or trainer, a book he read? Temperature and blood pressure are fine. So is his iron, no needle tracks on either arm. She rubs a finger up and down looking for an application of makeup Ronnie suspects. She seems surprised to find none. He's glad he trimmed his fingernails. Ronnie's no Good Samaritan. He needs the twenty-five bucks badly. She holds out the blood bag and sample tubes. He has to pull them away. The man who ran around the block is telling a male phlebotomist the story of his life, mostly WWII, some Disneyland. He served with a fellow who looked like Goofy. His favorite movies are, The Longest Day, Sand Pebbles and Bridge on the River Kwai. Ronnie wonders how different life would be had he not drawn high in the lottery and been drafted into Nam.

Ronnie's vampire is female, tall with short black hair, big eyes and dimpled cheeks, aqua scrubs. Her shoes are penny loafers. Her face is as familiar as the one on the waiting room wall. He surrenders the apparatus while noticing her perfectly manicured nails. She hangs his coat on a hook, silently leads him to adjustable tan recliner. Many steps up from the narrow cot that Ronnie remembers, it's comfortable enough for a night's sleep. A long spell since he sold

blood, last time also in Providence but on Orange Street. More of an alley, a barroom conveniently planted next door too. He and Bob Hanks would race to see who could fill the bag first. Five dollars a pint and Ronnie got an extra buck for being O negative. A bowl of soup at Mc Dowd's greasy spoon and a liquor store stop for a wine pint they'd kill in a hurry for the replacement fluid buzz. Starry-eyed launched into Craig's, a bar with an in-house bookmaker; they sipped draft beer while sending money to post and waiting for the phone to ring with race results from the wire service. The bookie recited them, working in rhyme when he found candidates, occasionally using song.

Ronnie identifies himself and she compares his words to the paperwork. Her forehead tightens. She repeats the allergic to iodine question. "Not to my knowledge." She prepares his arm. He feels like a junkie with a servant. "Holy shit," he says to himself: "She is the woman in the painting."

She breaks ice first:

"You're Ronnie Layne, grew up in Prospect Heights, right?"

"Yes, you are Cindy Allard."

"You look like hell."

"You don't."

"Sue Jenks told me you hit the skids, horses and booze but a body doesn't need x-ray vision or advance notice to figure that. You were a good-looking kid, very interesting profile. Sue used to call you silhouette-head."

"How's she doing?"

"She was doing fine, working in a Hallmark Store. She got fired for defacing sympathy cards, crossing out "Condolences," adding "Congratulations."

"A body could get hit by lightning over that," said Ronnie.

"Where are you living?"

"Home is a sleeping bag in Larry Timmons's cellar."

"Great company you keep. He's a hemorrhoid in need of a case of Preparation punch-in-the-face," she says, shaking her head, putting more pressure on the cotton swab that's working the iodine into Ronnie's skin. "Gorgeous veins," she adds.

"He's not behind bars yet."

"You heard, huh? It was just a case of bad penmanship on a \$5,000 check. Then some cold cases got warm. I did my time, nine-months of the three-year sentence, goody-goody me. I picked up a profession and I learned I have artistic talent. Did you see the painting out there? It's a self-portrait. I disguised myself with hair length and color, complexion and little tits."

"The sweet face clued a notion that I'd seen her somewhere." Her breasts were impressive and inviting even under scrubs.

"Thanks. In a way, Bob Hanks aimed me at painting. I went with him to the RISD Museum once. He had to pick up some drugs from a student. We roamed around, popped some pills sitting before a big Buddha, a religious experience I truly believe. I saw a painting of an old house that reminded me of a bungalow in Seekonk I'd imagined living in when we were in the Heights bricks. Bob said he'd steal it for me someday, never know. I used to think even the tiniest Cape Cod cottage was a mansion."

"Me too," says Ronnie.

Pumping up the cuff, she hands over a green ball.

"After the pinch and a burn, squeeze gently every five seconds."

"You're good, didn't feel a thing."

"When are you going to straighten out?"

"No telling."

"Take your ass to AA, get your looks back and find a woman to boost your worth, feed you right and make those threads fit. Ditch the shoes soon as you can, nothing but multiple hiking socks will make them snug."

"You have a man?"

"I got two sugars; one is the owner of this joint, in his seventies. That's how the canvas got on the wall. He's going to move it to a place he owns in Newport after a while, the Sky Hook Tavern."

"Don't tell me that guy with the dog is the second one."

"Yeah, he's only 45, so it's more than just the money and he's a photographer, encourages me and vice versa. He sold a blown up snapshot situation inspired by one of my dreams. A truck loaded with blood donations flips over, bags all over the

highway, cars popping them like big berries. He got some defective sacs at The Midnight Sales Outlet, waited for a truck to go out of control on the I-95 S curve in Pawtucket. He's a patient, laid back man. I do love that. A nimble footed Heights kid he'd hired placed the bags filled with tomato juice just in time for a couple of skidding cars to squash them, got great shots the airborne "blood." He's planning something with the dog. Man, your blood is slow moving, constipated, reminds me of the red licorice we used to buy at May's Variety."

"She's dead, you know."

"May, May rest in peace, a gentle lady.

Maybe she died in May."

Cindy jerks the needle, to a painful angle.

"That's more like it," she says before revealing the dog's name is Pontiff."

"Ouch, you're making up for the easy entry."

"That sounds mighty sexual to me."

"Didn't mean it to be; what ever happened to Bob Hanks?"

"He's in Oklahoma, new identity, has a pancake house franchise, luckiest guy on the planet, never arrested, platinum tongued king of the con."

"He was a ticket cashing wizard at Lincoln Downs, claimed he could smell a winner in the paddock."

"He'll never come back, child support. A woman from the Mineral Spring Ave gang has triplets by him. Good thing he's out of the picture, he'd turn everything upside down." She looks around to see if any eyes are on them then pats Ronnie's zipper. "Bob did no scamming in that department." A bell sounds signaling the bag is full. "Must have been that blush that finished it off," she says, laughing.

She hasn't changed. Stories about her teen sex antics were wide and tall. She fills the sample tubes, tells him no heavy lifting or exercising for the rest of the day, bandage must stay on several hours and 4-extra eight-ounce glasses of liquids, avoid alcohol for twenty-four hours. She rolls her eyes on the last one. "You'll be next door at the dive, am I right or am I right?"

"Yeah, I put all my money except carfare on a horse named Tinny Toothpick at Suffolk, caught Joey J. the walking bookie before boarding the bus in Pawtucket, five on the Tin nose. The race is on the radio in fifteen minutes. Who knows, if I hit I'll have a bit of a roll, blood twenty-five and all. I'll continue my cleanup act. I did pay off the bookies I owed, worked for two weeks painting three story tenements in Central Falls."

"Amazing you didn't splat the ground, bet mucho paint did. I doubt there will be a U-turn but how'd you like to make another \$50?"

"Doing what?"

"Easiest work you'll ever find. Wait a minute." She darts out of the room. Returning, she grabs the pea coat off its hook, shoves an envelope into the inside pocket. "Nice coat."

"I love it, great cold and windy day collar." She notices the "Pomeray" stencil. "I knew a guy by that name, died in a car stalled on railroad tracks. Now enjoy just one drink and root strong for Tinny. Would you please work on your posture? Look the fuck alive. Hope you can drag your ass back in fifty-five days."

At the long table in the recovery canteen, Ronnie sits at the far end to avoid the WWII Vet's biography. He squeezes the bulky envelope. There's no volunteer hostess. He helps himself to a couple of cans of orange juice; raisins and peanut butter crackers, savors every swig and bite. Those snack packs along with Oreos fit nicely in his coat pockets. The Vet stares as if he's witnessing a felony. Big Red comes over, gives up five of the limpest, saddest five-dollar bills Ronnie's ever held in hand. She smiles as if they were flowers she'd picked special for him.

Ronnie stops for a last glance at the Cindy canvas, takes a step forward to try to read the signature in the corner for truth's sake. The Doberman growls and bares teeth. His master drops his shades to the end of his nose and stares at Ronnie who hustles out. The Regulation Bar is half-full. A sign says Reggie, bartender / owner is on

duty. Ronnie takes a stool closest to the radio, orders a glass of port thinking the color of his good deed—a tumbler full for half a buck! He pays with one of the five dollar bills. “Looks like it spent a week lining a urinal,” Reggie says. Dropping two quarters on the bar, he places four crisp ones atop them. Ronnie thanks him, smiles guardedly. Recalling childhood sneaks from his father’s wine cooler glass, Ronnie counts to twenty-five between sips while keeping fingers on his left hand crossed for horse luck. He remembers Cindy at a Heights Hall dance. He almost got up the courage to ask her to waltz. The shock of her vampire touch kept him from getting a rise, no way that he blushed. Just sitting and relaxing earns a fifty spot. Is this a swindle from her Bob Hanks days? The envelope contents could be counterfeit or strips of newspaper making Ronnie the sap or guinea pig one. He’s afraid to check, will put it off as long as he can, look on the bright side. He recalls a guy he worked with on the loading dock at Apex Rubber saying that his poker addiction left in a pint of blood he donated for a kid hit by a car. Did he create a card sharp? Could it happen here? It’s not likely, no receiving target so what’s the fate of the poor bastard who gets the transfusion? Will he or she be howling at a racetrack first day out of the hospital? A man wearing a cowboy hat and a trench coat calls for attention, uses his long neck Budweiser bottle for a microphone. “Mr. Hemingway said: ‘...everything good or bad leaves an emptiness when it stops. But if it was bad the emptiness fills up by itself. If it was good you could only fill it by finding something better.’”

Horses are at the post and Ronnie has the same old adrenaline rush so he guesses someone is safe from his habit. Tinny Toothpick takes the lead out of the gate, never gives it up, four, five, six lengths a winner. Ronnie’s on his feet, arms triumphantly raised, when he feels something that’s not a hand on his back. Drinkers on either side of him run to tables. Turning, he finds Pontiff balanced on hind legs a blood bag in his teeth, owner poised with a fancy lensed camera, flashes are blinding. “Action” he shouts and the dog chomps and splatters the bag’s contents. Ronnie is stunned. Man and beast rush out. The prop lies on the floor. Ronnie is momentarily horrified at the blood but it couldn’t be, tomato juice like the Interstate, no, thicker,

cheap ketchup maybe. The bar is rocking with applause. A couple of guys try to imitate Ronnie’s reaction, one nearly falls over. Fortunately, Ronnie’s pea coat was wide-open, shirt and pants took the brunt, globs on his shoes. He’s often cleaned puke off them.

“Here you go, Dracula,” says Reggie, handing over a pile of napkins. “They didn’t pay you with a check did they?”

“It’s cash money.” Hoping again it’s so, Ronnie crosses fingers on both hands.

“I hope it spends. Don’t go buying the bar a fucking drink either. Andy the cab driver can help you out, be by soon. He sells work cloths out of his trunk, heavy-duty khaki shirt and trousers for seven-fifty, employable clothes. Work shoes for two and a half, no steel toe on the left. Many a citizen who looked more like crud than you do has rebounded thanks to the trunk haberdashery – “caberdashery” some say. They returned to draft beer, watched baseball, basketball and football on the TV, got deaf to the radio races I hate but have to feature for business sake. By the way, that stuff you’re drinking is like brake fluid. It’ll stop your life on a tiddlywink.”

A stooped man comes out of the back room with a bucket on wheels and a mop. Ronnie declines when asked if he wants the bag to recycle. The liquid seems to be clam / tomato juice mixed with a mystery thickener. The napkins do a half-assed good job. Reggie says Ronnie smells like a sailor off a Point Judith trawler. Ronnie recalls clamming at Colt’s Drive in Bristol. He’s counting to a hundred between sips now, needs sober and calm. Could that photo land in the RISD Museum? Imagine Ronnie Layne part of an exhibition. He’d visit it daily; borrow a camera from his sister, and swear on a stack of Bibles not to pawn it. Yes, a snapshot of that artsy photo framed would be a great souvenir, a wonderful casket companion. He’d search for Cindy’s bungalow too.

“Reggie, how much does a man’s profile change as he grows older?”

“Personally, I’d say it’s a matter of nightstick notches and a close review of the mug shot deck.”

Thomas M. McDade is a 71-year-old former computer programmer / analyst residing in Fredericksburg, VA, previously CT & RI. He is a graduate of Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT. McDade is twice a U.S. Navy Veteran serving ashore at the Fleet Anti-Air Warfare Training Center, Virginia Beach, VA. At sea aboard the USS Mullinnix (DD-944) and USS Miller (DE/FF 1091).

Eyes, Large, and Pale Blue

Alexa Rudoy

Sliding the door shut with a soft clang, Alyona stumbled after her sister, leaden suitcase in tow, blinking as her eyes slowly adjusted to the dim lighting of the surrounding train car.

“This is us,” Lina whispered, while nodding towards the nearest bunks on their right. “Sasha and Marishka will be sleeping over there,” she added, while pointing across the train. “Oh, and put these away ... please.” With a honey-coated smile pasted across her lips, she pushed the remaining luggage into the younger girl’s path. Though her countenance would have appeared pleasant, perhaps a bit overly-friendly to the casual passerby, only her husband, Sasha, and the young Alyona truly understood the terrors that such a tiny, permed woman could bestow upon those who dared to defy her commands.

Straining to lift the heavy bags, Alyona raised a slender brow in response, but said nothing, afraid to wake the slumbering forms of the huddled strangers around her. Amidst the rumbling snores and the mutterings of an old babushka, she heard the last of the train’s warning whistles, a sharp, keening sound, before their whole world lurched forward and began the long rattling voyage far from the woods of Tula towards the colorful pebbles of the Black Sea.

After their belongings were tucked away in their proper places, she and her sister got to work, draping ghost-white sheets across each of the bunks. As the locomotive chugged its way along the tracks, Sasha stood off to the side with a grim expression, gently rocking a fussy Marishka back and forth to the rhythm of the train. When the two girls had finished dressing the cots, Lina made her way over to her husband to help tuck the curly-haired, tempestuous toddler into bed.

With the rest of the family on the opposite side of the room, Alyona sat heavily on top of her sister’s bunk while letting out a small sigh, the weariness from hours of travel settling in. Though this trip was supposed to be a vacation,

she couldn’t help but feel as if she was only brought along to as act as a general servant to her sister and a babysitter for the young, spoiled Marishka. She shuddered as she had a sudden flashback to the four-hour car ride with a screeching pink toddler in her lap, as her sister lounged languidly across the passenger seat, sheltered away from the cacophonous screams with a pair of earplugs. Her shoulders slumped as she pictured all the noise-filled terrors she would have to endure before her feet could touch the calm, cool waters of the Black Sea.

After shrugging out of her thick grey wool coat, kicking off her boots, and slipping them under the bed, she made her way towards what must have been the worst sleeping spot on the entire train. Standing on tiptoe, she reached up and yanked the handle of top bunk down from where it lay flat against the wall, using the attached metal rung to climb up into her cot. With her pillow facing the door, Alyona sank down onto the sheets, attempting to make herself as comfortable as possible on top of the hard, thinly padded plank on which she lay. As the top bunk offered no more security than a small metal bar affixed to the wall next to her, she could only grip onto the rail with one hand and hope for the best, praying not to roll over in her sleep. After all, it would be quite an unpleasant thing to be peacefully slumbering one moment and lying wide-awake on the cold, unforgiving floor with a broken limb the next.

So there she lay, her eyes shut against the flickering, dimly lit lamps above her, fingers latched tightly onto the handle next to her, acutely aware of every cough, every passenger who stomped past her along the metal floor, and every clunk, whine, and creak of the train as it bumped unsteadily along its tracks. But the real trouble began when her sister finally returned to her cot and began to join in with the cacophony of snores all around her, her rumblings the deep baritone to the grating melody of a discordant choir.

Two whole nights of this torture, she thought miserably, as she tried desperately to block out the surrounding noise.

Suddenly, she found herself blinking as a burst of white light hit the back of her eyelids, the door leading to the connecting corridor slowly creaking open. Hearing the *thump, thump* of heavy boots on metal, Alyona glanced down over the edge of her bed, startled. There, in the dead of night, loomed the figure of a tall man with close-cropped hair, his features difficult to make out against the blinding brightness of the hallway. However, after the door squealed shut behind him and he slowly stepped into the eerie lamplight, what she saw in his face unsettled her down to her very core. It was his eyes, large and pale blue, and the way they fixated on hers, his piercing gaze roaming up and down her body, studying her every move, analyzing her every thought. As the hairs on the back of her neck rose and her heart darted wildly around her chest, white-hot alarm shot through every nerve ending in her body. *Pretend to sleep*, a panicked voice screamed out in her mind. Closing her eyes, she lay in the darkness, willing him to move along, to stop watching her with that unnerving, hawk-like gaze.

However, it was to no avail. Though she could no longer see him, she could still feel his presence in the small train car, still hear the sounds of his heavy breathing. There he continued to stand for what felt like an eternity, inanimate, motionless, as the train rambled along through the darkened forests of the countryside. And though she lay frozen in place, her eyelids squeezed shut, desperately feigning slumber, she could sense the way his fixed stare seemed to cut right through her, his ice-cold eyes attempting to penetrate down to the very marrow of her soul.

After a couple long minutes, she heard the sluggish thud of his footsteps receding back along the corridor, the rattle of the door sliding open, and the loud, harsh clang of it being slammed shut. Opening her eyes and glancing around to make sure that the man was gone, Alyona sagged against her bed in relief. A long withheld sigh escaped

from her chest and her heart began to beat at a normal pace again with the realization that he had truly left. However, try as she might, she could not shake the feeling of utter unease wrapped tightly around her body. Glancing down, she noticed that instead of gripping the wall rail with one hand, she now grasped it tightly with two, her knuckles white against the metal bar.

After that, sleep felt nearly impossible. Alyona now felt acutely aware of every screech of the train against the rails, every rasping cough, every time a nearby passenger tossed around their too-small bunk. However, after several long hours had passed, the ball of anxiety within her chest slowly began to unravel and her mind drifted towards a state of tranquility, slipping off into the world of shadows.

Alyona awoke suddenly to the feeling of a large hand clamped around her mouth. Her eyes, no longer weighed down by sleep, burst open in a mingled state of alarm and panic. She parted her lips to force out a scream, but the noise died inside her throat as she met the steely pale blue gaze of the man from before. Paralyzed, her body froze and she found herself unable to look away, unable to escape from the cold, piercing stare of the man standing before her. Features twisted in a cruel smile, the man slowly brought a free finger to his lips in an implicit command for silence.

Scream Alyona! a voice urged desperately inside of her. *Don't just lie there! Yell, shout, do something!* She willed herself to cry out, her mouth wrenching open against his sweaty palm, but all that came out was the air that rattled through her lungs. Her throat constricted upon itself, vocal chords crippled, body numb under the cruel, chilling gaze of the man standing before her. It was as if she had completely forgotten how to speak, or even how to force sound from her throat, as if a thief had crept aboard the train during the night and stolen her voice away.

A hand still clamped over her mouth, taking a small step closer to her, the man slipped his free arm across her torso and began to pull.

Alyona's fingers still wrapped around the railing on the wall, all she could do was grip the bar with every ounce of strength she had left in her body and will herself not to let go.

Wake up Lina! Wake up! Her throat was raw with withheld screams as she silently begged her sister to wrestle out of her state of unconsciousness. She desperately tried to connect to her somehow, to yank her from her deep slumber so she could lay witness to what was happening before her very cot. However, her inner cries fell upon deaf ears. Her sister, a notoriously heavy sleeper, continued with the deep rumbling of snores beneath her bed.

As the man's heavy arm constricted around her body, attempting to drag her off the bunk, she clasped tightly to the wall handle, wrists shaking, muscles screaming, a deafening roar building in her ears. She fought him with every shred of strength her weak, twelve-year-old body could muster, silently grappling against her captor in a room filled with family and strangers. With her fingers practically melded into the very metal of the railing, nails cutting into her palms, she felt a small jolt of surprise over the hidden well of ironclad fortitude lying within her. However, though the adrenaline coursing through her veins lent her the inner strength she so desperately needed to simply clasp onto the wall post and hang tight, the large, brutish man looming before her held much more power than that. With a few sharp wrenching motions, he attempted to break her grasp against the railing. Her arms screamed, shoulders jolted against their sockets, but still, somehow she held on. Taking yet another step closer, he wrestled to pull her off the bed. With her arms outstretched, body now halfway off the bunk, she fought to regain control, her breathing coming out labored against his clammy hand. However, as fear lanced throughout her body, sweat poured in rivulets down her spine. Her fingers slick with perspiration, the metal bar slowly began to slip from her grasp. The man, sensing her weakness, tightened his hold on her, ready to tear her from the iron rail on the wall.

No. No! her mind cried out desperately, the

air from her lungs continuing to rattle uselessly against the death-stillness of her vocal chords. One of her hands slipped free of the railing. The man before her spread his thin mouth in a cold, victorious smile as he bent his knees, preparing to wrench her from the safety of the cot into a dark, unimaginable future. As the last of her fingers grasped at the metal bar, she could feel his powerful muscles working to lift her from her bed. Alyona's head began to thud, replaying years of her mother's harsh warnings coupled with dreadful, nightmarish possibilities. Suddenly, as the man attempted what would be the final pull, his knee crashed against Lina's thigh, her snores halted for a blissful, hope-filled moment.

"What's going on here?" the older woman grunted, still half in a state of slumber. The man's glacial eyes flicked around uncertainly as he dropped Alyona's body back onto the bed, his sweaty palm still clamped around her mouth. "Oh, uh ... I just wanted to know if this is car number two or car number three," he sputtered anxiously, clearly unnerved by the unexpected interruption. "It's the third one," she muttered before rolling onto the other side of her bunk. The man stood there for a long minute, his eyes wide and alert. However, as his gaze continued to flick down towards where Lina lay, still half-asleep, a dark cloud passed over his face.

As the train began to roll to an unsteady stop, brakes squealing harshly against the metal tracks, the man gave Alyona one last lingering look, pale eyes sweeping hungrily across her body, before removing his hand from her mouth, grabbing a large black bag off the floor, and sprinting across to the connecting car.

Chest heaving, fingers shaking against the metal railing, Alyona lay there, unable to move or make a sound, as time dragged forward and the bright orange rays of the sun peaked through the open window below her bunk.

He had timed it just right, she concluded as she stared up at the metal rungs on the ceiling, still in shock. *He would have left on that train stop with me in that bag.* She shuddered as her mind

reverberated with thoughts of what might have been. As an immense fear continued to claw itself into the very core of her inner being, Alyona was unable to find her voice for three days after that. Her throat ravaged with the cacophony of silent screams that still echoed within her, she was only able to write to her family, so severe was her feeling of terror. Every night on the train after that, she was unable to sleep, her hands forever glued to the metal of the rails.

Alexa Rudoy is a student at Crafton Hills College and is a first generation Russian American. She is transferring to the University of California. "Eyes, Large and Pale Blue" is based on one of the terrifying experiences her mother went through, while living under Soviet Russia.

Penny Purse

Pamela Donahue

The whole world in front of their windshield turned into bright light. This had to be the place she'd heard about in the traffic report a while back. The clouds had mumbled and shuffled around until a tiny lance of early morning sun pierced through thick mist and haze, illuminating every drop of moisture in the sky. All the cars on the road were caught in the assault and, as all the drivers went blind, the cars crashed into each other and kept crashing, on and on, until there was a four-mile pileup. Her husband, David, slowed down from his brisk speed to a crawl-stop-crawl with all the other traffic. Some ambulances and firetrucks had already arrived, with more on the way.

As David slowly navigated his way around the first flare, she looked into the back seat. Penny, her eight-year-old daughter, was pressing up against the door with her mouth open, looking out the window. "Maaaaan. What happened?"

"There's been a lot of accidents out there, honey."
"How come?"

"People got sunblinded. See how bright it is outside? Sometimes when the sun comes through the clouds, that happens, and they couldn't see."

"How come they didn't just stop?"

"I guess they were going too fast. Sometimes things happen really fast, before you have a chance to stop."

Penny just stared at the sight of mangled cars, one after the next, the corners of her mouth turned down, her big eyes starting to blink. "You wanna come up here with us?" Penny shot a quick glance at David, and then looked out the window again.

"No."

She looked at Penny and sighed. She just couldn't figure out what was wrong with her. Penny had become so distant and surly toward David the last few months. They'd all been with him about a year, and all three of her older daughters seemed to get along with him okay – although, sometimes, not as well. She knew it might take time for them

to learn to really love him as a father. Even Penny liked him at first – liked him a lot – but that only lasted about six months. *Maybe she's got a problem with him because I give him more of my attention now.* That was probably it. It just started so suddenly – ever since that one camping trip to the Sierras, but she could never figure out why that should change anything. It was shortly after that when Penny started having nightmares. She would run into Penny's room and find her curled into a tight little knot with the blankets pulled up over her head. When she pressed her to tell her what the bad dreams were about, Penny always said she couldn't remember. She just couldn't figure it out. They'd had such a good time camping, and she was just beginning to relax, and hope that they really could be a happy family. Her neighbors had even commented on how happy everyone looked, and that she'd done a good job holding everyone together. Penny's new problem with David wasn't the only thing that bothered her, though. The muscles between her eyebrows tightened.

Her other daughters had stuck Penny with a new nickname. "Penny Purse" they called her, because she could never go anywhere without Penny begging to come along, sometimes to the point of tears. It seemed like she had developed some weird phobia of being left at home. The older girls would taunt her, saying, "Penny Purse! Penny Purse! God, Penny, just leave mom alone. Why do you have to be permanently attached all the time?" Once, when she had insisted on leaving Penny at home, she came home to Penny sitting on the second stair step, staring at the door, her face red from crying. "Penny Purse" hadn't moved from that spot since she'd left. She had no idea what was wrong with her, but she felt wretched. She always felt wretched. Only a year ago, she'd put all four of her daughters through the separation with their dad. He'd snuck away like such a coward, saying he was going to visit his brother for a couple weeks,

and that was that. Honestly, he behaved like a whipped dog. She had to explain everything to the girls because he didn't have the nerve to say a proper goodbye. Her eyebrows clenched together again, and there was that tight, stinging feeling in her chest as she remembered how he'd left after finding out about David. She knew the girls had lost their dad because of her. Wretchedness upon wretchedness. She never left without Penny again.

As they snailed through the single lane least obstructed by the wreckage, the clouds slowly tumbled back to cover most of the sun. She looked again through her window. Her eyes caught patches of blood on the road. A man was sitting nearby on the asphalt, a paramedic talking to him while he wrapped his head with a bandage. His face and neck were streaked with blood, and one arm hung slack from his shoulder, his hand and wrist resting on the road. He was looking at nothing, eyes half-closed, silent. Penny didn't need to be seeing this. "Hey, honey, you want some cookies?"

"Yeah." Penny reached into the bag she'd opened for her and took out a big handful of pink and white animal cookies. She noticed that Penny had developed a bad sweet tooth and was gaining a few pounds, but thought, *She'll grow out of it. If eating a few sweets makes her feel better, it's okay. She'll be okay.* As a mother of four young daughters, aged eight to fifteen, she knew how quickly things could shift. Weight, fashion, friends, phrases, and temperaments could all change very quickly. And they were moody. Fine one minute and all pitched up about something the next. If letting her baby have some cookies now and then helped her, it was worth it. *Penny'll grow out of it.* Her weight would shift. It was the least she could do, especially after everything she had put her through. She was so grateful that, throughout everything, David had been there! He'd known from the beginning that she had children, but he loved her and them so much that he opened his arms, and his home, wide. She moved her family in with him within three weeks of her husband leaving. *It's not every man who would take us all in like that.*

David had been like a savior to her. He was a tall, handsome man, and he owned a small

grocery store in town. She remembered how she'd catch him looking at her when she went in with the girls. She'd smile back and look away quickly, only to look back and see him still watching her. It wasn't a cordial, friendly-neighborhood-grocer kind of gaze. It was the very direct look a man gives a woman when he is interested in her. She thought sometimes about how bold he was, her being a married woman, but she still found it exciting. After a while, she made up excuses to go to the store. She'd do things on purpose, like forget to buy coffee so that she'd have to make another trip back to the store later. It had been a long time since a man had looked at her like that. It had been a long time since a man had paid her any kind of attention at all. After having four children, she had just gotten used to it ... until she met him.

Penny had taken her place back at the window, munching her cookies. They were now passing through the middle of the pileup. A car door was hanging off its frame, barely attached by its last twisted hinge. It was painted on the inside with a big splash of coffee. In another car, a small brown and white dog was on its hind legs in the driver's seat, barking at something in the back. They could hear it through the hole in the spider-webbed window. Suitcases and duffle bags had opened and spilled onto the pavement, and she saw the continued litter of clothes and other items. There had been a stream of it from the beginning. A beige bra. Some panties. A broken baby shampoo bottle, its amber-colored liquid pooling under the cap. One dress shoe on its side, a man's, dark brown. A navy blue nightie. It was awful. She wondered what it must be like, people driving past, everybody gawking at your private things, your misfortune, your miscalculation, your loss, and all your pain and injury, out in the street for everyone to see. She looked down and blinked. It felt like the people driving past had crossed some kind of line from being mere looky-loos. To her, it felt like they were all committing a violation.

As they once again came to a long stop in the traffic, she heard Penny gasp, and then she heard the back door open. She whipped around to look into the back seat to see what Penny was

doing, but Penny had gotten out of the car. She was running toward one of the ambulances.

“Penny! Pennyyyy! What is she– ? Pull over!” she barked at David. He started to protest – there was no room for him to pull over – but she didn’t stay to listen. She got out of the car and bolted after her daughter. “Pennyyy! Stop! What are you doing?”

Penny ran toward the back of an ambulance. A firefighter sat there, cradling a young girl in his arms. The firefighter was an older man and, as he held her, he gently caressed her arm, his other arm hooked under her legs. Penny stopped in front of them, helpless and furious. She put her fists up to her face and started to cry.

She caught up to Penny and grabbed her by the arm, turning her around. “What are you doing?! What is the matter with you?” Penny threw herself against her and sobbed.

“Mom! Make him stop!”

“Make – who? Him?” She motioned toward the firefighter.

“Uh-huh. Make him stop!”

“Stop what? Honey, he’s not hurting that little girl. He’s helping her.”

“But he’s doing that to her!”

“Doing *what*? What is he doing?”

Penny pulled her down by her shoulder so she could tell her something in secret. “He’s doing that to her, with his hands!” she said in a loud whisper. By this time, David had found a place to jerk the car into park and jump out to see what was going on. He came running toward them. Penny curled herself into her mother’s side as she saw David approaching. “He shouldn’t be doing that, Mom, help her!” As David got closer, Penny circled around behind her.

“Penny, I – ” Her daughter was hiding behind her, crying. She felt light-headed. David was getting closer.

“Penny, come on,” he said. “Get back in the car!”

“I don’t want to!”

The scene around her was spinning now, and her legs lost their strength. Her stomach was a sick cramp. She collapsed onto the road. Penny knelt down and put her arms around her.

“Mom,” she said, “... make him stop.”

Corruption of a Soul

Alyssa Gonzalez

I sat curled in the corner of the room shivering. I was freezing, my fingertips numb from the cold. Besides my unstable breathing filling the silence of the room, there was no sound. The quiet was deafening, providing no comfort at all to my growing anxiety.

How long had those people left me locked in this room? Who were they and why were they doing this to me? There was no sun, no light to let me know when the day had begun and no moon to tell me when it was night. I could never see anything but the ever present darkness and only the hunger from my stomach let me know that a certain amount of time had to have passed.

What could I even do to escape my confinement? The door was locked, I had checked many times. Screaming and crying did nothing, my sore throat was a testament to that. My senses as well had been thrown off ever since I had been forced into this room. I strained my eyes, attempting to try and see something through the darkness, but just like many times before, all I could see was the same blackness that had greeted me. My ears heard nothing, I could see nothing, and even now my ability to feel was numbing ever so slowly, the cold almost replacing my normal body temperature.

I curled into myself, my arms tightening their embrace around me as if the more I squeezed, the warmer I would become. I imagined that I was at home, wrapped in the comfort of its walls and warmed by the company of my family.

What were they thinking now? They had to be worried out of their minds. No doubt, they would go to the police, ask for help. Mama would be on the verge of hysteria, and Papa would be heartbroken. Did my parents think I was dead? Maybe they weren't looking for me at all because they thought I was dead. What if no one was looking for me?

"Mama...Papa..." My eyes watered, my bottom lip trembling. I closed my eyes, begging

for sleep when a large slam echoed the room. The sudden noise made me release a choked scream, and I was blinded when I was struck by sudden light.

My eyes burned as I felt hands grab my arms and I was forcefully lifted from the floor. I continued my wailing, and my throat ached from the lack of use. My legs gave out, but they continued walking, dragging me out of the room. My vision cleared slightly, adjusting to the light, so I could take in my surroundings. The walls were pale white, and they were leading me down a barren hallway, though I had no idea where I was. Many doors lined the hall, some opened, some closed. I heard banging and whirring machine-like noises. Mumbled incoherent words fell from my lips as I felt myself being consumed by fear and my long, knotted hair fanned across my face as they continued to drag me down the hall.

They turned into an open room throwing me on the ground, and I lay like a rag doll for a few moments before my head was pulled back. My hair was combed harshly and a brush occasionally raked across my face. I attempted to turn around and look at whoever was behind me, but whenever I turned my head even slightly it was jerked roughly back into position. Then the grooming stopped, and I gasped trying to steady my breathing as I heard snipping begin. The pulling on my hair stopped as I felt the cold air touch the back of my neck. I tentatively lifted a shaking hand to the back of my head, feeling up my neck to touch the ends of my hair, which were now choppy and short.

Before I could process the turn in events, a woman yanked me to my feet and lead me to another room. I felt tile beneath my feet, and I saw dirty toilet stalls and open showers.

The woman had left me to stand shivering by the doorway as she fumbled through cabinets. I looked behind my shoulder and startled as I noticed a man standing a few feet behind me. He was tall and menacing; glaring at me so intensely that his gaze seemed to singe my skin. As I stared

at him he crept a few steps closer to me, sneering down at me. My stomach churned and I skittered backwards, quickly looking away. At that moment the woman returned, her face devoid of any emotion, and barked, "Take off your clothes!"

I stared at her dumbly, not completely comprehending.

"Did you not hear me?" The woman's voice echoed in the bathroom and I suddenly felt a great need to return to the dark room.

I muttered a pitiful sound, glancing back at the scary man behind me. I couldn't get undressed with him staring at me. I stood there unwilling to obey until the woman grabbed the shirt I was wearing and began forcefully pulling it off. I struggled until she slapped her hand across my face. Disoriented, I went limp and allowed her to continue. I was then thrown into an open shower that pelted me harshly with ice cold water and sat on the floor as the woman scrubbed my skin raw. I wished for the shower to be quick and prayed that I could return home soon. I didn't like these people. I wanted to go home.

After an eternity, the woman turned off the shower and dressed me. I could barely even resist, and couldn't even move a muscle. Two men towered above me and, pulling me to my feet, lead me out of the bathroom and back down the hall. They opened another door and I could see nothing inside the room, it was completely dark.

I screamed in agony, pulling against their hold on me, "No! No! I don't want to go back in there! I want to go home! I want to go home!" I pulled with all the strength I had left but the men simply pushed me into the room, shutting the door quickly. I got off the floor, blindly feeling the door, hands searching for the door knob. I felt nothing but solid wall, my hands failing to grasp any door knob at all. I pounded my hands against the door, dissolving into sobs again as I slid down onto the floor.

It was quiet again in the dark room, only my sobs filling the silence as the cold continued to take hold of my body.

* * *

The next time the door opened, a brown haired woman with glasses stood there. She

frowned at me, watching with contempt at my pitiful attempt to struggle as the men yanked me from the room again. The men forced me into a chair, strapping my arms, head, torso, and legs down. The brown haired woman appeared by my side, but she didn't pay me any attention. She proceeded to attach patches on my arms, head, stomach, and legs that were connected to a machine. Her nose was pointed, cheek bones protruding, nails painted, and her brown hair was pinned into a slick, perfect bun. She was perfectly assembled unlike everyone else I had encountered so far.

"Subject 115, first test." She spoke out loud into a recording device, wrote on a clipboard, and organized a set of tools laid out next to where I was laying strapped to the chair. I pulled against the restraints, wincing at the pain.

The woman stopped writing and smiled at me, causing a chill to run down my spine. "Hello, my name is Doctor Petrikov and today I will be performing a couple of tests on you. How well they go depends completely on your cooperation, do you understand?"

I did not nod my head, or give any sort of confirmation. My eyes wildly raced across the room, but I couldn't see much. The strap across my neck kept me from lifting my head. "I-I want to go home!" I replied.

The doctor's eyes narrowed and her smile faltered, "Oh no darling. That is not how this works. You don't ask the questions. I do. Understand?" Weakly I nodded my head and she burst into a grin. "Wonderful! Now, for the first test I'll ask you a question, and you must give me the correct answer. If you give me the wrong answer, I will give you a small punishment until you get it right. Are you ready?"

I whimpered, shutting my eyes tightly.

Doctor Petrikov tapped her nails against the clipboard, "Alright, let's begin with a simple question... do you know where you are?"

I stared at the ceiling, but managed to shake my head side to side.

"Excellent! See, that wasn't very hard now, was it?" Doctor Petrikov scribbled on her clipboard before smiling at me.

"Now how about a harder question...who am I?" She gazed unwaveringly at me.

"Doctor...Peh...truh...cov..." I struggled to pronounce the doctor's name with my sore vocal cords, but Petrikov merely nodded.

"Very good. Now... what is your name?" She tapped her nails against the clipboard again, the tapping making my heart race.

"A-al...ma." I swallowed, my throat beyond parched.

Petrikov sighed and gave me a disappointed look, "I'm sorry. You answered that question wrong." The doctor set her clip board down and all of a sudden I felt immense pain. I screamed in agony, the straps keeping me on the chair against my will. As soon as it started, it ended, and Doctor Petrikov asked again, "How about we try again, hmm? What is your name?"

My body trembled, "M-my name is A-Alma." What correct answer was the doctor looking for? Alma was my name! Perhaps there had been a mistake and they thought that I was someone else?

The pain came back full force, and my screams filled the room completely. I sobbed, why was this happening? What had I done?

"We'll keep doing this until you answer correctly," Doctor Petrikov's glasses seemed to glint and I knew that she was speaking the truth. But so was I! This continued on for many times, so many that I lost track. My body tingled and I wanted to return to the dark room.

"I'm going ask you again. What. Is. Your. Name?" I hesitated. I was tired of being shocked and tired of being in pain. I wanted this to stop.

Tears blurred my vision while I gave a small, "I-I don't know. I don't know..." I braced myself for the pain but it never came. Instead when I opened my eyes, I saw the doctor smiling at me. "Finally, you answered correctly!"

I didn't remember anything after that except waking up to darkness, my body aching and my eyes crusted from all of the tears. They had wanted me to say that I didn't know my name. The doctor hadn't shocked me, so she must have thought that the answer was correct. But she was wrong, my name was Alma, right?

* * *

The first test continued for what seemed like weeks...maybe months? It could have been a few days for all I knew. My concept of time had not improved. But each time they brought me outside the dark room the routine was the same. I would be strapped to the chair and Doctor Petrikov would ask me the same questions as the first day, adding more questions the more successful I performed.

I didn't know where I was. She was Doctor Petrikov. I didn't know my name...I didn't have a name. Once I memorized all those answers, the doctor asked me new questions.

Do you have a family? The answer was no. Is this your home? Yes.

This routine continued for what felt like forever and when I had begun to get used to the schedule Doctor Petrikov announced that it was time to move on to the next test. By the end of the first test, I discovered I couldn't remember what my home looked like. Picking at my memories led to nothing, almost as if they never existed in the first place.

* * *

We were in the same room where they had cut my hair. I recognized the cabinets and shower stalls, but I just now noticed a huge array of mirrors lining one wall of the room. I could see everything in the mirror, even myself. But I didn't look like myself, I was discolored and unrecognizable. If anyone came to find me now they wouldn't know who I was.

The second test required me to stare at a picture of myself as I knelt in front of a tub of water filled with ice, my hands tied behind my back. The cold still permeated by body when I returned to my dark room, so I reveled in whatever sort of warmth I could have. The tub of ice cold water in front of me was uninviting and I hated the act of even being near it.

Doctor Petrikov held the photo, while a man stood behind me one hand on my shoulder, the other on the back of my head.

"Now, this test also requires that you answer a question, but this time you just have to tell me what you see." Petrikov waved the picture in front of my face, "Can you tell me who this is?"

This had to be the same as the last experiment. It was a picture of me, before they had cut my hair and starved me and tortured me. But was that the correct answer?

I opened my mouth to speak but no words came out.

“What was that?” The doctor raised an eyebrow.

“M-me...” Petrikov frowned and my heart dropped. She motioned towards the tub and I felt the hand on my head tighten as it pushed me into the ice water. The cold water burned my face and filled my lungs as I struggled to breathe. My head was pulled out of the tub and I choked, coughing up some water.

“Do you see the girl in this picture? She’s beautiful and has long brown hair. Tell me, do you look like her?” I continued to cough, gasping for air but my head was pushed back into the tub and water almost seemed to replace the air inside my lungs. I was pulled back out of the tub chucking up water.

The man jerked my head to the side so I was looking at the wall of mirrors and Doctor Petrikov yelled again, “Do you look like the girl in this picture?” I stared at my reflection. My hair was cut carelessly and it was greasy from the lack of showering. Bruises were scattered across my neck and shoulders, one even on the side of my face. Bags were underneath my eyes, and they were sunken in, I practically looked dead.

“Do you look like her?”

“No.”

Petrikov nodded, “That’s right... no you don’t. So tell me, who is this?”

I swallowed, “Not me...”

I was allowed to return to my dark room after that, food and water thrown in along with me. It took me a while to find the food in the darkness but I had gotten better at feeling around the cool floor. I ate the meal greedily while clinging to the few memories of my family I had left. I struggled to picture how they looked but my memories had become my enemy during my time here. They had begun to abandon me like any hope I had of ever escaping. I was forgetting.

I never got to finish the meal, throwing it up moments after I had begun to eat it.

* * *

The ice water test lasted shorter than the shock test which I was grateful for, but that also meant it was time for something new. I was placed in a room that looked like a laboratory and I sat in a chair in front of a table and my hands were not tied down. Being free outside of my dark room seemed wrong and I kept still in order to avoid any possibility of punishment. There were metal tools in front of me: knives, a scalpel, and other sharp things. Maybe they were finally going to kill me.

I heard someone fumble with the door knob and Doctor Petrikov walked into the room. She wore a white lab coat, and her hair was pulled up into the same pristine bun. She walked towards me, the click clacking of her heels causing me to flinch.

“Subject 115, a good day for an experiment is it not?” She wasn’t expecting an answer, which was good since I wasn’t able to give one. She wrote down god-knows-what on her clipboard while I squirmed in my seat and tried to refrain from moving in any extreme way that might get me in trouble.

“What a day for celebration! This is your last test!”

“L-last...?” No more tests? What did that mean?

“Yes, the last test. After this, you will be ready to fulfill your purpose.”

Questions were frozen on my tongue but before I could attempt to voice them, a boy entered the room holding a small box. He gave the box to Petrikov and she opened it, pulling out a small mouse. Placing the mouse in front of me on the table, she clapped her hands.

“Alright, the last test is the simplest one of all. Using anything on that table, you must kill this mouse.”

I stared at her horrified, taking a fearful glance at the rodent. It squirmed trying to escape but it couldn’t seem to lift itself up onto its feet. I felt a strange kinship with it.

I shook my head furiously, “N-no!” I mumbled, shaking in the seat.

“I am sorry, but the test allows no other option. If you refuse to participate in the experiment, I’ll have no choice but to punish you.” Petrikov’s eyes held no kindness and at that moment, it was like I saw a glint of joy reflected in them.

I stared at the mouse, still struggling to escape. Did it know it was in danger? Would it still be struggling if it knew?

I shook my head again moaning, "No, no..."

Petrikov sighed, "All these tests would go much faster if you complied right from the beginning...Carmichael, if you please?"

Through my tears I watched as Carmichael picked up a hammer from the table and brought it down on the mouse, its blood and bits scattering the table.

I wailed, closing my eyes and holding my head in my hands.

I wasn't allowed much time to cry as Carmichael seized some restraints and tied down my wrists and ankles. I sat there forever awaiting my punishment, but it wasn't until my head started to sway and my eyes began to droop, that Carmichael began striking me until I was wide awake again. They kept me from sleeping, putting me on the brink of exhaustion and paranoia, until Petrikov finally returned.

"Now," Petrikov set down another mouse on the table in front of me. "We will try this again. Now, if you refuse to participate, it won't matter. Carmichael will kill the mouse for you. Your actions won't save the mouse, but they will decide if you get to sleep today. If you participate, you will be given a meal, and taken immediately to your room to rest for your great effort. If you refuse, you will not be allowed to rest until our next test session tomorrow."

She held her hands out, gesturing towards the table, "The choice is yours."

I was tired, wanting nothing more than to return to my dark room and sleep. My stomach grumbled, urging me on. The mouse squirmed in front of me, almost begging for mercy. I felt like I was on the edge, and I wasn't sure if I could take another punishment. There was no hope for the mouse, but was there hope for me?

The mouse...was just a mouse. Perhaps I could make it quick, painless, not as drastic as Carmichael's method. I reached over, grabbing the mouse and cradling it in my hands. I stroked its head and it stopped twitching, nestling into my

hand. Petrikov and Carmichael watched me closely, but I ignored them, studying the tools in front of me. Maybe just a stab? Would that be quick?

I set the mouse, now calm, on the table. Stroking him lightly with my left hand, I searched for the least threatening looking tool. Finally settling on a sharp knife I grasped it firmly, my hand trembling slightly. It was just a mouse, people killed them all the time with mousetraps. How was this any different?

I lifted the knife and brought it down, stabbing the mouse through its back. Blood seeped out and stained my fingers. I scooted back immediately, staring at the red liquid on my hand.

Laughter rang as Doctor Petrikov smiled warmly, "Excellent! You have most certainly earned a good rest."

I was taken to the bathroom and allowed to shower, but no matter how much I scrubbed, the blood still seemed to be there on my hands. Even as I sat in my dark room I scratched at my hands, trying to remove the blood that was no longer there.

The last experiment felt like it lasted longer than the other two put together. I thought it had ended with the mouse, but I was terribly wrong. The experiment was repeated with a guinea pig. I had broken down again and was subsequently punished but was finally able to complete the experiment. It wasn't until I had to kill a cat that I felt myself becoming numb to everything. I was so focused on trying to keep the cat still and fighting against its claws that I didn't even hesitate to strike is many times with a rock. I hadn't noticed what I had done until Doctor Petrikov had congratulated me.

Lying now on the floor of my room, I contemplated what was to come next. Whatever Dr. Petrikov asked of me, disobeying orders was not an option and failing would most likely lead to punishment. Any hope of leaving seemed lost, but death was no longer an acceptable outcome for me. I had survived for this long, what was the point in giving up now?

* * *

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew I had been outside before. But the outside was now a foreign concept to me, and I grew tenser the longer I was outside my room. My growing

discomfort only encouraged me to complete my task faster, especially when snow began to fall from the sky above the public park where I currently resided.

Doctor Petrikov had given me a picture of a man and informed me that I was supposed to murder him. His image easily etched into my brain almost as if it belonged there. However, something inside me told me to stop, to think things through a bit, to reflect on why the man seemed familiar but I simply pushed aside these questioning thoughts as I had learned to do during my time with Doctor Petrikov. I continued to walk and scan the crowd until I found him. He was sitting on a bench in a secluded part of the park. There was no one around to see, no one to hear, and no one to bear witness. It was a perfect set up.

I finally spotted him and approached him silently. He didn't notice me as he was too preoccupied in his own thoughts. But when I stepped in front of him, he looked up, giving me a questioning look.

"Can I help you?" he asked. He studied my face, and then his stern features melted as he conveyed complete vulnerability.

He stood up from the bench, hands shaking, "Alma?" His voice cracked as he approached me. He gave a choked sob, "Oh, Alma it is you! My dear, we've been looking for you everywhere!" He embraced me tightly as he continued crying into my shoulder. His embrace

was warm, frighteningly so and I felt myself begin to falter, to hesitate as I had done many times before. His warmth burned, fighting against my cold.

I couldn't fail again.

"It's alright now, I've-" He gasped pulling away, staring at the knife I had stabbed into his abdomen. "A-Alma?" I twisted the knife in response, pulling it out swiftly and watching him crumple to the floor. His hand lifted up towards me as he gargled, attempting to talk but I made no attempt to help him in any way. After a few moments he stilled, his eyes frozen in their open state, blood corrupting the white snow beneath him. I steadied my breathing taking deep breaths. The fear dissolved from my body as I wiped the knife clean in the snow, before placing it back in my belt.

There was still no one in sight, so I steadily walked away from the body distancing myself from the scene and blended in with the reappearing crowd.

I had done it. I killed him. It was over, finally it was over.

Snow was steadily falling to the ground in the park, but it had no effect on me. I could barely feel it. Even through the thin material of my long sleeves, the cold did not penetrate me. I had faced fiercer cold, and this temperature resembled a slight chill to me in comparison. I couldn't feel the cold. I couldn't feel anything... nothing at all.

Alyssa Gonzalez is currently an English major, and a Sophomore at Crafton Hills College. Her overactive imagination and extreme love for storytelling, have inspired her to pursue writing from a young age. Due to the support and encouragement of family and friends, she continues to write in her free time with the goal of someday having a published novel.

Snails for the Frenchman

Ryan Mattern

The way she saw it, Cora, student and older sister by trade, the man living in her closet—to whom she had had an undefined desire to feed, to whom she gave the difficult crosswords torn out from her bright yellow activity book and sometimes sang a made-up song through the door about rain being sucked back up into clouds and the sun coming out eventually—was French. To some, she knew, his accent would make him sound either smart or dumb and as it stood she hadn't made up her mind either way, so she decided it best to treat him especially regular. He never came out of her closet and Cora, though not displeased with the arrangement, still felt a slow rise of hesitation belching in her feet any time she considered entering. What did he look like? Cora could not say for certain, though she imagined him suited and hatted, tall and seated awkwardly, legs driven high up into his chest. Sometimes he had a mustache and other times was clean-shaven. Once, during the thunderstorm that flipped her neighbors' ponderosa upside down, his face was a skull. Cora often wondered if he had a job, but didn't ask. She knew what it meant for a man to not have a job.

In the living room, Cora's younger sister Bee was dancing along to a Eurhythmics music video on their old television set. Her moves were choreographed delightfully, a play of arms and legs seeming at once a large bird trying to flap water from its wings and a routine taken from one of their mother's aerobics dance tapes.

Cora had to sneak food to the Frenchman. The task would be difficult between the hours of 11AM and 1PM, when her father sat at the kitchen table and read through maps he had purchased from men with whom he used to work at the lumberyard. Most often the clutter spread before him rendered Cora invisible. But as the two-hour window reached its close, the man became increasingly restless and in need of something

through which to transfer his disappointment. He had never stricken her, and sometimes this fact brined like guilt in her stomach when she listened to stories of her classmates' home lives. Though sometimes he kicked Jezebel. Once he hucked the phone through the kitchen window, it landing in a cache of rusted lawn tools and chainsaws beneath the carport.

"What are you doing?" her father demanded. But he was not talking to her, rather to himself.

From the kitchen she pilfered bowl and whisk, butter and garlic, pleased with her future creation the way she imagined Da Vinci had felt, not in the painting but in the seeing of Mona Lisa walking through the door for the first time, smoothing out her hair and smiling even though it had just been raining.

In the safety of her bedroom, Cora slid half her small frame under the bed and pulled out the old book of French recipes she had borrowed from the library. Next to it she placed the shoebox she had filled with dirt and snails and wild mushrooms. She spent all morning scouring the woods behind her house looking for the accouterment, the rain-wet trees looming over her like giant, Galapagos iguanas.

She took great care in mashing the butter and garlic together, whisking the hard, yellow block until it softened into paste. She removed the caps from the mushrooms, dusted their folds with a brush meant for doll hair. Taking the shoebox in one hand, she used the other to smear two spoonfuls garlic butter in strokes here and there. As if upturned and carried by a moderate breeze, she let fall a handful of mushroom caps and stems. Anyone looking at the array would have willed into mind the word *rustic*.

She checked the alarm clock on her dresser and could see that it was almost time.

Hurriedly though not slapdashedly, Cora plucked snails from the fir needles on which

they had been resting and placed five onto the cardboard plate. Jezebel started whining at the door. One of the snails pushed its eyes all the way out and then back in.

A minute before 1PM, the house silenced. Bee flicked the TV off and ran to her room. Cora let Jezebel in. She licked Cora's palm and then hopped on the bed, collapsing into the ruffles of the duvet.

At 1PM exactly, Cora closed the closet door to crashing sounds in the kitchen livened from a man-turned-tornado. She sat Indian-style across from the Frenchman.

"Bon appetit," she said, sliding the plate of escargot between them. There would be no good china left, Cora could hear. The noise of the hutch

being toppled over unmistakable. She thought of the thunderstorm and her neighbors' tree still upside down beside the carport. She remembered the lightning and Bee jamming herself between Cora and Jezebel in bed.

She looked up at the Frenchman. His face was not a skull. In fact, she thought he was handsome and not dumb. She placed a snail on her tongue and let its smooth shell massage the roof of her mouth.

"Tres bon."

The Frenchman agreed, doing as Cora. Tres bon.

Ryan Matten holds a BA in Creative Writing from California State University, San Bernardino and an MA in English from The University of California, Davis. He is the recipient of the Felix Valdez Award for Short Fiction. His work has been featured in *Crazyhorse*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and *The Red Wheelbarrow* among others. He currently serves in the US Army.



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