



The Works

The official arts publication of
Sauk Valley Community College

Fall 2013 - Spring 2014 Issue

Eye by Nate Bierdeman

The Works

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Disclaimers

The Works may contain subject matter that is objectionable to some readers.

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Student Art Contest

2013-2014

Theme: “Tempest in a Teapot”



Tempests in Teapots

by Camilo Quintana

Fiction Winner

Meraki's Miracle

by Deanna Pusateri

My name is "it". Where I live is a small empty world surrounded by darkness, only illuminated by a small, endless sun. Day after day I lay in the sunlight straining my ears to hear the sound of life in the distance; to hear the sounds of the strange creatures that make me feel less alone in my tiny world. Very rarely do I hear the sounds coming near to me through the seemingly endless darkness. When they come they bring me food, but not enough. I am always hungry. I don't even know what I eat. It makes me feel sick and weak. I know my body was not meant to eat this strange food, but I know I need to eat something to stay alive. I don't know how many days go by between the times that the giant creature comes to me and allows, for a few brief minutes, a greater sun to show me the strange world outside of mine.

I hardly even remember the concept of days; it has been so long since I have experienced the greatest sun that I first immersed into existence under. My tiny sun in my tiny world is always in the sky; it never changes, nor does it ever sink into the edge of the great sands like I remember the greatest sun doing so long ago.

I bask in my warm lonely world, and suddenly I am startled by the sounds of the biggest creature coming closer and closer. I am excited at the thought of seeing the odd, large world around mine as the he approaches, bringing with him his greater suns light. Yet I can't help to feel again the tremor of fear run through my body that I feel every time I see his figure appear out of the darkness, so large and terrifying. I can't stop myself from making myself look as fearful as possible; desperately attempting to tell the creature not hurt me. Just give me my food and leave me in peace! I will show off to him my great beard of needle sharp thorns

that encompasses my mighty jaw! If he tries to touch me I will stab him with my mighty back swords! I have done so before with the smaller of the great creatures when it almost pulled my tail off, and I swear I would do it again.

But this time I realize he has no food for me. And as he reaches my world my greatest fear is made into reality as he abruptly reaches to grab hold of me. I will not allow the creature to cause me terror and pain without a fight! I make myself as big as I possibly can. I know that I am small, yet I believe I can still keep the monstrous creature at bay if I try hard enough! But alas, I am failing. The monstrous creature is beginning to get furious, as he has in the past, and threatening me with death if I do not surrender peacefully. And soon I realize I cannot win. I am ashamed to admit to myself again that I am merely a weak, pathetic lizard. I am humiliated with myself that I did not win the battle. And because of my defeat I find myself imprisoned inside of a world no bigger than my own body. I am utterly terrified at what my fate will be.

As the monster carries me away from the world I have known for so long all I see is darkness. All I feel is an endless cold. But, through it all, I smell faintly familiar smells that I have not smelled in years; smells of a world outside of my tiny world, even outside the creature's strange world, and somehow, through the cold and fear, these smells bring me peace, and I sleep.

When I awake I sense I am in the possession of a new great creature. At first I am again filled with terror, but there is something different about this one. Her voice is sweet, soothing, and filled with kind, even loving, words. She is warm, I feel safe, and I am asleep again.

My name is "Meraki". My world is endless, it is bright, and it is beautiful. My throne is made of the most luxurious wood and it cradles me as I rest peacefully, warm, watching the great, illuminated world around me. I enjoy my days as I remember doing so long ago; long before I was imprisoned by the monster creature. I am no longer alone. I am never hungry. I have an endless supply of the best foods that have brought me back to my full strength. I have the freedom to roam and climb as far as my legs can carry me. I am not afraid of my new great creatures. I am loved! And I love back. I am no a petty lizard. I can no longer be defeated! I cannot be harmed or scared! I am the great and powerful Dragon, Meraki!

Poetry Winner

Mediocrity

Cold water rushes over my face
Icy droplets cling to painted lashes
Inky drips fall into a sink
Carefully placed hems rubbed red lines
Lurid threads drank from leaking veins,
Leaving pink stains on pale skin

Cellophane identities have been my skin
Personas that no one will face,
Proposing instead ideals of gold veins,
Caring enough only to deliver lashes
I toe where they've drawn lines
I'm flooded, and start to sink

I stare down at the sink
Water runs off of my skin,
Working along and exhaling damp lines
Inwardly I prepare a new face
Feeling the way my heart lashes,
Forcing life through worn out veins

Apperception plateaus, across which frustration veins
I watch my calm façade sink
I bind emotion with crude lashes
Absentmindedly I stroke the broken skin,
Dependent upon what I cannot face
Deepening fear apparent in facial lines

Movement brings memory to red lines,
Stained skin and yet seeping veins
Shifting so light drapes my face
Mason jars stare across the sink
Goosebumps start to cover my skin
Grey water slips off of lashes

Nobody sees results of the lashes
Will breaking, I recite my lines,
When instability is written in skin
Neglecting the burning in my veins
Creating peace while seeing sunlight sink
Craving any sort of familiar face

Rubbing my lashes, the murky water veins
Dripping tainted lines into a sink
Darkening my skin, staining my face

- Charlie Goad

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Visual Art Winner



Endless Daze

by Mercedes Lowery

SVCC Collaborative Writing Project: Fiction

In the spring 2014 semester, the Creative Writing II class sponsored a project intended to create collaboration in the arts at SVCC. The story below was begun by students in Creative Writing II, and then continued anonymously over a two week period by anyone at SVCC who wanted to contribute.

It was a cold, crisp evening. The kind where you can imagine the snow crunching under your feet before even opening the door. Apparently my new Texan neighbors don't feel the same way judging by the complaints they keep lodging about the snow machine I borrowed from the ski resort last month. Maybe it was the way I sweated through two layers of clothes, but I decided that I really don't like the heat waves, no matter how much whoever sings that heat wave song praises it. Someone pounded on the door to my trailer, so I got up. What was THAT? I saw this face surrounded by fur holding either a shovel, racket – or was it a gun?! Oh heck no, it was Santa holding a pogo stick – but the old saint had a very strange look on his face and just before he fell over he said...Ho! Ho! Ho! Hold ON! There isn't supposed to be snow in Texas! What are you thinking? Santa, Santa are you okay? I couldn't stand the heat no more! "Honey call 911, tell them a portly gentleman just went down from heat exhaustion or brain freeze I'm not sure which one." And then the police showed up with snow shovels. An ambulance with a large gurney and a dog catcher, because, to everyone's shock, all the Christmas puppies got out of Santa's bag and terrorized a nearby Shoe Carnival creating mass chaos and causing corruption in our snow filled, heat wave struck, quaint little town in Texas. We follow the ambulance to see if the jolly man is okay. Then a large shoe themed ferris wheel rolls in our way

followed by a trail of puppies. We were taken aback for a moment as she looked up at me. “We’re never going to make it out alive.” So I shouted, “Our magical pet unicorn, Charlie, will save us!” with hope. And all of a sudden the majestic unicorn appeared before our eyes! – with 60 kilos of coke. We suddenly realized why he was so magical, and why his nose was a red fountain. And that is when I woke up. Realizing I had been asleep for hours, I decided to brush my teeth for it was as if they were a glorious field of wild, tall, soggy wheat grass that had been sprinkled with only the finest dung of my tiny old Grandpa Hubert. I rolled over to see Grandpa Hubert’s gleaming face as he was biting through my arm, frozen, as only a three day corpse can be. And that’s how the zombie apocalypse started. Of course, with an apocalypse of some sort happens every other week, this one barely made the local news. They started with a meteor that was believed to contain some sort of unknown radioactive isotope landed in the ocean, and the next day some scientist announced he had discovered a zebrafish that was NOT black with white stripes but *gasp* white with black stripes, and a bit of bluish tinge about the tail. Mass panic ensued as people ran in random directions in every major city, trying to escape the coming death by overthrown preconceived notions about aquatic animal color patterns. This uproar was silenced when the government announced that the unknown radioactive isotope was just plain old uranium, the kind placed in local ICBMs. Nowadays, when some kid said, “Look at that mutant lizard with claws the size of bananas and teeth the size of number 2 pencils eviscerate that defenseless dugong: the one wearing the fez hat and singing Kum-ba-yah.” He wouldn’t even get a second glance. So I was not surprised when page thirteen of today’s newspaper had a vague article about reanimation of recently deceased geriatric patients, with a side note of how you can make one million dollars if you were a burial specialist these days. There was also money to be made in my chosen profession, PEGASUS RODEO RIDER. Oh to bound to and fro on the back of those winged beasts, wearing naught but a sequined unitard and a cowboy hat (matching sequence of course).

The Big One

by John Holland

The murky rain clouds slowly split apart after allowing their insides to spill across the stretching miles of dense corn fields, allowing the ambient sunlight to explore through the cracking clouds. Warmth swept across the breeze, birds chirping as life sprang once again. Trees stretched outwardly, trying to gather the nourishment that was offered between bits of hovering clouds, fresh rain falling in teasingly slow drops to the grass and roots below. The fresh scent of spring had trickled through each waving limb, allowing birds to flutter and spread their wings in a harmonious, joyful nature. The water that centered itself around the natural vegetation rolled in its natural current, coiling around the grassy banks and smoothed rocks as it drained inside of a dark, steel tunnel only to exit on the other side following the same path it had for years to come.

Neighboring dogs shook out their matted coats to warm themselves in the sunlight, sparking rainbows of color to splash across the front of a lawn while happily wagging tails. Horses parted from the barns while cows continued to take apart in the spring's essential time, chewing their grass from a field that had nearly been picked clean. Cats remained aloof inside of their makeshift huts, not yet ready to peer out into the softening wind.

Beyond the last house, near the gentle canal lay a small stream meant to water the cattle, now stormed to life with carp while bullfrogs sat on the edge of the bank chirping a merry tune and some warning of the water serpents that swam near them.

Down the road footsteps pounded lightly on the pavement, brown hair swaying in the breeze that stretched across the field towards the houses to the left. A young boy walked with his cat towards the only section of road that veered off to an area that most people would visit in this area of the country. With his rod and tackle in hand, he talked to the cat at his side, letting it know just how the day was going to be.

“Roam, we are going to bag us a big one today.”

The cat said nothing in response, only followed behind the boy until it could catch up with its owner and stand side by side with him. The boy continued forward staring up at the sky, knowing how well the sun looked as it shown through the dispersing clouds. His attitude the same way since the rain had parted and left the earth smelling clean and welcoming.

“The rain brings out the big ones but now that the rain is gone the bugs are going to come out and be looking for a drink. So we are going to catch them off guard, Roam. We are going to land us a big one and show it to Grandma.” The bank to the boys left was simple and pure. It was an easy target for fishing but it didn’t have the same effect as the other side. Turning his head, John could see that the area he wanted was clear today. No one came here, least not from afar. A few times a week one of the girls down the street would ride their horse around but it hadn’t happened recently.

Taking the right offshoot, John moved down the gravel path passing by a locked gate that prevent motor vehicles from enter the area. The grass to the left was glistening with sparkling sunlight while the shaded forest to the right left a murky atmosphere filled with dread.

Avoiding the tree line, John stepped off to the left, feeling the wet grass soak his white shoes and starting to drip into the sock he wore. Moisture pooled around his toes, causing his eyes to narrow as the feeling annoyed him, pestering him with each squishy step he took.

The rocks where he wanted to be were lined up neatly along the bank, dipping further into the water as they continued towards a large steel tunnel that connected one side of the canal to the other, built there for the road above to tower over it and allow car passage. John lifted his head to stare at the top of the cylinder, knowing that the spot up there was bright and sunny but he could drop his tackle into the water. The rocks were safe and he was able to stand on them more easily. Rock bass were near the rocks anyway.

Roam had continued to follow John, obeying any words he spoke. The cat was intelligent and would even wait for John to get off the school bus, or attempt to follow him on it during the week. John just had to tell the stray to ‘go home’ in order for Roam to leave him wherever he was and would walk all the way home and wait for him.

John was happy to have the cat, despite someone having just dropped it off at his farm house. John never understood why someone would do that to such a nice cat, but he was happy to have a friend.

John took his pole to the rocks, setting his tackle down on the side of himself so hat he could get ready for his big day of fishing. Having just released the hook from one of his pole’s eyes, he readied himself for his bait. Setting his pole down to the side of himself, carelessly just dropping it, he bent to open the tackle box to find the worms he had brought from the night before. Since it had been raining during the night, he scooped out his yard with a flashlight, grabbing up the large nightcrawlers that were out. They were the best bait

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he had around and really cheap on his pocket as well.

A small box was there with some shredded paper and worms wiggling all around. Picking up the box, John reached in and pulled out a large worm. It wiggled between his fingers and smeared a thick slimy substance across his fingers but he was not disturbed by it.

Roam moved around, looking at the water and then moving away into the taller grass, meowing gently as he went about his own business. John reached down and pulled the hook from the grass, lifting the whole pole by the hook and string alone. A small red bobber sitting on his string to help him figure out when the fish bites. The worm's life was stunted as he was hooked.

John shifted and picked up the rest of his pole, the worm dangling there on the hook while John checked the line and the breeze. Starting out slow, John tossed the line into the water before him, just off the edge of the rocks where the rock bass would be.

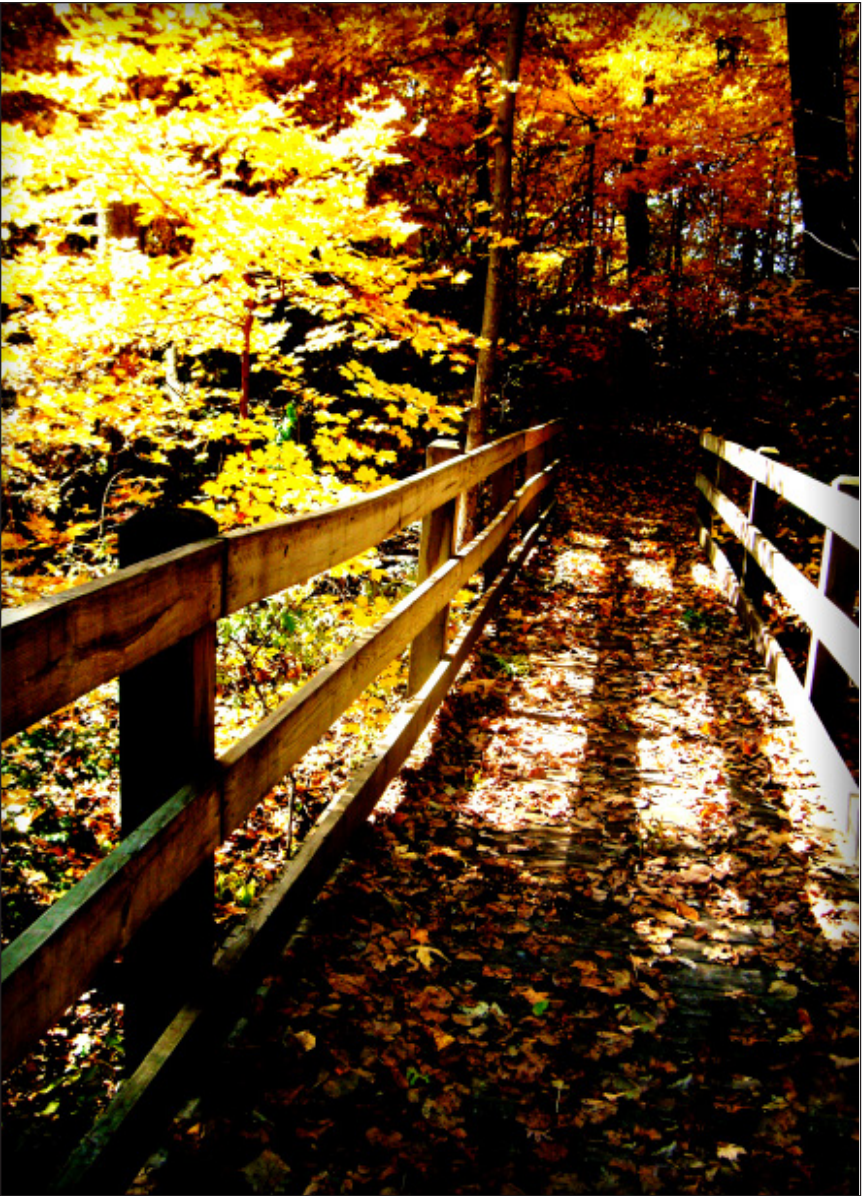
Minutes passed as the wind caressed his skin, sweeping across the blue t-shirt he wore. Trying to focus on his bobber was hard enough but the breeze cause ripples on the water, making it bob up and down. John knew better though, not until it was tugged downward would you pull on the line and try to hook the big one.

Staring intently at the bobber, John tugged at the line as soon as it dipped gently under the water. Then the bobber moved sharply which indicated the fish was on the hook. John pulled and started to crank the reel back towards himself, bringing in the line. As soon as the fish started to splash, John grew with anticipation but it was squandered when he pulled up the small blue gill fish that he was not looking for.

Knowing that the fins on the back of the fish hurt, John pulled out a small pocket knife and cut the line. He never learned to get over this fear while fishing, so he kicked the fish back into the water, the hook still sticking out the side of its mouth.

John looked into his tackle once again, seeking a new hook. Yet what he found was nothing but a few extra bobbers, sinkers and some jelly looking lures that he never understood how to use.

"Roam. Time to leave." John said as he turned and headed back towards the gravel road he traveled down to get here. His day may have started optimistic, but knowing he could never really take a fish off a hook, he found it rather depressing.



A Walk in the Park

by Kristin Helton

Walden Too

Any time I say “anyone”
am I projecting onto everyone?
my mistakes and solutions
contributing confusion

I think I think
therefore I am
certain at least
that I can
know myself
but limitedly
with an awareness of
infinity

I think I think
therefore I can
be quite certain
that I am
just as different as
the next man
by virtue of thought
I know I am

I thought I thought
no way of knowing
if anything else
was really glowing
it's impossible to have
all things considered
but believing that
leaves one cold and bitter

Instead of assuming
one's self alone
ponder rather
if you've really shone
the face you see
beyond the mirror
and couldn't make it
any clearer

It's true what they say
you give what you get
and the brightest lights
tend to reflect
so embrace with waves
of the sun you are
for the moon is too
a morning star

- Benjamin Walter

MEDORA

The translucent moon over the countryside unfurls
As somber streams flow to oceans deep with lover pearls
And so my heartstrings flow down the moonlit road
To the one who lives where the willow weeps
Serene is the maiden there in peaceful sleep
Upon silk spun by spinsters and blankets of golden fleece
Archangels glide down moonbeams to watch over her
Gilded locks interweave downward to the moonlit floor
Through valance of purple lace a gentle wind blows

~

Two candles burning low
For this love that has yet to grown cold
The unplucked strings of the virgin harp
This unsung song still remains in my heart

~

To a new morn unveiled she will arise
In a world where true beauty is unrecognized
Sagacious thou are on bended knee
In the garden where she was born
With all hope and fate of a patron saint
The passing of time shall I await
For Gabriel to come blow his horn

- Val A. Stanley



Untitled

by Nate Bierdeman

Fish Pen

It is not caged;
it's dorsal fin
archs with the
stroke of
passing water
and points
towards the
tapering
tail,
which like
an octopus
sta
ins
the
cle
ar
wa
te
rs
to
di
ve
rt
i
t
s
e
n
i
m
i
e
s
who must stop to decipher the blotted sea.!

- Mark Jordan

Another Excerpt from an Unfinished Novel:

Introducing Lauren Freeman:

by Jacob Pierce

Lauren Freeman lay on her bed listening to The National and could not think of any reasons why she should go to the Melissa's party tonight. Well, that was a lie really. A lie she told herself as she tried to convince herself not to go tonight.

There were so many good reasons she should not go tonight. She could probably write a paper, maybe even a book of reasons why she should not go. There had probably been papers written by scholarly people about the kind of kids that went parties like these. Kids who would wait all week long for a party, counting the minutes until they could go get shit faced with a bunch of their pears. Her parents hated those kinds of kids.

Lauren did not like most of those kids either, she just did not hate them as much as her parents did. Her parents acted as though these kids were committing an act of treasons, like they were worse than murders or pedophiles. Some of them weren't amazing people Lauren thought, a lot of them were assholes to tell you the truth. But not all of them, Ashley wasn't an asshole.

Then again, her parents were not too keen on Ashley either. They never really liked her, though they did not tell grade school Lauren this when her and Ashley first met in the first grade. No, they waited until Lauren was old enough to understand their complaints to tell her this. To tell Lauren about the kind of people Ashley and her family were.

Fuck Lauren thought. She couldn't take one now, they would know she took one and realize something was bugging her. Once they realized something was bugging her they would ask her what was bugging her. Once she started fumbling to find something to say they would realize that she was hiding something. Then she would definitely not be able to go.

She tried once again to calm herself down. She closed her eyes and started to do her breathing technique again. You can do this Lauren, she said to herself silently. You have lied to them before, you have gone to parties before without them knowing. This is no different. Man up bitch.

She started to walk down her stairs again, she was gaining confidence with every step. She finally hit the final step and turned towards the living room. She stayed at the bottom of the step, it was right across from the door making her escape pretty easy. She also figured that the farther away she was from her parents, the better liar should be.

"Yeah." She said barley keeping her voice from trembling. "I'm heading out. Going to see a movie with Ashely and a few people on the team. I think we're hanging out at Sam's house afterward."

"I'll be home a little later tonight." She added.

Her parents were both sitting in their respective chairs in the living room in front of the TV. The TV was right over the fireplace, which was lit. Neither turned their heads to talk to her.

"Ok honey." Said Lauren's mother. "That sounds great. Have fun."

Lauren was about out the door when her father chimed in as if she couldn't hear him. She waited half way between the front step and the door as she listened.

"As long as it's not at Ashley's house, I really don't care where she goes."

He said.

"It's bad enough that Lauren hangs out with her," Her mother agreed. "I would hate to think what would happen if she went over that. That mother has no..."

Lauren silently shut the door behind herself so that they couldn't hear her. She got into her car and headed to Ashley's house to pick her.

The Meanest Person I Know

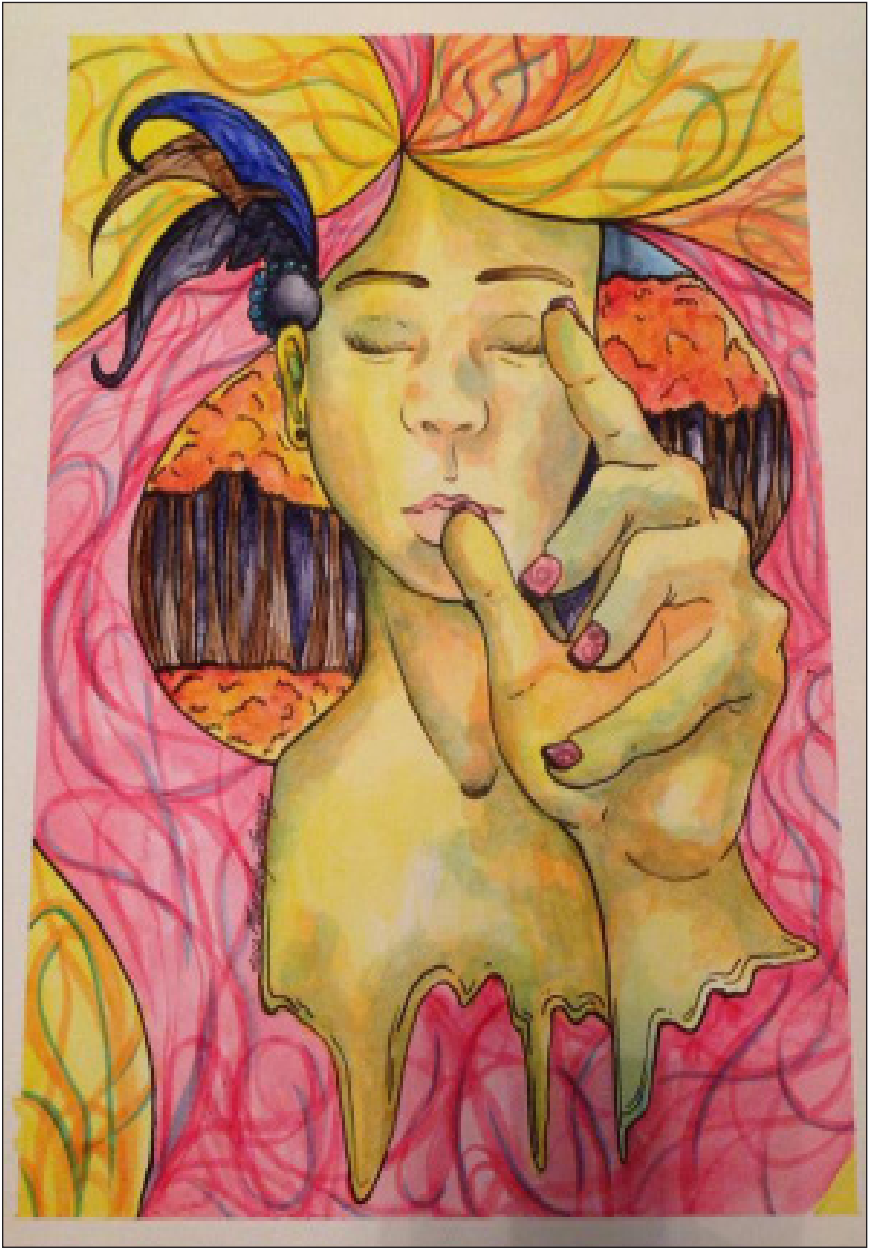
He was akin to a small tree with the way that he stood
He had twigs for fingers
His arms falling like branches on a weeping willow
He walked as though bowing to a harsh wind,
 Bending down with every step
Footfalls light, heading toward a fixed destination
His voice held the turbulence of rapids
 Rushed, forceful, amorphous sentences
 Millions of words with nothing to say
Yet he presents himself bathed in spotlights
 His own stage play, a theatrical show
 A curtain of hair pushed back every time he spoke
It seemed his mindset was that of comic book villain
 A brightly illustrated foe of the world
 A flash of difference – lightning amid fireworks
The acidity of his words could burn your stomach
 A sour taste was left in your mouth
 Perhaps a small burn in your mind
His unfinished conversations numerous as stars.

- Charlie Goad

Juice

There's a new superhero in town
You probably haven't heard of her.
She sucks all the liquids out of anyone she touches
And eructates it,
Leaving a parchment of skin stretched on a frame of exsiccated white bone.
But the newspapers and TV don't report on amber tinted lymphatic fluid squirting
Twenty queasy meters from someone's ear canals.
Or on someone engorged to the proportions of an obese globe,
Drunk on translucent cerebrospinal liquor,
Their eyes dangling on mucopolysaccharide lathered wires and corpulent purple veins,
Half clotted gobs of blood spurting from the hollow sockets,
Before the gummy white orbs are slurped back into gaping pink tissue-padded caverns with a squelching pop.
It would frighten people. Make them uncomfortable.
She likes leather.

- Michael Ehlert



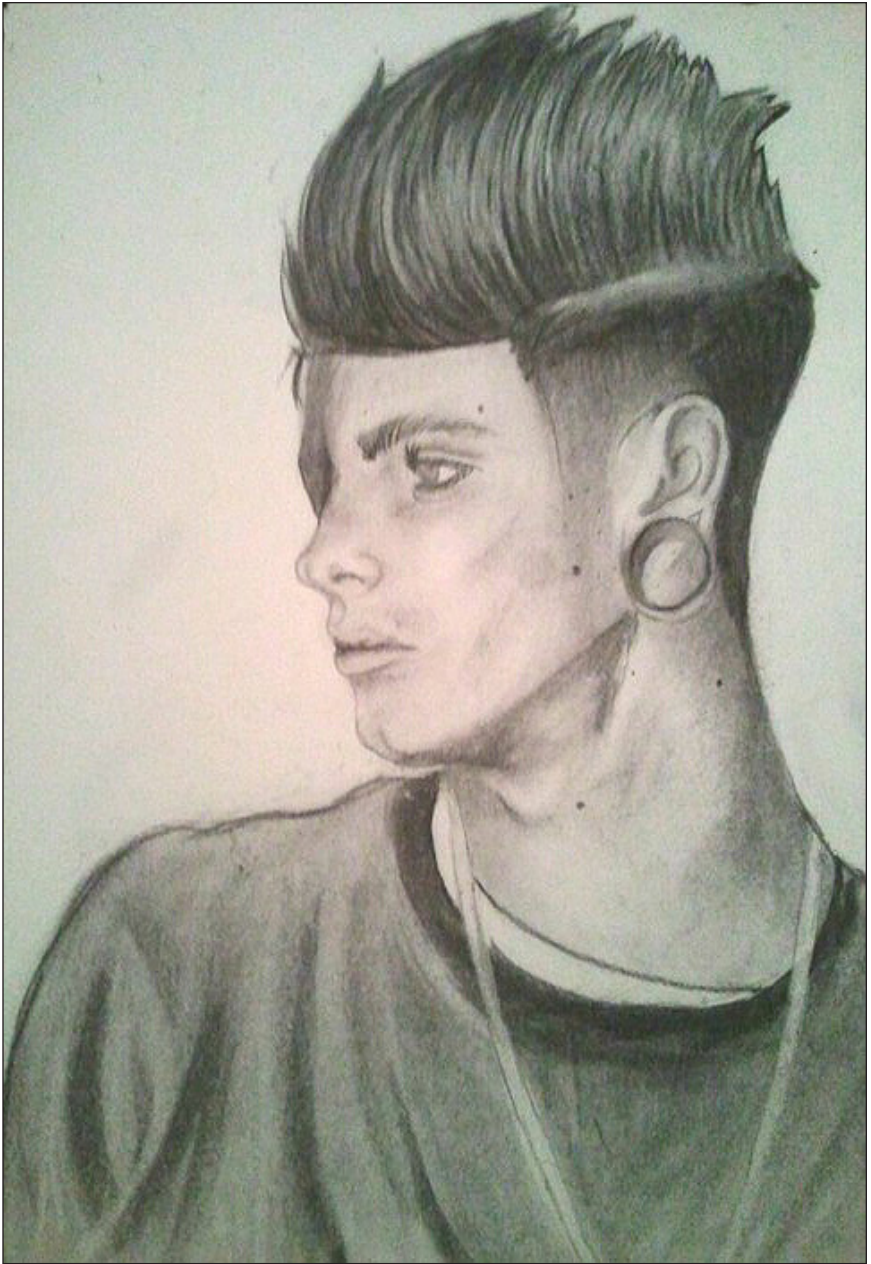
Mother Nature

by Mercedes Lowery

Isolation in its finest degree

Standing like a mighty oak, you will not weaver to your cause.
Passing a casual glance, flirting with the devastation that you will unleash.
You breathe fire and spit venom when you carelessly prove your strength.
Shown by the ruins of the collapsed castle you left.
Your anger hides behind your eyes, yet your face remains a blank canvas.
If you were to smile, it would be a smirk.
One perverted by the joy you feel when winning.
You do not grasp when the person is falling, you watch with amusement.
However I know how to crumble the foundation you have built.
Tears that fall are what cast a spell of silence upon you.
A mighty oak to fall so low, hollowed out by the termites in your bark.
Your armor is false, your strength is lacking where you feel invulnerable.
I am the guidance you refuse to accept with your condemnation.
Against me you are a child attempting calculus.
You're a crumbling foundation, holding up an already condemned house.
One that used to shimmer in the summer, now reeks with horror stories of late
October.
Your glass windows are clouded while dirt holds tight to the interior design.
The attic is filled with remnants long forgotten, discarded chests that held pre-
cious memories.
Rally your strength and atone for the sins you have committed.
Cause when your knees buckle and your head hangs lower than the set sun,
I will still be here, telling you the one thing you don't ever want to hear.
I am your misplaced emotions...
And I know who you are and what you actually feel.

- John Holland



Untitled

by Danny Slusser

Flesh and Bone

Wide awake and almost damned
We paint the fury of the wind
With star spangled bullets
And the piercing primal cry
Of agony.

Stand aside,
Splash your booze and passions
On tattered remnants of rotted billboards
Feed your fatted egos
Engorge your minds.

We scrub our shattered mirrors
With soap and gritty ashes,
Our taste is suffused with poison gasses
While your wasted brains wallow
In ecstasy.

When over the top we go
Tell us, if you know
Will you recognize the hell-blasted faces
And shelled minds you've known,
Or will we be only ghosts
Of flesh and bone.

- Michael Ehlert



Untitled

by Andromeda Jones

Part of Him

by Noel Berkey

Part of him felt hopeful. Part of him felt empty. He was driving to the bar.

He couldn't help but feel overly exposed walking into a bar alone. It was always better to go with a friend. He'd gone out for drinks with an old high-school friend who had recently divorced, and wasn't taking it well. After just a couple rounds his friend had begun staring at the floor, mumbling how he really really hated his ex, how she had deceived him. When he made his way through the crowd to the filthy restroom he got jostled and spilled his vodka tonic and got even angrier.

So tonight he was flying solo. His friend wasn't up to it, had sent him a text saying as much: "Not up to it dude. Just gonna drink alone in me jammies."

Part of him also longed to stay at home in his pajamas instead of heading out. He could sit there all comfy and do nothing in particular, secure in his domestic cocoon.

His daughter had bought him a pajama outfit for Christmas. It was a fuzzy blue one-piece thing she had seen on a TV commercial and found amusing. She couldn't resist buying it for him, making him put it on immediately after he unwrapped it Christmas morning, then snapping a photo.

"So, the people in the commercials say wearing it is a guilty pleasure. Do you feel guilty, Dad?" she had asked. Observing himself wearing the gift in a full-length mirror, he replied, "I feel like an infant." Then, turning to regard himself from a different angle, he added, "I'm not sure if that's good or bad." She laughed and told him he was funny before posting the photo online for her friends to laugh at and discuss.

Now, as he pulled into the parking lot near the bar, he found himself thinking fondly of his daughter's sense of humor, how well she had turned out. She was smart, had good friends, a silly laugh, read novels, and planned to become a teacher. Her vision of herself and the world made him feel like he had

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succeeded. She was a young woman with a life of her own. “We deserve to be happy, Dad,” she had said before leaving back downstate after Christmas.

Inside, there was a band playing too loudly. Abrasive statements were being shouted by a heavily tattooed man hunched in the middle of the stage. A couple big-boned girls with damaged hair and baggy jeans and cheap tennis shoes twisted their hips and shoulders on the dance floor to show their freedom. They held bottles of beer and sipped now and then while twisting and following the movements of the singer, who alternated between squatting on and pacing the stage, all the while belting out angry grunts through a wall of noise generated by two damaged guitars and a toy-size set of drums.

As a seasoned patron, he knew he would have to drink to be part of this scene. He couldn't just stand here and fake interest in the noise. So he ordered a beer. The bartender had served him before, had smiled at him the first few times he'd been in the place, had engaged him in idle chatter when possible, had even appeared to size him up. But she now wore a different look on her face. She definitely wasn't smiling. He wasn't sure if it was because of him, that something about him was no longer worth smiling at, or whether she was menaced by personal demons, her biological clock, whatever mystery it was that possessed women as they aged.

He took a sip and looked around the place. Not much of a crowd really, not yet anyway. A mirror behind the bar offered a reflection of himself regarding himself, wondering to himself what he was doing in this place, at this time of night, with these strangers, when he'd really rather be at home. He would be alone there, of course, and he was alone most every night of every week. Part of him wasn't opposed to sitting at home by himself. But another part prompted him to make the best of being single again, like when he was young and adaptable and waiting for his life to take shape.

How to explain the painful twist of fate that lay waiting for him fifteen years into his marriage, the one leading to his being single again? How to explain his confusion when discovering that the woman he had come to know as his wife, who had raised a daughter with him, would decide to end their marriage to pursue a relationship with an old friend she had been chatting with online? How to explain his mixed feelings months later, as the dust was still settling, when he received a call from a state police officer telling him that his soon-to-be ex-wife had died in a random car accident on an otherwise peaceful afternoon, leaving him with a daughter to raise on his own?

As he sipped his beer, he saw a guy from work across the bar. Steve had taken a big financial hit following his divorce. His ex had maxed out credit cards without telling him, had essentially eviscerated his credit rating, then somehow managed to take his home, a large chunk of his pension, and nearly forty percent of his paycheck for the next decade to help raise four needy kids.

Steve had confided in him at this very bar after too many drinks a couple weekends before that he missed mowing the lawn at the home he lost, sweeping the clipped blades off the sidewalk and driveway, like a proper man in

a proper community following a natural schedule. He missed spending entire days at his home, not going anywhere, just trying to ignore the kids screaming at each other, maybe reading somewhere relatively quiet, imagining growing old there, letting his wife run her errands and pursue her hobbies, whatever they were, while taking lots of naps, just being in his home, in his comfortable neighborhood. Steve had told him, probably because he was a bit too drunk, how he remembered feeling as though he'd been knit up in a dream he'd been told again and again, a common dream, but hadn't believed till it came true for him. Then that dream went away and was replaced by another. In this one he lived alone in an apartment building. A building where the stairwells smelled like cigarette smoke and bacon grease, where you could hear your neighbors' music and arguments, where the ceiling seemed to be right above your head, and in the apartment above someone was always pacing, making the ceiling bow a little, and squeak. When the kids would come to visit every other weekend, they would be scared. They wanted to know who was walking upstairs, why the walking never seemed to stop.

Steve made eye contact from across the bar and started walking over. For someone living in such a place and struggling to stay ahead, he sure smiled a lot.

"We have to stop meeting like this, my smiley friend. It's getting depressing."

"No need to be depressed," Steve replied, flashing his teeth behind a wide grin. "The night is young, and I am not listening to my neighbor's new sound system through my vibrating walls." Then, assessing the room, he added, "We really should find a better place to go. Why do the women in this town not dress like women on TV? I like a well-dressed woman. Not one who looks like she's been scrubbing floors."

Then Steve got a text and started interacting with the screen of his phone for a few minutes. Most others in the bar, those alone or with ignored friends beside them, were also interacting with their phones.

He looked at Steve and sipped his beer and thought of his own struggles to use text messages wisely to communicate with women he was interested in dating. Coming up with the right combination of words to fill the screen wasn't easy. He would sometimes not get responses to texts, making him wonder what he had said wrong, whether he had sent the text at a bad time, or maybe there was something wrong with the woman's phone reception. There was always some anxiety about texting. He would rather call the woman and talk with her in real time, but people hardly seemed to do that anymore. Sometimes he saw an attractive woman by herself and wanted to talk with her, but then she'd pull out her phone and start interacting with it.

One night he approached a woman focused on her phone and mentioned how it used to be more interesting going to bars when people made more eye contact. At first she just ignored him and kept swiping at the screen of her phone. But when she'd realized he wasn't leaving she looked up at him, blankly.

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“What do you want?” she asked.

What he felt like saying was that he wanted a woman who wasn't a blank screen. But he didn't say that. He simply said, “Just small talk.”

She sort of sneered at him, then asked, “Small talk? Really? You want some small talk?” She adjusted her head to look at him from a slightly more condescending perspective. “Is this conversation we're having right here small enough for you?”

He looked back her, a little wounded. “Yeah, it's pretty small,” he said.

So now he found himself watching Steve work his phone, imagined sitting here watching him a couple more hours. More music. More bad dancing. More of that vague feeling that settled over him when he returned home alone. He decided the time was right to make a quick getaway. Just a one-beer night. Hardly worth the effort of going out.

Out the back door band members huddled together in the cold and blew smoke toward glistening stars. Since his beer was nearly empty he placed the glass on an unsteady white plastic table passing for patio furniture. Just a few more steps and he was in the alley leading to the parking lot. He walked briskly because he was cold and wasn't wearing a coat.

Once in his car, he grabbed his coat off the seat, put it on, got in, turned the key, and navigated home. Halfway there he cranked up a song that made him long to do something radical, like just keep driving through the night, the light from the dash illuminating his face. At sunrise he'd get a room in a cheap motel, sleep like a log, then drive some more. He could max out his credit cards buying gas, coffee, and hamburgers. He would head for the biggest mountains he could imagine. In the foothills there'd be a beautiful peace-loving hitchhiker with pale green eyes, and she'd enjoy talking with him and sleeping with him beneath the night sky, her body warm and divine. When they ran out of money, they would make a home in the woods. She'd decorate it with flowers. He'd use the Swiss Army knife in the glove box to kill bears that dared cross paths with them. He saw it all. He almost believed it could happen. But the song ended a block from his house and he found himself pulling into his garage.

He walked in the house, took off his coat, poured a glass of water, then drank it. He took off his shoes, turned on the TV for company, walked up the stairs to his room, took his phone out of his pocket, then realized there was a text he'd missed. It was from his daughter, sent about the time he'd been driving home. “You free? We talk?” was the message she had chosen to send. Instead of calling her, he texted, “Yes. Call me. I'm putting on my pajama outfit.”

The outfit was too comfortable. He went downstairs, sat on the couch, and watched TV while he waited for his daughter to call back and talk about whatever was on her mind at this late hour. The news anchor was sharing new data that supposedly disproved the collapse of our ecosystem. Then there was a brief reference to millions of lives crushed by poverty. Then a reference to lives shattered by rocket launchers. Then the screen cut to a commercial for improving erections. Then a commercial for accepting Jesus into your heart. Then a com-

mercial for an anti-depressant. Then a commercial for an online dating service.

His daughter still hadn't called back. He got his laptop and logged onto the dating service site for a free trial. He entered his zip code and the distance he'd be willing to drive to date. The site wanted more info though, like his interests and income and body type, but he just wanted to see who was available. He hit search and saw a grid of photos. He wanted to read the profiles but the site required that he add more personal data first. Unfortunately, one of the first prompts was for him to create a username. What would he call himself? Would he have to assume a persona? The next prompt asked him to describe the kind of relationship he was looking for. But was he even sure? How could he explain it?

His phone squeaked that he'd received a text. It was from Steve. "Where u @? I'm gonna have to dance by myself now?"

He tried to think of something clever he could text back, something that wouldn't make him appear pathetic. Steve, at least, was making a go of it, and here he was in his pajamas. One time Steve had shown him explicit photos he'd taken with his phone while with a woman he'd met through the same online dating site he was exploring now. The images were blurry, and even then the woman didn't look good, but Steve couldn't stop smiling while scrolling through them.

Before he could text Steve back, his phone rang. He answered and heard his daughter. She sounded like she'd been crying but was trying to hide it. She was talking fast, saying how she was sorry to call so late, that she would call back tomorrow if it was a problem. But he told her to slow down, that he was glad to hear her voice, that he was wearing her Christmas gift. She laughed, but then he was sure he heard her crying. He pieced together through the words she spoke and the way she spoke them that she was upset about some guy she knew, some guy she'd never mentioned before, that they'd had some sort of fight, that she wasn't hurt or anything but just really upset. There was a lot of information for him to process, so he was glad she had decided to call rather than text. He figured she would probably have rather talked to her mom though. Images of the flipped car and awkward funeral quickly entered and then exited his mind, replaced almost immediately by that numb, empty feeling.

After telling him as much as she was willing to share she asked, "Will it get better, Dad? Will it always be this hard?"

He wanted to find the right words, to convince his lovely daughter that all would be well, whether or not she found someone true and kind, someone worthy of her. He wanted to say that everything would be all right. Everything. And he wanted to believe it. So that's what he said.



*Broken Glass, Broken
Hearts*

by Andromeda Jones

Regret

by Danny Slusser

With a slam behind him, Noah stalked down the alleyway that was adjacent to his apartment, pulling a hood over his head. Emmas screams rang in his ears like a never ending clang of a church bell, a sound he's nearly gotten used to over the past year. Methodically he watched one boot-clad foot follow the other, crunching the newly fallen snow beneath them.

Shaking his head, the mohawked boy continued on his walk, his fist jammed tightly into the pockets of his old letterman jacket. He hadn't worn the old thing in years; he didn't want to be like all the other losers that were stuck in this bum-fucked town still talking about the good ol' days. His ol' used to do that way too much when he was little; when he was around that was. He keeps telling himself that he isn't like him, he didn't abandon his kid and baby momma, he didn't hit his girl or his kid. He was a better man. But if he truly was, then why was there a never-ending fight waiting for him when he returned home?

"Where in the hell are you going now?"

His shoulders squared out as the well-known voice caught up with him and instantly he froze.

"Answer me Noah! Going for another mid-night fuck, hmm?"

The man in question turned on his heel and stared at the blond. She strode towards him, her face was beat red but he could still see the beauty that she always had. When she was a step away from him, he could see the small wrinkles around her eyes and the hollowing of her cheeks. Her once golden blond hair now had the resemblance of hay, graying at the roots. She was only twenty-five and already it looked like she had been battling a war. Noah supposed she was.

He cleared his throat, a slight furrowing of his brow to match her crossed arms and glaring hazel eyes.

"I'm just going for a drink." He said very plainly. Once again the same old fight only a different location.

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“Oh yes of course, I forget that Buddies now has a text alert that makes you hop right up and run out the door. Tell me, who is it tonight, hmm? Amber? Maybe Kat or ooh I know how much you like Jade.” Emma spat out the names like they were poison in her mouth. She was seething and Noah could tell how much she just wanted to rip him apart. She was seeing red and Noah had no idea how to stop it. His stomach felt empty and full at the same time, an uneasy dance of bile running up and down his throat. He wrung his hands together; his eyes darting around to find somewhere, anywhere to look besides the girl before him.

He took a slow breath to steady himself. “Its just a drink, Emma. Grab the stick out of your ass and go back inside.”

Instantly the blonds hand jumped forwards, grabbing a fist full of Noah’s collar and yanking him close. “You are a fucking joke,” Her voice was low, a dark husk lacing her voice as she narrowed her eyes at the man in front of her. “You will go back in that house, gather whatever lowly shit that you have in there and make like your dad and leave.”

“Emma I-“

“I’ve had it Noah! I’ve had it, I’ve fucking had it with you, with living in this dump, with supporting our supposed family all while you ‘go get a drink’. Get. Out.” Emma growled, shoving the man backwards using as much force as she could. He fell back into the snow, looking up at the festering blond. He gulped harshly, tears in his eyes. He ruined his family, the one thing that was ever good for him and he fucked it all to hell. Just like his dad before him.

He watched Emma turn around without another word, her crunching feet fading away before the door was slammed. Noah sat there for a moment, the snow slowly soaking into his jeans but he didn’t feel the cold. He didn’t feel anything. And he cried.

Summer

You look like summer.
And just like summer seems in January -
you're too far away to reach.

The waves in your hair scream of reckless teenage behavior
It calls to meet the wind, to blow freely and carelessly -
like those times when the air is hot
and the breeze only slightly cooler

Your skin reminds me of when everyone is happy
It makes me think of late nights next to bonfires -
falling asleep too late to care about anything
waking up to the smell of smoke in your hair and on your sheets

Your eyes look like secrets and sadness.
They're framed by the summer night -
it brushes against your glasses
folds when you close your eyes

- Charlie Goad

More than Time

Time is a thin layer of a bird's nest.

You must fill it with:
The first blade of grass
carried over the clouds,
Heavy eyes at midnight,
A city stoplight,
A family portrait
hanging prominently on a wall,
A lonely chair,
And a thick thesaurus,
A two way mirror,
A stitched up blindfold,
A thorn less rose,
And a ladder rising to the moon.

Only then, will it disperse birds,
Birds that fly ever so high.

- Samantha Shoemaker



The Laughing Gull

by Kristin Helton

The Best Damn Thing

The best damn thing that I ever wrote
was the first two-thirds to a dirty joke
a man, a plan, his hand, a hole
but I just forget where the damn thing goes
If you look superficial I'm a part from this hole
like the lips to the labia
and the kisses we stole
If you say you want a rock
I'll just say I want a roll
I've got a mind like I'm fifteen
and it's never getting old

This year on my birthday think I'm gonna throw a party-
Yeah, I'll supply the liquor and won't invite anybody
'cuz the way I feel when I'm drinking
or I'm getting high alone
I feel at home
I feel at home
I feel at home

The best damn thing that I've ever known
was a private screening of a cosmic joke
In a suspended moment I thought I saw it right
then the curtain fell and they turned on the lights
It's like this dog that I used to know
it would be wrong to say I owned
but for a while we shared a time and place
until the time had come to go our separate ways

This year on my birthday think I'm gonna throw a party-
Yeah, I'll supply the liquor and won't invite anybody
'cuz the way I feel when I'm drinking
or I'm getting high alone
I feel at home
I feel at home
I feel at home

The only things I ever cared to own
were a sentence that I borrowed
and another line I sold
And all that I can say that I ever really hoped
was that they weren't even listening
every time I spoke

- Benjamin Walter



Untitled

by Danny Slusser

An Excerpt from an Unfinished Novel:

A Hard Decision

by Jacob Pierce

Adam Green had been contemplating his death for several hours and still had made little leeway. Should he kill himself or should he try and live through this? It was a hard question for him, a question he felt he should really think about before he made any rash decisions. The question had been burning inside of him for six months now, six long months.

He was currently sitting on his bed inside of his bedroom with his legs in crisscross underneath him. In front of him was his suicide note, a bottle of pills, and a four page note from his sister, Jennifer Green. He had on him a navy blue dress shirt, a black tie, blue jeans, and some dress shoes. Adam was prepared for how ever his night would end.

He had it all planned out, if he did decide to end all at any particular moment. He had thought long and hard about the details of his future suicide, planned everything accordingly. He had even wrote his note up, at least the latest copy of his suicide note. His note had gone through many incarnations, many drafts before it had gotten to its current "Final" state.

Adam considered his note to be his magnum opus. It incorporated everything and anything about his young life and why he would have to end it if he ever did. He had studied various notes while making his; some famous and some more local. He figured out what worked in the notes and what felt cliché in the notes. Adam wanted a note that not only had people remember him, but also have people remember the note itself. It was the closest thing he figured he'd ever get to perfect.

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Adam figured himself lucky in a lot of the planning. His parents were gone most weekends and his sister was off in Los Angeles. If he did do it, the likely hood of them walking in on it was extremely low. He was alone for all intent and purposes and that's the way he wanted it.

The exact method was something he had dwelled upon for quite some time. He figured most people going through suicidal thoughts had planned out how they would do it. Hell, most normal people probably thought about it as well. Hanging sounded too painful for him. What if for some reason the rope broke and he hurt his back or something? How was he going to explain the hole in the ceiling and his back pain once his parents got home? Slitting his wrists was out of the question was well for many of the same reasons. Also, it seemed like a huge mess and he didn't want to burden his parents with his death and having to clean that up.

Realistically, pills had been the only option to his liking. Sleeping pills to be exact. He had begun taking those around six months ago as well and had enough to do it. It seemed painless and left only the mess of his corpse to clean up. Of course he figured he would have to take a lot of them, but they would get the job.

He was giving both sides their fair thought as well, that was why he had his sisters note out in front of him. She had written it a couple of months before she first left for Los Angeles, right when his depression seem to start. It was a long note, but then again she was never one to do something half assessed or even simply at a hundred percent. She was one of the select few people left in the world who could put her all into something if she really cared. If that wasn't enough of a chance for the living side of the argument, he didn't know what was.

Adam looked around his room as if it was going to suddenly give him some insight into his dilemma. As if it had all the answers, it was just waiting to become animate until now. His room was plain as rooms go, there was not much to it. The walls where all blue from when he was a child, and for the most part they bare. The sheets on top of his bed matched the blue of his wall. On opposite ends of his rooms there was two movie posters across from each other. One was of the movie Superbad and the other was of Saving Private Ryan, Adam's favorite movies.

In front of his bed, a couple inches from his door against the wall, was his dresser which had a television set upon it. Beside the right side of his bed, was his lamp and counter that it was on. On the left, a small book shelf that held his small book collection including Ernest Hemmingway's Farewell to Arms, Neil Gaiman's American Gods, Stephen King's The Shining, and his sister's novel When I Grow Up.

When Adam looked around his room he did not see these things, all he saw was a plain room for a plain person. He wondered if anyone could have even guess that this was a room for a teenage boy, oppose to one for a teenage girl. He wondered if anyone could even guess that the room was being occupied by someone. Maybe they would think it was his brother's room and his parents just had

not taken anything down yet.

He wondered if anyone would miss him as he heard the doorbell downstairs ring.

“Ring”

Who the hell could that be he thought? It was a Friday night, everyone should be out living their lives.

“Ring”

“Ring” “Ring” “Ring” “Ring”

Adam knew only person in the entire world who would ring the doorbell that obnoxiously. As it was a life or death matter that they answer the doorbell right now. He just wondered what the hell he could want.

“Ring” “Ring” “Ring” “Ring” “Ring” “Ring”

“I’m coming!” Adam shouted. “God damn.”

He stood up from his bed and grabbed the note his sister had written him. He folded it up and put it in his side jean pocket. He then grabbed his suicide note, folded that, and put it in his other pocket.



Untitled

by Danny Slusser

SANDALWOOD

For every dying ember
Desire burns a flame
Rose petals falling
Empty hand of fate
Gypsy wind blows
Through a rusty gate
Tip the keeper
The hours late
Doves over the horizon
Hope soars
Across this starved land
Then out of sight
Where silence leads
Treasures are found
Desolation angel sanctified
Nothing lost or forlorned
Walking through a valley of thorns
Searching for a desert rose

- Val A. Stanley

Excerpt from "The OtherWhere":

Episode 5 Housewarming

by Michael Jenkins

. . . Normally, I'm not the fastest runner, but you'd be surprised at the motivation provided by a raging hellfire creeping behind you. Actually, you probably wouldn't be all that surprised; "screaming inferno" isn't quite comfortable living conditions for most people. Still, even the heavy pounding of my feet against the floor was nothing compared to the . . . thing . . . chasing after me.

How has it not crashed through the floor yet?

I could hear windows rattling with each step, cabinets coughing up their contents in fear, the floor very loudly voicing its disapproval, and I'm honestly surprised that I was able to avoid wetting myself. Mickey had somehow opened the door to the hallway, and motioned for me to hurry up.

Yeah, like I wasn't in a hurry already!

The hallway was significantly cooler than the hotel room, probably due to the lack of fire. I mean, it was still completely colorless and poorly lit, and with similar unusual decor, but at least it wasn't 1100 degrees. I rolled along the mostly closed door, ducking behind it and trying to force it closed. The damn thing must have weighed a few hundred pounds, because I was having a hell of a time getting it to move at all.

"Would you mind helping me with this?" I shouted out. Mickey was standing across the hall, staring at something.

"This chair looks so sad." He said, giggling a little to himself, amused by the back of a chair standing against the wall.

"Mickey! It's getting closer!"

"Shit, you're right." He sprinted over, ramming shoulder-first into the door.

Even with his help, it took a few seconds to close the foot-wide gap.

An arm sized, slimy red worm poked its head through the door just as it closed. Its mouth blossomed open like a flower made of pain and filled with needles. It let out a bizarrely feline shriek as the door shut on its throat, and it struggled to squeeze its head back through the now closed door.

I had to step away from the door. Not just because the worm was still freaking out, but because the smoke pouring out of the door wasn't exactly agreeing with my hyperventilation.

"Do you think that'll hold it?" He asked.

"I don't . . . know. Did you hear . . . the floor shake . . . as it ran?" I asked, gasping for breath. "It might be able . . . to get through that." I said, backing away from the door.

"You're right." Mickey said, then walked across the hall and braced the old folding chair against the door. "That'll hold him." He said confidently.

"Whatever . . . we better get moving before it gets out," I took a deep breath, and started to walk down the hallway.

"Hang on a sec, Lyra. Does the carpet here look different?" Mickey asked.

"Why are you worried about the carpet? You should be more concerned with not letting it, uh, get you."

"Sorry, it just looks like . . ."

I glanced down at the carpet.

It looks like the part that burst into flames back in the dining room.

A now familiar crackling sound filled the hallway as Mickey tackled me to the floor. I scrambled away from the pain, pulling my legs out of the fire as soon as I could. Mickey rolled over and followed me, and we suddenly found ourselves running away from another wall of flames. We ran as fast as we could manage, following whichever path had the lightest colored carpet. After a while, we found our way to a part of the building that burned lazily, in scattered patches of glowing fire along the walls and carpet.

"This place is a wreck. I mean, even ignoring the fire." Mickey commented, looking around the hallway as he slowed to a carefree saunter.

"Yeah. It's kind of a shithole."

Shithole might not quite say enough. Strange black smears smothered a large part of the otherwise immaculate white walls. A suspicious number of black and white paintings lined the halls, hung crookedly and crying paint down the walls to the floor. There was also a curiously large number of broken down vending machines in the hall, many of them empty, broken, or both. And I'm pretty sure somebody dragged most of a dead body through the hall into one of the closets.

Both of us stopped dead when we heard a low thudding noise. Something very large was pounding down the hall around the corner. The eerie orange light in the nearby flame filled hallway cast a sickening shadow, and it slowly crept from the flames towards us.

It's the kind of thing that you'd laugh at if you saw it on television. But

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trust me when I say that it's not funny if you see something like that chasing you down. A big, slimy looking skull lumbered down the hallway, accompanied by a set of four worms burrowing out the temples and cranial floor like a pair of arms and legs. A fifth worm peeked its head out of the top, searching around, perking up suddenly when it looked in our direction.

That was all I needed. I started sprinting towards the opposite side of the hall instantly, but when I checked to see if Mickey had followed me, he was staring into one of the vending machines.

"What the hell are you doing?! It's coming back!"

"Hey, did you notice that this Coke-a-cola expired in 1956? Also, watch your fucking mouth. You know goddamn well enough not to end a sentence with a preposition, bitch."

I was about to scream at him to get moving, but the skull thing very quickly approached him. As it drew near, he leaped up and struggled to knock over one of the vending machines. The thing grabbed at him, but the machine suddenly toppled over, sending the freak crashing through the floor. The monster, I mean. Not Mickey.

Mickey walked confidently to my side with a smile on his face. He seemed to believe that he had expertly executed some kind of ingenious plan, rather than just blindly stumbled out of a disaster by attempting to make things worse.

"You know you should probably be dead right now, right?"

"Yeah, but I'm not." He grinned at me, and laughed a little. "Come on, let's get the fuck out of here."

I wanted to start running again, but Mickey was absolutely sure that the skull thing was trapped in the basement. The sight of it grabbing at the floor and struggling to pull itself up shut him up pretty quickly, and we started rushing through the halls, searching for an exit. Unfortunately, the entire damn building seemed to be nothing but windowless hallways.

After nearly half an hour of terrified scrambling around and praying that we wouldn't run into skull thing again, I was beginning to think that we were going to die in that wretched place. Of course, we eventually found ourselves trapped in a corner between two flame-drenched passages, and we had to seek some kind of relative safety on the other side of a pair of glass doors.

The good thing about the wall facing the hallway being glass was that we could tell that it was empty before we went inside. Unfortunately, it meant that the skull thing could see us if we didn't find some place to hide. It had already proven itself to not care about fire at all, so the hellferno likely wouldn't deter it much.

A few rows of tables had been arranged neatly in the center of the floor, handily covered by tablecloths that just touched the floor. And there were even chairs that could be improvised into weapons if we had to fight the thing. I still didn't feel very good about our chances, but I thought we could at least have a chance at escaping, and we could go down swinging if it came to that.

I ducked under one of the tables, but Mickey promptly called for me.

"Yo, Lyra! You . . . uh . . . you better check this shit out."

"Whatever it is, is it really more important than being alive?" I asked.

He ran over, grabbed my shirt collar, and walked me across the room to the far corner.

"Uh . . . okay. What exactly . . ."

All of the furniture in the corner had been either removed from the room, or shattered completely. The phrase "I must not ever harm my friends" had been scrawled in sloppy handwriting all over the walls, apparently writtin in blood and accompanied by smeared handprints. Most interestingly, a pentagram had been drawn on the carpet in blood, with a sketchy number "17" in the center. And instead of candles, each point of the pentagram bore a small cupcake, each adorned with a severed hand with its middle finger extended, each finger gently burning with a small point of pink light.

"What do you think it is?" Mickey asked, getting closer to it.

"Dude, I really don't think you should be touching that thing." I reached over to pull him back, but he instantly pushed me aside, inadvertently stepping into the circle.

The moment his foot touched the marking on the floor, a pink flash filled the room, and he dove away from the corner like it was filled with hornets. The fire in the hallway suddenly assumed an unnatural pink hue, and the rest of the world seemed to vanish around us.

Oh, come on! This cannot possibly be happening.

The floor seemed to tremble, quickly progressing from massage chair to devastating earthquake. A thunderous scream ripped through the air, a terrified cry of "NO!" that seemed to shake with pain. The strangely feminine voice seemed to sob uncontrollably, and a bright pink lightning bolt suddenly struck the circle. The air quickly filled with lightning and the sound of glass shattering, and I was absolutely sure that we were going to die there.

Then, without any warning, we were back in the hotel. Mickey and I both sat silently in the corner of the room, surrounded by overturned furniture and broken glass, trying really hard not to think about what just happened.

"You . . . uh . . . probably shouldn't have touched that." I said. Without looking back, Mickey responded.

"She doesn't want to hurt you again."

"What?"

"Huh? Did you say something?"

Great, now he's possessed.

Mickey assured me that he wasn't possessed, though he says that all the time, and I rarely believe him under normal circumstances. We were about to get into a heated argument about friendship and trust, but we were promptly interrupted by the skull thing sauntering casually into the room through the hole that used to be a wall.

The thing stared us down, and Mickey and I both quickly backed up

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against the wall. Actually, Mickey backed up against the wall, and I backed up against a door that apparently decided to exist at that exact moment. I tumbled backwards onto a concrete floor, sitting upright as quickly as I could. But apparently, the door decided to close itself, and then be locked as soon as I was on the other side.

Goddamn it, dealing with this place is like babysitting an eight year old. An evil eight year old. In a house full of monsters.

I must admit, the suddenly-right-there door did a good job of resisting my many attempts to open it. That probably says more about my lack of skill and strength than the door, though. Thankfully, a previously non-existent window decided that it wanted to be in on the fun too, and slapped itself right into the wall. Unfortunately, it was one of those "wall of glass" windows, not an "I'll just open it and duck through here" one.

Mickey saw the window too, and backed up to get a running start. I moved to the side, hoping not to get any broken glass on me. He seemed to be taking a long time to get going, which terrified me. I've seen him charge through closed windows for fun before. I was certain that skull thing had gotten him, but just before I leaned in to look, there was a massive CRACK!, followed by the sound of exploding glass. Something whipped past my head extremely fast, and I fortunately avoided getting filled with broken glass.

I suddenly realized that the thing that flew by my face was actually Mickey. He was lying on the ground twenty or so feet away, weakly trying to keep his head in one piece. He wasn't doing a very good job, and he fell limp after a few seconds.

Shit.

I couldn't move for a while. That's not a good position to be in, especially not with skull thing after me too. It stepped outside through the former window, approaching me slowly. I tried to back up, but quickly found myself stuck with the skull thing in front of me, and a swimming pool behind me. I considered maybe leading it on a slapstick style chase around the pool, or maybe chancing that it couldn't swim and diving in, but before I could decide, I heard another CRACK!, and felt like my skull just exploded.

I was suddenly in the air, trailing a rainbow of blood, teeth, and some jaw fragments. My entire body paralyzed, I let myself fall for a few seconds before a massive shock hit me, not just pain, but cold. Water rushed around me, and I'm pretty sure my spine broke when I hit the water, because I was really paralyzed after that. A tremendous splash shook the pool, and the skull thing walked along the bottom of the pool after me. I could just barely feel something wrap around my neck and drag me to the bottom before it could get close.

I blacked out a few seconds later.

Simply Stated

by John Holland

Let me iterate what has transpired in this solitary moment.
Something that will supplicate your indulgence after your thoughts, thoughts
that will undoubtedly transpire.

I did not do this strictly out of malice or petty recreation.
I did not do this because of the expression you've given me that one time before
this incident.
I am not compelling myself to surrender to my hidden emotions or regrets.
I am simply doing this because you have not taken the time to ruminate that
your actions, regrettably, provoked this provocation.

You may adjust your settings at any time, as well as your spectacles and take note
that the tone in my voice is rather artistic and for some degree, just to see that
dumbfounded look upon your face, intellectual.

I implore you to give me that leaden stare once more and inquire the viciousness
that actually runs through my veins before you frivolously open your mouth and
try to exchange the act of contrition that you were already attempting to stam-
mer, before I struck you.

You stereotype me, like all the rest. You question my astuteness because I may
brandish a blazer or insignia of pride upon my torso. But do not, for one second
think that just because I wear this badge that my insightful nature is lacking or
there for, void of any cognitive.

I study like you. I work hard like you. I have problems just like you and you do
not even ask if that has any factor in why I did what I have done.

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You simply stare, horrified by the actions I took to silence you. It is a look I have seen many times before and that is something that I do regret, but you were the last straw in this horrendous day and I am simply unwilling to bend to any more attempts of feigning arrogance or masculinity.

I am simply done.

You walk the halls, carefree and reassured. You do not have to sit and hear a coach constantly yell at you. Belittle your very attempts to perfect the art that he is so desperately holding onto because he failed in achieving his dreams.

You do not have to sit in class, struggling to understand the concept of mathematical equations that show how decomposed my brain functionality has become due to the constant strain or working other situations into it.

Where does my girlfriend want to go? Can I afford it? Do I have the gas to take her? Will her Ex be there? What if her pissy friends show up? I can't take anymore of her tongue incessantly clicking.

You got your acceptance letter to college didn't you? You hold that over my head and simply smile about it. Speak about how perfect your grades are. You are my tormentor and for it, I feel weak and useless. I struggle where you excel and you can't help but laugh in my face about it.

Is my strength something of importance? Is my status something to be feared?

I am just like you, simply coexisting in the same space and time that you are, but unable to adapt perfectly in this transition.

So when you ran into me and wanted to speak your peace, I couldn't help but knock you down a peg. I told you before this wasn't out of malice. This wasn't my intention to try and break your nose, dump you in a dumpster, lock you in your locker or drop your pants in front of the girl you have been crushing on.

It was just my way of knocking you down a small bit before your perfect life moves on. I get a slight enjoyment in knowing you now suffer much the same that I do. My smile will be your weakness and you will now cower under the surface of your skin and skull, wondering if I will make the same move twice.

I won't.

It will be different next time, assuming the circumstance will change to cause my agitation, aggravation and overall progression into the Neanderthal you think

that I am.

You may have the brain power to compute pie and constantly rattle off the space governed expanse of the numerical values that are associated with it.

You will be attending college with your perfect attendance, Head of the debate club status and academic scholarship while I worry if I will even be able to attend, to afford or gain an athletic scholarship.

And here you have the audacity to even fathom the thought that I myself have the perfect life? My father to hassle me about my skills on the field, the same as the coach. My girlfriend nagging me about her materialistic needs and the frequent gossip I must endure like Facebook is my life.

The stress I feel knowing I have to keep appearing up at parties, which cuts drastically into my study habit. A social life will not get me anywhere, but the status quo says I must dominate it like it was the curriculum that I signed on for years ago.

Do not blame me for my actions today in the cafeteria when I allowed my fist to transfer my feelings into the side of your jaw. Do not blame me for when I stood over you, huffing intensely while fire burnt at the ridges of my eyes.

I did not bring this onto you. You simply brought it onto yourself, the way that you gallivant around trying to bring me down with just how perfect the world has made itself for you.

You are just a god damned bully.

Brother in arms

A soldier in a foreign land,
Walks with his platoon in the desert sand,
Wearing frustration on his face due to this blind task,
Knowing as a soldier he does what is asked,
Dehydrated from the desert sun he looks to his left and to right,
Knowing he himself or one of his brothers mat die tonight,
Sad brown eyes with a slight smile on his face,
A bleeding heart consumes him accepting the human race,
A tired posture holding a heavy weapon stands,
A soldier in a foreign land

- George Garza



Tagg at First

by Chris Byar

W

a. Like a three-day weekend
following a monosyllabic crescendo,
this cueniform demands the tongue work,
will not be known in a sputter.

Like two bulls,
head to head,
legs digging to climax,
enduring in perpetual deadlock.

Yet an imposter!
A plagiarist of sounds,
an alias disguising his voice.

b. The distant heliograph barked once,
the ship slammed against the water,
the anchor whistled like a falling star.

c. With a thud the leviathan broke the surface,
the sea pulled back.
It did not hear the harpoon sing.

- Mark Jordan

Sociophobe

My mind has died the little death.
Worms white as nurses,
Coo and coddle the infection. Too long
I have felt them gnawing fat and dermis,
Growing corpulent on rancid jelly.
I am me, and yet no-one.

Tubes like contusions plaster my skin.
My embalmers wrap me in pallid injuries,
I am an oeuvre of bruising.
They burn oily words as incense.
My sarcophagi, crusted with golden flies,
Shimmers like a jeweled Ra.

Does this fit here?
My head, my swollen head
Full of brains and drunk on its own dread.
The birds, how they twitter!
Voluble chirpers,
I am not their kind.

A bed of conversation is my crucifixion.
Mary, mother of my affliction,
Pilate, master of odious elocution,
Administer the extreme unction.
Anxiolytics instead of holy water,
Euthanasia in place of sacred wafers.

- Michael Ehlert

Cartouche



I have chosen to make an original cartouche for my art 119 project. The symbols or hieroglyphs are of my own design. It is separated into three parts or registers like one side of Palette of King Narmer from Hierakonpolis ca. 3150 to 3125 BCE.

The mold is constructed of graphite a common mineral available in that time and capable of withstanding great heat. I first carved out a pocket, divided it into three registers, designed and carved three original hieroglyphs in the bottom of the pocket.

The lead cartouche is made from four old battery clamps that had been discarded. I melted them, scraped the impurities off the top and poured the melted lead into the heated mold.

The copper cartouche is made from some left over copper tube from an air conditioner that had been removed. I melted it, scraped the impurities off the top and poured the melted copper into the heated mold.

The silver cartouche is made from six sterling silver spoons and one fork also sterling silver that I bought at an auction. I melted them down but did not scrape off the impurities from the top and poured them into the heated mold.

The gold cartouche is made from 24 gold rings and some gold that I had previously reclaimed to make other jewelry with. I melted them down but did not scrape off the impurities from the top and poured them into the heated mold.

All materials used in this project would have been available in this time period.

The cartouches after being removed from the mold were covered in a lot of impurities and needed a great deal of cleaning and polishing. I had never used open graphite molding before and probably will not again. This method allows too much air to contact the molten metal causing oxidation and a lot of cleaning and polishing to make a beautifully finished project.

by Tim Kyker

It Is Well

by Rebekah Megill

I didn't have many expectations walking into the church. Mostly I was angry, trying to prove a point to my friend. Aubrey seemed to think that church and prayer and trust in God were the answers to everything. But she didn't know what it was like to lose a father. I did. It was hell and I wanted to show her that sitting in on an overhyped, overdressed, God-can-do-miracles classroom wasn't going to help.

But I had made a deal with myself. Yes, I was angry, but I was never any hardcore atheist running from God because of childhood trauma. Did I believe in God, no. But neither did I have any deep-seated convictions ready to pop the moment I "gave myself to God". I was reasonable. Aubrey was the type of girl to say, "Did you really give it a chance?" So I was going to give it a chance. Did I believe in God, no. Did I have any expectations for Him to fix anything, no. But neither was I going to be stubborn. I hated stubbornness. I was an open-minded kind of person and Aubrey knew that. She liked that about me. That was one reason we were friends.

Still, though, I knew that maybe I looked down on Aubrey and her beliefs, even if I didn't mean to. I mean, she was happy. She always had been. Friend, boy issues, sure. Bad breakups. Death of a family pet. But that'd been it for her. No divorces, no major deaths, no job losses that affected her. Why shouldn't she believe in something? She liked knowing that if anything bad ever did happen to her, "through God" she could manage. And, as long as her God continued to "bless" her, she would never have to find out for sure.

I said mostly I was angry, but maybe mostly I felt sorry for her. I couldn't see a reason for her to invest so much of her life into this. It was just a backup, wasn't it? Just a comfort. Someone to talk to on rainy days. Somewhere to go to for a favor. Something to blame, even. But she built her whole life around church. She was a smart girl, and it wasn't like she didn't have other things to do. So why did she use up all her time on this?

I had nothing against Christians, and sitting through this service didn't

change my mind. Aubrey had never been particularly judgmental, at least no more than any other friend I had. She wasn't particularly legalistic, either. All those stereotypes saying that Christians are jerks, well, I didn't care. Lots of atheists are jerks too, just like everybody else. The pastor didn't seem like a jerk. He talked about forgiveness, bunny trailed a little about anger and gossip, and at the end wound up talking about how God's forgiven us. Then we stood up to sing again.

It hadn't been the sermon at all. I had listened, but had not been struck by lightning or fallen facedown. But suddenly, in the song, in the words of the song – I had always been one to like poetry – I noticed it. I wasn't sure I could explain it; just IT. Although I suppose it wasn't in the words that I saw it. It was the people.

The song was an old-sounding hymn, "It is Well with My Soul". I first noticed the glimmer of the it in the words:

"My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, oh my soul!"

I had never before realized exactly what this meant to a Christian. I hadn't realized how revolutionary this idea, this whole concept of forgiveness of sins, really was. If you believed that, really believed it like Aubrey did, then it really was cause for celebration every Sunday. I hadn't understood that until now.

But that was only part of the it. The other part I noticed when I stopped and heard the entire congregation singing together in unison. There was nothing quite in the world, I thought, like the sound of a choir singing straight from their heart, and this was what these people did. But it wasn't the fact that they meant it, but they all meant it together. Being a Christian, I realized, meant being part of something. Of course, that could apply to a baseball team or an office of coworkers or a kindergarten class as well, but to Aubrey it meant that there was an entire world of people, even if a church might be filled with strangers, who shared this special joy with her and she could rely on them to all point her to the same place. There was something special, it seemed, in meeting someone else who also praised the Lord with their soul. If you believed it, really believed it like Aubrey did, then no wonder you met with all the Christians you knew every Sunday.

As we were dismissed, I knew I could understand, now, when people danced or waved their hands or cried in church. I hadn't, of course. I didn't believe. But I knew why Aubrey thought church would help. Maybe it had, in a way. I liked being able to see her world and I liked knowing why she loved it so much.

I didn't have a world like that. Not even a backup for rainy days. But now at least I knew that it was time for me to find one. I folded my arms against the wind and headed for my car.



Candyland Looking Glass

by Mercedes Lowery

Lethal Investment

by Peggy Schafer

Drip, Drip, Drip. Why do I keep hearing that sound? The pennies going into my piggy bank make the Clink, Clink, Clink jingle, man I love that sound. Daddy's favorite words of wisdom were, "Remember son, a penny saved is a penny earned" which has stayed deeply embedded in my brain ever since the first day he said them. It was my fourth birthday and Aunt Rosie sent this little white piggy bank with "Savor" embossed on it in copper as my present. I never did understand the significance of that word till much later on in life. Daddy explained it as having a passion for something, such as money. By taking out the trash and setting the table, I earned five cents each week as my allowance, and this particular week, Daddy paid me in pennies. Five shiny new pennies that were my very own to spend as I please, or so I thought at the time. Instead of being able to go down to Mr. McGregor's store and buy licorice, those pennies, I was told, were going into my new piggy bank. "You must save for a rainy day" was another expression Daddy loved saying. When does a four year old boy care about a rainy day? I just wanted to go buy licorice. There was no use arguing, Daddy said save, and that is what I did. Save.

Drip, Drip, Drip, that sound is still there. Knock, Knock, Knock. "Hi Mr. Thompson, I'm here collecting for your weekly newspaper delivery. Here's your change, oh, thanks for the tip." There must be a more efficient way for a kid of 12 to make better money. Getting up at 4 am just to start folding the stacks of daily newspapers then hopping on my bike and riding all over this neighborhood is

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getting old. I make good enough money, which is why I took on this extra job to go along with the yard work on the weekends, but hourly, this paper route just doesn't put enough cash in the account to make it worth my time. I do love the way coins feel in my hand, and truly savor the day the ole bank statement reaches 1 million dollars however, it won't get there at this rate. Guess I need to start looking for better paying work.

Drip, Drip, Drip. Why won't that go away? Tick Tock, Tick Tock, Tick Tock. How is anyone supposed to get any sleep? I've been up studying for this stupid accounting test all night and practice is in just a few hours. Please let me savor this time for just a little while longer. College is advertised as being fun: full of Frat parties, keggers, easy going, guess I must have signed up for the wrong campus. Luckily for me, the football scholarship is paying for everything, but I know this free ride is not going to last. If after graduation I want to join a big name fancy firm that includes all the perks and benefits, the grades must get me to the top of the class. Otherwise, bye bye bank account. No rest for the weary. Time is money and big money is my goal.

Drip, Drip, Drip. Can't someone turn that off? "Good morning George, it's time to open the doors and start making money." Ya'know, whenever the teller is counting out change Ting, Ting, Ting, I just love to hear that sound. It ensures I can savor this moment of being a fat cat for at least one more day. Where else can someone be surrounded everyday with their favorite colors, green, gold and copper, and get paid for it? In fact, paid pretty darn well. There isn't much more that would make my life any better. Of course additional money and perhaps a new Porsche, but that's it. Life is good and I plan on moving up in this world. Naturally its safe working here, but I have big plans, a corner office, job with bonuses, that sort of thing. It is definitely not going to happen here so for all intents and purposes I must move onward and upward.

Drip, Drip, D...Turn it off! Turn it off! I hate this time of the year. Ring, Ring, Ring. No matter where a person goes these days, there are Santa's asking for money, help the poor, the less fortunate, everyone always asking for a handout. Yea, Yea, Yea, well I don't mind helping other people, but only on my terms and I definitely want to decide who gets my precious money. I don't want it going to every Tom, Dick, and Harry just because they didn't harbor their savings. It's not my fault they got in debt over their heads. No one forced them to buy that expensive house. Those clever advertisements try to con people into thinking that they can help the less fortunate, "For just pennies a day" is the famous saying. Well, pennies are precious and add up to dollars. I have savored each and every one since the first few that were carefully put in the piggy bank on my fourth birthday, thus now, I have oodles of shiny pennies. The bank account with my name on it has bags of money in it, just like my pockets. "No, I don't want to donate. Leave me alone."

Drip, Drip....Finally, this sound is getting less noticeable, so please let me just savor the sanctity of the moment. That's weird, why are people looking at me strangely? Everyone is gawking and their stares are penetrating my very soul, but for what? Do I have something in my teeth left over from what I ate at lunch? Maybe I forgot to zip my fly up when I left the bathroom. Hey lady, don't point your finger at me. It's not polite. Just continue with your gossiping among those lower class friends and leave me alone. Wow. All of a sudden, it got very quiet but still the people continue to rape me with their eyes. What is going on? Somebody please tell me. Bang, Bang, Bang. "All Rise." No. No. They have it all wrong. Clang.

Drip, Dr.. I don't fully comprehend where that persistent racket is coming from, but it is very annoying. Now I remember coffee. Savor was the gimmick word that idiotic company used in their commercials. The consumer saw coffee dripping into the carafe and then a voice came over the TV saying, "Savor the taste of Java." Finally, that echo is fading but why can't I smell the coffee? Oh well, I'll just savor the peacefulness of this moment.

Drip, D... Why has it gotten dark all of the sudden? I didn't do anything wrong. I was good. I worked hard for my money, why can't anyone see that.

Drip. Oh good. I see a light.

Thank You

God?



Winter Castle Rock

by Val A. Stanley

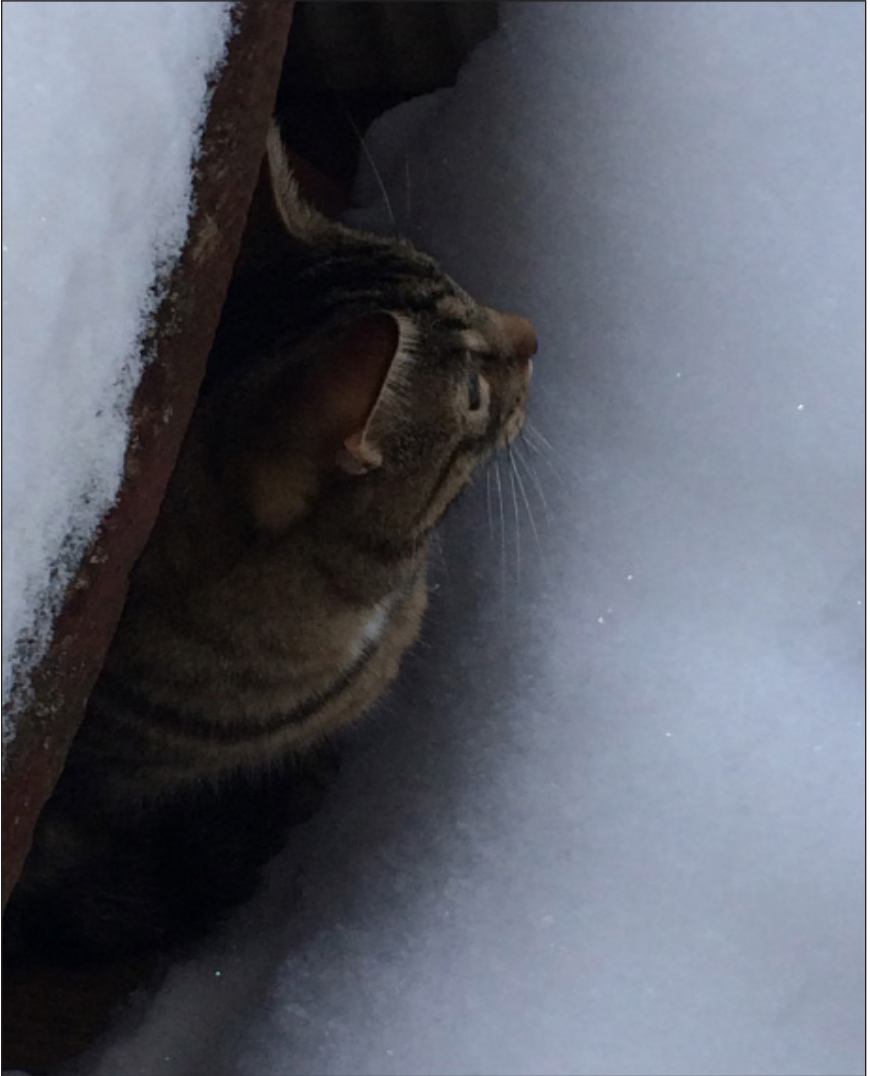
Untitled

Most days,
eyes will be small
with a glazed over expression
of sugar and spring.

Some days,
eyes will be red
with a tattered blindfold
left in the bubbling water.

One day,
eyes will be wide
to find symmetrical balance
when faced
with a dove and a crow.

- Samantha Shoemaker



Bitter Winter

by Nina Dulabaum

Tuesday

A motion picture inside a head
Plays through summers while air rushes
Fighting its way inside a rattling window
Cracked slightly and cased in frost
And cold fingertips shake as they grasp
Holding onto mouths and lungs full of smoke
The writhing breath baptized by streetlights
Is falling up and into the world

It's never so hard to breathe as when
Frigidity osculates your nose and lips
But the biting wind can't stop a mind
That is not inhaling grime
But pieces of borrowed ideologies

- Charlie Goad



Untitled

by Bethe Dinges Hughes

The Baseball Player

by Michael Jenkins

Cornelius was not much more than a boy that summer. He had once again just barely escaped with his life from the screaming pit of nonsense and despair that those on the outside referred to as Adolf S. Hitler Middle School. He had earned himself a three month period of respite for his troubles, time which he mostly spent on watching cartoons and urinating on his neighbor's house from the roof of his own. He knew that this freedom could not last for very long, yet he still couldn't be bothered to make the most of it, content to squander away his time with pointless nothings and trivial obscenities. Cornelius did eventually tire of his routines, and searching for some sense of novelty, he decided to throw himself from the immaculate comfort of his home to the uncaring, unfeeling vastness of the universe outside, or at the very least, to the sidewalk in front of his house.

Though the sun had spent much of its energy, and was preparing to bed for the night, Cornelius was still stuffed full of the energetic, passionate retardation that is inherent to most twelve year old males. In spite of this, for some reason, he paused for a moment before he threw open the wooden portal that promised a twilight world of wonder and contentedness, he meditatively gazed through the silica based super-cooled liquid sheet that offered a vision of the world, like a portal to another dimension, almost like some kind of window or something. Amidst the oblivious sea of life and wonder that swirled about the neighborhood, something was out of place. Cornelius thought he may have been imagining things, and decided to disregard this intuitive warning and romp about the blinding lights and screaming noise of heavy traffic. Yet still, all through that evening, he could not shake free from that highly unusual feeling that something integral to everything he loved had been subtly perverted, disturbed from the natural order.

By the next day, Cornelius had completely forgotten the previous evening, having filled the space left in his mind with dirty limericks, duck puns, and

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several seasons of Gundam. He had tired himself quite nicely of the part of the world not inside his house, and would likely be content to seal himself inside a nest made of old candy bar wrappers, gallons of root beer, and poorly translated Japanese video games for the next six weeks. As he stuffed himself full of the most sugar dense candies, snack cakes, and carbonated beverages he could find without going to the local black market (his member's card had expired, and he didn't feel very much like renewing it), he allowed his consciousness to slowly bleed out of his body, blending with the very fabric of the universe.

It was evening when he finally returned to the world of the living from his castle of dreams and stupidity. His peaceful, sugar-induced coma had been painfully interrupted by a barrage of constant, ill-deserved laughter with the power to rot away at one's faith in humanity, a sound that could only come from an episode of *The Big Bang Theory*. Still groggy, and only technically conscious, he instinctively fled from the dark, terrible place his bedroom had become: a vile, intolerable wasteland that struggled in vain to bury hatred and stupidity beyond human comprehension underneath several metric tons of ear shredding hyena-esque cackling presented before unremarkable circumstances and routine small talk. The juxtaposition of these many crimes with various transgressions to numerous to recount has left an irreparable stain upon the very foundation upon which humanity was built, and Cornelius would not stand it for even a moment longer.

In his irrational flight, without regard for his direction, only knowing to move as far away from his television as possible, he found himself once again staring out the window on the front door of his house. That confusing, almost dreadful feeling had brought itself upon him once more, though now he believed he may have known why. At first, Cornelius thought that he may still have been dreaming. Gradually, his wits came back to him, though his eyesight was not nearly so swift in its return. Still, he believed that he must have been hallucinating in the darkening dusk, though he only saw it for a moment, and he thought that he may have simply caught a glimpse of something innocuous, and the irrational paranoia of being roused from such a deep slumber with such an incredible amount of sugar pulsing through his body must have been taking a toll on his mind. He likely believed that this was the case because it was not yet in his nature to believe in such monsters.

Cornelius made an extensive effort to divorce himself from that feeling of dread in the following days. He had quite handily convinced himself that his fear on that night was completely unjustified. Not another comparable moment had occurred in those few days, and though it is debatable as to whether this calm came about of its own accord or as a result of Cornelius mercilessly pursuing it, he enjoyed it nonetheless. Naturally, he took this brief span of tranquility for granted, as he did most things, and like most other things, he assumed that he would barely miss it once he lost it. It could easily be said that no human being has ever been more wrong about anything.

During a particularly slow afternoon, after the rest of the world had filed

off to toil away at work, Cornelius had assumed his carefree summer attitude yet again, and he rightfully intended to destroy his body with various unholy combinations of food and comedically unfitting condiments. On his route to the kitchen, however, another fateful glance towards a window would prove to be troublesome for him. In the empty daylight, there was not another soul around, or at least, not another soul that had any earthly business being there. There could be no denial this time; Cornelius was suitably rested, and the world provided ample lighting. Denial could do him no good, as he stared without relent into the very eyes of horror.

Cornelius had seen monsters before, but none like this. This one was a wholly different breed from an average, every day monster. Many know the type. The kind like the human torso with a vertical mouth that cleaved it in half, with normal human heads attached at the arm sockets, and a large, hairy leg stretching up from where a neck would be. The kind that skitters out of the front door of its house, supported on a wave of human feet pattering along like oars on either side of a fleshy paddle-like tail, offering a quaint “Howdy Frank! How’s the kids?” before making its way to its day job as a customer service representative at a software engineering company, and eventually returning to its night career of invading the homes of the unsuspecting populace to force children into its chest-mouth and suck upon their bodies. The monster Cornelius saw there didn’t harbor any normal, run-of-the-mill malice in its soul. It stored a malice that shook at the foundation of his very being, a incomparable malevolence that could not survive in a more earthly vessel.

It had been walking before, if one could call such an uncoordinated shambling “walking”. The moment that it realized that it had been observed, it stopped. It stared forward, completely still. Very, very slowly, without moving its body, it turned its massive head. A tiny pair of beady, black eyes stared at Cornelius. Its enormous maw parted subtly, leaving a tiny space between its baseball bat teeth. It darted a narrow tongue in the gaps between the aluminum bats. The two silently stared at each other for nearly an hour. Then, the thing suddenly turned forward again, “walking” along as though nothing had happened. Its huge, hairy arms swung dramatically as it walked. Its baseball glove hands dragged on the asphalt as it made its way down the street on its miniscule legs. With each step, its knobby knees struck the back of its massive jaw. It disappeared beyond the horizon without looking back even once.

Cornelius didn’t sleep that night.

Finally, by the sun’s return, Cornelius had convinced himself to leave his barricaded bedroom. He made himself a promise to never gaze out any window in his house again. The monster from yesterday seemed to react the very moment Cornelius observed it. Anything that would keep that monster out of his life, he would do without a second thought. He made sure to close all of the curtains, and nail up some old towels over the rest of the windows. He couldn’t decide whether keeping the lights off would trick the thing into passing him by or draw it to a potential hiding place, so he decided to just turn half of the lights on, just

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in case. Content that he was sufficiently protected, Cornelius continued his life of mindless consumption of food and television, deciding that running amok outside in an attempt to gravely injure himself for entertainment purposes was not nearly worth the risk of running into that thing again.

The next few days passed by without incident, and Cornelius struggled to maintain his spirits as his supply of non-vegetable and non-sugar-free food diminished. And as several more days bled by, he began to exhaust these items as well, only able to stomach such rotten foods through the extraordinary circumstances; he would literally eat the silverware in his kitchen before chancing another encounter with the horrid thing that wandered his neighborhood. In fact, he had considered eating his silverware, but the metal was a little hard on his sugar-rotten teeth, and he decided to steel himself for a visit to the store across the street.

Money in hand, he cautiously approached the front door. For nearly a half-hour, he stood motionless, uncertain as to whether it would be preferable to open the door blind, or check behind the blanket he had stapled over the window earlier and risk finding it wandering the streets again. Finally, with a trembling hand, he timidly took the doorknob in his hand, and gently coerced the door open. He closed his eyes in anticipation, praying that he would find the streets empty, or better yet, occupied by other people. The door opened with a subtle creak, and as the door touched the wall to the side, Cornelius stood completely still.

It had been standing in the doorway. Staring motionlessly straight forward for an indeterminate length of time. Its small, beady, pitch dark eyes met Cornelius. Its high cheekbones pushed even higher when it smiled. Its tall, metal teeth twitched slightly, independent from each other. A tiny baseball cap sat upon its balding head. Its leathery, webbed fingers subtly grabbed at the air, hanging by its knees. Its tall torso had been stitched together from several parts, in the pattern of a large baseball. Staring quietly at him, it stepped forward the very moment Cornelius stepped back.

He moved to his aunt's house for the rest of the summer.

Though Cornelius lived in a rather remote neighborhood, near the edge of town, his aunt lived in a comparatively large home on a farm about seven miles out of town. She didn't actually raise any crops, but worked in a battery manufacturing facility eleven miles from town in the opposite direction. Her long hours combined with the fairly long commute meant that Cornelius had to spend most of his time alone. As a week passed, his aunt suddenly found that her mother, Cornelius' grandmother, had fallen terribly ill. Cornelius gave little thought to this, as his least favorite grandparent had been the one to suffer a terrible cancer attack, until he realized that his aunt would be away from home for the weekend to visit her.

Cornelius would not allow another incident. He dismantled most of the furniture to create makeshift barricades on every window and door. Everything he could move had been placed in front of a possible point of entry, and furious-

ly nailed in place. Everything except for his bed, which he dragged down into the windowless basement. He also carried with him an ornate, antique shotgun which had been mounted over the fireplace. After dismantling the basement staircase board by board, and sealing the door with a foot-thick barricade, he buried himself underneath several comforters in bed, cradling the shotgun in his arms.

He suddenly found himself awake in the middle of the night. Not awoken by a noise or light, but simply brought back to a state of awareness. He had thrown his comforters towards his feet in the middle of the night, and he rolled onto his back, trying to keep his eyes closed and roll back into a deep slumber. However, when he realized that he was no longer holding his shotgun, he hesitated, then snapped his eyes open.

It was standing across the room. Its mouth stretched open to obscure most of its body with a metallic wall of baseball bats, except for its outstretched arms. It held the shotgun forward so Cornelius could see it, and then tipped its hands forward, dropping it on the floor. Slowly, one leg at a time, it walked over the shotgun towards Cornelius.

He sat perfectly still, staring at the thing with wide eyes. He blinked once, and it very cautiously stepped forward. He blinked again to be sure, and again, it took a reserved step towards him. He stared without blinking for as long as he could, but still his eyes closed involuntarily after some time, and it took another step closer. He fought to keep his eyes open, but it was a losing battle, and within an hour, it had made its way to his bed.

Slowly, it clambered up onto the bed, pinning Cornelius in place. It moved very close to him, and put its head beside his own. In a low, harsh whisper, it nearly silently spoke:

"Three strikes . . . YOU'RE OUT . . ."



Untitled

by Danny Slusser

We Were Only Kids

Avoiding eye contact while
Shedding each other's clothes
Kissing freshly exposed, baby-soft skin
Touching hidden places under thin blue sheets

Avoiding eye contact while
Whispering in each other's ears to fill the lonely silence
The damn silence reminding us how vulnerable we truly are
Our hearts beginning to quicken as we are bracing our adolescent bodies

Avoiding eye contact as the
Sweat is dripping from each and every one of our pores
Panting in unison while clinging to each other's bare skin
Afraid of what will happen when we let go

Avoiding eye contact
Bodies tensing one last time
Sighing from relief and relaxation
I am numb

Avoiding eye contact
You are cleaning the mess left behind
Tears are falling from my eyes
Realizing I am no longer only a kid

- Ashley Barron

Bird Tracks

In the snow around the suet tree
A hundred braids left undone,
looking like a vanished empire.
Did hunger or enemies
signal exodus?
leaving the hair unkempt, fossilized?

The tribe broke into three bands,
Why?
Could they not exist as one?
Each trail points a different route:
each route ends.
Evolution can be cruel, can be buried in the snow.

The evidence is encrusted on the snow,
saying, "We fed here,"
as the brand identifies the cow.
Rustlers beware; they may be arrows
launched in the years of thriving
at violators of the sacred ground.

- Mark Jordan



Fishlike Zen

by Mercedes Lowery



Christmas Card

by Shamina

SVCC Collaborative Writing Project: Poetry

In the spring 2014 semester, the Creative Writing II class sponsored a project intended to create collaboration in the arts at SVCC. The poems on the next pages were written anonymously in a public setting over a two week period. Anyone at SVCC could contribute, and some of these poems were written by more than one person.

Blame Game

I wrote a rhyme
It made me glad
Read the retort
My mood went bad
This poem stems of my frustration
From written words of accusation
Of those who think a crime
Is done by they that rhyme
As if the act of poetry
Deserves a dangle from a tree-
So-
Don't blame those who like to rhyme
They share their thoughts throughout their time
With other folk – so where's the crime?
Cuz there are those who like to share
chosen words to those who care,
the kinds of things that matter most
or senseless things like burnt-rye-toast
wither way, it matters not, you see
to agree or disagree
just simple words that set us free
Its poetry
I like to rhyme, so don't blame me

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The List

I like to cross things off my list,
cluttered fodder for mental grist,
An added task can get you pissed,
It's just the way we are-
Priorities, first things first,-
Then the lesser jobs of the cursed-
Apply yourself, give them their due,
but be advised, you're never through-
cuz just as one thing gets the X
another appears, and then expects
for you to give more undivided, and
maybe go away,-provided
10 more things don't show presentment,
causing much more hot resentment-
So before I launch my tightened fist
I'm gunna burn this bloody list

*

Nothing to hide in, to hide
From my choice...no is all I needed
To say, if only I could turn back
The hours but then I would long to
turn back the days...no – that's all I needed to say.

*

She offered her honor
He honored her offer
And all night long
It was honor & offer
If life gives you lemons, you make lemonade, but where do you get the water??
-Distill your urine???

*

As I walk in the rain
A cold cool venom drips into my veins
I feel the buzz, I lose the pain
Writing poems is lame
You are all to blame
The hallucinations are all in vain

SLIPPING GRADES

I once thought I was mega cool
Strutt'n through the halls of school-
Gazing at my world of spades
Through my amber gargoyle shades-
I slowly realized what I was doin'
Wasting time in the land of ruin-
I began on track, that's true,
But my thoughts had strayed from school
To the attentions of a cute little maid
A sweet young miss with long blonde braids
The teacher's advice I should've paid
To the books I read & what he said
I can't let go to fade
With the darling wearing jade
Must get my focus, no more trades
Gotta improve my slipping grades
Slipping grades, slipping grades,
Can't let go to slipping grades

*

After taking my last sip of the night, I realized what is right.
Some of you should contain what you write, but instead, your words start my
fight.

For I am taking this poem to new heights.
Those who challenge me shall face my perilous might.
After all, you know that I am right.
Now that you face this endless paper,
Our bout shall never taper.
Now, please do us all a favor,
Inject into this project,
Something meaningful so that
This big paper is something to protect
Good luck class on your awesome project.
Now that I have this large wound sutured
This paper will stay to be a great idea in the future.
I wish you well,
You all now have an inspiring tale to tell.

Postpartum Depression in Men:

A Closer Look at the Emotional and Social Struggles of New, Young Adult Fathers

by Kristin Helton

Postpartum depression is experienced by new parents (either mothers and/or fathers) and is characterized by severe sadness and/or anxiety that interferes with daily living (Arnett, 2012). Due to extensive research of the postpartum depression phenomenon, the idea of mothers suffering from it, after giving birth, is widely understood and accepted. However, what many individuals fail to examine is the emotional toll having an infant takes on a new father as well, especially a young adult male. In fact, while around 10% of new mothers reported experiencing postpartum depression, an astonishing 4% of new fathers also reported struggles with extreme depression after having an infant (Arnett, 2012). This means that while fathers do not experience the extensive physical and hormonal changes mothers do after birth, they are almost just as likely to experience depression after having a child, especially young adult fathers.

This common sharing, between mothers and fathers, of extreme sadness and anxiety, suggests that the major factors of postpartum depression could be influenced by things other than hormones, such as: stress, economical issues, life changes, and most importantly social interactions. Social factors, in turn, can be even more influential in young adult fathers because they are already struggling with so many other life changing events and/or situations, without the added stress and challenges a newborn brings, all of which require a lot of emotional

support from social interactions. With all of these factors taken into consideration, it is not surprising that so many young adult men are coming forward with postpartum depression. Because of the surprising number of new fathers experiencing postpartum depression, researchers have also begun to examine this phenomenon further.

According to newly conducted investigations on paternal postpartum depression, researchers have found that the number one predictor for whether or not a new father will experience postpartum depression is the new mother, with whom he has had the infant with (Don & Mickelson, 2012). The reason why the new mother is influential in whether or not the father experiences postpartum depression stems from a number of factors.

The first, and most obvious link between the two, is marital status. Research found that couples, who are married, had the tendency to experience less depression and anxiety than unwed couples, after having a newborn (Don & Mickelson, 2012). Married couples also tended to demonstrate healthier relationships with deeper trust, love, boundaries, and a mutual understanding, which allowed them to emotionally support each other more effectively during the tumultuous ups and downs that come with new parenthood. In contrast, couples who were unwed tended to have more conflicts, misunderstandings, and additional disappointing, unmet expectations of one another, which led to higher levels of stress in both partners, causing an increased vulnerability to depression (Don & Mickelson, 2012). In conclusion, fathers who did not have a spouse were more likely to experience postpartum depression. With this idea in mind, it would be palpable to conclude that because young adult males are most likely to be unwed or newly married, they are more likely to lack spousal support and are more apt to experience postpartum depression.

The new mother's own emotions also influence whether or not her male counterpart experiences paternal postpartum depression. After studying this further, "...research suggests depressed people may be less likely to provide support. For example, it has been demonstrated that people induced into sad moods are more self-focused, which leads them to be less likely to help others" (Don & Mickelson, 2012). This research shows that even when fathers are married or have some sort of spousal support, because many mothers are experiencing emotional difficulties of their own, they still might not receive the attention they need, which in turn, could lead to depression. This idea of a new mother focusing on her own emotional struggles and losing sight of the father's emotional needs could also be more detrimental to young adult males, since they are already struggling with so many other life changes, thus concluding that young adult males could be at higher risk for paternal postpartum depressions.

One last key influence that a new mother has on her co-parenting father is whether or not he is satisfied in his relationship with her. "High levels of relationship satisfaction may prevent fathers from experiencing postpartum mood disturbances because they feel confident in the presence of a loving and supportive partner to help with the demands of parenthood" (Don & Mickelson,

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2012). Thus, in conclusion, new fathering young adult males will most likely struggle with having a satisfied relationship with their respective female partners, because they are still in the stage of life where they are trying to “unite (their) newly formed identity with another person...” which would in turn increase the likelihood of them experiencing severe depression and/or anxiety (Arnett, 2012, pg. 473).

In summary, with all of these factors in mind, social interactions can be said to play a key role in whether or not a new father experiences postpartum depression. Therefore, it is crucial that before young adult males decide to have a child that they have a relationship with someone who is committed to them and who is emotionally healthy themselves. It is also crucial that both partners are satisfied with the relationship. If all of these necessities can be met, a young adult father would be exceedingly less likely to suffer from paternal postpartum depression.

References

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The Nomadic Educator

by Jim Moore

Show me an adjunct teacher and I'll show you someone who has a "side job(s)". Until recently I drove a forklift, worked as a cashier, and said "Would you like fries with that?" about a hundred times a day. I saved every penny of my teaching salary like a squirrel hoarding his nuts for the long winter ahead. The full-time teachers have to stay full-time and if that means taking a class away from the nomadic educator to do that, so be it. Call me a victim of scheduling, budget cuts, or policy changes but I was told that the term was ending and my schools weren't sure if they would have anything for me in June. It turns out they didn't...

Let's face it, people don't teach because there is dump trucks of cash in it, they teach because they LOVE what they do. For a long time I was bitter about this. The administration constantly told adjuncts that we were "valuable members of the team" while in the same breath asking us to remind them of our names. I was sure I worked just as hard as the full-time faculty and should be respected and rewarded for it. I even tried to get full-time by leaving the classroom and joining the administration. You heard that right, I tried to join the "dark side" just for the money. Thankfully, I failed miserably.

After I surfaced from my pity party, I realized that I was the luckiest man on campus.

Most Adjuncts I have talked to don't have to go to "mandatory" training or departmental meetings because those are for full-time faculty only. Adjuncts don't have to sit through tedious seminars or one-on-ones. Adjuncts also don't have to be adept at departmental politics in order to keep their jobs. Please don't misunderstand, I know many excellent full-time teachers who embrace these responsibilities with elegance and good humor while maintaining the highest levels

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of quality in their classrooms. I think these individuals are secretly members of the "adjunct posse" but for reasons of national security must remain hidden until the revolution comes.

At one time I was teaching residually, fully online, and blended class in Speech and Communication at two colleges. I was also volunteering at a local grammar school helping second graders with their reading skills and writing SEO content for internet merchants. Each day I would stuff my teaching skills into my backpack and move on. What I once thought was unfair, I now realize was a blessing. That nomadic wandering along the great "spice route" of education has taught me the necessity of being adaptable, flexible, and adept at numerous curriculums in a myriad of situations. Hopefully, I've become a better teacher because of it. After all, my students deserve my "A" game every time I open my mouth.

The Prison is my next challenge. Honestly I am excited by the opportunity to bring what I've learned along my travels to this unique situation. Ultimately, it isn't about me and what I've learned, it's about what I can hopefully impart to my students. While I may not have a fat paycheck I'm rich in experiences.

Ultimately, isn't that what's really important? Every time I am tempted to moan about what I DON'T have, I pause to remember what I do.

I'm the luckiest man on campus. Cheers!

A Life Measured in LanYARDS

by Jim Moore

Over these past weeks cold weather and snow has held me hostage. Initially, I reveled in the sheer decadence of doing nothing but lay on the couch snacking and watching my favorite trashy shows on cable. However, the list for activities when Jack Frost has you on house arrest isn't a long one and eventually they run out. Although I love my wife dearly, watching travel shows about even COLDER places on the planet like the Alps during a blizzard doesn't go a long way to warming my mood OR level of activity.

So I found myself in my office spinning around in my chair watching the wind blow snow off nearby roofs wondering if there was an app for the number of days left until spring. When boredom reaches the level at which your feet threaten to grow roots, the mind can latch onto anything and twist it in unexpected ways. During one of my hundreds of rotations, and despite the vertigo, my eyes fell upon them:

Lanyards.

(Editor's Note) Feel free to insert "pen" anywhere you see "lanyard" if more closely applies to you.

Before I go on, I invite the reader to do an inventory of how many you have hanging from something or stuffed in a drawer somewhere. Incidentally, I will expect a percentage of any proceeds from lotto tickets find during this process.

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I had ten (10). Before you think this is "Lanyards Anonymous" don't worry you don't have to reveal the depth of your problem by sharing how many you have. It'll be our secret I promise.

What is the significance of this you may ask? Forget computer hackers getting your personal information and stealing your identity. Anything important about you can be learned from your lanyards in less than 5 minutes. Think I'm exaggerating?

I wish I was.

Anyone could get the following information from mine:

A favorite local sports team

A favorite vacation spot

A guilty pleasure

A favorite slogan

Where I go to Church

Where I volunteer in the community

My current AND last two jobs I've held

If I use the computer for more than checking my status on Facebook.

My name

AND several pictures of me which trace the evolution of my facial hair.

SO WHO GIVES A RAT'S PATOOTIE ABOUT YOUR PASSWORD!

I don't know about you, but as the gravity of this dawned it scared the daylight out of me. Then I thought about all the lanyards I had been offered and TURNED DOWN. Heck, I even remember my last vacation where I passed on a postcard and got a lanyard instead. Finally, I bet that if you REALLY think about it, you know someone who color coordinates their lanyards to match the outfit they are wearing that day.

"Hi my name is Jim and I am a lanyardaholic."

A tapestry of my life immortalized in plastic and fabric for anyone to see. I think for my next job interview I will just bring my lanyards instead of my resume. It would certainly be more interesting and save paper. So the next time you leave on vacation don't worry about passwords. Lock up your lanyards! They tell more about you than you realize.

